LANDSCAPE AND CRISIS IN NORTHERN ENGLAND: THE REPRESENTATION OF COMMUNAL TRAUMA IN FILM AND PHOTOGRAPHY

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VOLUME TWO OF TWO

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Abstract

Communal trauma is a culturally constructed ascription. Social agents propose that disastrous events have had traumatic effects upon the communities affected. If this proposition is convincing, then these events become acknowledged as communal traumas, and those affected as traumatised. This thesis examines how two crises in northern England: the Foot and Mouth Disease (F.M.D.) epidemic in Cumbria in 2001, and the demise of the mining industry in County Durham from the late 1970s onwards, have been constructed as communal traumas. While the F.M.D. epidemic in Cumbria has been explicitly studied, and therefore constructed as traumatic in sociological studies, the crisis was also broadcast through landscape imagery in press and documentary photography. This thesis examines such imagery in the work of photographers Nick May, John Darwell and Ian Geering, and in the printed and television media, and assesses how it has also contributed to the idea of F.M.D. as a communal trauma.

This is one of the original contributions of this thesis. Another is the examination of the disappearance of the mining industry in County Durham since the rationalisation of the late 1970s, as communal trauma. This demise also had devastating economic, social and cultural effects for the communities involved, but has seldom been construed as communally traumatic. However, the film and photography of Newcastle’s Amber art collective creates a narrative that suggests precisely this, and fundamental to that narrative is landscape imagery. Their collaboration with the communities experiencing the effects of this demise, and the exhibition of their films and photography back to that community has created a vision of traumatic social change that is both corroborated and constructed by those most affected. With a detailed examination of the imagery of these two specific crises in Northern England, this thesis examines how landscape has contributed to the cultural construction of trauma.
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Acknowledgements

This research was prompted by a conference organised by the arts group Littoral in 2006, which I attended while conducting MA research into socially engaged collaborative arts projects. *The Cultural Documents of the 2001 Foot and Mouth Epidemic* was a highly interdisciplinary event, involving specialists from across the arts and social sciences, and attempted to come to some concrete conclusions about the crisis of five years earlier. It highlighted the way that the meaning of catastrophic events rarely emerges unbidden; it is frequently assigned through a series of propositions. The event also included the landscape imagery of photographers who had responded to the crisis. However, as well as a response, it was evident that this imagery was as important as the accompanying sociological research in communicating what Foot and Mouth meant. It began a line of enquiry into the role of landscape imagery in forming a notion of trauma.

The subsequent research was greatly aided by Fiona Venables and David Clarke at Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle. My thanks go to them, as well as to Pål Hansen, Nick May and Ian Hunter of Littoral for their willingness to discuss their work. I am also grateful to Dr. Maggie Mort, John Darwell, and Graeme Rigby and Kerry Lowes at Amber for the generous donation of their time, and interest in the project. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Graduate School at Northumbria University, and colleagues and staff at the University for listening to and commenting upon the ideas discussed in this thesis. Finally my deepest thanks go to my supervisors Dr. Ysanne Holt and Paul Usherwood for their invaluable help, comments and support.
Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Name: Rupert Charles Ashmore

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Date: 20th July 2010
CHAPTER SIX
The Romance of Coal

“In the metabolism of the Western world the coal miner is second in importance only to the man who ploughs the soil. He is a sort of caryatid upon whose shoulders nearly everything that is not grimy is supported.”

The trauma of Foot and Mouth was engendered by an event. By contrast, the trauma that arose from the de-industrialisation in County Durham from the 1980s onwards stems from a combination of economic, social and cultural changes that unfolded over a much longer period. As Figure 1 below shows, mining in County Durham had been in continuous decline, in terms of employment and the number of working collieries since the 1920s, suffering a sharp contraction during the Depression, and again in the 1960s.

Figure 1: Coal Mining Employment in County Durham, 1910-1976.

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2 That event may have revealed certain realities and conflicts that pre-existed the outbreak, but the communal trauma itself was brought about by the epidemic.

3 Bulmer, M (Ed), Mining and Social Change: Durham County in the Twentieth Century (London: Croom Helm, 1978), frontispiece
The demise of mining is one of many symptoms of the change from an industrial to a post-industrial economy. Yet western economies are built upon constant economic and cultural change; while the results are often inequitable, they are seldom communally traumatic. So we have to enquire why trauma may have arisen due to the contraction of mining, and why only in certain communities, and at a particular time. To answer these questions this thesis draws comparisons between the situation in County Durham, one of the areas to be worst affected by industrial contraction, and the situation of certain post-Communist communities after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Piotr Sztompka suggests that certain communities were left behind after the collapse of the Communist system, while the rest of society appeared to be embracing rapid change. They were economically, culturally and ideologically stranded, and this stranding was potentially traumatic.4

This chapter proposes that the collapse of mining resulted in similar fundamental changes in certain communities. This is due to inherent features of the stereotypical mining village (which are obviously more or less prevalent in each situation). They were reliant upon a single industry, which employed a large percentage of the community. They were also geographically and socially isolated, and have been inhabited by a markedly immobile population, which means there has been a high degree of continuity of employment within families, and (as that employment is physical) strongly demarcated gender roles.5 There has also been a very obvious hierarchy of social standing within colliery workers, which extended to social relationships outside the pit, because, as Martin Bulmer points out, the salient feature of social relationships within these mining villages is the close integration of work and non-work ties.6 Leisure and social spaces tend to be run by the colliery, or union, and so all social patterns and cultural identity are highly influenced by the mining industry. This is also a geographical relationship. As the Durham artist-miner Tom McGuiness infers in his painting *Pit Village* (Figure 2), the colliery is physically at the centre of the lived landscape. Consequently, the contraction of the industry brought change that was all pervading across the economic, social and cultural spheres.

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5 Bulmer, M, “Social Structure and Social Change in the Twentieth Century”, in Bulmer, op cit, p.26
6 Ibid, p.23
Yet this does not explain why the two previous dramatic contractions of mining are not perceived as communally traumatic events. I suggest it is because traumatogenic change is due to a number of experiences coming together. The most significant factor was the wholesale change of political and social outlook that arrived with Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government in 1979, who planned to accelerate the closure of most of Britain’s remaining collieries, and turn to nuclear power and foreign coal imports for the nation’s energy. When those plans were put into effect the result was the Miners’ Strike of 1984-5, and with it a fundamental questioning of the legitimacy of union politics and mining culture. The miners’ defeat in 1985 led to the swift demise of Durham’s remaining collieries and the worst effects of high and long term unemployment. This economic crisis was intensified by a host of other factors prevalent in post-industrial culture: delinquency; wide-scale drug and alcohol abuse; and a loss of respect for the institutions of authority. These factors are more prevalent when communities are economically marginalised; they are simultaneously the symptoms of, and reasons for trauma.

Another significant factor has been the presence of social agents able and willing to produce the evidence of trauma. In the case of the Durham mining villages, this agent has been Newcastle’s Amber art collective, who have recorded those communities in photography and film, from the mid 1970s to the present day. This record of the demise of
industry and changes brought about by colliery closure has given us a comprehensive picture of crisis. This is the cultural construction of trauma; we can conceive of this period of mining’s contraction as communal trauma, precisely because social agents have created a picture that leads us to make that deduction. This is not to say that they have set out with a fully formed idea of investigating this crisis as “communal trauma”. However, Amber’s record of County Durham has always had an eye on the past, and a suspicion of the future. They have set out to record a process of change which will lead to catastrophic consequences for communities: all pervading economic, social and cultural upheaval. On the way they have provided the stories of real experience and actual social deterioration to make that picture convincing. In fact this picture is all the more convincing because it is specific. Amber have recorded the effects of de-industrialisation in many communities across the North East, and those effects have certainly been portrayed as negative. Yet it is only in the mining villages of East Durham that these changes correspond with the trauma of social change outlined by Piotr Sztompka.

Amber’s picture of East Durham also follows a chronology of events which correlates to Sztompka’s theory. First there is a period of prediction, in which the effects of mining’s demise are forewarned. This corresponds to Sztompka’s idea that communities can become increasingly disorientated by change, even before its effects are fully manifested. Secondly there is a period of upheaval, in which traditional culture becomes undermined. This correlates to the Miner’s Strike, a time in which mining communities become disorientated by radical change. Many of the collieries of East Durham did not close immediately after the strike, so although that event was felt as a crushing political and cultural defeat, the devastating effects of economic change were not felt until some time later. No doubt, the defeat of 1985 was itself traumatic for some, but for many it represented a period of confusion and disorientation. This disorientation weakened communities so that they were more prone to the traumatic effects of mass unemployment that were to follow colliery closing.
closure; the traumatic results of social change that were recorded by Amber in East Durham from the 1990s onwards.

The following four chapters will follow this pattern of events. Yet Amber also produced a body of work from the late 1970s that predicted the demise of these communities. After first outlining in more detail how Sztompka’s theory is directly relevant to the situation of East Durham, this chapter addresses how Amber recorded and fed into the growing tension before the Miners’ Strike. It examines how they predicted the forthcoming crisis through landscapes that idealised mining villages as harsh but heroic, but also nostalgic and moribund.

**Traumatogenic Social Change**

On the surface there appear to be significant differences between the situations in County Durham and post-Communist Eastern Europe. Despite the weakening of Communist ideology over the 1980s, the collapse of the Berlin Wall was a shocking and unexpected event, followed by an equally rapid flood of capitalist market ideology into the Eastern Bloc countries. By contrast, the de-industrialisation process in County Durham had been progressing since at least the early 1960s. Yet there are parallels because trauma is not merely down to economic change, but also due to cultural disorientation. Communities may be weakened by the perception of change, before that change actually has any real practical effects. Sztompka calls this “cultural disorganisation”, a communal condition similar to “cognitive dissonance” in the individual. Change reveals the embedded cultural and social markers, relied upon to make sense of the world, to be fragile, contradictory, irrelevant or obsolete. This disorganisation makes communities less able to withstand any practical changes that subsequently afflict them.

So perhaps the roots of the trauma in East Durham lie in the wave of pit closures during the 1960s across the whole of the industry. These closures, due to a mixture of natural exhaustion and a policy of economic rationalisation, began in the west of the county, and served to “herd” Durham’s remaining mining activity towards the newer, more modernised

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8 Sztompka, op cit, p.164
pits in the east. In their wake they left many villages as communal shells with high unemployment and crumbling infrastructure. This resulted in agitation in those remaining collieries as further closures were anticipated (with stark evidence of what that could mean). This agitation intensified as those closures became inevitable after the election of the Conservative Government. The result was the Miners’ Strike, which we can see as a desperate defence mechanism (and during which miners were fully aware of the consequences of defeat). While the strike was not necessarily traumatic in itself, and may actually have led to a strengthening of community, defeat also led to further cultural disorganisation. Ultimately, communities’ worst fears were realised as the collieries closed, leading to economic, social and cultural deterioration and full scale communal trauma.⁹

Sztompka identifies four features of radical social change which may make it traumatic. Firstly, he suggests that a change must be “sudden and rapid”. The decline of the mining industry was long but there was a marked acceleration in pit closure from 1979 to 1984, after a decade or so of relatively slow contraction. Furthermore, Sztompka suggests that some change is “prolonged and cumulative but eventually reaches a threshold of saturation beyond which it turns out to be fundamentally, qualitatively new”.¹⁰ We can suggest that the early 1980s marked a point at which perception turned from the decline of an industry to the death of an industry, a point which prompted the 1984 strike as a last, desperate stand. After all, the government plans to privatise mining and prioritise other sources of energy were clear; they had been formed before the Conservatives came to power, and were encapsulated in the Ridley Report, which had been leaked to The Economist in May 1978. In Durham this movement from demise to death had a geographical element as the industry had been progressively squeezed up against the coast. For many, the closure of the coal

⁹ Of course, in reality the process is far more complex. Trauma is felt in different ways by different individuals and communities, despite them experiencing very similar situations. Features of social deterioration, such as crime, drugs and failing health are both causes and symptoms of trauma. Furthermore trauma and cultural disorganisation are not so easy to separate: trauma engenders disorganisation as much as stems from it. Nevertheless, a general chronological and value-added process of agitation, cultural disorganisation, and full scale trauma is a useful one to bear in mind in relation to East Durham.

¹⁰ Sztompka, op cit, p.158 [italics in original]
industry’s “research and development” centre at Grimethorpe in Yorkshire immediately after the strike vividly symbolised the end of the industry in the UK.  

Secondly, the change must be faced with disbelief. Again, the long-term decline of mining may seem to negate this point. However, the rationalisation of the 1960s was meant to ensure the industry’s future, and disbelief that such plans were now seen as irrelevant was a significant factor in strike action. In 1960, then head of the N.C.B. Lord Robens had predicted a hundred year future for the Durham coastal collieries and in 1977 Horden Colliery in East Durham was used by the N.C.B. in an advert to attract former miners back into the industry, offering “big pay” and “a secure job”. Yet by September 1983 management decided that the pit was uneconomic and was to close (which it did in 1987). Many miners had relocated from other pits to Horden, so news that it was to close triggered a contradictory mix of disbelief and morbid expectation.

Indeed, despite the Ridley Report, this disorientating mix of tragic realism and disbelief was a defining feature of the strike itself. The government’s determination to break pickets with uncompromising police action was also shocking to a group of workers trying to ensure the very survival of their communities. While a strong government response was feared, it was startling when it materialised. As one Durham mining electrician stated, “We’ve talked about what the state would do and what this government would do with the state when it was pushed. But theorising about it and experiencing it – coming face to face with it – it’s a different thing. Emotionally it’s different. I can’t say that I’m surprised because I expected something like this. But I am shocked. It has affected me”. 

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11 Lazenby, P, “Covering Coal in Yorkshire”, in Williams, G (Ed), Shafted: The Media, the Miners’ Strike and the Aftermath (London: Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, 2009), p.56
12 Sztompka, op cit, p.159
14 Ibid, p.51
It denoted a cultural reframing of the miner from the figure who had once been the exotic hero of British industry, George Orwell’s supporting “caryatid”, to “the enemy within”. This was emphasised by the aggressive (and equally shocking) attitude towards the miners in the press. The miners’ defeat in 1985 was also faced with the disorientating mixture of realism and disbelief. They had recently won important strikes over pay and conditions in 1972 and 1974, and in early 1981 the threat of industrial action had been enough for the government to shelve the proposed colliery closure plan. So the complete defeat in 1985 struck an unexpected and catastrophic blow to the very legitimacy of working class politics and union solidarity.

The last two of Sztompka’s factors are more easily applied to the demise of mining. The change is usually “wide, comprehensive, either in the sense that it touches many aspects of life… or that it affects many actors and social actions. It is also “radical, deep, fundamental – that is, it touches the core aspects of social life or personal fate”. In East Durham these factors are intricately related. While the removal of the employment infrastructure from communities resulted in immediate unemployment, the fact that in many isolated pit villages this was the sole employer means that on a local level this change is indeed “wide” and “comprehensive”. It has been estimated that for every miner’s job lost from closure, seven more were threatened in ancillary industries and the local economy. Economic devastation led to the other insidious symptoms of mass unemployment in post-industrial society: political apathy or cynicism; the proliferation of drugs and delinquency; a lack of respect for social institutions of authority (family, church or law) amongst the young; and the withdrawal of individuals from public interaction to private isolation. It also led to the contraction of the public services and support networks that can alleviate communal trauma (for instance, though deprived areas have higher incidences of health problems, they also find it harder to attract medical professionals), and the general deterioration of housing, shops, transport and the physical environment: the accepted infrastructure of a normal

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16 During a speech to the 1922 Committee on July 20th 1984, Margaret Thatcher used this now infamous term to refer to the striking miners. Quickly picked up by the media it made a deep impression upon mining communities; an acknowledgement that they were seen as an unwanted element by a Conservative government which was determined to destroy their union solidarity, and industry.

17 Sztompka, op cit, p.159

18 Lazenby, op cit, p.59
lifescape. It is these aspects of deterioration, and the fact that they have been all-pervading that can be easily pointed to as traumatogenic.

Yet in mining communities, economic collapse inevitably affected other parts of life. The strong influence of the pit on communal life meant that “wide and comprehensive” economic change had a “radical” and “fundamental” effect upon social networks and cultural identity. The strike defeat, and the practical effects of social deterioration also led to a lasting loss of faith in the institutions of authority. For some it led them to question the relevance of the fundamental buttress of the mining community, the union.

However, there are clearly differences between the totalising systems of the Communist Bloc and the political experience of Unionism in County Durham. The first is that the traumatic experience of post-Communist communities is partly based on a feeling of being “let down” by the state. Whereas Union politics in the mining industry is based upon opposition to an inherently capitalist system; solidarity is based upon this traditional opposition, and class oppression is not only believable, it is expected. However, in both cases trauma arises from the conflict between a (traditional) Socialist and a (radical and neo-liberal) Capitalist ideology. Sztompka highlights some themes and discourses which are inherent within these contrasting ideologies, which are summarised in Figure 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Socialist</th>
<th>Emergent Capitalist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>collectivism</td>
<td>individualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity in poverty</td>
<td>competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>egalitarianism</td>
<td>Meritocratic justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camouflage in mediocrity</td>
<td>Conspicuous success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>security</td>
<td>risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliance on fate</td>
<td>Emphasis on agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counting on social support</td>
<td>Self-reliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming failures on system</td>
<td>Personal responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwelling on a glorious past</td>
<td>Actively anticipating / constructing the future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Table of contrasting social outlooks during times of radical economic change, as noted by Piotr Sztompka.

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19 Sztompka, op cit, p.177
21 Sztompka, ibid
These opposing features could also be applied to the stereotypical outlooks of mining unionism and Thatcherite entrepreneurism. Yet they are stereotypes. Sztompka suggests that the absolute cultural embedding of such Socialist features in many of the Communist Bloc countries led to a sort of “Homo Sovieticus”. By contrast, mining villages experienced the same cultural changes as anywhere else in Britain from the 1960s onwards: increased education, social mobility and home ownership; television; withdrawal into the private sphere; and the decreased influence of social institutions. As Martin Bulmer pointed out in the late 1970s, though the former colliery village remained the most common type of settlement in County Durham, they were no longer exclusively full of miners. However, though the contraction of the industry in the 1960s did mean that occupational and geographically had increased, Bulmer himself conceded that a lack of geographical mobility was still one of the defining features of mining village culture. This has been corroborated by Mark Hudson’s observations in the 1990s, and Emma Hollywood in this millennium. Furthermore, the coastal collieries of East Durham had become receiving pits, taking workers relocating from other collieries. This means that the proportion of people reliant on the industry in those communities was much higher than the county average.

Nevertheless, the socialist stereotypes stick because the miner has been framed as the archetypal proletarian worker, particularly by David Lockwood in the late 1960s. Lockwood suggested that the mining life was implicitly “shaped by occupational solidarities and communal sociability” which prioritised fraternity and comradeship, limited individualism, and gave rise to a:

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23 While in mining’s heyday more than two thirds of the county’s male work force were employed in the industry, by 1978 that figure was less than one seventh. Bulmer, M, “Social Structure and Social Change in the Twentieth Century”, in Bulmer (1978), op cit, p.22

“proletarian social consciousness...centred on an awareness of ‘us’ in contradiction to ‘them’... ‘Them’ are bosses, managers, white collar workers and, ultimately, the public authorities of the larger society”.

The miner thus had a fundamentally different outlook to the emerging “privatised” workers with a “pecuniary” relation to society: individualists simply concerned with the pay packet.

County Durham does display a uniformly left wing political persuasion. However, this does not mean that politics is uniformly experienced. In the mining villages loyalty is to the Durham Miners Association (D.M.A.), over and above party politics. The union built the physical and social structures that provide the social and cultural focus for the village, and has provided support in times of hardship. It has a physical presence and location; politics is not an abstract, but a real experience. This means that while there may be a uniform loyalty to Labour politics, what this loyalty actually means to individuals and communities is highly fluid and personal. Nonetheless, social isolation, the relative homogeneity of employment and strong social structures highlighted above did, to a certain extent lead to the domination of a certain set of class values in County Durham mining communities, which are certainly on the left hand side of the table above.

So, while the fall of Communism may seem an extreme framework to base this analysis upon, it does provide a relevant indicator of how a Durham communities’ ideology and identity can be undermined by a set of events. In terms of a threat to group ideology, we cannot overestimate the feeling of “regime change” felt by many of those at the sharp end of Thatcher’s economic surgery.

Once again, what makes the connection between Durham and Sztompka’s observations appropriate is the picture portrayed by the social agents that have documented change. Amber have portrayed the communities of East Durham as occupationally homogenous,
with a strong sense of cultural identity based on industry, and stranded by change. One of the indicators of this change has been the altered landscape. This is because the focal point of that change has a physical location: the colliery. As the pit colliery has been so influential upon social networks, these networks have a physical dimension. There is a social geography of mining villages. As Tom McGuiness’ painting indicates, the pit is the centre of this landscape: socially, economically and physically. Amber’s record of change is based precisely upon this assumption, and the way they treat this landscape reflects Sztompka’s observation that at every point of the traumatic change those affected look back to an idealised past. This is actually essential. For agents like Amber to make an effective case for trauma, they must suggest a “normal” state to which the trauma can be contrasted. Consequently a nostalgic vision of an idealised mining landscape is a defining feature of Amber’s record. In the case of mining this is supported by a wide range of well known cultural references that idealise mining culture.

The Romance of Coal

The writer Clancy Sigal suggested that we have a “romance of coal” in Britain. It is an appropriate phrase: romance is rarely objective; it always looks through the lens of a fondly held idea. In Britain, coal mining has always been viewed through the lens of its “ideal type”: the set of conceptual abstracts and stereotypical assumptions employed to make the complexity of the world manageable. The reality of mining has never been as important as the conceptual framework we look through at mining; whenever mining has been represented it has been in relation to how closely it corresponds to those conceptual abstracts. As too, has the miner. Fundamental to the picture has been the documentary movement of the 1930s: Alberto Cavalcanti’s Coal Face, or the writing of George Orwell. Such representations have set out to reveal aspects of mining life, but the revelation has always been inflected by the romance. The view has been inflected with the range of Modernist abstract concepts: the glory of culture; nostalgia for the simpler life; and the urge for social change. One result has been the view that the miner is not a man who does a job;

29 Sztompka, op cit, p.187
he is a breed (“The Miner”), and a breed apart from who is picturing him. Such representations have added detail to the genus, rather than question it.

Abstract ideal-type concepts have also dictated the representation of the mining landscape. The industrial landscape is as much informed by the contradictory impulses of Robin Kelsey’s “fantasy of not belonging”, as the rural. It is to be celebrated: it shows technological progress and cultural superiority over the natural world. It must also be mourned; it shows how far man is distanced from an idealised natural existence. Through the nineteenth century this conflicting attitude to the industrial landscape became infused with realism as much as romanticism. It was realised that industrial and cultural progress, does not just signify a melancholic loss, but results in real and inevitable hardship, and that these are eternal consequences; the socio-economic condition is irreversible. It is an idea that leads to the sociological critique encapsulated by Ferdinand Tönnies’ ideas of gemeinschaft and gesellschaft.

Such conflicting impulses have underscored the representation of the Durham landscape because mining in the North East epitomised the nineteenth century frenzy of industrial development. From around 1825 the number of pits grew exponentially, with the establishment of large collieries of unprecedented size and technological advancement across the region. At the high point of the industry between 1913 and 1919, there were between 350 and 400 pits in County Durham alone. This rapid expansion changed the physical nature of the landscape. From a predominantly rural county in the seventeenth century the Durham became a mixture of urban and rural, pockmarked by small industrial settlements.

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32 On one hand we are melancholic that we are increasingly detached from an idealised communion with nature; we produce cultural artefacts and sociological tracts mourning this detachment. One the other hand, the development of culture itself represents that detachment from an idyllic natural state. Kelsey, R, “Landscape as not Belonging”, in Ziady DeLue, R and Elkins, J (Eds), Landscape Theory (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), pp.203-213
33 Sztompka, op cit, p.157
34 Tönnies, F, Community and Association: Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft (London: Routledge, 1955) [originally 1887]. Though we should not see Tönnies’ idea as directly influential, but symptomatic of these ideas.
35 The urge to celebrate this progress is captured by Thomas Hair’s series of etchings of 1844, published as Views of the Collieries in the Counties of Northumberland and Durham, which charts the new techniques and structures of extraction.
It is not surprising then, that in 1908 J.S. Fletcher saw it as a landscape marked by industrial blight as much as industrial achievement: he was infused with the fantasy of not belonging of his age.\footnote{This is also demonstrated by Fletcher’s cultural contemporaries: the Modernist romanticism of artists such as La Tangue and photographic Pictorialism, and movements such as the National Trust. Fletcher, J.S, \textit{The Enchanting North} (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1908)} He notes that,

\begin{quote}
“\textit{most of the journey from Darlington to the northern border of the county lies through a region made dreary by coal pits, long, dismal rows of colliers’ houses, much smoke and more dirt, together with an atmosphere, physical and mental, which suggests the worst features of modern industrialism}”.
\end{quote}

J.B. Priestley’s view of the same landscape in 1933 is inflected with a set of concepts associated with class consciousness. His miner as ideal type is a heroic but tragic slave to “greedy, careless, cynical, barbaric industrialism”.\footnote{Ibid, p.143. Fletcher consciously turns his eye from this unpleasant scene, and instead emphasises the timeless “enchanting” England, seeking out lych gates and ruined abbeys. He is imbued with the return to rural romanticism at the turn of the century Easington is “one of those delightful villages built around a green, with an old church”, rather than the site of one of the newest coastal deep pits (sunk in 1899 and beginning production in 1911). Ibid, p.162} The Durham landscape as a hellish industrial sublime, epitomised by Shotton Colliery in East Durham:

\begin{quote}
“\textit{Imagine then a village consisting of a few shops, a public house, and a clutter of dirty little houses, all at the base of what looked at first like an active volcano. This was the notorious Shotton ‘tip’, literally a man-made smoking hill. From its peak ran a colossal aerial flight to the pithead far below...The ‘tip’ itself towered to the sky and its vast bulk, steaming and smoking at various levels, blotted out all the landscape at the back of the village...The atmosphere was thickened with ashes and sulphuric fumes: like that of Pompeii, as we are told, on the eve of its destruction}”.
\end{quote}

Priestley was writing during mining’s catastrophic plunge in the Depression. Nostalgia for a lost, pre-industrial way of life is mixed with nostalgia for a threatened industrial class; anger that men have to work in such places as Shotton pit is mixed with melancholia that they may also not have the option. The representations of Priestley, and the documentary....

\footnote{Ibid, p.259}
movement have influenced all subsequent depictions of Durham mining, including Amber’s. In the mid 1930s, the photographers Bill Brandt, Humphrey Spender and Edwin Smith, along with the writers W.H. Auden and George Orwell, produced the aesthetic that defines the industrial worker: physicality both in labour and leisure; defined features; and lowly nobility. They also captured the archetypal landscapes: harsh and rugged; sharp lines that cut into grey blocks of sky; deep chiaroscuro; the uniformity and angularity of factories and houses. Yet within the documentary record of the 1930s there are actually few images of the Durham landscape (there are more of Northumberland), or indeed the mining landscape at all. The landscape is actually an ideal type abstraction in itself. What is important is that it provides a scene for the social concept of the mining, and for the miner. The important detail is that it is clear what this miner means. He is the heroic caryatid, supporting our corrupted, but also marvellous modern world. He is also one of the first to fall victim of the changes in that modern world (figures 4 and 5).

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**Figure 4:** Edwin Smith, *Pithead, Ashington Colliery*, 1936  
**Figure 5:** Bill Brandt, *Searching for Coal, East Durham*, 1936

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40 Orwell in particular seems to have an obsessive interest in the physical characteristics of the miner. His emphasis on their stereotypical physical qualities, naturally leads us to wonder what do those that do not conform to this frame do in Wigan. The answer appears to be that they are simply not born. Orwell, op cit.
John Taylor has warned us to be wary of over-estimating the influence of some of these images on the contemporary perception of the industrial north.\footnote{Taylor speaks of the limited influence, or absolute failure to influence the national populace about the conditions of the north of the Mass Observation project, Brandt’s \textit{The English at Home}, and Orwell’s \textit{The Road to Wigan Pier}. Taylor, J., \textit{A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist’s Imagination} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p.152-182. Certainly Brandt’s book was remaindered, but such images did make some impression, certainly on those pictured. As David Mellor has pointed out, Harrison was shamed as “Public busybody number one” in the Daily Mirror and the Mass Observation project was resisted to a certain extent in towns such as Bolton. Mellor, D., “Mass Observation: the Intellectual Climate” in \textit{Camerawork, No.11} (September 1978), reproduced in Evans, J (Ed), \textit{The Camerawork Essays: Context and Meaning in Photography} (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1997), p.137-9. Furthermore, after Spender’s initial images of Newcastle were published in \textit{Picture Post}, the mayor of Newcastle invited the photographer back to capture some more balanced views of the city.} Indeed, they slipped into relative cultural obscurity between the 1950s and the 1970s, but rather than seeing the perception of the miner as being influenced by certain images at certain times, we should rather see it as reflecting certain attitudes: certain prevalent ideal-type concepts. Many of these concepts precede the documentary of the 1930s. The industrial north had been a site to observe the working class, the worst effects of industrial progress and social inequality since the mid nineteenth century. The miner was already the figure to represent these concepts, but the 1930s added the promise of Modernism, but also the realities of the Depression: this inequality can be overcome, \textit{but not yet}. The miner became the heroic symbol of the experience of modernity, because he was the sacrifice to modernity.

Yet the writer Sid Chaplin (himself a miner in his youth) creates a different more idyllic picture of life in the Durham pit village between the wars. His (self-admittedly) nostalgic vision of the mining village, “with the pit as its focal point, and…nurturing a sort of semi-tribal community which, in the light of present day urban society, seems almost a dream of paradise”, makes explicit a constant subtext in the documentary of the 1930s: that though mining communities are harsh, deprived, marginalised and exploited, they may actually be quite close to gemeinschaft.\footnote{Chaplin, op cit, p.70. Sigal suggest that the romance of coal only applies “as long as you are not working down in the pit”. Sigal, op cit, p.67. The work of Chaplin, Len Doherty, Tom McGuiness and Norman Cornish may suggest that this romance also affects those from inside the industry.} With its emphasis on family, equality and fraternity, the mining village may represent an idealised community isolated from the cynical complexity of urban life.\footnote{The mining village may indeed correspond to gemeinschaft. Tönnies outlined two sets of social relations, but merely suggested that they were \textit{more likely} to occur in rural or urban communities. They were} In the post-war period the representation of the mining life becomes increasingly informed by the idea that this authentic industrial community may disappear.
Decline and Loss

After a brief post-war revival, there was another sharp decline in the Durham mining industry from the late 1950s. Employment in the industry dropped from around 100,000 people to around a third of that number in a decade. The threat of another Depression was looming at the same time as some parts of the industrial North East had not even recovered from the last. The photographer Colin Jones makes this connection in his images from the early 1960s. His depictions of coal-searchers in Sunderland (Figure 6) mirror Brandt’s and Spender’s, just as works such as Colliery, County Durham, of 1963, show the influence of the documentary of the 1930s, with the winding gear captured from below in heavy chiaroscuro. For Jones the Durham coalfield is still a harsh landscape of deprivation, and its inhabitants beaten but heroic.

Yet Jones also wishes to record a way of life that is quite evidently about to disappear. His images of Benwell, in Newcastle’s West End record a community that is about to be cleared because of the ambitious development policies of Newcastle Council under T. Dan Smith (Figure 7). Jones therefore, is not reproducing the general and undefined sense of demise of the 1930s documentary, but quite specifically pointing to a particular “authentic” and self-sufficient industrial community, that will disappear because of the changes of modernisation. It is an urge that reflects the cultural concerns of the time: an obsession with class mobility, and the changing and disappearing working class. Socially mobile working

subsequently taken to describe whole social systems, systems which have been reified into a binary opposition of rural and urban. Hillyard, S, The Sociology of Rural Life (Oxford: Berg, 2007), p.15

44 Melancholia and heroic sacrifice did not disappear from mining imagery during the stability of the 1950s (particularly evident in the images of Welsh mining by Robert Frank, Bruce Davidson and W. Eugene Smith). But there was more emphasis on the progress of the nationalised industry and the benefits this brought to miners, particularly in the films of National Coal Board Film Unit, which produced over a thousand short films from 1952 until it was disbanded in 1984.

45 Crisis was also being predicted in the North East’s other great industry, ship-building. By January 1961, a BBC News Extra television programme was asking if the industry had any future. BBC News Extra: British Shipbuilding in 1961, aired 13th January 1961, from www.bbc.co.uk/archive/working, accessed 01/09/2008

46 In terms of infrastructure, conditions and the residents’ lack of social capital, the effects of the Depression were still very obvious in certain areas. Daysh, GHJ, Symonds, JS et al, “Inter-war Unemployment in West Durham”, in Bulmer (1978), op cit, p.143

47 The debt to the 1930s documentary was self-confessed. Jones was just beginning his photography career and cited the influence of Brandt, and the concept of the photo-essays of Observer photographer Michael Peto as a motivating influence. Haworth-Booth, M, “Introduction”, in Colin Jones, Grafters (London: Phaidon, 2002), p.9
class heroes, the British Realist films of the period and the efforts of cultural commentators such as Richard Hoggart to record the features of the working class, all point to the idea that the traditional working class was changing. Though against this change there was a very real concern (and a lingering 1930s aesthetic) of continuing poverty. Some areas were threatened by both the change of the present, and the isolation and hardship of the past.

![Figure 6: Colin Jones, Coal Searchers on a Slag Heap, Sunderland, 1962](image1)

![Figure 7: Colin Jones, A Shop Keeper Washing Her Doorstep, 1963](image2)

The themes of working class hardship, and a culture increasingly out of time are continued in Tony Ray-Jones’ images of Durham Miners’ Gala in 1969. Ray-Jones’ catalogue of rituals updates Brandt’s *English at Home* in contrasting the various ceremonies of the British social strata. However, his point is to highlight “the ‘Insanity’ of a specifically British condition of ‘Modernity’ towards the end of the 1960s”, in which traditional rituals collided with the perception of a thoroughly modern Britain. In *Durham Miners’ Gala* this sense of a culture out of step is suggested through the device of generational contrast (Figure 8). The young boy looks away from a tired old miner, while above his head the lodge banner, symbol of continuity seems about to disappear in the wind. The only connecting device between the two generations is the apparatus of ritual.

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49 The 1966 interim census set out to find exactly how socially and economically mobile people from different areas were, and in November of that year the *Weekend Telegraph* ran a photo-essay by Clancy Sigal and the photographer Nina Raginsky, asking, “Why Poverty in 1966? The Darker Side of the Affluent Society”. *Weekend Telegraph, Number 113*, November 25 1966, pp.20-27

Amber

The Amber collective were informed by these discourses about the changing working class, and the aesthetic conventions of representing them. The collective was formed around a nucleus of Murray Martin, Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen and Graham Denman, students at London’s Regent Street Polytechnic, who relocated to Newcastle in 1969. After considering a handful of British cities, and partly because it seemed “very exotic and bleak”, they chose Tyneside as the base for their project to document disappearing working class life.\footnote{Newbury, D, “Documentary Practices and Working-Class Culture: An Interview with Murray Martin”, in Visual Studies, Vol.17, No.2 (2002), p.117. The fact that he had been an art student in the city in the early 1960s was also a factor.} Early projects focussed on the communities and industry along the Tyne. Short films such as Launch (1973) and Glassworks (1977) celebrated traditional northern industries, while explicitly mourning their decline. In fact these Tyneside films were produced in collaboration with local historian Stafford Linsley specifically as visual records of disappearing employment lifestyles; they were conceived as what Darren Newbury has termed “salvage documentary”\footnote{Ibid, p.114}.

One film in this series, Bowes Line (1975) epitomises features and themes that recur through Amber’s projects of the 1970s, and coincidentally represents Amber’s first foray into the County Durham mining industry. It examines the last days of the rope-operated railway built by George Stephenson in the 1820s, which moved coal from Kibblesworth colliery in the far north of the county, to Jarrow Staithes on the Tyne, and the activities of
two of its operators. While portraying working class life, as often hard but dignified, it also celebrates the industrial achievements of the past. This is contrasted with an undefined and uncertain post-industrial future, which will presumably leave the characters adrift and marginalised. Sedate and melancholic, the film is also fond and shamelessly nostalgic for what is about to be lost; full of poetic shots of solitary coal tubs creaking into the distance (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Promotional Still from Bowes Line (Amber Films, 1975)

Bowes Line also comments upon the universal, through the particular. It is political, in highlighting how northern industrial lives are affected by decisions over which they have no control. Yet while representing an oppositional stance, it is not polemical. In Martin’s terms it is “poetic documentary”: reconstructing situations to emphasise emotion and relationships rather than didactically political.

Nostalgic Aesthetics

Such thematic similarities with the documentary of the Depression are mirrored in aesthetic continuities, evident from their first project, Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen’s Byker, of the early 1970s. Symbolic subjects such as little girls playing in the street, and advertising hoardings

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53 As Murray Martin suggested “nostalgia is experiences held in affection”, and it is this fond, humanistic portrayal of working life that is re-iterated throughout Amber’s work of this period. Interview with Murray Martin in 1995, in Dickinson, M, “Amber” in Dickinson, M (Ed), Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain 1945-90 (London: British Film Institute, 1999), p.254
54 In this, he emphasised the similarities between the projects and Grierson’s documentary movement, but also that while the former worked for the state, Amber remain resolutely oppositional. Murray Martin interviewed by Huw Beynon, 10/09/99, in Beynon, H, “Documentary Poet: Murray Martin”, in Rowbotham, S & Beynon, H (Eds), Looking at Class: Film, Television and the Working Class in Britain (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2001), p.162-3
against modest terrace ends, as well as aesthetic devices such as sharply receding terraces and deep contrast of light and shadow are all reminiscent of Humphrey Spender’s *Worktown*. The similarities continue in Amber’s commissioned projects throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. Izabela Jedrzejczyk’s depictions of Tyneside reflect both the imposing diagonals and chiaroscuro of Bill Brandt and the panoramic misty greys of Spender, while Tish Murtha’s images of unemployed Newcastle youth in the early 1980s frames contemporary characters within a landscape reminiscent of the Depression. Similarities are particularly clear in the theme of those living on the edge of the mining industry, as can be seen in the images of Brandt, Jones and one-time Amber Associate Chris Killip (Figures 10 to 12).

![Figure 10: Bill Brandt, Searching for Coal, East Durham, 1936](image1)

![Figure 11: Colin Jones, Coal Searchers on a Slag Heap, Sunderland, 1962](image2)

![Figure 12: Chris Killip, from In Flagrante, mid 1980s](image3)

Just as Jones had noted in the 1960s, the contraction of the shipping and mining industries in the late 1970s meant the re-emergence of the threat of mass unemployment. This provided fertile ground for Amber, just as it did for a body of oppositional Social Realist photography and film in Britain at the time. This thrived on a combination of factors. On one hand social and economic strain had given rise to urban social hardship. On the other increased arts funding, particularly in the areas of community arts and photography enabled such projects to flourish.
By the mid 1970s social studies were digesting the implications of mining’s contraction in the 1960s. Martin Bulmer’s *Mining and Social Change* of 1978 provided the first comprehensive overview of the implications of this contraction in the county. It coincided with a cultural rediscovery of the photography of the 1930s. Bill Brandt’s images were exhibited in a major show at London’s Hayward Gallery in 1970, which began a long critical assessment, particularly by David Mellor and David Campany throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In addition there was renewed interest in the work of Spender from the mid 1970s, and a special edition of the journal *Camerawork* on Mass Observation in 1978.\(^5\)

Popular television programmes such as *When the Boat Comes In* (BBC television, 1976-81) and Ken Loach’s *Days of Hope* (BBC 1975), also prompted associations between the social and economic climate of the two periods. When the latter was repeated in April 1978, it was amidst a rising political temperature that was to result in the “winter of discontent” and the political showdowns of Thatcher’s first term. By the early 1980s this link between the Depression and the fallout from Thatcherism was made vividly clear in two written domestic travelogues, Beatrix Campbell’s *Wigan Pier Revisited* and Beryl Bainbridge’s *English Journey*.\(^6\)

Nevertheless, Amber kept detached from wider critical debates about photography during this period, and remained faithful to oppositional humanist Realism, and the aesthetics of the documentary tradition.\(^7\) Middlesbrough-born photographer Graham Smith emphasised those links between the present and the past. Whereas *Bowes Line* infers the universal from the study of the particular, Smith’s work plays on the universal. It intentionally creates stereotypical views of a heroic, but moribund working class.

\(^{55}\) *Camerawork, No.11* (September 1978). The re-interest in Spender began with a solo show at the University of Sussex in 1977.


\(^{57}\) Though their film output did include the odd example of experimental animation, their photographic work largely resisted both the conceptual forays of other British documentary photographers such as Victor Burgin, and the move to colour (though British documentary generally resisted the move to colour until the work of Martin Parr and Paul Graham in the early 1980s).
High Level Bridge (Figure 13) is a montage image conflating the stereotypical aesthetic codes of North Eastern identity. With his obvious physical bulk, and surrounded by the props of north east industry (flat cap, heavy coat and brute lumps of steel), this is not a portrait of a contemporary man, but a symbolic figure linking past and present. He looks into the distance, contemplating the past, or the future. Smith makes associations with the imagery of the Depression, but also our cultural inability to see below the accepted vision of the North East as a landscape of melancholic stereotypes.

These themes also inform Smith’s imagery of County Durham. Easington, County Durham of 1976 (Figure 14), oozes nostalgia, with its long shadows and couple walking away from the camera. It conjures melancholy Realism of the final scene of Cavalcanti’s Coal Face, and the telegraph poles that frame the receding roadway echo the washing lines that transect 1930s alley ways, which practically became shorthand for working class industrial existence. Even in Blackhill, Consett (Figure 15), the presence of the contemporary car and works in the background only serves to exaggerate the contrast with the family scene

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58 Smith produced a handful of these montages at this time, but other, un-manipulated images also emphasise the same links with the 1930s. The photographs of Newcastle in the mid 1970s show an unmistakable quotation of Brandt, being sparsely populated, dominated by extreme diagonals and foreshortening, and developed in heavy chiaroscuro.
outside the terraced house, reminiscent of Spender’s *Worktown* or Edwin Smith’s *Gateshead*.

This debt to the past was readily conceded in the handful of interviews Murray Martin gave before his death in 2007, as was Amber’s marginalisation from the more innovative developments in British photography. He admitted that Amber had been criticised for being old-fashioned, but defended their focus on emotional imagery over theoretical subtleties. Though he criticised Spender and Brandt for their detached observational practice, he admired their work for its strength, which has ensured their images’ continued appeal. It is this aesthetic directness which conveys understandable truths to working class communities, “…because it’s all about audiences and what they respond to”.

**Collaboration and Representation**

This emphasis on a connection with the audience relates to Amber’s role as a “carrier group”, disseminating a message of trauma. Their focus upon communities marginalised by social change certainly provides the subject matter for that message, but they have also strived to break down the distance between observer and observed, by carrying out their projects with and for the communities they document. The Amber members received their artistic education when the emphasis was not only on class, but also upon alternative histories, subcultures and oral histories. It indicated a shift in the representation of working

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59 Newbury, op cit, p.125

60 Ibid, p.123
class life away from the detached and scientific towards self-representation. As a result Amber developed a working mantra based upon R.G. Collingwood’s proviso that “the artist must talk of the problems of the community he serves, not his own, because they are interested in their own dilemmas, not those of the artist”. Consequently, the emphasis has been upon collaboration, rather than observation, which is achieved in three ways.

The first is a process of embedding. In their early projects this took the form of either travelling around working men’s clubs acquainting themselves with the clientele, or living or working within the communities they photograph. In addition, from the mid 1980s Amber started to commit to certain communities, initially North Shields, and then East Durham, on the basis of five year plans, in order to build strong and long-lasting relationships. The second way is self-representation, often through direct community input. Amber re-wrote the script for the film *High Row* (1974) after consultation with the mine workers featured, and the dramatic feature films that started to emerge from the mid 1980s often include local amateurs as actors, delivering scripted or unscripted dialogue, or as consultants and editors. The most recent films set in the Durham coalfield all came out of long discussions with the Easington and Horden communities about the changes that had taken place since pit closure. Amber then, see themselves as facilitators, enabling communities to do their own work. The group have also commissioned local photographers to capture their own communities, such as Mik Critchlow or Tish Murtha.

The practice of preceding film projects with photographic ones, to allow communities to get acquainted and respond to imagery (for instance, Chris Killip’s work in Lynemouth, preceding the film *Seacoal*), also ties into this philosophy of granting working class people more control of their representations. As Martin said, “that process has always been part of

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62 Though early films such as *Launch*, of 1973, seem to epitomise the methodology of the detached observer. The curious glances back at the camera from the ship-building workers display a relationship of two very different entities regarding each other than interaction.
63 As Martin recollects of their first photographic project *Byker*, “we didn’t do any photography for two years until people started talking to us about outsiders, which indicated we were let through the door”. Beynon, op cit, p.172
64 This may also be through knowledge sharing (through the establishment of community workshops or educational projects such as Lambton Visual Aids).
65 Newbury, op cit, p.120
reflecting what people think, taking it back to them and having that debate, its part of the recording of that culture”.

The last method is the most significant for this thesis: the concept of reflecting. Amber’s works are shown in national and international exhibition spaces, but from the early 1970s, they have also been committed to local distribution. Films are shown in local pubs and working men’s clubs, often supporting a main feature, and their photography has consistently been “toured” to the clubs, schools and libraries of the communities themselves. This methodology is important in terms of the cultural construction of trauma. The first part of the audience that must be convinced by any message is the group of sufferers itself. It is therefore essential that this message has veracity to them. This does not mean that they constitute strictly factual evidence. The early film projects in particular betray a freedom towards creative vision, often combining sound and images from a number of locations, and mixing overheard speech with scripted text. *High Row*, according to Martin, “is totally constructed…a complete drama”, but was created in collaboration with the subjects. So while being dramatised, still maintains credibility. Amber’s system of collaboration and community touring, whereby film and photography is shown back to this audience before similar projects are undertaken helps to ensure this veracity. Collaboration also enables the group of affected people to form (in cases in which it has not already). It enables them to speak of their pain in an act of therapeutic gathering.

**The Politics of Documentary**

However, in collaborative projects between artists and working class communities there is an inherently unequal relationship between the artist and the subject; an inequality that cannot simply be bridged by embedding. More often than not the class and educational backgrounds of documentary observers means that there is an imbalance of power between recorder and recorded. Martin was keen to emphasise that all Amber’s core element shared a working class upbringing. However, he also conceded that a university education

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66 Ibid, p.119
67 Beynon, op cit, p.169. Similarly, *Last Shift* (1976) was filmed some time after the actual “last shift” occurred, with the factory workers re-hired to re-enact their last days at the factory, which was also rented and re-opened for a week some months after its actual closure.
68 Dickinson, op cit, p.250
Automatically serves to detach an individual from their class. Critics have pointed out that this educational privilege has given Amber’s members choices. They may choose to embed themselves in working class communities, but this remains a choice, whereas the very point of their projects is that their subjects have none. So, while Amber may take pains to understand their subjects’ position, and even willingly chose to share it, they cannot live it.

Perhaps we should not dwell on this. Amber’s policy of intensive interaction means that documentary subjects do put forward their point of view and Amber are self-critical of their position as outsiders. Miwon Kwon suggests that any project in which a group is represented by those from outside its boundaries must acknowledge the imbalance of power in its artworks, and often the communities in Amber’s dramatic films are seen through the eyes of a symbolic “outsider” character, who stands in for the eyes of both the collective, and the audience. This is accepting and internalising the inherent gap between artist and subject, and a self-critical defence against accusations that they may be utilising the underclass as exotic subject matter. They also ensure that commissioned photographers coming into those communities are hand-picked and rigorously directed as to how to approach their projects.

This though, raises another difficulty. The humanist dilemma is that to represent marginalised communities often means that those communities are only represented as marginalised. This problem is actually compounded when observers work with communities. As Kwon points out, projects can turn into descriptive exercises. This means that artists equate a community’s identity with one aspect of its marginalised other-ness (whether that is race, class or poverty). The artist then produces a project concerning that aspect of identity, and because the community co-produces that artwork, this identity is

69 Beynon, op cit, p.160. Martin finishes this statement with “…save for their taste and ideology”, but taste itself is also open to alteration by education. The inherent distancing from working class roots through education is expressed vividly in Raymond Williams’ Border Country, the fictionalised account of his return to his own roots in Wales, but also in the work of other northern realist authors, such as Alan Plater, himself an Amber collaborator. The shift in power enabled by the ability to observe is also implicit in Richard Billingham’s photographs of his own family and working class roots.


72 Newbury, op cit, p.123
seen as authentic. The putative identity is reinforced rather than examined.\textsuperscript{73} Of course, this view may be contested by the represented group, but as has been outlined by Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, one of the “hidden injuries” of class is that working class subjects do generally accept that their representation is controlled by those they consider socially superior (in terms of education, experience or accent), and tend to acquiesce to their findings.\textsuperscript{74}

Kwon instead suggests a \textit{projective} exercise, which acknowledges the circumstances of how the group’s identity has been defined by the artist (and the institutions they represent), and how this influences their interaction. It is a process of “un-working” the idea of a single, coherent group identity, and recognises that identity within groups is both varied and always defined in absolutist, abstract terms (often from outside).\textsuperscript{75} In many ways Amber’s later projects in the Durham coalfield (from the late 1990s) follow this projective methodology more successfully. This may be because that structural framework that had enabled an easy one dimensional vision of community, i.e. “the pit”, had disappeared. Precisely because those strong links between the colliery and life outside it had been broken, community became a set of individuals negotiating change, rather than a unified (or perceived as unified) social body. However in the projects up until 1984, community does tend to be framed in a limited way. Impending change is uniformly framed as a threat to a unitary, “authentic” community, whose authenticity in fact depends on its complete separation from anything that change may bring. So, overall, we might say that these pre-strike projects may add narrative detail to the story of County Durham, but they do not add narrative complexity. They are, however, more explicitly politically motivated.

\textsuperscript{73} Kwon, op cit, p.151-4
\textsuperscript{74} Sennett, R & Cobb, J, \textit{The Hidden Injuries of Class, 2nd Edition} (London: Faber & Faber, 1993). Though these outside observers may not be trusted, or may even be resented, this does not undermine their perceived “right” to make images of the working class. Sennett and Cobb’s study is based on the American working class who clearly place more importance upon the notion of self-betterment, and thus the educated observer is someone to look up to. We may suggest that in Britain, where working class unity is more highly valued this may be less prevalent.
\textsuperscript{75} Kwon, op cit, p.154. By ideal type concepts, in Weber’s terms.
At the end of the 1970s Amber began a period of more overtly political activity. They established a Current Affairs Unit, and exhibition and commissioning policy began to focus on pressing political issues, whether they be local or international. Simultaneously, more creative freedom was afforded by the introduction of the A.C.T.T. Workshop Declaration (by which non Equity members could work on community films as long as they did not deliver scripted lines) and the commissioning policy of the newly created Channel 4 Television. Amber became less economically tied to the gallery and cinema base in Newcastle, and had the resources to immerse themselves in community action.

By 1981 the Conservative’s plans for the coal industry were clear, and it became abundantly clear that a confrontation between the Government and the mining unions was imminent. In East Durham the swift closure of Blackhall colliery in 1981 signified that even the coastal pits were not safe. Rather than the disappearance of small marginal concerns, Amber now faced the demise of a whole industry, and it initiated a number of projects directly concerned with the threat to the coalfield. In effect it began to disseminate the message that industry and its dependent communities were going to experience deep and permanent changes over which they had little control. It began to predict traumatic change.

In 1983 John Davies was commissioned for a project of salvage documentary on a grand scale; to photograph the remaining colliery communities of the Durham coalfield. Davies’ style is distinctive. Taken from a high angle, his images record the landscape in minute detail, in black and white, and avoid the human figure. Consequently, the images seem to lack the melancholic symbolism of previous Amber projects (the symbolism of Smith’s figures walking into the distance, for instance). In Davies’ work the implicit distance between documentary observer and the observed is acknowledged, and steps are taken to

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76 This political activity started with a campaign to resist the clearing and modernisation of Newcastle’s quayside district, and gained impetus with the joining of Richard Grassick, who had been involved with the National Union of Public Employees’ (N.U.P.E.) newspaper, and Pat McCarthy, a social worker and community activist, to the collective.

77 As Martin recalls, £100,000 a year “with no strings attached” and with a further obligation for Channel 4 to pay for any work they chose to use. Newbury, op cit, p.121. In all, Dickinson calculates Amber received £1.2 million from Channel 4, and produced a total of 500 minutes of drama, Dickinson, op cit, p.257
ensure that the photographic record is as purely factual as possible. The stark title of the project, *Durham Coalfield*, simply states the evidential nature of this group of images.

Davies records the physical marks, in terms of insignificant structures, monumental scars and subtle shadows, imprinted upon a landscape by industry and habitation. These provide the visual evidence of how industry has shaped the environment and the social structure of communities. So all the stereotypical features of mining villages are revealed: geographical isolation; a high population concentration; and uniformity in housing which is basic, terraced and in the shadow of the colliery. Yet they also reveal details of how people live in these villages. Photographs like *Sacriston* and *Kelloe* illustrate particular facts about how coal has dictated the topography of the lived space, but also how people have left their impressions, through the bricolage of allotment buildings, or the unplanned track meandering across a field (Figure 16). Davies’ landscapes are palimpsests, they may not include the human figure, but they register the accumulation of changing marks left by human activity. These are not only the structures of heavy industry, but also the lighter marks left by people living around these structures.

Therefore, they are celebratory: they celebrate the simple fact of human networks; that people live as well as work. They are also clearly political and nostalgic: the recording of the moribund. *Sacriston, County Durham* shows a colliery that had been seen as increasingly uneconomic since 1975 and by 1983 was (along with Herrington) the
operation most obviously threatened by closure.\textsuperscript{78} The project arises from the explicit proposal that these pits are the last of Durham’s mining industry.\textsuperscript{79} This is symbolically implied in \textit{Dawdon}, which breaks from Davies’ usual methodology of the panoramic shot taken from a high angle (Figure 17). As the coal train bears down on the viewer on a diagonal course it becomes a contemporary mirror of the locomotive in Turner’s \textit{Rain, Steam and Speed} (1844). Yet rather than hailing the increasing frenzy of the industrial age in a swirl of paint, this emphasises its end in the stillness of the black and white photograph.

Bruce Rae’s \textit{Easington: A Mining Village} project is more consistent with Amber’s methodology of embedded research and consultation; the result of a month long residency in the February before the beginning of the 1984 strike. These images reflect upon the social realities of mining village life, portraying real characters going about everyday life. They also draw upon the aesthetic traditions embedded in images of Durham mining. \textit{Collecting Sea Coal beneath the Waste Conveyer} (Figure 18) makes clear links to former portrayals of the harshness of mining life, and \textit{Easington Miner} emphasis the heroism and physicality of the soon to be redundant figure. However, these remain contemporary images. Rae practically reproduces Smith’s earlier image of \textit{Easington}, in \textit{The Hill to the Allotments}, but it is peopled by two contemporary women chatting and walking towards the camera, not timeless symbolic ones walking away from it. Nevertheless, the project is motivated by the same impulse as Davies’: to record the contemporary realities of the mining village while suggesting that it is soon to be forever altered. Rae’s image of children outside the colliery walls clearly implies that the pit’s demise will leave them without their occupational inheritance (Figure 19).

\textsuperscript{78} It actually ceased operating in November 1985, a mere eight months after the end of the strike.
\textsuperscript{79} Graeme Rigby’s text for the 1983 exhibition places heavy emphasis upon the squeezing of the county’s remaining mining activity (and the consequent movement of miners themselves) into a narrow coastal ribbon; “slowly collapsing, west to east”. Rigby, G, Exhibition text: “Durham Coalfield: Text from the Amber Catalogue, 1987”, reproduced at \url{http://www.amber-online.com/exhibitions/durham-coalfield/detail}, accessed on 19/09/09.
Indeed, Rae’s project was undertaken with the writer Huw Beynon, specifically “to try and describe the extent to which a community has been determined by an industry and the vulnerability of its way of life to decisions taken elsewhere about the industry’s future”.

Both the realities of a community “determined by an industry” and “vulnerability” are suggested in Easington (Figure 20). It captures the interaction of the structures of industry, the uniform rows of terraces that house its workers, and the structures those workers have built to make that industrial existence a lifestyle. Across this scene, a long symbolic shadow begins to stretch. Overlooking the Bs is even more overtly nostalgic (Figure 21).

Here, the heroic miner is transformed to an aging man, overlooking the community disappearing into the mist; looking literally into the soon to be past.

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81 As the Easington colliery houses were built they were designated addresses whereby a block of terraces was given a letter, and the streets within that block a letter.
Davies’ and Rae’s landscapes infer the coming changes upon the lived space by political and economic decisions outside the inhabitants’ control. As such, they can be seen in William Mitchell’s terms; they are pictorial spaces in which the lived locality and the forces that impinge upon that locality come together, framed within direct references to how the idea of the mining village has been formed by a long tradition of representation. The projects also continue that idealised vision of the mining community; one which is affected by wider political decisions but insulated from the speed and consumerism of the contemporary world. Though Amber had addressed problems of the contemporary urban space, most notably in Tish Murtha’s project in Newcastle’s west end, and Chris Killip’s images of Jarrow, such problems are not seen as relevant to the semi-urban pit village. In fact, the point is that such problems are waiting in the shadows of an uncertain future. The pit village is an authentic working class community, and change will inevitably lead to a loss of authenticity and a more alienated life; it is a semi-urban gemeinschaft, about to be exposed to the corrupting gesellschaft of Thatcherite neo-liberalism.

This is an obvious idealisation, which correlates more with Lockwood’s vision of the miner and his community than with an East Durham already subject to change through migration and mobility. While portraying the village as gemeinschaft, the projects also portray the community as without mobility or political agency: they are merely “waiting for the axe to fall”.

Figure 20: Bruce Rae, *Easington*, 1984

Figure 21: Bruce Rae, *Overlooking the Bs*, 1984
**Agency and Trauma**

To accuse Amber of depicting the North East as predominantly working class would be pointless; to depict working class communities is their remit. Nevertheless, as Peter Hutchings suggests, their focus, and the success of their projects, has served to provide a singular vision of North East life, and has meant the editing of any evidence of middle class life in the region.\(^8^2\) Yet the North East has embraced change; there have been notable changes in the landscape of Tyneside and obvious signs of social mobility. Of course, it is also not Amber’s project to record the stories of those successfully embracing change, but those marginalised by it. But they have dominated the representation of certain areas for four decades, one of which is East Durham. As Martin said, “we focussed on particular areas and we were known as the film-makers and photographers in that community”.\(^8^3\) This means that the notion of success, as well as that of political agency, is conspicuously absent from the record of East Durham in the pre-strike period.\(^8^4\)

However, political agency is the theme of two documentary films that coincided with the photography projects, *News from Durham* and *Where Are We Going?* (1983). These were “trigger tapes”: information and education films, capturing the proceedings of union and community meetings and designed to provoke further discussion. As such they were sent out to communities and toured the lodges. The lack of emphasis on this aspect of life in the photographic projects is surprising, as those very institutions show the strength of political self-determination, encapsulated in the D.M.A., in Durham villages.\(^8^5\) In fact the nationalisation of the industry itself is representative of a singular union success, and symbolic of a host of moral, social and cultural victories: the miner’s escape from capitalist exploitation; the right of the worker; labour’s rights to capital, the sacrifices of forefathers; and the potential for victory through unity. This success is recorded by mining

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\(^8^3\) Newbury, op cit, p.120

\(^8^4\) In Rae’s photographs, the highly important political institutions of the village are shown through one image of a harassed *Alan Cummings, Lodge Secretary in his office*, and a portrait of three local councillors. In Davies’ the concept does not even arise.

\(^8^5\) After all, political self-determination and working class improvement (both political and social) is shown in other representations of mining life. Even in Priestley’s record of Durham villages in the 1930s there was significant emphasis upon self-determination and agency in working class groups, both political and social. Priestley, op cit, p.254-7.
communities: in commemorative photographs, portraits of union leaders, lodge banners, and local press and family records. This success story is also hugely significant to the traumatic experience that was to follow. It provided the “high” against which the experience of both the strike defeat, and the resulting colliery closure was so sharply contrasted.

It could be suggested that Davies’ and particularly Rae’s projects, recycle perceptions of marginalised mining communities to the point of becoming descriptive exercises. However, this may make them more, rather than less effective vehicles in the cultural construction of trauma. To suggest that a group has no power over the negative changes facing it may not be accurate, or popular with the group itself, but it does strengthen a message of oppression. Amber’s projects of the early 1980s are blatantly predicting the end of mining in Durham; they are stating that communities are soon to be stranded by change, and have limited power to resist it. Furthermore, this message is delivered directly to the very community about to suffer that change. The “trigger tapes” were shown in welfare clubs, union buildings and community institutions throughout the county, precisely to raise awareness of the implications of Thatcher’s closure programme. The photographic work was quickly exhibited at The Side Gallery in Newcastle: Davies’ in 1983 and Rae’s after the strike had started in early 1984. More importantly, it also travelled constantly around community venues in the county, before, during and immediately after the strike.⁸⁶

Predicting Crisis
Amber’s pre-strike projects in East Durham constitute the cultural construction of trauma. At the time of the projects there was no explicit conception that the demise of mining would constitute communal trauma. Nevertheless, Amber were predicting change, and it was implied that this change would be catastrophic and lead to communities becoming economically and socially marginalised. Their projects were ideal vehicles for this process of construction for three reasons.

⁸⁶ Precise details of when and where these tapes, and the accompanying photographic works, were shown in County Durham have not been recorded by Amber. Conversations between Graeme Rigby and the author reveal that this period was one of intense activity for the group; most possible exhibition avenues were used, and exhibition was often arranged informally and with extremely short notice, with the singular aim of creating the maximum exposure.
Firstly, the Government plans for the industry were well known by the time of these documentary projects. The leaking of the Ridley Report, the closure of Blackhall colliery, and the widely understood plans to close Sacriston and Horden provoked a rising tension and feeling of impending crisis. Secondly, Amber were well placed to become the social agents documenting this crisis. Graham Smith’s project in Easington in the mid 1970s had established links with the community, but Amber also had a reputation for recording the disappearance of working class culture. Yet we cannot see this process as one-way flow of Amber’s message to an audience. As Martin maintained, they got involved in campaign work largely at community request, rather than self-motivation.87 The trigger tapes arose because of the concerns of mining communities themselves, and simply record their opinions. Similarly, Rae’s portrait of Easington was the product of interactions with the villagers. It was Amber’s methodology of collaborative practice gave them credibility to work with communities to represent what change may mean.

Thirdly, Amber used an aesthetic that Murray Martin termed “romantic realism”, to ensure that this message was accessible to this audience.88 Impending crisis was conveyed through landscape imagery. It portrayed a lived space well known by the audience, and directly linked the threat to the coalfield communities with the hardships and closures of the past. It also showed a contemporary but idealised vision of the present: an industrial gemeinschaft, unprepared for a contemporary Thatcherite gesellschaft. Overall, the projects represented a process whereby rising community tension was discussed with the artists, contextualised by them, and then shown back to the community. Significance was consistently added by repeated dialogue between artist and subject until a message of impending crisis became cemented; the process reflected concerns, and informed concerns.

These Durham projects coincided with an art exhibition organised by the N.C.B. and the Arts Council, entitled Coal: British Mining in Art 1680-1980. This toured nationally, reaching Durham in February 1983. Given the Coal Board’s plans for the industry, this shameless celebration of coal may now seem like a strange political move. In many ways it

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87 Newbury, op cit, p.120
88 Dickinson, op cit, p.254
demonstrated a similar glorification of mining’s past to Amber’s projects. Yet the exhibition signified a continuation of the message that had been consistently delivered through the films of the National Coal Board Film Unit: that mining is a dynamic culture which constantly improves and adapts to the challenges it faces. Like Amber, the exhibition looked to the past, and ideas of the archetypal miner, but to convey a somewhat different message. The way that these representatives of opposing sides both drew on the past was to be a main feature of the Miners’ Strike that began in 1984.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Cultural Disorganisation: Landscape and Economic Change in the 1980s

“It was a winner take it all contest; unfortunately we lost, and they took it all”.¹

Amber’s work of the early 1980s reflects the growing tension within the mining industry, and the build up of a confrontational attitude within mineworkers towards the National Coal Board (N.C.B.) which was to come to a head in the year long Miners’ Strike of 1984-5. However the Strike was something of an incongruous event. It was practically inevitable by the early 1980s, but also highly unusual. The first sharp contraction in mining did provoke industrial action: the 1926 Coal Strike.² Yet the contraction of the 1960s did not.³ In general, this rationalisation was met with acquiescence by a moderate union led by Sidney Ford, who accepted that the industry had to adapt in changing economic circumstances. Yet it was also due to inherent divisions between regional unions that inhibited collective action.⁴ In fact the mining industry has a relatively localised history of industrial action, with most disputes being confined to specific issues at specific pits, and no national strike occurring between the years of 1926 and 1972.

The 1972 strike, and the one that followed in 1974, both concerned wage and job protection issues, and both provoked complete capitulation from the N.C.B., the victories even being seen as contributing to the downfall of the Conservative Heath government.⁵ Contraction slowed following the strikes (but certainly did not stop), and in County Durham there was a three year period in which there were no closures (the first time since the mid 1950s).⁶ However, after the leaking of the Ridley Report, and the election of the Thatcher

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¹ Artangel Media / Channel Four Television, The Battle of Orgreave (Director: Mike Figgis), 2001
² This was a response to colliery owners cutting wages to increase profits.
³ This second decline did come during a time in which there were other employment opportunities for ex-miners. It also came after nationalisation and in an era of compromise politics between the government and labour movements.
⁴ Such as decreasing demand and increasing competition from oil as an energy provider. Richards, A, Miners on Strike: Class Solidarity and Division in Britain (Oxford: Berg, 1996), p.86
government in 1979, trepidation, tension and militancy increased. Arthur Scargill was elected as president of the National Union of Mineworkers (N.U.M.) in December 1981, and the dominant discourse of union rhetoric became about the pit closure programme, rather than wage and condition issues. For Scargill the protection of the mining industry was nothing short of “class war”; pit closure became a cultural as well as an economic issue.

A nationwide strike, in response to the announced closure of 20-50 pits, in February 1981 was only averted by Government promises to stall the closure programme. In effect this became an excuse to divide and conquer, as closure was assessed upon the merits (or rather lack thereof) of individual pits, thereby undermining, regional or national protest. The period from 1979 to 1984 saw a loss of nearly 24% of mines, and a manpower reduction of over 22%.

On the 5th of March 1984, in response to the announcement of the closure of Cortonwood Colliery in South Yorkshire, miners began stoppages, which rapidly snowballed into a national strike, that lasted almost exactly a year, and ended in complete and utter defeat for the N.U.M.

Yet the relationship between the strike and the trauma of social change cannot be summed up in the equation, defeat equals trauma. The effects of colliery closure on communities were known to miners (they were the reasons for the strike), but those miners were fighting to prevent those traumatogenic changes, not because they were experiencing them first hand. The strike itself certainly threw many miners, their families and communities into a long period of financial hardship, stress and misery, and fundamentally changed accepted patterns of life. It was also divisive, turning “picket” against “strike-breaker” on a communal and national level (embodied in the formation of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers in the Nottinghamshire coalfield who continued to work on the basis that the

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7 Scargill fought his presidential campaign precisely on the issue of the pit closure programme and recorded a startling 75% of votes (Beynon, op cit, p.9).
8 Richards, op cit, p.77
9 Ibid, p.90
10 Ibid, p.87
11 The announcement of Cortonwood’s closure was shocking because it came just months after the employment of eighty miners from the closed Elsecar colliery, and an investment of over £1 million pounds, which was meant to ensure its survival for another five years. Williams, G, “Introduction: Look Back in Anger”, in Williams, G (Ed), Shafted: The Media, the Miners’ Strike and the Aftermath (London: Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, 2009), p.13
strike was undemocratic). However, the strike also represented the coming together of mining culture; a time of national unity in which regional and local differences were discarded. It was also a time when communities united, and formed social networks which had been lacking on a communal, or even familial level. Additionally, for some, it was a time of personal fulfilment. Individuals made connections across social and ethnic boundaries, and developed culturally and educationally. For many women it brought nothing short of social and political emancipation. So it would be hard to see the strike itself as communally traumatic; it highlighted the strength of mining culture, not its weakness.

In contrast, the complete defeat of the miners in 1985 was, no doubt traumatic for many. While the miners remained convinced of victory, they were well aware of what defeat would mean. It represented the clear failure of a “last stand”. Furthermore that stand represented more than jobs; it represented the security of communities, families, and mining culture as a whole. Defeat certainly shattered the validity of unionised labour politics. As Union official David Douglass bluntly states, “it was a winner take it all contest; unfortunately we lost, and they took it all”.

Yet most of the intensely traumatic social and economic changes within pit villages came some time after defeat. The closure programme resumed apace in 1985 but pits such as Easington did not close until 1992. So this chapter does not frame the strike as a traumatic event in itself, but as part of a longer process of traumatic change. The strike did however, serve to undermine certain assumptions, institutions and beliefs in mining culture, and this made communities less resistant to the subsequent economic changes. It was an event that subjected that culture to Piotr Sztompka’s “cultural disorganisation”. A systematic attack upon the markers mining communities relied upon for their sense of cultural identity meant that they became undermined or contradictory. So whereas the miner was once seen as the heroic figure of British industry, Orwell’s “caryatid upon whose shoulders nearly

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“everything that is not grimy is supported”, during the strike he became seen as redundant, and worse, “the enemy within”.¹⁴

This chapter examines that process of cultural disorganisation and how it was represented in landscape images. However, the strike was not predominantly represented through landscape, at least not in the press. There were scenes of working pits, or barricaded colliery entrances, and landscape gave context to the scenes of striking miners and police charges.¹⁵ Mostly though, the press focussed upon personalities, and tightly cropped images to suggest drama. Landscape was more important in the work of those documenting the crisis, and revealed the practical effects of the Government’s efforts to crush the strike. As well as taking place in the newspapers, cabinet meetings and union halls, the cultural conflict took place in the landscape: at motorway road blocks, or in villages like Easington where residents lived with an overwhelming police presence for nearly a year. The imagery that captured such moments was actively broadcast to raise support for the miners, but it also reveals that communities were becoming increasingly marginalised by both government policy and the extremely polarised terms in which the conflict was framed and fought.

**Political Polarisation**

Geoffrey Goodman, one time industrial editor of the Daily Mirror suggested that the Miners’ Strike was,

“*unique in terms of conventional industrial conflict. It was not about the pay packet; it was not about working conditions, hours of work, or even in the normal sense, a traditional conflict with management...the future of work was at the core of it. To remove a pit from a mining community is to snap the lifeline to a job*”¹⁶

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¹⁵ Though herein lies a problem. While landscapes in the printed press are easy to assess, the context of television coverage has changed. This is particularly evident in the BBC’s coverage. It was uniformly aggressive towards the miners in 1984, but since has notably changed its attitude. Clips have been radically re-contextualised to a sentimental, even positive attitude towards the miners’ cause. In some ways this is not important. What is important here is that miners’ at the time expressly felt that the BBC was hostile to their plight.

The strike was about absolutes, rather than specifics, and political rhetoric and media coverage framed it in precisely those terms: as a battle between two generals, Scargill and Thatcher.\textsuperscript{17} The early 1980s were more politically delineated times. Nevertheless, the idea of a nation of miners dutifully following Scargill’s every order is, no doubt, overstated. The strike started, and progressed as a bottom up, rather than a top down movement: powered by local unions motivated to save their own pits. In fact many miners felt that the simplification of the conflict to a battle of personalities eclipsed the actual issues at stake.\textsuperscript{18} Yet it served the interests of both sides to promote the conflict as one between the binary opposites of political opinion, and (for their own ends) to portray the miner as David Lockwood’s traditional proletarian worker.

The Union’s aim was to enlist those whose collieries were not immediately threatened with closure into the fight. As such the battle had to be framed as one for the very survival of the whole industry. It had to enflame the proletarian perception of a society divided between “us” and “them”. Fundamentally they had to prevent miners undermining the strike. Those who continued to work were portrayed as Lockwood’s “privatised” workers: individualists simply concerned with the pay packet.\textsuperscript{19} They were “scabs”, betraying class consciousness, or if they decided to take a redundancy offer, “selling their jobs”, or worse, selling their children’s jobs.

Such rhetoric was effective in communities in which work and social ties were closely related. The long historic prominence of the union in social networks meant that the loss of a pit could be easily contextualised as a class issue, but also that the past could be used to illustrate the eternal nature of this class conflict. Every conflict draws upon the past to motivate its troops, but past events were a significant motivational tool in the strike. Although the 1926 General Strike ended in defeat, it was consistently held up as the example of what could be achieved with unified class action, and the picketing of Saltley

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, 20 years after the event this perception has remained; Channel 4’s 2003 documentary \textit{Strike: When Britain Went to War} framed the conflict in precisely those terms. \textit{Strike: When Britain Went to War}, Channel 4 Television (director: Janice Sutherland), 2003. The programme was aired in January 2003, one of many programmes to mark the twentieth anniversary commemoration of the strike.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Williams, G, “The Media and the Miners”, in Williams, op cit, p.41
\item \textsuperscript{19} Lockwood, D, “Sources of Variation in Working-Class Images of Society”, in Bulmer, M (Ed), \textit{Working Class Images of Society} (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p.22
\end{itemize}
Coke Works in 1972 obtained almost mythical status as a successful example of the “flying picket” policy. This does not mean that the union cynically manipulated miners into supporting the strike, but that class rhetoric went some way to form an uncharacteristic national unity across the regions, and between the separate regional Miners’ Associations. The strikes of the 1970s had been supported nationally, but unity on wage issues is to be expected; they affect everyone equally, and do not threaten livelihoods. Closure and unemployment were issues that had not unified the unions in nationwide action since 1926.

However, most miners did not fight to support a class war, but over the simple issue of the closure of their colliery.\textsuperscript{20} Certainly, most were not Lockwood’s proletarian workers. In isolated pit communities, cultural consciousness and a sense of the past may have been deep (in County Durham both are refreshed every year in the Miners Gala), but the union is a social entity, over and above a site of fundamentalist class politics. Also, the contraction of the 1960s had led to occupational mobility, and many workers realised the nature of the industry and did treat it as a temporary source of income. Especially as by the early 1980s, due to years of redundancy and early retirement, the industry had the youngest workforce since its nationalisation.\textsuperscript{21} Miners actually existed on a scale between “proletarian” and “privatised” absolutes.

So for many, union rhetoric that framed the “privatised” worker as an aberration, and called upon a past that had limited significance in their everyday lives, represented a fundamentally new way of looking at their industry. It signified the embracing of an uncharacteristically defined political stance, which combined class, history and culture. This is significant to the cultural disorganisation experienced in defeat; no sooner had this mining identity and unity been so solidly defined, it was shown to be redundant. What is even more significant to this process of disorganisation is that Government \emph{anti-strike} rhetoric also used the same blending of uncompromising left wing politics and the past, to paint the industry and its union as dead wood in a new British political economy.

\textsuperscript{20} Beynon, op cit, p.21
\textsuperscript{21} Samuel, op cit, p.8. As Samuel points out, the strike actually relied upon the energy of the young man.
The Miners and the State

To a Thatcher government elected upon the public reaction to the “winter of discontent”, and still smarting from Edward Heath’s defeat by the miners in 1974, breaking union power over the British economy was the priority agenda. That defeat had effectively brought Thatcher the Conservative leadership; it was a piquant lesson and prompted the Ridley Report while she was still in opposition.

The nationalised industries, should they be permitted to exist, were to obey the rules of the free market, and the plan for the mining industry was to sell off the profitable pits to private ownership, rapidly close or withdraw investment from loss-making collieries, and to sweep up any shallow coal reserves through small privatised open cast operations to serve local demand. In the new Britain based upon entrepreneurism and an international service economy energy would be provided through nuclear power, oil and gas. Any shortfall could be bought cheaply from abroad. Any industry resisting such change was, by definition, holding Britain back. It was clearly displaying a reactionary and sentimental proletarian outlook. It was of the past. This applied to management as much as union, and in 1983 Thatcher appointed Ian MacGregor as head of the Coal Board, a man well known for ruthless industrial rationalisation. This served a dual purpose. Government involvement in the strike of 1974 had been Heath’s downfall. MacGregor’s appointment created a distance between itself and the dispute with the unions. The rationalisation of the industry could now be framed simply as management’s right to manage. Secondly it removed any sympathetic element within the management, which had always been populated by life-long “coal men”, with their own “romance of coal”. Conversely, MacGregor epitomised Thatcherite management: able to move between industries and prioritise the bottom line.

Overall, once conflict became inevitable, the government was determined to prevent that symbolic victory of all utility strikes: making “the lights go out”. This was prevented by stock-piling coal reserves before the strike, and the conversion of power stations to the full, 22

Paradoxically Thatcherite rhetoric also drew on the past: Churchill, and British values of standing strong, sacrifice and industry.

MacGregor had overseen the stream-lining of the British steel industry from 1980, which in Durham had meant the closure of the Consett Steelworks. For miners in Durham in particular the catastrophic consequences of MacGregor’s uncompromising approach to industry were all too vivid.

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or partial use of oil. The Government was also determined to break any potential unity with
the miners from the other unions, which could lead to the strike spreading to other
industries. There were also a number of measures that directly contributed to cultural
disorganisation. These had been outlined in the Ridley Report specifically to ensure that the
miners’ symbolic and practical victory at Saltley could not be repeated. One was the
mobilisation of a huge police presence to prevent the movements of any flying pickets and
ensure that miners wishing to work could cross picket lines. Another was the draconian use
of the legal system to ensure that striking miners could be arrested on the smallest pretence
and awarded disproportionately large penalties. The effects of these measures that have
provided the lasting imagery of the strike, and fundamentally contributed to the
disorientation felt in mining communities.

“The Enemy Within”
In July 1984, Margaret Thatcher made her now infamous remark in a speech to the 1922
Committee, in which she associated the battle with the N.U.M. with the Falklands War and
declared the miners “the enemy within”. Such vilification was deeply shocking for those
simply trying to protect their livelihoods. However the nominal identification had even
more shocking virtual effects. The utilisation of the police as an almost para-military force
against the miners cannot be over-estimated as a contributory factor in “cultural
disorganisation”. Every possible power of the law was exploited to ensure that striking
miners were prevented from successful picketing. As well as notable instances of
disproportionate force (in violence as well as scale), arrested strikers were removed from
the ranks of picketers by draconian judicial procedures. Curfew and the restriction of
movement were routinely implemented. Miners were often held in custody for non-
custodial sentences, either by the refusal of bail, or by setting it at unachievable levels. By
the end of the strike, over 10,000 miners had been arrested. However, the state also

24 It employed a number of manoeuvres based upon the lessons of the 1926 General Strike, ranging from the
weakening of other unions (MacGregor’s rationalisation of the steel industry had removed that particular area
of support), to the removal of any parties within the management of the Central Electricity Generating Board
who may be sympathetic to the miners’ cause.
25 In another speech in the November of that year she reiterated the sentiment by listing the strikers as
Strike”, in Beynon, op cit, p.60
26 Samuel, op cit, p.16
intruded upon the physical space of the community. The police presence in previously orderly mining villages such as Easington was large, aggressive and long lasting. As this police presence was made up of officers from other regions, particularly the Metropolitan force, it represented nothing short of an occupation by a foreign power, while simultaneously representing the aggression of the British state.

Izabela Jedrzejczyk’s photograph of Easington in 1985 shows a community under occupation (Figure 1). The photograph’s title draws attention to the incongruity between the idealised associations of the English village, and the heavy police presence in the physical space. It also shows a village divided by this presence. Jedrzejczyk’s camera position is not that of the detached bystander protected by the line of officers, it is that of the women of the village. It was taken while she was undertaking a residency with the women’s strike support group in Easington. These policemen are then, bisecting the physical and social space of the community.

There were other virtual results of the label “enemy within”. Benefit payments were withheld from miners on strike, but also to their dependent wives and children, regardless of their circumstances. It was a move to break the resolve of strikers by mobilising a supposedly impartial welfare state. It intensified the miners’ feeling of marginalisation, but

27 To use “Britain” would conjure a more political and abstract entity, in which police presence is conceivable. After all, the troubles were still at their height in Northern Ireland.
also strengthened solidarity; it effectively “put babies on the picket line”. The cumulative effects of these measures against the miners led to an all pervasive feeling of marginalisation and a complete breakdown in faith in the institutions of the state. As M.P. Eric Heffer suggested at the time, the lasting impact would be that miners “will never put their trust in the organisations of the establishment as they exist”. These draconian moves against the miners provide the lasting memories and images of the strike, and represent the clearest reason for cultural disorganisation. In some cases they were traumatic in themselves, as was the way that the conflict was represented.

“The Lie Machine”

The press coverage of the Foot and Mouth epidemic had a complex relationship to trauma. It broadcast that suffering was taking place, but simultaneously added to that suffering in some respects. During the Miners’ Strike the press’s role was far easier to define and far more active in contributing to the trauma itself. With the exceptions of The Guardian, the Daily Mirror and The Morning Star, the printed press was overwhelmingly aggressive towards the miners, to the point that Tory M.P. Ian Gilmour suggested that its support of the Government “could hardly have been more fawning if it had been state-controlled”. The ways in which the press attempted to undermine the strike were multiple and have been outlined in detail by a number of commentators, including David Jones in the wake of the strike, and most recently by Granville Williams. However we can summarise them as: portraying Scargill as deranged, dangerous and purely motivated by bringing down the

28 Jones, C & Novak, T, “Welfare Against the Workers: Benefits as a Political Weapon”, in Beynon, op cit, p.87-88
29 These measures and their effects have been extensively examined elsewhere. See Beynon (1985), op cit, Samuel, Bloomfield & Boanas, op cit, and Waddington, D, Wykes, M & Critcher, C, Split at the Seams? Community, Continuity and Change after the 1984-5 Coal Dispute (Milton Keynes: Open University, 1991)
30 Heffer, E, “Preface”, in Beynon, op cit, p.xiii
31 “The Lie Machine” is the title of one of the Miners’ Campaign Tapes, a set of videos produced in support of the miners and specifically to combat the highly partisan coverage in the press. They were produced by a group of independent film makers, including Amber. “The Lie Machine”, part of The Miners’ Campaign Tapes (Platform Films et al, 1984). [For references purposes I have prioritized Platforms Films. Although an ethos of collective authorship informs the project, they were the organizing impetus, and carried out all post-production].
32 Gilmore, I, Dancing with Dogma: Britain Under Thatcherism (London: Simon & Schuster, 1992), p.2, quoted in Williams, op cit, p.38. Indeed, indirectly, it was. From July 1984 the Department of Energy invested £1000 a week in a media monitoring agency to document any broadcast about the strike and to ensure the daily presentation of the government and N.C.B. position through the press. Williams, ibid, p.37
33 Jones, D, Media Hits the Pits: The Media and the Coal Dispute (London: Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, 1985), and Williams, op cit.
government and establishing a Communist (or sometimes, Fascist) state; demonising strikers as his unquestioning, and physically aggressive “foot-soldiers”; exaggerating the numbers of “strike-breakers” (and their output), and portraying working miners as heroic defenders of democracy and the right to occupational freedom.\(^{34}\)

One of the most obvious cases of bias was the BBC’s editing of events at the “battle of Orgreave” in June 1984, an attempt to picket the British Steel coking plant in West Yorkshire which ended in a running battle between police and pickets. The broadcast suggested that the police were merely reacting to unprovoked aggression from striking miners; a manipulation of events that the BBC admitted and apologised for in the mid 1990s.\(^{35}\) A second infamous case was the attempt by The Sun to publish a front page image of Arthur Scargill, cropped to appear as if he was raising a Nazi salute, alongside the headline “Mine Fuhrer”. This was seen as a step too far by the print-workers’ unions who refused to print the image. As a result the front page ran with no image, and an explanation of the union’s position (Figure 2).\(^{36}\)

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\(^{34}\) Jones, op cit, and Williams, op cit.

\(^{35}\) Lazenby, op cit, p.50-52

\(^{36}\) Williams, op cit, p.39
We should not over-estimate the power of the press to direct public opinion. The vilification of the miners did not prevent support for their cause, from all sections of a society still infused with the romance of coal. Nonetheless, it is indisputable that whatever power the press did have in shaping the conflict, it was overwhelmingly directed in support of one side. After all, during the strike, the pro-government press “barons”, Robert Maxwell, Rupert Murdoch and Victor Matthews controlled 75% of the national daily, and 84% of the Sunday newspapers.\(^3\) Such inequality was reflected in the mining industry’s own media. The N.C.B. newsletter became a vehicle for encouraging miners back to work, with promises of bonus and holiday payments. Its method of distribution was altered from being sold at pitheads to being posted free to every miner’s household.\(^3\) This campaign was supplemented with local and national newspaper advertisements. Conversely, the N.U.M.’s newsletter, *The Miner*, was only printed every ten days, was distributed by miners themselves, and in August 1984 had to half its print run through lack of resources.\(^3\)

Given its duty to provide a balanced coverage, television news should have provided a corrective to this bias. However balance was only required across each television company’s output, not within particular programmes. Alan Fountain pointed out that it is inevitably more newsworthy if a handful of miners make it across a thousand man picket line, than if they get turned back; bias was an inevitable feature of the simple requirements of providing news.\(^4\) This bias was also self-perpetuating. As miners increasingly felt that television was vilifying them, cameramen became less welcome in their company. Very soon into the strike, practically every television report showed a scene of aggressive pickets from over a policeman’s shoulder. This is revealing: what is important in terms of the deepening sense of cultural disorganisation was not that the press were overwhelmingly biased, but that miners *perceived that they were*. They felt that the forces of state and press were lined up against them. As N.U.M. press officer Nell Myers wrote in *The Guardian* in

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\(^3\) Schwartz, B & Fountain, A, “The Role of the Media: Redefining the National Interest”, in Beynon, op cit, p.124-5

\(^4\) For which, of course, the N.C.B. had the addresses.

\(^3\) Williams, op cit, p.37

\(^4\) Schwartz & Fountain, op cit, p.132. This is combined with the increasingly competitive news environment of 1984, in which televised breakfast news had begun to broadcast; television had to provide *more* news.
June 1985, “[t]he industrial correspondents…are basically our enemies’ ‘front line troops’ responsible for ‘a cyclone of vilification, distortion and untruth’”.

**Cultural Stranding**

The vilified miner was being increasingly culturally stranded, both through his association with the past, and with the left. These came together to paint a picture of an undemocratic monster from history, out of step with the freedom and efficiency of a new Monetarist political economy. As then Tory cabinet minister Cecil Parkinson suggested, the miners constituted a threat “closer to a revolution than a strike…much in the nature of a Peasants’ Revolt or a Luddite assault upon new textile machinery, as well as political attempt to humiliate and perhaps destroy the Government”.

In effect this meant that both Government and Union rhetoric came together to equate the miners’ cause with the past (though to different political ends). The victorious moments that Union rhetoric drew upon were the 1926 General Strike and the picketing of Saltley Coke Works in 1972. The attempt to recreate the success of Saltley at Orgreave ended in catastrophic failure. Though it provided plenty of Orwellian metaphors about a police state, the defeat left the 1926 strike as the major historic event in union rhetoric. Although the General Strike did symbolise solidarity across unions, it also ended in failure. It was also a long time ago.

Cultural disorganisation is not just a result of ideological mud-slinging, and how events of the past are given opposing inflections. Language itself is complicit in the trauma of social change. Traumatic social change always brings the old sharply into contrast with the new, but as Sztompka points out it also brings old methods of representation up against new ones. Change leaves communities stranded, but the only way they can vocalise their pain is through language and culture. Yet this language and culture is, by definition, that of the stranded; the very means of expression, let alone what it is expressed, is of the past. So

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41 Cited in Williams, op cit, op cit, p.36
43 Sztompka, op cit, p.164
while the government portrayed the union as ideologically redundant, the union’s own rhetoric of class war was itself looking increasingly old fashioned.

Even for those in the culture industry, on the periphery of politics, class was a discourse that was being increasingly replaced by ethnicity and gender. For the general public, class was also becoming less relevant. They did not see the new economy revolving around ideas such as “solidarity” and “emancipation”, but “mobility” and “enterprise”. Furthermore, a new, postmodern type of political engagement was emerging in the 1980s, based upon conscience issues, rather than ideological party loyalty. This was epitomised by cross-class movements such as the Greenham Common protest, or issue-based events such as Band Aid.\(^4\)

This did not prevent people from all classes and lifestyles actively supporting the miners’ cause, either because they saw their own unions undermined, or through a belief in socialist politics. However, Raphael Samuel proposes that many did so in sympathy for the miners’ weakness rather than their strength. Perhaps many were doing so informed by a nostalgic notion of an almost mythical working class (an idealistic counter to the realities of Thatcherite Britain).\(^5\) After all, the romance of coal had recently been refreshed through the rediscovery of photographers such as Brandt and Spender and a general recourse to the imagery of the 1930s in popular culture. In comparison to other photographic projects that focussed on urban problems, such as Derek Bishton and John Reardon’s work in Handsworth, these images did portray the mining community as some sort of idealised retreat from the modern world. But they could not do so without also portraying it as nostalgic, and northern.

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\(^4\) Of course, left wing politicians and union officials supported these protests. After all, many of these conscience issues are intrinsically left wing ones: inequality, poverty, etc. However, people did not have to be party political to support them.

\(^5\) Samuel, Bloomfield & Boanas, op cit, p.x. Channel Four’s Strike: When Britain Went to War interviews three former student leaders who were actively involved in student’s movements supporting the strike, one of them the author John O’Farrell. All of them admit that they were to some extent driven by a romantic notion of mythical northern miners and working class politics.
Discounting Kent, mining is predominantly northern or Welsh.\textsuperscript{46} Both were marginal to metropolitan centre of the state, and a new economy based upon global investment, and both were feeling the full effects of economic change. When Beatrix Campbell revisited Orwell’s north in 1983, she found a region devastated by poverty and social problems practically on the verge of a contemporary Depression.\textsuperscript{47} It was also the area in which mining was most threatened. Government plans involved a cut in capacity of 4 million tonnes, a third of which was to come from the northeast region.\textsuperscript{48} In contrast, most of the economical, safe pits were in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. For those in an already economically decimated Durham, it was evident that to lose the strike meant redundancy. In fact, redundancy was an apt word. Zygmunt Bauman suggests that there is an implicit difference between the terms “redundancy” and “unemployment”. Unemployment suggests an abnormality, an opposite to the norm: employment. Full employment is the natural desire of the productive economy. Redundancy, by contrast has no opposing norm; it does not denote a temporary slip from normality, it merely implies waste.\textsuperscript{49} Whereas the unemployed are potentially still useful, the redundant are un-needed, at worst a drain. For northern miners, it was clear that they were facing redundancy, both individually, and as an industry.

Unlike the working class embracing Thatcherism in the boom areas and industries; those opposing the strike garnered working class support in these areas by suggesting that the strike signified a threat to mobility, and the right to work. Sztompka identifies one potential locus of communal trauma as “intercultural contact”, and the strike occurred within a culture that was actively embracing an overtly entrepreneurial and consumerist attitude.\textsuperscript{50} This is not to suggest that miners were proletarian workers, disorientated by a new ostentatious society. The fundamental locus of intercultural contact was between a culture

\textsuperscript{46} There are mining areas in the debatably northern parts of the Midlands, such as Leicestershire and south Nottinghamshire.
\textsuperscript{47} Campbell, B, \textit{Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the 80s} (London: Virago Press, 1984)
\textsuperscript{48} Beynon, op cit, p.15
\textsuperscript{50} Sztompka, op cit, p.162
welcoming the full possibilities of trade, and one with a firm belief in industry. During a time of industrial rationalisation, this is an inevitable cultural conflict.  

The consigning of a once glorified northern industrial culture to redundancy was seen by miners as cultural betrayal. Insult was very literally added to injury by the vilification spread by both government and press. As Huw Beynon commented in early 1985, “the transformation in images is quite incredible and to many in the mining communities it is an unspeakable violation of themselves, their lives and all that they stand for. It has made them angry and very, very bitter”.

**Cultural Responses**

The press industry was not unanimously aggressive to the miners’ cause, and the N.U.M. was only too well aware of the power of the press in shaping public opinion. They also exploited every avenue for favourable coverage, and in Scargill had a figure that was more astute and media-friendly than MacGregor. Nonetheless, Nell Myers represented the only press officer for the N.U.M.

However the media aggression towards the miners was balanced by the view afforded by the newly formed Channel 4 Television, with its commitment to minority viewpoints. In June 1984 it screened the documentary *Coal Not Dole*, notable for its support for the miners. Immediately after the strike it broadcast Cinema Action’s *The Miners’ Film* (1975), which focussed upon the miners’ continuing struggle in the wake of the 1974 strike, and promoted the miners as integral to the British economy and cultural identity. It also showed Ken Loach’s *Which Side Are You On?* which was initially commissioned for ITV’s *South Bank Show* in November 1984. Initially seen as too inflammatory (it included a child’s poem which likened the British police to those in apartheid South Africa), it was

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51 Industry’s underlying ethos is to maximise production. The ethos of trade is to maximise profit, which may well be through decreasing production.
52 Beynon, op cit, p.5
53 Industrial reporters at local papers had often built strong contacts with local N.C.B. offices, with the result that they were expected to regard Coal Board press statements as fact. Nonetheless many felt loyalty to their communities and attempted to give a balanced view. Lazenby, op cit, p.47-59
54 A new prologue and epilogue was added to emphasise these points. “*The Miners’ Film*” at www.screenonline.org.uk (British Film Institute): http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1054102/index.html, accessed on 12/10/2009
pulled, but Channel 4 subsequently decided to broadcast the documentary in January 1985.55

Loach’s intention was to directly counter the misrepresentation of the miners. As such, he used a “fly on the wall” technique to emphasise impartial self-representation, and eschewed a narrative voiceover, or even direct interview. Instead it captures the miners’ story of the strike through a montage of clips, of people speaking at meetings and fund-raisers, in general conversation, or performing poetry and song.56 What is immediately evident from these clips is that the quotation of historical events is certainly not limited to union rhetoric alone. The references include: the Depression; the Means Test; the strike of 1926; the victory of 1974 (and Saltley in particular, though now with a melancholy, rather than celebratory emphasis); and a number of colliery disasters from Trimdon Grange (1882) to Easington (1951).

However, these events are not necessarily seen as the past. All are lifted from history to be contextualised as immediately relevant to the situation in 1984, epitomising what Eviatar Zerubavel has termed narrative “bridging” and “pasting”.57 Communal memory is based on a narrative, which emphasises certain events: the reference points for communal cultural identity. “Bridging” involves making links between these events and the present, which serves to edit the chronological space in between. So, 1926 effectively becomes seen as yesterday, not yester-year, and miners refer to those events as if they had actually experienced them.58

55 “Which Side Are You On?” at www.screenonline.org.uk (British Film Institute): http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/530268/index.html, accessed on 12/10/2009. When the documentary was repeated in June 2009 to mark the 25th anniversary of the strike, it was only the second time it had been shown on British television.
56 However, while the interviewer is silent and invisible in these clips, it is often clear that these people are speaking to some outside observer.
58 Conversely, the period of industrial stability, from nationalisation until the early 1960s becomes practically invisible. The victories of this period become just an abstract sense of what is “normal”. This is, in fact how history has generally tended to be constructed. It emphasises connection between significant events in a causal relationship, and edits those “quieter” periods. However, since the development of the “New History” it has been realised that it is often in these under-emphasised periods that great cultural shifts occur, which can alter communal identity to a great extent.
“Pasting” involves re-contextualising the past so that seemingly unconnected events represent a similar story. So a disaster such as Trimdon Grange (an explosion caused by the build up of mine gases), is linked to capitalist oppression, which is linked to the Thatcher Government’s plans to privatise the industry (which will inevitably lead to the lowering of safety standards). Of course, these links are seldom explicitly stated, and past events do not have a uniform meaning. The past is framed by the needs of the present. Hardship and political defeats become proof of continual capitalist oppression, and glorious sacrifices made by fore-fathers: the reason to fight.

Bridging and pasting is particularly apparent in times of communal distress, and a defining feature of the Miners’ Strike. It is also highly complicit in the way that the past contributed to cultural disorganisation. After all, Cecil Parkinson’s reference to the Luddites also demonstrates these narrative techniques. Bridging and pasting not only serve to bring the past into the present, but vice versa.

**Amber and Landscape**

Many of the scenes recorded in *Which Side Are You On?* took place at Easington Miners’ Welfare Club, and interspersing these clips are photographs from Keith Pattison’s *Easington: August 1984*. This project was facilitated by Amber, building upon the relationships developed through the work of Graham Smith and Bruce Rae. Pattison’s images were an intentional rejoinder to the press vilification of the miners: “they felt aggrieved that a decidedly one-sided national media was reporting a fiction and that it was important that their history was recorded”. As he recalls, “I was, for want of a better phrase ‘artist in residence’ with Easington Miners’ Lodge…and was touchingly taken care of as ‘our photographer’”. Amber’s ethos of embedding was mixed with the reportage role of the directly political, militant observer.

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59 Amber also facilitated Izabela Jedrzejczyk’s project with SEAM, though neither project was actually commissioned by Amber. Pattison’s was the result of a residency supported by Newcastle’s Artists’ Agency, but was subsequently purchased by Amber. Jedrzejczyk’s was supported by the Women Against Pit Closures organizations, and is not part of the Amber archive.

60 Pattison, K, “Keith Pattison” entry in Williams, op cit, un-numbered centre pages.

61 Ibid
Easington was both the location for some of the most militant activism in Durham, and a base for police operations in the North East. Consequently it was the site of some of the angriest conflicts between picketing miners and the police. The reportage impulse in Pattison’s project means that many of his images focus upon these moments of conflict: stand offs between the police and pickets, or running battles as that stand off collapses. The impulse of community representation emphasises that these events take place in a real village: a lived space. They occur in back streets, and are watched by women and children. One image graphically represents the impasse reached by two sides committed to fundamentally opposed ideological attitudes (Figure 3), but the setting is banal, incongruous with the drama: a narrow gap between an industrial unit and the back wall of a garden or allotment.

Pattison’s images do not only show the conflict between miners and police, they show a whole community locked down under the control of a state force. Figure 4 illustrates that the colliery buildings themselves became a police command centre. The image recycles the nostalgic icon of the colliery pithead, but between the viewer and buildings is a regimental row of police vans, facing out towards the camera. Standing in for the lines of policemen endlessly shown in TV bulletins, the implication here is that the state are preventing miners’ right to work, not protecting it.

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62 Beynon, op cit, p.4
The day to day presence of this force in the physical space of the community is even more vividly suggested in an image in which two women chat in an Easington backstreet (Figure 5). Behind them one notices another line: policemen in riot gear. The image reflects the Orwellian metaphors that littered pro-strike discourse, but also reveals the physical, authoritarian presence that imposed upon normality, and contributed to cultural disorganisation. As many miners suggested, the idea of the police as a positive institution in mining communities was permanently damaged. 63

This presence in village life, particularly as experienced by children, has since been used to comedic value, particularly in films such as *Billy Elliot*. Similarly, Pattison’s photographs show that during the strike life in Easington went on. One shows the waste conveyor from Rae’s project, but instead of providing the background for coal-pickers the conveyor makes an improvised diving board for children on a hot August afternoon (Figure 6). These pictures provide a humanist element to the political struggle, but also hint that for many the strike was not a completely negative experience.

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63 “Only Doing Their Job?”, from the *Miners Campaign Tapes*, op cit. Mining villages have never been social utopias, but as Peter Lazenby has suggested, due to the fact that the discipline of the pit tended to carry on to life beyond it, they were generally orderly and self-regulating. They were not used to a heavy police involvement in community issues. Lazenby, op cit, p.58
Dissemination and Campaigning

Pattison’s project was part of an active process of pro-strike campaigning. The photographs were exhibited in the Side Gallery in late 1984, and toured extensively around the coalfield. They were also used in pro-strike newsletters and papers, such as The Durham Striker, and the eight page leaflet that accompanied the Side exhibition was also distributed informally (alongside and within these papers) both during and immediately after the strike (Figures 7 & 8). Such papers were indicative of a range of alternative media that grew up to counter the views of the press, nurture support for the strike, and stem the flow of those returning to work. One notable project was the Miners’ Campaign Tapes that were produced during the late summer of 1984. This set of ten short films was produced collectively by a number of small independent British film companies, among them Amber and Newcastle’s Trade Films, and highlight the way that miners were feeling marginalised and disorientated during the strike. “The Lie Machine” addresses the actions and attitudes of the mainstream press, and catalogues a range of reactions from miners and pro-strike

64 In those venues that had been used to exhibit Davies’ and Rae’s work, and show Amber’s “trigger tapes” before the strike.
65 There is also probable that Pattison is the un-named local photographer whose images were made into postcards and distributed around the mining areas recalled in Hudson’s Coming Back Brockens. Hudson, M, Coming Back Brockens: A Year in a Mining Village (London: Vintage, 1995), p.215
66 The project was mainly organised between London’s Platform Films and the NUM. It won a John Grierson Award for short film in 1985.
politicians, ranging from disbelief to bitter cynicism. Similarly, “Only Doing Their Job?” captures the responses to police heavy-handedness, and shows mining communities with their faith in the police and judicial system completely shattered. There is however, a more contemporary feel to the *Tapes* than Loach’s documentary. There is a grainy black and white clip of a pithead which is repeated throughout the films, and another of a coal-searcher during the 1926 strike. However, the *Tapes* were made for miners, so the emphasis is less on the romance of coal and more on innovative graphics and getting the views of fashionably dressed contemporary miners and their families.67

**Community Cohesion**

Such pro-strike documents indicate how the strike brought cohesion to communities.68 In fact, the feeling of solidarity engendered by hardship may well have served to reconnect communities that had become prey to the alienating effects of modern life.69 Piotr Sztompka has noted that individuals and communities adopt certain coping strategies to deflect the impact of traumatic social change. Negative, “retreatist” strategies certainly became apparent after the strike defeat, but during it various positive “active and future orientated” strategies were also employed.70 Greater community involvement, the taking on of extra work by those not actively picketing, and the spreading of economic and emotional strain across the family and community, all constituted coping strategies, and served to stave off potentially traumatic pressures.

Sztompka also suggests that education and “social rooted-ness” (the extent and number of social networks) provide some immunity to trauma.71 One might predict that isolated mining villages, with limited facilities for education or personal development, would be the most prone to trauma. Ironically, the strike actually widened miners’ world view and

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67 The music is contemporary pop and reggae, associated with modern subcultures, rather than the folk of Loach’s documentary. There are panoramic landscapes, but again these are not overly romantic or nostalgic (save one that lingers on some little girls playing in front of a welsh pithead, which has little to do with the context of the film).

68 In some ways the twin features of community division and cohesion reflect that of communal trauma. Yet we should not see this as therapeutic gathering. The miners were suffering hardship, but not trauma: they had not yet lost their jobs, or the strike.

69 Some miners said that Christmas 1984 was the best they can remember, precisely because of this sense of community. Beynon, op cit, p.3

70 Sztompka, op cit, p.184

71 Ibid, p.167
increased this “rooted-ness”. Many dramatically increased their knowledge of the industry, politics and world issues. They had opportunities to explore their creativity, and a ready audience. While raising support for the strike, miners travelled nationally and internationally, and made connections with other, non-mining groups, often across quite obvious boundaries of ethnicity and sexuality. Individual miners’ groups, or whole villages formed links with other groups outside of the industry, such as Sikh groups in the West Midlands, student associations at Oxford and Cambridge, and London-based gay and lesbian organisations.

Most significant was the empowerment of women through the Women Against Pit Closures movement. Many women suggested that the strike enabled them to escape the traditional domestic restraints common in the pit village. Through organisations such as the Save Easington Area Mines group (SEAM), they embraced active coping mechanisms: organising collections, providing soup kitchens and political rallying. They also gained access to education, travel, political awareness, agency, and the traditionally patriarchal space of the miners’ union.

However, while this brought women opportunities in line with the rest of society, it sometimes sat uncomfortably with that patriarchal union and social conventions of the villages. As Horden resident “Moira Potter” opines in Tony Parker’s Red Hill,

“I think a lot of them neglected their homes and families if you want my honest opinion about it. I saw some of them on the television one night, they were making a big lot of noise. I don’t think that’s the way to behave if you want to do things”.

The numbers of women actively embracing these opportunities was not huge; Easington’s support group consisted of nineteen women. Nevertheless, one often repeated joke among striking miners concerned a miner who asks his union official, “When this strike is over,

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72 Strike: When Britain Went to War, op cit.
75 Jedrzejczyk et al, op cit, p.49. Most other support groups in Durham consisted of between ten and fifteen women. Hudson, op cit, p.218
can I have my wife back? Not this one, the one I had before”.  

So there may be a hint of tension in Jedrzejczyk’s shot of an Easington soup kitchen (figure 9). This photograph emphasises the support the SEAM women provided to the picketing miners, but this support still constitutes a temporary invasion of the male, homosocial space of the colliery club (albeit through a domestic role). There is a sharp division of the genders running through the centre of the image. The men do not look at the women, and the women appear either uncomfortable in this space (backed up against the wall), or resolutely standing their ground (with hand on hip). The image may suggest community, but not conviviality, or equality.

![Figure 9: Izabela Jedrzejczyk, “There was never anybody turned away”, 1985](image)

The emancipation of colliery wives and the broadening of miners’ horizons to embrace the political questions of ethnicity and sexuality are obviously positive developments. They are also significant changes, and changes, whether positive or negative, are disorientating. Connections with Sikh or lesbian groups are, after all, Sztompka’s “inter-cultural contact”. Such changes make it clear to communities that the world is moving apace, and the culture that they rely on is not in step. They inevitably contribute to cultural disorganisation. Nevertheless this expansion of personal and cultural horizons certainly staved off some of

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6 Campell, B, “Proletarian Patriarchs and the Real Radicals”, in Seddon, op cit, p.282

7 These titles are taken from the supporting captions as published in Jedrzejczyk, I, Page, R, Prince, B & Young, I, *Striking Women: Communities and Coal – Photographs by Izabella Jedrzejczyk, Raissa Page, Brenda Prince and Imogen Young* (London: Pluto Press, 1986)

8 There was apparently a limit to the changes the union could accept. At the end of the strike, when the Women Against Pit Closures groups applied for full membership of the NUM, it was denied (albeit by a narrow majority).
the traumatic effects of the strike, as did the creation of supportive social networks, often where those had been steadily eroded through the natural developments of modern life. The strike engendered not only class consciousness, but community consciousness. It also ended in total defeat.

**Defeat and Disorganisation**

The strike ended on the 5th of March 1985 with absolutely no compromise from the government. The pit closure programme was resumed, but the contingency measures arranged to ensure that the lights did not go out during the strike were also left in place. The immediate tangible effects upon mining communities are difficult to quantify, beyond shock and feeling of emptiness. One noted result was the total collapse of faith in the potency of a national collective action. National unity may have been a concept that was largely constructed by the N.U.M. for the purposes of the strike, but its collapse was total. This collapse was also aided by the Union’s refusal to hold a national ballot on strike action, which in hindsight seemed like a misguided decision. After defeat, miners withdrew into their communities, and the relationship between workforce, union and management was negotiated at pit, rather than national or even regional level. This loss of faith in the national union was reflected in a similar loss of faith in the Labour Party. That the Party under Neil Kinnock had consistently failed to publicly support the strike was noted, and an increasing source of tension during the conflict. Upon defeat, the Party was essentially seen as complicit.

The general feeling of union impotence was sensed by the Coal Board, and accounts reveal relations between workforce and management after the strike became reminiscent of the pre-nationalisation era. The N.C.B., swiftly re-branded as British Coal, removed the 80 year old restriction of maximum working hours. Colliery closure was carried out with total disregard for the standard 90 day assessment period, redundancy payments were offered with short expiry conditions, and safety procedures were routinely ignored by officials.

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79 Douglass, “Afterthoughts”, in Samuel, Bloomfield & Boanas, op cit, p.236
80 In July 1984, at the meeting held in place of the cancelled Miners’ Gala Kinnock was noticeably given the cold shoulder. The DMA (a reliable Labour Party supporter) discussed not even extending an invitation to the party leader for the 1985 Gala. In fact during the strike the Labour Party leadership also saw the miners’ struggle as a little too “old fashioned” (with its rhetoric of 1926) for a party reorganising itself towards an appealing centre left politics. Beynon, op cit, p.22-3
Workers’ protests were met with the retort that the union was a powerless entity.\textsuperscript{81} In the eight years after the strike 135,000 miners (79% of the workforce) left the industry, most because of pit closure, many through disillusionment.\textsuperscript{82}

However, industrial action against closure and working conditions did not stop. The trauma of social change brings political apathy, but it can also bring radicalism.\textsuperscript{83} The latter half of the 1980s saw a huge increase in stoppages. Yet this all took place at colliery level, and was probably more informed by the attitude that there was nothing to lose, rather than anything to gain. There was a significant rallying in national unity when, in October 1992 British Coal announced the closure of 31 of the remaining 50 British pits. This time, national strike action was widely backed by the public, and other unions. Two one day strikes ensued in spring 1993, and resulted in a temporary reprieve for some of the pits, but in 1994 the government effectively ended any dispute by privatising the industry.

Defeat in 1985 meant that the devastating changes predicted before the strike would be realised. Yet this did not happen to every community immediately. This made it difficult to assess what the strike, and the defeat actually meant. In 1985 many communities were left in the same position of uncertainty and foreboding that they had been in 1983, only now they were only too well aware that they had no power over their future, and no state or public support. In fact something akin to communal “cognitive dissonance” may have been prompted by the fact that much of what defeat actually meant was contradictory. The miner was:

a) still fighting a battle against closure, but that battle had already been lost;
b) seen as mythical working class hero, and still vilified;
c) reunited with a vivid cultural history, but also becoming history:
d) possibly the template for a new form of class action, and proof that class action was futile;\textsuperscript{84}
e) and still part of a rationalising, working industry, but already redundant.

\textsuperscript{81} Richards, op cit, p.205-210
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, p.207
\textsuperscript{83} Sztompka, op cit, p.181, p.188
\textsuperscript{84} The idea that the Miners’ strike could usher in a new class based politics provides the concluding remarks to the books by Beynon (1985), Samuel, Bloomfield & Boanas, and Richards.
Piotr Sztompka identifies certain situations in which cultural disorganisation is more prevalent, including “intercultural contact”, the “change of fundamental institutions” and the undermining of beliefs and ideologies.\textsuperscript{85} All these can be seen to have occurred with the strike defeat. Much of this was brought to light by the outpouring of academic and popular literature assessing the strike, often focusing upon first hand accounts of the strike (such as History Workshop’s \textit{The Enemy Within}).\textsuperscript{86} Some were based in sociological research. The study by Dave Waddington, Maggie Wykes and Chas Critcher assessed changes in worldview in a number of Midlands communities. They identified a number of features that we may see as contributory to cultural disorganisation: disrupted worker management relations; loss of faith in political action; altered gender relations; cynicism concerning the press; pessimism about the future; and a distrust of authority.\textsuperscript{87} Their conclusions also show that these features are by no means uniform. Even within communities there was an inability to apply a conclusive meaning to the strike defeat.

\textbf{Conclusion: Amber and the Strike}

Amber were an important part of this process of cultural disorganisation. Two projects evocatively captured the tension and utter breakdown of normality in Easington during the strike: Pattison’s \textit{Easington: August 1984}, and Jedrzejczyk’s images of the SEAM women’s support group. They recorded the turmoil of the rupture between miners and the state. They also contributed to the cultural disorganisation experienced by miners. Amber were active in broadcasting the bias of the press against miners and the brutality of the state, which added to disorientation. This was done both through their involvement with the \textit{Miners’ Campaign Tapes}, and the way that Pattison’s images were disseminated across a range of media, from local newsletters to national television.

Immediately after the strike the Side Gallery also put on the exhibition \textit{Making the News}, which examined the continuing bias in press accounts of the conflict.\textsuperscript{88} They continued to tour the works of Pattison, John Davies and Bruce Rae around the coalfield, and also

\textsuperscript{85} Sztompka, op cit, p.162-3
\textsuperscript{86} Samuel, Bloomfield & Boanas, op cit.
\textsuperscript{87} Waddington, Wykes & Critcher, op cit.
\textsuperscript{88} The exhibition was organised in collaboration with the Glasgow Media Group.
produced the documentary film *Can’t Beat it Alone*, which was aired on Channel 4 and assessed the relationship between the pit closure programme and the nuclear power industry. However by 1986 their documentary films *The Privatisation Tapes* showed an interest in the Conservative privatisation programme in general and they had begun a five year residency in North Tyneside. Perhaps the inability to attribute a specific meaning to the strike and its failure extended to Amber, and prompted them to grasp a new challenge. Nevertheless, from the late 1970s to the mid 1980s Amber were recording and contributing to cultural disorganisation, but also beginning to produce a thorough examination of long term communal upheaval. In essence they were beginning to culturally construct, and disseminate a record of the trauma of social change. So in Amber’s practice the recording of potential trauma was tightly inter-woven with disseminating the message of trauma.89

By 1993 there were no more deep mines in County Durham, and communities were feeling the very real fall-out of social and economic change in terms of wide-scale unemployment, increases in drugs, crime and delinquency, and a contraction of services. These are the factors that trigger the trauma of change, and it was to this social landscape that Amber returned in the mid 1990s, reviving the relationships built through the former projects. It is in this period that the full expression of communal trauma is realised and recorded.

89 In the immediate aftermath of the strike, an exhibition by two of their associates, Graham Smith and Chris Killip may also have contributed to this cultural disorganisation. *Another Country*, at London’s Serpentine Gallery brought together their images of working class hardship in the North East in the 1970s and 1980s. It put the continuing marginalisation of the region into a historical context wider than Thatcherism alone, but still made the divide between the post-industrial north and affluent south vivid.
CHAPTER EIGHT

The Post-Industrial Landscape

“There is nowhere else like the coalfields. Their long history as the engine of the nation’s industrialisation means they developed a cohesion, a reliance on a single industry and an independent existence with few parallels. This was their greatest strength when the mines were producing and now it is their greatest weakness”.

Amber re-established their connection with the communities around Easington in the mid 1990s. The area had been devastated by successive colliery closures, from Horden in 1987 to the final two local pits, Easington and Vane Tempest (Seaham) in October 1992. These last closures meant the loss of nearly 2,300 jobs, and raised local unemployment rates to 17%.

Yet statistics do not reveal the full impact. Piotr Sztompka’s suggestion that traumatic social change must be “wide, comprehensive… radical and fundamental” could not be more applicable to the mining village that has lost its mine. Needless to say, there had been the economic effects of high unemployment, a subsequent contraction of other services and investment, and resulting social deprivation and problems. The close relationship between pit and all aspects of communal life also resulted in significant social disruptions and upheavals, and various networks to disappear or contract. Accepted patterns of behaviour and social status, had also been altered, or found to be tenuous and unreliable. All these are upheavals in themselves; taken together they represent an all pervading change that is


2 The other coastal collieries that closed in this period were Dawdon and Murton in 1991.

3 When the first wave of job losses from these two pits went through, 940 redundant miners entered a local job market that comprised of just 13 listed vacancies. Richards, A, Miners on Strike: Class Solidarity and Division in Britain (Oxford: Berg, 1996), p.211. Actual unemployment figures would considerably higher, and include those on sickness benefits or who had taken early retirement, and the under-employed.

potentially highly traumatic. Especially as the cultural disorganisation engendered by the Miners’ Strike, had considerably weakened the communal resistance to these changes.

These changes were also felt in the physical space. They served to make already geographically and socially isolated communities more isolated, through the contraction of transport services and collapsing house prices. Closure also changed the landscape. It left a physical, social and psychological absence at the heart of the village. So every aspect of communal life was fundamentally and lastingly affected by closure. As Dave Feickert, former research officer for the NUM said in 2004, “the horrendous damage to mining communities will take at least two generations to heal”. It was this fundamental change to the social and economic fabric of the villages that saw Amber return to the Durham Coalfield in the mid-1990s, and begin a process of collaborative engagement which was to result in the Coalfield Stories projects.

Amber’s first project in the coalfield was the dramatic feature film Eden Valley (1994), about an absentee father and delinquent son who revive a broken relationship through the sport of harness racing. The film is not about the coal industry (so is not discussed in detail here) but it is built upon a number of assumptions that continue, or are critically examined in the Coalfield Stories projects. The first assumption is that the lack of the structure imposed by industrial labour results in delinquency in young males. Industrial communities were characterised by Paul Willis’ cycle of “learning to labour”: the traditional achievement of “manhood” through the natural progression from school to apprenticeship to full working status, which,

“accrued its own type of ‘body capital’, forged through notions of the patriarchal ‘bread winner’, physical ‘hardness’ and a strict sexual division of labour that split the public ‘masculine’ world of work from the private domestic realm of women’s unpaid labour”.  

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5 Feikert, D, “Arthur was right by instinct”, in The Guardian (11/02/04), cited in Williams, G (Ed), Shafted: The Media, the Miners’ Strike and the Aftermath (London: Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, 2009), p.20

As Anoop Nayak suggests, this pattern is broken in the post-industrial environment, leading young males to try to accrue body capital through ritualised displays of delinquency: drinking, drug-taking, excessively loud music, and statements of aggression, both in word and physical “strutting”. Delinquents become adjudged responsible for the deterioration of the social environment. They become both victim and cause of communal trauma: scapegoats for the difficulties of the whole community. In Amber’s films, this assumption is embodied in the local actor Darren Bell. Playing different characters in three films over the course of a decade, he negotiates alcohol abuse and delinquency, unwanted pregnancy, and finally how drug dependency inflects upon fatherhood (and how others react to delinquency). As Bell is a local amateur actor, it is obvious that he is reflecting the experiences of his peers, which makes him a credible and relatable agent for the message of trauma.

The second assumption is that involvement in traditional working class leisure pursuits can assuage the temptation of delinquency. They can replace the disciplinary structures of industry, and instil tradition and positive values. Masculinity can also be reclaimed through physical activity in free, non-domestic, outdoor spaces. This does imply another significant (but flawed) assumption: that urban problems do not occur in rural spaces.

The third assumption is that the removal of an industry that has continually employed father and son over generations disrupts social and cultural continuity. The younger generation simply does not believe in the values of their parents. Given the strong link between industry, communal memory and culture in mining villages, the fact that different generations may see the past and present in very different ways is actually a significant contributory feature to the trauma of social change. As the Miners’ Strike is so tightly inter-linked with the trauma in Durham, generational turnover is a potentially significant locus of tension. One of the motivations of the strike was to save jobs for future generations, but the younger generation may not appreciate the sacrifice, especially when mining culture has

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7 Nayak, op cit, p.820-822
8 As Peter Hutchings has suggested, this makes Eden Valley reflect certain narrative themes of the western, particularly in how they pertain to the idea of masculinity. Hutchings, P, “‘When the Going Gets Tough…”: Representations of the North East in Film and Television”, in Faulkner, T.E. (Ed), Northumbrian Panorama: Studies of the History and Culture of North East England (London: Octavian Press, 1996), p.285
become something consumed through detached symbols with unclear meanings. As Murray Martin said, “the only thing you have left in most villages is half of a pit wheel stuck somewhere in a piece of concrete”. So the idea of preserving memories between generations is a theme that recurs through the *Coalfield Stories*.

These assumptions are fairly self-evident and simply resolved in *Eden Valley*. The *Coalfield Stories* photography and film projects, commissioned from 1998 onwards, provide a much more complex view of post-industrial masculinity, femininity, and the role of working class traditions and history. This is perhaps because the romantic iconography of heroic miners, harsh industrial work and semi-urban gemeinschaft used in earlier projects was no longer available. Consequently, the subject matter became changed social networks, the deterioration of the physical and social environment, and how these are negotiated by the individual. As Martin suggested, it was a movement towards representing the “internal landscape”, rather than using the symbolism of the industrial environment. In the *Coalfield Stories*, working class culture is not a simple extension of a determinate industry, but more in line with Richard Jenkins’ process of identification, in which the individual negotiates a path through the economic and social structures impacting upon everyday experience. Working class existence may be fast becoming a marginal culture, but this is seldom represented as a simple tragedy. In fact those characters that do hold resolutely to the past often do so to their own cost.

This complexity is also due to an intense process of collaboration and feedback in the *Coalfield Stories*. This process began with a project with East Durham youth workers

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10 The grouping of “Coalfield Stories” does not only include those commissions from 1998 onwards, but also some pre-existing projects, such as Dean Chapman’s *Shifting Ground* series (begun in Tony Blair’s constituency of Sedgefield in the election year of 1997), documentaries and films such as *It’s the Pits* and *The Scar*, and often those initial photographic series by Rae and Davies.

11 Indeed, the romantic vision of mining, drawing upon the aesthetics of the documentary movement, did not (in Martin’s opinion) transfer well upon to the new landscape and structures of the post-industrial environment. As Martin stated, the Metro Centre is simply not as visually interesting as a shipyard; he could not get as excited about the Nissan plant as a mine. Newbury, D, “Documentary Practices and Working-Class Culture: An Interview with Murray Martin”, in *Visual Studies, Vol.17, No.2* (2002), p.123

12 Ibid, p.123. However, Martin maintains that Amber have always focussed on such subject matter, citing Graham Smith’s work concerning alcoholism in Middlesbrough’s South Bank (Ibid, p.123).

examining the lack of facilities and opportunities in the area. It resulted in the documentary film *It's the Pits* (1995), but also a series of connections which were developed over the following years. As a result, in the *Coalfield Stories*, members of the community provide the subjects for the photography, but also the inspiration, much of the dialogue, and the actors for the films.

The *Coalfield Stories* have also been continually shown in venues within those communities. This provides the basis for further alliances, but also makes them ideal vehicles for the message of trauma. That message is being created by, and displayed back to the group itself. It is also, as Katy Bennett and Richard Lee have pointed out, being *performed*.\(^{14}\) Community members are intentionally fictionalising their own experiences to correspond with a certain idea of themselves, and their community, with Amber as the facilitating partners (this is not unproblematic, and shall be returned to in the next chapter). The projects have also been completely inter-related, with individual stories and landscapes resurfacing, and developing, through different projects. The result is something of a collaborative gesamtkunstwerk, intensively examining a small geographical area, and the fallout from one particular industrial collapse.

Landscape has been fundamental. It is changes in the landscape that have prompted changes in the communities. The trials of the characters are also reflected in the space around them. Often the physical space influences their actions, or changes their relationships. It is also the stage upon which those changes are represented. So landscape is used as direct evidence of change, and as symbolic representation. Sometimes it is used as an affective device.

This chapter examines the landscape imagery in the *Coalfield Stories*. They show how outside political decisions have affected relationships in real space. They also make reference to previous representations of industrial Durham and the documentary iconography of economic change. They therefore relate to Mitchell’s triangular approach to landscape. Furthermore, as Mitchell suggests, they act as a verbs rather than nouns; as they

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\(^{14}\) Bennett, K and Lee, R, “Amber and an/other rural: film, photography and the former coalfields” in Fish, R (Ed), *Cinematic Countrysides* (Manchester: Manchester university Press), pp.249-268
are continually exhibited back to the East Durham communities, they reflect and formulate new perceptions of the lived space. Often the defining feature of that space is a palpable absence. The photographic projects from the late 1990s onwards focus upon that absence.

Homes

Writing in 1978, Sid Chaplin noted that American mining settlements are known as “camps”; their limited lifespan is acknowledged in their name. However, are “villages”; the industrial township based upon expediency is overlaid with emotive connotations of permanence, community, even the rural idyll. The Durham coastal pits had a working lifespan of less than a hundred years, but the settlements thrown up around them grew into communities. It was to protect communities, as much as jobs that brought the miners out in 1984-5. The strike highlighted the conflict that arises when one party views mining settlements as “camps”, and another as “villages”. The landscape photography of the Coalfield Stories addresses this conflict.

Sally Ann Norman is an architectural photographer and her project, Farewell Squalor (2001-2003), charted the various housing projects that have emerged over the years to accommodate mine workers. The title is taken from a report compiled by surveyor C.W. Clarke for the Easington Rural District Council in 1946. The report assessed the housing in the mining villages and concluded that a new town, Peterlee was justified. It urged its readers to,

“look back with unseeing eyes on the sordid existence of the first decades of this century. Let us blind ourselves to the septic and ugly building wens and ribbons perpetrated and planted upon us between the wars, and let us open our eyes and look brightly forward to the new town, the new living...Peterlee”.

This “septic and ugly” housing included the blocks of terraces hurriedly built by the East Durham mining companies in the early twentieth century. Yet, while Norman herself is from Peterlee, she records the Edwardian terraces of the coastal collieries ambiguously,

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merely presenting us with the housing that has been offered to mining communities. There are however, underlying implications. Housing is, after all, a system of official classification; good housing is a reward for the deserving, bad, a penalty for the undeserving. That classification reflects how the ideology of the moment values the working class. Yet while the terraces may have been built to serve a purpose and with little regard for their occupants (and subsequently derided by well-meaning observers such as C.W. Clarke), being allocated housing engenders a collective consciousness; they became communities.

Her photographs of Easington show the most recent change in the valuation of the miner. The streets of Bruce Rae idealised community are now half demolished (Figure 1). After the closure of Easington colliery these streets emptied, became sites of delinquency and vandalism, and were marked for demolition. In one image, a group of youths overlooks the demolition (Figure 2). Bystanders, they can only look on while official policies alter the environment in which they live. It prompts a contrast between the romantic image of the working class street full of playing children, and our contemporary environment in which youth in the street is immediately associated with anti-social behaviour. Norman’s record begs the question, who decides what squalor is, and what effects does that decision have?

17 Jenkins, op cit, p.165-8
18 Ibid, p.174
Memories

These streets are also sites of memory. Catherine Degnen has noted how memory in mining villages is embedded in places. In chat or gossip people refer to buildings and streets in which they (or family or friends) lived, worked or shopped. Social interactions turn places into prompts for memory, and memory lends continuity to spaces. When people disappear, they remain in memory through associations with lived space, when places disappear they continue to exist in conversation. As well as recording the physical removal of buildings, Norman’s images suggest that the memory of these places is gradually being stretched and broken.

In Simon Norfolk’s *Goaf* (2004-5) each image is accompanied by a nineteenth century colloquial term used in North East mining. “Goaf” refers to “a space or void from which the coal pillars that support the roof have been removed. Eventually the pressure reconsolidates the whole, the surface subsiding”. It is a clear analogy for the collapse of communities after colliery closure. *Claggy* (Figure 3) returns to the site of Norman’s *Farewell Squalor*, and refers to coal that adheres to the surrounding rock, and cannot be loosened easily. It is immediately apparent that the demolition has not progressed much in the intervening two years (no doubt reflecting the lack of demand for land in this part of East Durham); the connection between place and memory is still being stretched, but not

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20 These are taken from *A Glossary of terms Used in the Coal Trade of Northumberland and Durham* (1849).
erased. The figures of a man and child view the scene, and are perhaps engaged in the process Degnen outlines: transferring and continuing the memory of place through everyday conversation. The man may also be pointing out that one of these buildings is the house in which Stephen Daldry’s *Billy Elliot* was filmed. So there is another layer of memory contained in these streets. They exist in popular culture. Norfolk highlights the difference between the fiction and the reality, but also how these streets will continue to exist in a space between memory and fiction.

Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen was introduced to the landscape of her *Coal Coast* project (1999-2003) by the ex-miners who work the cliff-top allotments of Horden and Easington, and the accompanying exhibition text is punctuated by their memories of pit life. This is also a landscape undergoing redevelopment to sanitise its industrial past and create a “Heritage Coast” worthy of tourism and re-investment. However, Konttinen’s images examine how the detritus of that short century of industry refuses to be permanently erased. This debris remains as industrial fossils, some monumental and permanent, some only emerging occasionally in the littoral space of the shoreline (Figures 4 and 5). The fossils are parallels for the memories of the miners; they emerge, submerge and disappear. For a new generation they may provide the only connection with the industrial past. So again, the link between memory and locality is being stretched; it occasionally re-emerges, but unbidden and incomplete.

**Figure 4**: Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, *Ventilation Duct, Hawthorne Hive*, 1999

**Figure 5**: Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, *Dawdon*, 2000
This detritus has an ambiguous relationship to a new, environmentally conscious attitude to this coast. It is both a pollutant, and oddly beautiful; unwelcome, but also, in this newly anointed “heritage” site, a kind of museum exhibit. The use of a well-worn surrogate, the boot, in Miner’s Boot, Hawthorne Hive (1999) directly links this debris to the human experience of mining, but also to the history of representing economic change. Konttinen uses colour and eschews the deep chiaroscuro of earlier northern documentary, but also makes these fossils monumental industrial features in the landscape; the aesthetic of industrial documentary persists.

Palimpsests

The Coal Coast frames this detritus, and mining, as ephemeral but stubborn features in a landscape of longer geological time. The landscape becomes a palimpsest; an accumulation of hidden and visible marks and scars. In a similar way to John Davies’ earlier images of the coalfield, the landscape is marked by industry, but these marks take their place amongst others, both human and natural. In 2004, to mark the 20th anniversary of the strike, Davies returned to the scenes of 1983 to record the changes to this palimpsest in the series Durham Coalfield Revisited.

In his photographs of Dawdon, the tightly packed tapestry of ruts, struts, tracks and blocks that criss-crossed the site of the colliery in 1983 has been replaced with a manicured, ordered space (Figures 6 and 7). It is still a site of work, and there are parallel features: the triangular roof of the small unit echoes the pyramid of the spoil heap; the cars in their orderly spaces reflect the regiment of coal trucks lined up along the coast; the lamp posts and distant shapes of the Hartlepool wind-farm poignantly echo the colliery tower. Yet they are precisely this: echoes. The deep marks of mining were temporary (the second image provides the proof), but they seemed more permanent. The human marks on the post-industrial landscape seem already temporary. They are bleached out in bright sunlight, and appear as a clean and orderly surface placed over the landscape. It seems that they could be

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22 It might remind us of the tendency in the heritage industry to reify the everyday, unassuming object as a direct, significant link to the past.
23 It recalls the boot as melancholy stand in for its soon to be departed wearer in Walker Evans’ The Work Boots of Floyd Burroughs, Share Cropper, Hale County Alabama, of 1936.
24 Davies attempted to reproduce the views as closely as possible.
erased as easily as they were constructed (perhaps by the digger approaching from the bottom right hand corner of the photograph).

Davies’ *Easington Colliery* of 1983 (Figure 8) captured the view across the colliery car park to the colliery buildings. By 2004 this site had been cleared and returned to the agricultural field that it was before 1899. The high colliery walls which Rae recorded in 1984 had contracted to a small fence in the wide landscape, marking the only remaining feature, the pit itself. However, Davies’ *Easington Colliery* of 2004 also refers to Keith Pattison’s image from 1984 when the colliery car park was full of police vans. Because Amber regularly exhibit these images in the local area, pictures continually refer to each other. They constantly reflect and refresh the memories of the audience. So as well as making a political point about the erasing of industrial livelihoods, they are effective in conveying, and provoking, the memories of traumatic change.

Norfolk’s *Goaf* also highlights the subtle presence of the past in the post-industrial landscape. In images such as *Scares* the old and new collide (figure 9). “Scares” refers to the seams of tempting but worthless iron pyrites (“fools gold”) that occasionally run through coal seams. Norfolk’s *Scares* conflates the gaudy vehicles of a limousine hire business with the colliery spoil heap behind, which has been landscaped to make it conform to the look of a new trading estate. Perhaps the limousine company is run by an ex-miner, but the contrast between the ostentatious and ephemeral and the industry which once supported communities for life is clear.
The *Coalfield Stories* landscapes focus on the physical legacy of mining in the post-industrial landscape and the efforts to erase it as the coast is put to new uses. They also refer to the landscapes in the feature films, and are referred back to in turn. In the films, these landscapes become symbolic of the changes in the characters’ lives. They are also lived spaces, in which those characters’ tribulations take place, and spaces that are being visibly changed themselves. As these changes occur the conflicts between the pit village as “camp” and the space as “village” become realised.

**Traumatic Change in the Durham Films**

In his theory of traumatic social change, Piotr Sztompka identifies four traumatising “situations”, four resulting “symptoms” of trauma, and a number of “coping mechanisms” that are employed in response to that trauma. All of these are applicable to the situation of East Durham. However, in assessing the *Coalfield Stories* feature films it might be more appropriate to conflate those causes, symptoms and coping mechanisms into sets of experiences, or themes (such as “generational conflict”, or “gender negotiation”). There are two reasons for this conflation.

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25 Sztompka, op cit, p.155-195. Sztompka actually identifies five symptoms of trauma. However, the fifth concerns how former leaders should be held to account for their previous Communist activities which are now specifically seen as illegal is not applicable to the miners’ situation, and can be subsumed into “distrust of authority”.

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Figure 8: John Davies, *Easington Colliery, County Durham*, 2004

Figure 9: Simon Norfolk, *Scares*, 2005
The first relates to Kai Erikson’s observation that “trauma” refers not just to the wound, but also the blow that inflicted it. Communal trauma develops over time, and this development is “value added”, with the intensity of trauma increasing throughout. Yet we cannot see this development strictly in terms of cause and effect; symptoms sometimes become causes, and causes may not engender trauma until a number of other factors combine. So Sztompka identifies the deterioration of life standards as a traumatogenic situation, and criminal activity as a possible coping mechanism. Yet an increase in criminal activity also contributes to the deterioration of life standards. Furthermore, both may be simultaneously cause and effect of the traumatic symptom of “a bleak picture of the future”.

The second reason is that these films deal with a huge range of traumatic issues, but they do tend to focus upon the relationship between certain characters (often mirrored in the relationship between other characters). Therefore, it is possible to highlight a certain set of issues within those relationships. So, by blending Sztompka’s situations, symptoms and strategies, three “spheres” of traumatic experience can be highlighted.

**Social and Physical Deterioration**

This concerns the deterioration of the physical and social fabric of the community as a direct result of pit closure. It encompasses the traumatic situations Sztompka identifies as the “advent of new risks” (or increased perception of risks), and “deterioration of life standards”. It covers unemployment (or the persistent threat of unemployment), and the awareness of increases in drug abuse and crime. It also includes poverty and the contraction of communal support networks, or even transport infrastructure.

Social deterioration is also twinned with the increased perception of pre-existing problems. Pollution, communal health or even official corruption and incompetence, effectively become “new” problems when general deterioration occurs. This deterioration

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27 Sztompka, op cit, p.175
28 Ibid, p.180
29 Ibid, p.175
30 Ibid
can be ameliorated by coping strategies, such as the development of extended family networks, casual employment, or entrepreneurial enterprises. However, social deterioration can be increased if these strategies are illegal, leading to concerns about public safety. Social deterioration can result in two main symptoms: a “bleak picture of the future” and a “nostalgic image of the past”.  

**Past / Present Conflicts**

Another set of characteristics stem from the incongruity between past and present experience, and a need to solve this incongruity. In Durham, this past-present conflict may directly stem from the cultural disorganisation engendered by the Miners’ Strike. Again, symptoms may be nostalgia and pessimism. It may result in political apathy, but equally the coping mechanism of increased political entrenchment or even radicalism, and the need to settle old scores. 

It may not result in an idealisation of the past, but a brutal realism, and a feeling that former sacrifice was futile. It may engender a host of “retreatist” coping strategies which could be traumatic symptoms in themselves: withdrawal and fatalism; lack of faith in one’s own abilities and dependency upon support; abdication of responsibility and blaming the system; and ghetto-isation or drawing up the barriers of community. Another pertinent strategy is “ritualism”; the search for security in the traditional ritual, even though it is no longer underpinned by a contemporary function. This may be reflected in the renewed passion for the annual Durham Miners’ Gala, but also the ritualism of traditional cultural pursuits such as pigeon racing. These strategies can be negative, or positive.

**Disrupted Status Hierarchies**

Change also undermines accepted patterns of social interaction, and thus individuals’ position in society. In Durham, this encompasses features such as renegotiated gender relationships, particularly the crisis of masculinity of the post-industrial male, and the political emancipation of women during the Miners’ Strike. Both of which are main themes.

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31 Ibid, p.180-1  
32 Ibid, p.181, p.188  
33 Ibid, p.186-7  
34 Ibid, p.187
in Amber’s films. As too is the upsetting of status hierarchies between generations, represented in youth’s lack of respect for official or familial authority, but also their perceived ignorance of class history and standards of behaviour. Sztompka’s symptom, the “distrust of authority” also reflects the disruption of hierarchies.\(^\text{35}\) In Durham this is linked to the strike experience, which resulted in a distrust of the police, the mass media, but also a questioning of the competence of the Union.

All these causes, symptoms and coping strategies are tied to the landscape in the three *Coalfield Stories* films, *The Scar* (1997), *Like Father* (2001) and *Shooting Magpies* (2005). They arise in certain spaces, and because of changes in those spaces. As such, they are examined here in chronological order, as the development of the landscape is itself part of the narrative. Actually, one could draw upon the metaphor of Simon Norfolk’s definition of “goaf”, and see each of the three films as representing one aspect of a process of subsidence.\(^\text{36}\) So first there is a picture of a community facing *absence*. The next film shows *instability and collapse*, and the final film, *the aftermath*.

**Cultural Disorganisation: The Scar**

*The Scar* provides a bridge between the condition of communal cultural disorganisation felt in the wake of the Miners’ Strike, and the full blown trauma experienced as the fallout from colliery closure was fully realised. The “scar” of the title stands for the psychological injury left by the 1985 defeat. The scar is also the space left by the removal of the physical infrastructure of colliery in the centre of the village; an absence as palpable as the former pithead’s presence. This wound in the landscape reflects the psychological wounds of the characters. If we follow the metaphoric process of Norfolk’s *Goaf* it is the void left as the supports of community, the pit, have been removed.

The film focuses upon women’s experience of the strike and its aftermath.\(^\text{37}\) In particular on May (Charlie Hardwick), a figurehead in the Women Against Pit Closures movement during the strike, but now without purpose and agency. Her political awakening has also

\(^\text{35}\) Ibid, p.178  
\(^\text{36}\) To reiterate the definition of “goaf”: “a space or void from which the coal pillars that support the roof have been removed. Eventually the pressure reconsolidates the whole, the surface subsiding”.  
\(^\text{37}\) It thus provides a corrective feminine view of post-industrialisation to the earlier *Eden Valley*, which focused almost exclusively upon masculinity.
proven to be a false dawn. May must return to a domestic role, and the double failure of the strike, and her truncated political emancipation, leaves her an emotional shell. Her husband is also a shell. Unemployed ex-miner Tony (Brian Hogg) has withdrawn from any social or political interaction, except with his daughter Becky (Katja Roberts). He now lives in his pigeon cree, that constant of mining culture. There he views the village from above, reproducing the view captured in Bruce Rae’s *Overlooking the Bs*. However this view is now dominated by the unhealed wound that signifies defeat. His mental escape is through his soaring pigeons, but his conflict is that of Billy in Ken Loach’s *Kes*; as much as he attempts to live through the freedom of his birds, he remains grounded in the physical, human world.

May and Tony embody the traumatic symptoms and coping strategies associated with a conflict between past and present. Tony cannot reconcile the incongruity, resulting in an almost total loss of faith in everything working class culture and solidarity represents. May is symptomatic of the cultural disorganisation experienced by women during the strike. Political purpose and emancipation represented a break with the past, but this progress was itself undermined by defeat, a return to a limited domesticity and an unravelling of the communal spirit. May’s only link to her former cause is through preparing for the upcoming Durham Gala: the recourse to ritualism.

An early scene shows these preparations. The break between past and present is visualised as the colliery band practice their mournful performance to the high construction fence that now separates the village from the scar of the colliery; culture has been physically separated from that which gave it meaning. During this elegiac performance, Tony appears pushing his bicycle up the hill towards the band. He has been sea-coaling and plastic bags of coal hang from the handlebars. He becomes a direct transcription of Bill Brandt’s iconic coal-searcher; embedded in the past, and incapable of making it fit with the present. As he suggests, “the past is the past, and you’ve got no claim on it”.

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38 The soundtrack accompanying our first view of Tony surveying the village is a brass band rendition of *Abide with Me*
Femininity, Loyalty and Class

May’s disorientation is intensified by her falling for the outsider Roy Cotton (Bill Speed), manager of Morlands open cast mine, one of the short term Thatcherite enterprises that “mopped up” any shallow coal seams after the closure of the pits. Roy embodies the mobile Thatcherite worker, prepared to “get on his bike” to embrace opportunities, but at the cost of ties to both family and community; the very things that embed May in geographical place. It is a *Romeo and Juliet* plotline that mirrors *Clash*, the 1929 novel by socialist heroine Ellen Wilkinson, in which Joan Craig, a union official during the 1926 General Strike falls for outsider Tony Dacre, a suitor incompatible with her socialist principles.39

![Figure 10: still from *The Scar* (Amber Films, 1997)](image)

In May’s case this relationship unfolds in the landscape, and with appropriate symbolism. The revelation of Roy’s occupation is paralleled by the symbolic contrast between an innocent picnic in spring bluebells, and shots of a denuded tree and cloudy skies. The progression of their relationship also takes place within symbolic landscapes. The Morlands open cast colliery is the site of May’s confusion as she battles between love and loyalty. We experience her emotional disorientation through her own eyes as she becomes dwarfed by the oppressive walls of the mine, and looks down at a crack in the earth opening beneath

39 Wilkinson, E. *Clash* [1929] (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2004). In fact, in one scene May is shown watching a news clip of herself giving a speech at a political rally during the strike; her red hair and passionate rhetoric from the podium lending her a notable resemblance to “Red Ellen”.

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her feet. She finally accepts Roy’s affections on the site of the old colliery, and they perform a dance upon the scar (Figure 10). It is a collision of values that can only be negotiated by the formality of a dance. For Roy the scar means nothing, it is merely a space. For May it is everything: a hole. This dance is nothing short of a transgression of her class loyalties.

May’s “temptation in the wilderness” follows, but her wilderness is one of luxury hotels and idyllic countryside. This is inter-cut with scenes of Easington, and the tribulations of her son Dale (Darren Bell). Ultimately May redisCOVERS THE IMPORTANCE OF HER CLASS LOYALTY, and a new role in the community. Her emotional rebirth takes place on Easington beach, reunited with her family. This begins a thematic strand that runs through the subsequent films. The beach becomes the symbolic site for both emotional tension, and a recurring landscape of protection and solace. The film ends with two contrasting images of the traumatic fallout of the colliery closure. Tony burns his pigeon lofts, unable even to find comfort from this link to tradition and class identity. May’s last scene emphasises her rebirth, as she dresses (to the radio playing “Morning” from Grieg’s Peer Gynt) and begins her role as community leader. She and her and her reunited family are shown involved in a street party in the green space in front of the terraces that lead down to the sea.

May’s story is the fictional combination of many women’s experience of the Campaign Against Pit Closure. After embracing political empowerment, their application for full membership of the NUM was rejected. Some women went on to full political careers, but

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40 Afterwards, she seeks out her husband to attempt to resolve her inner and marital conflict. The imminent betrayal of her class is forewarned by a snarling dog, which warns her away from the allotment.

41 It thus has uncomfortable associations of dancing on the grave of her former life.

42 During their relationship she consistently displays her cultural and ethical superiority to Roy, who confesses to being a “simple muck-mover”, and whose ultimate fate is to find himself as dispensable in the new entrepreneurial environment as the former miner Tony.

43 The beach is used in a similar way in the films of Federico Fellini. Murray Martin professed a love for European Realist cinema, and Amber have always included the classics of European film in their cinema programme. Dickinson, M (Ed), Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain 1945-90 (London: British Film Institute, 1999), p.248. However, as James Leggott points out, coastal settings have also often provided locations of solace and upheaval for characters in British films. Leggott, J, Contemporary British Cinema: From Heritage to Horror (London: Wallflower, 2008), p.41-2. In the case of East Durham, this actually reflects a real relationship between the mining communities of East Durham and the beach. It has traditionally been a source of survival in hard times, providing sea-coal and even housing dispossessed families in times of hardship. Brisley, op cit, p.1
many were left politically directionless.\textsuperscript{44} May’s story particularly mirrors that of Heather Wood, who was active in the SEAM campaign, but felt physically and emotionally broken after the defeat.\textsuperscript{45} Yet like May, she is now engaged in various community based voluntary movements and local issues. In many ways such stories reflect the movement from the absolutes of party politics to a postmodern, micro-level politics, based in residents’ associations and issue groups, and integrated with family and community life.\textsuperscript{46}

The politicisation of women around the strike represents a potentially traumatic upheaval. It disrupted the patriarchal status quo for men, but also ended in disappointment for women. Many ultimately returned to their former domestic roles. The character of Carol Elliott in Amber’s next film, \textit{Like Father}, employs active coping strategies to deal with her husband’s unemployment: finding makeshift employment as a seamstress. In practical terms this means long hours of low paid, solitary, menial and repetitive work, in solitude. She also has to fulfil her domestic role as wife and mother, so her “emancipation” is in essence an intensification of the domestic role. May is also employed in a low paid, servile and unfulfilling job, which contrasts with her very public former role. She rediscovers purpose in community service, but this does not show a break with domesticity, but an extension of the maternal function (and re-emphasises the stereotype of the northern matriarch and of women as planners and healers).

The demise of mining represented an upheaval of all gender roles. Linda McDowell suggests that to focus on the crisis of post-industrial masculinity eclipses the challenges for women in deprived communities. Traditional domesticity is undermined, but job opportunities (if they exist at all) are often menial and exploitative with no security or opportunity for advancement.\textsuperscript{47} Though the benefits of post-feminist consumption are

\textsuperscript{44} For instance, Juliana Heron went on to become mayor of Sunderland in 2003-4, after becoming politically active in the strike movement, and is now Labour mayor of Hetton. Wainwright, H, “We are Women, We are Strong…?”, in Williams, op cit, p.100-1. In fact, the area’s Labour movement is remarkably women-dominated, and Wainwright suggest that those empowered by the strike were, in most cases those that had shown \textit{at least some} political or community interest before the strike. Ibid, p.107

\textsuperscript{45} SEAM stands for Save Easington Area Mines. It was East Durham’s manifestation of the women’s strike support movement. Ibid, p.103-5

\textsuperscript{46} Or, indeed an extension of how the D.M.A. has \textit{always} been a community organisation, as well as a political one.

widely celebrated across the media, experience in the former mining communities demonstrates that, in reality, access to them is still restricted by class.48

**Delinquency**

May’s problems are compounded by her son Dale’s delinquency. His life consists of unemployment, techno, drugs and the (ultimately fulfilled) threat of premature fatherhood. His temporary escape from this life is to embrace the consumerist lifestyle through work at Morlands; work which is more offensive to his mother than his delinquency. Daughter Becky is also tempted by delinquency, but resists. Presumably, this is because of her interest in her father’s working class pursuits and opinions on class politics.

This delinquency is also placed in and around the scar of the old colliery site. Again the scar physically embodies the idea of trauma as both the wound and the blow that inflicted it. It is the landscape in which the characters experience their trials, and the very reason that they arise. It is implicit then that the colliery closure has not only led to the loss of jobs, but also discipline and structure. In one scene, youths gather in the railway underpass earlier photographed by Rae. Whereas in the 1983 image this provided the link between industry and working class community (pit and allotment), here it becomes the antithesis of the mine shaft: a threatening scene of indiscipline, rather than order. Dale is shown involved in Nayak’s strategies to emphasise a subversive “body capital”: drinking, loud music, messing about in cars, and a lack of respect for the police. In another scene he slips back into delinquency after losing his job. It takes place on the cliffs above the conveyor that Rae and Pattison photographed in the 1980s. It is all but absent by 1997, and the collapsing stumps form a metaphor for the crumbling influence of the pit on social discipline.

Yet the characters in *The Scar* are not simply ciphers of sacrifice; they have agency. Dale demonstrates a strong work ethic towards his new opportunities (albeit driven by consumerist desires), and dedication towards his impending fatherhood, which contrasts vividly with his father’s withdrawal from both spheres. He considers this coming

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fatherhood from a position on top of a wall (accompanied by birdsong, the sound of freedom), mirroring his father’s position overlooking the village, but unlike his father, embraces his responsibility. His sister Becky’s future, it is hinted, is through education, and to escape from the gender shackles that have only been loosened for her mother. May’s and her children’s attitudes to change are future orientated, while Tony’s is a mixture of nostalgia and withdrawal. They all contrast with the figure of Tony’s mother, Belle. Confined to a care home and suffering from dementia, her experience of the past and present hovers between vivid, happy personal memories and total confusion and panic.

This complexity is to be expected from a collaborative project; it shows the ambiguities of negotiating historic class attitudes and contemporary communal realities. Ultimately, The Scar ends positively; notwithstanding Tony’s withdrawal from the scene (it is unclear whether he destroys himself along with his cree as a sort of auto da fé to working class existence).\(^4\) The village comes together at the street party, with Belle singing a traditional folk song, to emphasise the continuity of place, culture and community. Ultimately, the generations are united, but in the following film, Like Father (2001) generational conflict is the main theme.

**Men, Spaces and Change: Like Father**

Like Father is based around the lives of three characters, grandfather Arthur Elliott (Ned Kelly), his son Joe (Joe Armstrong), and Joe’s son Michael (Jonathan Dent). The story inter-weaves the themes of generational responsibility and conflict, the fading memory of class traditions and post-industrial masculinity. It is also about the landscape, and again we can follow the metaphor provided by Norfolk’s Goaf. If The Scar focussed upon the communal void left by the absent industry, Like Father reveals the resulting instability. Each character feels the impact, as mining’s physical and social legacy is erased through the redevelopment of the East Durham landscape. So again, the physical changes to the landscape signify both the traumatic wound and the blow that inflicted it. The action unfolds in the landscape, and because of it, and the characters all correspond to their own

\(^4\) I refer to *auto da fé* in its original sense as ritual sacrifice of devotion rather than religious punishment for heresy, although perhaps both could be appropriate given Tony’s conflicted nature.
defined physical spaces, which are symbolic of their relationship between past and present, and all ultimately unstable.

Arthur is an ex-miner who retired around the time of the strike, and so looks back on his working life with pride and a strong sense of identity. His physical space is his allotment, and his passions are pigeon racing, and the breeding of canaries (Figure 11). The other spaces he occupies are merely extensions: the livestock auction or to the dog track. Even a trip to the colliery club is an exceptional event, warranting a suit. His son Joe is a former miner who took redundancy when the pit closed, and now barely supports his family as a self-employed club singer, trumpet player and music teacher. It is the source of a tense hostility between Joe and Arthur, who identifies that he is neglecting his family. Inevitably this neglect leads to rejection and dismissal from the family home by wife Carol. Joe is unable to fully assimilate himself in either the mining tradition his father holds dear, or take full advantage of the post-mining economy. As such he exists in the spaces of transition. His view from the family home is the demolition of the terraces captured by Sally Ann Norman (reflecting his own redundancy), or of the local children using the “half a pit wheel” as a climbing frame. His rejection leads to exile in a liminal wilderness, taking up temporary residence in a windswept static caravan overlooking a coast which is simultaneously being re-branded as a heritage site but in which the presence of industry still lingers (Figure 12).\(^{50}\)

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\(^{50}\) This caravan represents just one item which Joe purchased with redundancy money which are themselves becoming redundant: the family home, which has no doubt been devalued in the post-mining area; a family
Joe’s son Michael is negotiating the passage from childhood into adulthood without the presence of his father, and with little attention from his over-worked mother. He floats between spaces, not entirely fitting into any. One of these is the domestic, as he follows his mother from home to her work as a seamstress. Alternatively, he visits his grandfather’s environment. The grandfather fills the gap in the relationship between father and son, and they bond through Arthur’s traditional masculine hobbies. However, this bond comes with the obligatory acceptance of mining customs and identity, which do not quite fit with his contemporary needs. So he is awkward among his peers, and low in the hierarchy of the schoolyard. His escape is to the littoral space of the beach, where he fantasises of being a samurai, surrounded by that re-emerging detritus of the mining industry captured in Konttinen’s *Coal Coast*.

However, these physical spaces are in a state of change. The “Phoenix Project” is literally reshaping the coastal landscape in an attempt to “get rid of the eyesores of the past”. A product of the Coalfield Task Force plan, it mixes Thatcherite top-down regeneration with New Labour community support, and promotes this redevelopment to the locals as an attempt to change their children’s legacy. This redevelopment either causes direct upheaval to the physical space these characters inhabit, or changes their actions and attitudes towards that space.

**Collapsing Space: Arthur**

Arthur’s retreat to the allotment is not just due to the disappearance of his industrial workspace. It is also the result of the death of his other son (also named Michael), for which he blamed himself. To cope, Arthur withdrew into work, an aggressively masculine attitude to fatherhood, and the homosocial space of the allotment. He also withdrew into the past, and affection for the symbols of mining at the time of his own youth, such as the canary. His main point of contact with the present day is his grandson (and surrogate son) Michael. Yet this relationship is almost entirely on Arthur’s terms; Michael is obliged to holiday to Florida which has not saved his family life; and a caravan which the family have been too busy scratching a living to use.

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51 Arthur, as far as we know, does not now have a domestic space. We see him outside, but not inside his house, and he is a shadowy figure in Joe’s flashbacks of his own domestic childhood.
accept the class culture of bygone times. Arthur’s gift to him, a canary makes this explicit. It emphasises generational continuity, but is also redundant, indeed symbolically sacrificial.  

Yet Arthur’s retreat (both physical and mental) is revealed as unstable. The redevelopment of the coast means that his allotment is to be bulldozed. His protest that he and his friends have been using their allotments for over 50 years is met with the developers’ retort that the site is “still classed as temporary”. Chaplin’s distinction between the notion of the “camp” and the “village” becomes apparent. The class constant is revealed to be liminal, and the outside forces that control lived space are revealed. He and a small group refuse to relocate, determined to “dig in, just like the strike”. Ultimately though, Arthur cannot prevent the physical changes to his retreat. This upheaval not only affects the present, but erases the past: the space that Arthur has really retreated to. When his allotment is vandalised and his pigeons killed, possibly by the developers, he is driven to total disorientation and an act of desperation. He kidnaps the development manager, David Hylton (Derek Walmsley) and holds him at gunpoint.

**Liminal Space: Joe**

The physical changes to the landscape do not directly affect Joe as they do Arthur, but they do alter his role and status. The closure of the colliery has deprived him of his industrial masculinity, but he has embraced a new life as entertainer, composer and music teacher. This extends a fairly conventional notion of masculinity: membership in the industrial brass band, or the figure of male idol, the club singer. Yet he lives in the tenuous position of being entertainer for the community; the fool. It has also undermined his role as breadwinner, and the protective and instructive roles of the father. This changed role has led to a changed position in the lived space; it has led him to be evicted from the stable space of the

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52 Arthur emphasises that the canary is a direct descendent of the birds used in the mine. Another gift is the catapult. Again, it is emphasised that this represents disciplined masculinity. It is also a relic from the past.

53 It is unclear whether this is actually done by the developers, symbolising the uncompromising use of force during the strike, or by local children, signalling their indifference to traditional class culture.

54 Flashbacks emphasise that Joe’s success in music is actually due to time he spent with his mother listening to the radio (an activity frowned upon by his violent father). Joe’s music is the result of his mother’s traditional domestic limitations and his father’s absence.
home. In the relationship between Joe and the physical space, it is not so much the landscape that is liminal, but Joe himself.

Retreat to the allotment is not possible for Joe. He has embraced a post-industrial life, and cannot simply retreat to the past; a source of animosity between him and his father. Instead he enters the space of exile, a static caravan on the Easington cliffs. Here he waits for stability to reassert itself. Yet the changes happening in the landscape will not leave Joe alone. Developer (and childhood friend) Hylton sees Joe as an example of post-industrial enterprise, and commissions him to compose a piece for the redevelopment’s opening ceremony. Tension between father and son rises. For Arthur, former miners who support the development are “scabs”. Nevertheless, Joe withdraws into an obsessive period of composing his opus (further distancing himself from Michael). His music attempts to reconcile past and present in a contemporary piece infused with the sounds of mining. It mirrors Joe’s own attempt to find his place. The view from his caravan window, of rainbow over stormy sea, promises a new start, or alternatively, an illusory prize. Ultimately it is the latter. Hylton reveals that the commission comes with strings: he must help evict Arthur form the allotments. Yet again the ground has slipped beneath Joe’s feet.

**Imaginary Space: Michael**

James Leggott has suggested that Michael reflects the “angelic” restorative figure of other post-industrial films (such as Nathan in *The Full Monty*). He helps to resolve the tensions about gender roles in other characters, but does not quite exist in the physical space himself.\(^5\) Indeed, Michael is an other-worldly child who does not seem comfortable in any of the spaces of the village. He is negotiating the passage from boy to man without the rigid structures of the industrial environment, and the process of “learning to labour”. His preferred retreat (and expression of masculinity) is into solitary fantasies of being a samurai warrior, either through video games or on the beach.\(^6\)

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\(^6\) These associations with the samurai underscore Michael as the wanderer, unable to fit into either contemporary society, or the past.
Michael finds solace in the natural space, and is even a part of it to some extent, but this emphasises his detachment from the contemporary social world. Yet the conflicts in his life begin to impinge upon this escape. His relationship with the beach is broken when it becomes the place of confrontation with his schoolboy peers. As with Joe, it is not that the physical changes taking place in the landscape have a direct negative effect on Michael; it is more that they upset relationships, which in turn affect his relationship to space. After this confrontation with his peers, the fossils of mining that constantly submerge and re-emerge on the beach become hellish, and Michael descends into disorientation.

This leads to the film’s climactic scene in the allotment, where fathers and sons finally come together in an ambiguous finale. Joe frees the kidnapped Hylton, and sides with his father, to the inevitable detriment of his own interests. The disorientated Michael falls from the cree roof, where he has been observing the scene in shock, and is cradled by both men. Yet while the family group is restored, the recourse to a disappearing history is shown to have potentially dire consequences. As Leggott points out, the resolution is ambiguous; unlike other feel-good films, the angel in Like Father must fall to earth. All three men ultimately lose as much as they win.

So, as in The Scar, the conflict between past and present is addressed ambiguously. Again this is no doubt due to the collaborative process of production. Ned Kelley and Joe Armstrong are portraying fictionalised versions of their own stories. Certainly working class masculine stereotypes are raised, but are shown to be a problematic, rather than safe: traditional class and gender positions are shown to be both anchor and albatross. Arthur epitomises the intransigence of the traditional industrial father. He is grounded in David Lockwood’s proletarian loyalties, and embedded in the free, homosocial space of the allotment, but conversely emphasises the importance of family. Joe blends similar aspects of this rigid outlook with caring and teaching roles in the community (with Mencap) and yearns a communicative relationship with his son (unlike that with his own father). Michael shows the result of these often conflicting attitudes to fathering and masculinity. These are aspects of social change that are deeply problematic, even traumatic. Yet it is the

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57 This does not prevent him mirroring Arthur’s “moulding” technique of fatherhood towards Michael, specifically in music and accepted patterns of masculinity.
landscape that brings these issues to a head. The changes to the physical space of the village, again imposed from outside, render any solid ground gained, shifting and unstable.

**Social Deterioration: Shooting Magpies**

While individuals make hard choices and suffer mixed fortunes in *The Scar* and *Like Father*, we are left with the impression of a functioning community. The dilemmas these characters face are mainly associated with the second and third groupings derived from Sztompka’s traumatic conditions: the conflicts between past and present; and the collapse of previously accepted patterns of social behaviour. However, *Shooting Magpies* focuses upon that first set of potentially traumatic conditions based in the deterioration of the social and physical environment. Rather than facing questions about the validity of their class identity or history, the characters face battles for very survival. If the previous films ask what is to become of the individual, family and community, *Shooting Magpies* questions the very possibility of community. So returning to the *Goaf* analogy, this is the slump: the landscape that is left after the struts of community have been removed and the dust has settled. Again, the landscape is the scene, metaphor and cause of this decline.

Dave Feickert proposed that the “damage to mining communities will take at least two generations to heal”, and *Shooting Magpies* addresses the stories of the young families in the second and third generations after the Miners’ Strike, for which the structure of full time employment has never been an experience or option. The film is based upon the real life experiences of the actors, Emma Dowson and Barry Gough. Dowson’s story emerged in the 2003 documentary film, *We Did It Together - So Why Do I Feel So Alone?*, which addressed teenage pregnancy in the former mining communities, and was produced as an information film for educational establishments in the area. She relates not only the problems associated with young motherhood, but also those stemming from her partner’s heroin dependency, which negated any possibility of a normal family structure. Barry Gough is a youth worker who first collaborated with Amber on the *It’s the Pits* project, and then became one of the subjects in Peter Fryer’s *Fathers* photographs examining the lives of single fathers in East Durham.
Emma’s story revolves around her conflict between loyalty to her drug addicted partner Darren (Darren Bell), and providing a protective environment for her young daughters (played by real life daughters Jade Bell and Shannon Harker). Barry’s story focuses upon his attempts to prevent his own son Callum (Callum Gough Jackson) descending into delinquency, and his role in community support. Both stories include documentary asides: Emma’s to an unseen interviewer filling in the narrative detail of her story; Barry’s to the camera, providing context about the deteriorating environment and resulting social problems. The film intertwines these stories with a fictionalised one about Ray (Brian Hogg) who operates as a jewellery dealer in the local black economy, and his ultimately failed attempt to conquer his son Deano’s (Sanchez Coulson) heroin addiction, through traditional pursuits such as harness-racing. This then is a collaborative blend of drama and documentary. As Amber suggest, “the stories that are told are theirs, the fictional structure is ours”.

*Shooting Magpies* builds upon the two preceding documentaries in another way; it explicitly ties the problems of the urban space to the former mining village. It is filmed in the run down estates of Seaham, Horden and Easington, which appear more like Tish Murtha’s Elswick than Bruce Rae’s bleak but romantic gemeinschaft. The rows of Easington back-to-backs running down to the sea that formed the parting shots of *The Scar* (and subsequently achieved some kind of iconic status through their use in *Billy Elliott*) did suggest the survival of at least a memory of the “authentic” industrial communities idealised in earlier Amber projects. Here though, the streets have literally subsided. Any remaining community is in isolated islands of increasingly dilapidated terraces amongst the debris of demolition. They are surrounded by rubble or boarded up post-war council houses. These houses, built upon the idealism of nationalisation, to provide mining families with space and gardens, are now shells or dens for heroin addicts.

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58 Jade and Shannon act as something of a symbolic extension of the iconic little girl figure which recurs through Amber’s projects, from Konttinen’s *Byker* onwards. Jade’s surname can be explained by the fact that the project resulted in the marriage of Emma Dowson and Darren Bell. This adds another layer to the mixture of performance and reality noted by Bennett and Lee.

Shooting Magpies vividly links the decline of the economic, physical and social environments. For Barry the demise of mining and the rise of drug dependency are clearly linked; drugs swept in to the “goaf” left by the industry. The only cure is jobs. Utopian planning is shown to be an inadequate response; the scenes of delinquency take place in the post-war council housing, but also a bleak modernist community area and shopping area, shown as mostly closed and deteriorating. Delinquency, leading to dependency is an inevitable consequence of an environment in which Barry points out, in the whole year of school leavers from the area’s large comprehensive school, only four students gained full time employment.

The film includes footage of the Queen’s trip to Easington, which coincided with filming. Her momentary appearance in a speeding motorcade implies the cursory nature of the state’s glance towards this area of the North East. The shot that ends this sequence rests upon the new “heritage coast” signs directing potential tourists to the “Coastal Footpath”. In the context of the film, this seems to suggest that the most recent attempts to redevelop the area are also no more than ineffective gloss.

Parenthood

Shooting Magpies continues the theme of parenthood. Yet in this decaying landscape it focuses upon the parents’ strategies to protect their children from the lure of drugs. Barry and Ray’s defence is to involve their son’s in the traditional physical pursuits of mining culture. Barry attempts to maintain his son’s interest in the passion for ferreting he inherited from his own father, which naturally take place in the open, restorative landscape of the cliffs and beach. Ray tries to wean Deano away from drugs through harness-racing. While the battle is increasingly difficult for Barry, for Ray is unsuccessful. Deano’s descent into heroin abuse ends in suicide.

Ray and Barry negotiate fatherhood in the total absence of the disciplinary structure of employment. While both use traditional outdoor pursuits, Ray emphasises physicality and

60 That the cliffs of Easington beach are a symbol of support is reiterated by the character of Rocky (Rocky Langthorne) an itinerant dweller on the beach who acts as unofficial caretaker of the decaying terraces.
61 Deano commits suicide by jumping from the cliffs. The beach is again the site of raised emotional tension and ultimately, a site of relief.
discipline (he supports boxing, and insists that Deano wear the correct uniform for harness-racing) and ultimately fails. Barry emphasises communication and caring, for which the pursuits are a vehicle rather than an end in themselves. Though constantly facing new challenges, Barry perhaps shows a more successful negotiation of post-industrial masculinity and fatherhood. He is as comfortable in the domestic space as outside it. He acts as a traditional bread-winner for Emma, when he finds her some money, but also acts as carer and emotional support. This is extended to the wider community. It is in fact Barry who symbolises the resilience of community spirit in this environment. This is a fluid and unstructured community, and he often adopts some semi-feral tactics of “make do and mend”, and questionable manoeuvring of resources. Yet ultimately only Barry extends any concern for those outside his immediate family.

Emma’s aim is to provide a stable home for her daughters by breaking Darren’s addiction. Her final move is a trip to an isolated cabin on the Tees estuary, in which Darren can go “cold turkey”. Again the beach becomes a restorative landscape. While she takes solace in long walks, he sits on the beach batteling his withdrawal. This is the landscape of Greatham Marshes, photographed by Ian MacDonald for Amber in the 1970s, and shown as an idealised community under threat from industrialisation. In *Shooting Magpies* it provides a pocket of semi-natural escape from urban decline. Yet it displays a mixture of natural and industrial symbols (Figure 13). Its appeal to Emma is that it provides both natural spaces,
and a vision of functioning, healthy industry. Emma’s yearning for escape is signified by watching the tankers entering and exiting the Tees. She is inevitably betrayed by Darren (as he steals from her to buy drugs), which is accompanied by shots of stormy skies over the estuary, but she and her daughters take a symbolic boat ride across the river to industrial Teeside, and she can finally break the ties to her former life.

Darren is also a parent, but is also negotiating his extension of the Billy / Dale characters, and post-industrial masculinity as delinquency. This takes place with other young males, in the landscape: outdoors and in the semi-enclosed space of the heroin den. The protective and bread-winner roles obviously collapse under the influence of the drug, but Emma emphasises that when he is off heroin he can fulfil these roles. When clean, he also seems easy in the domestic space, but it is inevitably problematic when the roles and spaces of Darren as drug addict and Darren as father cross. Delinquent behaviour must be consigned to the delinquent space.

The characters played by Darren Bell throughout the County Durham films can be viewed as one character negotiating the development from adolescence to manhood in the traumatic environment. That he retains elements of his delinquency into fatherhood adds complexity to that character, but it also enables him to become a vehicle for wider questions about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable working class behaviour.

The film makes it clear that some sections of the marginalised, post-industrialisation community regard others in the not as victims but as cause of the deteriorating social environment. In the opening scene two Easington residents attack Darren for being a “smack head”. This takes place on a piece of waste ground undergoing redevelopment: Darren is beaten into the ground to join the other detritus from the past. We see that there are acceptable and unacceptable ways to cope with post-industrial fallout. There are shots

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62 When she ultimately asks him to leave he emphasises his financial contribution to their life, and thus a traditional role of masculine bread-winner.

63 Nayak’s study of young masculinity in Newcastle also included young males employed in insecure contracts in the “feminised” service industries, such as catering and call centres. Though also deprived of the structure of “learning to labour”, they displayed a similar need to reinforce male body capital in similar social activities: “circuit” drinking, and visible displays of physical and sexual prowess. This group also saw themselves as representing a continuation of traditional working class masculinity and heritage, and vehemently contrasted themselves with delinquents. Nayak, op cit, p.817-820
of neighbours scornfully peering through curtains at Emma’s house, the camera lingering upon the name of the street above her bedroom window: “Shinwell Crescent”, named after Emanuel Shinwell, the Easington political hero and reformer of the mining industry in 1947. The associations with a proud history of working-class industry and the contrast with post-industrial indiscipline are clear.

Yet the point of the Coalfield Stories films (and Bell’s characters in particular), is that such distinctions are not so clear. While Amber appear to idealise working class culture, social status and relations are shown to be a negotiation in the disciplinary void of the post-industrial environment. By Shooting Magpies, the reified class ideals and values of earlier projects have become a very grey area. Darren is a drug addict, but otherwise a good father. Barry provides community support, but is not averse to illegal methods. Meanwhile, Ray puts great emphasis upon physical discipline and traditional pursuits, and attacks the addicts for their unacceptable behaviour. He is also little more than a gangster, dealing in the black economy and ostentatiously displaying his wealth. Ray also displays the ambiguity of the community towards post-industrial social morality. His actions, though unlawful, are generally accepted, and he maintains a place in the community through a mixture of fear and support of communal activities. The moral ambiguity of Shooting Magpies is no doubt due to the collaborative process, but it also a reflection of how communities divide and cohere along unpredictable and very fluid lines during traumatic times.

Mark Hudson suggests that a system of blame emerged in Horden and Peterlee in the mid-1990s. Initially aimed at ethnic shopkeepers or at a mythical influx of “bad elements” shipped from elsewhere into the area’s council housing, it may well signify the raising of community boundaries in response to trauma. By the time of Shooting Magpies blame is aimed squarely at the standard scapegoat for social deterioration: the delinquent urban male. Of course, as Hudson explains, communities such as Horden have always had

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64 However, as Nayak points out, although appearing as delinquency, petty crime is frequently seen as “scamming”, or even “grafting”; making the best of difficult circumstances, and actually contributing to group welfare and a source of dignity [Nayak, op cit, p.827]. As such, rather than emphasising exclusion and criminality it may be more useful to see these acts as a contemporary reflection of the “coal-searching” depicted by Brandt and Jones.

65 Hudson, op cit, p.254
wayward elements; streets or areas which showed higher instances of delinquency, theft or disturbances.\textsuperscript{66} He points out however, that pit life could absorb the unruly of the community. There was always a place within the colliery for those who fell through gaps in the social fabric, and just as the pit influenced social relations beyond it, problems outside the colliery wall were often rectified with gentle (or not so gentle) pressure from peers in the work environment.\textsuperscript{67} Hudson and Amber highlight the social deterioration seen as a natural result of the removal of this safety net. These marginal or unruly elements are more obvious, and more unwelcome in a community fully at breaking point and trying to maintain some continuity.\textsuperscript{68}

The “corrosive” division of the community is a natural feature of traumatic social change, particularly in the isolated pit village. Where industry has had such an influence on all social networks, we would expect some elements of the community to cling to the continuity of that industrial culture (manifested in attitudes towards work, fatherhood, discipline, etc). Conversely, in an isolated community with high unemployment, we would also expect any changes (attitudes, or behaviour) to sweep rapidly through the community. Nostalgia and clinging to past standards, \textit{and} delinquency and criminal behaviour are \textit{both} coping mechanisms in response to traumatic social change. That they are contradictory only adds to the traumatic nature of that change.

\textbf{Conclusion: Landscapes of Trauma}

The \textit{Coalfield Stories} combine to provide a detailed picture of one highly specific part the North East going through a decade or so of radical social and economic change. They outline the development of increasingly traumatic conditions, from the cultural disorganisation felt in the wake of the Miners’ Strike, to complete social deterioration as a result of the collapse of economic infrastructure. In this process traditional mining culture is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Ibid, p.258
  \item \textsuperscript{67} Ibid, p.279
  \item \textsuperscript{68} Hudson also highlights that those with mental disabilities certainly had a place in the pit, and even those with unsociable behaviour, such as those who had committed sexual offences could, to a certain extent be accommodated (Ibid, p.186). The character of Rocky in \textit{Shooting Magpies} is played by Rocky Langthorne, an itinerant Easington character who acts as unofficial caretaker for the empty terraces. In \textit{Shooting Magpies} he is shown living in the caves on the beach. He both mirrors the earlier cave dwellers of the Depression, but also when his cave is burnt out by Ray shows that the former tolerance for marginalised individual that the pit provided cannot be relied on in this post-industrial environment.
\end{itemize}
shown as a haven, but one which fails to insulate individuals and communities from those changes.

In the projects, landscape acts as direct evidence of those changes. It is also a symbol for tensions within the community, and the breakdown of social networks and the destruction of livelihoods. Fundamentally though, it is changes to the landscape that are the direct cause of these tensions, as the lived space is physically altered. Landscape as a viewed space, landscape as a stage upon which to set the message of trauma, and landscape as a cause of that trauma, are all tightly inter-linked. Therefore, landscape is an essential tool for broadcasting the message of suffering. Furthermore the immediate audience for that message is the traumatised group itself. They help to produce the message; performing their own pain, in their own lived space, and Amber ensure that this message is reflected back to them. It is this process of dissemination, and how it exists in a larger framework of cultural products, that this thesis turns to next.
CHAPTER NINE

Broadcasting Trauma and Recovery in the North East Landscape

The honest dirt ingrained in my heart,
the dirt that forms my fingerprints,
has been removed.
To make way for what?
The clean hands of tomorrow?1

There is no uniform experience of traumatic social change. Individuals and communities are more or less resilient to traumatic events depending upon their pre-existing strengths, weaknesses and experience. In County Durham the length of change adds complexity to this experience. Younger members of the community may feel the negative effects of post-industrial deterioration acutely, but they have not experienced the cultural disorganisation of those who lived through the strike, and subsequent closure, at least not first hand. Of course with the importance of mining culture in such communities the cultural and social history of the industry continues to be entwined with present circumstances. This is precisely one of the points to be gleaned from the Coalfield Stories; mining culture becomes an increasingly distanced and mythical entity with generational turnover, and it ceases to be a lived reality. As such it becomes the basis of misunderstanding, as much as continuity.

Individuals and communities will also recover from trauma at different rates. Across County Durham there have been very different communal experiences of mining’s demise. In socio-economic terms, some villages have not recovered from the closure of collieries in the 1960s. Others have developed a strong community spirit, seen employment levels, health and education steadily rise. A number of national, regional and local policies have also been implemented to relieve the devastating effects of colliery closure. In some cases trauma can be relieved by such measures; they simply remove the traumatic phenomenon. It can also be ameliorated by coping strategies implemented by communities themselves,

such as private enterprise or community programmes. In other cases the traumatic conditions are not relieved by investment, and communal initiatives are insufficient. This is predominantly the vision offered by the *Coalfield Stories*; a situation in which traumatic change results in a downward spiral and ultimately the wide scale undermining of the affected communal identity.

However, Piotr Sztompka suggests that even in cases in which there is no fundamental improvement in infrastructure, traumatic events may actually become a positive touchstone of community memory and identity; a challenge faced and conquered.\(^2\) This has occurred in some of the worst affected Durham communities, and this chapter addresses how those communities’ re-involvement in events such as the annual Durham Miners’ Gala has helped them turn suffering into resilience. However, such phenomena highlight an under-explored feature of Sztompka’s assessment. For him culture is particularly illustrative of, and prone to traumatic social change because it acts as the store for communal identity.\(^3\) Certainly, culture is the communal depository for ideas of continuity, and so is vulnerable to radical social upheaval. However culture is also often the *site of* radical change. Indeed, Sztompka also highlights how recovery can be accelerated when parts of a community (specifically a younger generation) embrace the features of the new social environment. He seems caught between emphasising cultural identity as constant and singular, and also fluid and plural. Yet identity is precisely a negotiation between the constant and the changing; it is Richard Jenkins’ “process of identification”.\(^4\) Ultimately, Sztompka seems to agree. He concludes that tapping into traditional cultural resources can provide a therapeutic buffer to change, but also that re-contextualising such resources as relevant to the new social environment can smooth the transition between old and new states.\(^5\) In the case of Durham this means that aspects of traditional mining culture may be drawn upon, not simply as a retreat from change, but in innovative ways to reflect a negotiation between past and present.


\(^3\) Ibid, p.162


\(^5\) Sztompka, op cit, p.191
Just such a negotiation is a feature of many representations of the county, the North East and the post-industrial north in general, many of which do not even raise the idea of trauma. The cultural construction of trauma is a brittle process; for the message to be accepted, it must be convincing, but also stand out from other cultural representations, which may corroborate, or conflict with it. Amber’s film and photography exists within the same wide cultural context as these other expressions. This chapter examines how Amber have broadcast the idea that change in County Durham has constituted a radical economic, social and cultural upheaval, both to the communities affected, and to a wider audience. It also examines whether these other representations have corroborated, or diluted this idea. It concludes by returning to a discussion of Amber’s collaborative practice, and questions to what extent their commitment to humanist documentary realism enables, or forestalls the dissemination of trauma.

Local Broadcast

From 1989 a conjunction of funding policy changes came together to seriously undermine the financial support for Amber projects, resulting in the temporary closure of the Side Gallery and an even greater emphasis upon community touring. The Sideshows programme exhibited Amber’s projects in community halls and working men’s clubs throughout the North East, and this policy has continued with the Coalfield Stories. The photographs and films have been toured around an established circuit of six community venues in West Durham and six in East Durham, including the Glebe Centre in Murton, Easington Colliery Welfare Club, Dawdon Community Centre and Blackhall Community Association. Shooting Magpies was also shown during the 2006 Durham Miners’ Gala. Some of the documentary films have been produced specifically for, and with the local community, building upon the methodology of the pre-strike “trigger tapes”, such as It’s the Pits and We Did It Together, So Why Do I Feel So Alone?(2003), and have toured

6 Northern Arts cut its funding from £120,000 to £25,000 per annum. However, funding was available for the Side Gallery to become a “key strategic organisation”, showing a range of photographic exhibitions. Amber decided to maintain its autonomy and commitment to “humanist documentary” photography and forego this funding. Newsinger, J, “Together We Stand”, in Vertigo: For Worldwide Independent Film, No.11 (August 2007), Online Issue, p.3 available at http://vertigomagazine.co.uk/showarticle.php?sel=bac&siz=1&id=838, accessed 15/10/2009. This resulted in the temporary closure of the gallery for around a year, and a resumption of activities on a reduced scale. The cinema remained closed for a longer period, resuming activities in the early 2000s as a result of new funding which became available as Newcastle’s Quayside became part of the city’s cultural regeneration.
exclusively to the county’s educational institutions as information films. For the cultural construction of trauma to occur, a message must be effectively delivered to an audience, the first element of which is the affected group itself. Amber’s touring policy has ensured that for this audience, that message has been delivered to their door. In fact, for those collaborating with Amber, the message of pain is being disseminated at the same time as it is being constructed.

Yet social agents inevitably want to broadcast the message of trauma to as wide an audience as possible, and Amber are no different. This process begins in Newcastle with exhibitions and screenings at the Side Gallery and Cinema. The Side’s reputation for exhibiting national and international social documentary means that it may have an established, naturally sympathetic audience. It may also mean that there is a limit to that audience, but its position in the busy cultural district of the Quayside ensures a steady stream of new visitors. However, as Murray Martin conceded in 1999, “One thing we found which I don’t think is surprising is that the exotic – Nicaragua or El Salvador – was always more attractive to people, than, say, unemployment”.7 Herein lies a problem with the communication of trauma in Durham. Even within Amber’s overall output, the specificity of the traumatic change in East Durham may be lost in a large body of work, all emphasising marginalisation.

This is despite the collective’s extremely proactive approach to broadcasting Durham’s plight. One factor in Amber’s longevity has been their control over the distribution of their products.8 Photographic commissions are held in their Quayside archive. So when, for example, they wished to commemorate the anniversary of the Miners’ Strike in 2004, the complete visual narrative of the Durham coalfield was available for exhibition. Copyright control has also enabled wider dissemination of their output. The films have long been available on VHS, and now DVD.9 Early in the new millennium Amber also took advantage of the broadcast opportunities offered by the internet. The majority of the

7 Interview with Murray Martin by Margaret Dickinson, in Dickinson, M (Ed), Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90 (London: British Film Institute, 1999), p.253  
8 Working under the auspices of the Workshop Declaration means that they have always retained ownership of the documentary and dramatic films.  
9 Conversion of the catalogue has been supported by the Northern Rock Foundation and Northern Film and Media, who are beginning to realise Amber’s contribution to the documentary history of the North East.
photographic catalogue is now available online.\textsuperscript{10} 2009 saw the launch of Sidetv.net, through which the entire film, documentary and photography catalogue is streamed through a constantly rotating programme.

Yet this does mean that although the imagery of East Durham is very effectively broadcast, it does exist with a huge body of work based upon similar themes, showing various communities experiencing hardship in a generally disenfranchised North East. Between the Miners’ Strike and \textit{Eden Valley}, Amber undertook a five year residency in North Tyneside. It recorded the demise of the fishing industry at the mouth of the Tyne and urban decay on the Meadow Well housing estate. These were also collaborative projects based upon real individual experiences, but if we view the whole Amber oeuvre (say, on their website), these other representations may blend with the coalfield imagery into a generalised vision of a deprived north; the specificity of Durham’s suffering (or indeed Meadow Well’s) may become lost.

There is also other imagery specifically recording mining’s decline. Amber’s first full length dramatic feature, \textit{Seacoal} (1985), addressed the community living from collecting sea coal at Lynemouth in Northumberland, building upon the photographic projects of Chris Killip and Ashington photographer Mik Critchlow (Figures 1 and 2).\textsuperscript{11} Amber also organised the Crook International Photography Workshop in 1993. This brought together twelve photographers from the North East and Europe, to explore post-industrial life in the former mining town of Crook in south west Durham. The workshop specifically looked at the how post-industrialisation impacts upon the idealised nuclear family, and set out to question commonly circulated perceptions of northern “welfare mothers” and dysfunctional fathers. Consequently, the result is a rather optimistic vision of families adapting to testing

\textsuperscript{10} This includes other bodies of historic social documentary focussing upon the North East which have been donated to the collective. For example, the anonymous record of the building of the Tyne Bridge, Jimmy Forsyth’s images of Newcastle’s West End in the 1950s and 1960s, Edgar G. Lee’s late 19\textsuperscript{th} century record of Tyneside, and Mary Gillens photographs of Wheatley Hill during the Depression.

\textsuperscript{11} Killip’s images of Lynemouth were subsequently published in the monograph \textit{In Flagrante}. Killip, C, \textit{In Flagrante} (London: Secker & Warburg, 1988). They also appeared alongside Graham Smith’s images in the Serpentine Gallery exhibition \textit{Another Country}, in London, July 1985.
times, and the resilience of traditional working class networks and values. When the photographs do become melancholy, there is a tendency towards the iconic vision of a generalised northern, or merely working class post-industrial environment. Czech photographer Jindrich Streit documented former mining communities in South West Durham, but also post-industrial villages across Europe. His subjects do not then reflect the particularities of either, but become, in his own words, “heroes of commonness” (Figure 3). In Veronique Lesperat-Hequet’s project Sunnisode a generalised post-industrial nostalgia is reflected in the iconic image of the father and son walking into the distance (Figure 4); an icon that is perhaps more knowingly and self-critically employed in Graham Smith’s Easington.

![Figure 1: Chris Killip, from In Flagrante, mid 1980s](image1)

![Figure 2: Mik Critchlow, from Seacoalers, early 1980s](image2)

In emphasising resilience rather than trauma, these images do emphasise that de-industrialisation across the County has been a varied experience. They highlight that although the communities share certain features in terms of social structure, geographical isolation and mining culture, the experiences of Crook and Easington continue to be very different.

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Within Amber’s catalogue there is also imagery that addresses non-mining post-industrial communities, but conveys a very similar message to the *Coalfield Stories*. The closure of Consett steel works in the autumn of 1980 gave rise to a combination of economic and social devastation comparable to that experienced in East Durham. Julian Germain’s *Steelworks*, which was partially supported by Amber, records the aftermath. This project was exhibited at Side Gallery in 1989, and forms part of the web catalogue. Though in colour, it also uses similar motifs of post-industrial scars in the landscape, and disorientated individuals to portray a community in crisis (Figure 5).

There are distinct similarities between the situations in Consett and East Durham. Both were incredibly reliant upon a single industry, and its demise was due to Thatcherite economic policy. There are also similarities in the ideas, symbolism and motifs used to portray their deterioration. While the specific nature of that deterioration is minutely

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14 The fallout from the closure of the steel works was also captured in Penny Woolcock’s drama documentary, *When the Dog Bites* made through Trade Films in 1988.

15 Steel manufacture differs from mining in that it does not have the concept of exhaustion built into its economic structure. Nevertheless the fate of the Consett steelworks mirrors that of many collieries: its demise was predicted from the early 1970s, and its closure resulted from rationalisation implemented by Ian MacGregor). The demise of Consett was thus met with the same mixture of expectation and shock as colliery closures. Closure brought already high local unemployment to disastrous levels. This also had a knock on effect upon the wider South West Durham economy, as the steelworks had traditionally provided alternative employment during the various crises in mining.
examined, this specificity will inevitably become diluted the records sit side by side.
Amber’s catalogue provides an essential and detailed picture of deprived communities in
the north, but it is extensive, and the specific message of trauma conveyed by the *Coalfield Stories* may become lost.

However, the *Coalfields Stories* imagery has been shown in galleries with a less obvious commitment to social commentary, in which it may have stood out more prominently. Konttinen’s *Coal Coast* enjoyed a well-received exhibition at Gateshead’s Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in 2003. Images from Norfolk, Konttinen and Davies were also exhibited at London’s Photofusion Gallery in late 2005, and Davies’ *Durham Coalfield* images have been included in various solo exhibitions, with accompanying monographs.\footnote{Two examples are the exhibition *Green and Pleasant Land* at Manchester’s Cornerhouse in 1987, and *The British Landscape* retrospective at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford in 2006.}

In fact, Amber’s place in British documentary is accepted in cultural criticism, and their photographs have appeared in recent national exhibitions. Yet the problem that the trauma of East Durham may be swamped by a generalised vision of a deprived north is even more acute when these images reach the national stage. The images included in these national exhibitions have tended to be Davies’, Killip’s and Graham Smith’s, and they are shown within a wider panorama of British photography.\footnote{The imagery of Davies, Killip and Smith formed part of *The Art of Photography, 1839-1989*, Royal Academy of Arts, 1989. However, only one image, Smith’s *Easington* of 1976 portrayed County Durham,} While this does elevate imagery of the...
North East into the national consciousness, it does little to reveal specific traumatic experiences. Exhibited in the survey show, these images either become examples of the oppositional photography of the Thatcher era, or become subsumed within a large body of imagery of a generalised post-industrial north.

Amber’s work is actually far from well known at a national level. Only one of their dramatic features, 1991’s *Dream On*, has enjoyed a mainstream cinema release in Britain (at Newcastle’s Odeon cinema). While the documentaries and dramas have received critical acclaim and awards on the independent film festival circuit, it remains a notable fact that the majority of this critical success has been achieved at foreign film festivals in Europe and beyond, more than within Britain.\(^{18}\) As Martin noted, “We’ve had our work shown extensively in Scandinavia, particularly *Dream On*. We’ve been fairly popular in Australia and New Zealand. We’ve had French television but not French cinema. We’ve had some interest in Italy”. Conversely, until recently, British nationwide distribution has been limited to a handful of documentaries broadcast on Channel Four during the 1980s.\(^{19}\)

This has changed a little the 20\(^{th}\), and then 25\(^{th}\) anniversary of the Miners’ Strike. This, alongside an increased recognition of Amber’s forty year commitment to documentary, led to a recent “mini-season” of Amber’s feature films on the More 4 channel in December 2008, which included *Seacoal*, *Eden Valley* and *Shooting Magpies*.\(^{20}\) The Miners’ *Campaign Tapes* were also released by the British Film Institute on DVD in November 2009. However, it must be noted that More 4 season was aired late at night; the visibility of

\(^{18}\) It is not necessary to recount an exhaustive list of Amber’s film awards here. However, we may highlight that *The Scar* received the Prix Europa Special Prize for TV fiction and the Silver Nymph for Best Actress at the Monte Carlo TV Festival in 1998, *Like Father* was awarded Best Feature Film at the Girona International Film Festival in 2002, and *Shooting Magpies* received a special mention at the Britspotting Festival in Berlin, 2006.


\(^{20}\) Another impetus behind the season was to commemorate the achievements of the late Murray Martin. The four film season ran from 06/12/2008 to 12/12/2008 and also included *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2008). The earliest start was 10.35 pm on Saturday 6 December.
Amber’s films is inevitably tied to national televisions overriding concerns with ratings. As Martin Hunt of the British Film Institute laments,

“It is unfortunate that a distribution and exhibition system increasingly aligned with mainstream commercial product has restricted opportunities for audiences to view their original, accessible and relevant films”.

What increased visibility has been afforded to Amber’s output reflects a general increase in interest in social realist photography, and particularly how that of the 1970s and 1980s fits into the British documentary pantheon. Just as the imagery of the 1930s received renewed attention in the 1970s, it seems that the imagery of Thatcher’s decade has become due for re-appraisal. Since the turn of the millennium there has been a glut of realist documentary photography exhibitions; both large scale and international, such as Cruel and Tender (2003-4) and In The Face of History (2006), and in countless smaller venues. Yet while this trend has elevated some of Amber’s imagery of Durham to the national stage, it returns us to the problem that the specific message of the Coalfield Stories may become lost. It may also quickly lead to compassion fatigue in the public.

**National Representations of Post-Industrial Durham**

It is an inescapable fact that in a media saturated environment most of the audience for the trauma message can, and will, merely “change channels” unless they have some pre-determined interest in what is shown. Yet the message may be more readily consumed if the pill is sweetened, and humour has no doubt been a factor in the huge success of the trio of films specifically addressing the crisis of masculinity of the post-industrial northern male: Brassed Off (1996), directed by Mark Herman, about the colliery band of a Yorkshire pit facing closure; Peter Cattaneo’s The Full Monty (1997), the story of Sheffield ex-steel workers who form a male striptease group; and Stephen Daldry’s Billy Elliot (2000), about a Durham miner’s son dreaming of becoming a ballet dancer during the Miners’ Strike. These films have brought the issues of the post-industrial north to a significantly wider

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national and international audience than Amber’s features. Indeed, *Billy Elliot* has been one of the most widely circulated representations of the East Durham landscape. Consequently, it has influenced a wider audience’s view of the area and its problems, and provides the vision against which the *Coalfield Stories* has to compete to effectively transmit trauma.

There are clear similarities in theme (post-industrial masculinity and fatherhood) and subject matter (mining) between *Billy Elliot* and *Like Father*. Both films also deal with the idea of constraint and incarceration, whether that is physical, social or cultural. They also, as James Leggott points out revolve around the figure of an other-worldly “angelic” boy, whose function is to initially highlight, then resolve the conflicts of the post-industrial male role. Criticism of *Billy Elliot* has focussed upon two issues. The first is that while it builds tension throughout between Billy and the other male members of his family, concerning traditional physical and post-industrial performative masculinity, ultimately it resolves this tension rather vaguely and easily. Billy’s father and brother apparently buckle in the face of his determination, and their own tensions are henceforth simply glossed over. The second is its uncritical acceptance of a post-Thatcherite individual, rather than collective escape from economic disenfranchisement. By contrast, *Like Father* critically examines both individual and collective agency in the post-industrial environment, and ultimately finds both problematic, even futile. The tension between class loyalty, family


24 This has led them to be compared in both local and national reviews. For instance, by David Whetstone in Newcastle’s *The Journal*, and by Richard Kelly in *Sight and Sound*, both reproduced at [http://www.amber-online.com/exhibitions/like-father-2001](http://www.amber-online.com/exhibitions/like-father-2001). no precise dates given, accessed on 16/11/2009. Obviously, comparison has been exclusively in the reviews of *Like Father*, and as such has been complementary to the Amber film.


27 See particularly, Hill, op cit. Thus Billy Elliot simply glosses over the debate about the individual release from shackles that should be collectively overcome. It is a debate that permeates films from, as John Hill points out, Pen Tennyson’s *The Proud Valley* (1940), but is also identifiable in *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*, as well as 1960s realist cinema.
responsibility and gender roles finds only superficial resolution. At the end of Like Father, Joe and Arthur are left with family, but nothing else. Michael, as Leggott suggests has literally fallen to earth.\textsuperscript{28}

Billy Elliot is clearly a feel-good musical fantasy, and sanitises the tensions of the 1985 conflict with humour or unexplained acquiescence by the characters. However, we should not discount it from playing some part in the dissemination of trauma. If we credit the audience of television shows such as Peak Practice with an ability to simultaneously consume different narrative elements as reality, symbol and fantasy, we must extend that courtesy to the audience of Billy Elliot. Indeed musical relies upon the premise that the audience recognises the pure spectacle of escapism, and underlying social realities, and the incongruous relationship between the two.

Billy is not quite the angelic agent of a new post-industrial masculinity. He remains physically confrontational, even violent, and industrial: dancing for him feels like “electricity”; his power comes from the taming of a natural or industrial force. It is this northern rawness that provides the appeal, or at least concessions, for his southern teachers (who betray their own romance of coal at the conclusion of his interview). He is as much forced into a new existence as his father and brother; his joyous dance through the Easington streets comes to an abrupt stop against the colliery wall. Ultimately, despite the dreamlike leap into space that concludes the film, Billy’s new life depends upon the vagaries of the intensely capitalist economy of entertainment, in comparison to the stable servitude of industry.\textsuperscript{29}

Actually, the film is what E. Anne Kaplan would describe as a contemporary “male melodrama”, it reflects upon the trauma of wider social change through the tension of the family and unspeakable secrets. Yet ultimately these secrets are re-submerged, and the spectator is reassured that all is actually well. As such, it may very well reflect trauma (i.e. the inability to confront or talk about change). However, it is unable to effectively convey

\textsuperscript{28} Leggott, op cit, p.173
\textsuperscript{29} For photographer Colin Jones, who himself escaped a working class industrial life through ballet, dancers were “grafters” not only because of the physical demands of the trade, but because it is a trade: dancers dance for someone else, and thus join workers on a certain rung of the class ladder.
or represent it. In melodrama the audience remains a spectator; for trauma to be communicated through film the audience must be made to become a witness (and the realist technique of the *Coalfield Stories* goes some way to drawing the viewer into this position of witness).\(^{30}\) We cannot pretend that *Billy Elliot* sends a message of trauma; the film suggests tension, but then simply resolves that tension, or ignores it. Yet in the vein of melodrama, there is the feeling that something has been hidden; something left unsaid. One of the things left unsaid is what happens to those Billy leaves behind. It compresses time; moving seamlessly from 1985 to a present day in which all the conflicts of de-industrialisation are presumably resolved. If the viewer is not shown the post-industrial fall-out in Billy’s village, they must assume that it has developed in the same way as other parts of the North East, such as Tyneside.

Another vision that the *Coalfield Stories* must compete with is the picture of a revitalised North East. Once symbolic of the bleak industrial and post-industrial North, recent representations of Newcastle have shown the city as a thriving contemporary city.\(^{31}\) Television series such as 55° *North*, photographic projects such as that of Stepanka Stein and Salim Issa (Figures 6 and 7), and televised tourist promotions such as the *Passionate People, Passionate Places* campaign, show the city as a model of cultural regeneration, but also as a site of idealised social integration.\(^{32}\)

\(^{32}\) Stein and Issa are Czech commercial and fashion photographers who undertook a short international exchange residency commissioned by the International Photography Research Network at Sunderland University. Regional accent also has a role in the national perception of the North East. As Linda Grant has suggested, during the 1980s and 1990s, the scouse accent became popular media shorthand to denote redundancy, criminality or political militancy. Grant, L, “Calm Down Yourself”, in *The Guardian*, Saturday, 10/07/1999, reproduced at [http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/estuary/liverpool.htm](http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/estuary/liverpool.htm), accessed 29/01/2009. TV series such as *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet* may have led the Geordie accent to have similar associations with redundancy and working class attributes. However, paralleling the redevelopment of Newcastle has been a rise of the Geordie accent. Marcus Bentley became famous as the voice of Channel Four’s *Big Brother*, but quickly moved on to provide the promotion voiceover for the BBC Prom season. With the emergence of figures such as Cheryl Cole and Jill Halfpenny, the Geordie accent may now denote glamour in a similar way that the cockney accent did in the age of Michael Caine and Twiggy.
The idea of post-industrial marginalisation has not disappeared from representations of Tyneside, but what is important is that the wider audience may not differentiate between Durham and a more generalised North East. Imagery of a recovering, indeed thriving region must interfere with how the idea of a traumatised Durham is received at the national level. Such imagery may even add to the traumatic experience of communities who see their suffering as overlooked and their close neighbours prospering.

**Literature: Popular and Institutional Visions**

However, popular literature has emphasised East Durham’s deterioration. The press have frequently represented the area as isolated and run down, and singled out Easington as the unhealthiest, most obese and least culturally diverse community in the UK. Horden has provided the location for two lengthy journalistic accounts of the post-mining experience: Tony Parker’s *Red Hill* of 1986, and Mark Hudson’s *Coming Back Brockens* of 1994. *Red Hill* portrays a community suffering from post-strike cultural disorganisation: confusion; division and dislocation; and a loss of faith in authority. Hudson’s account (a journey to discover his own North East roots after a middle class London upbringing) shows Horden experiencing the full effects of unemployment, social deterioration and generational

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division. Both books were popular; Parker’s inspiring a song by the group U2, and Hudson’s becoming something of an academic semi-sociological reference.\(^{35}\)

There are also the many studies of mining’s demise drawn upon in this thesis. The twentieth and twenty fifth anniversaries of the strike have also prompted a flood of memoirs and re-assessments.\(^{36}\) This is reflected in visual culture: John Davies’ *Durham Coalfield Revisited*, Amber’s re-showing of the exhibition *Making the News*; the publication of Keith Pattison’s 1984 Easington photographs in book form; as well as television programmes such as Channel Four’s *Strike: When Britain Went to War*.\(^{37}\) The clearest exploration of the strike as a traumatic event is the art project by Jeremy Deller, which comprised of a re-enactment of “the Battle of Orgreave”.

The problems of the Durham coalfield have also been recognised by the Government. In 1997 the new Labour government set up the Coalfields Taskforce, and published the report *Making the Difference*, in 1998.\(^{38}\) It outlined that deprivation goes beyond simple unemployment and lack of opportunities, and recommended action across the whole social, physical and economic spectrum. It made recommendations that target investment and employment, but also for education, health and the physical environment. It recognised that coalfield communities suffer highly localised and specific problems, and re-investment can not be achieved through the formation of blanket enterprise zones. It handed control of redevelopment back to Regional Development Agencies, who could target investment based upon ward statistics and a more appropriate “index of local deprivation”.\(^{39}\) In turn, the Taskforce recommendations, and the measures introduced to combat deprivation have themselves been the focus of studies and reviews. Most notable is the series of *Coalfield*

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35 Hudson’s book is cited in many of the sociological studies I have drawn upon in this thesis.
Discussion Papers instigated by Cardiff University and the University of Durham, which examine indicators of deprivation, such as unemployment, housing and health. Easington was one of four areas chosen precisely because they had failed to recover from mining’s demise. The papers highlighted the area’s continuing problems but also pointed out that only those measures that involved communities at grass roots level were likely to be successful in relieving them.

Recovery

However it is worth re-iterating that while these studies describe all the conditions of Sztompka’s trauma of social change, few explicitly describe the condition of the coalfield communities as trauma, except in the most cursory terms. They do though, provide the evidence to corroborate that claim. They also highlight the measures being implemented to aid recovery. Piotr Sztompka proposes that recovery in the post-Communist experience has been relatively swift; many have been quick to employ “future orientated” coping strategies, such as moving to other employment, starting new ventures, or grasping educational opportunities. Conversely, studies highlight a significantly more unequal and stumbling process of recovery in East Durham.

Yet the Coalfield Taskforce recommendations have had some effect. Unemployment continues to be high in localised pockets, but has certainly dropped since the collieries first closed (although this has been influenced by a decrease in population due to outward migration). Educational success at secondary school level has risen at a significantly higher rate than the national average since 1997 (though attainment remains marginally lower than the national average). There has also been much inward investment. After all, while Davies’ and Norfolk’s photographs may acerbically comment upon the infiltration of

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40 See the Coalfield Research Programme, http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/contactsandpeople/huwbeynon/coalfields-research-programme.html
41 Sztompka, op cit, p.184-5
faceless, new industrial units into the mining landscape, they are also emphasising that there are new industrial units.

Such measures lessen the impact of traumatic change. There is also natural adaptation: the gradual negotiation between old and new identity. It is precisely this negotiation which is portrayed as problematic in the Coalfield Stories, but it has been more successfully negotiated in other instances. Needless to say, it is easier to achieve the more social and cultural features are shared by the old and new conditions. Tim Strangleman has noted how geographical isolation in Durham, and high unemployment in the over fifties has actually served to preserve extended family support networks.\(^{44}\) Furthermore, as Dave Wray has pointed out, the north and east of Durham is remarkable within Britain’s former coalfields for the continued relevance of the local union (the D.M.A.), as a support network and focus for community cohesion and identity.\(^{45}\

Carol Stephenson, Dave Wray and Mary Mellor have shown the complexity of this negotiation in their studies of New Herrington in North East Durham. They looked at the continued relevance of, and participation in the annual Durham Miners’ Gala.\(^{46}\) During the height of the industry the Gala frequently attracted around 200,000 visitors. However by 1993 attendance had dropped to around 8,000. Yet by 2003 attendance numbers had risen again to around 60,000.\(^{47}\) Though a significant proportion of this increase is due to tourism, much comes from former mining communities themselves. Many villages have commissioned new banners to reflect their post-mining identity, and this has become a focus for community cohesion and recovery. In the case of New Herrington’s banner, commissioned in 1999 (14 years after the pit closed) this process has been one of therapeutic gathering, which in Stephenson et al’s terms has led to “emotional

\(^{44}\) Strangleman, T, “Networks, Place and Identities in Post-Industrial Mining Communities”, in International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Vo.25, No.2 (2001), pp.253-267


\(^{46}\) The Gala has been held in early July since 1872, it involves a parade of colliery lodge banners through the streets of the city to the accompaniment of colliery bands.

regeneration”. It has demonstrated the tapping into traditional cultural resources to bridge the gap between old and new social situations. The new banner provides a powerful symbol of the community’s survival, but also its post-industrial make-up. While the commissioning partnership has certainly been driven by the local D.M.A., it includes a wide variety of occupational and age backgrounds, and the banner is an educational tool uniting these elements. In effect, the banner acts as Anthony Cohen’s symbolic mask, it provides an umbrella for a number of different ideas of what community means and literally aggregates a sense of communal feeling.

**Nostalgia and Heritage**

However, the studies reveal that the emphasis here is on survival rather than total recovery, and there remains a definite feeling that the past is better than the present. For many, the ritual parading of the banner states “we have suffered, and survived”, and contains a clear element of political resistance. Indeed both the banners and the Gala itself may not have survived without the continued relevance of the D.M.A., and a continuing political bitterness about the Miners’ Strike.

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50 Stephenson & Wray, op cit, p.190
51 Ibid, p.194

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Figure 8: Paul Reas, from *Flogging a Dead Horse*, early 1990s
Banners also reveal a complex relationship between heritage, tourism and tradition.\textsuperscript{52} Much politically motivated imagery, such as that of Paul Reas (Figure 8), has drawn a binary opposition between authentic tradition and consumerist expressions of industrial heritage in Durham. Yet the imagery of many new banners does not reflect this distinction, but how individual communities negotiate tradition, political history and the post-industrial economy. Sometimes they reflect resolve, sometimes pragmatism. As Mellor and Stephenson note,

\begin{quote}
\textit{The Seaham banner re-dedicated in 2002 proudly displayed its pit buildings with the legend 'Gone but not forgotten'...The Blackhall Lodge...which previously celebrated ‘Leisure through Modernisation’ now shows a mixture of rural and seaside scenery with a pit far away on the skyline. The new slogan is ‘Need before Greed’. However, the new Vane Tempest banner shows the famous view of Durham Cathedral from the river with no slogan apart from ‘The Famous View’}.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

Redevelopment and the promotion of industrial heritage are not merely due to outside agencies riding rough-shod over community needs. Since the 1990s institutions such as the East Durham Task Force have realised that redevelopment must be community led rather than enterprise or property led. Councils such as Easington have developed a holistic approach, integrated with communities’ cultural identity and needs (though we must not pretend that this has always been successful).\textsuperscript{54} The changes in the landscape are integral to this process. Reclaiming colliery sites and the Durham coast from mining pollution may lure tourism and investment, but it is also realised that improving the physical environment can impact upon the local mental and physical health, and re-motivate a community’s drive to throw off the negative effects of change. This process involves local people who recognise these benefits.

\textsuperscript{52} In fact, that the Gala is now a popular tourist event is important. The participation in the ritual has an important element of internal recognition (“we see ourselves together”), but identity must also be validated by an external audience. For those involved in the New Herrington banner partnership this is particularly important; the banner emphasises the individuality of the community and also resistance and survival (“look at us, we are different but we are still here”)
\textsuperscript{53} Mellor & Stephenson, op cit, p.349
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, p.348
It is precisely such developments that form the focus of the *Coalfield Stories*, in which those marginalised by change are contrasted with those who benefit from it. Yet recovery cannot be strictly divided into those who have, and those who have not, or consumption versus tradition. The New Herrington Partnership suggests a complex negotiation of the traumatic past, which involves celebration and mourning, nostalgia and forward vision, and both tradition and cultural fluidity. All wrapped around an event which is pragmatically accepted as both a site of political resistance and tourist consumption.

*A Credible Message?*

Needless to say, the message that Amber want to convey is that despite redevelopment, the post-industrial environment continues to leave many disenfranchised. To do this it focuses upon the marginalised, rather than the success stories. Consequently, it portrays a somewhat two dimensional picture of those regeneration initiatives as undertaken by self-serving organisations and individuals. The *Coalfield Stories* emphasise the austere beauty of the Durham coastline, yet that this beauty may provide a lure to tourism is treated with acerbic irony. Depicting post-industrial experience in terms of binary opposites may well strengthen the message of trauma, but it may also weaken it. There is no doubt that the Easington area continues to face significant economic and social problems, yet to exclude any notion of success from the picture may also exclude much of the Durham audience.

The message begins in *The Scar*, in which the coastal developers who employ Roy are portrayed as no more than money grabbing investors, diametrically opposed to (and a catalyst for) May’s return to working class integrity. It continues in the portrayal of the “Phoenix Project” in *Like Father* as a development company hell-bent on erasing all physical traces of the industrial past in order to sanitise the area for the outside eye. While offering ex-miners employment, and supporting community projects, the developers are shown as self-serving, and ready to exploit both the landscape and its inhabitants. This cynicism is repeated in *Shooting Magpies*. The camera lingers upon “heritage coast” tourist signs, as an obvious juxtaposition to both the desperate conditions, and signs celebrating industrial heroes (who presumably developed the industrial landscape to the benefit of its
inhabitants). In short, those embracing the reconstruction of East Durham are always two-dimensional “baddies in black hats” (or hard hats at least).

Perhaps this cynicism is justified. Projects in the coalfields under the late Conservative government did tend towards the investment and property led, and community initiatives could be accused of being predominantly for show. However, since 1998 the Coalfield Taskforce initiatives have emphasised the role of not-for profit community based projects and the role of local culture as a source of revival, and this is particularly evident in East Durham.\textsuperscript{55} Communally traumatic change is marked by differentiated experience, and ambivalence in how groups see that experience. Trauma arises from incongruity and complexity. The studies of Stephenson et al reveal that the difficulty of “emotional regeneration” comes from negotiating the seemingly conflicting pulls of past and present, not by rejecting one or the other outright.

\textit{Agency}

The characters of Dale in \textit{The Scar}, and Joe Elliot in \textit{Like Father, are} offered opportunities to embrace the new economic system, but this entails the loss of family, which is unequivocally associated with working class tradition and values.\textsuperscript{56} Either value is placed purely upon money and mobility, or these things must be sacrificed to an unwavering class loyalty. Two sets of standards are outlined, which seem uncannily similar to those of David Lockwood’s proletarian, or pecuniary workers.\textsuperscript{57} Of course, it is how the characters negotiate this conflict that provides the drama of the plot.\textsuperscript{58} However, it remains a choice: there is no middle ground. We may remind ourselves of Peter Hutchings’ reservation that while Amber investigate the individual experience of a stereotypically marginalised working class existence, that investigation still inevitably perpetuates those stereotypes.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, Greenhalgh & McCafferty, op cit, p.50-51. Indeed, banner projects such as New Herrington’s have secured funding through those very redevelopment initiatives.
\textsuperscript{56} In Dale’s case a loss of place as well.
\textsuperscript{58} This conflict continues one of the predominant themes of British social realist cinema since the 1950s: social mobility at the expense of working class roots, particularly in Jack Clayton’s \textit{Room at the Top} (1958), and Lindsay Anderson’s \textit{This Sporting Life} (1963)
Like Father certainly provides a more complex picture of this negotiation between past and present than the feel-good simplicity of Billy Elliot (Elliot simply walks away without looking back). Yet it also suggests that escape from deprivation in the coalfields must be given, not simply taken, and this also refuses Joe any individual agency. Billy is given the fantasy of absolute cultural freedom. Joe it seems, no matter how hard he works, or the extent of his musical knowledge, has his potential capped.

The notion of political self-improvement is the subject of The Scar, and cultural self-improvement is raised (though ultimately dashed) in Like Father. However, the very notion of improvement is absent from Shooting Magpies. Yet improvement is one of the strongest traditions of northern working class social and political institutions. Priestley celebrates it in his descriptions of amateur dramatics, reading rooms, and debate in his account of the North East. Bleakly comic juxtapositions of individual improvement and lack of agency also come together in recent plays from the area, such as Alan Plater’s Shooting the Legend (1995), or Lee Hall’s The Pitmen Painters (2007). Amber though, appear to have systematically erased this possibility. Working class institutions are confined to the pub, allotment or pigeon loft; life is defined solely by industry, or the lack thereof.

Perhaps Amber, while defending the validity of working class culture, wish to highlight that edifying or politically enabling institutions are part of a long-past idea of class struggle. Given that Durham is notable for the continued strength and relevance of the D.M.A., this appears incongruous. Amber also seem to refuse the possibility of future mobility, and thus sidestep a whole historical debate about democratic access to culture. This seems strange given the emphasis upon the working class background of the Amber members, and how

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60 Admittedly, Priestley’s County Durham is depicted as less fertile ground, but he was still keen to mark out its inhabitants as aspirational. Priestley, J.B, English Journey, Jubilee Edition (London: Heinemann, 1984), p.252-4
62 No doubt this reflects reality in disenfranchised communities; tackling youth disillusionment is probably more effectively done through the boxing clubs of Shooting Magpies, than drawing upon the example of Billy Elliot. However, this does suggest a move towards cultural retrenchment rather than cultural opportunity.
educational improvement has distanced them from that background. Yet this opportunity does not seem afforded to their characters.

Amber emphasise the resilience of the human spirit in adversity, and so in fact their challenge is the same as the development initiatives that attempt to lure investment to East Durham (and that they cynically portray). These initiatives are caught in the seemingly contradictory position of promoting the area as both “needy” and “attractive” to investors. They must highlight continuing deprivation, while emphasising the area’s strengths: a keen and available workforce with a strong work ethic and sense of tradition, but also with nowhere to turn; and a landscape both attractive and ripe for development. This is the essence of Amber’s humanist approach. It is also the essence of trauma. Trauma arises from the continuing incongruity of social change, not merely the movement from one state to another; the constant jarring of possibility and the lack of it. To only focus on this lack edits what makes social change so disorientating. It is also unfair to those it affects.

After all, Amber, as a carrier group, are labelling. In giving a group or individual the status of victim, they run the risk of ensuring that is what they become. Perhaps Shooting the Legend gives a more accurate reflection of post-industrial tensions, with its cast of working class characters who are afforded university degrees or occupational opportunities but still have to negotiate under-employment. Perhaps indeed, there could be more gleaned from the tensions within the character of David Hylton, the pit village born developer in Like Father, or even the opportunist ex-miner Brian (Brian Hogg), rather than merely assuming that they are simply unscrupulous winners in the post-mining shake-up.

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64 Bennett, K, Beynon, H & Hudson, R, Coalfield Discussion Paper, No.2: Different Places: Representations (Cardiff: Cardiff University, 1999), available at http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/resources/Different%20Places-Representations-2.pdf, accessed 21/08/2009. In their analysis Bennett et al show how this contradiction permeates every conception and promotion of the area. They use a triangular combination of factors that has similarities to Mitchell’s triangulation of space, place and landscape; in their terms how places are “realised”, “imagined” and “lived”.
65 All the while, the characters knowingly draw a balance between class heritage and conforming to industrial and post-industrial stereotypes.
**Performance and Realism**

There is a corrective view in the *Coalfield Stories*. Joe Elliott is the semi-autobiographical characterisation of the actor who plays him, ex-miner Joe Armstrong. *Like Father* may have reflected the difficulties of Joe’s life in 2001, but when he re-appears in Richard Grassick’s *Post-Industrial* photography project in 2004, he is employed negotiating those very links between development agencies and communities (Figure 9). Joe himself reflects the fact that negotiating life and identity in post-industrial Durham cannot be seen as a simple binary opposition of tradition or regeneration. In the *Coalfield Stories* films it is clear that many of the actors are performing versions of their own experiences. In *Shooting Magpies*, Barry Gough’s asides to camera and the interludes in which Emma Dowson appears to be responding to an interviewer act to reveal the dramatised nature of the rest of the film, in which they play “Barry” and “Emma”.

It also adds to the veracity of the asides, encouraging the spectator to become witness. Realism and dramatisation are closely intertwined in the films and Amber make their position as film-makers clear. The *Scar*...
employs a stand in character, Roy, who mirrors the position of the collective itself. This outsider enters the community, gradually learns their values and occasionally attempts to help them. So Roy’s attempt to take Dale under his wing may mirror Amber’s influence upon the actor Darren Bell. As James Leggott and Tobias Hochscherf suggest, the fact that these attempts to help the community are not always successful suggests a critical self-appraisal by the collective that their projects are not providing cures for the post-industrial experience.  

For Leggott and Hochscherf, Amber’s commitment to humanist realism goes hand in hand with a critical enquiry into that tradition. The films,  

“acknowledge, address and even dramatise some of the perceived problems with realist practice. Recurring debates around such issues as authenticity, romanticism and, in particular, intervention and adaptation, are woven into the very fabric of the films themselves”.  

Amber then, take a self-critical position throughout the projects. This does not make them completely unproblematic. They may internalise the position of outside observer, but that does not make it go away.  

The important consideration here though, is how Amber’s dramatic realism affects the message of trauma. The asides in Shooting Magpies may appear to be factual interludes in the drama, but that does not mean that they are necessarily true. Dowson and Gough are performing their stories. While a collaborative approach may go some way to safeguarding authenticity, the actors become involved because they want to tell their stories, and they are chosen by Amber because of the nature of those stories, but also for their story telling abilities. When conveying trauma, the humanist emphasis upon resilience under adversity adds further complication. There is a temptation to simplify traumatic change to the view that “bad” events happen to essentially “good” people. This may be accurate, but it also becomes the view that underscores the artistic project, which may result in it becoming  

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68 Leggott, J & Hochscherf, T, “From Launch to Shooting Magpies: Locating the Amber film Collective”, in Fawcett, op cit p.112  
69 Ibid, p.104  
70 We could return to Susannah Radstone suggestion that direct testimony does not inevitably lead to an indexical connection to traumatic experience. Individuals shape their stories in the act of telling them, and even the way that personal narratives are shaped in memory is according to cultural templates. Radstone, S, “Reconceiving Binaries: the Limits of Memory”, in History Workshop Journal, Issue 59 (2005), pp.134-150.  
71 Leggott & Hochscherf, op cit, p.113
Miwon Kwon’s descriptive exercise.\textsuperscript{72} The collaborative approach certainly does not ensure that the stories produced are representative of a \textit{whole} community’s experience.

Ultimately, for an effective message of trauma, it does not matter if the narrative is true, just that it is believable. As Leigh Gilmore has highlighted, what is important in the autobiographical testimony of trauma is that a story must resonate with a truth that is representational of communal suffering (it must be symptomatic). However, it must also be personal enough to be recognisably real (to be fixed to the identifiable experience of one particular person). Otherwise it risks having no legitimacy as evidence.\textsuperscript{73} Amber have refined a methodology to ensure that the individual story has resonance with the communal experience. Graeme Rigby explains:

\begin{quote}
\textit{“as the film begins to emerge you bring people in and you show them what you’ve done and you talk about it with them...it emerges out of the relationship you start to build with them. You’re working with those people very, very specifically, allowing them to see what you are doing, taking on board what they are saying. When they say that something isn’t right you listen to what they say. As the film begins to emerge you bring in other people in the community and show them the film as it emerges and take on board what people say”}.\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

This process of constant research and vetting by the community ensures the credibility, if not the verity of the message of trauma. While the films might not reproduce verifiable \textit{truth}, they provide recognisable \textit{truths} that tally with the community’s real experience of trauma. While Amber concede that not everyone will necessarily agree with their vision, they believe that, in general, the message is accepted. As Rigby suggests “other people

\textsuperscript{72} Kwon, M, \textit{One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity} (Cambridge, Mass: the M.I.T. Press, 2004), p.151-4
\textsuperscript{74} Newsinger, op cit, p.9. After all, they are committed to R.G. Collingwood’s dictum that “the artist must talk of the problems of the community he serves”. Collingwood, R.G, \textit{Principles of Art} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), quoted in \textit{Amber: A Short History} (promotional pamphlet, 2007), p.29. This technique of constant re-appraisal was used in \textit{Like Father}, for which the script was developed in situ, as the film was being made. Bennett, K and Lee, R, “Amber and an other rural: film, photography and the former coalfields”, in Fish, R (Ed), \textit{Cinematic Countrysides} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.258
might easily have said, ‘no, that’s not it at all’. But actually people were coming up to us and saying ‘you’ve got it – that’s the way it is with our lives’...

**Landscape and the Trauma of Social Change**

From a purely analytical perspective we might suggest that realism, and a coherent narrative should not be the best vehicle for the representation of trauma. Trauma is illogical, it disrupts narrative; it is experienced in feelings, not graphic representations (though graphic flashbacks may be a symptom). In Jill Bennett’s terms, it is experienced in sense memory, whereas realist narrative is built upon common memory: established cultural meanings. However, Amber have not set out to convey trauma. The picture they have painted of East Durham over the last thirty years certainly is one of communal trauma, but their commitment has simply been to record and tell people about a community undergoing upheaval, in the most responsible and effective way. Murray Martin maintained that the films may be accused of romantic nostalgia, but realism is a language that is “comfortable and accessible” for their public. Their longevity suggests that communities are happy with Amber’s record.

Landscape is fundamental to Amber’s message of social change in the Durham coalfield. Elements of the *Coalfield Stories* films do communicate through Bennett’s affect: the disorientation of the characters is shown through camera effects; the use of hand held digital video camera renders space claustrophobic and colours more vibrant. The long sequences of scenery also encourage the viewer to project themselves into the space on the screen. Similarly, the photographs of John Davies or Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen tempt involvement, with minute details of how people inhabit space, and what they have left behind. The characters in these stories also experience change through the landscape. They embody the changes going on in the landscape, and in turn the landscape reflects their altered mental, social, and economic condition. They are also in a constantly shifting position to those landscapes. The physical space is as unreliable as the economic environment that left these communities stranded. Yet it is also a source of comfort and

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75 Newsinger, op cit, p.10
77 Dickinson, op cit, p.254
escape. It is the landscapes of the *Coalfield Stories* that reveal the incongruities and contradictions of traumatic change.

Landscape imagery also contributes to the verity of the stories. The residents of East Durham are offered a detailed picture of how the places that they know and live in have changed. For those outside the communities this record provides a detailed, but also disorientating narrative. From photograph to film, and back to photograph, landscapes and characters appear, disappear and then reappear, altered. Sometimes the changes are hard to fathom, sometimes they are starkly obvious. It is a picture of upheaval. In Amber’s record of East Durham we are offered a narrative that covers a period of fundamental turmoil that stretches from the political changes of the late 1970s to the present day. This narrative proceeds from predicting crisis, to outlining a period of intense communal cultural disorganisation, to a time of full scale economic and social collapse. This process has stranded the coastal communities from a society with altered priorities. Amber’s record of it is a detailed vision of the trauma of social change.
CONCLUSION

Landscape and Trauma: Challenges and Opportunities

“The connection between landscape and identity may, in fact, be so obvious as to seem banal, but if that is the case we have surprisingly few studies to indicate the precise mechanisms through which landscape operates on our sense of self, on personal or individual identity”.1

This thesis has investigated how two traumatic events in Northern England have been represented in landscape imagery. It has built upon Jeffrey Alexander’s proposition that communal trauma is culturally constructed, and is constructed by certain social agents. These agents broadcast a message that a community is suffering from trauma, and if that message is accepted (by the community itself and a wider audience), then that community is perceived as such.2 This is a logical proposition. “Communal trauma” is an ascription that covers a wide range of ill-defined social and psychological symptoms. Unlike other medical ascriptions, it is also one in which effects are explicitly tracked back to origin; it refers to the wound, and the blow that caused it.3 Communal trauma is a proposition, rather than a definition.

This proposition can be made through landscape imagery. In fact, landscape imagery is essential to comprehending why the demise of the mining industry in County Durham since the late 1970s, and the Foot and Mouth epidemic in Cumbria in 2001 have been communally traumatic. These were crises that happened to, and within the land, predominantly as a result of official policies to re-organise or control what happens within that space. This has disrupted not only economic structures and social relationships within that space, but also the accepted relationship between communities and the place they

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1 Harris, D, “Self and Landscape”, in Ziady DeLue, R and Elkins, J (Eds), Landscape Theory (London: Routledge, 2008), p.193
3 Erikson, K, “Notes on Trauma and Community” in Caruth, C (Ed), Trauma: Explorations in Memory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p.184
inhabit: the emotional geography of place. In William Mitchell’s terms they are events that have brought potentially traumatic tension into the relationship between lived space and organised place.

This thesis has shown how landscape has provided direct evidence of these changes within the physical landscape. For instance, John Davies’ photographs of East Durham enable the direct comparison between the landscape in 1983, and how it had changed by 2004. Yet landscape imagery shapes as well as reveals attitudes towards the land; it impacts upon, as well as reveals the relationship between space and place. These landscape images refer to others, and sets of assumptions about what the landscapes of Cumbria and Durham signify.

They may communicate change through symbol and connotation, prompting viewers to make links between what is shown and various embedded cultural assumptions and narratives. They also consistently refer to what is not shown: wider economic change, social division, or political disenfranchisement. The projects discussed here have also included imagery of human distress, but landscape has been essential in symbolising that distress. So these images refer to discourses beyond the frame, including the history of landscape representation itself.

Yet their symbolic references cannot always be simply decoded. Sometimes, they may provoke a more visceral reaction, which unbalances those accepted associations. The bucolic idyll may become claustrophobic, or contain features that are physically repulsive. The industrial landscape may be revealed as shifting and insecure, rather than solid and regulated. These images violently disrupt assumptions about the landscape. This makes them effective at alluding to the trauma that has been experienced within those spaces.

Trauma manifests itself in feelings; it disrupts logic, and defies explanation. These images suggest what it feels like to be in a disorientating landscape in which associations and

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4 In the North East this emotional geography has been revealed in how individuals and communities regard certain places as representative of continuity in the face of change (and films such as Amber’s Like Father shows the emotional turmoil that arises when that continuity is broken). In Cumbria disorientation has also arisen due to the alteration of the emotional geography of place, in the way that disease and disease control combined to disrupt the accepted way that certain processes are confined to certain physical spaces.

meanings that have been relied upon become unravelled. They attempt to translate some of the inexplicable experiences of trauma.

So, landscape has been used to provide direct evidence of change, worked symbolically to suggest what change may mean, and attempted to provoke reactions that translate the indefinable experience of that change. These combine to inform viewers that the crises in Northern England have been traumatic. However, some of those viewers have been the people directly affected by these traumatic changes. This thesis has suggested that these events, and the landscape images of the events, have altered these individuals’ perceived relationship with the space they inhabit. In William Mitchell’s terms these landscapes act as verbs, rather than nouns: they have formed subjective relationships with space, as well as revealing them.\(^6\)

**The Importance of Landscape**

Patrick Bracken points out that trauma should be approached holistically, and a multitude of factors, such as planning, housing, isolation or how the lived space is perceived are important contributory factors in the shift from distress to trauma.\(^7\) Consequently, the thesis has embraced an interdisciplinary approach, and has drawn upon other research into these events. Most obviously it has drawn upon the work of Maggie Mort, Ian Convery, Cathy Bailey and Josephine Baxter, who have explicitly claimed that Foot and Mouth has been a communally traumatic experience, a conclusion corroborated by one of the leading figures in this field of enquiry, Kai Erikson.\(^8\) Landscape imagery has mirrored some of the conclusions of Mort et al: suggesting that F.M.D. led to social isolation, a feeling of political impotence, and a critical rupture in the accepted patterns of life in the rural space. Yet landscape has, so far been an incidental feature in the analysis of the crisis, often merely used as an illustration to corroborate other assertions. This thesis has demonstrated how it was, in fact fundamental to communicating Foot and Mouth, and important in

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\(^6\) Mitchell, W.J.T, “Introduction”, in Mitchell, ibid, p.2


remembering the crisis, and in forming the perception of “trauma” in both affected communities and a wider audience.

It has shown how accepted visions of Cumbria (predominantly of the Lake District) were undermined from the beginning of the Foot and Mouth crisis, by images of burning pyres in the landscape circulated in the press. These pictures however, were accompanied by highly contradictory messages about who was suffering from the crisis and why. Subsequently the photographers John Darwell, Ian Geering and Nick May attempted to provide a more detailed picture of the effects upon the landscape and its communities. They examined the longer term effects of the epidemic, and showed that Government assurances that the crisis was under control were misleading. Exhibited during, but predominantly after the crisis this landscape imagery has worked in conjunction with other studies to cement the idea that Foot and Mouth was traumatic for communities in Cumbria. However, this assertion is by no means uncontested, and since the epidemic there has been a resurgence in imagery of Cumbria as an idealised rural idyll. This has corroborated Jeffrey Alexander’s suggestion that the cultural construction of trauma is a fragile process, often greeted with ambivalence. The thesis has concluded that whole range of imagery of the Cumbrian landscape, the idyllic, the sublime and the realist, and the incongruities between them, are necessary if we are to comprehend Foot and Mouth as a traumatic event.

In the case of County Durham, change has not been comprehensively framed as communal trauma by other agents, despite the wealth of studies of post-industrial economic and social change.\(^9\) As such, Piotr Sztompka’s investigation of disenfranchised and marginalised post-communist communities after the fall of the Iron Curtain provides an invaluable study, and parallels can be drawn between this experience and that of communities in a de-industrialised East Durham.\(^10\) It has been possible to draw these parallels precisely because of the photography and film projects of Newcastle’s Amber collective. Although unaware

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\(^9\) Although the studies of Dave Wray, Carol Stephenson and Mary Mellor have framed the experience after the failed Miners’ Strike and colliery closure as communal “emotional degeneration”. See in particular Stephenson, C & Wray, D, “Emotional Regeneration Through Community Action in Post-Industrial Mining Communities: The New Herrington Miners’ Banner Partnership”, in Capital & Class, No.87 (2004), p.175-199

of the findings of Sztompka, Amber have recorded a process of traumatic social change that closely corresponds to his conclusions. Their work in the Durham coalfield essentially predicts traumatic change, then records a period of cultural disorientation during the upheaval of the Miners’ Strike in 1984-5, and then intensively records the traumatic impact of economic deprivation. One of the main features of this record has been landscape imagery. Using the insights of Amber’s record it may now be possible to re-examine other studies of post-industrial mining communities.

In fact, the inter-disciplinary approach of this thesis makes it directly relevant to a number of fields of enquiry. The most obvious is the field of trauma studies, in which there is already an established body of study that assess the use of art, photography and film to convey traumatic experience. It also makes a contribution to this field of enquiry. These studies are in effect, carrying out Jeffrey Alexander’s cultural construction of trauma; they are broadcasting certain phenomena as traumatic. Yet none explicitly refer to this process, and many begin from the assumption that the artwork reflects a sovereign traumatic experience. Equally though, such artworks can be seen as constructing an experience as traumatic. This thesis has assessed landscape images not only in terms of what they show, but what they might achieve when they are shown.

The research has also drawn upon, and contributes to knowledge in other related fields, particularly that of cultural geography (which intersects with a number of other disciplines: sociology, tourism studies, planning, as well as cultural and visual studies). In analysing how political and economic spheres impact upon space and how representations of space influence those interactions, many studies in the realm of cultural geography correspond very closely to William Mitchell’s triangular approach. The landscapes discussed here reflect the interactions between isolated social networks and wider spheres of influence, whether that is the policies of government, the demands of tourism and heritage or the global control of infectious diseases. Addressing landscape in this way bears direct relevance to the fields above by highlighting its importance in forming subjective identities in regard to those spheres of influence.
Yet these landscapes do more than just illustrate the processes of change. These changes have been traumatic, and traumatic experience is intangible. As Jill Bennett suggests, it cuts across and disrupts the accepted narratives of meaning. These conflicts over space have led to experiences that cannot be explained (but are still highly influential upon communities’ sense of identity). The landscape images that have arisen from these changes translate, rather than explain this experience. They provide a space for us to ask questions about how traumatic experience is lived. As such, they need to be approached from a number of disciplinary viewpoints: art history; cultural geography; visual sociology and through trauma and memory studies.

**Opportunities**

This thesis then, provides a foundation for further research. Howard Becker has urged us to recognise the value of documentary projects as sociological resources. Clearly, the overtly subjective or fictionalised nature of some projects may make them unsuitable, but Becker’s point is that once we accept and account for the inherent subjectivity of the photographer, documentary becomes a valuable source of information. The landscape images of John Davies or John Darwell illustrate this potential. Darwell’s view of a protest sign on the farm

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12 Many of these fields lack distinctive boundaries, or even a sense of cohesion as a discipline. Trauma studies is a discipline founded in cultural studies, predominantly literary studies. It is a similar case in memory studies, despite the long history of this area of enquiry. Jeffrey Olick for one, has urged some sort of disciplinary structure to be formulated (Jeffrey Olick keynote paper, “Is the Memory Boom Over, and What Would this Mean for Memory Studies?”, at Memory, Media, Global Formations conference, University of Greenwich, 01/05/2009). In the case of Visual Sociology, the field is now nearly forty years old, and yet still lacks cohesion and an overriding mission. One of the founding figures of the discipline, Douglas Harper is seeking to rectify this in 2010 with the publication of his *Visual Sociology: An Introduction* (Harper, D, *Visual Sociology: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2010)).


14 Needless to say, documentary developed precisely to explore this potential as a sociological record, but the increasing critique of the realist image, and the power imbalance of observation has meant that documentary objectivity has been questioned since the 1970s. In fact, trauma studies have been infused with the same mistrust of the realist image, due to a belief that traumatic experience is beyond direct representations. Nevertheless, the lay observer still seems to invest faith in Roland Barthes’ “umbilical cord” between the photograph and reality, and accept realist imagery as providing at least some record of reality. If we see photography and film as translating, rather than capturing experience, then it can still be an effective vehicle for the broadcast of that trauma. As Amber demonstrate, Realism may well ease that translation.
gates in the Vale of Lorton, provides evidence of the biosecurity measures imposed to prevent the spread of Foot and Mouth Disease, but also how that policy was received by those who had to live under it (figure 1).

John Davies’ Durham Coalfield and Durham Coalfield Revisited projects capture a wealth of sociological information, and are undertaken with a certain scientific objectivity (Figure 2). The photographs do not focus upon the actions of people, but the evidence left by the ways they live in the physical space, and the changes in that evidence after a period of twenty years. In fact, Amber’s projects hold much potential for such study. For over forty years they have built up a multi-layered document of de-industrialisation in one locality. Amber simply provide one of the most comprehensive pictorial social resources concerning the change brought about by de-industrialisation in the North East. One of the reservations that Becker raises concerning documentary is the relative lack of ongoing reassessment that

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16 If we include the Side Gallery archive, which includes the Depression photographs of Wheatley Hill by Mary Gillens, and Edgar G. Lee’s images of Tyneside at the end of the nineteenth century, this document actually stretches back for around 120 years.
goes on during the process of making records. Yet in many ways Amber do act “sociologically”, rather than following a pre-conceived plan of recording. They engage in a constant process of re-appraisal and self-appraisal, rather than reaction and “capturing”. Film scripts are developed during filming, or reworked after community feedback, and projects build upon one another; if a new line of enquiry emerges, it is investigated. This is a natural result of their technique of constant engagement and research within the community. This does not necessarily prevent them from recycling stereotypical ideas about northern communities, and their commitment to romantic realism may provide a stumbling block to the acceptance of that imagery as “evidence”. Yet as the last chapter has outlined, both romanticism and realism are critically assessed and found to be justified in order to make the products more accessible to the audience.

![Figure 2: John Davies, Easington Colliery, County Durham, 1983](image)

This highlights one of the most important aspects of Amber’s project as a resource. It not only provides a visual record, but reveals itself as a social process. The way that

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17 Sociologists explore their findings during the research process; they continually assess and update them, and are willing to pursue new avenues that stem from the evidence. Photographers, he claims, tend to record a volume of material based upon a preconceived idea, and then formulate a “vision” at the end of the project, effectively editing changes that may occur “in the field”. Becker (1974), op cit, p.12
community and documentary collective work together to negotiate and represent change may provide information in itself, about how groups deal with trauma and construct, and reconstruct communal identity and memory. Needless to say, the art collective mediate this process and we must accept that Amber’s story is part of the story. Nevertheless, that process indicates how communities negotiate the conflicts of space and place during disorientating times, and landscape takes a prominent place in this negotiation.

Yet Becker suggests that the challenges facing the use of documentary as sociological information go beyond the issues of how they are made, but also what uses to put these images to. Perhaps one option has been explored by Chris Byrne and Aiden Doyle who showed diverse target groups in the North East photographs of mining history and then recorded their responses in informal discussions. Understandably their survey elicited some very different responses, but what was notable was the willingness of some younger participants to consign all imagery of mining to a dirty and derelict past. Byrne and Doyle’s study was as much about researching the process of how groups discussed images and used them to form meaning, as about the meanings attributed to them. It is a process that closely resembles the way that Amber (and indeed the New Herrington Banner Partnership) collaborate to form and negotiate the meaning and memories of social change through images. Byrne and Doyle’s study provides a potential framework for the ways in which the imagery, methodology and conclusions of this thesis may be put to further use.

The events studied here require continued analysis. The spaces affected are, after all still spaces of conflict. They are still in a state of accelerated and unresolved change, and the experiences of that change are still being negotiated. Studies of the Foot and Mouth epidemic continue to be published, and March 2010 saw the conference Digging the Seam at the University of Leeds, which addressed the cultural documents of the Miners’ Strike, and highlighted that even after twenty five years, this event continues to reverberate in the

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18 Of course, this departs from the rigorous objectivity of the scientific study. Amber cross the scientific taboo: the long process of collaboration and then displaying to the community means that the act of observation is actively changing the character of the observed.
19 Becker (2004), op cit, p.196
20 Byrne, D & Doyle, A, “the Visual and the Verbal: The Interaction of Images and Discussion in Exploring Cultural Change”, in Knowles & Sweetman, op cit, p.166-177
21 This study has after all, not investigated the reception of these images in great depth, beyond noting the ambivalent response to Nick May’s exhibition at Tullie House Gallery, for reasons set out in the introduction.
lives of those involved.\textsuperscript{22} The traumatic effects of these events still linger. Some individuals and communities may have recovered, but there will always be a fault line within the collective memory and indeed social body of the community. These events will always serve as a marker dividing a life before and one after. In some cases these fault lines have not yet healed, in others they may reopen.\textsuperscript{23}

However, these events have also left a fault line within wider British culture. In the case of Foot and Mouth this rupture has unsettled a host of cultural assumptions about the relationship between the natural and the human world. The epidemic revealed that contemporary society holds a host of incongruous attitudes towards the rural space: utopian longing \textit{and} fear; the urge to consume \textit{and} preserve; and the tendency to ignore and marginalise \textit{and} insist that it adheres to structures of control. It is the rupture implicit in the conflicting urges of the “fantasy of not belonging”: to separate from, and to yearn for. For Piotr Sztompka this fault line has its source in the early nineteenth century, with the realisation that industrial modernity is inherently divisive, and inevitably leads to loss. Sztompka asserts that this realisation begins a discourse of trauma that infuses western capitalist culture to the present day.\textsuperscript{24} The final demise of mining also adds to this discourse; it signifies the collapse of any utopian Socialist counter to this trauma, and the embedding of the perception that “there is no alternative” to neo-liberalism. The closure of the last collieries in County Durham signified the fact the British “romance of coal” can now only be based upon a sense of loss. Both Foot and Mouth, and the collapse of mining in County Durham demand further study. They are not merely events in remote parts of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Most obviously, Convery et al, op cit, and Döring, M and Nerlich, B (Eds), \textit{The Social and Cultural Impact of Foot-and-Mouth Disease in the UK in 2001: Experiences and Analyses} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009). \textit{Digging the Seam: Cultural Reflections and the Consequences of the 1984/5 Miners’ Strike}, University of Leeds, 25\textsuperscript{th}-27\textsuperscript{th} March 2010
\item \textsuperscript{23} As Sam Hillyard has noted, the divisive affects of Foot and Mouth continue to leave their mark on social relations in some communities hit by Foot and Mouth. Hillyard, S, “Farmers and valuers: divisions and divisiveness and the social cost of FMD – a sociological analysis of FMD in one locality”, in Döring and Nerlich, op cit, p.81-94. Also however, the studies of the New Herrington Partnership by Carol Stephenson, Dave Wray and Mary Mellor show that recovery is still a highly fragile process in County Durham. Its momentum is provided by a single individual with the help of the Durham Miners’ Association. Should this individual be incapable of providing that momentum, the partnership, and with it the focal point of community recovery could collapse. Stephenson, C and Wray, D, “Emotional regeneration through community action in post-industrial mining communities: the New Herrington Miners’ Banner Partnership”, in \textit{Capital and Class, No.87} (Autumn 2005), p.175-199
\item \textsuperscript{24} Sztompka, op cit, p.157
\end{itemize}
Northern England, but in their own ways indicative of the rupture between political or cultural idealism and the realities that shape contemporary British spaces.
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