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**THE COLLIERY AESTHETIC:**  
cultural responses at the end of industry

**AIDAN DOYLE**

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Submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy

**UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM**

Department of Sociology

**2001**



28 MAY 2002

The effects of industry are often visible in the landscape: industrial scars are part of the way in which the history of a place is known. For mining these scars indicate an industry which was carried out in mostly unseen places. Mining scars in the landscape; spoil heaps and collieries buildings, were interesting and sometimes beautiful to look at. In my work as an artist I have sought to depict visual 'clues' to the identity of places. I have dealt with mining in painting, photography and texts based in oral testimonies, working to develop images of the coal landscape as it represents this sense of place of the North East.

### ***Personal background***

As my interests cross the fields of art, mining narrative and history, and as I am engaged with ideas about culture, my thesis is an attempt to synthesise an approach to distinct fields of study in a cross-disciplinary approach. It is a study of culture written by a cultural practitioner engaging with the intellectual apparatus of sociology, anthropology and history, to make sense of personal observations. Arising from my classical training in fine art I present my work with a pictorial emphasis, and use images throughout the work. These images provide evidence as documents in their own right, but are deployed as support to my text. This underscores my concern with visual enquiry. Few documents of sociology employ visual material in spite of being presentations which deal with visible phenomena. Why is this? Much of the world of mining remained invisible yet on investigation it is particularly rich in visual evidence.

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## **Dedication and acknowledgements**

This work is dedicated to the memory of my parents Tommy and Maureen Doyle.

The thesis was commenced following a meeting on 25 April 1995 in Durham; on the feast of Saint Mark, in the city which stores the bones of Saint Bede. Both men were writers in times of profound changes. My grandfather Cornelius Toberty had a great enthusiasm for County Durham, and the City of Durham, and I have kind memories of walking slowly with my father around its river banks. These people are the four corner stones of my work. It is placed under their patronage.

I have a great number of people to thank for assistance with this work. They include people working in North East coal mines whose names I never got to know, and others too numerous to mention. I particularly wish to thank the miners and management of Westoe Colliery at the time of closure, and the miners of Harton and Westoe Colliery Welfare for assisting with visual and focus group developments of my research, especially Ronny Wightman and Ronny Slater. The contribution of focus group respondents must also be acknowledged. Thanks are also due to the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers for providing facilities at the Nicholas Wood Memorial Library, and for their continued work in the upkeep of this valuable resource. I am particularly grateful to Mr Ralph Sanderson.

Dr. David Byrne of the University of Durham has exposed me to the riches of his discipline. Thanks are also due to Mr. William Queenan who assisted in the production and presentation of images.

Thank you to my family for support, especially my auntie Gerry Toberty. Most of all I am grateful to Maeve, Fintan and Vivienne Dawson, for putting up with it all.

## List of Abbreviations

CG	Colliery Guardian
CISWO	Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation
CQ	Coal Quarterly
FSA	Farm Security Administration
'ISL'	Name of electronics factory in South Shields, formerly 'Plessey's'
LP	publication <i>Last Pit on the Tyne</i>
NCB	National Coal Board
NEPC	Northern Economic Planning Council
<i>per comm(s)</i>	personal communiqués or extracts from unrecorded conversation
yBas	young British artists

## **Abstract**

This thesis is concerned with culture at a time of profound change, when coal mining, hitherto the region's industrial mainstay, has been eradicated. It questions notions of cultural regeneration which do not take existing industrial culture into account. It questions how culture regenerates, and who it regenerate for.

Monumental public art works are closely associated with cultural regeneration; yet few have significant association with the landscape. Museum, art gallery and other cultural representations are sustained through public funding. Public art re-images the identity of the landscape as a part of a wider process. Specificity of place, and cultural relevance of lived experience, is contrasted with the art at the core of cultural regeneration. Art appears as a surrogate for missing industrial structures. High art practices colonise the cultural spaces previously occupied by low culture.

True representations of mining and miners are suppressed by caricature and stereotype, not cultural reality. In contrast much of the spoken word narrative of colliery working life, informed by aesthetics based in experience, goes unrecorded. This culture is not called upon to participate in the regeneration process. Presentation of mining working life, in its own vernacular, is a verbal demonstration of the colliery aesthetic.

Cultural dynamics are perceived in visual and narrative forms. Centring investigation on visual material a body of research is embarked upon which develops methods of social investigation, through the use of images to elicit testimonies. This is carried out in the context of focus groups. Obtaining information through research into cultural understanding invests respondents with the role of cultural representatives: expressing concepts of culture, in their own way, reveals their concerns about culture and its representations.

Focus groups consider presentations of mining and other local industrial culture in respect to public spending on public cultural forms. Representations through memory and memorial are also considered.



# THE COLLIERY AESTHETIC

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about culture in a time of change. It is an enquiry into different forms of culture and how they are related to one another. It concerns the claims that are made about 'cultural regeneration' based in arts projects which are engendered and enabled with huge resources. These do not take existing or local cultures into consideration. It seeks to understand attitudes of people to these forms of culture. It also examines the ways in which cultures are represented. (Fig.<sup>intro: 1</sup>)

In the last decade of the twentieth century the mining industry in the North East came to an end. Prior to this coal was an emblem of the region itself, characterised with songs about the 'Coaly Tyne' and the adage 'carrying coals to Newcastle'. Now it is history. This history is often represented as being doom laden, and nostalgia about mining communities as bastions of political militancy and quaint leisure pursuits also inform popularly held notions. Representations of this kind are full of suppositions, as Thompson (1980.71) has noted that "[e]ven sympathetic observers often write about miners as if their solidarity sprang from some sub-intellectual sociological traditionalism, a combination of the muscles and the moral instincts".

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<sup>intro: 1</sup> A miner looks out over a landscape of demolition: Easington Colliery, 1993.





Visiting collieries above and below ground to document these places my photographs, which began as densely populated images, became increasingly bereft of human content, showing places where people had been. A typical photographic shoot of the time would involve the descent of a pit with a salvage team and an official of the mine to visit some engineering marvel or geological anomaly before it was consigned to oblivion. In most cases these photographs would constitute the only physical record of that structure (Fig.<sup>intro: 2</sup>). I became aware that no photograph could convey the sense of vastness of this unseen underground world.

The indecent hurry to cleanse the landscape of these vestiges of mining developed a new aesthetic of desolation. Evacuated industrial locations are relict and ghostly. After demolition the token “bit of heritage” - halved pulley wheels are all that remain, standing at the entrance to small industrial estates.

The stories miners told at the pit head presented a working world redolent of humour and good will. These were not (always) the expected doom laden tragedies. They were, however, always interesting and full of colour and powerful imagery.

My concerns for mining representation arose from observations at the time of the last colliery closures in the early 1990s. In spite of the importance, as I saw it, of mining to the culture of the region at the time of its ending there appeared to be no museum or other cultural representation strategy to record or document it. It was not given the important consideration which it deserved. At the same time that historically significant buildings were being demolished monumental sculptures were being

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<sup>intro: 2</sup> The ‘salt flats, Wearmouth Colliery.

erected on the skyline to take their place. These works were invariably expensive yet seemed to have no significance to the sites which they came to occupy, in spite of claims to 'site specificity'. In terms of presence in the landscape and in the public eye one form of culture was replacing the other. We are getting art in exchange for industry (Fig. <sup>intro: 3</sup>).

These differences in approach to culture begged a lot of questions. Was mining not sufficiently important to the region's identity to merit significant public representation? What are the causes of stereotyped representations? Do these hinder real representations of mining? If there is a programme of cultural representation can the culture of mining inform or participate in this process? Between real and supposed images is there an underlying approach (or look) which can be described as the 'colliery aesthetic'? When mining ends what happens to these stories? What becomes of all the humour? If stories are not told what do people know about mining life? Without these stories how can the place be known and understood? If cultural regeneration is going on how can these stories and the goodwill of their content inform regenerative practices?

Can existing social culture share in the project of cultural regeneration with art forms which are competitive by nature? Can they coexist? If one cultural form is being presented in place of the other is one better than the other? Is one type of culture entirely exclusive of the other? Is this change in emphasis indicative of general social or cultural trends? Is there an aesthetic element to the experiential culture which should be given equal status to that of its 'high art' counterpart? What claims are

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<sup>intro: 3</sup> Public sculpture on a former industrial site: Mark diSuvero's *'Tyne Anew'*.

made to marginalise local culture? Do people cherish the sense of place as afforded by mining? Can a sense of social inclusion engendered by engaging with industrial culture enrich the process of cultural regeneration?

These questions determine the basic organisation of this work. Its aim is to clarify principles and presuppositions: to make knowledge of a culture more distinct and available. This thesis is an attempt to understand the culture of a place at a time of profound change. It takes as its starting point the understanding that an important culture is under threat of extinction.

### ***Organisation of the thesis***

The thesis is constructed in two parts. The first is concerned with theories and the second is about practice. The first part comprising the first three chapters is an attempt to come to terms with theories which surround culture and elucidate cultural practices and purposes. The principal theme which runs through this work is an attempt at recovery of understanding: what this culture means and has meant to people. I determine the practical means of examining this theoretical material in the later chapters. The second part is about how people perceive and understand culture. It is about what people say and think. I develop methods of enquiry into this perception. Having established a methodological frame with which to proceed I report on conducting a series of focus group and other interviews. The last two chapters analyse material generated by these focus groups and interviews. They attempt to address this material as it identifies and relates to different forms of culture.



The first chapter engages with my substantive argument. Here I express my concerns with culture, specifically the capacity of a form of culture which claims to deliver regeneration at a time of final change. As a consequence of this change a form of culture emerges which is granted resources which valorise its specific forms. New cultural symbols are emerging which indicate a momentary tension but do not present inclusive cultural opportunities. These forms endorse high culture as the 'winner' of a competition for legitimacy. The relationship of culture with art is emblematic of a wider debate about what is and what is not to be reproduced which concerns the "realm of values and beliefs" (Shils 1961), the official region of society where order and authority are created and maintained. The existing local culture is discarded in favour of an incursive anti-local counterpart. The newcomer moves in and takes over spaces left vacant by the culture in retreat.

The purpose of this chapter is to configure my arguments within theoretical debates about culture itself. The first of these distinguishes cultural practice and comprises an overview of theories about culture; identifying the specific fields under investigation. In developing the constituencies of my theoretical arguments it is important to contextualise these through an exploration of accepted definitions because much of what is taking place in the name of culture is attendant upon ambiguities of definition and understanding. This chapter contains preliminary definitions and links with other ill-defined cognate concepts - cultural regeneration and heritage, through an enquiry into aesthetics. In the scramble for resources what does heritage mean? What does art regenerate? If culture is at the core of regeneration I argue that it is important to understand what the culture is about.

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My proposed clarification provides a position from which it is possible to investigate the processes which high culture creates distances between cultural objects and lived experience. I develop an argument with the posmodernist insistence upon an 'aestheticisation of everyday life'. Much of what is emerging to replace lived experience is the product of art business which, in affecting aesthetic disinterest, conceals the fact that the cultural businessman "consecrates a product" (Bourdieu 1977:76 - 7) which appears superficial but nevertheless empowers the art trader to impose dominant definitions of culture; and hence social reality. I argue against the postmodern suppositions of the 'aestheticisation' of everyday life through identification of elements of this aesthetic. Through this I attempt to elucidate what new cultural opportunities mean, and for whom.

Heritage is also a contested concept. This term must be engaged with as far as representations of culture are concerned, especially in the way that it reduces experiential culture to a particular form - thus taming it. Following from this I present high and low culture as they are linked with aesthetics.

Having discussed key themes and concepts I turn to theories related to cultural inclusion. If a culture is failing to articulate local concerns and uphold and preserve the notion of identity it is failing to do its job. In the second chapter I outline my principal hypothesis which concerns the *inclusive* capacities of culture, proposing experiential cultural forms as means of social inclusion, and arguing that communicative culture is essentially optimistic. The chapter is concerned with the themes of culture as inclusion, investigating culture as a way of life. Culture identifies the everyday expectations and things taken for granted in a community. I investigate

the potentialities of inclusive culture through identification of commonalties with the capacity to underpin politics of resistance. This engages with cultural theories and the political philosophy of Hanna Arendt (1958) who bemoans the 'private' realm as a space deprived of social intercourse. Social activity is privatised through the disappearance of shared public spaces of discussion, co-operation and coexistence: the loci of contributive and interactive culture of common experience.

This chapter is about the occupancy of space and distinctions. The landscape of the North East is a product of geological and historical fact.

“every social space is the outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributory currents, signifying and non-signifying, perceived and directly experienced, practical and theoretical. In short every social space has a history, one invariably grounded in nature, in natural conditions that are at once primordial and unique in the sense that they are always and everywhere endowed with specific characteristics” (Lefebvre 1974.110).

A series of questions about representation and signification are posed. I examine the problems of separation of 'us and them' and 'then and now'.

The third chapter describes the *Colliery Aesthetic*. Outlining dimensions of aesthetic understanding which reflect suppositions and notions about the visible landscape and the hidden pit. It concerns what is known and what is imagined. It focuses on how understanding is informed through literary and artistic representations and ideas which underpin attitudes. Here I attempt to describe dimensions of 'otherness' through notions of the look of miners as members of alien races. This is considered in the context of the change in emphasis in social science disciplines. Urban anthropology is concerned with urban societies, countering anthropology's traditional domain of 'primitive' peoples. This change of emphasis acknowledged the part that



Fig. 94.—Descending the Shaft at Wieliczka.



industrial urban cultures play in the world of diversity. Groups are no longer considered as apart, sequestered or self-contained entities. Equal status is given to notions of the urban as a means of understanding differences.

The postmodernist concern with superficiality fails to come to terms with depth as a problem of representation. This chapter is about the look of mining and the link between perception and depiction: what is shown and what is perceived. I present a fanciful catabasis, a visit to the unseen world, as a demonstration of how perceptions are informed (Fig. <sup>intro: 4</sup>). The removal of recent history makes possible a 'suitable historic past' valued in terms of its marketable content. The central concern here is how and why narratives and cultures are represented in the way that they are.

The second part of this thesis is about the means of recovery of understanding and its representation. Having established a series of concerns about modes of interpretation of culture. I consider the interpreter in social research and representations. This leads to the key dynamic around which my theories are articulated: pictorial representation. My concern is with visual sociology and the visual processes which inform sociological enquiry. I examine the use of visual material in conjunction with the spoken word. This introduces the second part of the thesis. Having identified and articulated theories I turn to the development of the distinctive techniques and procedures for collecting data with which to evaluate them.

I argue that understanding of mining culture is conjectural. The reality of working life experience has been carried out away from the public gaze. As such it is prone to

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<sup>intro: 4</sup> Descent into the underworld. Miners at Wieliczka, from Simonin, 1889.

suppositions and misrepresentations. The initial impetus for my enquiry was an identification of absence. What does this absence mean to different people?

Chapter four is about the recovery of personal understanding of this culture and its meanings. I deploy visual materials as a means to cultural enquiry. I review aesthetic choices and other technical limitations which govern the production of images. There are essential differences in the kinds of pictures used in different forms of social enquiry or representation. The purpose of all documentary is to record and present what is important about any sort of event, people or place: ways of reporting what we know about the society we live in (Becker 1986). Documentary photography is associated with exploring social conditions; but in common with all forms of imagery photographs are subject to personal aesthetics (tastes) and moral judgement. It apportions a use to visual imagery to explore overlooked background understanding of everyday life.

A documentary contains selected observations which represent a whole. The problem with all documentary is the mediation of the author which impairs its 'reality'. The photographer is not an objective recorder, but a subjective evaluator. The value of using photography as a research method lies in this dual function. Sontag (1977) remarked that "the camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own". This part of the work is about the problems of visual representation and the problems of representation of absences.

The following two chapters propose and develop a research project as an example of how this enquiry can shift its emphasis from analyses of the rhetoric of representation

to an understanding of what is being said and what is not being said, shifting emphasis from theoretical concerns to means of empirical enquiry. The aim is to develop a methodological framework capable of examining the social understanding and historical-temporal location of culture. I have argued that the locus for meaningful understanding and reproduction of culture is created in the space where people meet and act as groups. This chapter establishes the means to recover group understanding.

I have established a series of concerns relating to dualities and dichotomies: high and low culture, past and present, folk and urban, folk and technical, representation and reality. Here the axis of knowledge and opinion is considered. My observations have shaped my approach to problems of representation. I investigate what is and can be known and understood about a culture. How is it known? What distinguishes this knowledge from opinion or conjecture? In chapter five I review methods and research procedures related to a review of technical literature about the collection of oral testimonies for analysis through focus groups. From this I arrive at methods for conducting focus groups. This chapter is concerned with how these questions can be asked. Phenomena are approached free from presuppositions in order to develop insights into experience. Procedures have been adapted to investigating what people think about their culture, and how they stand in relation to it.

This leads to an analysis of conversational exchange - what is said when people talk to one another - as a way of investigating common understanding. Through analysis of these interstices things that are understood but not explicit are revealed. Common sense knowledge of the facts of social life are generally taken for granted. Common

understanding reflects culture in the way that it relates to everyday life. Common understandings plays an important role in the production, control, and recognition of cultural practices. Members of social groups articulate their own background expectancies framed by social reality. How is culture perceived in the context of mining? How are these perceptions created?

The next three chapters present evidence: what people said. Chapter six is concerned with the general issues and concerns raised in focus group conversation. A considerable arsenal of materials, especially images and recordings of conversations and interviews, has been assembled. How do I address this material in order to make sense of it all? The first of these analysis chapters concerns ordering and preliminary coding of focus group data relating it to other documents and texts. Primarily this concerns what was said at the focus groups. I approach this analysis with the identification of recurring themes. Groups understand themselves and others in the context of the 'them and us' axis. This exposes strategies which constitute social groups, their understanding of themselves as groups, and their suppositions about how people perceive them. Much of what was said identifies attitudes to time: what was and what used to be and what will be. This is grouped into attitudes to past, present and future.

Chapter seven is about analysis of meanings. It is concerned with "the twilight zone between history and memory" (Hobsbawm 1987.3). Here I examine the content of focus group generated data which triangulates oral testimonies identifying unusual events with verification from other sources. Independent narratives and texts are consulted to classify discrepancies of understanding and suppositions. It is also



concerned with events which make mining a thing of the past. I refocus on how people locate their ideas about mining in the past, developing the theme of historicisation of personal and interpersonal realities.

Chapter eight continues analysis of assembled materials and attempts to answer the questions posed in the theoretical chapters. Once again I am primarily concerned with the meanings and attributes proffered by respondents to focus group research. In chapter one I examined dimensions of a cultural 'turn' through engaging with arguments about the qualification and endorsement of high art in this vein. Focus group respondents engage with problems of art and representation and monumentality. These themes are examined in the context of the present. The central concerns of this chapter are how people see their culture now as it stands in relation to their own aspirations and those of exponents of art as cultural regenerator. As such it is concerned with relationships of power in cultural representations. It returns to questions of us and them; 'ourness' and indignation at what is perceived as the wrong which has been done to culture as a way of life. The 'them' who are identified with the destruction of the industrial work base can be conflated with the 'them' who are engaged in defining cultural projections. But 'they' have underestimated the miners. In keeping with the general theme of the thesis this chapter considers suppositions about representations, monumentality and memorial.

I conclude the thesis through a synthesis of the theories which have generated and underpinned my enquiry and the empirical data which it produced. I present ways in which people perceive themselves as participants in cultural processes and as carriers of culture into the future. This has parallels in how and what cultures are being

represented. I turn again to examine the aesthetic attributes associated with these representations and understandings.

“Miners’ strikes have had [a] way of posing larger questions: who is the nation anyway” (Thompson op. cit. p75) (Fig.<sup>intro:5</sup>).

### ***Conclusion and a note on the use of images***

This thesis is about culture at a time of profound change. It investigates what this culture means to people. My enquiry has its foundation in a quest for images. It stems from a visual investigation into difference. It uses visual images to elicit images in various forms from different points of view. These forms of image vary from my own photographs and drawings and those of other researchers into the social world who have used pictures to describe phenomena and experiences. Sociology rarely employs pictures, although they are an obvious form of describing the social. History presents pictures as evidence, and uses all forms of pictures available to it as evidence including drawings, paintings and engravings. These were not always created for historical use, but are acquired from a variety of sources.

In my research I deploy pictures to access other forms of information, which may also be described as images. These are the images which people hold, of themselves and others, of their experiences and their suppositions. Many of these are narrative descriptions which are rich in explanation about people, groups, events and experiences. I present some selections of narrative at length, primarily for their capacity to describe - to present images.

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<sup>intro:5</sup> Shaft men after the removal of the last cage: Easington, 1994.



Visual images, mostly generated by myself, were obtained for purposes other than as illustrations to this thesis. Some stand alone as objects in their own right, and are brought to my enquiry to invest it with a further dimension. Some images were obtained as documentary investigation of place, particularly those photographs taken underground around the time of colliery closures, or of events around that time. Several of these constitute historical documentary in their own right. Some images were obtained to illustrate specific points or inferences drawn in the thesis. Some are presented because they have congruencies with other visual materials or other image based parallels within the text. Each image is accorded with the same weighting and appears as close as possible to identifying text, which is indicated with chapter and image numbers, and captioned at the foot of the page. As they are presented all images are to be considered as documents in their own right.

## Chapter One

### THE PROBLEM OF CULTURE AND AESTHETICS

*Without doubt, some of the richest and most powerful and populous communities of the antique world, and some of the grandest personalities and events, have, to after and present times, left themselves entirely unbequeathed (Walt Whitman 1871).*

This thesis is concerned with approaches to culture. This chapter is about the different things that culture can mean in different contexts. It provides a theoretical framework for my research which is related to debates in the social sciences that are concerned with urban regeneration and the construction and deconstruction of identities (Jacobs 1961; Zukin 1982, 1992; Smith: 1986; Harvey 1986, 1990; Byrne 1989; Lash and Urry 1989; Lash 1990; Featherstone 1991; Shields 1991; Sassen 1991; Bianchini and Parkinson: 1993; Wódz, ed 1995; Westwood and Wiliams, eds 1997; Miles 1997).

I explore the claim made by agencies involved in effecting cultural change and groups which are seen to be central to the active dissemination and promotion of this change. These agencies can be described as cultural intermediaries. I argue that their activities, in spite of claims to cultural regeneration, are central to the termination of existing cultural forms. I examine this argument through an ethnography of cultural spaces in which one form of culture is used to drive out another. The thesis argues that the cultural forms which are being deployed in this way exert a hegemony over existing structures which is founded primarily in taste. The extirpation of existing cultural forms does not take account of their

variety and richness. In later chapters I will explore this cultural richness more fully.

My research works with some of the arguments of Bourdieu (1977, 1980, 1988, 1996) which concern taste, analyses which comprise descriptions of cultural consumption and a comparison of levels of cultural competence. These give particular reference to the consumption and distribution of the art element of culture as an index of cultural capital. Culturally based urban regeneration is characterised as integral to improvement of people's conditions and expectations. Such an improvement implies a qualitative exchange of something which exists for something which is better. I argue that this is not the case. At the time of significant cultural upheaval concomitant with the end of the mining industry in the North East many questions are raised about what kinds of culture ought to be resourced and what kinds of artefacts or ideas should be retained and cherished as culturally important.

My argument is that without understanding the culture which is being removed no claim to 'cultural regeneration' *per se* can properly be made. This thesis attempts to understand the industrial culture which is being replaced by applying questions to it that are applicable to the culture which is claiming to regenerate. This chapter is concerned with claims that are made by the culture which is doing the replacing. I propose to engage with some of the contradictions inherent within the project of cultural regeneration. The chapter is concerned with emerging cultural structures, and the hegemony which they seek to exert over the locally different. I investigate the hegemony exerted by this form of culture in

the context of personal taste. Definitions combat ambiguities. I identify the different uses of the terms culture, aesthetics and heritage. This leads to an investigation of culture as difference and culture as commodity.

### **Structure of this chapter**

I begin with a general discussion about culture and link this with observations about postmodern interest with the surface. This can be outlined in ambiguities about definitions and about culture as a mode of consumption. Much of what goes under the name of culture confounds art and its attendant problems of inclusion and exclusion and exclusivity of ownership. I investigate the problem of art as it is distanced from everyday life - a continuing problematic in my own personal vocation. A postmodern approach insists upon notions of the aestheticisation of everyday life. I investigate postmodern ideas and connect aesthetic notions with cultural definitions. These notions can be further examined in the context of taste and affordability. A further dimension which I intend to bring to this understanding relates to ambiguities attendant upon ideas about heritage. This is important to my enquiry because much of the subject matter relating to the past is distanced through its considerations under that rubric. I am concerned throughout with how culture creates distance, and hence exclusion. Returning to themes of what does and does not constitute culture I end the chapter with an investigation into different categories of culture as they are hierarchically differentiated in order of importance as 'high' and 'low'. This is the first of a series of problematic dichotomies which will be presented throughout the thesis.

## **PART ONE**

### **WHAT IS CULTURE?**

It is necessary to begin by giving definitions. As the word is variously used there are a great number of theories to choose from. Culture is tied up with numerous modes of thought: anthropological and ethnographic theories (Tylor 1871; Boas 1940; Malinowski 1944; Mead 1972; Hatch 1973; Geertz 1974; Appadurai 1991, 1996); historical theories, with particular reference to cultural history and the history of ideas or philosophy, geography and cultural studies (Collingwood 1936; Williams 1958, 1962; Lowenthal 1985; deCerteau 1988; Fiske 1989; Hewison 1991; Chaney 1979, 1993, 1994; Samuel 1994; De Kerckhove 1995; Jameson 1998; Crang 1998); sociological (Featherstone 1995; Martindale 1961; Klein 1965; Wolff 1982; Szczepanski 1993; Lash and Urry 1994; Swiatkiewicz 1995; Wodz 1995;); in art criticism and urban design (Read 1931; Lynch 1960; Berger 1977; Fuller 1983; Hughes 1990; Bourdieu and Darbel 1991). The list indicates that various intellectual disciplines are both increasingly fecund in the way of proffering definitions, and give considerable attention to this fertile field of enquiry. Crang (1998) noted that by the 1950s there were over a hundred and fifty definitions of the word culture to choose from.

The wider sense in which culture is set in the fields of anthropological, historical, and sociological studies, considers virtually all aspects of human life (Kim 1995). Boas considered cultures in their many layered and interrelated entirety. For Tylor it included “knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits.” My broad definition encompasses the social, artistic and scientific *heritage* of a society, and the communication of values and information



from previous generations through behaviour, including rite and ritual, codes of distinction, attitudes, knowledge, ideas, taxonomies, associations, scientific texts and artefacts, tools, buildings, works of art (Krippendorf 1986; Jary and Jary 1991).

These codes are, in part, responsive to environmental conditions, and are framed by, and continue to respond to these conditions in an evolutionary way. Knowledge and understanding of culture is acquired through a variety of complex processes. To Crang cultures are systems of beliefs and values that give meaning to ways of life and are produced and reproduced in material and symbolic forms. He is concerned with the acquisition of meaning for specific places. I defer from biological or agronomic references, although Williams (1976:77) makes the observation that its early uses it “was a noun of process: the tending *of* something, basically crops or animals”. Viniculture and apiculture are socially transmitted parts of way of life. Furthermore essentially they are about a significant element of culture which concerns this thesis the aspect which concerns nurture is central to the practical projection of people into the future. Sowing seeds may be considered as transcending the present into the future as either scientifically endowed practice or an act of faith. In chapter two I will investigate participation in the future as Arendt proposes ‘natalities’, and in later empirical chapters I present data from focus groups which indicate the sense of the future, or transmission of culture across time into the future, as an essential component of mining cultural life.

## **Culture as an analytical device which defines difference**

For Appadurai anthropology is an archive of lived actualities (1996.11). He explores the concepts of public culture in the context of sociocultural anthropology which present an approach to problems of globalization and consumption. Important to this thesis central to the difference in the form of culture which I am trying to underline is Appadurai's replacing the noun 'culture' with the adjectival form 'cultural'. This removes the association of the word with physical objects. The most valuable feature of this use is the introduction of the concept of difference as a contrastive rather than substantive property of certain things. Difference becomes a useful heuristic device: it can be framed as an aid to analysing points of contrast between various categories. Describing the *cultural* dimension of something thus stresses the idea of situated difference: difference in relation to something local, embodied, and significant (p13). The emphasis is on its dimensionality. Culture as a dimension of human discourse employs difference to generate diverse conceptions of group identity. This notion of culture as differentiating group identity aligns the concept of culture with ideas of community. 'Imagined communities' as discussed by Anderson, developed when the nation

“... is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives an image of their community” (1983.6).

## **Culture as commodity. The logic of late capitalism**

Urban regeneration which adopts culture as a central theme of its strategy exemplifies a turn away from culture as process and towards culture as commodity. The intensification of the commodity aspect of culture and the need

for cultural outlets to amplify consumption is a symptom of the growth in importance of the culture industry. The term 'culture industry' was, first used by Adorno and Horkheimer in 1944 to differentiate culture that rises spontaneously from the masses with "products which are tailored for consumption by masses". Elements of everyday practical life which were taken for granted which were not part of high culture are now cultural products central to the commodity experience. These include facets as disparate as cuisine, architecture, interior decorating and gardening. Each of these may have been construed as belonging to cultural practices but as elements of consumption they represent a breakdown in the distinction between culture and the society that produces it. Another product which emanates from everyday life and has become a commodity is heritage. Approaches to this commodity form are discussed later in this chapter.

This commodification of culture corresponds to a phase of late capitalism. Jameson (1991) identifies postmodern architecture, for example, negatively, as a product of 'invisible' capitalism in which social activities are turned into economic ones with the continuing need for commodification. This cultural commodification is part of a process which he identifies as a triumph of the logic of capitalism. In this logic cultural becomes economic, and the economic and political are turned "into so many forms of culture". He explores this dramatic "dedifferentiation" which formulates postmodernism as the cultural representation of multinational capitalism. Through an analysis of contemporary art, architecture, and film, he outlines the principal features of postmodernism, including the emergence of a consciousness which conflates past and future into a perpetual present, the reduction of the collective human record to empty images

of nostalgia as a crisis of historicity, and the rise of pastiche which draws material from past cultures at random.

### **Postmodern cultural forms**

Heller and Fehér write that the “primary concern for those living the present as postmodern is that they live in the present while at the same time, both temporally as well as spatially, they are *being after*”. The individual electing self description as ‘postmodern’ supposes herself to be apart from recent lived experience.

“Politically speaking, those who have chosen to understand themselves as postmodern are in the first place after the ‘grand narrative’ ... Postmodernity is in every respect ‘parasitic’ on modernity; it lives and feeds on its achievements and on its dilemmas. What *is* new is the novel historical consciousness developed in *post-histoire*; the spreading feeling that we are permanently going to be in the present and, at the same time, after it” (1988 pp 1 - 2).

The much vaunted word ‘postmodern’ as a concept generally refers to a preference of styles or a mood rather than any specified philosophy. In this frame it is virtually meaningless. For Hobsbawm postmodernism “was [sic] not so much a ‘movement’ as a denial of any pre-established criteria of judgment and value in the arts, or indeed the possibility of such judgments” (1994.516). As a perspective postmodernism denies the existence of any universal truth or standards or foundations for truth, bringing notions of truth and reality into question. Truth is subsumed to relevancy to individuals or cultural programmes: to the purpose to which it is put. This denial is defined by Lyotard as “incredulity towards metanarratives” (1984.xxiv) or the elementary suppositions through which our experience and knowledge is mediated. Metanarratives, according to

Waugh, are “large-scale theoretical interpretations purportedly of universal application”(1992.1).

As a system of beliefs postmodernism is the rearticulation of truth about the self. Discourse is dislocated to the edges of personal preference. What comes to constitute truth is what is relative to the individual or group which holds that particular belief, reducing all constructions to personal or cultural bias. This orthodoxy does not present the locus for common discourse or understanding differences. Hughes (1990) takes this project to task as an exercise in bricolage. Through exalting cut and paste multiculturalism, postmodernism destroys the shared, the particular. For Himmelfarb this assimilation dehumanises

“the people who are the subjects of history. To pluralize and particularize history to the point where people have no history in common is to deny the common humanity of all people, whatever their sex, race, class, religion” (1994.154).

As process postmodernism secures the commodification of all forms of experience to the merely consumable. Eagleton (cited in Buck Morss below 1989.125) writes that “[a]esthetics [...] is a form of cognition, achieved through taste, touch, hearing, seeing, smell - the whole corporeal sensorium”. Through postmodern appropriation experiences are reified as the final commodity form. The cultural dominance of the mass media is underlined when our identities are assembled from mass media images. People, groups, societies, cultures, become constructs of the producers in cultural industries.

### **Postmodern aesthetics**

The notion that postmodernism is concerned with the collapse of the divisions between high and low art wherein everyday life is aestheticised can be identified

as a core problematic in cultural politics. In reality the form of aestheticisation in which the axis around which this distancing can be identified as the monetary value of the 'cultural object' where culture is determined by things rather than identities or affiliations. Rojec writes that with postmodernity

“everything becomes perceived and explained in terms of culture. Class wars [...] are replaced with style wars. In conditions where appearance is said to have replaced substance as the focus of association, practice and identity, there is an obvious sense in which the quality of appearance comes to preoccupy social consciousness. Hence the pre-eminence of aesthetic questions in discussions of postmodernity” (1995.165).

In this sense the ill definition of culture is used to obfuscate the real field of contest. But this is in name only. Conditions and contestations go on the same but they are subsumed to a realm of appearance which reduces their ontological status as difference to that of a qualitative index of taste. The aestheticisation of morality is seen as far reaching and indicative of the trajectory of the political right. Historical narrative as a cultural information, then, is a casualty of the continuing history of the “struggle for monopolistic power to impose the legitimate categories of perception and appreciation” (Bourdieu 1996.74). In reality engagement in cultural industries qualifies certain players to endorse normative aesthetic judgements which impinge on cultural norms.

Aesthetics is an attempt to systematise the experience and understanding of beauty in its various forms. Rojec explains the concern of aesthetics with both the perception and the philosophic investigation of beauty. It has a direct association with art insofar as art is concerned with the search for beauty or truth.

Porteous notes that

“... all aesthetic questions involve *preference*. Aesthetics also involves the art of *discrimination*, of making *judgements*. With the growing ability to

distinguish good from bad, one develops *taste*. Tastes may be collective, or intersubjective, but their verification can only be subjective; we may be told that a sculpture is beautiful but we can only tell if it is indeed so by looking at it ourselves” (1996.21).

Crucial to the understanding of aesthetics in the context of aestheticisation of life is the etymology which is recalled by Buck-Morss from the ancient Greek

“... *aisthitikos* [...] ‘perceptive by feeling’. *Aisthisis* is the sensory experience of perception. The original field of aesthetics is not art but reality - corporeal, material nature (1989.125).

The aestheticisation of everyday life, so called, serves the opposite function. This ‘turn’ can be identified as it is characterised by Appadurai who proposes a scheme in which this aestheticisation is articulated around particular distinctions or change in perspectives of imagination (1996.5-9). For him these are the distinction between exceptional and daily practice in which imagination has broken out of the expressive space of art, myth, and ritual to become a part of the everyday life of ordinary people; in the distinction between imagination and fantasy which is expressed through desecularisation or a return to religiosity; and the distinction between individual and collective senses of imagination, where imagination is now the property of collectives. I deal with each of these in turn. First of all imagination has always been at the core of people’s responses to the problems of the everyday world, and has never been restricted to the realm of art. Furthermore in many societies ritual has been, and remains, at the core of everyday life. Important to this thesis are the second and third aspects which he describes. Evidence of the aesthetic dimension of mysticism can be found in an upsurge in the availability of ‘new-age’ commodities and literature. *Feng-shui* manuals and accoutrements, for example, can be obtained in every high street. To all intents and purposes this is harmless; but noticeably it fills a gap or

absence in the lives of its consumer. The third aspect is the most disturbing. We may all be assaulted with the same globally available images but our assimilation of these into imagination is informed by deeper cultural stimuli. Where these are founded in common experiences a degree of concurrence is acceptable. This becomes disconcerting when responses or attitudes are patterned by unfounded assumptions. Ultimately the turn to aestheticisation is a turn away from corporeal responses to the spiritual realm of the 'aesthete', where preferences are to do with more than taste. Visual perception is important to this discussion as an integral part of belonging. Seeing, recognising and knowing are attributes of familiarity with what is known and can be communicated. Parekh notes that "our sense of reality is profoundly shaped by the existential fact that we belong to the world of appearances" (1981:85). I will have continued recourse to aesthetic dimensions as qualities of understanding and contextualisation of self and identity.

### **Private pessimism and public optimism**

Having examined theories which underpin an approach to postmodern aesthetics I turn here to their consequences in relation to hidden frameworks of power. Within the context of emergent postmodern cultural trends Jenks (1997) examines the broad Foucaultian framework of power in which "mechanisms by which the categories of public and private are constituted within the frameworks of postmodern fragmentation of human identity" by considering the disparate contributions of Foucault and Arendt to the notions of power in relation to postmodern identities. Foucault's (1990) discussion of power is not essentially



pessimistic: even within authoritarian power relations there is countervailing resistance. As knowledge constitutes, and is constituted by, power relations, increased knowledge and information necessarily transforms the relations of political and social oppression. Yet the potential for any individual to alter this power structure, described by Foucault as social hegemony, seems at best random. Citing Norris (1992) he notes the inherent pessimism in postmodern academic culture, such as Baudrillard's denial of the Gulf War, Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* that "... the possibilities of human political action are hindered by an epistemic nihilism [and that] intellectuals who believe that the subject has died and who believe only in discourses and representations (as opposed to material, corporeal events) will find it increasingly hard to function within the political realm." This pessimism is also noted by the artist Hans Haacke, in conversation with Pierre Bourdieu, as an eschewal of responsibility to participative practice

"What [Baudrillard] and his disciples have lost is a sense of history and social conflict, which, in spite of the fireworks of the latest intellectual fashions, do not dissolve in the virtual. In short they have lost a sense for the real. The ecstasy of communication, a quasi mystical state, is expected to deliver them from the shitty reality of the everyday. This miracle is to occur in the style of the Baron of Münchhausen, through the very communication practised by the faithful. There is no reality, no reason to fight ..."(Bourdieu and Haacke 1995.37).

Developing this argument he adds that "in the practical world, the evacuation of the political is tantamount to inviting whoever wants to occupy the vacuum that's left behind, including political gangs like the National Front" (p39).

At this point I redefine the argument that culture as lived experience can stand against agencies of social control, and conversely control can be exerted through

cultural practices. Zagała (in Szczepański, ed. 1993) explores the dynamics of cultural hegemony, pointing to Bourdieu (1977a) where cultural signs and symbols, together with their interpretations and meanings, are imposed yet hidden from consciousness. The processes through which culture is reproduced represent mechanisms of social structure. This critical element of culture lead to another concept which Bourdieu develops - that of 'hidden symbolic violence' (Szczepański 1993; Świątkiewicz 1995). This needs to be hidden because if the nature of symbolic violence inherent in cultural hegemony is understood it can be challenged for what it is. Forms of cultural reproduction which deploy aesthetic criteria for legitimisation can hide inside of highly visible structures and remain unchallenged - especially where the aesthetic criteria for judging these forms is obscure or competency is non existent.

### **Non neutral aesthetics**

The tragedy of this cultural turn to aesthetics is all the more apparent where art is harnessed to programmes which avowedly de-differentiate. Donoghue underlines the concern which I have attempted to articulate through the series of arguments about the location of culture and participation in relation to aesthetics. Art can attempt to obtain to value neutrality - or it can be deployed as a tool for cultural domination.

“[Art is] antagonistic not to reality, but to any and every official knowledge of it. This antagonism should be maintained whether the official determination of society is bourgeois liberal, Marxist, aristocratic or Fascist. That’s why aesthetics must never degenerate into politics or psychology. Both are reductive and play into the hands of a society which likes nothing better than to reduce the arts to the form of knowledge it already enforces” (1983.59).

This is not to argue that this is a sudden departure for art from a pure political neutrality. Art has always enjoyed the dubious patronage and close consort of power and has always been an instrument of established powers from the time of Michaelangelo and before. The difference I am describing here is a shift in emphasis from the mission of art itself to the vision of the broker of power. Who is this person harnessing art to political power, and what does she want?

### **The production of belief**

“The art business, a trade in things that have no price, belongs to a class of practices which [affecting disinterest conceals the fact that ... ] the cultural businessman is at one and the same time the person who exploits [the artist’s] labours and ‘consecrates a product’” (Bourdieu 1993.74 -7). The role of the art trader is taken up by “the art businessman accedes to this acknowledged power to transubstantiate ... guiding the buyers’ choice” with the power to spend, and therefore to valorize. The ownership of the *means* to cultural representations is the power to impose the dominant definition of artistic and social reality.

The anxiety of corporations and local authorities to participate as corporate funders to access resources is outlined in such publications as the directory detailing funding for European cultural activities (Garonzik 1996). Corporate identities are presented with initiatives, ab/using art, subsuming art to imperatives of corporations “... in innovative ways to support the social causes chosen by [the] company” or political system. Hughes (1995) points out that across France’s political spectrum there is a concurrence that one per cent of the national budget should be earmarked for culture.

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Cultural Funding in Europe reflects the disparate cultural programme interests of select independent funders and aims to help stimulate increased co-operation with respect to foundation and corporate funding in the cultural sector. The fifth EFC directory, European Foundation Centre Profiles, includes detailed profiles of 112 foundations and corporate funders that are members of the EFC, with total annual expenditures in this volume amounting to 1.65 billion ECU (Hughes 1995. *Time/url*).

With such funds available to arts programmes a significant question can be asked: who decides who gets access to these resources? (Fig 1:1)

### **Culture Industries**

Cultural reproduction is mediated in specific practices which require resources for their realisation. An artist may draw pictures with nothing more than a pencil and paper, books may be written with pen and paper, but once the drawings are drawn or the books are written they need to be exhibited or published and distributed in order to have any communicative effect. Museums and art galleries, publishing houses, book shops and libraries go to create the infrastructure of which designates the production of art as a form of cultural politics. Contemporary culture industries - book publishers, the music business, the film industry, and radio and television - are the product of the technical inventions that made most of them possible (Becker 1982.122-3). These culture industries are, according to Hirsch "profit-seeking firms producing cultural products for national distribution" and the cultural industry system is "comprised of all organisations engaged in the process of filtering new products and ideas as they flow from 'creative' personnel in the technical subsystem to the managerial,



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institutional and societal levels of organisation” (1972.642). These organisations deal with very large, unpredictable audiences. No one knows with any assurance what this mass audience will wish to pay for, or what cultural appreciation will inform their choices, in spite of the efforts of market researchers. Cultural industries adopt a number of strategies to deal with the uncertainty of audience taste. People working in the mass media can influence sales. For Hirsch the process involves the “co-optation of mass-media gate keepers” (loc cit.).

### **Cultural gatekeepers**

Bourdieu and Darbel (1991.41) investigate the uneven distribution of cultural access, privileging a minority with both the means of transmitting knowledge and the means to understand, and the “instruments which imply familiarity with art”. In their discussion of elitism pictorial competence can be employed as an index of snobbery or a means of assessing cultural values. The themes surrounding the question of whether it is proper for the interests of one social class to exert influence as arbiters of taste, is explored by Sorrel (in Hanfling 1992. pp 297 - 347) where “accreditors of art seen to be drawn predominantly from a single, and privileged class”. Here the central question of authority in the licensing of taste is raised, and concomitantly who deems what cultural item or practice to be important. Hoggart (1970) discusses the worthies who are the mediators of cultural worth, describing them as the ‘*Guardians*’, and distinguishes them from the group that Coleridge called the ‘*Clerisy*’: “The guardians - senior clergy, leader writers, presidents of national voluntary bodies, head masters.” The clerisy

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Fig. <sup>1</sup> Work of art sited in the River Wear at Sunderland.

maintained the cultural standards of a society by virtue of their disciplined intellectual and imaginative energy. Hoggart's *Guardians* have come to be superseded by a new wave of gatekeepers who are informed by a different set of values.

Becker (1982) discusses the status of objects that merit nurture as cultural forms. Because artists obtain privileged status in society the licensing of art and artists must be carefully controlled to prevent those it does not license from practising. The conventions that inform distinctions of what does and does not constitute art and who is and is not an artist - the conferring of status for appreciation or ratification as art - is a process at the core of the problem of cultural reproduction. Sociological analysis may identify certain agents acting as (self-appointed) representatives, the core personnel entitled to designate the status of art on certain objects or activities. These agents act on behalf of the art world to provide for its continuing existence.

For Lewis the definers of art "...controlled by a middle-class establishment [are given] a great deal of power." One of the most important of these concerns the question of value. It represents the main criterion for deciding which activities are supported by public subsidy and investment, and which are not. As the 'cultural industries' are the forms of culture which the majority of people now use and through which the world is mediated - radio, television, video, cable, satellite, records and tapes, books and magazines ... "*The battle for the cultural industries really is a battle for people's hearts and minds*" (1990.4) (my emphasis).

## Culture and competition / the cultural sector

Through cultural regeneration the future of deindustrialised spaces is linked to specific sectors of interest in the culture industries - broadly speaking areas of media and the visual and performing arts. As a consequence of the escalating cultural market privatisation of cultural intervention is increasingly common. Consultants become cultural entrepreneurs taking charge of cultural manifestations. These manifestations exaggerate boundaries through exclusion across bands of social strata. I argue that through this process no mechanism exists for the representation of existing cultural interest. Graffiti on the walls proclaims that “artists are the storm troopers of gentrification” (Bianchini, in Bianchini and Parkinson 1993:202). Bianchini further explores the theme of cultural regeneration as a means of pitting the emergent consumable culture against the existing cultural reality with the following example. In 1986 composer Lloyd Webber and a business investor decided to establish another musical theatre for a Lloyd Webber musical, the ‘*Phantom of the Opera*’. They chose as the site the *Flora*, in Hamburg, a building that had in the 1920s been a workers entertainment and variety hall, but had at that time was used as a department store. Located within an urban renewal area, it was reconstructed for its new purpose. Protests by neighbourhood residents, craftsmen and shopkeepers fearing gentrification led to a series of harsh and violent clashes between these groups and politicians and urban planners, which were not resolved by the use of the police force to secure the start of the reconstruction work. I do not see this bid for hegemony as a harmless bit of artiness. I see it as emblematic of a process



which is engaging with real and powerful social systems of domination and construction of reality.

### **The sublime of the ridiculous**

Arts businessmen, as described by Bourdieu, are often publicists who court publicity (as distinct from populism) to valorize their own concepts of culture. The question of whether it is right for the tastes or interests to exert influence is further brought into question as the most significant accreditor of art in Britain in the last decade who has set cultural standards for over a decade in Britain and consequently the global art market, is Charles Saatchi. His importance as arbiter of taste was endorsed by “celebrities” who “flocked (my emphasis) to gaze at a cow’s head and a dead shark” (Verity E in Timms, Bradley and Hayward eds. 1999). These cultural commentators included TV presenters, fashion designers, and Pop and TV producers. Images from the Saatchi ordained ‘Brit Pack’ of artists trend towards the facile, making them easy to adapt as newspaper cartoons. Their imagery is readily presentable to pastiches of themselves. This power was displayed at an exhibition held at the Royal Academy in September 1997 called ‘*Sensation. Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*’. It included a painting by artist Marcus Harvey which became the exhibition’s clarion call. The painting of a notorious child murderer, in which the artist set out to investigate the “dubious glamour” afforded to her, created considerable offence to the public at large. The newspapers in their vociferous criticism of this work were further endorsing its content through advertising the event. They have always had a way with sensationalising mass murder and mass death as a spectacle for consumption. Disasters, quantified in terms of numbers killed, sell

newspapers. This phenomenon is further identified and investigated in chapter three. The offence was further amplified by newspapers and stood as a shibboleth of art criticism. The director of exhibitions at the RA stood firm in his insistence that “good art often shocks” citing Goya’s *Disasters of War* as a precedent. Sewel in the *Evening Standard* (cited in Timms et al, op. cit.) noted at the time that

“Saatchi (it is claimed) leads the world in taste and connoisseurship - and his chosen artists are the cutting edge [...] Saatchi is an advertising man of whom none is more skilled in the slick business of the message of the moment which is precisely what he respects in contemporary art, and therefore he buys it. He is not interested in layers of meaning, in contemplation, empathy, catharsis or the elevation of the spirit ...”

He goes on to describe the works in the show as the “playthings of the pretentious panjandarums” who run the art show. The controversy that surrounded the exhibition ensured its success. Three hundred thousand members of the (£7) paying public brought the RA its largest commercial success ever: netting around £20,000,000. Formal taste (as in ‘bad taste’) is subjugated in this instance to a moral perspective which is annexed by economic expedient. The Academy, more than any institution capable of endorsing aesthetic quality, aligns itself to an emergent set of cultural values far removed from its origins. Heritage is redefined in this single *volte-face*.

I present this as an example which underlines the ‘non neutral’ deployment of aesthetics as aesthetics. An ‘important’ exhibition such as *Sensation* endorses commodity status on the participating artists in the same way that “postmodernism has learned to love the commodity, embracing it as both subject and condition with an eagerness which betrays, perhaps, a deeper anxiety”

(Wood 1996.257). Posmodernism is seen as the locus for the development of the “guiltless embrace of art and money”. Haacke notes, however, that

“it would be unfair to accuse the artists (and their following) who made a fortune under these circumstances [having the price of their work soar through Saatchi’s interest] of having consciously promoted the policies of the people in power. However, I believe that, at the level of the climate, there was a mutually profitable collaboration”(Bourdieu and Haacke 1995.100).

### **Buying into the art economy**

I present here an example of exercise of personal taste for art assumed under the aegis of public office. The city of Newcastle planning initiative in the 1960s was led by local council leader Smith who attempted the use of high art to combat what he described as the “besetting sin of parochialism”. He defended his approach to the exposure of ordinary people with art in his autobiography (1970). Unleashing the artist who’s credentials were established through his teaching post at Newcastle University - the local Labour Party’s dog of cultural war - “Pasmore *was let loose* in the Civic Centre Rates Hall” (p140, my emphasis).

“The provocative result was planned intentionally and responsibly. I wanted people to go in there, albeit reluctantly, to pay their rates, and to come face to face with Pasmore’s abstract art. *I willed them to react actively*. As they fingered their cheque books or opened their purses, I longed for them to snarl ‘this is the end,’ not because I am a masochist, but because I believe that this is what the relationship between the artist and the individual is all about. People have eventually got to face the question of what priorities they consider it worth paying for. Democracy may in this way become reconciled to its role as patron of the arts. Certainly those of us concerned with Newcastle Civic Centre were at pains to see that finances were available to permit the commissioning of works of art. Moreso, I suspect, than did many elected bodies in Europe...the arts for the people, of the people, and must be constantly communicated with the people. We have not yet achieved this in the North, but we are building up a credit balance” (op cit. 141).

Smith envisages art as a cultural banking system with which he can enrich an impoverished local population. Smith reminds his ratepayers of the paucity of their own potential contribution. Located in the public space art serves to remind the contributor of their status as ignoramuses. In this relationship between local people and imposed high art the only contribution the local makes is through paying their rates. The notion of art's capacity to enhance cultural capital is refuted by the artist Ad Reindardt (in Harrison and Wood 1962.806), in an essay in which he described art:

“... art is art-as-art and everything else is everything else. [...] Art is not what is not art. [...] *Art is not the spiritual side of business*” (my emphasis).

Valorizing a particular artist and art style Smith does not present communicative space but his own vision mediated through another man's paintbrush.

It is unfair to criticise this plea for, if not turn to, culture out of context. In its time Smith's enthusiasm may have been a catalyst to break from the inertia of local authority operatives. In spite of the crudity of Smith's articulation Pasmore's art in the Rates Hall testifies, like the art of churches, to the cultural aspirations of an age. The large open space presents a sense of commitment to the progress of secular openness: an end to clutter—‘closing the door on past dreariness’. Around this time Hoggart was able to remark that

“The great body of urban working class people are at last beginning to leave the dark, dirty back streets and the imaginative horizons which the economies of life there encouraged. There is no need at this stage to look back in nostalgia. If we remember the physical conditions for these families - many of them our own families - fifty years ago, then we have a lot to thank our radical forefathers for. Our children ought to be healthier, and more opportunities to develop their gifts, than our parents ever had” (1970.30).

Hoggart identified the British left's “bull headed parochialism towards artistic matters”, where they would associate anything to do with art as belonging to

“upper class gentility”. The foundation is laid here for an emergent hermeneutic, an interpreter class. The regenerative qualities of art, with spiritual undercurrents, which Smith sought are obtained at a price. Barzun quotes a lecture given by Henry James in 1852 in which he broadly characterizes artefacts made through artistic endeavour as “all those products which do not confess the parentage of either necessity or duty”. He contrasts this luxury with everyday life, and in doing so outlines the arrogance of Smith’s supposition.

“When I go to pay my house rent, I leave my human love at home with my wife and my children and come into purely inhuman relations with my payee. I hurry into his presence and hurry out, careless of the thousand noble qualities that may glow in his bosom, or animate his voice, because all these things are overlaid and defaced by the spurious and unequal relations established between us. Everyone would be greatly happier if being brought into the world without his own consent he might be permitted to live in it without the continued consent of someone else” (1974.77).

I am identifying this attitude with a turn to religiosity. As though an aesthetic is being imposed as some form of palliative for a missing dimension. For Barzun

“reconciliation through beauty is almost bourgeois complacency. It damns the world too directly” (1974.46).

Smith had, as an antidote to the poverty of ideas in 1958, tried hard to introduce artists as catalysts in the creation of urban homes and landscapes - the mystique of professionalism won the day. He recalled seeing Pasmore in Peterlee: “To watch his houses develop was to immerse oneself in visual poetry.” Peterlee at this time was being built to house mining communities. It was a vast mining village.

## Part Two

### **FURTHER AMBIGUITIES - HERITAGE AND VAGUENESS**

I have examined the shortfall, as a consequence of the absence of ontological rigour, through which concepts like culture can be misappropriated or redesignated for political use. This short section introduces the idea that 'heritage', like culture, is a contested concept. In identifying different modes of understanding culture another ambiguity which is central to this argument attends definitions of heritage when the history of a place becomes its 'heritage' (Fig 1:2). Where market values are the governing concerns of the heritage industry the culture of experience takes on the specific form of entertainment, particularly through tourism. In chapter eight I present material from focus groups which discusses the possible regenerative capacity of culture as the raw material of tourism. When the sense of place affords the opportunity for commercialism industrial heritage becomes an accommodating fiction. The sense of place falls victim to anti-historical approaches to lived reality.

The problem of the uncertainty about what heritage is and who it is *for*. The so called 'heritage debate', is not so much about what heritage is but about *who gets to inherit what*. Samuel (1994) considers "Heritage [as] a term which has been serviceable to the local authorities, who have used it to promote town improvement schemes and to extract government money for service sector jobs."

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Fig 1:2 Miners collect a pulley wheel for preservation as 'heritage'.

Heritage is defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as “what is or may be inherited; [...] portion allotted to anyone [...]”

There is more to the ‘heritage’ of former coal mining areas than entertainment. These places ‘inherit’ a series of man made geohazards, many of which are potentially lethal. These include subsidence and subsidence induced fissures (Wigham 2000); the migration of mine gasses - particularly ‘black-damp’ or carbon-dioxide-rich and oxygen-deficient air, with the potential to asphyxiate - and flammable or explosive concentrations of methane (Robinson 2000); and the contamination of ground waters (Sherwood and Younger 1994; Banks et al 1997). As a significant proportion of mining has occurred beneath the urban environment for many commentators the impact of these hazards on urban populations is inevitable (Culshaw, McCann and Donnelly 2000). Robinson notes the methane related appearance of flames issuing from the ground in Gateshead in 1988 from a long abandoned shaft, and a similar incident in a school yard less than half a mile distant in 1989, and black-damp incidents in Northumberland especially one at Widdrington Station in 1995 which led to a man’s death.

### **The Heritage Industry**

In defining the past as commodity the ‘heritage industry’ does not differentiate between elite and working class experience. Heritage incorporates all forms of experiences for consumption. Popular experience, especially of the more distant past, is locked up in museums where it is further reduced to the object of commercialised consumption. Lowenthal (1985) notes that when the past is enjoyed nostalgically it does not need to be taken seriously. This distance from

the past eschews the notion that the past can still shape people's ideas and actions.

A correspondence is implied between the absence of the reproduction of regional heritage and its informing narratives and the presentation of culture in the form of theme park. Samuel (1994), in his defence of heritage efforts against its critics who promote the concept of its essential conservatism, provides a key to the potential deployment of cultural heritage as a strategy for regeneration. Critics variously consider heritage a 'project' - a bid for hegemony, a way of recruiting knowledge to the purpose of power - reactionary chic, trafficking history and commodifying the past - being "crypto feudal" it constitutes a "vast system of outdoor relief for decayed gentlemen". For Samuel the reclamation of heritage, and one way to account for its popularity is "to see it as an attempt to *escape* from class. Instead of heredity it offers a sense of place" (p246). He quotes Hewison (1991)

"A new museum is not only one of the conventional ways of re-using a redundant mill or factory. It is treated as a form of investment that will regenerate the local economy that has decayed as a result of the closure of that mill or factory. That is why it is relatively easy to find capital to set up a new museum. Museum projects are useful means of cleaning up a derelict environment prior to commercial investment"(op cit. 242).

The museum stands as an emblem for the emergent project of cultural regeneration. What the museum rarely represents is the causes of the mill's closure. Museums can acquire huge sums for capital projects. The association of (particularly recent) historical reality with meaningful notions and understandings about the past and its relation to the present are relinquished as nostalgia is harnessed in discrete historical parcels to the service of an invented usable past.



## **Association with heritage and representation**

I am drawing a parallel here between the hegemony asserted over culture through arts business practices and those associated with the heritage industry. An important feature of the art world is that once licensees have conferred the honorific status of art on an object it is given the veneration to which it aspires (Dickie 1974). Systems of patronage connects the aspirations of patrons with the art which is produced. This argument impacts directly with the heritage debate where what is represented is at the discretion of the museum directorate. What is and is not culture - what is and is not heritage - what is and is not aesthetically relevant. These may be articulated around and reflect systems of personal taste or the aspirations or fashions of a particular time.

“Some people occupy institutional positions which allow them, de facto, to decide what will be acceptable. Museum directors, for instance, could decide whether photography was an art because they could decide whether or not to exhibit photographs in their museums” (Becker 1982 pp150-151).

Some cultural forms are deemed too vulgar as candidates for art status. This introduces pivotal conceptual definitions to the thesis: the concepts of high and low culture.

### **Part Three**

#### **HIGH CULTURE AND LOW CULTURE**

In the following short section I introduce a dichotomous concept which may serve to define attitudes to culture by reconsidering the differences in consumed and lived culture in the context of high and low. For Burke (1978) there existed two cultural traditions, the ‘great’ and the ‘little’, and the ‘great’ was that of the educated minority - it was communicated in Latin - it took itself seriously - it

was an instrument of the exertion of power. The 'little' conversely, was the vulgar. Noting the dichotomy represented as size stresses importance of one against the other. Big versus little, high versus low, the sacerdotal versus the scatological. The 'folk culture' which was embodied in the talk and practice of the marketplace and the popular fairs through the Middle Ages, which mocked the officially serious with scatology, blasphemy, and erotic humour could find no place in the official, religious art of the time.

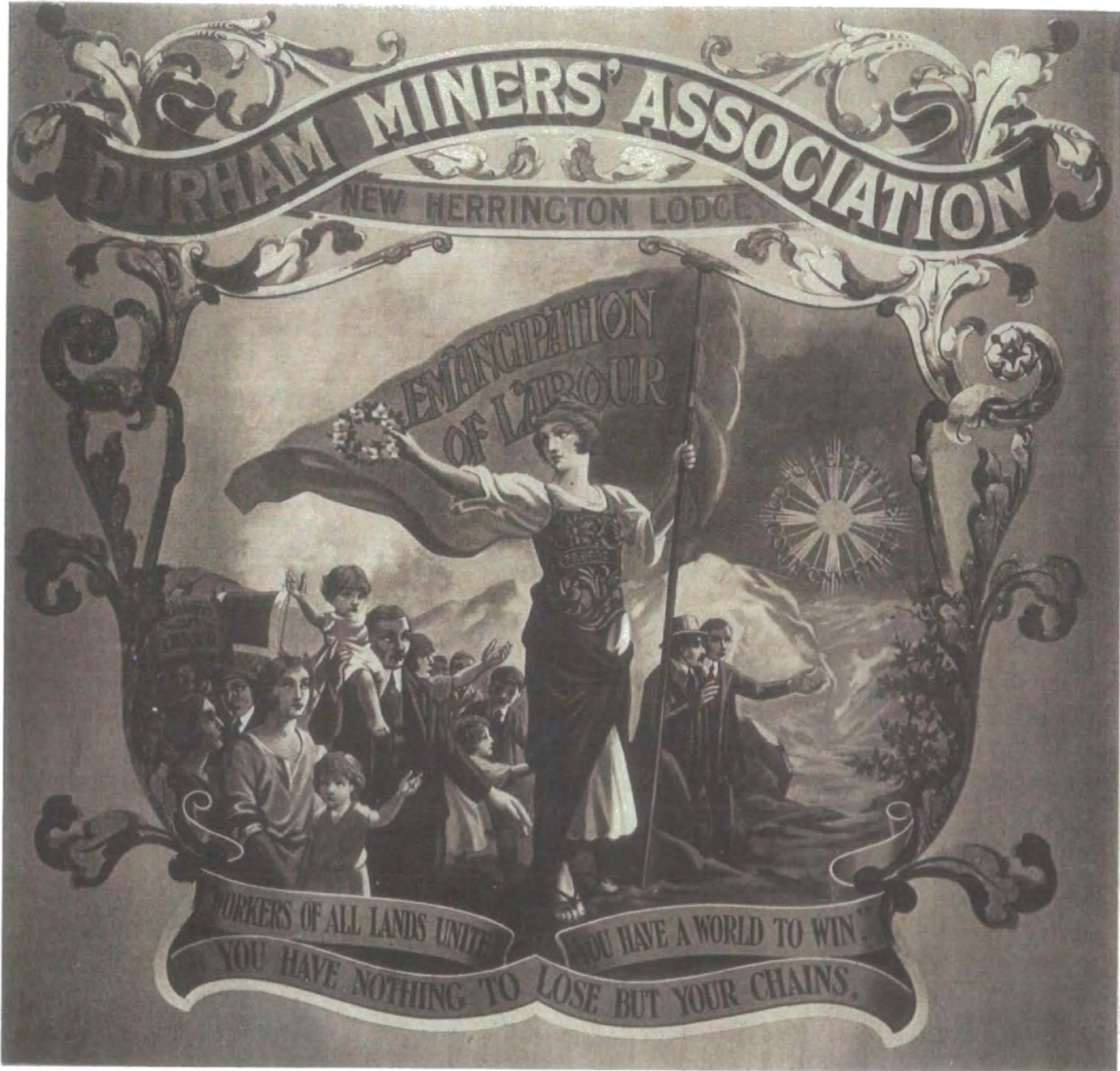
### **Exclusion stemming from elitist activities and pursuits**

If high culture is deployed in the maintenance of boundaries for the preservation of elites then this poses questions about what qualifies certain people to belong to elites and exclusive power structures. Exclusivity functions through the power of a particular group to deny access to "reward, or positive life chances, to another group on the basis of criteria which the former seek to justify." High cultural production and reproduction is a clear example of the location at which these relationships have always existed. Those between the producers and the consumers, and people for whom the product has no meaning or relevance. Both high cultural practices and global information technologies appear to deal with commodities. Said asks

"Who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances?"(1982.135).

Said cites Gramsci concerning this central issue of access that all ideas, philosophies, views and texts aspire to the consent of their consumer. This introduces the theme of hegemony. Gramsci articulated the concept of hegemony as the willing acceptance of one social group's or class domination and control





by another and the dominating group's main vehicle of control. This domination of subordinate classes and groups through the elaboration and penetration of ideology (ideas and assumptions) into their common sense and everyday practice.

### **Folk culture and material culture. An argument for art**

Folk cultures create material objects which are classed as art. According to Boas (1955) art springs from the practice of making utilitarian objects. For Read the most

“amazing characteristic of peasant art is its universality. The same motives, the same modes of abstraction, the same form and the same technique seem to spring up out of the soil in every part of the world” (1931:65).

The term motive here is adaptive to meanings both as indicating imagery and purpose. (Fig. 1:3) Disparate societies are drawn to art practices in homologous purposeful ways, and produce artefacts with similar qualities. Read draws the inference that characteristics of this form of art “reveal that the artistic impulse is a natural impulse implanted in the least cultured folk.” He considers the distinction given to ‘fine’ over applied art as ‘odious’ (loc cit).

The importance given to prestige of high art forms denies democratic access cannot be committed to making this quality product available to everyone. It is exclusive: it excludes. Becker (1982) notes that the concept of art which is promoted by the ‘established order’ is irrelevant except to very few people. High culture is safeguarded through the deployment of ‘culture dispensing institutions’

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Fig. 1:3 Miners' banner displaying traditional 'progress' motif.

with powers to disarm attempts at questioning their legitimacy. It is easy to marginalise voices of dissent, especially in a situation where art matters to few people. High culture, then, as it stands in opposition to the culture of experience, is an endorsement of a cultural outlook which is at best irrelevant to “all but a few”. How then can it claim to regenerate in any inclusive way?

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has attempted to present cultural debates with theories which work within the theme of high culture versus low culture. It associates elements from this theme with ideas concerning consumption and the superficial nature of postmodernism and its associated aesthetics. I have developed ideas about the non neutrality of emergent hegemonic structures, which in turn introduces the idea that the cultivation of in-difference serves a political purpose. The political purpose of the “aestheticisation of everyday life” is historically associated with processes of desecularization, wherein political trajectories are affiliated with systems of belief. The impact of aesthetic unawareness or cultural indolence is potentially far reaching. The specific aesthetic conflict is about the power to impose reality, about what deserves to be represented and the way things are represented.

The distinction between art and culture is sustained by powerful agencies, particularly where public funding underpins constraints on local creativity. Bureaucracies license certain activities in favour of others. This problem is equally central to the concepts of culture and heritage. Through this chapter I

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have attempted to establish the relationship in which cultural regeneration stands to local culture. I have considered the fragmentary nature of the imposed turn to culture as a means of regeneration. There are winners and losers, and the loser is the local. Regeneration strategies which are aligned with culture industries lead to the imposition of a normative culture based in a consent which is arrived at through the imposition of aesthetic symbols as opposed to symbols signifying cultural experience. As the arts become entangled with other aspects of culture and involve themselves with and aestheticise the texture and routines of everyday life such as entertainment, recreational activities, architecture and townscape, and eating, these attributes come to characterise the identity and external image of post industrial space. But they are not its culture! Cultural industries aligning their trajectories with the purpose of high art develop and perpetuate a negative relationship with lived culture rather than develop alongside existing culture in an equity which acknowledges the existing and potential cultural assets of place that could be exploited through redistribution of cultural benefits, education and access.

“Policy-makers in west European cities are still not sufficiently aware of the potential of their cultural resources. Aesthetic definitions of culture as ‘art’ still tend to prevail, and policies for the arts are rarely co-ordinated with policies on sports, the media and other elements of local culture. The result of this lack of integration is the failure to exploit potential synergies and strategic development opportunities” (Bianchini 1993.209).

For Williams “[b]oth the problem and the sociology of culture can be seen in the difficulty of its defining term: ‘Culture’”. To Gramsci it was “evident that, to be precise, one should speak of a struggle for a ‘new culture’ and not for a ‘new art’ ...a moral intuitive way of life that created the opportunity for ‘possible artists’ and ‘possible art’” (1985.98). The organization and mobilization of resources is

required to provide the means to cultural representation, rather than determine its course. 'Nativity', the capacity that people have to make a contribution, is centred in their endowment with distinctive natural gifts and talents. This stems from a sense of the reality of ourselves and the world in "confirmation and tacit acknowledgement" by others (Canovan 1974.84). Crucial to that reality is the sharing of public space where people can "see and be seen - acknowledge and be acknowledged by each other, and compare their perceptions of the world" (p92). In the next chapter I expand ideas about the participatory and inclusive elements of culture, again aligning them with aesthetics.

## **Chapter Two**

### **CULTURE AS THE MEANS TO GOODWILL**

Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings (Williams 1958).

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The last chapter outlined my central thesis which concerns the use of culture for regeneration. I argue that high culture has a capacity to exclude or otherwise exhaust resources which could be made available to more inclusive modes of culture. This argument can be substantiated through an analysis of the aesthetic dimension and aesthetic experiences which are an integral part of any cultural form. The aesthetics of 'Cultural Regeneration' derive power from the deployment of aesthetic criteria and principles in the creation of specific forms of value. These values are not neutral by any aesthetic criterion.

This chapter examines the generative and regenerative capacities of experiential forms of culture: how culture has traditionally regenerated, or acted as the locus of regeneration. Moving from ideas of the role various forms of culture play in maintaining systems of power Świątkiewicz (1995:18) describes culture as "a cumulating of values and symbols" which serve the role of social stabilisers, providing relatively permanent foundations for choice and position from which to assess actions. The relativity of this permanence may rely on the temporal solidity of the base upon which it rests. In anthropological understanding positional notions of culture and the 'cultural' articulate important sensibilities concerning identity. This identity is spatially contextualised by Szczepanski (1993) who

further identifies culture as colloquial awareness. In the same frame Williams (1958) describes the *genius locii*: “the informing spirit of a whole way of life, which is manifest over the whole range of social activities but is most evident in specifically cultural activities - a language, styles of art”. He incorporates the production of art as a vital facet of cultural reproduction - not its be all and end all. The hegemonic distancing of art versus life, which I alluded to as a theme developed by Dewey in the last chapter, is identified as a negative, a-cultural feature of market forces by Gramsci.

“Our anger is all the greater when we think that amongst the so-called intellectuals runs the widely held prejudice that the workers’ movement and communism are enemies of beauty and art, and that the friend to art in favour of creation and the disinterested contemplation of beauty is supposedly the present regime of merchants greedy for wealth and exploitation, who perform their essential activity by barbarously destroying life and beauty” (1985.35)

In this analysis he presents the pecuniary motive of promoters of high art as a reason for the development of the dichotomy which pits one form of culture against another. This chapter is concerned with the communicative nature of cultural activities and the regenerative capacity of this locus of communication. It seeks to realign the aesthetic dimension with its experiential hinterland. The thesis is concerned with forms of prejudice which are detrimental to the creative impulse which provides the potential locus for contributive engagement with culture by anyone who wishes. At the core of my argument is the assumption that if a person is a part of a culture that person can engage with that culture in many ways. Some postures of high art deliberately deny access to their cultural forms.

This chapter essentially deals with three interrelated problems. They are culture as experience or the means to goodwill, culture as identity or participation, and

culture as temporal exchange, the transmission of culture over time. None of these excludes artistic representations.

In contrast to the use of culture as a device which establishes and maintains hierarchies of power, as described in chapter one, the first part of this chapter examines cultural theories which present culture in various ways as process of inclusion. I explore theories of DeCerteau, Arendt, and Lynch, which deal with the communicative potential of space. Much of DeCerteau's work is focused on ways of escaping from the power exerted by technologies of control through the creation of communicative space. Arendt discusses the "curious contradictions inherent in the impotence of power" through noting that "whatever the administrative advantages and disadvantages of centralization may be, its political result is always the same: monopolization of power causes the drying up or oozing away of all authentic power sources ..." (1969:85). She expresses concern for the private: the realm which is set apart from public participation. In many of his theories of the planned and built environment Lynch is concerned with the pleasure which people derive from being in a city as a consequence of associations and memories: elements which contribute to personal qualities of perception of place.

In the second part I will examine theories as they are relevant to the concept of space. I will investigate how space, and the occupancy of space, creates an aesthetic experience which underlies experience. This can be considered as the 'message' which specific places communicate. In order to develop a key with ethnological and sociological debates about the perception of location I

investigate understanding of industrial villages and mining towns in the context of urban sociology. This broad introduction to categories of understanding is an attempt to explain the difficulty in locating my questions in any single social science discipline.

Memories serve to differentiate landscape. For Lefebvre space exists only as it is inhabited: it is created by the act of occupancy. This part of the chapter deals with problems of identification *with*. It is concerned with investigated the sense of time and place through its look and ways in which a place is perceived. DeCerteau sees people as writing themselves into the text of the cityscape as “the city’s common practitioners” (2000.102).

The third part of this chapter is concerned with the transmission of culture over time. People learn culture. Culture, as a body of learned behaviours common to a given society, shapes behaviour and consciousness within that society temporally: across generations. These trans-temporal systems can be categorised as systems of meaning or ways of organising society into identifiable groups, from kinship groups to states and multi-national corporations; or the distinctive techniques of a group and their characteristic products. In other words who identifies with whom?, and how are differences which articulate this identification manifest to themselves and to others? An important principle concerning time follows from definitions of culture as difference. If the process of learning is an essential characteristic of culture, then teaching is also crucial. The way culture is taught and reproduced is itself an important component of culture. Culture exists in a constant state of change wherein the relationship between what is taught and what

is learned is not absolute. Systems of meanings are constructed through negotiated agreements. Within a given cultural alignment people must agree to relationships between a word, behaviour, or other symbol and its corresponding significance or meaning.

Developing from these themes I propose to investigate the notion of apportioning of collective memory, and the role it plays in the development of co-operative behaviour of a group of people who have worked and lived co-operatively as a means of presenting history of the previous activities of the group as a resource for the future. This theme is again visited in chapter eight as it is identified by respondents to my field research as a key component of the potential 'use' of otherwise redundant narrative. When the central industrial activity which informs patterns of ways of life is removed how can the narrative of this way of life furnish a resource which communicates with or inform the future? How can it continue to enculturate? I also examine problems which arise through the distancing of time compounded through postmodern approaches to a 'useful' 'pick-and-mix' past. This chapter, therefore, is concerned with the contributive capacity of culture over time.

## ***PART ONE***

### ***CULTURE IS ORDINARY LIVED EXPERIENCE***

I begin by examining the theme of the cultural as a practical locus for participation and contribution. To do this I must establish an articulation of the term with sufficient breadth to encompass the inclusive capacity of culture as

experience whilst at the same time identifying its aesthetic components. Eagleton (2000.32), for example, is concerned that the too broad and too narrow definitions of the word culture, from its anthropological to its aesthetic associations, render the word impotent. I agree with his critique which identifies much of the aesthetic 'artistic' dimension of culture as "nebulous", and his concern that Arnold's "sense of culture as perfection, sweetness and light, the best that has been thought and said [as] embarrassingly imprecise" (loc cit.). Having identified the breadth of meaning potentially allotted to various realms of culture and the cultural, I am here concerned with how culture communicates. Art is a necessary element of this meaning. Art, by its very nature, is a means of communication. But I adopt the datum line definition of culture in its inclusive context as a tenet for the understanding of the communicative capabilities of culture as it is presented by Raymond Williams.

"Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings ... The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressure of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land ...

"The making of a mind is, first, the slow learning of shapes, purposes, and meanings, so that work, observation and communication are possible. Then, second, but equal in importance, is the testing of these in experience, the making of new observations, comparisons, and meanings.

"We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life - the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning - the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction. The questions I ask about our culture are questions about deep personal meanings. Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind" (1958.6).

The development of culture is experiential and communicative. Through cultural processes meaning is evolved over time and wrought from engagement with the



environment in both capacities as art and way of life - inseparable. In the context of cultural regeneration, where one form is pitted against and considered as obstacle to the other the nexus of creativity is vested in only one form. The very contest over the term indicates mutual exclusivity. Williams follows the anthropological inclusivity outlined by Tylor (1871) encompassing his declension of “knowledge, belief, art ...” and so on not so much as a hierarchical index but as a “complex whole”. Williams embraces the inclusive, heuristic ‘cultural’ term which serves not as a “*neat and exclusive definition, but as a genuine complexity* (1971.73). I propose here to undertake an examination of the locus of communicative cultural engagement as a way of refuting high culture’s claims to hegemony.

### **The aesthetics of personal experience**

Dewey sets the frame for a closer, more intimate, human scaled, appreciation of the aesthetic. There is no need to set aesthetic experience apart from other modes of experience without the hermeneutic mediation of critic, interpreter or ‘facilitator’. I have argued that there is a purpose to the setting of a distance, from the art object, from a cherished culture, from a powerful and informing aesthetic, from recent history. As such this constitutes a distancing from lived experiences.

Williams points to the Marxist understanding that culture must be interpreted in relation to its underlying system of production. It is affected in its potencies and potentialities through the restriction, for instance, of education and expectation, a

theme which is constantly reviewed by Bourdieu. To Whitman the idea of art and the culture of experience was inseparable. The theme throughout his poetry is one of continued optimism and alacrity of human endeavour.

“I should demand a program of culture, drawn out, not for a single class alone, or for the parlors or lecture rooms, but with an eye to practical life, the west, the workingmen, the facts of farms and jack-planes and engineers, and of the broad range of the women also of the middle and working strata.. I should demand of this program or theory a scope generous enough to include the widest human area ... The best culture will always be that of the manly and courageous instincts, and loving perceptions, and of self-respect...” (1892.962).

The commodity form of art has no indexical corollary in other modes of cultural production. Hannah Arendt outlines the rise in public prominence of “men of letters” which created fungible outcomes for artistic cultural contribution. In this mode of valorisation of art monetary reward and public admiration become commensurable. Status is an item of consumption because it is capable of fulfilling a need in the same way as food: “public admiration is consumed by individual vanity as food is consumed by hunger”. But as ‘objective’ indices whose only basis is money, art as a mode of consumption, does not engage in the realm of other ‘cultural necessities’ (such as hunger) because between them “no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised” (1958.57).

In contrast with this cultural distancing Arendt celebrates the potential afforded by common spaces in which inter personal uniqueness can be explored. This implies the capacity for people to arrive at their own unique interpretation of their common project. In this public space people assume individual identities but are able to communicate positions on common issues. The capacity for newness of this communicative space is indicated by Arendt. Its regenerative

capacities are found in “the consequences of an act within a community of equals where everybody has the same capacity to act” (p242). The necessary agency where these cultural ‘fields’ intersect is found in locus of participation where a person’s uniqueness is accepted by other people. The concept of communicative space is the means to bring “multiple perspectives” together in a public realm which

“relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised. For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life...” (1958.57).

Parekh (1982) reviews the principal themes of Arendt’s political philosophy, examining in particular her notions of public space. Her important concept of ‘natality’ is explained as a capacity for choice which posits the means to “‘transcend’ what is given and begin something new” (1982.8). The ‘space’ of natality is essentially cultural in its capacity to transcend time to communicate understanding. Nye, explaining natality as it is presented by Arendt in *The Human Condition*, establishes its distinctive personal condition in which “women and men in speaking and acting are reborn as they reveal themselves in new ways and ‘take upon themselves’ their pasts, their futures, their appearances in the world” (1994.190). The impulse to this self-revelation stems from “an original impulse of sociability embedded in human sensibility”(loc cit).



Arendt bemoans the “private” as a space which is deprived of public activity and social intercourse. Social activity has been privatised through the virtual disappearance of public spaces of discussion. She details the structure of our capabilities which inform our common capacities to take certain actions. Through this locus she asserts a notion which is linked to plurality and natality where people investigate their capacity to begin anew. A shared commonality in people is fundamental to distinctions. People’s differences and commonalities are potentially capable of providing a politics of resistance. The emancipatory dimension of Arendt’s theory of action is brought into action through a web of human relationships. Power emerges in “space of appearance”. Hegemony is consolidated by preventing the capacity of people to inter-relate and subsequently closes off the capacity to empathise and object inherent within the communicative spaces. Spaces (such as writing) have been corporeally de-spatialized, lacking the presence and power of people coming together to agree and disagree. This communicative space is considered by Benhabib (1996) as a process of involvement: “once in action, one can make things happen”. The social realm must be brought out into the spaces of appearance (<sup>Fig. 2:1</sup>). Arendt’s concepts of power, action and natality provide the framework for reconstituting spaces where sustained democratic action is possible, represented by the need for the emergence of an ‘inclusive space’ where equality and distinction are respected. The spontaneity of natality and its capacity to unite people through difference carries with it an emancipatory potential which can be actuated through the constitution of viable public spaces, both physical and non-physical.

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Fig. 2:1 Members of a colliery band; Durham Miners’

## **Communicative open spaces**

Transactions occur in physical open spaces. The potential of these spaces is further elucidated by Jacobs (1961) who identifies communicative social space as the locus of “trust”. For her the “trust of a city street is formed over time from many little public sidewalk contacts”. She describes those simple communicative transactions that occur in public spaces the “nodding hello”, “comparing notes on their dogs” and the “admiring of new babies” and so forth. She describes most of these transactions as “

“... ostensibly utterly trivial, but the sum is not trivial at all. The sum of such casual, public contact at a local level [...] is a feeling for the public identity of the people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal or neighbourhood need [...] its cultivation cannot be institutionalized” (p67).

Arendt’s open space is the location of both contribution and communication. The potential for participation is not lost to theorists of urban planning. Kevin Lynch discusses the need for physical space to meet and share ideas and knowledge. The forum is the place where knowledge is constructed and reinforced. An important aspect of this analysis is the temporal structure of this knowledge. Inter subjective sedimentation occurs when several individuals share a common biography, the experiences of which become incorporated in a common stock of knowledge.

Arendt uses public space both as metaphor and actuality, hooks (1991. 145) promotes a cultural “politics of location”, which reflects the uniqueness of the location or situatedness of every human being in respect of their relationship with others. In my research I engage with some of these spatial perspectives in

attempting to locate understanding of culture from the perspectives of people as they interact with groups in conversation, as a way of describing situatedness.

### **Learning from participating in newness**

The perception of and interaction with social space are an integral part of environmental experience. Carr and Lynch (1968) discuss the element of surprise that is to be experienced in cities that create the possibilities for learning and participation.

“When a ‘new’ scene is related to our interests, we may learn something. When it is compelling we may enter into it to change it by our actions or to join with others. In such times we teach ourselves: the learning is integral with the experience, a by-product of some perception or activity engaging in itself. Most likely this informal learning will be relevant to our needs, to finding or making our place in the world. The occasions for such incidents can be dramatically increased by urban policy” (p418).

Personal development and growth, for Carr and Lynch, are an increase in competence and the capacity to respond to and interact in a significant way with the environment, is an integral part of the development of the city. Calls for access to and availability of symbolic information - computers, museums, tutors, newspapers, TV and radio - as information outlets, is vital to this development. These means of communication approximate the media assimilated to the dissemination of culture via the ‘Culture Industries’. Lynch’s work is essentially linked to the optimism which inheres within the appraisal of the contributive and interactive nature of the open access space of Arendt and De Certeau. City space is the locus for community activities which recreate culture. In *The Openness of Open Spaces* (1965) Lynch presents the notion of physical as well as conceptual city space – a space to think and be and join socially with others. These spaces

“may serve as a locus for certain new, unspecified, or unusual social contacts, free from many of the restraints of routine living. On the one hand, people of similar tastes, whether it be kite flying or anarchism, can convene temporarily [...] an opportunity for the venturesome to break through some social barriers [...] They may at least observe other kinds of people and engage in similar activities side by side with them” (p117).

Explanations of this type of space emphasise the potential for becoming - what may be possible or what can happen. The development of physical space providing freedom for open action or response: social action which proceed from the meaning of open: “ free to be entered or used, unobstructed, unrestricted, accessible, available, exposed, unrestricted, candid, undetermined, loose, disengaged, responsive, ready to see or hear as in open heart, open eyes, open hand, open mind, open house, open city” (p108). In analysis of my empirical materials I will identify the communicative ‘open access’ fora for corporeally communicating culture in mining workinglife.

### **The postmodern aesthetic of ‘pay for’ spaces**

In contrast to these spaces of communication I present the commodity based alternatives. Boyer (1994) constructs a reading of the complex cultural entity of the city through an understanding of its structures and their representations which combine to create models by which the urban environment is planned and understood. She explores ‘maps’ of the city which identify city as a work of art, common to the ancient city; the city as panorama, characteristic of the modern city; and the city as spectacle which characterises the contemporary city. These categories outline historical or epochal phases and characterise various elements of a ‘consumer sublime’. These cities may be the culmination of a long-term

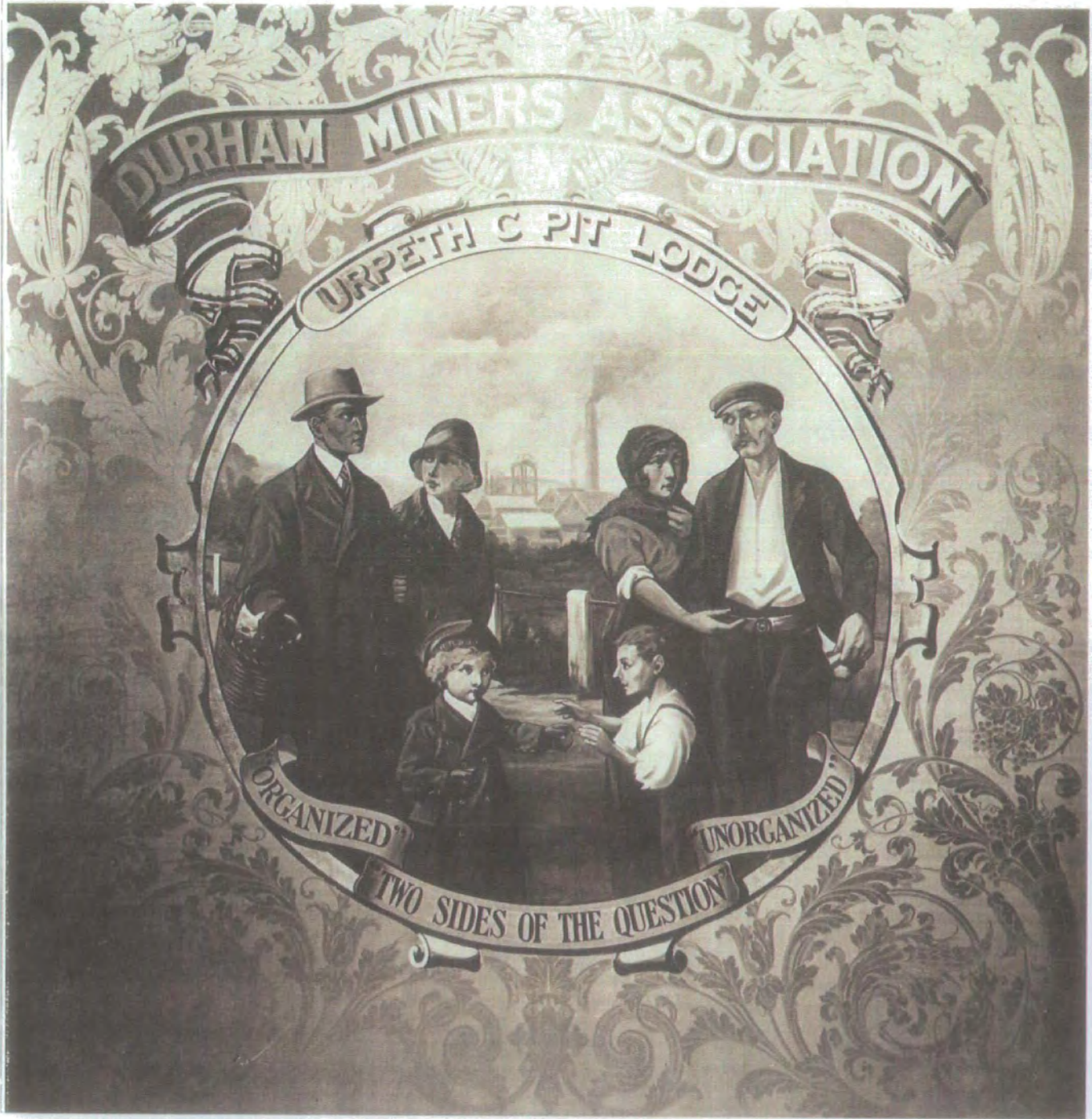


trend in which private space replaces public space. As new 'downtown' identities are formed are they presaging the destruction of vernacular community spaces. They symbolise the city's transformation into a consumer commodity, centred in cultural goods.

Here I contrast common lived experience of culture with the imposed high culture of the postmodern aesthetic. The notion of a potential public realm in this city is challenged by Hannigan (1998) as he chronicles the late 20th century depopulation of inner city areas by middle class people into the suburbs, and their gradual return as consumers of 'lifestyle' activities. Lifestyle entertainments provide "the end-product of a long-standing cultural contradiction in American society between the middle-class desire for experience and their parallel reluctance to take risks, especially those which involve contact with the 'lower orders' in cities"(p7). They are afforded by the development of sports complexes, Imax cinemas, virtual reality arcades and themed restaurants. They are public spaces in which most activities are prescribed - and cost money. The postmodern landscape par excellence was outlined by architects Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, whose manifesto *Learning From Las Vegas* established the debate on postmodern aesthetics and the built environment. For them the built environment of all cities "communicate messages - functional, symbolic, and persuasive - to people as they move about"(1972.73). Yet they supposed that there is no moral or ethical conclusion that can be drawn from the look of the place; places are neutral in value. "Just as an analysis of the structure of a Gothic cathedral need not include a debate of medieval religion, so Las Vegas values are not questioned here" (p6). This position fails to take note that the built environment has its

specific purpose, and that its aesthetic is not value neutral. We cannot have aesthetics laden with messages without their message being 'about'. I argue that these constructs symbolise very real cultural practices. Hannigan investigates the likelihood that the highly visible urban trends evident in Las Vegas are becoming evident everywhere. Through their reconstruction, post industrial cities are establishing themselves as centres of leisure and consumption organized around marketable themes. This postmodern *Fantasy City* is aggressively branded and its developments are at the expense of its surrounding neighbourhoods. Sassen explores the changing significance of the city through "...the combination of spatial dispersal and global integration" (1991. p 3 - 4). Cities which have converted to a financial, business and service economy create jobs which are designed to control and manage the activities of the new urban centres. Although many of these industries can support the high-salaried lifestyles of the global elite the glamour is supported by "large populations of immigrant workers who perform the blue-collar, industrial, low-wage, dirty work of the global economy as the valets, the coffee-stand servers, the janitors" (1998.11). Jacobs notes the physical real division 'the other side of the tracks'.

The message conveyed by cities presents an interrelationship with the messages that are encrypted in buildings, in their associations with how they are perceived. Pocock and Hudson align environment and behaviour. "a premise [...] of many image studies is that the environmental image underpins behaviour and forms a crucial link mediating between the environment and behaviour in that environment" (1978.9). Borsay (1982) notes an important link with the built environment and moral outlook "The appearance of a building was of crucial



DURHAM MINERS ASSOCIATION

URPETH C PIT LODGE

ORGANIZED

UNORGANIZED

TWO SIDES OF THE QUESTION

importance in its construction, since one of the purposes of architecture was to express aesthetic and even moral values” . Combining these two observations the built environment, the urban industrial landscape both contains elements of the values which created it and instil behavioural sensibilities towards it.

### Group definition of place

The built environment, as a response to environmental stimuli, like the cultivated aspect of culture, is an excursion into the future . Buildings provide for future needs whilst representing the aspirations of a particular time. Mining communities have demonstrated concern for their members welfare in engaging with the built environment. A typical example of this is to be found in making provision for the future of elderly members. A report in the *Colliery Guardian* describes the opening of 16 homes for aged miners at Boldon Colliery, consisting of ...

“16 of the *pleasantest bijou* residents in the county of Durham [...] The cottages are arranged in a crescent shape. At their rear is a *fine sweep of garden plots, one to each house*, whilst *beautiful spacious lawns*, which are to be used as bowling and croquet courts, etc. *adorn* the front of the houses. Each cottage consists of a *large kitchen*, bedroom, and scullery, with the usual out offices. The houses are *semi-detached*, with a *cosily-covered veranda* and *garden seat* to each pair [...] the crescent is *exceedingly picturesque*. In short, the homes are of such a character as almost to represent some compensation for growing old” (CG 22 January 1915: my emphases).

In this report the emphasis is on space, comfort, leisure pursuit. Aged miners’ cottages were part of a trend towards provisioning the future in house building design. Sanitation and leisure, two essential ingredients of common decency were at the heart of the colliery welfare organisation CISWO (see Denis et al.

1956). Organised welfare started in the coal industry in 1920, when an Act of Parliament required that all coal owners pay a levy on all coal ‘the proceeds to be used for improving the social well-being, recreation and living conditions of mineworkers.’ The NCB took over direct control of all colliery welfare in 1952, including pithead bathing facilities. By the end of the following year it was able to report that it had “made great strides ... in looking after the welfare and interests of the mineworkers”. The NCB boasted its continued commitment to provide bathing and first aid facilities at the pit head for most of the workforce (CG 7 January 1954). CISWO was established to administer to social and recreational welfare, presenting a cultural antidote to the ‘dour and drear’ of places like Horden (Selwood 1964), the essence of which will be identified in chapter three.

Malinowski (1944) investigates the responsive nature of culture as the construction of the environment which solves the “problems set by man’s nutritive, reproductive, and hygienic needs”, and sees these responses as “neither more nor less than culture itself, [which] has to be permanently reproduced, maintained and managed” (37). But these improvements depended on economic realities. By 1966 the *Colliery Guardian* (6 October) concluded that “the reduction in manpower in the industry and the consequent loss of contributions has presented problems to many local welfare schemes”. Welfare provision was a locus for contribution in economic terms also.

## **Narrative and the social construction of identity**

Aspirations of groups in society manifest in the built environment leads to questions of identification and representation of self. Geography means, literally, to write the world. An examination of the idea that collective identity formations based in geographically lived space are constructions is dependent upon how that space is defined. I am concerned with how these images of the landscape identify what Soja describes as “socially-produced space” which “in itself may be primordially given, but the organization, and the meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience” (1989.80). This then is how people write themselves into the landscape as a consequence of necessity, but through optimistic communicative interaction with environmental givens. For Lefebvre “social space incorporates social actions - acts of individual and collective subjects ” (p33). Things or images, “and discourse on space supply clues to and testimony about this productive process” (p37). He describes

“representational space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols ... which is described by artists, writers and philosophers. This is the dominant - and hence passively experienced - space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate” (p39).

(Fig. 2:2)

## **PART TWO**

### **US AND THEM:**

#### **PERCEPTION OF LOCATION AND THE 'OTHERNESS' OF MINERS**

In this section I will deal with perceptions of spaces as they define social groups. The space of experience and communication is the locus for understanding identity. In an enquiry into the sense of place which is created by coal mining I take into consideration the relationship of the geography of location with lived experience. A key to this central problematic is the perception of difference and attendant definitions. I introduce here notions of perceptions of groups, from both inside and outside, and how these perceptions draw upon complexities which cross various disciplines. Central to the discussion are concerns about whether we are looking at mining villages or towns or parts of cities. The idea of mining communities as village dwellers affords definitions of 'otherness': "*the internal-external dialectic allows us to think about identity boundaries*" (Jenkins 1996.112).

#### **'Otherness' and the identity of community**

For Jenkins the concept of *community* is amongst the most important sources of collective identity: a constant changing commonality (p104-5). A sense of place is an understanding of the differences which lie at the heart of awareness of culture. Distinctiveness makes the culture available to ethnographers and other investigations of social processes. Cohen (1982) discusses the boundaries which allow the identification of otherness. For Cohen the community of locality is no less imagined than the community of the nation, and no less symbolically

constructed. This definition is important in the way that various social sciences represent village dwellers. Chaplin investigates the difference imbued in the sense of community afforded them by the weight given to their naming.

“The villages were built overnight—the Americans are much more realistic about mining than we are. They know it’s a short-lived thing, relatively speaking. Even if there is fifty years of coal—what’s fifty years? So they talk about mining camps, we talk about villages, which is one of the oldest words in the language. It means a permanent settlement. But most of the Durham villages were, in fact, camps, and they were put down as camps” (in Bulmer ed. 1979.63).

We are less able to defend the concept of transmission of culture across time if our identity is formed and dissolved by temporal locational transience. But North East colliery villages and towns aspired to greater permanence. Perception and aspiration to cultural temporal transcendence concur if we perceive the village as a permanent social structure. The camp is here today and gone tomorrow.

Liefchild, in the *Commission of Enquiry into the Employment of Children in Mines 1842*, (hereafter CE) described the distance he experienced with mining people.

“If they had little time, they had less inclination to be examined, and still less to answer the questions of a total stranger; and even when their attention was obtained, the barriers to our intercourse were formidable. In fact, their numerous mining technicalities, northern provincialisms, peculiar intonations and accents, and rapid and indistinct utterances, rendered it essential for me, an interpreter being inadmissible, to devote myself to the study of these peculiarities ere I could translate and write evidence”. (p515)

“For a stranger to read the mind of a pitman, a circuitous approach and no small tact are requisite. [...] Even where evidence could at last be elicited from them, it was so intermingled with extraneous remarks, explanatory of their opinions upon politics and public and private affairs, foreign to the question addressed to them, that it was essential that a large portion of it should be ‘laid out’ by a process analogous to their own ‘separation’” (p515).

This distance was perceived both visually and linguistically. The miners were being wilfully obtuse. Liefchild remarked that their reluctance to comply with





the commission stemmed from deeply held suspicion of their 'masters'. The assumption that 'they' could have "no desire to benefit them". Miners were apart: they belonged to another world and supposed that the "rulers of their land would never have contrived a mission to their colonies...". Shortly afterwards this perceived distance was underlined in an article in the *Colliery Guardian* (28 August 1858) in which it was noted that the "citizens of the great metropolis ... entertain rather curious ideas about the appearance of the mining districts, and the habits of the mining population". They supposed the land to be "blasted, the habitations squalid, and the people barbarous". I draw attention here to the notion of *great* metropolis as it stands in distinction to the *barbarous* place of the miner (Fig 2:3).

This 'consignment' of mining people to the places in the margins is not conducive to an appreciation of the potential of inclusivity of 'their' culture. In order to identify culture as is aligned with dimensions of difference I present the sense of difference - 'otherness' - as it is framed in the context of changes in emphases in social science classifications. In the 1960s urban anthropology turned its attention to cities and urban societies, countering anthropology's traditional domain of 'primitive' peoples, which excluded urban, complex and industrial societies (Basham 1978). This change acknowledged the part that modernity plays in cultural diversity. Through this shift cultures are no longer considered as apart, sequestered or self-contained entities. Primitive cultures, investigated from afar, are given equal status with discrete industrial communities in the context of the modern world.

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Fig 2:3 Miners in the shaft cabin, Vane Tempest Colliery

To give a personal example the town where I live, the Felling, grew up around coal mining and cognate industries, particularly chemical works and iron foundries. It is no longer a 'mining town': the town pit closed in 1933. In the street where I live until recently almost every house had a former miner living in it, although nearby Heworth Colliery closed in 1963. As late as 1994 several men were still employed at Westoe Colliery, seven miles away. This part of the conurbation would not be described as a mining village. The colliery where these men worked was located in a large town, South Shields, which would not be described as a mining town.

A problem with those studies of communities like that of Denis et al (1956) is that they describe attributes of community from without. The community thus described becomes *them*. In this they converge with the product of anthropological approach. They the miners become the exotic, they become the 'other'.

### **The urban village and the coal mining town**

Beaujeu-Gariner and Chabot discuss whether single occupation places are indeed towns at all. Places where tens of thousands of men assemble to carry out an urban function but "the population is never engaged in a single activity; when we think of a town we expect a certain proportion [of its inhabitants to be] engaged in other activities" (1967.154). Industrial activity in town is part of a complex urban structure but the town's location often depends on the nature of the

industry. Noisy and dirty activities all need a lot of space and are forced into the outskirts (p294). This is not the case with mining because a pit must be sunk where the geological circumstances favour the winning and working of coal.

Urban settlements grow up surrounding coal mines.

“The town revolves around the mine shaft, dominated by the pithead and the pit heaps where waste accumulates, with the sorting and the washing installations nearby. The working population must be housed, and in a condition such as will keep the miners as content as possible to compensate for the hard work they have to do” (p152).

Other industries spring up around mining: “coal facilitates a wide range of industrial possibilities, coke ovens, blast furnaces, steel works and power stations, all use [coal] on the spot” (op cit. pp 152 - 3). Populations naturally locate in places where industrial engagement with environmental processes such as mining and coke or steel making occur. These activities precede the formation of industrial communities. Cities, on the other hand, are constructed out of amalgamations of industrial, commercial, economic and social and other processes. Location is endowed with unique qualities subject to various environmental influences, such as its location in relation to other places, their industrial activity, and so on. Lefebvre considers whether a city which has been shaped by social activities is a *work* or a *product*.

“Every social space is the outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributing currents, signifying and non signifying, perceived and directly experienced, practical and theoretical. In short every social space has a history” (1974.110).

Lefebvre continues, “when the history of a particular space is treated as such, the relationship of that space to the time which gave rise to it takes on an aspect that differs sharply from the picture generally accepted by historians: traditional historiography assumes that thoughts can perform cross sections upon time,



arresting its flow without too much difficulty; its analyses tend to fragment and separate temporality". The landscape both produces and is a product of the identity which went to create it (Fig. 2:4). Socially produced space invests territorialities which define groups of people. Said describes "imaginative geography" as a practice of

"... designating in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond this which is "theirs". These spatial distinctions may be entirely arbitrary because the "imaginative geography of the 'our land-barbarian land' variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our own minds; 'they' become 'they' accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from 'ours'. To a certain extent modern and primitive societies seem thus to derive a sense of their identities negatively" (Said 1993.54).

The connection of territoriality and mentality that Said highlights is exemplified in the connection of lived-space and identity. It is assumed that geographical space produces and also delimits identity formation. This leads to the presentation of another problem of polarity which I propose to illustrate through a brief discussion of definitions in sociology and anthropology.

### **Them and us in anthropology**

Urban anthropology involves the study of the cultural systems of cities as well as the linkages of cities to larger and smaller places and populations as part of the world-wide urban system (Kemper 1996). Fragmentary pictures of the urban reality of the family, tribe or other social units, likened to mosaic (Fox 1977.pp 2-9) are brought together. Various sources such as written materials, surveys, historical studies, novels and ethnographic observations are ordered as data.

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Fig. 2:4 Abandoned headstocks, Eppleton Colliery

Basham (1978) discusses the study of urban societies in their relationship to various topics. Urban anthropological studies contribute to understanding anthropological topics in urban milieus. Sociocultural anthropology is concerned with urban phenomena, investigating social patterns and urban spatial systems. The initial major shift of focus of urban anthropology addressed the dichotomy between representations of 'primitive' and 'complex' societies (Ansari and Nas 1983.2). The notion of miners as 'primitive' people becomes increasingly central to this argument.

Langness and Frank discuss anthropological methodology "autobiographical [anthropological] accounts give insights into values and motivations that [drive] societies". The significant characteristic of anthropology as it informs this thesis is its emphasis on the presentation of the "*insider's* view of a culture" (1981.29: my emphasis). Basham discusses the shift in anthropology away from 'primitive' societies towards the study of complex societies. There is a depreciatory undercurrent to the use of the word 'primitive' in describing a social group and this can be closely aligned with perspectives of cultural highs and lows. Redfield (1941), in his 'folk-urban continuum' identifies the city as a proper focus for anthropological research. "Redfield's notion was that as folk communities evolved into urban societies, they changed from small, self contained, isolated, highly personalized, religious and traditional social locales into large, heterogeneous, impersonal, secular ... social milieus" (Fox 1977.9). Sjoberg (1960) described the urban locus: "sociologists who speak of 'peasant societies' are wont to assume as typical, patterns that are not rural but urban - but - sociologists have labelled as 'villages' entities that stand between true peasant

communities and the larger cities - that actually are market towns or small *cities*". Redfield's heterogeneity and lack of isolation are the distinguishing traits of the city. Sjoberg takes Wirth and Redfield to task for "neglecting to examine much of the organization that is the city". Redfield (1947) adapted this formulation of these characteristics to his folk-urban continuum concept (Miner 1952), by characterising the urban pole in Wirth's terms, and the folk pole as its opposite (small, homogeneous, isolated, traditional communities which were economically self-sufficient and has only a rudimentary division of labour). This emphasises notions of high and low culture in terms of *importance* of the one *vis-a-vis* the other. Cities constitute 'Great Tradition' small villages 'Little Tradition'. Redfield supposed that "understanding of society in general and of our own modern urbanized society in particular can be gained through consideration of societies least like our own: the primitive, or folk, societies." Using the term 'folk', which is inconsistent with technology suggests "peasant or rustic people" who are part of a society characterised as an 'ideal type' by their being the subject of the collectors of 'folklore' and 'folk song'. He considered the habitual ways of these societies:

... in the ideal folk society, what one man knows and believes is what all men know and believe. Habits are the same as customs.

It is important to note that the "ideal type" which Redfield's scheme defines is a "mental construct and 'No known society precisely corresponds to it'" (Miner p529). But people living on a large conurbation, such as South Shields miners, are not perceptible in folkloristic terms. I am arguing that if we wish to present an 'insider's view' then they cannot be an ideal type either. Some method must



be sought to present their various points of perspective which does not follow idealised representations.

My purpose in belabouring this differentiation of categories or ways of thinking about groups of people is twofold. First of all the presentation of mining people in a folkloric frame is clearly spurious. Miners and their families live an integrated urban life in the same way as any other group of industrial working people. At the end of the twentieth century we are not dealing with folkloric 'otherness'. Secondly, leading from this, through the categorisation of miners and mining people as village people an oversimplification of their reality is compacted into a homogeneity which creates distance in understanding. This compaction is useful to projects of reification but problematises any attempt to recover the reality of the cultural contribution of mining people as a group or groups through obfuscation of a further dimension of complexity which can be described as the 'folk-technological continuum'.

### **The problems of folk-urban and folk-technological**

CP Snow (1959) investigated representations of technical or material versus aesthetic or spiritual cultural elements. Linking them both is a problem which engages folkloristics. In the *English Handbook of Folklore* Burne (1914, cited in Georges and Owen 1995:19) notes that the scope of folklore is restricted to the spiritual culture of the people. Importantly it excludes technical culture. "It covers everything which makes part of the mental equipment of the folk as distinguished from their technical skill". Folk literature is an idiom which attracts

attention of “linguists because of the obsolete words and idioms that it preserves”(p21). Essentially folk in this sense is concerned with the idiosyncratic, colourful and homespun.

When industrial activity ceases to operate technology becomes folklore. The narrative of mining has always contained an identifiable historical and romantic tradition (Archer 1897; Galloway 1898; Simpson 1910). Industrial archaisms and confections such as glossaries of words relating to northern mining were compiled by Greenwell (1888) Brockett (1829, 1846) and others. In the folkloristic tradition the idiomatic and the quaint are sought after.

“That which is incomprehensible to the informant and his audience should not be confused with the unnatural. Quite the contrary, the peculiarity of a characteristic at the place and time of its transcription offers a certain guarantee that it was already present at the transplantation or transmission of the tradition” (Georges and Owen, p116).

The concept of ‘folk’ represents collective as opposed to personal or individual approach, which further serves to define a collective sensibility about place. Folklore does not deal with technical matters relating to mining in the same way that songs like *Little Chance* discuss relationships with ponies. Technology tends to be concerned with everyday hard facts. *A Dosco Roadheader* is not quaint. It is not that kind of picturesque (Fig. 2:5)

### **Axes of understanding and representing place and time**

Commonplace relationships are tacitly agreed but generally overlooked providing a background in which unique elements stand out. They are the landscape in which everyday life carries on. Background and commonplace



expectations serve to make the habitus and social structures of everyday activities observable. Common understandings and background assumptions are made visible where exchanges reveal implicit understandings between people with continued relationships such as work or friendship. This does not necessarily consist of agreement on particular topics.

Taking the lead from the earlier discussion of Arendt in which commonalities are the locus of communicative engagement with culture I turn to the fundamental problem of sociology: the concern with understanding of attributes of, and relations between, groups of people. Bhaskar (1989) discusses the problem of knowledge of society. Methodological individualism is concerned with laws in which facts about society can be explained in terms of facts about individuals (p92). What is important to the analysis of my empirical materials is the location of generalities of understanding or groupings of ideas and perceptions. Wirth sees collective behaviour as the “proper locus of sociological investigation” (1939.965). Windelband distinguished between ‘nomothetic’ sciences, which are concerned with general laws, and ‘idiographic’ sciences which consider particular entities. The distinction between laws and generalizations is outlined in Megill, (in Evans 1997 p 58).

“The ‘problem of generalization’ as historians conceive of it, is usually the problem of how to get from fragmentary and confusing data to [...] larger assertions. But such assertions are not what the logical positivists [...] had in mind when they spoke of general laws. In ‘nomothetic’ science, the desired generalizations transcend particular times and places...”

McCullagh (1984) explains Windelband’s distinction between nomothetic, or law giving, properties of natural sciences and the idiographic approach of

historical discipline. “Windelband’s characterization of history as concerned with the unique rather than the general has been widely accepted [...] while this contrast between history and science is essentially sound, this concern only with the particular and unique is misleading” in that historians’ interests are in things which are particular and unique to cohorts, (Schuman and Corning 2000), and groups and societies over periods. In order to ascertain truths about certain groups historians formulate and test generalisations about them distinguishing between accidental and law like generalisations (p129-30). One exception is enough to invalidate the law. A phenomenological approach to an understanding of background must take into account discrepancies which point to generalisations, and the habitus from which generalisations stem.

### **The twilight zone**

Schuman and Corning investigate what Hobsbawm has called “the twilight zone between history and memory” (1987.3). In this space the past as a general record stands in contradistinction with the past as a background to our own lives. Their work experimentally examines meanings given to particular social symbols which relate to specific socially significant historical events. They develop examples which investigate the importance of specific events in the context of collective knowledge, supposing that individuals in a particular cohort (age group for example) will react in the same way to public event.

### **The stranger: the enemy within**

Most conversation is underpinned with tacit agreement which implies an understanding from within. A great deal of data generated through the interaction of social groups centres on tacit understanding of group membership. Collective,

cultural or social identity is found in a relation between the inside and outside. Various attributes of a member of a group become attributes of the whole group. Bad behaviour of an individual belonging to the group is seen as a shortcoming of the whole group. From the outside miners and indeed the whole mining community are at different times assumed to be cliquy, socialists, militant, criminals, ignorant. All of these attributes point to stereotype and caricature. In Simmel's *'Essay about the Stranger'* (1908) classifications of strangers with stereotypes or prejudices develops out of the fear and uncertainty in defining oneself in relation to that object of strangeness. In order to limit this process of re-defining, comparing and ensuring, pre-experienced incidents and stereotypes are deployed. In this way classifications become safety mechanisms. Difference stems from isolation from the rest of society, the structuring of difference space with known patterns, idealising, belittling, the unknown, assimilation to new hegemonic structure, enforcement of cultural norms, or alternatively understanding and communication and interaction to create something new.

Members of groups share common interests. Schutz examines various articulations of the social world " ... the subjective meaning the group has for its members consists in the knowledge of a common situation, and with it a common system of typifications and relevances" (1970.82). He describes

" 'They Orientation' [as] the orientation upon others with whom we have no direct dealings and of whose existence we have but vague general notions. For example, entrusting a letter to the mail with the expectation that 'someone' (mailmen as general type) will see to it that it reaches its destination" (pp 322-323).

Hoggart (1957) makes an illustration of them in which most groups gain some of their strengths from their exclusiveness, from a sense of people outside who are not 'Us'.

“ ‘Them’ is a composite dramatic figure, the chief character in modern urban forms of the rural peasant-big-house relationships, The world of ‘Them’ is the world of the bosses, whether those bosses are private individuals, or as increasingly the case today, public officials. ‘Them’ may be, as occasion requires, anyone from the classes outside other than the few individuals from those classes whom working-people know as individuals” (p72).

“ ‘They’ are ‘ the people at the top’, ‘the higher-ups’, the people who give you your dole, call you up, tell you to go to war, fine you, made you split the family in the thirties to avoid a reduction in the Means Test allowance, ‘get yer in the end’, ‘aren’t really to be trusted’, ‘talk posh’, ‘are all twisters really’, ‘never tell yer owt’, ‘clap yer in clink’, ‘will do you’ down if they can’... ‘are all in a click (clique) together’, ‘treat you’ like muck’ ” (p73).

These observations concerning us and them are central to all cultural reproduction. Then the “*higher ups*” subscribe to hierarchic systems of reproduction. The museum director who decides what is or is not to be presented is a member of the ‘them’; the writer who represents through cultural industrial process likewise is one of ‘them’. The written word privileges ‘their’ account of working life.

### **PART THREE**

#### **TIME AND MEMORY**

This section deals with the problem of transmission of culture across time. It concerns ideas about participation with history and participation in the future. It is about people’s relationships with and transcendence of time. Oakeshott (1983, in Adam 1994. 5) states the characteristic marks of identity which discerns historical from other types of enquiry is an exclusive concern with the past. The

end of industrial activity and discourse means that an enquiry into mining practices is an enquiry into history. At the core of the problem of understanding of place in relation to mining is the sense of distance created by the phenomenal change which has turned a technologically based discourse into history almost overnight. But the recent has no place in folklore. The recent past does not always communicate. I have discussed the participatory nature of culture in the context of open access spaces and the means to conviviality. Gramsci considers the thrust of a turn to culture where the emphasis is placed upon those elements which contribute to the sense of participating in a historical process “an historical, dialectic conception of the world which understands movement and change, which appreciates the sum effort and sacrifice which the present has cost the past and which the future is costing the present, and which conceives the contemporary world as a synthesis of the past, of all generations, which projects itself into the future” (1971 pp 34-35: cited in Kaye1991.4).

The dichotomous position - the either / or - rather than inclusive - both / and - indicate that these elements are in a state of conflict: they are not mutual. To appropriate this theme of potential synergy in a temporal as opposed to a spatial setting I propose to examine the cultural flow or interface between the historically dispossessed recent past and the newly ordained ordering of cultural practices. Temporal hegemony fails both to accept the historical context or adjoin with it. Its purpose is without context in the present. It has outlived its function, and can only be considered useful in the context of a disjointed structure. The past - the culture of lived experience - is capable of



communication if it is asked. The didactic capacity of the narrative of mining working life is upheld up by many focus group participants.

### **Empathy and relationship with the past**

Empathy is a means of communicative understanding. It is explained by Danto (1986) in the notion of *Verstehen* “in which we seek to interpret through vicarious occupations of the agent’s own point of view” (pp 50 - 60). As it is presented by Collingwood (1936) it concerns the notion of being in touch with the concepts and thoughts of historical agents, through its interrogation of the thoughts of people of the past within their known context. Whitman (1871) indicates the significant problem of the capacity for the best culture to continue to inform practices into the future. However important its content it does not always have at its disposal the means for transmission. The notion that the long dead may speak is dealt with in Gray’s *Elegy* (1751).

Their name, their years, spelt by th’unlettered Muse,  
The place of fame and elegy supply ;  
An many a holy text around she strews,  
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey  
This pleasing anxious being e’er resigned,  
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,  
Nor cast one longing ling’ring look behind?

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,  
Some pious drops the closing eye requires ;  
Ev’n from the tomb the voice of nature cries,  
Ev’n in our ashes live their wonted fires.

For Whitman culture embraces all of the best of modes of human expression of indigenous ideography, of being in a place and responding to that place in the most human, instinctive, generous, and natural way. It is for and by everybody. But it is not for always. Gray records the “mute inglorious Milton”, the potential great poet or artist who never had the means to develop potential at her disposal, and “unhonoured dead”, people whose contribution has gone unrecorded. Their efforts no longer contribute to their society; excluded from artistic endeavours through circumstances of their social lives, or lives which have no certainty of apprehension in the future.

### **The problem of nostalgia**

Here I examine the negative aspects of retrospection and the irreversible sense of loss associated with the passage of time. I equate this with problems of relationships with times past in the form of nostalgia. The word nostalgia is derived from ancient Greek, roughly meaning grieving to return to a native land, or homesickness. Lowenthal (1985) investigates nostalgia as a substitute, and as a means of embracing images that may never have existed. For him this sentiment is fuelled by mistrust of the future. Wilson (in Westwood and Williams 1997, pp 127 - 139) asks if nostalgia is sentimental refusal to accept change considering as an example the strange possibility of a feeling of nostalgia for the optimism in town planning which created the Bull Ring in Birmingham. Once the experience is past and safely in its place we are able to invest it with a charm which it lacked at the time. She discusses emotions whereby familiar old things that exist now only in memory are endowed with a beauty they never possessed at the time. She describes the sense of pleasure

that wallowing in nostalgia imbues. In the poem the *Pitman's Pay* (1843) Thomas Wilson described a typical pay day night in a public house on Gateshead Fell in the middle of the nineteenth century. In this excerpt he develops the theme of modern practices (blowing down coal with powder) have superseded the difficulties of work of bygone times when old miners 'awd langsyners' had to win coal with hammers and wedges:

*Here, agyen, had awd langsyners  
 Mony a weary, warkin' byen,  
 Now unknawn te coaly-Tyners,  
 'A' bein' mell-and-wedge wark then.  
 Aw've bray'd for hours at woody coal,  
 wi' airms myest droppin' frae the shouther;  
 But now they just pop in a hole,  
 and flap her down at yence wi' pouter.*

Women are not what they used to be:

*We'd lots o' bonny lasses, tee,  
 A' flantin' i' the pink o' fashion;  
 !A finer seet ye couldn't see—  
 We've now-a-days nowt half se dashin'.*

Everything had changed:

*Aw cannot help remarkin' here,  
 How varry different things are now:  
 We want that sonsy, hearty cheer,  
 That we on sic occasions knew.*

Wilson reports conversation from a time of profound change. Values, attributes of daily culture and the nature of the changes that are taking place are all discussed. The desire to retrieve the past is identified with nostalgia, an

unfulfillable longing, a desire to clarify a vague sensation about something in the past, such as the desire to photograph or otherwise mechanically record something which is no longer available to that process. Lowenthal explains this as seeming “less concerned to find a past than to yearn for it, eager not so much to relive a fancied long-ago as to collect its relics and celebrate its virtues.” “When beer was cheaper... and people had more respect ...” but a “...past nostalgically enjoyed does not need to be taken seriously”. The past which nostalgia conjured up or sought after in this way exhibits similar traits: its natural setting, a rustic idyll, simple but cosy way of life. It is generally colourful too. If it existed at all it didn't exist in that way. This kind of longing is provisioned in Samuel's (1994) discussion of the snapshot album booklets of the *'Looking at Old Lemington'* and *'Bygone Byker'* type. Nostalgia searches for the past in a distant, rusticated setting, far away from the recent urban industrial familiar.

(Fig. 2:6)

### **The burden of the past**

The past can be learned from or utilised for purposes of social control. It can be manipulated for a variety of purposes. In developing theories to approach a critical analysis of nostalgia, as a means to understanding how cultural perspective are shaped, Kaye (1991. pp 20 - 21) examines Lasch's assertion that “ordinary men and women live in a world in which the burden of the past cannot be easily shrugged off by creating new identities or inventing usable pasts”(1984. 65). We relive the past and learn from it. Reality is created and changed through this process for “...legitimizing existing practices and for



personal and social control and power” (Adam 1994.147). The past is useful as its information is stored in memory and thoughts, artefacts and writing and in its representations in the landscape. In this way the past is socially constituted and remembered and reconstructed in the present.

Through the demise of the mining industry we have witnessed a turn about which creates a hiatus between the recent and the historical. Industrial activities created

discourses. As these practices become redundant through industrial decline they no longer inform attitudes. They are ‘reduced’ to folkloristics, but their modern mechanical content is not the stuff of folklore. Change is manifest in difference in outlook where what was until recently modern engineering has not quite achieved the status of the historical substance of museums. Where once Priestley exhorted the visitor to stay away from East Durham because of its “unloveliness” due to the presence of the coal mines, by the late 1990s few traces of their existence can be found. Danziger notes that

“the Romans left more traces of their stay in Britain than the East Durham collieries. Not even a stone marker commemorates some of the sites that once employed people in their tens of thousands. As with Hadrian’s wall the only way to visit the mines is to go on a heritage trail” (1996:66).

The recent past, which has a direct relationship to the present, to continuous lived experience, is a theme taken up in the work of Banka (1983; 1991; 1994). He develops concepts in which the present is consciously perceived and can be reduced to two dichotomous perspectives on history, which he describes as *presentism* and *recentivism*. He deals with the problem of the priority of the present over the perception of other tenses; evaluating the point of view of the

conscious perception of the present as the basis for the reception of all manifestation of culture. The sense of 'now' becomes a medium for attaining something in the future. The crisis is located between experience and expectation. Kosselleck notes that "the more a particular time is experienced as a new temporality, the more demands on the future increases" (1985.xxiv).

### **Recent experience and the distance of history**

Distance of recent events as history reveals a political function. Government appropriation of the distance of time assumed Byzantine dimensions with the decision that as far as historical education is concerned recent history wasn't history at all, and as such was to be excluded from the school history curriculum. Kenneth Clarke

"... felt there was a tendency throughout the curriculum to focus on the present day: part of a mistaken philosophy, as he saw it, that pupil had to study their immediate environment. He was also worried about the politicisation of lessons drawn from contemporary events. So in what appeared to be a surreal pastiche of *1066 and All That* he decreed that United States history ended in 1963 with the death of President Kennedy and Soviet history in 1964 with the fall of Khrushchev. Everything else Clarke deemed to be current affairs. His view was that pupils should not be legally required to study contemporary events and people, because of the difficulty of gaining a historical perspective. Eventually, he allowed the cut-off point to be a constant twenty years behind the present day, with the syllabus updating itself once every five years; in about the year 2010, therefore, British history will officially end with Mrs. Thatcher's resignation" (Balen 1994:219).

This strategy determined Thatcher as a millennium figure, standing at the end of history. Kenneth Baker, as Education Secretary in Thatcher's Government explained his reservations over making such decisions about when history begins, and about what history consists.

"Ken Clarke decided that the history curriculum had to end twenty years before the present day. Presumably he felt that anything more contemporary would become highly politicized, which was not desirable in classrooms. While there had certainly been too much emphasis upon current affairs in

history teaching, this step seemed too rigid a demarcation. Children today are much more familiar with recent events through their reporting on television, and are often well informed about them. That is why I believe that children would benefit from a historical understanding of how we have arrived at present day positions” (Baker 1993:206-7).

This distance also presents problems for the significant appraisal of the recent lived past as it informs future actions.

### **The preservation of the past**

An integral part of the reflexive process of culture, for Dewey (1982 / 1988), is that

“... man differs from the lower animals because he preserves his past experiences. What happened in the past is lived again in memory” (p80).

This mnemonic reliving is at the core of the reflexivity and continuity of culture. Story telling is an inveterate component of cultural reproduction. The bequest, the past experience is located in oral tradition. This temporal transmission can occur through art, which, for Dewey, is recorded as “the collective life that was manifested in war, worship, the forum, knew no division between what was characteristic of these places and operations, and the arts that brought color, grace, and dignity, into them” (1934. pp 1 - 9). People and their culture are organically linked. But when the link is broken meanings are dislocated. Returning to the problem of chapter one the complex wholeness with which this field needs to be comprehended can be contrasted with the narrow concept where reified objects of high culture provide an index of financial exclusivity. Dewey gave insights into the natural processes of this association of culture with life experience, and contrasted this with the purposefully imposed distanciation with



aesthetics and, for example, the fine art object. For Dewey the core of the problem of art is one of distance of bearers of meaning from modes of experience. Conversely “a conception of fine art that sets out from its connection with discovered qualities of ordinary experience will be able to indicate the factors and forces that favor the normal development of common human activities with matters of artistic value” (1934.11). This reflexivity with life, and ordinariness, in the best of all possible worlds, leads to an understanding of ‘traditional’ modes of existence.

“The African of tradition is not much bothered about the distant past. History to him is strictly a functional business. He remembers the past which is meaningful; that is, those events and personalities that explain, make meaningful and justify the present” (p’Bitek 1986.42).

### **Cyclical time**

Texts that are generated through community history and popular autobiography are evidence of a type of popular memory which relates the past with the present. In chapter seven analysis of conversation themes presents a dialectical approach capable of integrating several perspectives of a single issue or event. Ensuing constructions serves to challenge ideological or doctrinal notions of events or groups of people, and thus of the past. In oral testimony and autobiography facts are not only about the past, but the whole way in which memory is constructed and culture is reconstructed within contemporary consciousness. Much narrative is related to cyclical time that exists in terms of seemingly regular occurrence of ‘we used to’ without relationship to the historical past tense concept of time ‘we did’. These elements constitute continued lived experience.

Introducing the notion of 'organized forgetting' (Kaye 1991) explains how memory is the essential component in the culturally located struggle against historical forgetting. Collective experiences are personal background, establishing a context in which personal histories are constructed, by means of "assembling a series of 'stills' through which we come to 'know' the period and its consequences (p12). Organized forgetting is thwarted through popular memory. Conversely this is constructed through images like the action replay. He discusses the snapshot version of memory which produces a simple retrospect organised through emblematic fragments. Sontag discusses this point "photographs actively promote nostalgia... by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt" (1977.15). This 'soft abstract pastness' is distant. Encoded in an iconographic system a composite image is agglomerated which becomes history. The past becomes an emblem, composed of completed, distant narrative: an 'iconographic past'.

### **Ways of understanding the social world**

Common interests, as indices of changing circumstances, are related to accepted notions and *idées reçues* of the narrative of mining working and social life. These notions are simplified as they order and interpret vast amounts of historical data. In doing this they identify 'Imagined Communities'. The qualities which have contributed to the experience of a place and which may be devalued and erased as a consequence of cultural regeneration enable us to observe processes which are difficult to objectify. People do not need to constantly review their status as members of mining communities when things continue

normally, but vast changes force reflection on meaning of group membership and the importance of membership at this time of change. Much of this reflecting occurs in conversation, which is a social rather than an individual act. As such it requires communicative social space to happen.

In turn this reveals cultural understanding hitherto taken for granted. Bourdieu explains modes of knowledge of the social world, of which the primary or phenomenological form, “sets out to make explicit the truth of primary experience of the social world, i.e. all that is inscribed in the relationship of familiarity with the familiar environment, the unquestioning apprehension of the social world which, by definition, does not reflect on itself ...” (1977b.3). This knowledge is gained from experiencing a particular social world. He describes this as ‘habitus’ which “ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the correctness of practices and their constancy over time...” (loc cit.). Habitus is informed through processes of habit. Dubray (1913) explores the meaning and forces associated with habit. These are certain points of view or modes of thinking which are acquired by repeated daily actions. Due to practice and past experience a person can do things easily that were formerly difficult or even impossible. Like any faculty or power, habit cannot be known directly in itself, but only indirectly - retrospectively from the actual processes which have given rise to it. Instead of the clear and distinct perception of the action in its details, there is only a vague consciousness of the process in its totality, together with a feeling of familiarity and naturalness. The ‘remembered

past' is located in the continuity of consciousness and identity and as such awareness of the past in memory is self-awareness.

### **Group perceptions of place**

Lynch noted that "There seems to be a public image of any given city which is the overlap of many individual images" (1960:46). Massey presents the historical processes which define place in a geological metaphor in which the structure can be considered as "a product of the combination of layers, of the successive over the years of ...new forms of activity" (1984:74). The emphasis can be placed here on the idea that places continue and change, and that residual layers can be perceived. Understanding these *images* presents the possibility for learning and participation in the future development of socially constructed space. The fact of personal involvement or understanding of important historical events is of no consequence without the locus for transmission of this understanding. Becoming 'stake holders' in future cultural developments, where the store of collective memory is put at the disposal of that future: where information communicates and contributes. Projection into the future, such as Aged Miners' Homes, are a provision for ones own future through gerontological concerns for one's current elders. One day we will be them. This is a future aspiration. Development of individual people, for Lynch and Carr, is an increase in competence and capacity to respond in a significant way with their environment. Interaction with the lived landscape is the locus for the development of people in their environment is increased by policy which invites inclusion.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I have explored the notion that spatial location is created and adapted by physical activities which contribute to social construction of identity. Considered historically space emerges as a successive construction where layers are superimposed on previously existing structures. Past activities are equally important in the definition of a location as current use or projections of future possibilities. The identification of specific cultural patterns that divide groups of people along the lines of occupational commonality creates consciousness of difference. This contributes to the primary differential referent of culture.

Encapsulation of miners and mining communities as discrete village dwellers located in a distant time renders their experience as a homogenised entity available for consumption: the commodity form of culture. I am arguing that in order to continue to make a communicative contribution industrial cultures must be identified with the reality of experience.

The argument which follows explores this difference which is predicated in suppositions of otherness which are in turn the product of a particular succession of aesthetic constructs. This difference is necessary to the otherness which identifies specific groups, such as mining communities. A central theme of this chapter has been to look at and hence to try to establish the means to recover the impetus of participation and understanding of social change. In my next chapter I will examine characteristics of the aesthetic which colliery activity produced. This will lead to a discussion about problems associated with representations of this aesthetic. I will consider changes to the landscape and consider the

landscape itself, as palimpsest, as metaphor for change, as the locus of transition. This look of the place in terms of the landscape has a quality which I shall attempt to describe as the 'Colliery Aesthetic'.

From these observations questions begin to emerge which link with concepts surrounding difference. These lead this thesis in two directions. The first concerns how mining is perceived and presented in terms of aesthetics. The second is how this presentation concurs with the reality of experience. The remainder of this work is an attempt to identify the first concept, which I am describing as the 'Colliery Aesthetic' and reconcile it with the second. Can suppositions relating to industrial working and community life be examined and contrasted with the complex social and cultural conditions of their actual experience? Are perceptions and experiences different? What processes bring *imagined communities* into existence? Habitus can be reviewed in the way in which we are shaped by the past but are in turn continually re-rehearsing and reworking it. How can our knowledge of difference inform culture into the future? Conversely in what way is memory a component in the construction of the past? If reshaping are we developing history as an "accommodating fiction"? Do historical accounts gain currency through reinforcing stereotypes?

Important to the concept of cultural regeneration I have identified participation in historical understanding as an essential ingredient of cultural reproduction. In the light of my argument against cultural gatekeepers how is this potential participation thwarted? How are differences amplified or transformed through aesthetic means? How do literary and artistic forms privilege notions of the past

which accompany specific perspectives on events? Does the sense of 'us and them' create distance which causes difficulty in presentation or understanding of experienced reality? Are cultural attributes associated with mining life, such as close knit communities, consigned to the past? How can enquiry into these communities which investigates what made them different be conducted? How do people who are members of these groups perceive themselves? Do they consider themselves as parts of groups?

Taken for granted culture may be disappearing. What effort can be made to understand this process? Is this culture perceived to be gone? In the absence of representations what indication is there that this past even existed? What underlying aesthetic continues to inform the culture to indicate its continuing existence?

Do people consider their recent history as an means to understand themselves? How can historical understanding serve a means of participating in the future? Is there scope for inclusion of this historical understanding as a part of regeneration? Can historical understanding regenerate? Where does the past begin? Is the distanciation from the past a deliberate break which constitutes a political act?

## Chapter Three

### THE COLLIERY AESTHETIC

“To me all seemed largely pits and pit villages, set against which hills, fields and river - together with clouds scudding eastwards - constituted little more than a scenic background.” (Sid Chaplin. 1974. *The Banner Book*)

The last chapter was concerned with establishing the means to recover the impetus of participation and understanding at a time of change. Central to this is the notion of experiential understanding of the environment and how it is perceived by people who participate in its changes. Changes have been effected by physical processes - active human participation. Mining is a principal example of human interface with environmental processes. In direct engagement with the underlying geology mining plays a direct part in changing the look of a place.

This chapter is concerned with aesthetic response to environment. It is about the look of a place as it has been determined by human interference with the environment, the ‘Look Of Coal’ and the look of the coal landscape. Specifically it concerns how industrial activity, especially coal mining, has defined and identified the landscape of the North East of England. This look of the place in terms of the landscape has a quality which I describe as the ‘Colliery Aesthetic’

The first part of this chapter examines some of the characteristics of the aesthetic which colliery activity produced. This is concerned with changes to the landscape. I consider the landscape itself, as palimpsest, as metaphor for change,



as the locus of transition. This leads to a discussion about problems associated with representations of this aesthetic.

My concerns about the absence of reference to mining are expressed in the second part of this chapter which deals with museum representation. Without a participatory understanding of mining which engages people who have known and experienced its culture and its ways, representations may be formed as a consequence of supposition and conjecture. In the last chapter I expressed concerns that the reality of mining and mining culture is obscured through suppositions which homogenise reality into a convenient package for consumption. It is possible that reality is further stultified through representations which depict mining in particular ways. What, then, informs these suppositions about the unseen landscape? Ideas about the hidden world of the pit, are dealt with in the third part. This begins with an attempt to reconcile reality with extreme representations. Extremity is categorised in its association with theories of the 'sublime' which are investigated as a background to the final part of this chapter. The dwellers of the unseen other world are acquainted with other underworld dwellers. I conclude this chapter with a catabasis: a visit to the underworld.

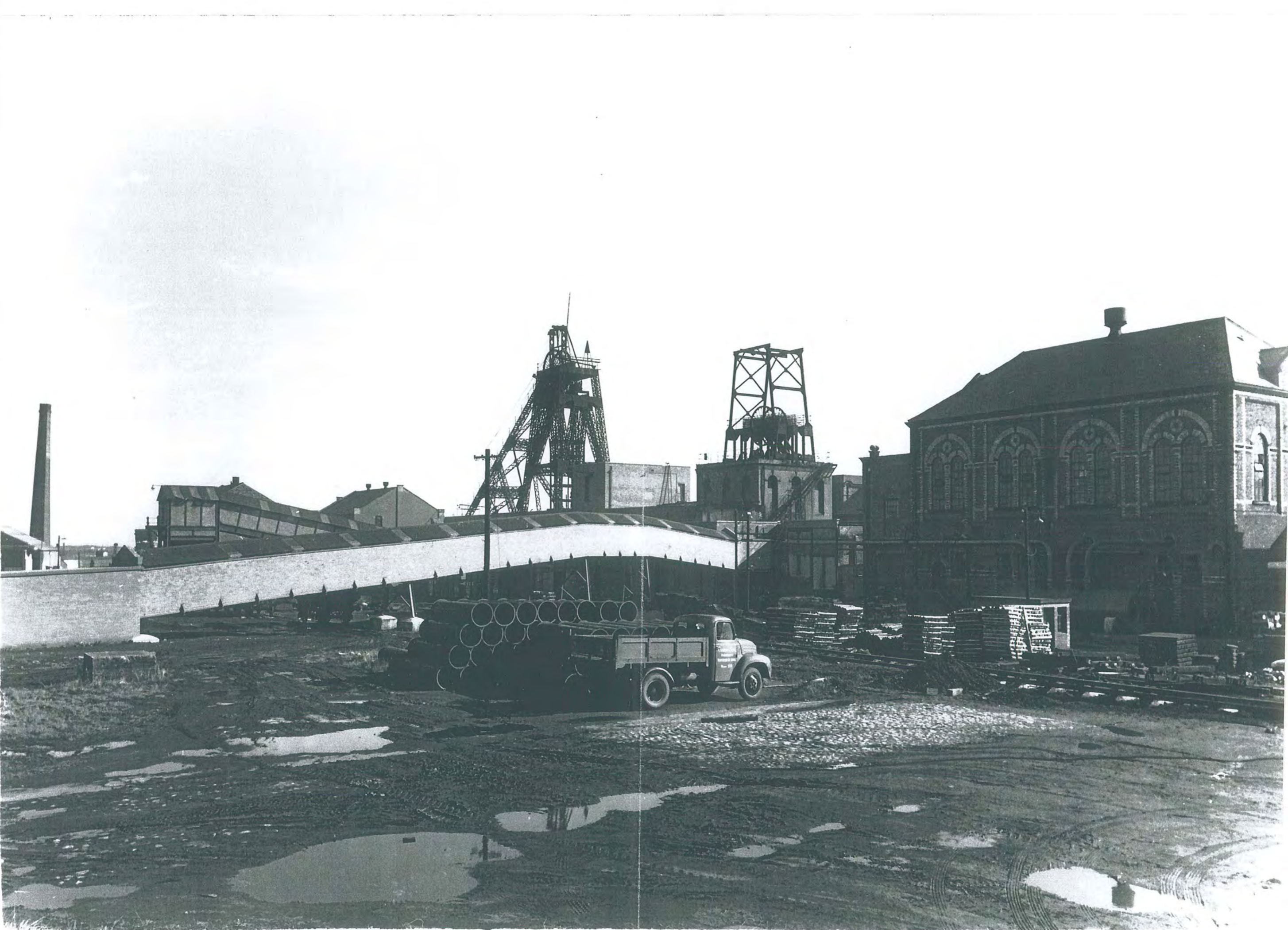
The value with which this aesthetic is judged is not neutral but informed by attitudes and suppositions about mining working life. Some of these are founded in reality, but many are based in literary and other representations which are interpretations of subjective understanding and prejudices which reduce understanding to dimensions associated with loathing and fear. I present some

literary texts for examination under this rubric. As an invisible activity, carried out unseen from the everyday gaze the times when mining has been in the public gaze it has been because of terrible events, violent death or social upheaval through strikes. Mining gets a bad press. This work is about representations. In approaching a dimension of 'otherness' the idea of the look of an alien or primitive race is upheld and exemplified in the painting by Parker. Travel narratives approximate concepts of colonial discourse as defined by Bhabha, in which "colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (1990. pp 70 - 72). I wish to examine the landscapes of coal and modern coal as codified spaces or labelled territories. Theories relating to the Sublime lead to considerations of how the landscape of mining is known, mapped and understood.

## **PART ONE**

### **THE LANDSCAPE DEFINED**

I have attempted to establish an understanding of participation in the landscape which informs and is informed by culture. The landscape of coal is the landscape par excellence of human interaction with the forces of nature. Coal must be got from the circumstances where nature put it. Miners respond to the challenge of difficult natural circumstances. Mining consists of great feats of craftsmanship and engineering skills against subtle and tremendous forces of nature, and comparisons cannot be brought with routines related to other industries of mass production. Persistent attempts, at various times, at the routinisation of codes and working practices in mining inevitably came into conflict with geological and



product of activities in a specific place. Mining produces a definitive look in the landscape. This constitutes an image of the mining landscape without depicting its actual activity, which goes on unseen under the earth. I present three phases of imagery of the landscape of mining: the first is concerned with the look of modern mining in the landscape; the second is its concomitant, an image of the degradation and blight caused by mineral extraction; the third is an attempt to present the sense of absence in the landscape after activity has ceased.

### **Landmarks which define a sense of place**

Mining can be identified in the structures it produces in the landscape. Returning to notions of participatory urban landscape and means to understand them, Lynch (1960) considers the look of cities in which he asserts that the urban landscape is “something to be seen, to be remembered, and to be delighted in.” For him “landmarks are [a] type of point of reference [...but the ] observer does not enter within them, they are external [...] typically seen from many angles and distances [...] and used as radial references [at a distance] for all practical purposes they symbolize constant direction.” (p48) The mining landscape was redolent of its underlying industrial process, made visible through the presence of landmarks: cranes, heapsteads, pit heaps. (Fig. 3:1)

Lynch (1963:65ff) lists three desiderata for landmarks: they must have a “clear form”, they must “contrast with their background”, and they must be endowed

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Fig. 3:1 Heapstead building, Boldon Colliery, c 1965.

with “prominence of spatial location”. “Beyond this, in order for them to serve as centers or goals, they must have sufficient solid mass to emphasize their presence, in other words there must be an emphasis on their sheer bigness”(p183). Higuchi discussing mountains, notes “as centers or goals that attract and concentrate attention [they] give coherence and stability to otherwise diffuse spaces around them” (1983.183). In order for such elements to create spatial order they must be seen, sensed, and constantly recognised, not merely as geographical entities but as identifying features of the landscape. Landscapes denote the biographical features of places. They explain the narrative of place in which its character and significance are formed. Like Higuchi we are interested in how well something can be seen: how clearly the narrative of place is defined. The most important feature of the colliery landscape in this context is that it can not be seen.

### **Coal represented as beautiful**

In order to introduce this sense of the look of the landscape, and to present a literary image of coal itself, as it appears underground I present literary and artistic images. Heslop (1994) describes the look of coal as it appears to him in its natural state in a mine. His description differs significantly from that of Orwell, for example. Orwell knew the coal mine as a visitor; Heslop knew it from working life experience.

“In that Five Quarter seam the coal stood in all its primordial and pristine loveliness, blinking back our simple lighted candles like a shy maiden. Coal is always beautiful when it reflects such light. I can still recall the stillness of



that coal as it stood before us in the presence of its own enormous centuries. It was beautiful” (1994.118). (Fig. 3:2)

It is important to note at this stage that a man familiar with the world of work underground describes coal as beautiful! Through history accounts of undertakings of the Great North Coalfield of Northumberland and Durham have been delivered with an expression of wonder. This wonder, from early times, has been expressed in terms of its prodigiousness: its vastness of scale. The vastness of the undertaking of mining in early verbal ‘images’, such as that of Defoe, in *‘A Tour Through The Whole Island Of Great Britain’*.

“The road to Newcastle gives us a view of the inexhaustible store of coal and coal pits, from whence not London only but all the south parts of England is continually supplied: and whereas when we are at London, and see the prodigious fleets of ships which come constantly with coals from this encreasing city, we are apt to wonder whence they come, and that they do not bring the whole Coal Country away; yet when in this Country we see the prodigious Heaps, I might say Mountains of Coals, which are dug up at every Pit, and how many of those Pits there are, we are filled with equal Wonder to consider where the People should live who consume them” (1724.250).

Defoe describes the landscape of coal to people who have not seen it, nor are likely to, as a traveller in a strange land. The region has a historical association with people who tell travellers tales of its difference: especially insofar as the blighted landscape of mining is concerned. Various accounts are presented through this chapter.

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Fig. 3:2 Beautiful coal at a shearer face, Blenkinsopp Castle Colliery, 1997.



### **The recent look of modernity**

As I have noted mining occurs where the minerals are; coal must be got where it can be obtained, cognate (invariably heavy) industries such as coal processing plants and mining machinery and rope factories all needed to be located nearby. Smoke and dust and big buildings are a part of the look of a mining area. Coal mining has been carried out on South Tyneside since before records were kept but the significant undertakings of four immense collieries commenced in earnest in the early nineteenth century. Heslop's account expresses awe with the vastness of the undertaking of Harton Colliery.

“The Harton Coal Company Limited was a vast mining operation carried out in the rich seams of excellent coal lying under the county borough and the rural district of Shields. The tremendous seams were mined at four separate pits, Saint Hilda, Harton, Marsden and Boldon. Each pit was geared to a daily production of three thousand tons of coal. It was at that time the most majestic complex in the county of Durham. Each pit was powered by electricity throughout. The economic basis of the structure was a secure and satisfactory coalfield. All the produced coal was screened before being loaded onto the company's own waggons, carried by its own electrified railway to its own coal trimmers into colliers by its own staithes. The Company's own railway serviced three of the collieries [...] The entire county borough was circumscribed, transport wise, by the colliery railway. Not one chimney honoured the Company with a belch of smoke. Each colliery was drawn by an impressive winding engine and an enormous headgear that imposed its ever revolving wheel over a scene of incessant labour activity. Even the subsidiary appurtenances complementary to the task of creating the coal commodity were impressive. The pit buzzer was an electrified screech” (1994.132-3).

And the electric locomotives, although built at the turn of the century dignified the whole operation with a look of modernity. Here we find a description of more than a colliery town; a whole borough brought to a look of modernity by its mining industry. The fanciful ‘New Aberfoyle’ of Jules Verne's novel *The Underground City* (1877 [html](#)) described a scene which shares the visual dynamic of the reality of mining engineering as science fiction. He depicts a



“double line of railway, the wagons being moved by hydraulic power, plied from hour to hour to and from the village thus buried in the subsoil ...”

“Arrived in Coal Town, the visitor found himself in a place where electricity played a principal part as an agent of heat and light. Although the ventilation shafts were numerous, they were not sufficient to admit much daylight into New Aberfoyle, yet it had abundance of light. This was shed from numbers of electric discs; some suspended from the vaulted roofs, others hanging on the natural pillars — all, whether suns or stars in size, were fed by continuous currents produced from electro-magnetic machines” (Verne.html).

In reality and in fiction mining captured the imagination of the look of the modern. As well as the electric railway the image which dominated the South Tyneside landscape in recent times was the winding tower above the Crown Shaft. Borings had ascertained good quality coal in abundance near Bents House at Westoe Village as early as 1779 (Hodgson 1903). Westoe shaft reopened Saint Hilda Colliery in 1949 and in the ensuing period immense undersea reserves were exploited. The Crown Tower stood in this context as a monument. Its high visibility marked the entrance to the Tyne for seafarers, and marked position which could be seen from considerable distances. Brand (1994) explains that buildings are “pushed along by three irresistible forces - technology, money and fashion.” The look of a building is dictated by a simple market expedient: “[f]orm follows funding. If people have money to spare, they will mess with their buildings, at minimum to solve the current set of frustrations with the place, at maximum to show off their wealth, on the reasonable theory that money attracts money”(p5). The colliery buildings were erected at a time of great confidence in the future for coal. The sinking of the Crown shaft marks the exuberance of the 1950 ‘Plan for Coal’ which envisaged outputs at collieries well into the future. Between the time of the shaft’s commissioning and its completion the NCB was forced to revise its projections. The decline in demand in 1957 meant that by

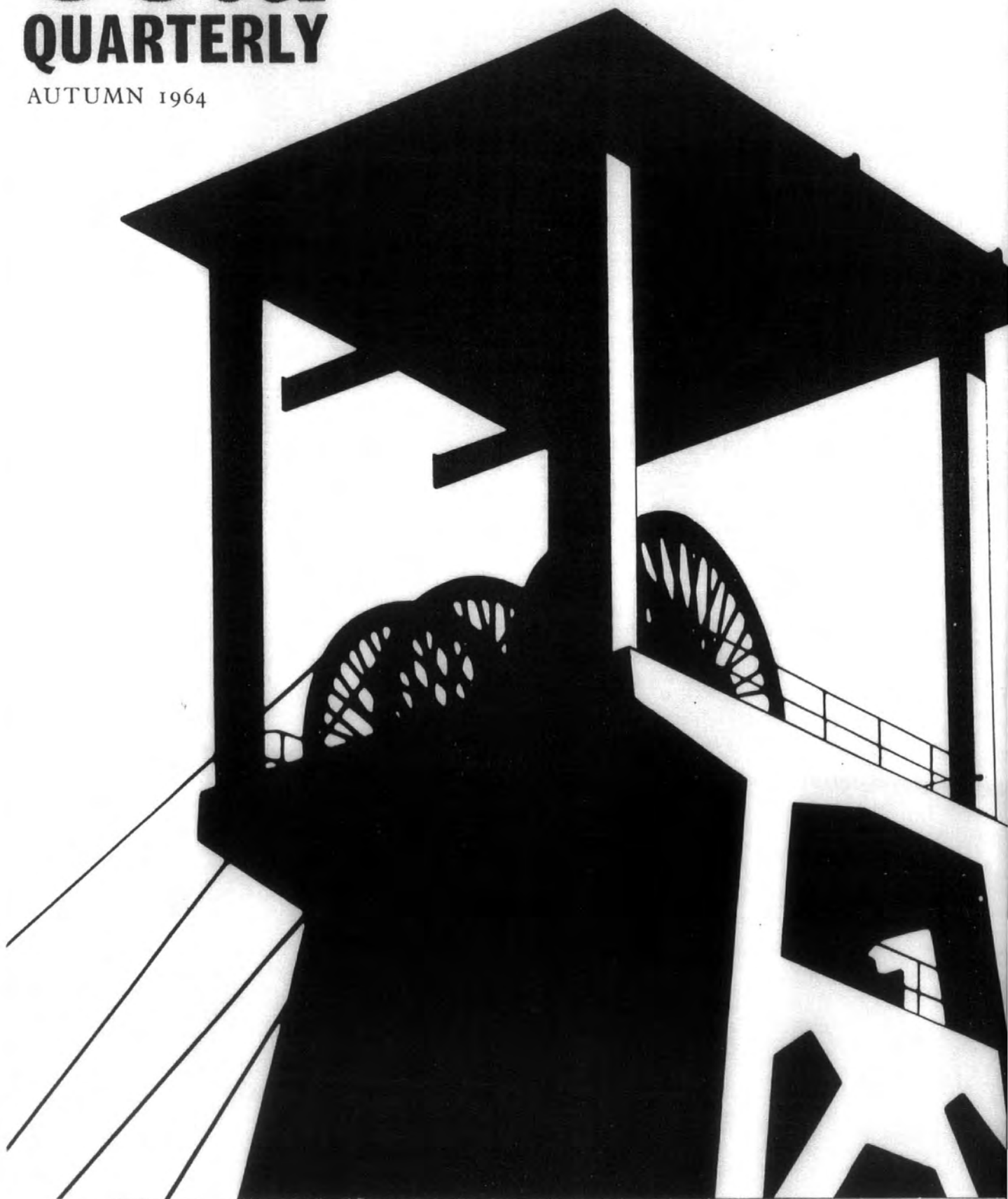
1959 (*Iron and Coal Trades Review* vol. 131, 28 August 1959) nationally 240 colliery closures were foreseen. Exhaustion of reserves, mergers with other collieries and pits “which have served as reservoirs of labour for new pits will be closed as the new pits come into operation”. In chapter seven I discuss the event of colliery closure as it is understood by people effected the most - the miners themselves. Westoe Colliery consolidated the concept of progress in mining technology at a time of massive upheavals in the structure of the industry.

Colliery buildings by and large conform to a set of principles which identify the interface between the user and the community outside. The tower, as well as conforming to a necessity of design in terms of its use, also reflected a necessity, an arrogance of efficiency and scale. “Every building leads three contradictory lives - as habitat, as property, and as a component of the surrounding community” (Brand 1994. 73). Chaplin sang the praises of the seemingly tangible modernity and dynamism of the white heat of technological revolution. As apologist general for the Coal Board locally his bulletins in periodicals like *Coal Quarterly* expressed these sentiments. Looking to the future young men were engaged in a training programme which invited them to participate in their own futures - their own destiny. Writing about a programme of education which enabled vast technological advances in mining technology which was

“Initiated in 1953, a constantly improving National Apprenticeship Scheme has already made a major contribution to the success of the British coal industry in providing skilled men for the breakthrough in coal-face mechanisation which has hoisted productive efficiency by one-third in the last seven years. Without men with skill at their fingertips the rapid momentum of the power loading programme, which has more than doubled mechanised output to nearly 80 per cent of the national output since 1960, would not have been possible” (*CQ* 1965. pp 15 - 17).

# Coal QUARTERLY

AUTUMN 1964



The talk of percentages, output, participation in the future. The look of modern mining (Fig. 3:3) is a monument to the concept of functional progress through power.

### **Dilapidation and squalor**

Even alongside this high modern image there is a concomitant sense of dirt and decay. Squalor and desolation of the landscape were and are a feature of mineral extraction. The work involves moving vast unsightly quantities of dirty material exuded from the earth. At the same time, alongside the highly modern look of the buildings waste materials were produced on a vast scale, which created a general sense of dilapidation. Durham County Council sought to address the blight of the landscape. Scheduling and categorising, in a continued project which sought to implement change. “In the industrial areas of the region the untidiness and drabness produced by derelict land has been heightened by the sporadic development of settlements associated with adjacent industry, particularly coal mining, and which, due to the reorganization of the industry, have lost the purpose of their existence” (Atkinson 1964.151). Priestley reflected as he went upon a visit to the North East in 1938. After a pungent description of the volcano that is the pit heap ... “like that of Pompeii as we are told, on the eve of its destruction”. He goes on to reflect upon the wealth that has been created with these heaps as their *caput mortuum*,

“I stared at the monster, my head tilted back, and thought of all the fine things that had been conjured out of it in its time: the country houses and town houses, the drawing rooms and dining rooms, the carriages and pairs, the trips to Paris, the silks and the jewels, the peaches and iced puddings, the cigars and old brandies, I thought I saw them all tumbling and streaming out,

hurrying away from Shotton - oh a long way from Shotton - as fast as they could go" (1934.337).

Through the last century across virtually the whole of the North East industrial concatenations gradually expanded to meet one another. As the town worked its way into the hills of County Durham: "...nor was the industrial landscape represented solely in the great towns, for between them stretched miles of torn and poisoned countryside - the mountains of waste from mining and other industries; the sheets of *sullen* water ... the disused pit-shafts" (Hoskins 1955.229 my emphasis). Alongside the look of the modern was an inevitable sense of dereliction. Regionwide examples were outlined in a planning report in which the coal landscape was prioritised.

"... the disused spoil heaps, worked out mineral excavations, abandoned industrial installations and land damaged by mining subsidence. At the end of 1965 the total amount of derelict land in the region was some 20,000 acres ... The actual growth of dereliction, taking colliery closures into account, is estimated as 500 acres a year" (NEPC. 1966).

Colliery closures had, in the period between 1960 and 1965 reached a peak also.

Not everyone saw industrial blight the same way. Norman Cornish describes his esoteric approach to Hoskins' torn and poisoned countryside.

"Pit-heads, in this shape complex, can look like windmills in old Dutch paintings. They loom up over the village. Pit-heads and windmills both control a lot of the industrial welfare of the village. The workers within them could get flour diseases, or coal-dust diseases. One wonders, with the passing of time, when no present day type pit-heads actually exist, if pictures of them might one day be thought of as picturesque and as socially significant as old windmill pictures" (Cornish 1980.54).

Again the artist who knows the place finds elements which, whilst fully aware of the reality of industrial illness, is able to conceptualise the place with a degree of

wonder. Sid Chaplin's works attest to the reality that rural life continued alongside mining and dilapidation in the mining villages.

### **Images of emptiness**

Mining is carried out across vast spaces underground. Above the ground collieries can encompass large areas also. After a mine is closed and its buildings demolished these vast spaces, remaining empty awaiting new use, are redolent of a different sense of desolation. One is aware of a vast history without knowing it. I attempt to draw a parallel of the sense of emptiness instilled by these spaces with an image adapted from the 1949 Twentieth Century Fox film '*Twelve O'Clock High*' which develops the action replay genre. The story begins with an American War veteran who is prompted to return to the aerodrome where his bomb group was stationed during the war. (*Eighth Air Force* urls). They flew B17s on daylight precision bombing missions from 1942. The place is deserted and the derelict control tower, huts and hangers still stand in ruins evoking memory of the time. In his mind he hears the echoes of the singing his bygone, (mostly dead) comrades in arms in song. This film is presenting a recent reality (five years on). His aural, echoing memories phase into visual real time reality. The movie is enhanced with actual combat footage which heightens its sense of realism. Belloc attempted to explain the paradox which the past returns in times of silence and darkness.

“and that this absence of what once was possesses, nay obtrudes itself upon, the mind: it becomes almost a sensible thing. There is much to be said for those who pretend, imagine, or perhaps have experienced under such conditions the return of the dead. The mood of darkness and of silence is a mood crammed with something that does not remain, as space remains, that is

limited by time, and is a creature of time, and yet something that has the immortal right to remain" (1959.170).

The image is conjured up through an attempt to identify the place with recollection.

"All those boys who held the line of the low ridge or rather swell of land from Houghoumont through the Belle Alliance have utterly gone. More than dust goes, more than wind goes; they will never be seen again. Their voices will never be heard - they are not. But what is the mere soil of the fields without them? What meaning has it save for their presence? I could wish to understand these things" (p171).

Belloc was scorned by many people who saw military service because of this romantic portrayal of warfare in the trenches (Fussell 1975). The idea of romantic imagery is further explored in the context of mining in chapter eight. James Agee, whose important work *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is extensively drawn upon as a model for my representation in further chapters, visited the home of the tenant farmers when they were all out at work, in what he described as an 'uncured time', when no one was at home 'in all this house, in all this land'. The house was ... 'standing empty and silent ... all thus left open and defenceless to a reverent and cold-laboring spy, shines quietly forth such grandeur, such sorrowful holiness of its exactitude in existence, as no human consciousness shall ever rightly perceive, far less impart to another; that there can be more beauty and more deep wonder in the standings and spacings of mute furnishings on a bare floor between the squaring bourns of walls than in any music ever made" (1941.134).





## **PART TWO**

### **LACK OF REPRESENTATION**

I have presented three distinct images of the mining landscape in the way they can be clearly perceived and understood. The industrial activity has ceased and as far as possible the landscape has been restored. Towers and heapstead buildings have been removed. What is there to show for mining? What remains of this landscape of mining which indicates its significance or underlying meaning? There is, of course, the highly visual pollution of the environment which is amplified when mining operations cease. As mining has changed the hydrology and hydrochemistry of the coal measures, when dewatering as a part of mining operations ceases “rising minewaters entrain acidic salts ... as they saturate voids” (Younger 1995). Acidic groundwaters discharging into local rivers have “serious consequences for the aquatic ecology and human use of the river ... system” (Younger 1993). In many places ochreous water is the only physical presence of mining in the landscape. It will not go away. (Fig. 3:4)

Having paralleled the notion of the legacy of mineral extraction with that of heritage in the first chapter I use it again to provide a link between the categories of what is real and what is represented. As discourse reverts to history the lot falls to the arts sector to make representation of this history which gives meaning to cultural activities for the future. In this part of the chapter I investigate the problem of museum representation. The provisioning of the popular appetite for ‘the past’ is partly the means by which the ‘past’s inescapable claim on the present’ is denied (Kaye 1991). Lowenthal has

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Fig. 3:4 The Colliery landscape after mining has ceased.

remarked that a “past nostalgically enjoyed does not need to be taken seriously”. For him “the urge to preserve derives from several interrelated presumptions: that the past was unlike the present; that its relics are necessary to our identity and desirable in themselves; and that tangible remains are a finite and dwindling commodity”(1985:389). According to Adorno ...

“The German word *museal* (museumlike) has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are the family sepulchres of works of art” (1967:175).

### **Museum representation**

The preservation of heritage is a purposeful and integral part of the means to understand how the past shapes our ideas and actions. It affords a sense of history, in which we are able to contemplate and inform our own deliberations with the experiences, struggles, and aspirations and visions which have preceded our own.

Although museums as institutions operate with high-cultural, educational, presentational or archival purposes, the whole world which operates within the sphere of history or heritage as cultural policy, the world of museums, art galleries and record offices which has been explored in chapter one as Heritage, does not deal with the recent lived past. The educational system in curriculum leading to examinations belongs here also, as in establishing ground rules of

what does and does not constitute history. It excludes the recent in the texts that are used in schools.

McCord (1979) noted "Some of the crucial elements in the region's history have received relatively little modern scrutiny. Most glaring deficiency of all is the absence of any comprehensive account of the development of the Great Northern Coalfield which played such a vital part in the evolution of the modern North East." The North of England Museum Service (NEMS) representation of mining heritage in the region is outlined in the strategy document '*Fuel For Thought*' (Gale 1994). Atkinson, who influenced the direction of the museum service since the 1960s, defines the museum problem in his foreword to the report, quoting in turn his introduction to the Durham County Local History Society in 1966: "thinking of the material objects still existing, from pit lamps to winding engines, and it is from this point of view that the present notes are written". Atkinson ends his introduction in Gale by saying that

"It has to be the last tragedy of this industry that due to a lack of suitable storage, staff and funding among the museums of the region, it has not proved practicable to offer a balanced representation of the northern industry's final days. However, such is the scale of the late twentieth century developments it would be difficult to accommodate them even in an ideal and well funded situation. Hence what has been built up in the region must now be fully cared for and used to remind the region of a time when Britain - and especially the North East - played a significant role in facilitating the developing of industry in the formative years of the 'Industrial Revolution'"(op cit.2).

This effectively excuses the museum from making any attempt to tell the recent 'story' of mining. NEMS depiction of mining is concentrated in its core representations at Woodhorn and Beamish Museums. Beamish portrays to its visitors a social history of the North East in presenting two given periods of disquisition, 1825 and 1913 (Beamish One 1978 Beamish 1996). Various items,

from buildings and machinery to tools and furniture, have been collected, erected, reassembled, restored and put on show in order to recreate the situation of these times and “also to make it possible for visitors to experience [them] in some degree”.

Museums reinvent space through the deployment of many layers of meanings. They are symbolic sites which confer artistic value on objects (Bourdieu 1993); they produce or reproduce colonial identities (Combes 1994). Artefacts are not neutral: they shape experience according to both the museum context and the social and cultural identity of the visitor. Museums purposefully frame space, and people in space, according to historically and ideologically specific conditions. Duncan and Wallach (1980) characterise museums as ‘ceremonial monuments’ which serve a similar function to traditional locii of power and knowledge, such as churches. Yet due largely to the shortcomings of the museum services at the time of colliery closures a significant bulk of important material artefacts, which could inform the wider narrative of the mining industry, are still in existence are comprised of the privately held items that “went home from the pit in people’s haversacks” (per comms various). Items of personal importance were saved from the shredder at the pit head. Their importance to their current owners is matched with the continued risk of material degradation through unprofessional storage or handling that these items face. Nevertheless theft or other piecemeal abstraction of materials from colliery offices by individuals has effectively saved documents from their official consignment to oblivion. At the time of the colliery closures in 1993 and 1994 shredding machines worked in shifts - I personally witnessed this at three

important North East collieries. No collection policy from the museum sector meant no collection policy: nothing was officially collected. The consequence of this is that collections of photographic negatives existing in garages is only just better than not existing at all. A significant proportion of material which would otherwise inform representations of the mining industry have been *privatised*.

### **Museum as theme park**

The *Rhondda Heritage Park* tells the story of a place through focusing on a specific time in the history of Lewis Merthyr Colliery - from 1880 to 1926 - the hey day of mining in Rhondda (Dicks 1997). A representation of this nature is intended to make the cultural structures of everyday activities observable. Assertion of unitary identity supposes a degree of self sameness that crosses temporal boundaries. This construction presents an archetype of somewhere that never existed. Theme parks require the suspension of appreciation of time. The place becomes the time it represents. This place *is* this community across time.

The hiatus between culture and the cultural object, between experience and the artefact which represents that experience, is a consequence of temporal fragmentation and disjuncture. Featherstone (1995:39) associates the global construct 'theme park' with the local. But local reality is unimportant to theme park representation in any other than a superficial ornamental way. As long as a "... sense of home is sustained by collective memory, which itself depends on ritual performances, bodily practices and commemorative practices" (p74). If it

ceases to function in these terms it ceases to exist. Featherstone fails to appreciate that the museum ritual performance is not cultural continuity or “preservation of the real”. He supposes that visiting museums must provide for old people “... an uncanny sense of the local cultures they lived in...”. But the uncanny element is distance created between this product and lived culture rather than the experience relived, and the superimposition of (perhaps) non-existent memories. Neither can this, as he supposes, “help to regain a sense of place” so much as detract from that sensibility. It creates an acceptable pastiche. In a discussion of Verdi’s opera *Aida* Said weighs the authenticity of its Egyptian narrative content. The “new middle class...who work in the cultural industries... are most well disposed to experiment with the reconstruction of locality”(1993:97). The commodity narrative of a work of fiction which is based in a real mining tragedy, *The Stars Look Down* (Cronin 1935) is inauthentic experience, albeit based in reality.

### **Caricature and myth**

Jenkins (1992) expressed concern for the sanitising process which presents an innocuous picture of a stereotype community. Many ‘uncomfortable’ elements and themes are simply ignored. Anthony Cronin (1985) debunks the caricature in nationalist myth which asserts that everyone comes from the “same humble stock”, and that everyone had the same experience of misery and exploitation - and not only were there different levels of experience among different classes of the rural community but there were often bitter and bloody conflicts of interest amongst them. Caricature such as racial stereotype is identified by Hobsbawm

(in Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) questioning the social significance and political function of invented tradition. "...it also seems clear that the most successful examples of manipulation are those which exploit practices which clearly meet a felt - not necessarily a clearly understood - need among particular bodies of people". This may represent nostalgia as a surrogate religiosity in keeping with Appadurai's thesis from chapter one. The stereotyping of miners and mining history assists in their consignment as innocuous commodities for consumption. This represents a form of myth making, where the coarse edges of reality are smoothed over for consumption. Barthes (1972) understood myth as a system of communication which can pass into an open oral state because "there is no law which forbids talking about things". He saw the function of myth as emptying reality and thus creating absence.

Representation which has been simplified for consumption is discussed by Chaney (1994) who describes as 'bowdlerization' the sanitising of classics of literature for unsophisticated audiences. Through this the process culture is 'prettified' to suit the expectations or conventions of its consumer. Collections of folk songs have similarly been censored because of the vulgarity of its core (low cultural) content. These theories of reduction of actual culture to commodity has its apogee in the reality of the 'theme park' as the place of consumption of the culture of experience. Soja uses the term 'theme park' to describe urban developments such as Disneyland or Disney World (Soja 1992). Typical examples of this model are hybrids, like most post modern phenomena. Ontological boundaries, which previously separated distinct cultural, social,

economic, philosophical, political and scientific realms, are dissolved. As seemingly fictional constructs, theme parks are embedded within the multiple symbiotic relationships between cultural, social and political actualities. As 'playgrounds' in both the sense of their consumption and the way in which themes are played with and manipulated, they appear harmless. 'Disneyfication' is a term coined to describe the expansion and the application of the hyperreality principle beyond the boundaries of theme parks. The emblematic appropriation of different architectural styles that have been displaced from their original historical context and the spatial ordering systems which generated them is also described in this way.

The themes of tourism through Catherine Cookson Country and Catherine Cookson Trail are all considered by focus groups. Catherine Cookson, as a South Shields author is identified as someone who can tell the story of the locale. The idea of a 'trail' as an interpretation of her work and her life through the landscape poses problems as virtual reconstruction of cultural reality. It is not necessarily the authentic lived experience of people in a place. One supposition concerning theme park representations of cultural reality presenting this reality as a commodity which performs an economic function associated with cultural regeneration can be shown to be little more than postmodern 'cargo cult'. This thesis does not address the realities of the suppositions that reified culture can engage with economic renewal. But fallacious assumptions inherent in this theme are exposed by Baudrillard in his observations of postmodern cynicism where every attribute of culture is fungible: everything can be bought. This materialised, according to Baudrillard (1996 html):



“when the metallurgical industry in the Lorraine region entered its final crisis, the public powers had the idea to make up for this collapse by creating a European leisure zone, an ‘intelligent’ theme park which could jumpstart the economy of the region. This park was called Smurfland. The managing director of the dead metallurgy naturally became the manager of the theme park, and the unemployed workers were rehired as ‘smurfmén’ in the context of this new Smurfland. Unfortunately, the park itself, for several reasons, had to be closed, and the former factory workers turned ‘smurfmén’ once again found themselves on the dole. It is a somber destiny which, after making them the real victims of the job market, transformed them into the ghostly workers of leisure time, and finally turned them into the unemployed of both”.

But the reality of recent memory does not readily lend itself to this “ready-to-wear fashion”. Modification is necessary to erase political reality. “Disney, the precursor, the grand initiator of the imaginary as virtual reality, is now in the process of capturing all the real world to integrate it into its synthetic universe, in the form of a vast ‘reality show’ where reality itself becomes a spectacle, where the real becomes a theme park”. This assimilation of the real into the virtual or consumable is not neutral in terms of outcomes in the world of real as opposed to bought experiences where these worlds which are based in colonial absurdity and violence - “General Schwarzkopf, the great Gulf War strategist, celebrated his victory [with a] huge party at Disney World” (loc cit).

### **The distance of the past**

To Appadurai anthropology presents an archive of lived actualities (1996.11) where recent experience links the past and present. He outlines modernity as unevenly experienced rather than one single moment of break between past and present. Private temporalities weaken the reality of interpersonal relationships with public history. This leads to questions about historylessness and

depthlessness: constitutive features of the postmodern, in which whole historical periods are massive homogenised. Kaye notes that

“... post-modernists’ not only portray contemporary experience as discontinuous with the past but contend that ‘a permanent change has taken place’ in Western and world culture and history. In essence they, too, assert that the present, our contemporary experience, represents an *ending* or, actually, an *afterwards*” (1991.147).

Kaye identifies this crisis as not simply the reduction and marginalization of historical education, but that after the onslaught from the political right in which “inequality has been increasing, and democratic activity had become narrower and shallower, our sense of and anxiety about discontinuity and decline not only persist but are now exacerbated and made all the more problematic by the ongoing siege of collective historical memory, consciousness and imagination being waged via a discourse which celebrates the supposed end of history” (p148).

### **The superficial**

Central to the theme of postmodernism, its “supreme formal feature” (Jameson 1984, also quoted in Bertens 1995) is the surface. It is depthless; it offers “a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense”. An important element of representation is that meaning requires understanding and “depth, a hidden dimension ... the postmodern scene exhibits signs of dead meaning and frozen forms mutating into new combinations and permutations of the same” (Kellner 118). The indifference thus defined is not simply constructed in the sense that people are impervious to their surroundings, but also that individuals are not different from one another. Importantly, in the context of Jameson, This points to another important difference of culture as experience versus culture as

commodity. This returns to ideas in chapter one in which postmodern compression blurs the distinction between personal and collective imagination and leads to the creation of “communities of sentiment” composed of groups of people that imagine and feel things together (Appadurai 1990). As a process of consumption then culture rewrites *place* from its own specific perspective, creating for it its new cultural identity. This identity is based on an exclusion of those who inhabit that outside space: difference again serves the function of defining spaces and forming boundaries that separate ‘us’ from ‘them’.

I will end this part of the chapter with descriptions of miners in which their appearance emphatically defines their ‘otherness’; their occupancy of the space of them. Lawrence remarks at the other worldly appearance of miners moving about the town.

“the main street of the town ... was uncreated and ugly, and yet surcharged with the same potent atmosphere of intense, dark callousness. There were always miners about. they moved with their strange, distorted dignity, a certain beauty, and unnatural stillness in their bearing, a look of abstraction and half resignation in their pale, often gaunt faces. They belonged to another world, they had a strange glamour, their voices were filled with an intolerable deep resonance, like a machine’s burring, a music more maddening than the sirens’ long ago” (1921.129).

Miners belong to another world. The next part of the chapter looks at ways in which that other world, especially as it goes on unseen, can be identified.

### **PART THREE**

#### **UNSEEN AND SUPPOSED**

Miners are depicted as 'others'. Mining is carried on in an unseen world. Fortey notes that there "has to be a historical narrative, which, as it happens, runs broadly in *tandem* with the geography of Britain. Lying beneath the thin skin of recorded history in our islands, geology has the same role in the landscape as does the unconscious mind in psychology: ubiquitous but concealed" (1993). This is the hidden landscape. So far this chapter has attempted to deal with the nature of space as a social product: the reciprocal nature of the landscape and experience at the core of the development of collective and personal identity. Due to the largely unseen nature of mineral extraction much of what is perceived is either residual - the by-product and blight associated with the extractive activity - or conjectural. The real and imagined landscapes thus created both contain attributes which can be described and understood in the context of Burke's 'sublime'. The following part is concerned with how what is unseen is supposed.

A place has a history only insofar as it can be understood: that what has happened here can be told. The history of mining in the region is literally as well as metaphorically encrypted in the landscape. It is buried underneath it. Its symbols must be sought out and understood in order for its historical narrative to be understood. Belloc describes the feeling of awe derived from being in a place where something significant has happened.

"It is perhaps not possible to put into human language that emotion which rises when a man stands upon some plot of European soil and can say with certitude to himself: 'Such and such a great, or wonderful, or beautiful things happened here' " (1959.167).

### **The supposed landscape of mining**

Public understanding of the unseen underground world are informed by literary publications, some of which dwell upon this sense of melodrama and sentimentality. Cronin's *The Stars Look Down* is a fiction based entirely in the events of a mining disaster which really happened in Newcastle in 1925 (Cronin. 1935). The real narrative of the inundation is in itself dramatic reading. The story concerns a colliery holing into old underground workings through which a number of men were drowned. The fictional work, in fact, reproduces the official report, changing only the names of the protagonists. The fiction was written ten years after the real event. McCutcheon (1955) *Troubled Seams*, recounts the narrative of the 1880 explosion which killed 160 men and boys. Amongst the most distressing elements of the tale was the finding, long after the event, by a search party, of a tin bottle inscribed with a message to his wife by one of the entombed miners. This *melodrama* sets sensational tales of mass violent death. He explains that there was a great interest in mining disasters following the explosion at Easington in 1951 when the exercise to recover the bodies of many of the 83 men who died went on for several months. When the rescue men came across the putrefying bodies of the dead horses they buried them in lime. McCutcheon relates: "In the Seaham explosion 181 ponies were killed. Their hooves were preserved as souvenirs - polished, inscribed and adapted to various uses, such as stands for ink-wells, snuff boxes, and pin cushions". He previously wrote about the entombment and subsequent death of 204 miners in the Hartley pit in Northumberland in 1862. A travellers handbook to the Blyth and Tyne Railway (Welford 1863) written shortly after the event included the site of the colliery as an item worthy of note on a tourist itinerary.

The incident which made the pit noteworthy was the breaking of the beam of a pumping engine which fell down the shaft, entombing the two hundred and four men and boys working below. The contemporaneous newspaper report in the *Illustrated London News* reported the disaster in detail. The ensuing rescue attempts - the men were known to be still alive for some days after the event - excited the emotions of the nation at large, through the spectacle created by the newspapers. The *Illustrated London News* reported

“When day broke this morning a mournful and impressive scene was presented at the mouth of the pit. Two huge fires burning near the shaft cast a sickly flame of light upon the tall engine house, and the cage, which was broken on Thursday, now lying a battered mass of metal upon the heap [...] On the evening of the third “The crowd of listless, curious, unfeeling gossipers; who have swarmed round the place the whole day, is now beginning to disperse”.

[The following morning ...]

“... here they cluster in anxious groups; and it would rend a heart of stone to see the longing eyes with which they follow every man as he disappears down the shaft, and the breathless interest with which they watch the coming of returning shifts, and learn the varying success with which they have met”.

“Passing this painful spot, we may scramble up a heap of coals to the iron platform at the head of the shaft. Here a curious sight is presented. In the background is the yawning chasm, black and dangerous looking, down which the mighty beam fell with irresistible force. Huge timbers, torn and twisted like pieces of paper, evidence, in small degree, the violence and the frightful velocity with which the fatal mass of metal dropped through the air; otherwise there is little about the appearance of the place to distinguish it from an ordinary pit-mouth”.

Setting the scene for the audience the reporter writes that “years hence the place will have a terrible interest in the eyes of all” Later he entreats ...

“earnestly impressing upon all curious persons to abstain from visiting the spot tomorrow. A grim battle for life and death is going on here; and no listless, talking idlers are wanted”.

This prurient, self righteous reporting brings to mind the indignation expressed by the T.V. journalist at the scene of the *'Herald of Free Enterprise'* disaster: he found it difficult to obtain a space to report from in consequence of the traffic

jams of the cars of the ghoulish voyeurs queuing to witness the spectacle.

“[S]uch a scene is presented as defies description. The crowd, madly moving in a body, like caged hyenas, are swaying to and fro by an irresistible impulse”

Reports of mass death adopt a more prosaic style of writing. Mines Inspector Matthias Dunn (1844) wrote about his personal experience upon entering the galleries of Heaton Colliery in 1815 where miners had been entombed for upwards of nine months.

“Just outside of the water mark one of the most awful spectacles presented itself. Two or three bodies lay between this place and the crane, which presented a shocking sight. A set of laden rollies stood at the crane, and between them were scattered such a number of bodies, that it was with difficulty a footing could be had without trampling upon them. Between the crane and the holing many others were lying, some of them faces stretched out right, others on their backs and sides, grouped together. In the candle chest were found 8 or 10 empty candle boxes, and a very little boy, who had either taken refuge or been put in after being dead. [A little further in by] we encountered a sight, if possible, more impressive than all the rest. A horse, which had been brought from a distance, was suspended from the roof by ropes fastened to his thighs, and a stab, several inches long, very distinct, at his flank. His feet had dropped off at the fetlock joints, and the carcass had every appearance of having been carried away for food. We could perceive no instrument which had been used for the purpose of cutting the flesh; but some pieces of flesh were lying about wrapped in bags or caps.

“In the north holing we observed a sort of enclosure, constructed of old doors and brattices within which several bodies were lying as if they had withdrawn themselves thither to die. The bodies in this bord were lying in a similar position to those before mentioned; and in this very contracted space there were at least 55. It was afterwards reported that a tin candlebox had been found containing writing to the effect that they, the men, were left time to meditate and to cry to heaven for mercy. It is impossible that they would attempt to eat horseflesh before the end of the second or third day; and on the fourth, there is reason to believe that their suffering would be ended ...”

In this he scotched prurient speculation that the entombed miners had eaten the horses to the bone. Reports on tragedies such as that of Aberfan (Report. 1966),

Easington (Roberts. 1952) provoke an emotional response without provisioning literary need for elements of nostalgia, the quaint or melodrama. They are not works of art. Fictionalised accounts of mining disasters, however, trend in an unseemly way towards prurience; the provisioning of morbid interest. Novels which address this morbid melodramatic interest adhere to a series of lurid tropes which engage the imagination in a way which overcompensates for the reality it mythologises.

These principles may be a set of responses based in indignation and frustration in the face of evil or a problematic world beyond redemption. Works like *Troubled Seams* deal in a picturesque way with violence and mass death underground, but through their prurient approach they approach the frivolous form of the novel which fictionalises and presents the facade of mystery to an otherwise unpalatable set of circumstances. They make the reality, however hard, a romanticised other. It is easier to align imagination with fictional characters, however In this there is ever present the danger of such an entire experience becoming a convenient fiction where real experience becomes imaginary experience: a reliveable folk tale repackaged in consumable parcels.

### **The SUBLIME**

The 'Pathetic Fallacy' is a form of understanding in which objects are codified with characteristics of feelings which they cannot experience (Ruskin 1907). Here I wish to introduce the aesthetic notion of the 'sublime'. This is a concept which is constituted of a society's notions, attitudes, ideas and perceptions of a



space which is terrible to contemplate. It is concerned with concepts of things or places which are extreme. Rooted in Aristotle's philosophy concerning beauty the notion of the 'Sublime' was outlined by Burke in 1757 as a category of understanding which adheres to aesthetic principles. Burke developed a treatise on the sublime in which "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling". Sympathies with sufferers are provoked through an understanding that "... the satisfaction has been commonly attributed, first, to the comfort we receive in considering that so melancholy a story is no more than a fiction". This tends to comply with Wordsworth's 'romantic image' in his theory of poetry, which "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity [...] the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself exist in the mind". Distance of time or place are essential to this form of contemplation. The sublime as the terrible place, is manifest at the fringes of the world, the margins, *terra incognita*, were spaces populated in the medieval imagination with strange beasts and peoples. Danziger (1996) is left of the bus at a crossroads In a hostile North East landscape. Here be dragons. Travel narratives such as that of J B Priestley describe the fringes of civilisation where strange beasts dwell are those spaces farthest from the safe confines of travel. He cautioned any would be tourist not to alight from the train at Durham. "The romantic traveller, impressed by the Macbeth like look of the city, will be well advised not to get

out of his train at Durham station.” because the inhabitant of the East Durham mining village ...

“ ... lives in a region so unlovely, so completely removed from either natural beauty or anything of grace or dignity contrived by man. [The landscape was] darkly studded here and there with pitheads and tips. It did not seem like an English landscape at all. You could easily imagine that a piece had been lifted out of the dreary central region of some vast territory like Russia or America, then deposited onto this corner of our island. The scene, as I remember it, was brown monochrome, except where an occasional pithead brought a black stain to it, or a cloud of steam showed a distant little curl or two of white [...] I cannot help feeling that I shall be told that there is no such place”.

What must it take to convince the visitor into someone else’s reality that this place actually does exist? What dimension is the author failing to come to terms with when he presents a traveller’s tale which dismisses the reality of the people in a place “so unlovely”?

### **The sublime in fictional representation**

Sensational stories of subterranean starvation or suffocation were very popular in the 19th century. The disaster genre has an early model in *Germinal* published in 1886 which ends in underground catastrophe. Zola’s description is a vehicle for symbolism. The work is highly visually charged. Throughout the work the colour black is prominent. His description of the first sight of the colliery landscape is laden with gloom.

“Suddenly, at a bend in the road, the fires reappeared close to him, though he could not understand how they burnt so high in the *dead sky, like smoky moons*. But on the level soil another sight had struck him. It was a *heavy mass*, a low pile of buildings from which rose the silhouette of a factory chimney; occasional gleams appeared from *dirty windows*, five or six *melancholy lanterns* were hung outside to frames of *blackened wood*, which vaguely outlined the profiles of *gigantic stages*; and from this *fantastic apparition, drowned in night and smoke*, a single voice arose, the thick, long *breathing* of a steam escapement that could not be seen. Then the man recognized a pit. His *despair* returned.

“He could distinguish *living shadows* tipping over the trains or tubs near each fire.

“Everything was hidden in the *unknown depths* of the *gloomy night*. He only perceived, very far off, the *blast* furnaces and the coke ovens. The latter, with their hundreds of chimneys, planted obliquely, made lines of *red flame*; while the two towers, more to the left, *burnt* blue against the *blank sky*, like *giant torches*. It resembled a *melancholy conflagration*. No other stars rose on the *threatening* horizon except these *nocturnal fires in a land of coal and iron*.

“... fragments of *burning coal*, which now and then fell from the basket, lit up his pale face with their red reflection. There was silence. The distant hammer struck regular blows in the pit, and the wind passed by with its *moan*, like a *cry of hunger and weariness coming out of the depths* of the night”.

I have emphasised his symbolism which indicate the ‘pathetic fallacy’. He names the pit *Le Voreux* ‘the voracious one’: comparison of the colliery with a greedy beast is one of the central metaphors of the novel. This fascination with otherness continued with George Orwell ‘*Road To Wigan Pier*’ in 1937. Ruskin treating with this asks us to “observe that in their dealings with all these subjects the Greeks never shrink from horror; down to its uttermost depths, to its most appalling physical detail, they strive to sound the secrets of sorrow”. Distance, of time or place, are essential to this form of contemplation, inducing nostalgia. Pacey (1983.88) recounts the visit of Herman Melville to Liverpool docks at the time when they were the largest in the world, and still being extended. He exclaimed that “their extent and solidity ... seemed equal to what I have read of the old pyramids of Egypt”. In 1913 Walter Gropius wrote about American grain silos which can ‘stand comparison with the constructions of ancient Egypt...’ This sublime is an attempt to encompass in ones mind the imponderable vastness of unmitigated or almighty power. Melville associated the significant achievements of technology with the legend of Prometheus. The architect of Battersea Power Station, Gilbert Scott, was also responsible for the

design of the Anglican Cathedral in Liverpool. He was said to have built two cathedrals “one for God, one for electricity” (loc cit.). The Promethian image of technology was also adopted in the 1960s by Harold Wilson, whose ‘white heat of technological revolution’ was signified by real images from industry. “That was the prelude, in 1964, to ambitious attempts to reform government administration of technology, and to promote a range of specific projects, including aluminium smelters linked to nuclear power stations (p93): the fires of hell brightened by the incandescence of nuclear fusion. Nye (1994) reports the enthusiasm of William Stidger’s celebration of the romance of the factory in his *Henry Ford. The Man and His Motives*, in a visit to Ford’s factory in which “In this vision, nature is but raw material - grimly impressive, volcanic, stigmatized as raw and dirty ...” Stidger presents the factory in the context of the natural sublime ... “we looked through the blue glasses and saw typhoons of white flame leaping white against the brick walls, Niagaras of tumbling, turbulent, tumultuous white waters of flame and fire, awe-inspiring, soul-subduing romance! Romance! Romance of Power!”(p137).

This apprehension of the sublime in terms of power serve to identify attitudes as they concern new forms of technology. Nye explains that “the logic of the technological sublime demanded that each object exceeded its precursors” (p284). Big human disasters, likewise big atom bombs require bigger atom bombs to satisfy the prurience of their audience. Las Vegas, as we learn from it according to Jencks et al is the extension of the postmodern ‘consumer sublime’: the ultimate city of consumption and display. “Bigger [atom] bombs. That’s what we’re waiting for”. The visitors’ centre and the theme park.

Disneyland *is* the Wallsend Colliery of our time. "After centuries of neglect, the sublime - just described in classical antiquity - re-emerged in the eighteenth century in tandem with the apotheosis of reason and the advent of industrialization" (p282) it stands in dynamic tension with nature: both flaunting and containing it. This leads to the otherness of mining narrative becoming a commodity. (Evans 1997) Being denied access to the historical perspective of the recent the difficulty of representation of life experiences is further compounded.

When catastrophe besets a place it is obvious to characterise that place as being that event. Place becomes the event by which it is perceived: Aberfan, Lockerbie, Heysel, Hillsborough. Easington Colliery is more than the memory of the explosion in 1951 which killed 83 men. Venturi remarked the end of modernity with the demolition of a block of flats in 1966. The liminal event after which everything is 'post' defined the Ukrainian town of Chernobyl for all time.

### **The fear of the dark**

The perception of a place from outsiders' points of view are no less valid than lived experience, but distortion of their perspective often makes their observations unintelligible to people whose lives are being described. In a chapter entitled "*Newcastle. They Burn Houses, Don't They?*" photographer Danziger (1996) sets the scene for his traveller's tale which echoes the abhorrence felt by Priestley. Arriving in Newcastle, "[w]hen the bus deposited

me at a desolate crossroads I felt the same adrenaline rush of fear as I had when covering the war zones.” He meets someone there who tells him that “only hell is worse than here, put that in your book”(p66). In Scotswood “positive stories are as rare as hens’ teeth”(p79). These places, become the exotics, the Sarajevos of the documentary photographers’ circuit: tourist ‘musts’ to quote Cohen (1993. pp77 - 119) “which Neitzche termed monumental when he described the nineteenth century’s veneration of its triumphal past.” These markers of recent history are sites where terrible things have happened.

It is not uncommon for visitors to the region to associate their excursion with a day trip to hell. Pit visits inspire metaphors. The pastime is indulged in from passing royalty to circus performers. Fordyce (1860.56) recorded “The late celebrated clown, Grimaldi, whilst performing in Newcastle in 1818, was induced, by the glowing descriptions of the manager of the theatre, to see a coal mine” where he took fright at a fall of stone. About two years previous to this

“... the Grand Duke Nicholas visited the North of England with letters to the late eminent viewer Mr Buddle. Having arrived at Wallsend the illustrious visitor assumed the ordinary pitman’s garb with the intention of descending the shaft. On reaching the pits’ mouth, however, the future Emperor of all the Russias started precipitately back exclaiming “Ah! My God, it is the mouth of Hell!- None but a madman would enter into it”.

“Zaro Agha the Turk alleged to be 156 years old who is appearing with Mills Circus at Newcastle, descended the Dudley pit of the Hartley Main Collieries last week.” (CG 1932). The local collieries were the marvels of their age - the wonder pits of Wallsend and Sunderland. Visiting these sites is a way of encountering the events that turned them into what they are.

“The uncanny effect of Parisian places, Breton suggests, derive from effaced historical memories that continue to cluster around the place of their occurrence in invisible but perceptible form. The notion of Paris as a city

haunted by ghosts, above all the ghosts of violent death, is familiar from a lineage of Parisian representation..."(Cohen. 1993.83)

She explores the nether regions of the mind, quoting Callios' observation that the literary representations of the city have created a myth which "hides another Paris, the real Paris, a ghostly Paris, nocturnal, elusive, all the more powerful as it is the more secret, and which at every site and at every moment comes to mix itself dangerously with the other Paris". For Cohen the Paris of the Phantom of the Opera, ghostly evocations of the Parisian dead are "too vague to prove historically revealing." Benjamin echoes Nietzsche (1974.104) when excursions into thought exert retroactive forces in which "thousands of secrets crawl out of their hiding places ... there is no way of telling what may yet become part of history. Perhaps the past is still undiscovered". Garey (1994) identifies notions which tie concepts of memory with place. "Memories and legends tend to lend themselves to the physical contours of the landscape to become incarnate in places"(p124). But we are not able to shape memory to the contours of an unseen landscape. The image of collieries peopled as catacombs with the dead invites an investigation of perceived parallels with their imagined counterparts in Rome or Palermo or Paris; the parallel with the sewers of Paris is also worthy of note. Cohen (1993) discusses the mind's nether regions and "a voice that sings of confused and forgotten things...old general ideas fallen into disuse...". In *Les Misérables* Hugo asks the reader to "imagine Paris taken off like a cover, a birds' eye view of the subterranean network of the sewers..." Our underworld too is peopled with ghosts of violent death. But the way that these 'ghosts' inform the sense of place depends as much upon how they are perceived or understood as any actuality they may have from history. One of the only ways that the detailed

history of mining is known is through Government Inspectors Reports, catalogues and litanies of violence. Prior to the explosion at the Felling Colliery in 1812 in which 93 people died and which was reported by Hodgson (1813) no note was even taken of this form of death on a mass scale. An image of Père Lachaise, "That huge city of the dead with its hundred thousand cadavers and the ashes of a million more" (Melly 1991:155). The necropolis, the city of the dead, has three manifest states central to the imagery of Christian Europe since the twelfth century: Purgatory, Limbo and Hell. The name Purgatory comes from the latin 'purgare', to cleanse or to purify. It is, in accordance with Catholic teaching, "a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace, are, not entirely free from venial faults" (Hanna 1911). Limbo is a kind of prison. The name comes from the latin *limbu* which literally means "a hem or border, as of a garment, or anything joined on"(Toner 1910). The word limb is a derivation of this root. Theologically it means either the temporary place or state of the souls of the just who, "although purified from sin, [are temporarily] excluded from the beatific vision ... or to the permanent place or state of those unbaptized children and others who, dying without grievous personal sin, are excluded from the beatific vision on account of original sin alone". In its literary usage it is applied more generally to mean "any place or state of restraint, confinement, or exclusion". Literary representations create myths which consign the narrative of underground dwellers to a time of expurgation, or a place of waiting, or a place of consignment (for ever) in the borders. The place of liminality is Limbo.



### **The Underworld. The dwelling place of the Other**

Black faced miners whose parlance separated them from all but their marrows may be the other because they live in the underworld. Travellers in the other, invisible, underground world beneath the surface of the coal mine return to tell travellers' tales. Respondents who have no knowledge of the mine, and one or two that have, concur with a general body of literature that describes fear at approaching the underground world. The hellish image or metaphor is commonplace throughout mining literature. Orwell visiting a mine (1937.19) wrote that:

“... at those times the place is like hell, or at any rate like my own mental picture of hell. Most of the things one imagined in hell are there - heat, noise, confusion, darkness, foul air, and, above all, unbearably cramped spaces. Everything except fire, for there is no fire down there except the feeble beams of Davy lamps and electric torches which scarcely penetrate the clouds of coal dust”.

In *Germinal* the place in which Maheu works is called 'Hell' (pp 244 - 245). Another pit *Le Tartaret* is named after the Greek hell, Tartarus. A 'Catabasis' is a descent into the underworld. It is a theme common to ancient Greek thought involving Orpheus, Theseus and Herakles. The fundament - the place of darkness - the abode of the other. Hell, damnation and Purgatory have been central to European Christian cosmology since the twelfth century (leGoff 1984). Caves with infernal atmospheres are central to Hindu cosmology, and Zoroastrians descend by way of a sloping path to a shadowy subterranean world. The infernal notions of mediaeval Christendom was inspired by Egyptian notions of pits, fire and the dark abyss. (p20). Dante presents a highly ordered and hierarchical, cartographic description hell. A well as cosmological

undermining many places have physical hollow foundations. Ancient Rome is underlain with subterranean tunnels sharing a tradition of under city catacombs with Paris and Palermo. They are their necropolis - their city of the dead. They are void spaces, filled with supposition and dark thoughts. In the *Underground City* Verne asks

“If the fields are peopled with imaginary beings, either good or bad, with much more reason must the dark mines be haunted to their lowest depths. Who shakes the seam during tempestuous nights? who puts the miners on the track of an as yet unworked vein? who lights the fire-damp, and presides over the terrible explosions? who but some spirit of the mine?”

### **CONCLUSION**

Beamish sets its principal displays around the period of 1913. The illustration of twentieth century industrial technology and developments is thwarted by this strategy. Technological advance in this period has been immense - its artefacts varied and wonderful in their concept and design. To collect and display such items would require a knowledge of the fundamental processes of recent and present day mining. This expertise is widely available to museum professionals through the experience of mining men. In extending my argument of the previous chapter projects which engage with these experiences to inform heritage displays create the locus for meaningful contribution: communicative ‘open access space’ across time.

The break with the recent modern in avowed postmodern projects precipitates a sense of disjuncture; but modernity isn’t over yet (Ritzer 1998). Being presented with our social, historical, and existential present and recent past, the incompatibility of the reality of experience with postmodernist nostalgia throws

the latter into stark profile. The past has been approached through stylistic attributes of imaginary and stereotypical idealities. Artefacts from conquered cultures are paraded as a standard way of displaying power and dominion over them. But very few cultural artefacts have been acquired from the recent past.

This chapter has dealt with images which are informed through conjecture, caricature and myth. The next phase of this work is to present more concrete evidence as it can be presented through sensory experience. What we see is what we know.

## **Chapter Four**

### **VISUAL RESEARCH**

The first three chapters of this thesis establish reasons for conducting an enquiry into cultural aspects of working life. They are concerned with theories of culture, aesthetics and aesthetic competencies and representations. The next two chapters investigate the landscape of mining from a variety of perspectives from which it is understood. The last chapter investigated the problems of knowledge of place and representations. How do we know a place? Is there something more to mining work and community life than that which is presented in 'standard' literary or museum interpretation? How do representations lead to the sense of 'otherness' with which mining communities are perceived and understood? The last chapter was concerned with the look of otherness of mining and mining communities. It is not easy to depict something which isn't there. Fictional representation is about and leads to conjecture of reality. In turn this leads to questions concerning how representations are opposed to realities: how they misrepresent. If the museum is part of the perpetration or projection of caricature or myth then its representations require investigation for what they are about.

#### ***INTRODUCTION***

I am proposing two ways of understanding culture as it is experienced: through visual evidence and through the everyday communication of the spoken word. In this chapter I further investigate the look of spatial and temporal constructs and how the look represents the sense of place at a particular time. I engage with ideas about the use of images of mining and their deployment in the context of

visual sociology. The first part of this chapter is about visual representation, interpretation and points of view. It is concerned with visual and other recorded representations across time. It investigates images of mining and the use of images as evidence. I return to notions of value neutrality. Historical imagery can be investigated as representations of mining: what is and what is not represented. "The separation of Us from Them is inscribed into the very institution of anthropology and into the structure of most ethnographic film" (Nichols 1994:63). Visual representations in ethnography are equally concerned with who is representing whom.

The second part is concerned with images in scientific enquiry. It is concerned with visual research methods and researching the visual. It is about how imagery communicates. I have begun an enquiry into aesthetic appreciation of this sense of both look and perception. Here I examine aesthetic choices, and the technical limitations in the production of images about mining.

The third part reviews collected visual materials and their context with conversational and historical data. It presents information about visual images and their context in relation to other sources of visual material about mining, and some notes about their acquisition. I examine visual competencies in the context of ethnographic representations. I investigate stylistic attributes again turning to imaginary and ideal stereotypes. The union banner is a visual representation of cultural aspirations. It is connected with communicating these aspirations through time. This part of the thesis comments on visual sociology by beginning with an appraisal of the use of visual imagery in sociological enquiry. It proposes to stimulate an interface with, or key across, disciplines within social sciences,

by investigating visual representation across fields of enquiry and methodologies.

## **PART ONE**

### **VISUAL REPRESENTATION**

Adam (1994) notes the importance of representational technologies to the representation of past events to ourselves. These technologies concur with Benjamin's definitions of cultural industrial processes paced by mechanical reproduction. The way that the past is relived is effected through art and writing, printing, and the technological inventions of photography, film, records, and cassette players. Through these we can relive moments, in externalised form, which before were entirely dependent on personal memory. Technological inventions suspend the passage of time by trapping experience as artefact. The action replay allows us to relive and redefine attitudes to specific events - cherished photographs of loved ones at special occasions - Bobby Kerr climbing the stairs to lift the FA Cup - "They think it's all over - It is now!". Their presentation bears similarities with myths or allows us to define ourselves in mythical contexts. Their meaning, their quality, and their feeling, like those of myths, changes with the context. In other words, the present experience can only be understood through the mediation of the intervening knowledge and historical events. The past is reconstituted in the present, as Mead (1959) asserts, because each moment is recreated, re-selected, and re-interpreted, preserved, and evoked afresh in the light of new knowledge. This makes the past revocable and as hypothetical as the future. The means by which we revoke and preserve the past have changed, and so have our attitudes and relationships to it. Chronicles,

museums, photographs, and newspapers join with myths as strategies for preserving the past.

### **Images as evidence**

Becker (in hbecker/http) notes that contemporary sciences such as biology, physics and astronomy would be “unthinkable without photographic evidence.” Yet in social science, only history and anthropology, for him the least ‘scientific’ disciplines, make extensive use of photographs. Economics and political science don’t. Sociology doesn’t. He asks what visual sociologists need to accomplish to convince other sociologists that their work is in some sense integral to the sociological enterprise. He emphasises that this problem is not only a matter of convincing others: they must also convince themselves that what they are doing is ‘really sociology’, not just making pretty pictures. To do that sociologists have to show that their visual work furthers the enterprise of sociology, however the mission of the discipline is defined. In considering ideas about inclusion and potentialities it might add a dimension which is currently missing. Becker explores the essential differences in the kinds of pictures visual sociologists make in the way they resemble those made by documentary photographers or photojournalists as representations of understanding, such as “ethnographic reports, statistical summaries, maps, and so on” (1986). Pictures acquire their meaning from the ways in which they are understood and used (1982). Banks (1995) discusses the use of visual data in anthropology and sociology as visual records produced by investigators and visual documents produced by those under study. The question is again raised “who is producing images for and of whom?” As the dichotomy between the observer and the observed collapses another form

of visual representation begins to emerge: the “collaborative representation”, which is to “studying society by producing images, by examining pre-existing visual representations, studying images for information about society, and by collaborating with social actors in the production of visual representations”. On the one hand researchers are concerned with the content of any visual representation - the ‘meaning’ of a particular design motif or art object, or the person who is depicted in a photograph. The other concern is with the context of the visual representation, asking “who produced the art object, and for whom?” In this way photography has always been an important adjunct to research. These questions echo those posed in chapter one about the making of art.

### **Graphs and maps**

Historic images are not neutral information; neither are maps nor graphs. For Harley maps are not “value-free images [...] in the selectivity of their content and in their signs and styles of representation maps are a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world which is biased towards, promoted by, and exerts influence upon particular sets of social relations” (1988.278). What is selected for graphic representation - what information is gathered - what is discarded. The purpose of owning and reliving of the past, according to Adam, is to learn from it; “to use it for future action and for making a puzzling present manageable, for creating reality and for changing it, for legitimating existing practices and for personal and social control and power” (p147). As part of my investigation I prepared an image in the form of a graph, to represent mining employment in South Tyneside across time, which indicates the importance of mining and its centrality to employment in the borough. It



specifies mining employment to the overall social context of a particular place in which it played a significant role. The graph provides a temporal context in which other images can be understood. Although some statistics are available over several centuries this graph becomes more detailed in the twentieth century. Records were drawn upon including Census Reports and statistics from Colliery Yearbooks and Mineral Statistics. The availability of 'official statistics' is contingent upon reasons why records were kept. Minerals raised as represented over persons employed and represented graphically may give a clear indication of the economic performance of a coal mine, demonstrating viability of the enterprise to shareholders in colliery companies, for example. Bittner and Garfinkel (1967) explain that records are not kept solely for the sake of provisioning future social scientists with data. This reality is central to an understanding of images in general as they stand in relation to social enquiry.

### **Documentary photography**

Photojournalism is the production of images for newspapers and magazines. Documentary photography is associated with exploration of social conditions. The purpose of all documentary is to record and demonstrate what is important about any sort of event, people or place. This complies with the understanding that the photographer is not an objective recorder. Images are evaluated subjective to personal aesthetics, tastes and moral judgement. People record and document the life and times of the period in which they lived, from a sense of mission or for ideological purposes. Photography has the capacity to capture a particular moment in time, to reproduce images in considerable detail, to draw attention to situations about which we might otherwise be unaware, but, as with the spoken or written word, it is a documentary source of uncertain veracity.

the spoken or written word, it is a documentary source of uncertain veracity. Photographs are evidence of what can or could be seen. The photographer evaluates events and people subjectively. Trachtenberg (1977) notes that photographs transcribe, not so much reality as the world in which the “angle of the camera’s partial vision” raises questions of neutrality. Sontag (1977) explains that the

“photographer was thought to be an acute but non interfering observer - a scribe, not a poet. But as people quickly discovered that nobody takes the same picture of the same thing, the supposition that cameras furnish an impersonal, objective image yielded to the fact that photographs are evidence not only of what’s there but of what an individual sees, not just a record but an evaluation of the world” (p88).

Photographs, as such, constitute “evidence of not only what’s there, but of what one individual sees, [capturing] not just a record, but an evaluation of the world”. Photographs interpret the world, represent a particular point of view, and this perspective is further reinforced through the use of explanatory text, material which narrates the pictorial content, obscuring any gap between what the viewer sees and the interpretation which the producer of the image wishes to develop. A such a dynamic exists between the ideology of the image and its neutrality or objectivity.

Lewis Hine was a sociologist who took up photography in 1905 and used it as a documentary tool, to show the working conditions of poor immigrants. From 1911 to 1916 he toured the US as official investigative photographer for the *National Child Labor Committee*, where he depicted the plight of children working industries such as coal mining, meatpacking, and textiles. He would hide his camera so as to take authentic photographs of this reality as his work was met



with considerable opposition from employers. (Fig. 4:1). Truth to the reality he was depicting was vital to his project. He saw good photography as being a reproduction of impressions made upon the photographer, accepting the personal subjectivity of his work, considering it 'photo-interpretation'. His work exposed appalling abuses of children (Gutman 1967). His images provoked legislative change (html/hine1999). Hine's work displayed elements in needs of change but gave equal importance to the celebration of the subjects' way of life. This has its parallel in verbal social enquiry. Matza (1969) described the element in Chicago School sociology which appreciating what was ordinarily condemned. This celebratory acceptance amplifies the important anthropological injunction of respecting the people under study.

## **PART TWO**

### **THE PROBLEM OF IMAGES**

Past understanding is necessary to any conception of the future. Hudson (1994) attempted to explain the sense of emptiness experienced in a place which is losing its memory. I proposed to set out a programme the aim of which is to explore people's relationship with place in the context of the recent past. Adam proposes that it was 'oral cultures' that produced cave paintings and because of it they need to be understood as time-distanciated to a far greater extent than is generally allowed for by social scientists..

"Historical knowledge is an instrument of acquiring values that are located beyond that knowledge ... A purpose of history and its understanding, the most important, is the examination of this memory for the elaboration and understanding of the causes and circumstances that generate the present" (1994.31).

Through the development of this discussions I hope to clarify these perceptions by means of relating problems of history and abstract debate about representation with personal understanding of the production of images.

### **Time reconsidered as representation**

The problem of communicating social and economic realities visually was dealt with through the work of the FSA in the 1930s, whose images gave the lie to the widely promoted idea that America was a land of general prosperity. The work of documentary photographers brought emphasis to the social forces that were at play in the everyday experiences of ordinary individuals. The FSA commissioned the work of photographers and artists such as Walker Evans, Ben Shahn, Dorothea Lange, Russel Lee, Jack Delano, and others. James Agee collaborated with photographer Walker Evans in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. It combined powerful images and descriptive text. Agee's narrative echoes the work of Walt Whitman. In *The Poetry of Barbarism* George Santayana discusses Whitman.

“We find the swarms of men and objects rendered as they might strike the retina in a sort of waking dream. It is the most sincere possible confession of the lowest - I mean the most primitive - type of perception” (html santayana)

Whitman's work yields to the multiplicity of images which pass before him. The world he portrays is “a phantasmagoria of continuous visions, vivid, impressive, but monotonous and hard to distinguish in memory, like the waves of the sea or the decorations of some barbarous temples sublime only by the infinite aggregation of parts” (loc cit). This aggregation contrives at making an impression through which “he fills us with a sense of the individuality and the universality of what he describes”. His approach to common life does not

establish standards through which he criticises it; “he has seen it, not in contrast with an ideal, but as the expression of forces more indeterminate and elementary than itself; and the vulgar, in this cosmic setting, has appeared to him sublime”. Whitman viewed life believing that his inclination corresponded with the spirit of his age. Williams sought to identify the *genius locus*, the spirit of the place.

### **Let Us Now Praise Famous Men**

In 1936, an assignment for *Fortune* magazine brought a photographer and a journalist together in an attempt to describe accurately the lives of three families of tenant farmers in Alabama. Roosevelt had appointed a Committee on Farm Tenancy to investigate the situation of America’s farming population. Its report of 1937 revealed widespread poverty in farming communities. Agee and Evans examined the life of the tenant farmer from the perspective of artists, not New Deal politicians or economists. The result of their work, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, is, “as much as the New Deal itself, a great experiment in addressing the issues of social responsibility and human dignity that faced the United States during the 1930s” (Austgen/html). Agee and Evans experimented, attempting to create an approach to art that conveyed a new height of consciousness, yet allowed their subjects to retain their dignity. “Individuals and families are most commonly captured with a frank, head-on camera angle, and the subjects are obviously posed [... as Agee tells us,] they have posed themselves.” They invited mothers to clean up their children before photographing them. They had no interest in reinforcing stereotypes or the status of their subjects as victims. “Candid shots were not to be achieved at the cost of shaming the families beyond the shame they already felt.” The families are portrayed as “real, complex, three-dimensional people”. Because for Agee “every human being is potentially capable within his ‘limits’ of fully ‘realizing’

his potentialities; that this, his being cheated and choked of it, is infinitely the ghastliest, commonest, and most inclusive of all the crimes of which the human world can assure itself.”(*Famous Men* p5) (<http://xroads>). The people themselves are not ‘shameful’ but their circumstances are. Nye describes the way that Agee

“seeks to make us feel the weight and texture of the [farming families] lives [...] Agee was trying to evoke the experiences of those who did not share a common popular culture with the middle class reader. To overcome radical differences without reducing them to ‘historical types’” (1988.96).

As such his work stands in marked contrast to the suggestive fiction which I have described above. Walker Evans’ photographs portrayal of a realistic view of poverty revolutionised the standards of documentary photography. Evans supposed his photographs to be self-explanatory and that using words implied a deficiency of the image. In *Famous Men* his images were presented separately from Agee’s, breaking with traditions in photojournalism in which images are used to illustrate text. In terms of values underlined by these documentary photographs the images explain the circumstances without passing judgement, thus retaining their subjects’ dignity.

### **Availability of images of mining**

Examining the significance of photographs and what they communicate raises questions about the reasons for their existence. How and why were they taken? By whom? For what purpose? Beamish Museum archive incorporates at least 200,000 images of which more than 40,000 are concerned with mining and mining communities (Doyle 2001). The photographs in the collection can be grouped into generic types indicating how mining is photographically depicted. These include topographical views which locate industrial activity in a geographical context; showing heapstead buildings in their relation to towns.





Some of these are family photographs and incidentally or accidentally include the coal mine in the background. Photographs of social events depict mining communities include those of evictions and strikes. The most true to life photographs of groups miners working in significant numbers are taken during the times of strikes, depicting people working at spoil heaps scratching for discarded coal. Photographs documenting collieries at the time of closure present empty and lifeless pictures. Photographs of people include individual portraits of working people, photographs of groups of workers, such as blacksmiths or sinkers; groups of workmen or individuals at work; commemorative photographs, such as face teams engaged in record productivity for newspaper use; and photographs of specific events. (<sup>Δ</sup> 4:2). No photograph can give a sense of the vastness of underground undertakings. The other event type photograph, alluding to the previous chapter, depicts mining communities are journalistic pictures taken at the time of disasters. These often present groups of people waiting at the pithead for news - what is happening away from view. I am presenting this series of observations to underpin my explanation of the fact that mining work is never available for visual recording without some form of deliberate intervention.

The nearest photographs to the reality of underground working life in the Beamish collection were taken by a miner named Tulip in the 1930s. They were made with a four second exposure in which the camera was mounted on a tripod. Candles were photographed first and then extinguished, to avoid a glare or burning from over exposure. The working places were illuminated by burning strips of magnesium ribbon which were hung from the roof or roof supports by

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4:2 Posed underground group photograph, Wearmouth Colliery.



methods of working. He was prevented from continuing this work, probably for safety reasons, in 1944. Other underground photographs include 'how to' type photographs for training of boys, photographs of machinery and the construction and erection of plant for trade circulation. In my experience these are staged and represent the reality that the mining machinery manufacturer or the colliery company wishes to present. A photograph may depict objects out of place, or in a dangerous condition which, whilst true to life, is not something that the commissioner of the photograph wishes to portray. One focus group respondent, Steve Conlan, a professional photographer who was commissioned by South Tyneside Council to record scenes underground at Westoe colliery at the time of its closure, had most of his naturally posed, rather than staged, photographs censored by British Coal management because they did not convey the image the company wished to portray. (Fig. 4:3)

The problem with mining photography is that mining is carried out in very dark places and the lighting of these places, even for everyday working purposes, is problematic. Photography, by definition, requires light to activate its processes. In order to create sufficient light in a coal mine to take photographs various expedients are employed. Flash photography is forbidden in all flame lamp protected coal mines because of the potential danger of an electric impulse giving a spark in an explosive atmosphere. Specially designed underground flash units, with intrinsically safe housings for batteries are needed: and the batteries may not be accessed underground. Intrinsically safe cameras must be used, with all mechanical shuttering. Cameras with casings made of aluminium alloys are generally forbidden underground. Before the flash can be fired gas testing must be carried out. Alternatively long exposures of exceptionally fast black and white

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Fig. 4:3 'Censored' photograph of men in kibble, Westoe Colliery.



film stock, pushed to the limits of its capabilities in the developing process captures the essence of ambient light. When this technique is used the directional light from a cap lamp can burn the photograph out, but the result is closer to actual visual experience. Flash photography, on the other hand, flooding the workings with light, show everything that is there, but makes visible an entire picture which would never be actually witnessed underground. In order to access images which present the reality of working life underground I embarked upon an extensive photographic expedition in the collieries between 1991 and the present, developing techniques involving exposing film at exceptionally fast speed. This succeeded in the production of photographs using ambient underground working light when it is available. (Fig. 4:4)

### **Photographs of modern coal**

In photographs I attempted to identify a cross-section of mining working life. This view is personal and as a result various facets of community life and society were ignored or overlooked. This was not out of indifference so much as what resources were to be afforded to documentation in the short time span allotted between obtaining permission to photograph and developing practical time scale to take photographs. The era of modern coal is marked by the predominance of mechanical engineering in coal mining with the development of machine based extraction and transport. Westoe Colliery stood as the centrepiece of this image and at the pinnacle of the historical development of the landscape of coal in South Tyneside. The colliery's Crown Tower was a highly visible manifestation of modern mining. It stood as an emblem of this dynamic period of progress. The

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Fig. 4:4 Miner in the cage, photograph employing ambient light. Wearmouth.

time of its closure and subsequent demolition is the period of change which is under investigation. The demolition by explosives of the tower was one of the most photographed events in South Tyneside history.

### **Images and identity**

Images and events are interpreted according to a series of predetermined understandings. My own visual investigation resulted in the production of a series of images and an engagement with conversational and historical material. The everyday environment is full of images that reflect society and culture. Visual sophistication leads to the assimilation of images into the currency of daily language. Focusing on the process by which individuals interpret events “as being caused by particular parts of the environment” (Heider 1958:297) images are self defined and take on meaning which is attributed by their audience. Their meanings are negotiated by, without necessarily having to be about, their audience. Understanding images about specific realities implies that people have had the same experience, or that these experiences are judged by standards of given assumptions. In order to negotiate the meanings of images their themes are re-evaluated.

The use of quantitative methods to establish understandings of personal attitudes to images as works of art is investigated by Bourdieu and Darbiel in which surveys concerning meaning were conducted. In this “[t]he main survey established, with a very large sample, the fundamental profile of the museum going public on the significant and meaningful relationships between the social characteristics of visitors and their attitudes or opinions” (1969.11). This is an investigation of the appetite for and consumption of particular cultural products

by different social groups in their enquiry. Images as cultural goods present indices of competence of taste in a socially mediated context.

Every community has its own culture which discourses upon knowledge, beliefs and values and these attributes identify it in relation to other cultures (Kluckhohn 1957 in Kuper 1999:16). Culture is made apparent as it is evident in conversations in which reality is represented rather than encoded. As cultural representations conversations are subject to the influences of their social, cultural and historical contexts of production and consumption. Images are self defined as points of reference yet through the process of adaptation to focus group procedures their audience attributes meaning to them.

### ***PART THREE***

#### ***MEANINGS AND UNDERSTANDING OF VISUAL IMAGERY***

This thesis presents images at the core of understanding culture. In this chapter I am explaining their centrality as data or evidence and in the way they can be used to adduce evidence. Here I set the context of the presentation of images in conjunction with texts. Centring an enquiry on the specific properties of visual images addressed the general issue of assignment meaning. In *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* the families are portrayed as “real, complex, three-dimensional people”. The photographer wished to make available through his pictures the weight and texture of the lives of his subjects: to evoke experiences. This depends upon the meanings which are given to pictures. Worth and Gross develop the field of enquiry into meanings given to objects and events. I develop this semiotic approach to a temporal ‘reading’ of core mining community

iconography. As meanings are ascribed by people I identify the use of images as a means of interrogating cultural understanding.

### **Consciousness and appreciation of images**

For all the ubiquity of the visual world it is difficult, or even impossible, to approach images without assaying them through a system of values. In aesthetic terms visual images are not neutral. People, objects or events, and their images, are encountered 'significantly' in that we interpret the significance of images culturally. "Being a member of a culture 'tells' one that certain events [or objects or images] are communicative" (Worth and Gross 1974.135). Meaning is assigned to images through systems of interpretation and strategies are sought from schedules of understanding which are transmitted culturally.

"The world does not present itself to us directly. In the process of becoming human, we learn to recognize the existence of the objects, persons and events that we encounter and to determine the strategies by which we may interpret and assign meaning to them" (p.134).

In describing the interpretive processes two basic distinctions are drawn. Most objects and events that are encountered in life are interpreted 'transparently': understood without conscious awareness of any interpretive activity. We respond to these in a way that indicates tacit interpretation. Events that are coded 'transparently' are '*nonsign-events*'. Their opposite '*sign-events*' require interpretation. A sub category is designated within sign-events between those which they describe as *natural* and those which they called *symbolic*. Group conversations are communicative events, and as such they can be observed. All public behaviour is communicative. Various social attributes can be identified as 'messages' which communicate to the 'public' at large, and as such all public behaviour is framed and governed by a system of symbolic codes. Sign systems



are responsible for the construction of meaning. “Common sense meanings or taken-for-granted practices are not givens, but the product of ideological coding” (Thwaites *et al.* 1994.161). The semiotic analysis of any text involves considering several codes and the relationships between them. Codes reproduce ideology (Hawkes 1977.107). Every text is a system of signs organised according to codes which reflect particular values, attitudes, beliefs and assumptions. Understanding these codes and how they are applied is another means to understanding culture. Danesi sees culture as a kind of “macro-code, consisting of the numerous codes which a group of individuals habitually use to interpret reality” (1994.18). Images, like texts, require understanding of codes of signification. Descriptive realism, the light by which we read cinematic images is ordered through visual choices where images serve to reinforce their textual message. Film imagery appears obvious because of its seeming entirety. Images in films appear to present themselves as reality which can be clearly interpreted. Metz notes that “a film is difficult to explain because it is easily understood” (1977.69). The filmic paradigm, the cowboy in the white hat, is discarded as a hackneyed signifier. The convention ceases to serve its purpose and is abandoned. The miner with his blackened face stares into the television camera at the end of his long shift is more than just a man finishing a day’s work. Both depicting and understanding ‘reality’ through iconic signs requires the learning of various codes. Gombrich (1977) illustrated how aesthetic codes which now seem natural, were regarded at the time of their emergence as strange and radical. Our viewing of images is weighted with suppositions. Images are rarely neutral.

### **Privilege of imagery**

In *Ways of Seeing* Berger articulates a set of concerns with visual images. The primacy of visual perception (1977.7) is in “seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it”. But perspectival centrality of images is eroded through technologies of mass production, as outlined by Benjamin. The image carries less absolute meaning, “its meaning multiplies and fragments into many meanings”. Benjamin (1969/1923) described the social changes manifest by ‘mechanical representation’, modern processes which characterised most of the entertainment world: the culture industries. Entertainment experiences, no longer unique, are repeatable over time. The mystified quality of authenticity of the original was lost in mechanical reproduction. “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time in space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (p220). Barthes (1977) provides a theoretical tool for the examination of images in relation to text in a discussion of newspapers ‘*Image, Music, Text*’. In this the newspaper is considered as “a complex of concurrent messages with the photograph as centre and surrounds constituted by the text, the title, the caption, the lay-out ...” (15). That which is represented is separated into two structures: the visual and the textual. These are “contiguous but not ‘homogenized’ ”(16). There are two forms of interaction interrelation between text and image. In the first, the “image illustrate[s] the text” and in the second “the texts loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination” (26).

My thesis is concerned with the 'image' of mining - how mining appears to people. My interest, as I have explained, stems from an attempt to make a visual record of the end of mining. As such my research is predicated in visual images. Throughout the thesis I have been presenting images alongside the text as illustrations of ideas raised in the body of the work. In this way they underpin, clarify or reinforce these ideas. They are intended to work in the way articulated by Barthes in his analyses of levels of signification: the linguistic message, the coded iconic message, and the noncoded iconic message. The linguistic message is both *denotational* and *connotational*. Denotationally it directly indicates the brand name. Connotationally it signifies the coded iconic message. It represents the totality of all of the messages that are connoted by the image itself. In a newspaper a photograph "transmit[s]...the scene itself, the literal reality" (17). This direct representation is the *denoted* message of the photograph, it is '*what it is*'. The photograph also conveys *connoted* message, which is the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it. The connoted message is historical or social as it is dependent on the conventions and expectations of the society within which that image appears. Hawkes (1997) sees 'connotation' as meaning "the use of language to mean something other than what is said" (p.133). For Barthes "the noncoded iconic message is simply the literal '*what it is*' of the photograph which is immediately apparent when viewing an image". In a reciprocatory relationship combining image and text, "the unity of the message is realised at [the] level of the story, the anecdote" (41). In presenting images of the geological formation 'Marsden Rock' in its various recent temporal phases of collapse the pictures can be experienced in a noncoded iconic sense for what they are, photographs of a rock in the sea, or how



the rock is experienced and understood with all its historical and cultural associations. (4:5)

Hawkes notes that we

“invent the world we inhabit: we modify and reconstruct what is given. It follows that, implicated as we are in this gigantic, covert, collaborative enterprise, none of us can claim access to uncoded, ‘pure’ or *objective* experience of a ‘real’ permanently existing world. None of us, in short, is innocent” (1997.107).

Presentation of images in conjunction with explanatory texts further identifies the way in which they are encoded. My presentation, in the way images have been selected and in the way they are deployed in the thesis is not neutral.

### **Aspirations and iconography : Firm As A Rock We Stand**

Popular cultural phenomena can be decoded with the same weight and seriousness ordinarily associated with ‘high art’ and artistic and musical canons. Certain images carry greater iconic importance than the meaning imposed on particular ‘important’ works of art. Eco (1979) insists that there is an obvious “difference between a strong extra-coding by which a social group explicitly and publicly establishes that a ready-made message, circumstance, or context must definitely be coded” and the “weak extra-coding” which depends on individual memory (1979.137).

Public extra-coding through group signification is especially the case in the symbolic representational form of the miners’ banner. Miners’ banners are a highly important form of public symbolic imagery which represent aspirations of mining communities, incorporating decorative and representational elements.

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4:5 Marsden Rock, about 1970.



They are clearly understandable juxtapositions of image and text. They generally comprise a standard format of painting on large rectangles of bright silk with ornamental scrollwork, mottoes and with painted centrepieces of portraits or allegories. The most familiar banner form have their origins in popular art: Tutill, the founder of the banner making company which made most of them probably began his working career as a fairground artist (Gorman.1973). His banner designs were based on the elaborate scrollwork of the fairground. Earlier examples of banners from his works have ornamental foliage and scrollwork incorporated into the fabric as damask, finely woven on a Jacquard loom. Later models employ gold and silver paint to emulate this decoration. In 1889 his company was producing a banner a day, establishing the trend which became the tradition of trades union heraldry. Through their scale, brightness of colour, clarity and skill of execution miners banners are intended to communicate their message simply and immediately. This is not to say that they engage with simplistic concepts. Their central themes are unity, brotherhood, and the moral of progress, as well as symbols and insignias of mining. Fynes (1873) described assemblies of miners upon the Black Fell, Gateshead, or marching in procession onto Newcastle Town Moor for the cause of Union in 1832 “bearing numerous banners, of the gayest description, nearly all being embellished with a painted design and with a motto, more or less connected with the recent struggle between the miners and their employers”. Trades union banners are an important feature of mining iconography. Images which were sought to illustrate these social and political concepts were obtained, off the peg, from manufacturers’ catalogues. The images presented here indicate how this symbolism can be adapted to a

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broad variety of concepts. It is worthy of note that Tutill's works remained a non-union shop until 1935.

An image which is central to my discussion of a time of liminality is that of the Marsden Miners' Lodge Banner. Marsden Rock stood, and stands, as a symbol of South Shields, a limestone stack in the sea just off the coast. It stood there from immemorial time until the early 1990s when a portion of it collapsed into the sea in a storm. Afterwards a part of the structure was deemed to be dangerous and had to be demolished. In its day the rock had served as an image of immutability and was adopted by the miners' lodge in 1921 (Moyes 1973) as an emblem on the banner accompanied by the slogan 'Firm As A Rock We Stand'. The obverse of the banner carried the motto 'Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey, Where wealth accumulates, and men decay' from Oliver Goldsmith's poem *The Deserted Village* which continues:

"Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;  
A breath can make them, as a breath has made:  
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,  
When once destroy'd, can never be supplied".

One side takes constancy as its theme, the other vigilance: awareness of a future which is not guarded against. I include a picture of the banner in relation to photographs which depict the passage of time in sequence.<sup>(Fig. 4:6)</sup> These are a picture of the 'historic' rock, the rock partly collapsed after the fall which broke it into two parts and in its new, reduced state after the blowing up of the smaller stack. The motto has further poignancy in the theme of the deserted village: the cliff top village of Whitburn was abandoned and demolished before it could be claimed by the sea. <sup>(Fig. 4:7)</sup>

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Fig. 4:6 The Rock partly collapsed.

Fig. 4:7 The Rock after being blown up.

## **Visual tools in market research**

I return to the idea that visual materials can be deployed as tools to develop understanding and images can be put at the disposal of research. In market research the focus group generally engages with visual materials because commercial researchers are primarily concerned with the effects images which might be used in advertising have on peoples actions. The emphasis of the use of images in this context is in the production of accounts of what images will lead people to do. I propose a different approach to the use of images as research tools. This process has its ontogenesis in my own research, which sought images for their own sake, and as such is preceded by the production of images. But the proposed development in method stems from an interest in what people thought and understood about my images. I supposed that images could establish a means of getting beyond the reach of simple observation, where meanings can be investigated, rather than causes. This kind of observation is grounded in the tradition of anthropological field work which I began to outline in chapter two.

For Tyler (1985) ethnographies involve a pretence of representation. They work through reference and allusion to other texts and story forms that are common to one's own culture. Often what is portrayed from an outsider's point of view is supererogatory: presenting more material than that which is required for an accurate representation. At the same time it is less than indicative of the reality it attempts to portray, being concerned more with the sensibilities of the culture which it addresses: the consumer of the information. Photographs allude to other forms of representation for their interpretation. Clifford (1988) examines the colonial nature of ethnographic writing in anthropology. The constructed and negotiated character of ethnographic research and writing is emphasised in an

article *On ethnographic authority* in which he examines the realism of conventional anthropological ethnography. His central critique concerns definitions of reality of 'other' people studied from a Western viewpoint, and the hidden nature of the process by which these accounts are produced. These viewpoints and their political context are disguised as objective. He examines the sorts of descriptions that ethnographers used in traditional kinds of ethnographic writing, and how these rely on background knowledge on the part of readers. My deployment of images proposes a reaching beyond their use as studies of their subject to inviting participatory engagement with the images themselves.

### **Photographs as a stimulus for discussion**

In chapter three I discussed the look and perception of place. I am proposing the use of images to investigate the sense of the time of those places. The FSA programme supposed that more than any other medium the camera could simulate the impact of a face-to-face encounter. Photography could exert what Lipmann described as an unparalleled "authority over the imagination." supposing that a photographer could guide the process of interpretation by a viewer and could encourage a better understanding of the world existing beyond the picture frame. Interpretation, as well as selection of image and subject, is conditional on the photographer's interests. It is important that the photographer understands the social forces present in a scene in order to make a pictorial representation (Stott 1973). Images which master symbols control the situation of their application. Ewan (1996) cites John Dewey's description of how popular consciousness is becoming engulfed by a dreadful and ubiquitous apparatus of mass persuasion.

“The critical edge of an informed and independent minded public - the vital linchpin of democracy-was daily being blunted by a perpetual flow of psychological trickery. ‘We lived exposed to the greatest flood of mass suggestion that any people has yet experienced...’ There are individuals who resist; but, for a time at least, sentiment can be manufactured by mass methods for almost any person or cause” (Dewey 1930 pp 42 - 43).

Consensus is created at the expense of individual understanding.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has explored visual representation as a means of understanding difference. A central concern of this chapter is how supposed understandings of images or symbols create the background in which narrative is understood. Pictorial representation is an established tradition within this form of representation. Documentary photography is the production of images in association with exploration of social conditions. In *Famous Men* Agee combines with photographs of Evans to explore the texture of everyday life; the nuances, the interstices. Having established the potential for synergy of combination of visual materials and narrative the next chapter examines how visual materials can be developed to adduce oral testimony through focus groups. It presents oral testimony as a means of representation and presents methods for its acquisition and inclusion. Clifford advocates collaborative ethnography and texts that are multi-vocal and open-ended. Are there topics for which visual material can be put to work as a means of research? One way which I have identified is through the use of photography to elicit information in interviews (see Harper 1988). At the core of my investigation is an attempt to identify relationships of the present with the past. Oral testimony is an important means to understanding the problem of this relationship. I have discussed the concept of how places are perceived. Through procedures which employ oral history I will explore how past-present

relations are remembered and reconstructed. This in turn leads me to the development of a systematic research programme founded in the precepts of oral history which enables multi-perspectival investigation of ways in which the sense of place is constructed in people's memories.

Ethnography seeks to represent peoples' 'lived experience'. Interpretation and description are processes of mediation. The more these rely on the personal constructs of the 'interpreter' the further away from experience they become. The problem of interpretation is developed in Blumer (1969) where he argues that without asking people what meanings they are actually giving to things the interpreter will, of necessity, invent them. If we want to understand their actions, reasons, and motives we should only attribute to actors ideas about the world they actually hold, and not invent their viewpoint, their perspective. The means to this is through asking people what they think. A multi-perspectival approach requires the deployment of qualitative methods of enquiry. Focus groups can be employed to understand the complex relationships that exist within various viewpoints via explanations obtained through discussions of experiences and expectations. The next chapter discusses oral testimonies and focus group methods as a means to recovering understanding.

## **Chapter five**

### **ORAL TESTIMONY and VISUAL METHODS**

A central concern of this thesis is how the specificity of place is effaced at the end of industry. As the activity of coal mining is erased how are the aesthetics of its everyday life presented, known and understood? The thesis is therefore concerned with both representations and absences. In the foregoing chapters I have investigated problems which concern representations and perceptions. What is selected for representation depends on who selects and for what reason. Photographs evaluate; visual images are generally produced for a specific audience or constituency. This chapter concerns verbal images. It is about how the spoken word re-presents a taken-for-granted world.

A complex configuration of this 'sense of place' is articulated by, and about, mining communities in everyday conversation. Day to day conversations occur outside the discourses or institutions of accepted high culture. They do not belong to disciplines of cultural representations, but they are vital means of understanding how the aesthetics of a place at a given time are appreciated. This 'real' aesthetic, which stems from personal experiences, co-exists alongside representations - its simulacra, which are informed by the impressions made on and by visitors to the underground world: travellers' tales. I further argue that the distance between representations and 'lived actualities' is exaggerated by the perceived 'separateness' of miners and mining communities.

To investigate the reality of this experiential aesthetic it is necessary to understand how participants in this cultural form, the producers of the *Colliery Aesthetic*, perceive and present this aesthetic. An important dimension of participatory culture is the element described by Arendt as 'natality', the "capacity to 'transcend' what is given and begin something new" (Parekh 1982.8). At a time of profound change, of 'natality' the commonplace spoken word can be recorded and included in the historical discourse, an adjunct to the historical 'voice', or it may be discarded, as it is no longer relevant to progress. DeCerteau discusses ethnology, which is "especially interested in what is not written... or engraved in stone" (1988.210), describing a 'popular culture' which is essentially 'oral'. Through its inclusion in aesthetic representation the spoken word 'orality' "changes its status to the degree that writing becomes the interconnection and communication of works through which society constructs its progress" (op cit. p183).

DeCerteau (1988.57) describes the "historical operation", or the construction of historical representation, as the practice and the product of the historian. He sees this as a "combination of a social *place*, 'scientific' practices, and writing" through which the underlying aesthetic of the 'sense of place' is made available for examination.

The point of the projected research, in subsequent chapters of this thesis, is to examine the point at which "oral language waits for a writing to circumscribe it" (loc cit p210), and to provide this moment of change with a 'voice' necessary to

its potential 'natality'; its capacity to inform representations into the future. In this chapter I present the foundation for an enquiry into how participants in this industrial culture understand, and present the aesthetics of mining working life.

In the last chapter I explored the use of visual materials in the development of understanding, and visual representation as a means of understanding difference. Difference can be identified through visual processes. Visual sociology engages with ideas about lived experiences which identify differences and contribute to understanding of social groups. I have presented aesthetic choices and technical limitations in the production of images about mining. A central concern of the chapter was how images or symbols create and amplify meanings. This chapter is about ways of ascertaining what is understood. This chapter links visual investigation with oral testimony through conversation. It is concerned with ways in which visual materials are deployed as a strategy to obtain understanding.

Ethnography seeks to represent peoples' 'lived experience'. Interpretation and description are processes of mediation. The more these rely on the personal constructs of the 'interpreter' the further away from experience they become. The problem of interpretation is developed in Blumer (1969) where he argues that without asking people what meanings they are actually giving to things the interpreter will, of necessity, invent them. If we want to understand their actions, reasons, and motives we should only attribute to actors ideas about the world they actually hold, and not invent their viewpoint, their perspective. The alternative to this is to ask people what they think, requiring the deployment of qualitative methods of enquiry. Focus groups can be employed to understand the complex



relationships that exist within various viewpoints via explanations obtained through discussions of experiences and expectations.

At the core of my investigation is the problem of identifying relationships of the present with the past. The spoken word - what people say - is a means to understanding this relationship. I have discussed the concept of how places are perceived. Through procedures which employ oral history I will explore how past-present relations are remembered and reconstructed. Oral testimony methods are a means to multi-perspectival approaches which enable investigation of ways in which the sense of place is constructed in different people's memories. Culture which includes future projections of inclusion - 'cultural participation'- is predicated upon this understanding. Future participation depends upon the transmission across time of the understanding of ones own culture. How a person is able to assimilate and mediate changes is linked with how these changes are communicated. The principal locus for this communication is the spoken word in conversation: what we say about what we know.

To examine the purpose and impact of oral testimony the first part of this chapter considers the importance of personal stories. It keys with the work of oral historians: Studs Terkel's 'collective portraits'(1975; 1988; 1996), Paul Thompson (1978) who considers knowledge as the social product of everyday life, Allesandro Portelli (1990) who deals with reconstruction of meaning. Oral testimonies often present accounts which may either challenge 'official' histories or provide more detailed or 'truer' descriptions of acts or events. These

variations of historical events should be seen as providing complementary, rather than conflicting, information.

This chapter links theory with practice. The second part of the chapter concerns the use of imagery as visual stimulus to obtain insights into people's understanding. Having discussed the look of the place this I use images to investigate the sense of the time of those places. Here I begin with a review of literature concerned with the conduct of oral testimony and focus groups. This chapter reviews methodological issues concerning oral testimony leading to the adoption of focus group discussions to generate material perceptions of culture as data for analysis. It presents reasons for conducting focus group research and procedures for their conduct, outlining activities which generated data for analysis. I note the deployment of focus groups as a research technique in the social sciences.

The third part of this chapter deals with the combination of visual materials with oral testimony. For the purpose of my research into how people perceive themselves, their culture and its aesthetic attributes I engage with the use visual materials as stimuli. Visual materials are used to promote open discussion and interaction of research participants. I use images to elicit views and experiences within groups. How do supposed understandings (of images or symbols) create the *background* in which the narrative is understood?

## **PART ONE**

### **Stories as strategy**

The first part of the chapter provides a background to oral testimony. A strategy which can explore cultural boundaries, and the dynamic relations between dominant and subaltern cultural forms is a good story well told. Stories lead to questions. Oral history is a valuable method of historical enquiry through which the recent past of experience can be investigated and studied. It presents information about tangible cultural artefacts and material culture. It is assembled through the collection of personally narrated life histories or personal recollections, when people speak about their own experiences. Through oral history the insider's perspective on important events are communicated.

Oral testimonies reconstruct experience and are capable of adding coherence to historical events and presenting contemporaneous attitudes as narratives. As a supplementary source of information oral testimonies provide invaluable insights by filling gaps in historical records. Presenting personal understanding in conjunction with texts gives narratives context as historical documents some unique stories are so vivid that their representative content stand as independent documents of events unrecorded in other forms. In combination with other official data, such as census reports, an important foundation is constructed to provide the basis for understanding away from the abstraction of numbers to a more concrete approach to the real world of phenomena as experience.

The importance of triangulated personal historical narrative sources for the presentation of actual *recent* events is considered by Georges and Owen (1995).

They point to the ‘usefulness of oral tradition’ as an adjunct to archival material in reconstructing history, referring to Montell, who notes the capacity to write historical accounts that could never proceed using material from libraries and archives alone. Personal history goes further than describing people or events by articulating the feelings of a group towards the events and persons described and although all oral traditions are not necessarily of themselves historical truths, personal recollections are history from a particular viewpoint, and by collating multiple individual oral accounts of the same event a clearer picture of the reality of that event emerges.

The problem of the continued access to collective memory in the most useful and accessible manner for problem-solving in the future, is essential to its availability to and inclusion in continued active cultural participation. Importantly people who have lived particular experiences are a part of that experience, and it is a part of them. Bourdieu discusses the problem in which full use is made of the “advantages inherent in the relations of belonging, which would enable us to combine information gathered by the objective techniques of scientific enquiry with the profound intuition gained from personal familiarity” (1988.2). The past does not bequeath itself by itself. Where culture is no longer transmitted through daily practice there is a need to determine other techniques for its storage and maintainance. It requires active and deliberate engagements with processes of recording. “Archives are the product of the chance survival of some documents and the corresponding chance loss or deliberate destruction of others” (Evans 1997.87). The collection of data which will provide information about the history of an event is a function of the personal interest of the collector shown in that

event. Historical information has an exact parallel in forms of data available for and from maps and graphs indicated earlier. Historical traditions of local people need to be gathered and analysed otherwise the histories of countless people remains unrecorded. Lampedusa's observation clearly identifies a purpose to the collection of personal narrative.

“When one reaches the decline of life it is imperative to try and gather together as many as possible of the sensations which have passed through our particular organism. Few can succeed in thus creating a masterpiece ...but all should find it possible to preserve in some such way things which without this slight effort would be lost for ever. To keep a diary, or write down one's own memories at a certain age, should be a duty 'State imposed'; material thus accumulated would have inestimable value after three or four generations; many of the psychological and historical problems that assail humanity would be resolved. There are no memoirs, even those written by insignificant people, which do not include social and graphic details of first rate importance” (1958.226).

### **Purposive collective amnesia**

Taped oral testimonies both preserve the narrative of events and explain personal understanding of them. By ordering personal experiences focal points are presented upon which the changing moving landscape of history can be fixed. Ewan (1996) describes the conscious manipulation of significant symbols or stories, rumours, reports, pictures and other forms of social communication with the deliberate intention of controlling opinion. Nostalgia can induce recollection of memories of events which a people have experienced, setting memory firmly in time. In a postmodern compression of social and historical present, the past is reduced to a convenient referent. Postmodern nostalgia is incompatible with genuine historicity. It reinforces a conservative outlook. Nostalgia reproduces conservatism. Cultural domination marginalises people through denying access to the means of cultural reproduction through recounting the lived sense of the

past. If the past is useful as a tool of hegemony then it is so by its reduction and marginalisation of history. Terkel collects and presents people's life stories, recognising their significance for the present. He supposes that young people have no sense of the past (1996). "They've been deprived of it." He becomes the "Ancient Mariner" as he *'picks'* a discussion at a bus stop with people who "loathe the unions!"

"How come you don't work eighteen hours a day? [...] You know why you work eight hours a day instead of eighteen hours a day, as your great-grandparents did? Because some guys got hanged for you. [...] How would this couple know about the eight-hour day? No-one's told them about it. There's no labour history they were ever taught. So they wouldn't know. All they do is read the business section of the *Wall Street Journal* and they've become part of it".

This sacrifice by previous generations, the cost to the past of our present, is explored by Gramsci and as I have noted it is important in the sense of both cultural and political processes, a theme which could be considered as 'temporal inclusion'.

### **The landscape of memory: what is remembered**

In contrast with physical edifices, which have been demolished or otherwise subsumed beneath the surface of the visible landscape, memories do exist to elucidate mining working life. Processes of recovery, representation and understanding of these memories require programmes of oral testimony: through which the narrative of mining can re-emerge. Terkel's medium for representing the landscape of memory is recollection: the narrative of everyday life and experience. He collects and reproduces oral testimonies about people's life worlds. In his work collections of voices are brought together construct

panoramas rather than individual perspectives. He reconstructs texts which reveal intimate portraits of people and their relationship to other people, events and realities of their time. These 'collective portraits' are constructed from the memories of different people spanning generations. His works are assembled from oral testimonies supplied by people from all walks of life with a wide range of experiences. They provide an index to popular perceptions of time and change, recounting the way that the lived experience of people has changed - sometimes beyond recognition.

The 'tradition' of oral history grew from the *History Workshop* movement. It provides layers of understanding of and meaning to the recent past, in terms of participation in reproduction of actual experience. It is no less disciplined than other approaches to history. Thompson insists that

“[History] should provide a challenge, and understanding which helps towards change. And for the historian who wants to work as a socialist the task must be not simply to celebrate the working class as it is but to change its consciousness ... [Oral history] provides the means for a radical transformation of the social meaning of history” (1978.17)

Another way of looking at the social production of memory attends to a different set of processes. Knowledge of past and present is a product of everyday life. Traditional textual historical sources often rely on administrative and other records of authority, and as such can not be included as 'value neutral'. But these can be triangulated with lived experience. Oral history makes this experience available to verify or otherwise 'official' accounts. “[W]itnesses can now also be called from the underclasses, the unprivileged and the defeated” (p.5). Testimonies may challenge the legitimacy of establishment accounts. Canonical notions or *idees reçues* are capable of establishing tradition. Often what is

remembered has passed through personal filter system of selectivity. Memory selects; it registers some processes and discards others.

### **An added dimension of understanding**

Portelli (1990) outlines an approach in which the possibility of unnecessary and uncertain reconstruction of an 'intention' which is not the real origin might arise.

“Oral testimony has been amply discussed as a source of information on the events in history. It may, however, also be viewed as an event in itself and, as such, subjected to independent analysis in order to recover not only the material surface of what happened, but also the narrator’s attitude toward events”.

The past is most commonly known and preserved through “scholarly histories, literary works, and reconstructed sites” (Nye 1987) But the boundaries of these

“... ‘ways of knowing’ have never been firm, and in recent decades have become increasingly blurred. The ‘non-fiction novel’, documentary film, oral history, historical restorations, among other forms defy traditional classification” (p93).

The other principal literary forms which deal with construction from adductive idiom developing themes into narratives from several perspectives are novels or movies, in which events appear to be described from various people’s stand points and starting out points. These tend, however, to be manifestations of one person’s imagination.

Thompson points to oral evidence as a means of the addition of value to cultural artefacts “...by transforming the ‘objects’ into subjects makes for a history which is not just richer, more vivid and heartrending but truer” (1978.100). The meanings people give to their world and experiences point to the understanding of the everyday world of groups. In a discussion of the differences between qualitative and quantitative research Schultz (1962) draws attention to the



problem of presentation of the viewpoint of the social actor, dealing with the embeddedness of all social action in the world of everyday life with particular reference to the 'thickness' of descriptions presented by ethnographies. Ethnographers present detailed and dense descriptions of social life. Geertz (1974) describes these descriptions as 'thick'. This returns to problems of who represents what to whom. Oral testimony differs significantly in that "the original impulse for recording these stories lay in the discovery that ...ordinary people could illuminate aspects of the past which no historian had been aware of - they could be rescued from the condescension of history and could be disinterred from under the stacks of statistics, the reports of government officials and the resonant generalisations of learned observers". The purpose of collecting oral testimony then is to identify what social actors thought of and think of events that are being described.

### **Understanding through listening**

Cranfield (1997) has written about the different perspective produced by a conversational approach in oral history work. Conversation is a subtle, living thing. "Key words that arise when this approach is used include intimacy, trust, disclosure and self-revelation". Portelli uses the phrase 'history-telling' to identify interviews which produce complex life histories when the interviewee becomes the narrator of stories. Events become episodes in a narrative broken by sequences of time. Evans (1973) describes the impact on him of the combined power of voice and memory, explaining how the feel of history is conveyed; that ... "sense of the past which is such an essential ingredient in the best historical writing". "We should go to the interview not only for the historical information,

but hoping to be given or to acquire that little bit extra - that enlightenment, a trace element of imagination, a little supererogatory grace ... call it what you will" (p71). He concludes with the ideas of Panikkar, on the significance of spoken word materials:

"We have two forms of speaking. One is to chatter, to gossip, to go on repeating learned things and previously conceived opinions, generally of others. The other is when we inhabit the words we say, when language is the very house of our being, when we live in the very words we utter, when we create each phrase out of a concrete experience in time and place - an experience which we allow to crystallise, as it were, in the very words which flow spontaneously out of our whole being. We do not think such words beforehand, we do not calculate them, nor do we arrange them, trying to make an impression on our hearers ... we simply say them; we inhabit those words; they are a revelation of what we truly are [... they are] sacraments. They create a space [...] which encompasses both us and our true listeners" (1993.73).

Methods of recollection involving personal memory reclaim both history and the potential to reconstruct historical futures: investigating what was thought about and projected at a particular time. Oral testimony recordings preserve the narrative of events, present suppositions of their time, and explain personal understanding of them. By ordering personal experiences focal points are presented upon which the changing moving landscape of history can be located. Gramsci indicated that strong popular culture needs the foundation of a sense of history, as the means by which people acquire knowledge of the broad context of their collective struggles. Such an understanding enables the engagement in a fuller and more positive transformative role in society. Oral testimonies provide the subtleties and nuance of the experiences of everyday life, the views of oral testimony narrators explain historical events and changes in the context of memories of life experience and how the events of history have shaped people's opinions and outlooks. Lowenthal notes that

“[h]indsight as well as anachronism shapes historical interpretations. To explain the past to the present means coping not only with shifting perceptions, values, and languages, but also with developments after the period under review”.

Beamish Museum has conducted a programme of oral testimony collection since the 1970s. one of its respondents, Mr. David R. Mallett, a colliery manager, discussed the problem of ordering and marshalling thoughts in the light of hindsight in his testimony:

“when you get older, to go back and fully appreciate how you felt. You know, it’s a funny thing [...] say you cut yourself, well say ten minutes ago. You know you had a pain, but you can’t describe it, can you? All you can remember is ‘ouch’”(extract from oral testimony in Beamish Museum collection, cited in Doyle 2001).

### **Attitudes in everyday conversation**

In Bourdieu's notion of habitus, through which values are possessed without being consciously perceived, conversation identifies the ordinary things which amplify uniqueness and create differences, although these are often not consciously perceived or understood. For Tye (1995), citing John Locke, consciousness is “*the perception of what passes in a man’s mind*”. The nature of this understanding is implied. What I have been looking for is the difference which defines, in a cultural sense, through which members of a society make the social structures of everyday activities observable. This can be found in the overlooked background features of everyday life. Expectancies as schemes of identification and interpretation, which are essentially cultural, can be recovered in ordinary conversation. Rosen expands the notion of personal constructs through a discussion of the everyday practice of conversation.

“The word spontaneous suggests there is an absence of a fixed agenda and defined goals and that what is spoken is unrehearsed and free from constraints, which might operate to make it inhibited, and to use Labov’s

word, careful. We compose as we go. It is a matter of degree, of course, but there are obvious differences between talking with a group of close friends and a group of fellow students encountered for the first time in an adult education class” (1998.56).

Ethnomethodology studies social order as it is constituted in and through the socially organized conduct of the members of society (Have//http). This notion is developed by Garfinkel from the concept of group ‘membership’ from Parsons’ (1967) theory of action in which the problem of ‘membership’ is addressed from a phenomenological perspective. The competence of members as members is demonstrated through connecting ‘indexical particulars’, context-specific information, with generally available knowledge (p78). In ethnomethodology the ‘problem of the invisibility of common sense’ is examined (pp76-103): common sense understanding itself becomes the subject of analysis. Ordinary practices can be interrogated by first recording the ‘products’ of common sense interactions; through taping conversations. Transcripts of these recordings identify common sense procedures through noting what is said and how it is said. These strategies are deployed to evade unthinking and unnoticed use of common sense inherent in empirical research (Zimmerman and Pollner 1971). Introducing a collection which discusses analysis of conversation Heritage and Atkinson note that the

“... central goal of conversation analytic research is the description and explication of the competencies that ordinary speakers use and rely on in participating in intelligible, socially organized interaction. At its most basic, this objective is one of describing the procedures by which conversationalists produce their own behaviour and understand and deal with the behaviour of others. A basic assumption throughout is Garfinkel’s (1967:1) proposal that these activities - producing conduct and understanding and dealing with it - are accomplished as the accountable products of common sets of procedures” (1984.1).

## **PART TWO**

### **PROCEDURES**

#### **Technical literature: oral testimonies and focus groups**

Having presented a case for developing a programme of collecting group conversation for analysis the second part of this chapter is concerned with practicalities. I present a review of the technical literature about conduction oral testimony interviews and focus groups. Oral testimony programme guidelines are given in a wide spectrum of on-line literature (cited in bibliography). For Kluckhorn and Murray (1948) a discussion between two people, an interpersonal discussion is the psychologists most significant type of real activity or transaction. It is the locus for understanding attitudes and values, likes and dislikes. It provides the possibility for the study of interrelations.

Oral testimony interview programmes guidelines are presented by Baum (1995). For her best information can come from juxtaposition of differing accounts. Different accounts of what the narrator is describing are used to elicit evidence to refute or challenge opposing views. Baum elucidates a number of important points about how to conduct successful oral testimony research: an interview is not a dialogue, the point of the interview is to get the narrator to tell her story; 'off the record' information has no value if the purpose of the interview is to collect information for later use by other researchers; and the liberality with recording materials is essential: "[i]t is much better to waste a little tape on irrelevant material than to call attention to the tape recorder by a constant on-off operation". Much of this literature is insightful and useful in presenting

guidelines for designing and implementation of conversational focus group research, especially Callaghan (1998).

### **Focus groups**

Group discussion is considered under the technical rubric of focus group research. Morgan (1997) describes basic group interview methodology and techniques. As to the constitution of the groups themselves Krueger (1994) discusses recruitment of the right people - who - how many - the purpose drives the study- "the purpose should guide the invitation decision" (p76). "The focus group is characterized by homogeneity but with sufficient variation among participants to allow for contrasting opinions" (p77). In recruiting participants homogeneity is generally sought in terms of occupation, education, age, gender, education or family characteristics. People sharing common characteristics may have more to talk about. Group size is also discussed. Small groups of four to six people are easier to recruit (p79). He describes as piggyback focus groups when people are gathered for another purpose (p83). The recommendation that focus groups should consist of strangers provides " ... a good example of a useful rule of thumb that has become an overly rigid restriction on when to use focus groups" (Morgan and Krueger 1993:6). Interest is the primary dimension of willing participation. Groups will necessarily be biased in favour of people with an interest in the issues under discussion. This is not to say that respondents will always have a favourable attitude towards the subject: far from it. People are more likely to participate in discussions about issues which present matters for concern. A sense of intimacy is afforded through small groups numbers which are close to those of a natural conversation. Natural groups of adults interact with one another in the manner of natural conversation. Phenomenological validation

is based upon the spontaneity of natural conversation, and analysis of conversation generated data can be adjudged to have a degree of representative character.

Knodel (1993) notes that the usual approach is to hold discussions with separate groups, each homogeneous within itself but differing in terms of particular characteristics specified as selection criteria. Holding separate sessions with homogeneous but contrasting groups is believed to produce information of considerable depth than would be the case with heterogeneous groups, because it will be easier for participants sharing similar key characteristics to identify with each others experiences (p39-40). Callaghan working with focus groups in Sunderland developed a strategy approaching this ideal working with 'natural' existing groups, such as existing mother and toddler groups. She remarked (Callaghan 1998a [http](#)) that the advantages of working with 'natural' groups in research

“lies in the fact that it is ‘real’. It is a place of regular social interaction and we discussed issues which were part of the daily experience and conversation of the women involved”.

Once again ‘piggybacking’ on existing groups is useful because

“The mother and toddler group is useful precisely because it is one of the places where elements of consciousness are contested and confirmed. For the researcher this is access to a piece of social interaction. We are not concerned with the psychological processes of particular group members but with the social processes of the group. We can learn from where the group sets its boundaries of acceptable opinions and behaviour what is the context within which people develop attitudes and practices in their own lives. It is this general account which I have relied on to argue the importance of place and in the focus group we can these processes in operation”.

In the same way as Callaghan's purpose of study I am not "seeking some idealised objective account". The ideal of the research programme is to elicit responses which give insight to real experiences and understanding. This differs significantly from market research the outcome of which is an abstraction away from the significance of personal understanding in favour of idealised abstractions. I further note the importance of groups being known to one another for the convivial development of conversation. Caterall and Maclaran (1997) point to Frey's (1994) indication of the disadvantage to group research of the methods employed by small group researchers involving "zero-history groups formed for a short term purpose in a laboratory environment as opposed to existing groups studied longitudinally in their natural environment". They argue that a further important feature of focus group interviews is that group dynamics assist in data generation. Interaction is employed to generate data and as a source of data for analysis. They identify the important element in focus group data which they describe as the "moving picture", the important process of interaction of participants, noting that this interaction can be overlooked in the analysis process where segments are coded and retrieved. The focus group is not simply a technique where data, for example thematically grouped texts, are gathered and analysed for their specific content but that the plexus of participant interaction can provide access to insight. A reflexive understanding of group dynamics is important to its analysis. Kitzinger (1994) notes that focus group researchers recognize that group interaction is a considerable resource in data analysis and that the real value of data generated by focus groups is found in the analysis of the interaction between participants as well as the insight into the experiences of



individual participants. The interaction amongst participants is a key data resource for analysis and interpretation.

Conversation from focus groups indicates many versions of group remembering. Even where an event is described from different points of view suppositions seem to concur. Catterall and Maclaran (1997) present a series of assumptions about conversation which can be interrogated as a method of analysis of group interaction. These include elements such as shared language and taking suppositions for granted. Can shared beliefs and myths be identified? In what way can these (suppositions, myths) be challenged? What degree of emotional engagement is presented in conversation?

### **PART THREE**

#### **MY METHODS. VISUAL STIMULUS**

I have noted that the FSA programme upheld the photograph as the medium promoting understanding of the world beyond itself, creating consensus at the expense of individual understanding. In contrast to this the power in the work of Agee and Evans derive from the fact that the author and photographer 'lived inside the subject (pxi).

'The immediate instruments [with which they conducted their work] are two: the motionless camera and the printed word. The governing instrument - which is also one of the centers of the subject - is individual, anti-authoritative human consciousness"(pxiv).

'The photographs are not illustrative. They, and the text, are mutually independent, and fully collaborative"(pxv).

In contrast to Sontag's supposition for Agee prying 'intimately into the lives an undefended and appallingly damaged group of human beings [seemed] obscene'

(p7). He wished to present a picture of the tenant farmers, and celebrate their dignity in the face of unmitigated hardship, in its entirety: without his words mediating or interfering with the composite image in any way. "If I could do it I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and excrement" (p13). This contrasts sharply with presentations such as that of Danziger: commenting, interpreting, interfering, interpolating.

### **Competencies, visual literacy**

In order to begin conversation around my chosen subject, but without prescribing the particular content of this conversation, the procedure which I arrived at sought to elicit individual and group responses to images about coal mining. Individual and group responses to images were meant to generate data about the given subject area in a manner which approximates everyday conversation. Images were used to create a less formal approach to this through developing the locus for 'natural' conversation. Images, like conversation, are a part of everyday life. The everyday environment is full of images which reflect culture and which are assimilated into daily use. Images are self defined and take on meaning which is attributed by their audience. Their meanings are negotiated by - without having to be about - their audience.

My methods involving the use of images differ from other social science practices, even within the framework of oral testimony collection. A distinction can be drawn between the use of images precipitating "... a flow of

reminiscences” (Caunce 1994.157) and using images to initiate reflection on present experience and expectations, although this distinction is not absolute as reminiscence can serve as a basis for reflection on now and the future. Emmison and Smith (2000) point to uses of images in social research particularly as documentation of social process, in analysis of existing (especially advertising) images in the field of cultural studies, as analysis of practices of visualisation in ethnomethodology, and through the use of video recordings to assist in conversation analysis approaches. Another field of investigation deploys visual materials as a stratagem for indexing cultural competencies. As noted in the previous chapter quantitative methods can be deployed to establish understandings of personal attitudes to images (Bourdieu and Darbel 1969). Surveys profiling the attitudes or opinions of museum consumers present indices of cultural competencies through which social characteristics can be identified. Images themselves, as cultural goods, present indices of competence of taste in a socially mediated context. Gross (1973) presents a discussion of the relationship between competence and aesthetic appreciation. Aesthetic evaluation is influenced by the audience’s assessment of the skill and control exerted by the producer over the medium. Elements of a work that successfully realise an artist’s intentions are appreciated by its audience. Interpretation and aesthetic evaluation of narratives involves attributions concerning the authors that consist of our assessment of their intentions and their ability to realise those intentions: what is said, what is meant, how it is said. “When viewing documentaries, we often are worried that the participants’ ‘naturalness’ has been contaminated by their desire to present a particular *persona* to the camera” (p10). In presentation of life story oral testimony a performance is delivered to the collector to the tape

recorder, in the same way as someone posing for a camera. This performance element is notable in empirical materials chapters on occasions when focus group respondents address the microphone directly. The reality of the representation may become an aesthetic component of the narrative beyond the conventional level of general social discourse. The recorder or mediating agent, the documentary film maker, artist, photographer or ethnographer, decides what is to be recorded, what is to be included in the presentation, and how this material should be presented. The participants are seldom simply 'being themselves'. Natural conversation obviates much of this mediation. Focus groups can be developed and employed in order to acquire formal data with its foundation in the everyday exchanges of conversation.

### **Presentation of self**

Goffman's study of social interaction elucidates the *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* as a series of performances; human interaction is defined in terms of dramaturgical metaphor. Behaviour is identified with role playing or the performance of a series of theatrical parts where *actors* take on *roles*. People present fragmentary aspects of themselves to others, strangers or people who know them only through their occupational categories. In the 1960s miners singing folk songs gradually presented themselves to the outside world in this way. Bean (1963:8) presents an image of the "immense and amazing" Elliott family of miners "singing the old songs back to life" in a folk club in a public house in Birtley. Songs ...

"about the pit, songs about their wives and sweethearts, about the owners. And now (for the tradition lives and perpetuates itself) songs about the National Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers. Not often complimentary songs these, but as alive as the miners and the industry itself."

In this article miners are singing folk songs about themselves and for their own consumption. The process of enculturation is reinforced in performance to themselves singing “about life as they know it”; sung “naturally, roughly, spontaneously”. The “survival of the sung word” was a near thing, until the miners were joined by interested “undergraduate beards and pony tails”. In the account by Dennis et al of a mining community, although many cultural aspects of life in Ashton are considered, such as social welfare and leisure activities, the concept of culture is not explicitly examined. But the workmen’s band as a cultural producer, “represents Ashton to the outside world.” (1956:120). Gans (1962) discusses Wirth’s essay 1938 *Urbanism as a Way of Life* in which a city is “a relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals”. Because of these numbers and this heterogeneity the social structure which circumscribes the city dweller’s nature in terms of anonymity and isolation are dictated by relationships which are “impersonal, segmental, superficial, transitory and often predatory in nature”. In cities ‘natural’ communicative groups are replaced with impersonal combinations such as corporations and voluntary associations. The group’s existence is made known by external attributes. For Goffman “whether his acquisition of the role was primarily motivated by a desire to perform the given task or by a desire to maintain the corresponding front, the actor will find that he must do both.” Many people sincerely believe that the definition of the situation they habitually project is reality. When an actor takes on an established social role a particular front has already been established for it.

“In addition to the fact that different routines may employ the same front, it is to be noted that a given social front tends to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations to which it gives rise, and tends to take on a meaning and stability apart from the specific tasks which happen at

the time to be performed in its name. The front becomes a 'collective representation' and a fact in its own right".

The intention of conducting focus groups was to elicit a response from people to images rather than deliberate questions so as to bring culture and attitudes to culture into the frame without posing leading questions. Through deployment of visual materials as stimulus conversations were elicited as direct responses to the content of the visual representation, thus indicating personal meanings and understandings of these images. It was intended that the topics that came to the fore, although concerned with the central theme under investigation, were not prejudiced by suppositions weighted as yes and no answers. Conversations provides access to respondents' sensibilities and understandings of place and changes. The topics thus raised in conversation identify specific themes important to the respondents.

### **Other sources of material for triangulation**

Marshall and Rossman (1995.82-3) cite Patton (1990.70) describing data collection methods include in phenomenological interviewing, specific in-depth interviewing which "carries an assumption that there is a 'structure and essence' to shared experiences that can be determined". They discuss the importance of collection of data through the 'elite interview' in which "well-informed people in an organization or community are selected for interviews on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research". From personal conversations with mining engineers I have been able to conduct a series of interviews with individuals about their working life. These include engineers at the highest level

of their profession who have considerable overall understanding of the industry at large. As individuals and as a group they were responsible for many of the decisions which brought technical progress to mining in the region and elsewhere. I will combine material gained from taped interviews with colliery engineers and managers to verify or refute focus group data. Several mining engineers have contributed autobiographical interviews which have proven especially useful in attempting to triangulate topics in discussions with historical events from alternative perspectives. Considerable amounts of material was also generated through recorded conversations at the pit head at the time of closures. This consists of a collection of opportunistic recordings of group conversation amongst miners. They are talking amongst themselves in a seemingly natural manner, although knowingly 'performing' to the tape recorder.

## **CONCLUSION**

The object of this chapter has been the development of the means to recover and understand social processes and signifiers which illuminate everyday knowledge. These are to be found in the inter subjective knowledge people share with one another in the normal routines of everyday life. The complex structure of everyday life is transmitted in social interactions. The task of this chapter has been to develop an enquiry into the manner in which this common sense knowledge is constructed and is traditionally transmitted. It is understood in everyday verbal transactions: in conversation. A significant casualty of the end of industrial activity on a mass scale is the removal of the locus for this transmission, everyday conversation in which cultural oral traditions are couched. Where previously experiences were sedimented as recollections and narrations of

memorable events and experiences there is no longer the place or the time that the tale is told. In order for stories to exist they need to be told and listened to. Memories recovered as oral testimonies provide an important element for understanding events, especially their meaning to people who experienced them. When these are triangulating with other sources, other autobiographies for instance, comparisons testify to the incompleteness of presentations which do not include lived experience. The understanding of the past, in a common sense way, is circulated in everyday conversation which engages comparisons and personal narratives. When personal history becomes trapped in the confines of private remembrance where it goes unrecorded it is not offered the locus of communication. It is silenced. Other elements of narrative are retold and become encapsulated in the form of anecdotes which develop over time into forms of myth. The narrative of life experiences has no outlet in the world mediated by cultural industries.

I have presented reasons for conducting focus group research and procedures for their conduct. Having reviewed methodological issues concerning oral testimony which leads to the adoption of focus group discussions to generate material about perceptions of culture as data for analysis the next task is to consider data generated in group discussions, coupled with visual material as it presents itself for analysis. Having established reasons for collection of oral testimony and procedures using visual stimuli I now need to explain the manner in which these procedures were deployed and the results obtained. In the next chapter I explain what happened when I put these procedures into practice and begin an analysis of the data thus generated. I break these down for analysis into themes as coded



phenomena of verbal interaction: historical singularities, the relatively unique actions or episodes discussed or singular remarks made by participants.

Other evidence brought to this to combine analysis includes the pictures themselves, oral testimonies collected at the pithead and 'elite interviews' with mining engineers. In the next chapter I review images used in this enquiry, the nature of the groups with whom the research engaged, and the principle topics discussed by each group.

## **Chapter Six**

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION:**

#### **EXHIBITION and FOCUS GROUPS at HARTON MINERS' WELFARE**

In order to gain insight into personal appreciation of culture at a time of profound change I devised a programme of research, the aim of which was to develop and expand understanding through engaging with people for whom the end of mining and the demise of colliery culture impacted most directly. I sought the testimonies of mining people whose lives were affected significantly by recent colliery closures: people who worked and lived around Westoe Colliery.

Having said why I have elected to conduct focus groups and reviewed literature about how they are conducted this is what I did and with whom. I prepared an exhibition as a stimulus to group conversation which would then be taped, transcribed and analysed. Individual and group responses to images were meant to generate data about my proposed subject area in a manner which approximates everyday conversation. Images were used to create an approach to this developing the locus for conversation with a view to elicit this understanding. This differs from reminiscence in that its intention is to provoke responses which are concerned with reflection on present experience and expectations.

The first part of this chapter reviews the visual material presented. It presents an exhibition, *'Recollections of the Collieries of South Tyneside'*, which was held in Harton Miners' Welfare. The exhibition presented images about mining which I selected to express my interest in the way in which change can be visualised. These images were deployed as a means of understanding what people felt about the way their lives had changed in the very recent past. Images of changes were deployed to stimulate discussion about these changes. The image of the existence of mining as such constitute lived experience.

The second part of the chapter is about my groups. This identifies respondents to the research. Here I identify participants detailing respondents as groups or parts of groups and their relationship as individuals and as groups to the mining industry. As this research is designed to elicit data from conversational interaction amongst group members being too prescriptive would trammelling procedures. The purpose of the procedure was to elucidate group response to visual stimulus. Procedures are designed to address the problematic at hand: the essential characteristic, recording conversation, is intended to fit with the general framework of the study. The proposed programme of analysis of conversational interactions likewise sets broad limits to procedures.

The third part presents what was said: detailing thematically the general fields of conversation subject matter as they occurred in focus groups. It explores principal themes which came under discussion, identifying lived experience in contrast with suppositions and opinions. It attempts to align themes in focus group generated data with the visual imagery which provided its stimulus.

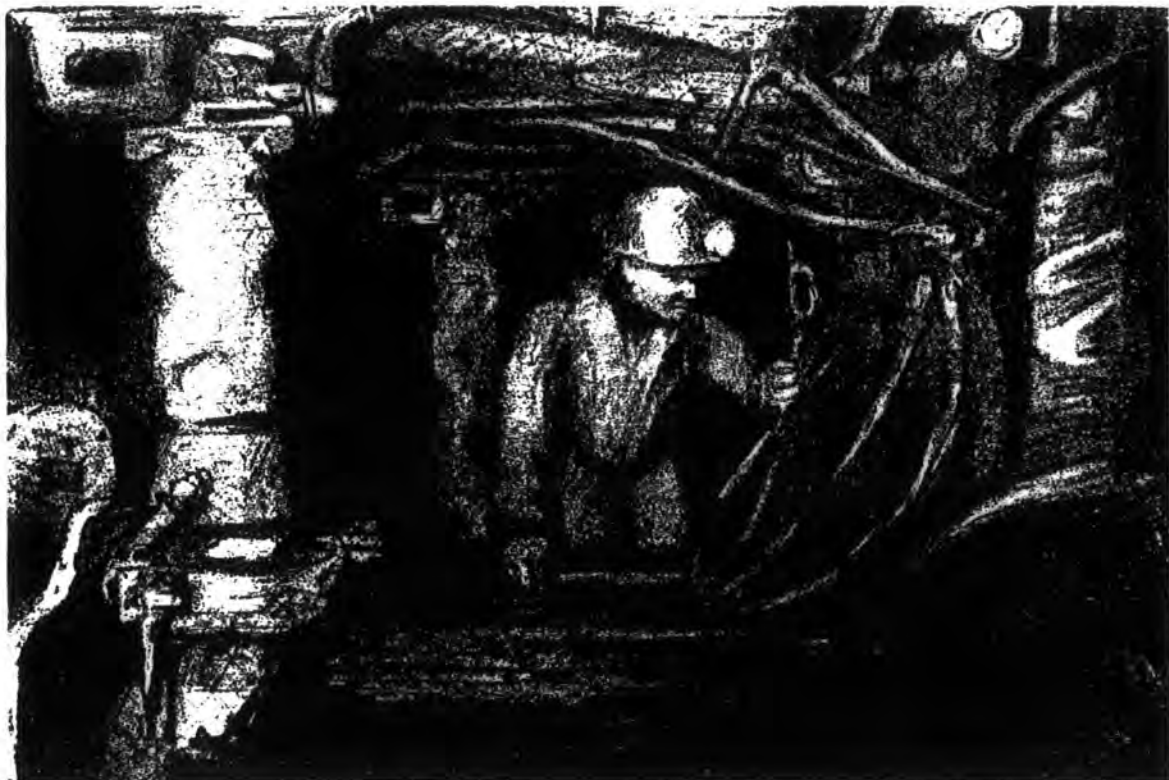
From this point of departure I attempt to develop procedures for analysis of this data based upon theories under investigation. What was said is presented as a thematic introduction to the contents of the conversational material. In subsequent chapters I will analyse the content of this material in relation to time: identifying the temporal content of both images and conversational material. The 'Us and Them' axis is one of the key concepts which underpins notions of community. This is discussed giving examples from focus group data. The content of much of the conversation material included is both highly personal, emotionally charged, and richly descriptive. This chapter is interspersed with examples from conversations as an introduction to these elements of their content.

## **PART ONE**

### **THE EXHIBITION**

Through my continued practice as an artist and as a consequence of many underground photographic expeditions I have assimilated large databases of visual imagery related to mining. Many of my photographs were taken at Westoe and Saint Hilda Collieries, above and below ground. As such some pictures present images with which non mining South Shields residents would be familiar. Drawing upon this and other historical sources I was able to present an exhibition of images about mining in South Tyneside. Images represented an historical cross section. It was given the title '*Recollections of the Collieries of*

# RECOLLECTIONS OF THE COLLIERIES OF SOUTH TYNESIDE.



AN EXHIBITION OF HISTORICAL IMAGES OF WESTOE,  
HARTON, SAINT HILDA, WHITBURN AND BOLDON  
COLLIERIES.

WITH PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS BY AIDAN DOYLE.

AT HARTON AND WESTOE MINERS WELFARE,  
BOLDON LANE, SOUTH SHIELDS.

Open Mondays to Fridays. Admission Free.

*South Tyneside*'. (Fig. 6:1) This brought images into a distinct historical grouping, the now or very recent past and the historical or distant past. These can be further subdivided by time. Photographs of 1950s and 1990s were sufficiently separate in treatment. Images of place, incorporating landscape and a sense of place and images of underground working life. Photographs were taken and presented to investigate the current state of landscape to juxtapose with archive (1950s) material. The exhibition included my photographs drawings and paintings of underground enclosed spaces.

For the exhibition I attempted to present images which represented a cross-section of mining working life as it was available to me to be photographed at the time of colliery closures, and as a result various facets of community life were ignored or overlooked. It is important to stress that these images are highly personal. As well as photographs these included paintings, drawings and a graph. The photographs are the result of the resources which were available to me in the short time span allotted between obtaining permission to photograph and developing practical time scale to take photographs.

### **Documentary content and context of photographs**

This presentation is essentially different from the kinds of pictures visual sociologists make which resemble documentary photography or photojournalism. They are not “ways of reporting”. As I pointed out in chapter four documentary photography is associated with exploration of social conditions. Its purpose is to record and demonstrate what is important about an event or people or place. This

complies with the understanding that the photographer is not an objective recorder. Images are evaluated subjective to personal aesthetics (tastes) and moral judgement. Hine's images investigated serious problems and exposed evil, Evans' photographs portray poverty. He supposed his photographs to be self-explanatory: using words implied a deficiency of the image. In *Famous Men* his images were presented separately from Agee's breaking with traditions in photojournalism in which images are used to illustrate text. These images are concerned with meanings. An essential component of their meaning is the way in which they are perceived and understood. Meaning is attributed to photographs by people who are involved with them, understand them and use them, in the same way that paintings are consumed by representatives of the art world (Becker 1986).

Images for the exhibition were selected to represent historical changes in mining activities in South Tyneside. The era of modern coal is marked by the predominance of mechanical engineering in coal mining with the development of machine based extraction and transport. Westoe Colliery stood as the centrepiece of this image and at the pinnacle of the historical development of the landscape of coal in South Tyneside. (Fig. 6.2) The colliery's Crown Tower was a highly visible manifestation of modern mining. It stood as an emblem of this dynamic period of progress. The time of its closure and subsequent demolition is the period of change which is under investigation. The tower as an indication of the presence of mining appears to have been generally accepted neutrally as a part of the landscape. There never had been a hue and cry about its blighting the view of



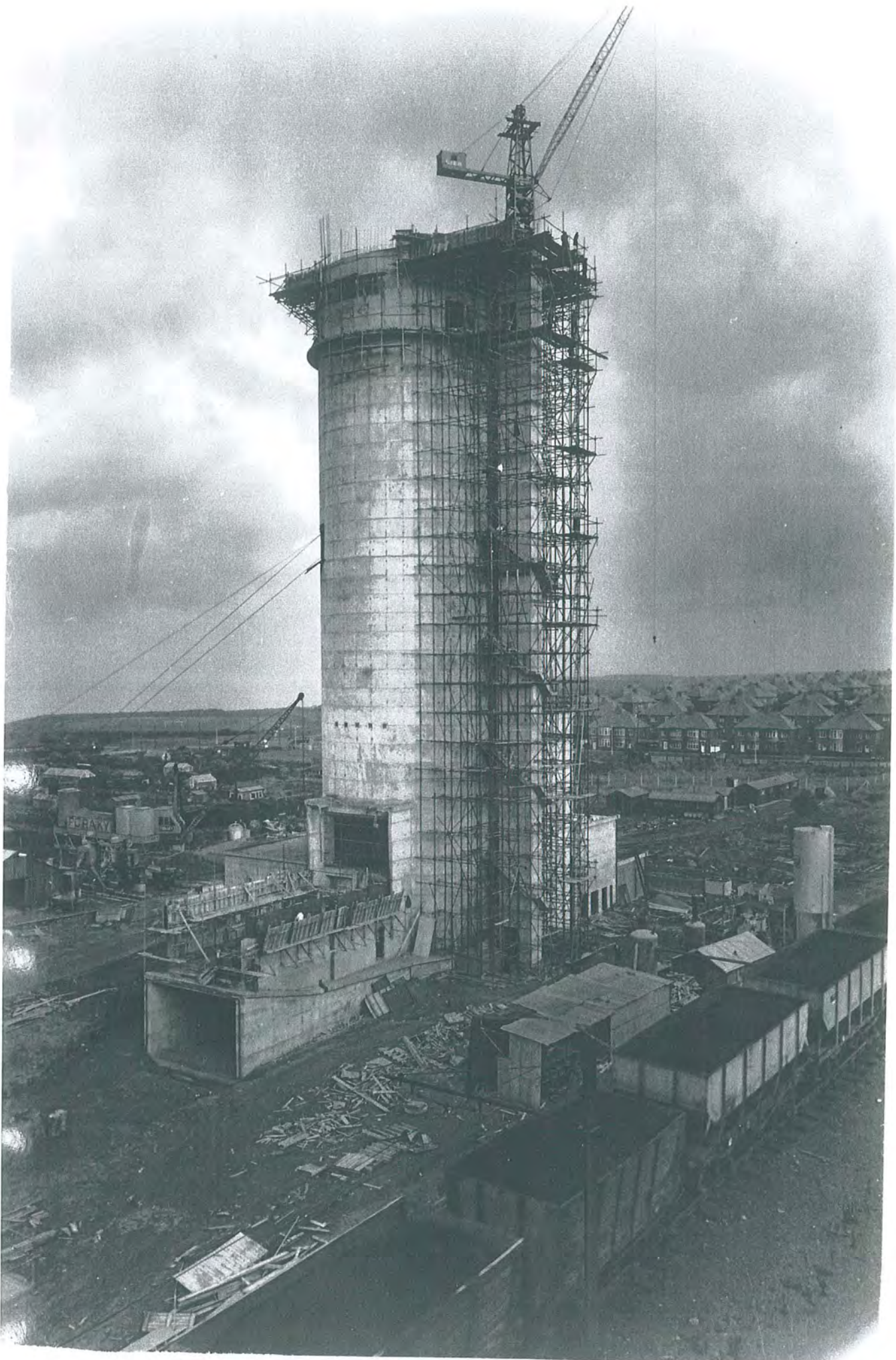


the seaside resort. Its representation of coal mining was clearly and widely understood. (A6:3)

### **The venue for the group meetings**

Museums and art galleries are the normal venues for art exhibitions. The use of such a standard place was ruled out for the purpose of this study. First of all they tend to be booked well in advance. They exist within the system of arts bureaucracy; a variable which would not guarantee that an exhibition would take place. Despite Bourdieu's enquiry their primary purpose is the presentation of art, not social research. Art galleries are public places. Public access would lead to interruptions to the groups' concentration. Personal contact with members secured a welcome to the premises at Harton and Westoe Colliery Welfare. On reflection when conducting research at the Welfare the occasional interruption to the focus group discussions did not affect respondents' contributions negatively. It rather added to the sense of a normal conversation.

Perhaps the most important aspect of conducting focus groups at the Welfare is its inherent symbolism. The Welfare and grounds are located on the site of Harton Colliery in South Shields. The place figures significantly in the memories of many respondents as the colliery location (at which several had worked). It is familiar as a part of a wider social structure, having been developed as a provision for a wide variety of cultural needs of miners and their families. Respondents recalled symbolic cultural activities such as galas and picnics held on its grounds.



Welfare members believed that discussions held there would be fitting to its cultural remit. The Welfare premises consists of clubroom where people meet during the day, primarily for sporting activities, football, cricket, bowls and snooker. Occasional social functions are held in the clubroom. The Welfare was built next to Harton Colliery, which closed in 1969. The perimeter walls of the sports ground, or those still standing, are built of horizontal concrete laths which have the look of the *Plan For Coal*: the post nationalisation colliery aesthetic. Many of the visible attributes of the place are evidence of the cannibalisation of Westoe Colliery at the time of its closure, such as the steel gates from the pit at the entrance to the sports field and a minecar filled with coal at the door of the building. The grounds are kept by a team of volunteers who participated in the focus group discussions. Privacy and the intimate acoustics of the room meant that the contributions people made were generally clear and audible

### **Harton Colliery**

To locate the Welfare building in the wider context of mining in South Tyneside I include a brief outline of the mining history of the borough, focusing on Harton. Mining is recorded at Jarrow in 1618 (Galloway 1902) and at Hebburn in 1656 (Hair 1844). Jarrow Alfred pit was begun in 1803 (Sykes 1833). Templetown, afterwards Chapter Main, Colliery, situated at Jarrow Slake, commenced shipping coals in 1810. It ceased production in 1825 due to excessive water make. Hebburn Colliery closed in 1859 due to flooding and reopened in 1870.

Hebburn was largely abandoned in 1932. Reserves were continued to be worked from Wallsend Colliery.

Harton is situated a short distance to the west of the outcrop of the Magnesian Limestone; a geological formation which conceals the eastern and southern part of the coalfield beneath a stratigraphy which presented significant mining difficulties, and because of which no mining took place here before 1822. The colliery was sunk between 1841 and 1845, on Church Commissioners' land just outside of the town. Blower (in *Last Pit on the Tyne*, hereafter *LP*, Westoe Campaign Group 1994.60) noted that "the colliery's growth created a whole mining community on what had hitherto been agricultural land at West Harton around the tiny rural hamlet of White Leas". (Fig. 6:4)

The Harton Coal Company was known for its four collieries: Harton, Saint Hilda, Whitburn and Boldon. The first pit associated with Saint Hilda Colliery was commenced in 1822 and produced coal in 1825. An explosion occurred in 1839 in which 51 people were killed. Boldon began working in 1866. Whitburn Colliery was won in 1874 to exploit undersea coal reserves. Westoe commenced sinking in 1909 and began production in 1911. Saint Hilda closed in 1940 but reopened with Westoe Colliery in 1949. Westoe was deepened and the coal drawing Crown Shaft sunk in 1957. The image of the Crown Shaft winding tower is central to this research. At the time of its development undersea reserves were being proven which would provide the colliery with a long term future. "The offshore boring tower has been used extensively during the year to provide further

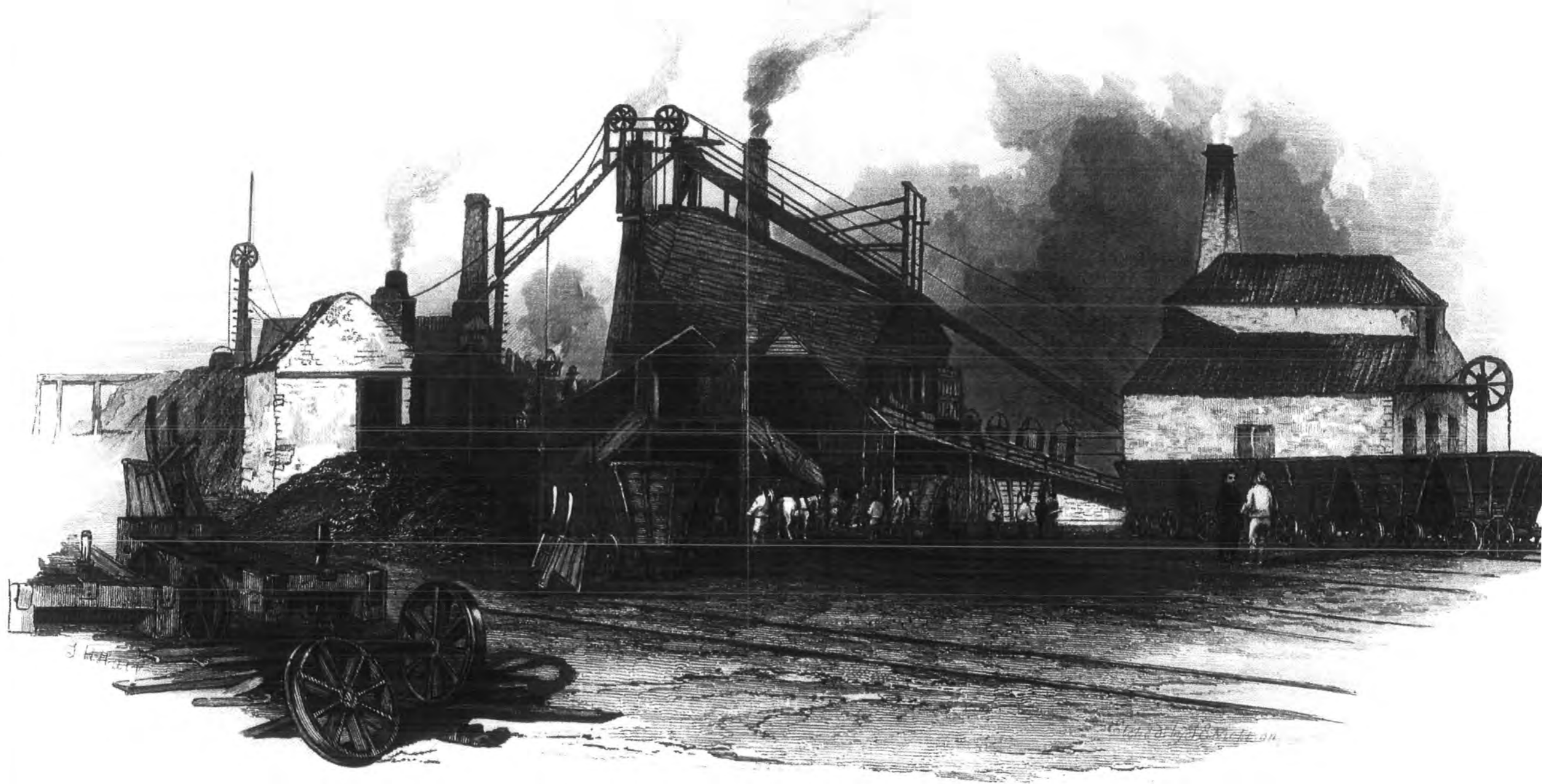


details of the position of seams beyond the present undersea workings. [...] at the Westoe Crown Shaft the sinking itself has been completed” (*Report of Inspector of H M Mines and Quarries* 1961).

Like many collieries in Northumberland and Durham, Harton Colliery peaked in terms of output and manpower around 1910 -1914, after which it went into gradual decline due to partial exhaustion of readily workable reserves. Power loading machinery was installed in the pit in 1942, before which “the ‘donkey’ work was done by 1,200 pit ponies” (*LP*). It closed in 1969. The miners’ lodge (union branch) was established in 1870 and at its high point, again before 1914, it had 3,000 members.

“The last few years of the pit’s life saw unwanted publicity and controversy as a result of damage to homes ... allegedly caused by subsidence. After a gas explosion at a home in Sunderland Road had injured a young couple Harton Residents Association was established”

...which took up its concerns with the NCB and lobbied for the closure of the colliery (*Shields Gazette* 22 June 1966 cited in *LP*). On the announcement of its impending closure the secretary of the miners’ lodge told the *Shields Gazette*, “there are no miners in the county of Durham better than those at Harton, and this is a disaster for them which should never have happened. It is a tragedy for the town and shows no dignity for the men” (*Shields Gazette* 31 July 1969 - in *LP*). Of the 558 men still employed at the pit at the time of its closure 292 were transferred to Westoe, 100 to Boldon, and 12 to the workshops at Whitburn. Whitburn closed in June 1968. Whitburn Area offices and Workshops closed in 1985. Boldon closed in 1982: Westoe “the last pit on the Tyne” in 1993.



## **Temporal selection of images**

I selected visual images representing the colliery aesthetic for the exhibition at the Miners' Welfare. They were meant to represent a temporal cross section - from earliest available images of mining in the town to the last images made of mining in South Shields. I have discussed the problem of underground photography. Another problem with photography is that it is difficult, although not impossible, to depict something which isn't there. Few structures remain standing to testify to or give expression to the *colliery aesthetic*. Hackneyed images are not difficult to produce which indicate the emptiness of the landscape where industry has decamped - derelict land with open spaces - safety boots or hard hats strewn in attitudes which indicate departure - abandonment. The reality is that without these indicators it is difficult to present a human involvement in this landscape. Early in 1997 I revisited the sites of the collieries, the electric railway line between the Harton Staith and Westoe, Monkton Cokeworks and coal stocking sites at Boldon, searching for such clues of industrial activity.

## **Time sequences depicted**

As attitudes to change are at the core of this enquiry sequential photographs depicting changes through time were selected for the exhibition. In the exhibition images were presented relating to four specific locations which depicted sequences of time. (Fig. 6:5)

***Saint Hilda Colliery sequence.*** Saint Hilda Colliery has existed in the centre of South Shields from the 1820s. A preserved building can still be seen (2001) marking the location of the shaft. The colliery figured prominently in both the





history of South Shields and the history of mining. Following the 1839 explosion a committee was established to investigate accidents in mines. This *South Shields Committee* was the forerunner of the Mining Institute, founded 13 years later. The pit is of further historical significance in that in 1994 it was the last to be used by miners to access underground colliery workings along the length of the River Tyne.

Images used in the exhibition included an engraving of the 1840s by Thomas Hair, the second an archive photograph from around 1902 and the last a photograph taken after the colliery heapstead and winding house left as a scheduled monument after the pit had closed.

***Whitburn sequence.*** A photograph of the *Marsden Rattler* a locally famous steam train which served the colliery, smoking its way through the colliery in 1959. (Fig. 6:6) This is juxtaposed with a view of the location from the same view point in 1997. The colliery site has reverted to fields. The colliery village of housing built by the Harton Coal Company at the time of Whitburn sinking remains. An earlier settlement, a village which was located around the pit was abandoned because of erosion of the sea cliffs, but remains in memory of many of the respondents. (Fig. 6:7)

***Westoe Colliery Crown Tower sequence.*** This group of photographs is meant to represent the time of modern coal. The exhibition included NCB photograph of the tower under construction in 1959. A view of the tower in the background

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Fig. 6:5 Saint Hilda Colliery, 1841.

Fig. 6:6 The *Marsden Rattler*.

Fig. 6:7 View of Marsden from the same location.



from the beach in the 1960s with a tellingly dated image of people playing with a beach ball was obtained from Bean (1971). The collapse of the tower during demolition was one of the most photographed events in recent South Tyneside history. The sequence continues with a picture of the remains of the structure of the tower lying on the ground shortly after demolition. A shaft cap indicates where the tower stood. A plinth with a metal plaque stands on the site of the 'man riding' downcast Westoe Shaft. The heapstead buildings were demolished at the same time. Respondent explained that the plaque is repeatedly stolen, then replaced by the Coal Authority, only to be stolen again. There is a waiting list for the plaque which is stolen to order.

**Marsden Rock.** I have discussed the symbolic importance of the Rock structure and its representation on the miners' banner. The exhibition included a sequence of pictures of the structure entire, from a picture postcard of the 1960s, partly collapsed, and its new, reduced, formation.

### **Other images**

**Boldon Colliery Yard 1959.** This picture represents a typical well ordered twentieth century large coal mine. Headstocks and heapstead buildings at Boldon, Whitburn and Harton were almost identical. Traditional open frame lattice work structures topped with pulley wheels were a common visual indicator of the presence of coal mines across the landscape of the region. Lawson wrote about his to images of gleaming steel and immensity and modernity.

“The pit-head on which we stood was a vast structure of steel. Powerful supports reached to the pulleys away up beyond the roof that covered the working part of the surface. The platform on which we stood was steel. There was steel everywhere. We were surrounded by it; we could hear it in the crashing coal “tipper” and running-tub. We saw the thick,

glistening, steel-like ropes gliding up and down the shaft and the steel chains emerging, heralding the coming of the steel cage which carried the iron shaft gates upward in its flight. I shrank inwardly in the midst of that great organisation, and once more that sense of “closed-in-ness” came back anew, making me feel even smaller than I was” (1951.48).

The pulley wheels have continued use. Many former colliery sites are now denoted with pulley wheels halved and planted into the ground. I include a short description of this heritage process as given in conversation at Easington Colliery at the time of its closure in 1993. As a skeleton crew involved with the demolition the respondents were responsible for overseeing the disposal of the colliery’s artefacts.

“Aa tell you about Easington Council. Well with the pit shutting they wanted some artefacts, so the council phoned down. Every disused pit site you probably see a pulley wheel - and they say ‘Is there any possibility of getting a pulley-wheel for a bit of heritage?’ ‘Oh aye, nee problem, we’ve got a few here ... Leave it to us’. ‘Oh, by the way, how big is the wheel?’ ‘Well it’s twenty two foot in diameter, and that’s the bad news, ’cos you’ll not get a waggon to take it. But you can half it, because the wheel is bolted in two halves’. Put the phone down - fifteen minutes later, phones back to Ronnie and he says, ‘Oh it’s mister so and so from the council. Do you know that wheel were on about, twenty two foot diameter, but it bolts in two halves? Can you tell me how big the half of the wheel is?’ And that’s a fact mind” (Doyle 1997.15).

**Poster.** This image used as an exhibition invitation from a lithograph based on a charcoal and ink drawing of a maintenance worker at a long wall face. Once again the man posed for a photograph from which the drawing was made. The image shows typical conditions along a face in a seam about a metre thick. The picture was taken when the face was idle due to impending closure. In working conditions a man in a boiler suit would be overdressed.

**Bensham Steps.** A photograph of an underground stairway in Westoe Colliery leading to the Bensham Seam with a deputy testing for gas 1993. This picture

shows brickwork lining an underground way. It was taken using designated flame safe flash units specially constructed by the NCB. The over exposure of the immediate foreground of the photograph shows the difficulty of flash photography in confined spaces. Richard A, the colliery overman who posed for this and many other pictures in abandoned workings to give a sense of scale was known as '*Dicky Dac*' from his injudicious use of the underground remote communications system (the '*Dac*'). There is a tendency to good natured cruelty in much colliery humour. When the colliery closed Dicky got work at a textile factory where he became the object of some bullying from women over whose husbands he had officiated over at Westoe. I will present examples of attitudes to colliery officials in reports of transcribed conversation in the following chapters. On viewing the photographs at the pit head one of his colleagues accused him of "modelling workwear". The exhibition included a large oil painting of Dicky also testing for gas at the pumping ranges at the Saint Hilda pit bottom.

***In the cage.*** A lithograph from charcoal drawing of miners in cage at Easington Colliery North Pit in 1993. The photograph used for this drawing engaged with a high exposure utilising ambient light. Fast film stock (3200 ASA Kodak TMAX) was 'pushed' to the extent of its capabilities in the darkroom through a process I devised especially for this type of work involving extensive development time whilst gradually warming the chemicals. The result of this process pushes the film to capability of speed around 250,000 ASA. This leads to a strong graining which adds grittiness to the image. In 2000 a variation of this drawing was adapted by Durham County Council as part of a heritage trail leading up to the colliery site where the massive three deck cage has been planted in the landscape (in lieu of a pulley wheel).



THIS COLLEGE IS NOW  
MANAGED BY THE  
NATIONAL  
COAL BOARD  
ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE

**Ponies.** A lithograph from charcoal drawing of pit ponies working underground at Ellington Colliery in 1994. Photographed with opportunistic use of flame safe flash in a bord where the ponies were working drawing salvage in almost total darkness. No focus - nothing to focus on - just open bulb exposure and flash. Comment was passed by Colin P, one of the pony handlers, when the colliery closed in 1994. Word had gone round that ponies had been in use in the pit (although this was no secret it was not widely known that ponies were still working in British Coal mines). When they were brought to bank for the last time cameras and crews came from everywhere to present the event for television. Colin was interviewed leading the last pony from the cage. He remarked that the world's press was prepared to turn out to witness four dumb animals being put out to pasture and yet the day before five hundred men were made redundant in what was becoming one of Europe's worst unemployment black spots and yet no one turned a hair. This indicates a degree of sentimentality which made the colliery closure newsworthy.

**Mural.** A photograph of the Commercial Road Mural which depicts the industrial past of South Shields including mining. This work figures importantly as a representation of mining as public art in the town. All focus group respondents were familiar with, and fond of, this image. (Fig. 6:8)

**A poster depicting photograph of shaftmen working in a kibble.** A bucket used by sinkers and shaft men, in the Crown Shaft. After the cages had been drawn out of the pit maintenance needed to be carried out in the shafts. Access was effected by this kibble suspended from a winched rope. Interestingly the shaft men performed a series of acrobatics for the camera. The colliery manager would not





grant permission for the publication of these photographs. A respondent to the focus groups told how he had to travel in a kibble in this same shaft when it was under construction. Ron W assisted my work, both at Westoe Colliery as an official of the mine and the Welfare. He was a member of the last official party of miners underground in Saint Hilda Colliery when it was abandoned in February 1994. He began his working life as an apprentice at the time of the Crown Shaft sinking, He spoke of his experiences of his first days at the pit. This narrative encapsulates the era of late modern mining in South Shields. It is the story of a man's whole working life.

“Foraki’s were the firm that did the shaft sinking. The fellows they had working with them were all rough and ready characters: worked in the most arduous conditions you have ever seen. They looked as if they had been honed - tough as teeth. I used to have to go to the shaft as an apprentice. They had a rough and ready set of signals, a little tugger at the bottom of the Crown Drift. Anyway, when it went off we used to have to go down in the bucket; me being fifteen and sixteen year old, I was petrified. And these guys thought nothing of it, working waist deep in water and slime and sludge - muscles in their ears - nothing beat them. They were well paid, sixteen hours a day, all Irishmen and Poles. Round the area of the Crown Shaft there was loads of wooden huts, makeshift dwellings where they used to live, like a shanty town. They’d have a couple of pints in the New Crown and then back to work. Here was me fifteen years old and hanging on for grim death - my knuckles used to be white hanging on to that. Imagine at that, straight down from school, and you thought, ‘Is this it?’ And here now thirty five years later and it’s all pulled down”. (Fig. 6:9)

The photograph was used by a theatre company in a production of *Close the Coalhouse Door*. This 1993 version had been extensively rewritten and politically corrected by its author.

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Fig. 6:8 David Wilkinson. Mill Dam Mural, c1980.

Fig. 6:9 Approved photograph of men in the kibble, Westoe Colliery.

**Graph.** This representation outlines mining employment in the context of South Tyneside was included as a visual image to provides a temporal context in which the other images could be viewed.

## **PART TWO**

### **MY GROUPS**

Having outlined the necessary preparation of the visual material and the venue the next task is to recruit participants. This part of the chapter is about the participants as groups and their relationship to the mining industry. Following this description I detail what participants in focus groups said, marshalling data thematically.

Twelve group discussions were organised. In all about fifty or so people or so sampled. Ten of these were based on groups of people which existed as an organisation, knew each other, or had something else in common. The groups were, with one exception, composed of people known to each other and generally had one or more member known to myself. Those with a history of engagement with the mining industry were over-represented in the group population as compared with the population of the locality as a whole. This represents an element of weighting in a very rough and ready 'stratified' sampling of the potential population of natural groups. The numbers of participants were not easy to control in that people were invited from organised groups. The numbers turning up to form each focus group was a function of willingness and interest. People with an interest in art are likewise over-

represented as the research is located at the intersection of mining, representations of mining and visual images. Other groups included a women's health group, a group of business studies students, and a random invited group. Where possible pre-existing natural groups which have a real existence already were recruited, or people who interacted with each other on a regular basis in relationship to common interest and or friendship. Non-group membership difficulty was experienced in one particular session in the role that one teacher played in relation to group participation involving his own students. Gibbs (1998.2) aggregates regular focus group participants in numbers of people per group is usually six to ten. The groups in this sample ranged from three to nine members with most having four or five participants. Designating a sample of possible groups was essentially opportunistic. Participation has to be understood in terms of the groups themselves. It appeared that the correct way to manage this issue was by careful specification of the nature of each group. To this end details of the groups are presented.

### **Participants**

Focus groups conducted at the Welfare were scheduled to fit with the working patterns and routines of the Welfare. Discussions were commenced and subsequently taped and transcribed for analysis. Participants were asked to fill in a short questionnaire about themselves which doubled as a consent form. Two key respondents were people who have assumed the responsibility of looking after the Welfare's affairs: the *'Two Ronnies'*. Ron W principal colliery electrical engineer at Westoe, and ex NACODS union official Ron S keep the Welfare alive: now without the support of union or NCB levies. Another 'key'

respondent, an artist Dave W, who painted the mural referred to above in the early 1980s which depicted recent history. At the time of the focus group discussions the future of the part of the town in which the mural is located was under appraisal for regeneration, the future of the painting was in question. A number of people rallied in favour of restoring the work. This activity provided a further dimension for arts minded groups concerning imagery which portrays the heritage of the place as a work of public art. Other key respondents included Billy S, who as an electrician at Westoe had significantly contributed to my work; John S, from the South Tyneside arts project was particularly helpful as a 'recruiting sergeant' for focus groups.

Active Welfare members: all of whom had long service at Westoe Colliery. The first group discussion was made up of the usual gathering of fellows who meet regularly at the Welfare and tend to its daily needs. Looking after football and cricket pitches in season and booking them out to the respective clubs that use them. It materialises in subsequent discussions including some of these men that their commitment stems from an overall cultural concern. Ron S explained the role of the Welfare to members of more than one of the group. This is at the core of my understanding of the cultural necessity of the continuing activities of the Welfare. The whole group had been miners up until the closure of Westoe Colliery, and were all known to one another - some of them were known to me.

Colliery officials and power loaders: Dennis T, as a colliery overman , supervised the construction of the underground 'TOCH Junction' at Westoe Colliery, part of the reconstruction programme in the early 1960's after having

served his time as a marine engineer. He assisted in the recruitment of focus groups of ex colliery officials. This group was composed of men who had considerable experience underground. One of the respondents introduced them in the context of their work experience including an overman from Harton Colliery and Westoe Colliery, a ropeman from Westoe Colliery who had followed his father and his brothers, a power loader, an electrician who worked at Whitburn, two power loaders and another colliery official an overman at Harton and Westoe. Another man who hadn't worked at the pit.

Arts group drawn from a Women's Health project in South Shields with a number of group members who had family members formerly in colliery employment. Their initial interest was in visiting an art exhibition, but as conversation unfolded it became obvious that the respondents were particularly interested in the mining aspect of the enquiry.

Business studies students and their teacher. None had any experience of collieries, and their responses were speculative as to what mining was about. One had a grandfather who lived near Westoe Colliery.

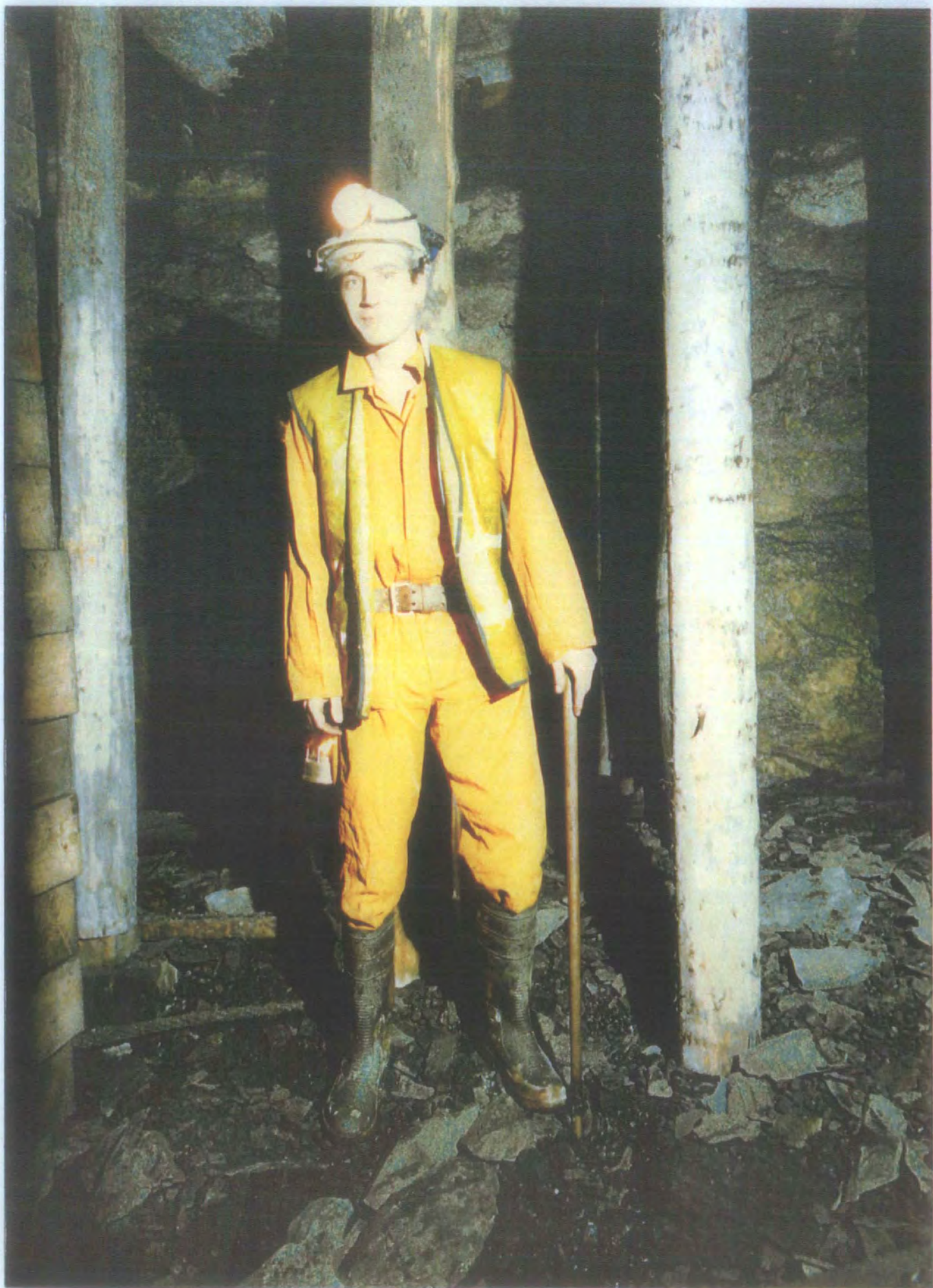
Mining heritage enthusiasts. Bill C, a local (though not South Tyneside) councillor of long standing, with an interest in museum, history, heritage and mining culture. Billy S, a former colliery craftsman with an enthusiasm for mining heritage, colliery bands and a keen photographer. John S, an artist who lived locally and was continually enthused by the project. He attended more than one group meeting. Derek S, a retired colliery safety engineer with a particular

enthusiasm for heritage, represented by bands and banners. Two of them are active volunteers in the amateur heritage sector, based at the Bowes Railway at Springwell. The railway museum is housed in a complex of early nineteenth century colliery buildings and is staffed with mining enthusiasts. They had collected artefacts from collieries at the time of the closures. This collection was carried out without assistance from the professional museum sector. Each respondent was known to me personally.

An arts group: including photographer Steve Conlan who had been commissioned by South Tyneside council at the time of the 'mothballing' of Westoe Colliery and had experienced difficulties from colliery management when he exhibited the work in the library in South Shields. Another fine artist, Peter M, nicknamed Tonto, who works as a hospital porter in the South Tyneside General Hospital. John S, the artist who attended the industrial heritage group, and Mark, a young man who had been a deputy at Westoe up until the time of its closure in 1994 and had assisted me with my underground photography. (Fig. 6:10)

Amateur arts group: identified themselves in discussion with how many people had relatives in South Shields who worked or are connected with mining. One's grandfather was a trimmer, another's father worked on the little electric train that ran up and down Westoe.

Postal recruited focus group: drawn from the electoral register of the ward within which the exhibition was held. The response to the postal recruitment was poor.





Of sixty invitations four responded and two people turned up. Neither respondent had worked in mining, although both had visited underground. One of these was a foreman in an electronics factory which employs many former Westoe miners.

Mature art students from South Shields Technical College. They were brought together by Dave W, the muralist. His painting comprised one of the images which was referred to in the exhibition and figured in most focus groups.

Two reflexive groups were convened to reconsider themes stemming from preliminary analysis. The first was composed of Welfare members. It was originally intended as a revue of conversations from the earlier groups. As well as occasionally contributing to other focus groups several former colliery employees attending the Welfare regularly were invited to form a focus group to reflect upon the programme as they saw it. This focus group was almost entirely a 'performance' to the tape recorder.

The second reflexive group overview was held in the library of the mining Institute. Every respondent who wished to make this further contribution was invited to attend. The second reflexive group invited participants from all the original groups who had participated in other focus groups and had indicated that they would be willing to come back and discuss the preliminary group discussions and their findings. The intention with this group was to establish where necessary the meaning of remarks which we have adduced in the preliminary survey. This group convened away from the exhibition, but images

were once again used. A sequential group of photographs of the construction, use and demolition of the Crown Tower was distributed. This conversation fundamentally differed from all the others in that a series of questions based on preliminary analysis of focus group transcripts were formally posed to prompt specific responses. A second investigator, D Byrne, joined the group.

## **PART THREE**

### **WHAT WAS SAID IN FOCUS GROUPS**

Having presented images around which discussions were promoted and profiles of the groups of people who participated in the discussions I present here subjects which came up for review in the sequence in which they materialised. The variety of subjects touched upon indicates a variety of opinions from all of the respondents. I identify generic themes in square brackets (e.g. [us / them] ).

#### ***Welfare members***

The discussion began with a conversation about whether or not the coal left at Westoe could ever be mined again. This led to reminiscences of mining experience [working life experience]; geology ; the relationship of experts to the men [them]; explanation of mining activity; conditions of work; strange events that happened [unusual events]; strangers, including a conversation on the recruitment of non miners at the time of the Crown Shaft expansion, known to them as the 'King Street Drifters' and miners who came from elsewhere as a result of pit closures inland, known to South Shields men as 'hilbillies' which can be dated by the 1960s television programme that they were named after [them]; shift patterns [working life experience]; kinship; people known to the

group [us]; wage agreements; the union; infirmities; the work of the welfare; pithead baths [bathing]; an underground atomic bomb shelter; families; the everyday running of the Welfare such as the condition of the cricket wicket [everyday experience]; colliery houses; the disappearance of culture.

***colliery officials with face workers***

The Welfare and its activities came in for brief discussion [us / cultural activities / aspirations]; football, bowling, cricket, weightlifting fitness, the struggle to maintain the Welfare since the closure of the colliery, the colliery band [culture]. A discussion prompted by the images of change [change]; ponies [ponies]; the Easington Colliery Disaster of 1952 (remembered by all) [event]; the fire which closed Saint Hilda Colliery in the 1930s (in one respondent's personal memory); the closure of Harton Colliery in 1969, where most of the respondents had worked [colliery closures]; the *Marsden Rattler* [place]; characters; nicknames; pit humour; trips from the club; drink; leeks; water underground [water]; the Tories [them]; colliery closures in general; the 1984-5 strike [event]; the police; union officials [them]; Arthur Scargill; justice; conditions at work after the strike [working life experience].

***women's health group with interest in arts***

Discussed mining; two sisters whose father had worked at Whitburn [us / family]; the *Marsden Rattler*; the place as it used to be [place]; pithead baths; the bath in front of the fire [bathing]; the passing of Whitburn village [place / then]; '*Close The Coalhouse Door*' [cultural industry product]; coal still left down in the mine [supposition]; outside toilets [bathing / sanitation]; underground water [water]; demolition of Westoe Colliery [closure]; potential

future use of colliery site [future] ; jobs; strike [event]; redundancy; children in mines [children]; conditions; emphysema; Bevin Boys; compensation claims [conditions and suppositions]; housing; rationing; miners' free coal [social conditions]; women coal miners in America; comparing domestic heating arrangements (one of the respondents who came from Norway); ponies [ponies]; the bombing of the market during the War [event]; wages [supposition]; the 1984-5 strike [event / strike]; Arthur Scargill.

***business students and their teacher***

The students discussed the image of dirt [dirt], supposing mining activity to make neighbourhoods dusty and smoky; dereliction after industry, the look of the place [place / the look]; dereliction and boarded up council houses; the place described as a wasteland. One respondent was familiar with Monkton Cokeworks. The sports arrangements at the Welfare; concepts of community; collieries killing people [suppositions]; shops; unemployment; safety; risk; accidents; death; Dunblane; Aberfan [risk]; aspirations; job prospects [the future].

***three artists and a former colliery official***

One respondent was commissioned by South Tyneside Council to photograph Westoe Colliery before the time of its closure around 1992. Another is an artist who works as a porter at the hospital where casualties from the colliery would have been taken until its closure in 1990. The discussion began with the photographer explaining his difficulties in showing his work. This led to a discussion about images themselves and how images are censored. Topics

flowed across a variety of arts representations about mining including heritage use of former industrial sites; memorials; landmarks and their removal; museum representation; *Catherine Cookson Country* [representations and images of collieries / memorials and museum representation]; Bevin Boys; strikes during the war [event]; casualties of war; *THEM* [them]. Each respondent gave a description of their personal work history which had a compatibility with or was clearly understood by the others. The former miner now working at chemical works; the hospital porter's work in the casualty department, related to the pit [working life experience]; mining injuries; mining humour; culture [culture]; people travelling to work at the pit; how time had changed people from all walks of life [time]. The discussion ended with humorous proposals to make a museum representation based on the more 'adult' content of mining humour - an 'X Rated Museum' [culture / cultural representation].

### ***amateur arts group***

Discussed collieries in their social context and recalled memories such as grandfathers who were miners, a grandmother reading and writing the minutes of the meetings of the miners lodge [us / union]. The group discussed the importance of remembering conditions of sanitation, toilet facilities and tin baths [sanitation / bath]. Some had vivid memories of the hard life, comparing wealth created by mining industry with exploitation of the working class; the power of the coal owners; child labour [children]; housing conditions and miners' illnesses such as pneumoconiosis. Memory itself was discussed; people's memories; subconscious memory; memory evoked by cultural representations such as *Close the Coalhouse Door* [cultural industry product]; people wanting to forget [memory

and forgetting]; young people are not interested in these things, preferring rock, booze and drugs [supposition]. Mining was the only available work. The building of community; miners' houses; the lost village [place / then]. The end of mining [closures]; natural gas is going to run out and there will be a need to reopen the mines. The destruction of the mining industry was equated with Thatcher, unemployment, destruction of the unions and political control [them]. Echoing Terkel young people who have never worked will not be able to understand the importance of history and community spirit. The past explains the present. As arts practitioners the group believed that an exhibition about mining would prove popular [representation of mining]. The future of the mural at the Mill Dam. Childhood memories and the place as it was [place / then / memory]: Tyne Dock Arches; grandparents; music hall; shoeless children [children]; people have different conception of what is poor nowadays [poverty]; social conditions of the twenties and thirties led to the conditions in the sixties where unions became strong [union]. Allotments and Beamish Museum were also discussed [cultural representation].

### ***industrial archaeologists***

This group was interested in the things of mining culture: its representation, politics and humour, colliery bands and banners and old recordings of band music [culture]. Themes of this group discussion included training for the pit; children working [children]; mining experience; people the respondents knew in common; the Co-op [us]; scabs [them]; the 1984-5 strike [event / strike]; the Durham Miners Gala [culture]; museum interpretation and artefacts related to the industrial heritage of the region [cultural representation]; Beamish and Bowes

Railway; arts policy; the Labour Party, public art; funding for arts projects; sponsorship for bands; American influence on band music [culture]. One respondent discussed his delivering groceries as a boy to the miners' union leader's door. Local dialect and culture [culture]; the New Town; Nationalisation; culture in the context of the heritage society which retains the name of Blackfell as an indication of its importance as the meeting place off the first great miners' union in the 1830s [sense of history of place]. A historical discussion including children in mines [children] and the social influence of the 'chapel' [religion].

***postal recruited group***

Although not miners respondents were familiar with welfare through sport. Discussed familiarity with industries in South Shields. One's dad was seafarer and his wife was a nurse at the Ingham Infirmary. He himself had been frightened to go down pit [fear of pit]. One respondent had been down the pit as a visitor a few times including school visits and his wife's uncle was a deputy. Choices of work, it was either the pit or the yards or nothing: family connections to get a start at a workplace and percentage of population working in coal mines [availability of work]. The world of work now: quality control, computers telephones, miners in the factory workplace [working life]. Suppositions about what miners' work was like; *esprit de corps* [supposition]; mining places; village shops [place]; people in common [us]; football; old photographs; old people's reminiscence [then / history / event]; Zeppelin raid; holidays.

***mature art students***

The picture of the Rattler provoked an opening discussion on the danger of children playing on railway lines [children / changes]. Changes; nosy neighbours; clicky people [community / us and them]; wasteland [sense of place / dereliction]; community consultation; tourism; removal of the heart of the community; Beamish [cultural representation]; nostalgia. Concerning representations the group were concerned about the games that the local authority were seen to be playing in the context of art in public places [them / cultural representation]. Public art came under review; arts funding; mining in art; memorials [memorial]; need for cross generational discourse; record what it was actually like; memory [memory]. The supposition was that mining was a shitty job and the colliery an awful place [supposition]. But it is important to get people to tell the stories as a gift to the future; grandad's photograph album [enculturation / culture]; the importance of history. There is loads of history in Shields which includes the Romans, the iron age, prehistory and the bombing of the market place [history / event].

***reflexive group of welfare members***

Topics included nicknames; people known in common [us]. A typical working day as a form of group autobiography. Stories of the colliery: the story of a man sent to Coventry; an esteemed colleague; a legend; the way people talk [working life]. Colliery closures included the consensus that they "killed Harton" [colliery closures / them]. Harton was a good pit; old miners remembered; people who were brought up to work in the pit. Then pit was a place where everybody knew everybody [families / us]. A story about playing dominoes with Prince Charles.



Social life including the miners' union and that the miners allowed seats on the Trades Council [us]; deputies [them] Discussion about Welfare activities, football teams booking the ground [culture].

### *second reflexive group*

Began with a discussion of images. The importance of mining to the region. An important remark that elderly miners had cried when the tower was blown down. There is something missing even though it was an ugly object [place / absence]. The look of the mining landscape. The village that fell into the sea and the rock. The preservation of heritage; Bevin Boys. The question of representation and memorialisation [cultural representation / monument]; what happens now; land use; public sculpture; monuments to miners; Aged Miners' Homes; reading rooms and public libraries; museum strategies [cultural representation]; They would like to see the whole mining industry issue forgotten [them].

### **Problems in focus groups and focus group understanding**

Preparing the ground for analyses of data generated through focus groups it is important to distinguish ways in which people know and understand things. Schutz (1964) distinguishes two types of knowledge: knowledge of acquaintance and knowledge about. The type of knowledge that can be described as 'thinking as usual' is associated with the basic assumption that "social life will continue - because the same problems requiring the same solutions will occur - former experiences will serve to address future problems". This form of knowledge, including 'generational knowledge' which corresponds with Mead's notion of the postfigurative transmission of culture, can be called upon whether we understand it or not. "It depends for continuity upon the expectations of the old,

and the almost ineradicable imprint of those expectations upon the young” (1970:35). It has its parallels in ritual. It is enough to know a little about the type of event we are likely to encounter, and we share these assumptions with other people in our society. In this they are normative. A norm, according to the American Heritage English Dictionary, is “a standard, model, or pattern regarded as typical”. Social processes are normative in that they bring social pressures to bear on behaviour that is considered unusual. Conversely processes are normative when they results in bringing atypical patterns in line with typical ones. For Schutz (op cit.) the ‘crisis’ arises when one of these assumptions is no longer applicable. Aubert insists that “social norms are made up of expectations. This is more than a whim” (1967: 24).

### **Observations on group internal narrative dynamics**

Thematically grouped texts have been generated and gathered through group participant and interaction. This interaction provides a key to beginning analysis. Many elements of the narrative content of this data clearly stem from stories told and retold. This is evident from interruptions from different group members anxious to impart a portion of the tale. Psychological experiments of ‘serial reproduction’ represent the distortions which occur when a group constantly retells a tale (Hunter 1957). The results of these experiments

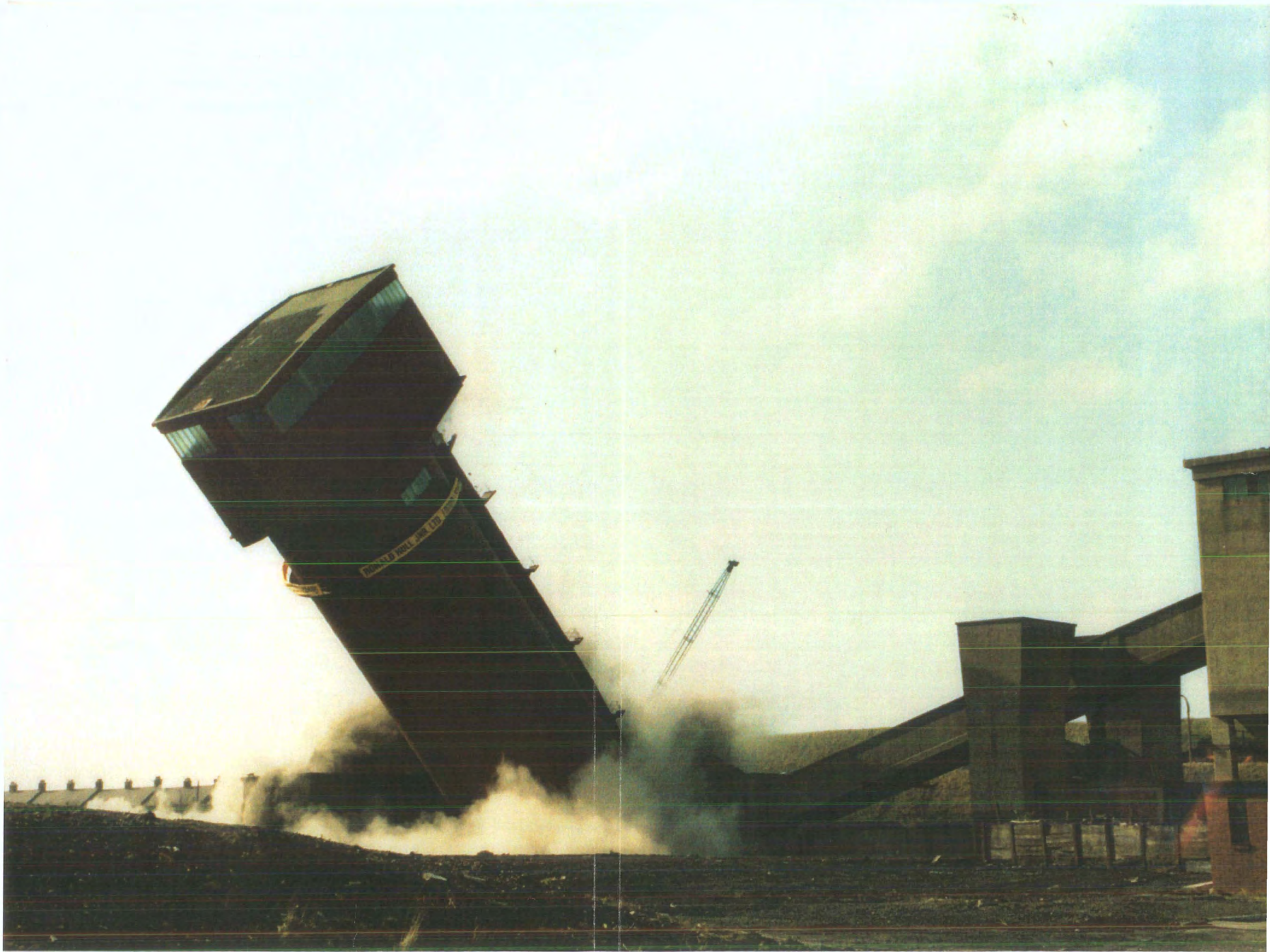
“ ... illustrate the distortion which occur in long-term remembering; and they represent an analogy to the way in which rumours and folk tales grow and change in the growing. A rumour may be broadly defined as information, purporting to be about some real event, which is passed on from person to person ... without secure standards of evidence being present. ... their source is vague, whether it be an insubstantial ‘they’ or an equally elusive ‘good authority’”(176).

Rumours rise and then fall from circulation when they lose topicality. Folk tales apply to a longer timescale, preserving events or suppositions of long ago. Charlton (1988) recalls as archetype the ghost in the pit genre. In *Sacrifice Achievement Gratitude* (Doyle 1997) I reproduced a story about a man on the night shift witnessing paranormal goings on; a ghost story in which the protagonist swears he has seen “a pair of boots dancing on the belt”. Stories of disappearing men underground are invariably told in good faith. Respondents remembered holing into old workings at Whitburn Colliery, of which no records were known to exist. This group rendering or serial reproduction is particularly evident in conversation of friendship groups such as the active Welfare members. The recurrence of themes has parallels in the fictional recycling of real events; the Scotswood inundation for example.

Again concerning practicalities of group conduct, there is a problem which arises from non-peer relationships in groupings. Responses from one group were prejudiced by the provocative questioning of a teacher’s weighted remarks. Typical of this leading is his question to his students redefines the trajectory of the conversation with questions such as:

“So this represents a community living together. And you look at a site like this and say “Hell” you know ... this is a terrible thing to have gone. But then again pits killed people, didn’t they?”

Here the teacher is re-trammeling the response of his students away from their potentially neutral response to a conditioned acceptance of his point of view as a





starting point. This is not to say that relationships do not exist in any peer group conversational structure but it is more pronounced in this context. ( <sup>Δ</sup>6:11)

## **CONCLUSION**

Visual sophistication leads to the assimilation of images into the currency of daily language. Understanding images about specific realities implies that people have had the same experience or that these experiences are judged by standards of given assumptions. In order to negotiate the meanings of images their themes are re-evaluated. Images are self defined as points of reference yet through the process of adaptation to focus group procedures their audience attributes meaning

to them. The everyday environment is full of images that reflect society and culture. My exhibition assimilated images from a repertoire which included both publicly known and highly visible appurtenances of the landscape of coal and those which would not ordinarily have a non mining public constituency.

I presented pictures which represent change in mining activities and their impact on the general look of the landscape. My presentation of these images intended to convey a sense of the place - South Tyneside - in the context of industry - mining - in the temporal locations of immemorial time, the recent, and the time of transition after industry. In conversation the past and people's relation to it is constantly under review. It is invoked to justify present choices. Information about the past is selectively reconstituted to suit specific purposes. For some respondents all that can be found of the mining culture is doom and gloom, dirt

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6:11 The demolition of the Crown Tower.

and grime and emphysema, returning to it is a return to squalor, to '*past dreariness*' which we are well rid of. (<sup>Δ</sup>6:12)

My next chapter undertakes analysis of the conversational material primarily acquired through focus groups. This begins with coding this material in its temporal context, starting with people's attitudes to time that has passed.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **CONVERSATION AND RECOLLECTION:**

#### **RECEIVED AND POPULAR PERCEPTIONS OF THE COLLIERY AESTHETIC**

In my last chapter I reviewed data generated by focus groups indicating recurring themes. Here I propose to examine this material in several ways: as deeply personal testimonies, as historical evidence, as corroboration of other sources of information, as a means of developing understanding about suppositions about particular events, and as ways in which mining identity can be identified. Many of these elements differentiate the experience of mining working life and identify mining communities. Identity concerns relationships of particular characteristics and their perception from within and without: some attributes are shared and others absent. Particular phenomena with common characteristics can be considered as nomothetic in that they point to generalities whereas ideographic understanding focuses on uniqueness and historical particularities. For this analysis these distinctions are unwieldy in that many descriptions presented by focus group respondents deal with unique events or circumstances but these are not uncommon within representations of the mining industry. This chapter will identify particular elements that lead to general understanding. Data generated by



focus groups can be examined to identify both experiences and suppositions about working life and identification of community.

Themes common to most focus group discussions are examined here. In connection with community life the look of difference, otherness, is defined in notions concerning dirt and bathing. From early art representations this notion characterises mining communities as being visually distinct. Central to the colliery aesthetic is the look of miners as 'others' - a look which distinguishes them from various industrial counterparts. The ending of the mining industry presents an opportunity to examine and challenge suppositions like this. Much of what was imparted in focus group discussions describes lived experience of extraordinary events, unusual narrative which can be corroborated through triangulation with other evidence. The historical miners' strikes of the 1970s and 1980s are a typical form of extreme event experienced by all respondents - miners and non-miners alike.

This and the following chapter, in analysis of data from conversations generated through focus groups, considers this material along temporal axes. This chapter is primarily concerned with recollection of what was.

The first part of this chapter begins with observations concerning the willingness of some respondents to openly tackle difficult, even distressing subjects. Several people confide material of a highly personal nature to the groups. Personal responses to bereavement and chronic illness as well as the highly private matter of sanitary arrangements are disclosed. The miner in the tin bath is a hackneyed

image. Conversation about bathing is reviewed here as a means to establishing understanding of personal attitudes. The important anthropological consideration of culture is as an active response to specific problems of living conditions is outlined by Malinowski. The outside toilet and tin bath were constantly reviewed in focus group conversations. Inherent in these observations are notions of concomitance of mine grime as squalor and the look of miners as different. They are dirty - they are different.

In chapter five I noted the importance of collection of oral testimonies to both broaden understanding of historical events and furnish evidence which supplements existing documents. The second part of the chapter examines extracts from focus group transcripts which illustrate the cross referencing of independent narratives to identify a discrepancy in understanding leading to suppositions about unique historical events which help to explain their peculiarities. Suppositions about a historical events which have significance to a large number of people, such as colliery closures, are triangulated with other textual evidence. Analysis of focus group materials privileges access to personal understanding of how such events were experienced. The examples I give relate to events which delineate liminality: the event which changes everything afterwards. The end of mining in the region is a point of vast change. Colliery closures leading up to this final departure have been met with resistance and attempts at understanding.

Leading from descriptions and recollections of colliery closures the third part of the chapter is an examination of how people perceive these events as delineating attitudes of 'us and them'. 'They' closed the mines. Why?

## **PART ONE**

### **THE PRESENTATION OF PERSONAL IDENTITY**

This thesis is an enquiry into the loss of potential contribution to existing and continuing culture. The chapter begins with observations about some specific qualities of the evidence which some respondents contribute. To annotate focus group data I will include, where this elucidates a point being made, observations about the respondents in relation to their evidence. An extreme precedent of personal observations can be found in Rowntree and Lavers' (1951) descriptions of their respondents to social surveys, for instance: "He is enormous in bulk and genial in disposition"(p104), "she makes a good job of being a spinster"(p82), "an artificial blonde - she is a hard faced female"(p92), "a rather faded woman of about 60"(p103), a retired prostitute who is "willing to come out of her retirement to oblige a friend, but being bloated and repulsive it is inconceivable that she should be troubled"(p75), "a terrible gossip and an insufferable bore ... her tongue is barbed"(p36), "she is faded, weary and bitter"(p9), "[the man's face] has an expression that is an odd mixture of innocence and vice"(p17).

These observations on the part of social researchers coincides with intersubjective notions about photography and the presentation of other types of documentary material, affording a personal hermeneutic through which the respondent is observed. Terkel also briefly describes his respondents, although in a less critical tone: "she is a sparrow of a woman in her late forties (1977. 244) ... he lives by himself in a tidily kept basement apartment (op cit.357) ... his

long hair is beribboned in a pony tail; his glasses are wire rimmed; his mustache is scraggy and his beard is wispy (p365)". In *The Great Divide* (1988): "Jack Maurer's appearance is more that of a Talmudic scholar than a commodities broker (p.122) ... Imagine Robert Duvall, to whom he bears a remarkable resemblance, in shirtsleeves, handling a continuous flow of messages, the phone constantly ringing. His feet are, of course, on the desk"(p.112). These are real people. His descriptions are celebratory and, whilst they give an impression which invites the reader's complicity in weighing up the respondent as a 'type' they differ fundamentally from the previous example in that they do not judge or condemn. I make the clear distinction to outline an approach to the 'subject' of the enquiry. Many of Rowtree and Lavers' descriptions would insult the respondent. They are doing research on, Terkel is researching with. His studies are not idealised samples but real people. Terkel's toolkit is comprised of a tape recorder which he explains is a potential "transmitter of the banal".

"The camera, the tape recorder ... misused, well-used. There are the *paparazzi* and there is Walker Evans" (1975.9).

In research into people's personal affairs much depends upon the attitude with which one approaches the subject and the reception one gives to proffered data. Again this underlines the fact that all interpersonal transactions which are capable of adding value to research are both personal and, to a degree, symbolic. The mediating agent, the documentary film maker, the artist, photographer, collector of oral testimonies, always makes decisions about what is to be recorded and how this material should be presented. Personally collected data are not neutral. My work is no exception: it edits and presents interpretations. There

is, however, a further dimension which stems from the participant; in examples of 'performance'.

Presentation can assume the form of censorship. In one focus group the photographer Steve Conlan explained that his pictures were censored by the colliery manager before permission was given for their public exhibition. This, as he explained in focus group discussion, was concerned with the presentation the manager wished to make of the colliery under his management. Many of my photographs likewise failed to pass a censorship of this nature in which a tacit agreement was reached that as permission was obtained to obtain the images this extended to their public use. Written permission from British Coal was needed to use the photograph of men working in the shaft at Westoe Colliery on a theatre poster advertising '*Close the Coalhouse Door*'. This returns to Sontag's notion of 'tourism' in other people's reality.

### **Painful experiences recounted**

It is important to stress the highly 'personal' nature of many of the accounts in group conversation which creates a distance from the more common forms of public history. Social relations are presented in conversations which stem from experience. These personal experiences present the standpoint from which the oral accounts are constructed. Much focus group narrative is constructed from moving passages concerning painful experiences or tragic events, such as remembering family illness, death, a father's funeral, or betrayal in the strike. For some respondents this presentation of self is the motive force which has impelled

their participation in the enquiry. The willingness of participants to expose highly personal particulars about themselves may serve the purpose of identification of their reason for participation: to set the record straight, to readjust the balance of an unfulfilled part of a narrative, honouring a loved one's memory. For example one respondent seemed to blame the very attempt to revive the narrative of mining as an invocation of the evil which brought about the ruin of her brother's health. These memories are recalled in the present, affording the past a continued presence in the here and now. Frank S, who assisted with my photography at Easington Colliery told of the death of his father during the strike of 1984-85. The function of recounting his painful story is a means of redress of the anguish he was caused by the obloquy of his treatment by 'them', the council, at a time of severe personal distress.

"Me dad died like - the police came to the door. Aa'd been on the beach - digging down the banks - we'd been riddling coke - so aa had to get a shower like. So the next thing aa had to do was mek some arrangements, cos there was only me".

In his narrative he identifies what he considers to be a responsibility of representatives of 'Them' - the local authority. When he calls upon this responsibility he is disabused of this supposition.

"Aa had no money from the strike, so aa says what aa'll de, get some advice - gan to the council. The council! They've got a duty to help you. Gans to the reception, press the bell, there's about five of them sitting reading the papers, tannoy's gannin off about the bin motors. This lad says 'aye, what d'ye want?' 'D'ye think aa could speak to somebody please?' 'What is it like?' 'Why me dad's dead like' and there's quite a few people there and aa didn't want to discuss it in the open. And he says 'and er - what is it? House cleared?' Aa says 'if ye think aa'm gonna stand hear shoutin' ower the counter to ye five sittin' readin' the papers like!' Why then he jumped up 'oh, er what's the problem?'

"When all come to all the undertaker that'd been runnin' about didn't get the job. This farmer stroke undertaker, from up Haswell somewhere, he got the job. Come to bury me father - nee underbearers, just the hearse. We gets to the

graveyard, we gets it doon, me two brother-in-laws and me - got the ropes - as they're rollin' the coffin into the grave this undertaker comes awer to me. He says 'got a nice plot next to him you knaa, want to book it?' Aa says 'YE WHAT? D'ye knaa summit y're a butcher. This is neither the time nor the place'. Here's me supposed to be bereavin' me father's death. What aa did, aa complained bitterly to the MP and got a letter from the House of Commons. Aa says to the council feller 'Aa'm convinced that if ye's could get away with it ye'd dig a hole in that field and bury him and that would be it'. The MP wrote to the chairman of the council and he was very apologetic, saying it was a complete misunderstanding. Eeh! Councils. Especially this one".

Frank identifies a shortcoming of the 'them' mandated to act on behalf of socially disabled people. He hasn't the means to execute the simple cultural task of burying his dead father. Here the cultural surrogate as a representative of 'them' ought to step in. The postman - the unidentified other who we have grown to rely upon - the 'them', however, is absent. The local authority fails to meet requirements or expectations. Here is an example of 'them' towards 'us': miners (us) are excluded for being miners.

For Hoggart (1957) a function of 'them' is that "they call yer up". One of the angriest presentations of personal narratives given in the whole of the series of focus groups was given by a woman from the women's arts group who explained her purpose for participating in discussions. This was to tell about her brother, who died of emphysema .

"It's a terrible thing, emphysema. When they give him stuff all coal dust came up. That's why I thought I'd come. I've got something of the colliery in my blood".

She went on to describe the traumatic experience of her brother's conscription into the mines and the family resistance to this move.

“Well he died of it, and my father died of that as well and he was fist Bevin Boy in South Shields to say ‘I will not go down the pits’. And they put him in Durham prison for six solid weeks for being defiant. It was in the *Gazette*. He was just eighteen years old. And on the headlines it said ‘YOUTH. I WILL NOT GO DOWN THE PITS’. Even his doctor who he was under, for bronichal ... he wouldn’t sign the certificate to give him to the man.. what do you know, the judge or whatever. All me mother knew - the policeman knocked at the door and he said ‘Can I have a toothbrush and a change of clothing’. She says ‘What for?’ He says ‘Ralph’s going straight up’.

“He went to prison rather than go down the pit.. and when he had finished his six weeks he was a changed young lad. And the day that he came out of the colliery [prison?] the feller knocked at me mother’s door and said ‘Your Ralph has to report to Whitburn Colliery and start on Monday’.

“He made him go. And he stood up for his rights in the paper. And not so long ago - it could have been a year or two ago - it had on, you know, about twenty five year and thirty years ago, It said ‘FIRST YOUTH IN SOUTH SHIELDS’ It said ‘I WILL NOT GO DOWN THE PITS’. And it was on his eighteenth birthday. And he never got over that. He died two years ago of emphysema. And he fought - tried to get it and said it was the coal on his chest. And the doctors wouldn’t sign his certificate. He had his trial sort of in the morning and all there was the policeman knocked the door. And me mother, she was in tears. She says ‘But he’s my baby. He’s my son’. And he says ‘He’s going to prison. It’s not my fault missus’. And his employer then was Cowies. From Sunderland. He went to Cowies to get out of the atmosphere he even worked on a farm. At Holders, is it, on Cleadon Hills? Just to get the air. And they wouldn’t let him even do farm work. And he suffered all them years. It was a terrible. When he came out he was frightened. He said he would never go back to prison.

“And Cowie was very good - he said to me mother ‘I’ll pay for the solicitor to fight his case’. And our Ralphy says ‘I haven’t got a case to fight. The doctor’ll give is a certificate’. And he went down and asked doctor McKee, I think it was, or the one previous to him, to give him a certificate so that he would be exempt. He said he would work. He said he’d do anything but go down the pit. And the doctor wouldn’t give him a certificate.

“But that finished me mother. Eighteen year old, his life - Died a terrible death, he did really. He died when he was sixty eight. The week before his sixty ninth birthday. He was a terrible state. And that is through the colliery. But that’s what I think of the collieries. It makes me feel upset to think my brother was a hale and hearty lad”.

The function of the respondent’s participation in our discussions is a form of setting the record straight. Terkel explains his awareness of the paradox of trespassing on the privacy of strangers and incursion into private grief.



“Yet my experiences tell me that people with buried grievances and dreams unexpressed do want to let go. Let things out. Lance the boil, they say; there is too much pus. The hurts, though private, are, I trust, felt by others too” (1975.9).

All investigative conversation with others is, to a degree, an invasion of private space. But the respondent feels the need to express this grief both to assembled friends and the anonymous incorporeal historical listener via the tape recorder. I contrast this with a different form of presentation of personal grief.

### **Aestheticisation and inversion: private grief and public spectacle**

Alongside the aestheticisation of everyday life, which I have discussed in the context of Appadurai’s theories, there is a trend in cultural industry mediated presentation to invert the private and public realms. This stands in contrast with the personal dignity which much visual social research insists upon for its respondents. Once again the benchmark for this form of description is established by Agee and Evans cited above.

I contrast much of what was presented in focus groups as personal (and relatively private personal) recollection of group sensibilities with highly public displays of details of personal life exhibited via cultural intermediaries. An example of inappropriate incursion into realms of private grief as public spectacle is the form of television show in which identity is publicly presented in confessional form. I describe as ‘shouting television’ and its counterpart the ‘late-night phone-in’ genres which present highly personal details and problems paraded as public spectacle. Jerry Springer is the self proclaimed ‘ringmaster’ of this domain. (<http://www.cnn>) He explains how this inversion occurs. His show is about -

“... outrageousness. That’s what I’m hired to do. If I do a show about outrageousness, I can’t do serious subjects. I can’t do normal behavior. It doesn’t belong on our show. If someone calls our show with a warm, uplifting story, we send them to another show. I’m not saying they shouldn’t be on television, but they shouldn’t be on our show. Our show is about craziness. So to watch our show and then say, ‘Gee, those people are crazy,’ ... of course, they are. That’s why they’re on the show.”(Springer html - constantly updated web site).

Springer’s genre differs significantly from the representation made by the focus group respondent about her brother. They are founded in wholly different approaches. Springer ekes entertainment out of personal suffering. A variant of the personal suffering is the bizarre, which is also sought for its entertainment capability. Typically -

“Jeff has a highly unusual fetish ... he enjoys watching beautiful women when they vomit”. (Springer html)

Or -

“Violet isn’t completely surprised to learn that her boyfriend is cheating on her because he’s cheated before ... with her mother!” (op cit.)

Once again this points to a variant of the consumerist postmodern sublime which relishes the spectacle of disgust experienced by others, tying tragic (or pathetic) experience with entertainment - Sontag’s ‘emotional tourism’. In view of their highly populous uptake air time given to attitudes of which these are typical present inappropriate responses to personal problems as potentially culturally normative. These presentations are pathetic but they differ fundamentally from the private grief expressed by focus group respondents in that they are matters of choice, rather than givens. Considering the contrast presented in these images it must be noted that conscription to colliery work is not a lifestyle decision. Its consequences may be borne with reticence but they are not displayed for the purpose of entertainment.

The consequence of such presentations to the cultural industries is potentially far reaching. Aesthetic value, represented in the craftsmanship of the mediated moving (television) image is inverted as the important visual dimension is eschewed in favour of highly charged emotional banality. Cultural industry mediated presentations are undermined in real aesthetic terms. Springer's focus groups respondents, on the world stage, become caricatures of themselves and the "quality of organized amusement changes into the quality of organized cruelty" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1944.138). To add to this argument Jhally and Lewis (1992 pp16-19) note that in television presentations the blurring of the "line between sense and nonsense" is effected through our own complicity: our "ambivalence towards their reality". The information it presents is fiction, yet it provides us with information about the world we live in. They note that "television is not an innocent bystander".

### **Miners and the look of the other**

Tourism in the spectacle of otherness is a key to understanding an approach to the colliery aesthetic. The world inhabited by miners is different, and so are they. They look different and behave differently. Parker's painting of *Pitmen Playing Quoits* is a central image to this representation of otherness. 'They' - miners - appear strange in many representations in art and personal testimony. Lawrence remarks at the other worldly appearance of miners moving about a town ...

"that was uncreated and ugly, and yet surcharged with the same potent atmosphere of intense, dark callousness. There were always miners about. They moved with their strange, distorted dignity, a certain beauty, and unnatural stillness in their bearing, a look of abstraction and half resignation in their pale, often gaunt faces. They belonged to another world, they had a strange glamour, their voices were filled with an intolerable deep resonance, like a machine's burring, a music more maddening than the sirens' long ago" (1921.129).

Personal memories likewise bring images of otherness to the fore. A respondent from the women's arts group spoke of the look of difference of the miners she knew.

"Yeah I can remember me grandfather coming back home with the white eyes and the black face. We used to live in the Westoe area, near the pit bank as they called it, and when the hooters went you saw them all coming down. And they were like another species. They really were. Because they were all black faced. The white eyes. The teeth showing. And they look like another species. And you knew they were all going home, the same as my grandfather did".

Elizabeth D grew up in Amble, a mining town and coal port, where she was well acquainted with miners moving about the town. She described her daily encounter with men coming home from work.

"You'd meet these miners coming across the dunes from Old Hauxley; they walked that way every day of the week, come hail rain or snow. They'd be soaking wet by the time they got to work, and soaking wet when they got back, because it was a wet pit. They'd be bent double into the wind; sometimes they could hardly walk for the wind. Shadowy figures in the evening twilight. Not a bit of wonder they're all rheumatic, bent old men now. For all their strange appearance you knew that no harm would come to you from them".

What is important in this description is that although these people are familiar to her they correspond with images of otherness or otherworldliness of literary images. She describes them as shadows: familiar shadows.

## **Bathing**

Miners look different. Vane (1842.115) noted the visible difference of miners.

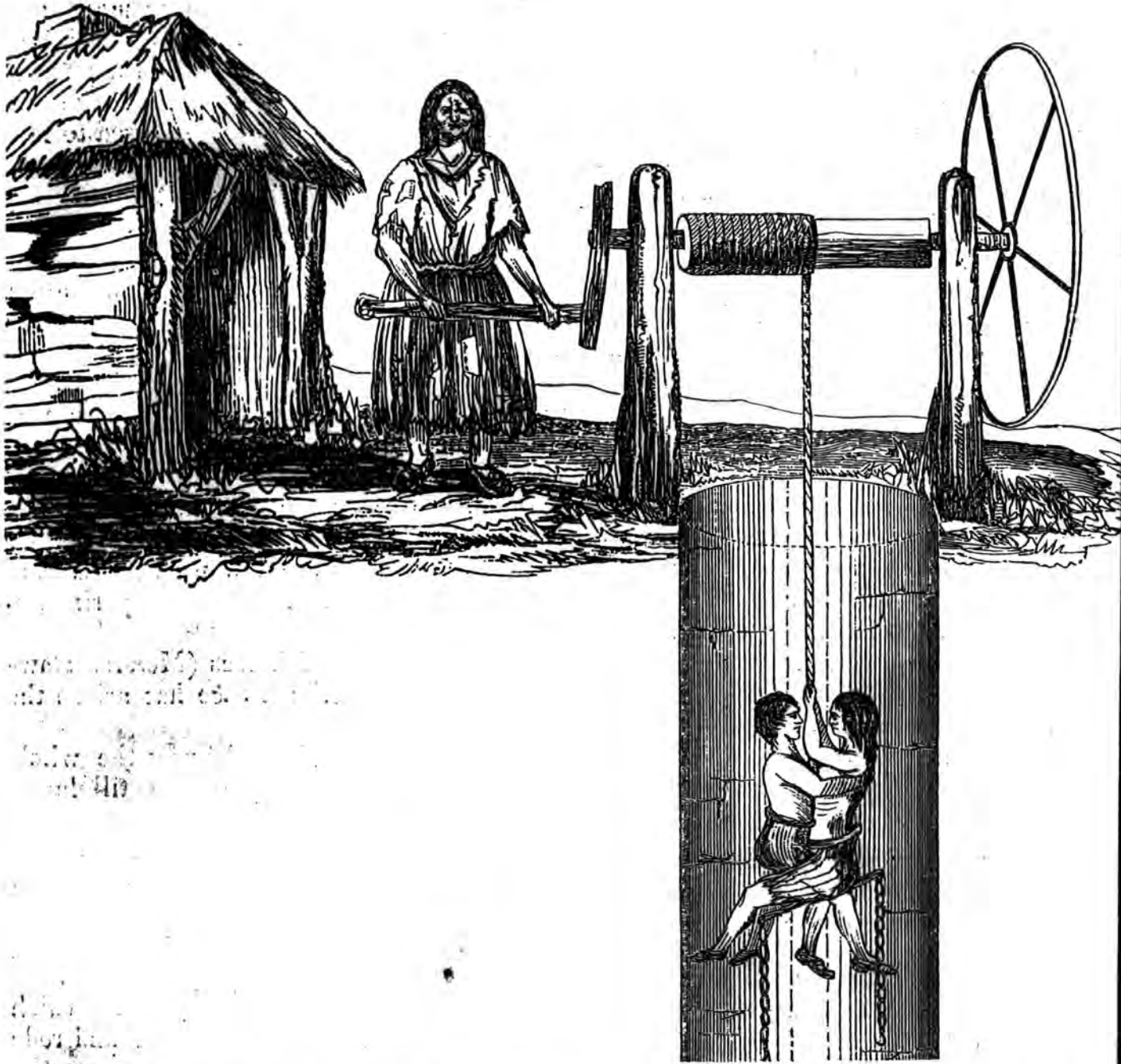
"The outward man distinguishes a pitman from every other operative. His stature is diminutive, his figure misshapen and disproportionate, his legs much bowed, his chest prominent, and greatly developed. His brows are overhanging, and the forehead retreats ..."

More important they are dirty. Fordyce (1860) had remarked upon the look of the “begrimed and black beings which flit in every direction amidst the gloom” and the look of the miners in Parker’s painting, with their coal blackened faces, presents them as different. Attitudes to cleanliness are an important cultural attribute. I shall return to this in considering colliery welfare. Several respondents expressed suppositions about living conditions. Both mining and non mining groups discussed bathing. Douglas (1966.6) discusses classificatory capacity of dirt as an indicator of disorder, immorality or wrongness, noting that if pathogenicity and hygiene are removed from our notion of dirt then we are left with the old definition of dirt as “matter out of place”. Sanitation was an important welfare consideration for miners, which also included facilities for food preparation, recreation, medical care, dentistry, physical fitness classes, training, adequate provision of open spaces and public parks. Rowntree noted “it will, I think, be generally agreed that every employer should seek to surround the workers with the best material environment which his special circumstances and the conditions of his industry render practicable” (1921.123). Historically basic human dignity has not always been taken for granted. It frequently needed to be contested in the face of strenuous opposition.

### **The tin bath**

The tin bath was referred to with nostalgia by many of the women respondents, and laughter indicated ‘naughtiness’ in this remembering. This brings another real and supposed image into the frame. The publication of Commission of Enquiry into the Employment of Children in Mines 1842 brought indictment from the public at large as a consequence of depicting the images of people

Fig. 3.



26. The sketch given is intended to represent Ann Ambler and William Dyson, witnesses No. 7, hurriers in Messrs. Ditchforth and Clay's colliery at Elland, in the act of being drawn up cross-lapped upon the clutch-iron by a woman.

working naked underground. (Fig. 7:1) One of the commissioners, Dr. Southwood Smith - a physician with an enthusiasm for sanitary reform had the foresight to realise that many people who would not read an official report might be attracted by pictures, and he persuaded the commissioners to illustrate the report on mines with simple line drawings.

“Even today ... these pictures arouse feelings of shocked protest. When they first appeared the effect was electric: at once a wave of horrified indignation swept the country” (Battiscombe 1974.146).

More than the image of hardship of working conditions Ashley's contemporaries were outraged by a picture of a half naked boy and girl straddling one another in their descent of a pit. Public indignation was aroused more by suppositions of sexual impropriety than by the hardship of the work depicted. This again raises questions about prurience and imagery: what is depicted and what is surmised. Has this picture still the capacity to shock? Throughout this thesis I am focusing on arguments about the power of the image. Is it diluted as it is distanced through its historicisation? ‘They’, who were people who lived in the distant past, treated children badly, Children, and attitudes to children, are a common theme in focus group data. Several respondents note that their fathers, miners, did not want their sons to work in the mines. This is given fuller consideration in the argument below. The idea I wish to establish here is the notion of otherness of people in history who allowed children to work. Children worked in mines, and in distant parts of the world they still do. This is different from employment in modern mining being available to future generations. The availability of work for children when they become adults.

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Fig. 7:1 Children depicted descending a pit.

## Superstitions and suppositions

There is a widely reported belief that a superstition was adhered to by old miners would not wash their backs for fear that it would weaken them.

“Some of them never used to wash their back, because it was supposed to weaken their back if they took the dirt off. But it was a right concern getting the water ready and filled the bath. and the clothes dadded and cleaned, and hung on them at the front of the houses”.

Durham coal owner Gainford of Headlam, in evidence before the Sankey Commission refused to accept that miners would make use of bathing facilities, believing that the “greatest obstacle to the proposal [to bathe at the pit-head] would be with the men themselves”. Replying to commissioners’ questions:

Q. 20,745 With regard to baths and drying arrangements, would you approve that they should be made compulsory?

A. ... so far as I have been able to look into the matter there has been no demand by the men for baths at the pit-head. Where baths have been erected in connection with new cottages most of these baths have been abused, and utilised for purposes other than washing. There have been suggestions made that the baths should be put up ... at the pit-head. In some districts I think it would work well, but where men are exposed to all kinds of inclement weather they would much sooner go home than they would walk long distances in their dry clothes, which they have put on at the pit-head, and then walk home in rain and sleet and snow, and reach home in their ordinary clothes, and leave their pit clothes behind them.

Q 20,746 ... - A. I think you ought to try and educate them in the system of washing at their own homes and having a proper hot and cold water supply in their houses. (Sankey 1919.857)

There are a number of images available of the miner and the tin bath. High profile is given to the unlikely Depardieu as Matheu in Claude Berri’s 1993 film *Germinal* and a photograph which is central to Beamish Museum’s representation. The tin bath as an image of nostalgia is endorsed by the popularise photograph of a ‘miner’ in a tin bath on Beamish Museum publicity



nakedness; lying their whole length along the uneven floor, and supporting  
heads upon a board or short crutch (Fig. 4); or sitting upon one heel balanc-

Fig. 4.

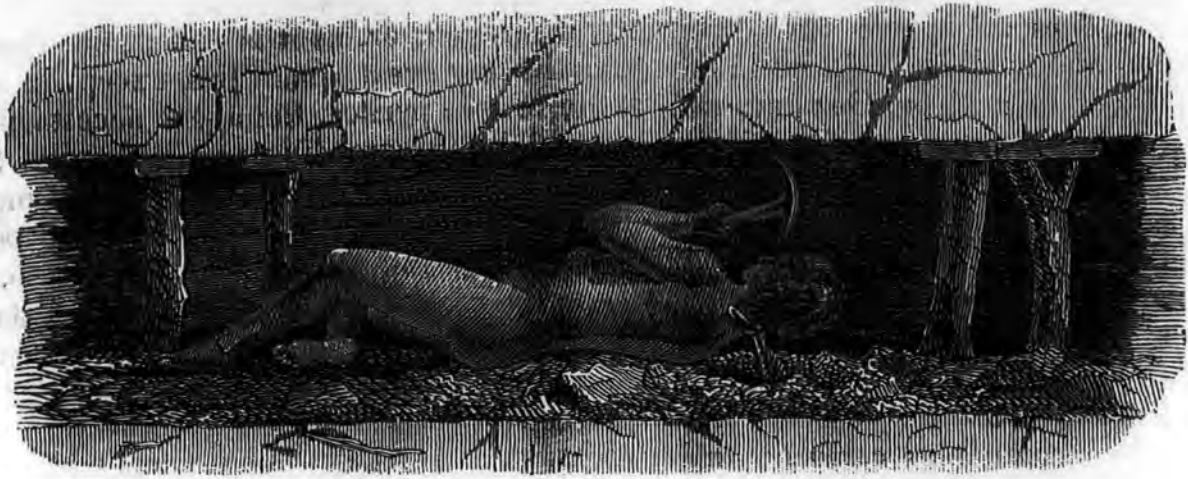


Fig. 5.

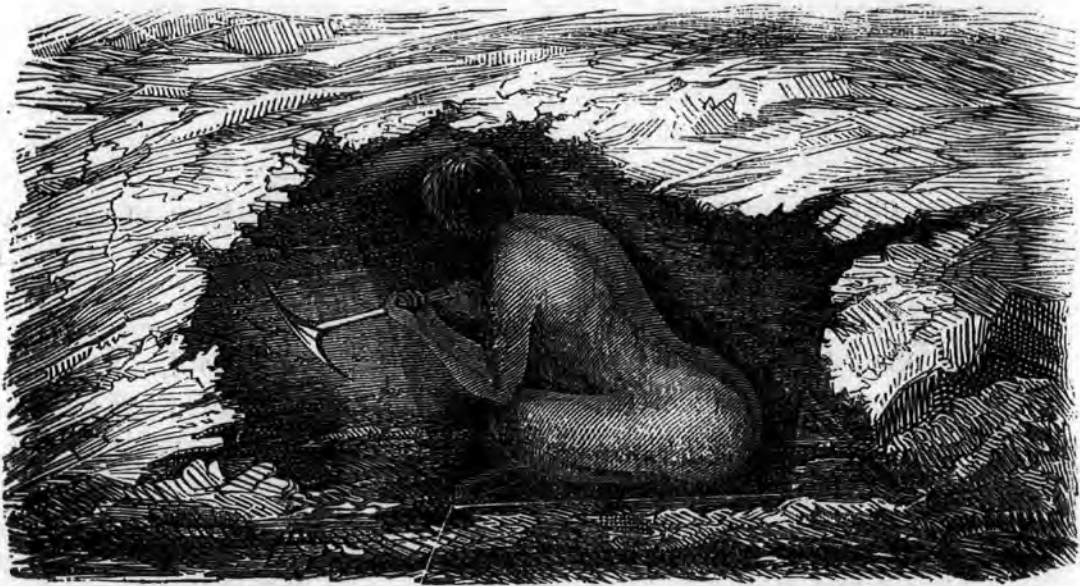


Fig 6.



ing their persons by extending the other. Black and filthy as they are in, their low, dark, heated, and dismal chambers, they look like a race fallen from the common stock. It did not much surprise me to be told that old age came prematurely upon them, and that they were "mashed up" at 40 or 45: indeed the care-

material. What is important to note about this image is that it was staged by a museum photographer, it is a reconstruction, not a picture taken from real life. The photograph is not authentic. It is a product for museum publicity. It does not constitute evidence of an actuality, unlike the wood engravings in *CE* (Fig. 7:2).

Outdoor toilets, 'netties', constitute another part of this folkloric representation, and were referred to on several separate occasions in focus groups. One example identifies specificity of place. The artist Dave W explained that as a boy he was taken aback by a question by another boy's father.

“ ‘Sand dancer eh? Have you got a ring in your arse?’ A good little Catholic lad, eleven or twelve [years old]. I'd never heard anybody's father say the word arse. What was all that about. Well I found out. We never had netties. We had the middens, didn't we. And Shields was one of the first places to get crappers with the ... B. The Lawe Top was about the last place to get rid of them. Eeh I used to hate outside netties. D. Well we had on in Gilbert Street. We had no bathroom. Me and our kid had to share a bedroom. And we had to get washed in a tin tub”.

Tin baths and outside toilets invoke nostalgia. Many non mining respondents projected notions and recollections about sanitation. It is noteworthy that these were not solicited through presentation of images from the Harton exhibition. They were, however, often tied with comments about Beamish. It is possible that the Beamish image of the miner in the bath conflates and focuses several suppositions into one iconic image. Mining, like dirt and squalor, are things from the past, and are accorded equal status in recollection as a consequence of the deployment of an image. The Beamish image is important in that featuring on the cover of museum brochures it holds a key position in the presentation of an iconic representation of mining family life. As an icon of the North of England

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Fig. 7:2 Miners working naked underground from the CE report.

Open Air Museum it represents the region's culture to the outside world. But it is, in Baudrillard's definition, a simulacrum.

In regard to shared experience - things we 'used to do' - bathing and deification are a part of all life, not just mining. Yet they are identified by many respondents as part of mining life. Moving from details of personal and private life touched upon in open conversation I turn to a presentation of different perspectives brought to bear upon the same (publicly known) events. A daily bath is scarcely an 'event'. The next section identifies common experiences with a specifically mining historical twist.

## ***PART TWO***

### ***UNUSUAL NARRATIVE WITH VERIFIABLE FACT***

In this section of the chapter I develop the theme of combined images and personal recollections. Attitudes are expressed in terms of suppositions about historical events and this part of the chapter further deals with received notions about particular events and interrogates explanations of the same events from different sources. Through the adduction of focus group data with contemporaneous documents and elite interview the events of a specific event can be triangulated and examined.

#### **The closure of Lynemouth Colliery**

The events which led to the closure of Lynemouth Colliery in Northumberland in 1966 can be examined in this way. Attitudes and suppositions are brought into

contact with personal experiences. The first passage is extracted from focus group data as a part of a conversation about ponies and sentimentality.

“Well was it the big fire - was it Ellington - years ago a big fire at Ellington, somewhere in Northumberland. Lynemouth. Well I was in the mines rescue brigade and the superintendent told we they could have saved that pit. All the men were out and somebody in the press got wind there were twelve ponies in. And ... no they could have saved the pit by blocking that part off. No they had to get the ponies out. And the fire spread. The leader of the Rescue Brigade telt is that”.

‘They’ the impractical bureaucrats that ought to have behaved more responsibly in the discharge of their responsibility towards a publicly owned asset were profligate because of sentimentality over a few ponies. The supposition that the pit, and the jobs of seventeen hundred men, was jeopardised in favour of the safety of ponies can be triangulated with other sources which concur with this observation - in part. Hand written manuscripts in Nicholas Wood Memorial Library, the *Occurrence Book of Houghton-le-Spring Mines Rescue Station, No. 29* present a contemporaneous record. The occurrence book contains the report of Benwell Rescue Team turning out to an underground “heating” at Lynemouth Colliery on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> November 1966 at 0141 hours. Houghton is expected to “stand fast - [meaning be prepared for action]”. By Friday 18<sup>th</sup> November 1304 it is reported that the Ashington crew are standing by at the surface until all the men are withdrawn at adjacent Ellington Colliery. Widdas (1967. pp14-15) reported on the underground fire at Lynemouth which culminated in “temporary discontinuance of production from Lynemouth Mine”. At that time the mine “employed 1,700 persons and had an average daily output of 8,000 tons, mainly from extensive under-sea workings.” The heating had become progressively worse over three years up until the night of 13<sup>th</sup> November 1966 when an open fire appeared outside of the already sealed area.

“It was decided to withdraw all workmen and rescue men and to flood that part of the mine [...] This would completely submerge the fire area and isolate the [workings] from which 84 per cent of the total output was won [...] However, the 79 ponies which were in the pit bottom stables were then cut off from the Lynemouth downcast shaft by the fouled return airway through which they would have to pass if they were to be withdrawn. The fresh air to the stables was fed from Woodhorn Mine via a connecting road which although possible for men to negotiate was too low for the 14 hand high ponies. The only way of getting them out involved taking the risk of reversing the ventilation with the fan still running so making the return to the upcast shaft into an intake. All the ponies (and a cat) were successfully withdrawn. The alteration to the ventilation presented far reaching problems in that the products of combustion [primarily hydrogen, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and smoke] were carried [to the adjacent] Ellington and Woodhorn Mines”(loc cit).

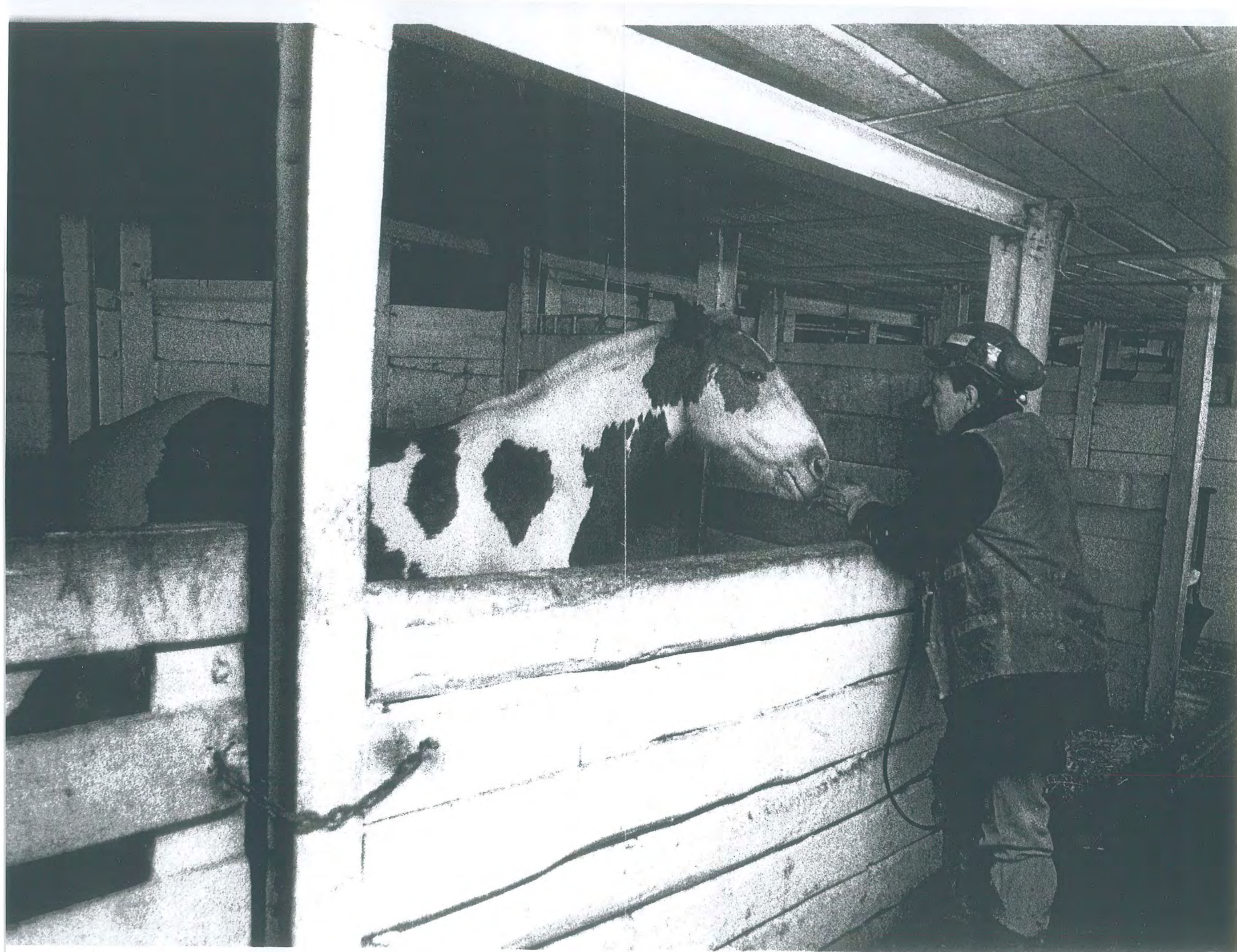
Ashington Colliery was also evacuated. Lynemouth was indeed lost as a result of this fire. The supposition that the attitude to the ponies resulted in the loss of the mine was not upheld by Ron R, the area ventilation engineer of the time, in a taped conversation. His privileged position in senior NCB management provided an overview of many remarkable events. He gave a personal account of the loss of Lynemouth Colliery. The decision to withdraw fire fighting teams and flood the mine was taken by him in consultation with the colliery manager and the regional director of the NCB, C. C Reid.

“With the job that I had, where there were incidents and disasters of whatever scale inevitably I was in them. The underground fires were very dangerous affairs. And there were a few of those in my time, plus ignitions of gas.

We lost a pit, Lynemouth Colliery, through an underground fire which couldn't be brought under control. We were unable to control the fire and we were trying to build stoppings near the shaft bottom. Even though Lynemouth wasn't a gassy pit the products of combustion ... had formed an explosive mixture that just about filled the pit. It was held to be too dangerous to keep men underground, so everybody was brought to the surface. The pit was evacuated. Shortly after that they got in dozens of fire pumps. It was right beside the sea so they were ... pumping water straight down the shaft and filled the workings to above the level that the fire was raging. Lost the pit. Bewick Drift was driven to recover the workings. It was a traumatic incident insofar as there was so much smoke coming up the upcast shaft sucked by the fan that discharge into the air looked like the chimney of the Queen Mary. It was horrific. During the day we were all in the managers office looking after

things as well as we could. Making sure that the men got out and all the rest of it. And we realised that at the shaft bottom stables there were seventy odd ponies, and we couldn't get them out. The reason that we couldn't get them out was that the intake air for the stables came along a very low road from another pit, and the return air from the stables went up the upcast shaft and the only way we could have brought the ponies out was to bring them out into the roadway that had all the smoke and the products of combustion in, and bring them up that shaft. Well they would never have got out. The products of combustion would have killed them. And the other thing would have been we would have needed rescue men to do this in full dress. And the ponies would be crazed and cause a lot of mayhem. So we were trying to plan how we could send enough men down the pit with humane killers to kill them all in the stables. You cannot just have anybody going around with a humane killer. What the other ponies would be seeing before it was their turn. It was so bad that *there were grown men crying at the prospect* [my emphasis]. The ventilation engineer and I thought of a scheme where we could reverse the air from the surface fan and blow fresh air down the upcast shaft. It is a very rare thing to do. In fact this century it has only been done twice. We had to do this without stopping the fan. Because if we had have stopped the fan the air coming along the return would have pulled into the stables and killed them in any case. Anyhow we did it. then we had to bring the ponies out one at a time up the shaft. And the ponies at Lynemouth aren't really ponies at all. They are like store horses. Massive. We got all the horsekeepers that there were in Northumberland and each was bringing a horse up at the time. When we got them to the surface we had to put them somewhere. But we brought them all out including the three stable cats. I felt that that was a good thing we did. That incident lasted for several days".

I draw attention to the remark of the Coal Board engineer that "grown men cried". This has its parallels in other comments in focus group testimonies. Does this point to an undercurrent of sentimentality which gives the lie to the first focus group respondent's statement that the colliery was lost for the sake of a few ponies? Perhaps it indicates a decorum reflected in humane attitudes to working animals. The detail of the stables' cat(s) was sufficiently significant for inclusion in an official report as well as the personal recollection of the engineer. The stopping and abandonment of the Lynemouth mine were the ultimate and only available option. The story of the ponies serves as an example of propriety in behaviour and how personal recollections supply various glosses over experienced events. What I have presented are variations from different



experiences of this same event. The fire at the colliery was significant in a number of ways. It sterilised important reserves of a big modern colliery and at the time threatened the major nexus of Northumberland coal production. Many people lost their jobs. The colliery never reopened for production. Grown men cried! (Fig 7:3)

### **Documentary of colliery closures**

From this observation I progress to a different configuration of social survey and personal retrospective understanding of a similar event. Thoroughgoing quantitative surveys may be conducted around a specific event or group. An important survey which was carried out around the closure of a Durham colliery in the 1960s appears exhaustive. Its findings were published in 1970 (*Ryhope: a pit closes. a study in redeployment*). The survey was intended to monitor the impact of the pit closures proposed in the Coal Industry Bill of 1965. The NCB “aimed to close all those collieries which were failing to cover their running costs and were unlikely to do so ‘in a foreseeable period of time’.” Pits were classified into categories “‘A’ consisting of continuing pits, ‘B’ pits with doubtful future, and ‘C’ pits likely to close or merge within about five years”. A comprehensive research project into the problems arising from large-scale redundancies was undertaken (p3). The survey was conducted over eighteen months. Records were kept concerning such things as job mobility, the placement of men in outside employment, records of earnings before and after pit closure, duration of unemployment and potential for retraining. Questionnaires were circulated and a sample of men were interviewed.

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Fig 7:3 Pony in an underground stable.



Interestingly the report remarks that “[f]rom 1956 to 1958 labour relations, as measured by the number of disputes, were troubled ...”. A Divisional Coal Board report conducted in 1962 concluded that “[i]t is apparent that the atmosphere at the colliery is influenced by factors exceptional to the colliery which creates conflicts of loyalty by workmen to the management and the lodge” (p14). From 1957 to 1959 the colliery underwent a substantive reorganisation programme. This work was extensively photographed. Perhaps because of the cost of capital investment the pit could no longer be considered economically viable. The colliery was classified in the ‘B’ category in 1965 and closed in 1966. “Typical comments from [groups of men who, when interviewed, expressed surprise at the decision to close the colliery] were: ‘...that the reserves of coal at Ryhope would last a hundred years’ [and] ‘In 1956 it was stated that there were 76 million tons of coal at Ryhope to be worked and they would last for 70 years’”(p17).

A table indicating why the decision was not a surprise to the workforce showed 56.8% of mentions concerning this as ‘past rumours’, whilst only 3.6% mentioned ‘labour relations / difficulties’ as a prognosticating factor. Spin, in the form of hearsay, had succeeded, in so far as recorded statistics were concerned, in preparing people to accept an unpalatable set of circumstances as inevitable. Men who were about to be made redundant were allowed, as respondents to a survey, to record their opinions and understanding of why they were about to lose their jobs, as a series of tick box options to provision statistics. Remembered through the distance of recollection former Ryhope miners (as with Whitburn, see focus group testament below) assert that for whatever reasons

given by the Coal Board economists, the pit was closed because of the militancy of the men.

### **PART THREE**

#### **LIMINAL EVENTS**

I have presented historical events as they are triangulated with other forms of evidence. Moving from this I present personal accounts and understanding of colliery closures. Different pits meant different things to different people. But many suppositions concur. I explore these in this section. I begin with a singular image of personal responses to colliery closures. Colliery closures are liminal events: turning points in many people's personal remembrance. They reveal notions that miners suppose of attitudes of the outside world to them. Crowds turned out to see the demolition of the Crown Tower. The spectacle for consumption was far from cathartic, however. The onlookers experienced the opposite sensation to that which is described at the launch of a rocket, for example. Post coital collapse. Respondents noted that men cried.

“Do you know when that was knocked down [the Crown Tower] there was an old friend of mine, a miner for 30 40 years And he cried when they knocked the tower down. He had his redundancy. But when he was standing there and saw the tower fall he actually cried. It wasn't a beautiful structure, was it?”

#### **The family pit**

Heslop and Lawson both furnish us with images of Harton and Boldon Collieries redolent of an industrial dynamic aesthetic. Focus group testimonies allow another dimension of understanding. The collieries were familiar places: where families grew up and worked together. One respondent Lesley T, whose family are remembered in the narrative of Tommy Turnbull (Robinson 1996)

had worked at Saint Hilda at the time of its closure. The event which closed it, like Lynemouth, was a fire.

“Oh aye that’s when she burned oot. It was the end of Hilda. B. Thirty six. E. That’s when Alan T got his medals. For rescuing people. Alan was at Hilda. He got medals for the rescue there. The fire in ’thirty six. The ropes used to run with a set. And this was on the drums. When it went round the corner. You’re supposed to check after a set had went in and out. And nobody bothered. And on Friday night it slowly smouldered - the dust -spontaneous. And that finished Hilda. They all come to Harton. And they shut that place and they all come to Westoe”.

Harton was described with fondness throughout by miners with experience of the place. It was a place where mining tradition flourished. This was not experienced when miners were transferred to Westoe. This description also leads to an understanding of *us* and *them* within the mining industry. Men who were traditional miners and people who simply arrived from other trades to take work at a boom time. This attitude was explained by Ron S explains

“Aye. It was a good pit, and they were brought up, the old miners. A lot of people used to get envious when they went to Westoe. They used to call Harton the Mother Pit. But Westoe was classed, with being a modern pit. A lot of the started the pit, you knaa, early twenties or thirties, and it didn’t have the same upbringing as the ... anybody that was brought up from the mines. The likes of me. We went straight in as young lads. And it was hard, mind. When we think back now.. it was unbelievable how hard it was. And they used to say Westoe, you knaa, butchers, bakers, candlestick makers. But the Westoe men.. even when I went to Westoe, when I come back from Nottingham, the best team was Harton men. For production. There was Nee bother with them. Not awkward. Good miners. And they just got on with the job. They weren’t soft nor nowt”.

But both collieries were known for families with big mining traditions also. I shall review ideas about familial relationships with mining in terms of attitudes expressed by respondents. Miners who knew Harton remembered it for family connections.

“Aye why at Westoe. Goftons. Tons of big families there at Westoe Colliery. Joe Gaffen, do you know the Gaffens and all them? It was funny how many

families worked at the pit. T. As I say it was a family pit. There was only a hundred and fifty there when it first opened”.

### **No son of mine**

Many statements express at least ambivalence, and often antipathy to coal mining because of the human costs for those who worked in it. These are often associated with the notion of debt owed to the miners.

“He was on strike, and he was on picket duty - I said well why? You know its going to close down. He said I want a job for my son.. I says, do you want him to go down the colliery ? I says my father didn't want any of his boys to go down. He says it's a hard. It's the worst job you could ever”.

Palmer (1952) echoed the sentiments expressed by Londonderry over a century earlier when he refused to accept government ‘interference’ in *his* business underground, in appointing inspectors. For Palmer “government interference persistently increases and progressively becomes more irksome and arbitrary. Of course it is all for our own good...” (p9) He toys with a syllogism concerning coal shortages, condensing the whole problem of production as -

“*Major premise:* Under full employment miners easily get jobs in other industries. *Minor premise:* The resulting decline in coal threatens to stop those industries. *Conclusion:* Full employment threatens to cause unemployment. It's as simple as that” (p178).

An extension of this suppositions invites comparison with much focus group data about sons following fathers taken in combination with the supposition expressed in C.C. Reid's Report (1945.4) concerning father and son.

“With few alternative openings for employment, the sons followed naturally in the footsteps of their fathers. As soon as they left school, they would enter the colliery ... there to be trained by their father ... and learn all the traditions and customs handed down from one generation to another. The miner took pride in his craftsmanship, and through it his calling”.

In 1951 Rowntree and Lavers' “inadvertently embarked upon a study of the cultural and spiritual life of the nation”. Their emphasis on the study of town

dwellers was justified by the fact that the vast majority of the population lived in urban conditions (pxii). They built up a “lively picture” working with 220 “case histories”. In this study their second respondent in their enquiry.

“Mr R. is a retired colliery manager, aged about 70 and a bachelor. He is violently anti-socialist and ascribed the current economic difficulties to the decrease in private enterprise. He considers that coal miners have been fairly, or even generously treated in the last two generations and complains bitterly of their failure of duty to send their sons into the pit “(pp1 - 2).

The ‘calling’, described by Reid, is reconfigured as familial duty by this respondent.

### **Family connections**

If, as the Reid Report suggested, mining was ‘hereditary’ - passed down from father to son - then this was and is no different to engagement in labour in other industries. The ISL [electronics factory] night shift foreman from the postal recruited group explained that jobs were sought and obtained through family connections.

“My uncle Don got into the yards because my nanna’s uncle was foreman up at Jarrow - the Mercantile. But they only got in because my nanna ... they finished school and my nanna walked up and saw uncle Geordie and they started their apprenticeships as fitters. Whereas if she [hadn’t] had people in the yards they would have been in the pit. So you only had two ways to go ... you worked on the river or you worked in the pit. And that was it. But they had the steel works up in Jarrow. I don’t think many people from the Shields end went up in the steelworks”.

In this view people obtain work through family connections. Again this reflects many notions of the ‘family pit’.

“I think it got into their blood. They really enjoyed it. They might have said they didn’t, but they did. And of course it was a job mainly where father passed on to son, didn’t they, you know”

It is also worth noting that working at the pit was not a matter of choice.

“They had no choice to go there. They went to the pits or to the shipyards. But they were not asked would you like to do this as an alternative. It was simply

that that thing was taken away from them and that was the end of the story. It was gone. I think that's the thing why people might want to memorialise it more than they would, perhaps, if it was just something that gradually faded away".

The ISL foreman also discussed the reluctance of many miners to change, to adapt to the conditions in the electronics factory where he works, with different approaches to demarcation of labour. Robertson and Strangleman (1999) discuss this as a 'culture of' the workplace. New working practices "culturally cleanse".

"They're still very reluctant to change up here like. They put up with working at ISL. A couple of them have tried Nissan. Cannot stick it at Nissan. Too regimented for them. B. You cannot go to the toilet or anything, can you? You've got to get permission. A. Well somebody's got to jump on your job before you can go. You cannot stop the line. You work as fast as the line. You cannot just let this one go and it not have a steering column in. I used to work for a Japanese firm at Peterlee making steering columns. We had to deliver every four hours. So they only kept a half a shift's worth of stock.

So if we stopped them at trim and chassis it was four thousand pound a minute we got fined. That is deadlines. It's not "oh can you get them to is by Friday" it's "I want them between two and half past". And they've got to be in their proper stillages, properly marked up. If they didn't have a label on they sent them back. They might have been able to say they are the right ones. But because they didn't have a label on saying they were the right ones they didn't use them. Oh no. Send them a stillage with the wrong label on is as bad as not sending any cos they can't use them".

### **The end of the 'Mother Pit'**

A peculiar sequence of events led to the closure of Harton Colliery in 1969. The personal tragedy of a woman involved in an accident provoked the emergence of strong feelings against the presence of the mine. Focus group respondents concur with the understanding that it closed as a consequence of an explosion in someone's house. Where they agree with the contemporaneous newspaper report is in their plaudit of the qualities of the workforce. Where these personal accounts differ is in the way they apprehend how miners are perceived by the

outside world. There is a sense that the miners are being blamed for this personal tragedy. This story comes from the focus group of overmen and deputies. The fact that it is told in a multiple voice form indicates its wide currency amongst the narrators. (The change of narrators is indicated by capital letters).

“J. What closed Harton was a gas explosion. Doctor Magee. There was an accident was the talk of the town. It was where the pub is, the old Ship Inn. Marsden Road area. There was a gas explosion and a woman lost her legs. G. There was an under manager lived there. Heckels. J. And the story went round, which is true, her husband left her. He said ‘Yer nee good to me like that’, and he left her. G.. That’s right, aye. J. And all the residents in that area. Doctor Magee was one of them. A. He got ten thousand pound, which was a lot of money then. J. They blamed the subsidence at Harton Colliery for that explosion and there was an uproar and that many big knobs lived in that area it helped force the closure of Harton Colliery”.

Here the ‘them’ are clearly identified according to class. The attitude of the people in the locale towards the presence of the colliery is informed by their being snobs. Tellingly the woman who was injured was the wife of a colliery manager. The same focus group elaborated the public opinion against the miners.

“Can you not remember reading in the paper that the people could hear the miners tapping underground? J. Oh that was the best. G. That was a classic, that. J. I was one of Lesley T’s deputies at the time. And somebody said they could hear the drilling machine gannin at Harton Colliery. And Lesley says Yer bugger ...sorry I didn’t mean to swear on your mike ...

[the respondent here is consciously performing to the tape recorder, and indirectly to the listener]

“... he says yer fucker he says I was in neet shift in the tail gate canch. He said they heard more than me. I was in the district and I never heard the fuckers drilling all neet. J. They could hear down below thirteen hundred foot. Eeh the tales!”

The miners were, however, aware of the reality of mining subsidence in the area at the time. If the world was against the miners it was sometimes justifiable

“Well Redwell School had a big arch over the top. It was always breaking up, the brickwork. H. It was the Seventeen face that clattered bloody Redwell, so they say. G. They used to put special panes of glass in there in the windows to test for the ... you know the glass used to crackle sometimes with the subsidence. Well they built a whole estate of brand new hooses on there now. I wonder if them buggers disappear into Westoe pit”.

Another group identified the same cause for the closure of Harton. This respondent also notes the class nature of the problem.

“... subsidence. There was a house blew up, up Cleadon, near the Ship Inn, that way. Marsden Road area, Harton. And this lass lost her legs. It was a sad tale. It was a cruel tale, because they blamed subsidence. It was the gas. That’s the first thing the Gas Board says. Everything.. you knaa. It’s subsidence fractures the pipes. And they lived in an area where there’s prominent people. Doctors, lawyers, you knaa. And what.. they got their heads together. Because what kept the ball rolling was, there was a sad tale. The lass ended up broken hearted. Her husband was a bit callous and he told her he was leaving her. She was no good. It was straight out, he says ‘You’re no fucking good to me like that’. You could imagine the sympathy she got”.

As a consequence of this tragedy ‘they’ could consolidate an argument against the colliery which was beleaguered in its being ranked by the NCB as category ‘B’ colliery.

“And the campaign just grew and grew. And Harton was under a thousand men. Was one of the best small pits in the country. And they just gave it impossible tasks. They shortened the coal faces from a hundred and fifty yard to eighty yards. And you knaa, they were up and down like a whooer’s draws, the machines. But they couldn’t keep the roadways up. They tried lots of innovative ideas, new inventions and adaptations, but they couldn’t keep the roadways up. It was a simple as that. So it became uneconomical. They killed Harton. Aye. Harton was a good pit. Very efficient. Good workforce”.

‘They’, the NCB, created engineering difficulties advancing its inevitable closure. This echoes notions concerning the massive investment in Ryhope Colliery infrastructure. The repayment of capital expenses would prove the pit



to be uneconomical. This appears as a convoluted approach to a rather simple expedient - if 'they' wanted to close the pit 'they' would not need to go to such lengths.

### **The militant pit**

The supposition that Ryhope was closed because of the militancy of the men is paralleled in suppositions about Whitburn's militancy. A colliery manager explained the contiguity of colliery militancy in terms that when a militant pit closed the miners obtained employment in adjacent pits. A Whitburn miner explained that

“Well when it was a nice sunny day all the bairns used to run and play on the beach because they knew all the bloody bait was gonna get hoyed awer”.

This is refuted by another respondent who worked there and whilst accepting that the pit was as militant as it was known to be supposed that there were sound economic reasons for its closure.

“You know we were laughing about it being little Moscow, but it was because of that fault. They were going near the surface. It was either close Westoe or close Whitburn. And they'd poured so much money into Westoe, new winders, new shafts, everything. I mean Whitburn still had the old steam winders. And it would have meant sinking new shafts”.

Standardised ideas about colliery closures and militancy are upheld in focus group data and elite interviews alike. Mining engineers testify to the fact that a difficult workforce could create sufficient problems to review the long term prospects for a colliery's survival. And the problem concerning efficiency in these collieries was compounded with the re-deployed militant workforce from adjacent closed pits. Another slant deploys humour to come to terms with the inevitability of the decision which would finally be taken by 'them'. John

Elliott, from the folk singing family described by Bean above, told me a story about colliery closures in the 1960s.

“Staff was - you’ll have to cut the names out cos aa think he’s still alive - S was a blacksmith at Cotia, and came out of his time there was too many, so he took a job down the pit as a greaser, gannin’ round oilin’ and greasin’ all the machinery ... and he was a very funny lad, used to tek a set of claithes to the pit, after the holidays, and the same claithes were there till the next holidays, never used to change his work claithes aall. So they stunk. So did he. And he had bad breath an’aall. Anyway, were aall in the cage, it was about ’62, ’63, when they were starting to close the pits, and we were aall in the cage this day, and we’re crackin’ on about that. They had just shut that one where the lad was supposed to have hit Robens, was it Lambton D? It was just after that anyroad, and we’re coming up in the cage talkin’ about it, which one was next on the line. We were in the top deck. Well the top deck has a bar runs across it, and you can sort of lean on it, well Staff was leaning on it. And our Len says ‘Aye, aa knaa two bliddy mair they should shut’. S says ‘Aye what’s that?’ ‘Thy bliddy armpits’”.

This idea of a pit being closed as the result of an individual act of retribution in consequence of an unusual incident is echoed in Emery (1998:115) - the story of the threat of closure of Lambton Colliery in 1965. In this it is recounted that the miners marched to confront Robens.

“The great Lord eventually came, and he got out of his car, along with his police escort, and confronted us lodge officials. We presented him with a resolution from our Lodge, and also a set of proposals to make our pit a paying concern. He took them and said he would study them. All this time good humoured back-chat was going on, and a little chap was very enthusiastic and waving his fist shouted ‘Howay the lads’, the battle cry of our two famous football teams, Newcastle and Sunderland. This seemed to upset Robens, and he menacingly went toward him, and showed completely his lack of self control, and our members repeatedly pointed to our banner blowing slightly in the wind, to the symbolic phrase, and shouted to him ‘Oh ye of little faith, why dost thee doubt’. But our protests were in vain, and the pit closed ...”.

## **Spite**

Many respondents identified the purpose of massive deindustrialisation with the political imperative of getting grid of the locus of organised labour. One miner explained that

“My honest opinion is, why they done the same to the river was because it was a labour controlled area, and hey just hammered a labour controlled area. Cos, you prove it now right. They privatised the Tyne. Now they get a canny bit of work in now because it is privatised. But when it was nationalised they wouldn't send any ships. T. Or just give them the one to keep them happy”.

Ultimately all the pits were closed because of the spite of them. Why were the collieries closed?

“Why.. hatred of the miners. B. Spite! Yes. G. Westoe was spite! Westoe had enough coal for another hundred years. They couldn't get them closed fast enough, man! G. Aye but they've found out since.. they've found a survey they've had hidden for five years. They've found a survey what was the dearest.. extracting oil from coal or nuclear power and things like that. and they found out it's cheaper to get oil from coal far cheaper than other means of power. And they've had it hidden under the bliddy bedclothes for years and years.. the Tories. They had to close the pits since 1974, when we turned Edward Heath over Thatcher was - the Tories were determined to trample us into the ground”.

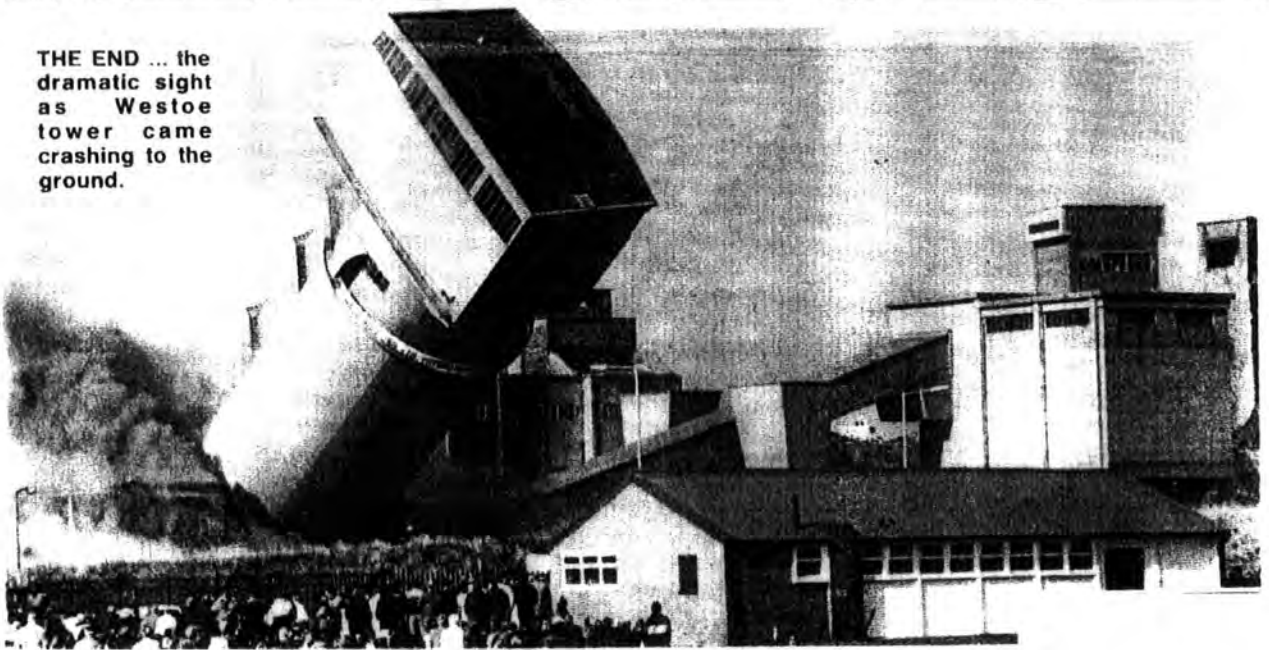
This vindictiveness has its roots in earlier industrial action. It is widely supposed that the Heath Government was brought down through the miners' industrial action. The miners were never to be forgiven for this, and the 1984-85 strike and colliery closure programme, resulting in the virtual eradication of the mining industry from the region, is supposed by all respondents to be retribution for this.

“...once they got power, once they got the whip in their hand. In 1974 when Heath went down we went in. Then the Tories regained power. As soon as Thatcher got in power. C. Oh well she did that on spite. G. When you watch Question Time on TV in the afternoon. the Tories used to be sitting with their feet up on the table. Of pure arrogance. Did you see it? I experienced that. I watched that.. who was it Dougie? That arrogant bugger that used to sit in Parliament with his feet on the table? Was it Lilley? The one with the funny eye. Heseltine hated the miners. G. He used to sit with his feet on the table and he was GLOATING! 'We are going to close...' and you could see that they wanted the pits finished”.

The notion that the miners were singled out for harsh treatment as a reprisal for political action in the 70s is widely adhered to. The notion of political revenge is

# THE TORIES? MASSACRE!

THE END ... the dramatic sight as Westoe tower came crashing to the ground.



also upheld from the Tory perspective. This sense of polarity is underpinned by observations in many autobiographical memoirs. Hurd was Heath's political secretary at the time of the 70s strikes. He described the result of the miners' strike in 1972 as "disastrous"(1979.102). Heath and his colleague "deserved to fail because they had no clear and consistent grasp on the correct line" (p140). For Ridley (1991.4) the coal miners finally brought about [Heath's] downfall.

"Indeed it seemed as if the miners decided to cast themselves into the role of gladiators, to champion the cause of militant left-wing trade unionism against the hated Thatcher government. [...] the miners' leaders took it upon themselves to try to overthrow the elected Government by frontal assault. Arthur Scargill, the miners' President, was no novice when it came to frontal assaults upon governments. He had been the inspiration behind the miners' strike of 1973 [...] The miners had twice routed Ted Heath. [...] The 1973 strike was pursued as a sort of military operation"(p66).

Us and Them polarity is detailed as a barrier to co-operation in the workplace.

An important elite interview was granted my Tom W, the manager of Westoe at the time of its closure. He also thought of Westoe as a militant pit. (Fig 7:4)

"There was only one thing wrong with Westoe and that was it was very militant, and the unions ran the pit. And what the manager of the day had decided to do was to put all the union guys in the same shift in the same district. And eventually as part of my training I got to be overman in their district. And I recall one day after placing them, following them up in the gate and they're all sitting there and there's six inches of water, and they refused to walk through it until I had either removed the water or built something which allowed them to get across it, to keep their feet dry. So an hour later we got them inbye. It was a battle every day. It was a battle of wits".

His concern is that many people from non-mining backgrounds brought with them different sensibilities from different cultures which tainted the more workmanlike attitudes of the more traditionally mining minded men. Non mining men were central to this problem of militancy.

"They were despicable people. A lot of them had come out of the shipyards. Well I look back at them with a little bit of humour now, but at the time I thought they were the dregs. Westoe was only a small pit in the fifties and after the reconstruction they had to recruit like the clappers. They went onto

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Fig 7:4 Newspaper account of the end of Westoe Colliery.

the dole and everywhere to get men. Recruited people off the streets virtually. A lot of people at Westoe, most of them that turned out militant, didn't have that traditional backbone of mining in them, didn't even like working shifts. I mean, can you believe it? A miner that didn't want to work shifts! In fact to the day it closed the night shift at Westoe was on a voluntary basis".

Many of the narratives fundamentally represent relationships of power and conflicts. There is an overwhelming sense of 'ourness' and an expression of indignation, of wrong having been done, give the continued story an emotional edge and strength of feeling. Concerning the liminality which makes the future uncertain there is a sense of incompleteness, that coal remains under the earth in abundance. That 'they' have made a serious mistake, in underestimating the worth of both the people and the material itself. There is no satisfactory conclusion in the narrative. Disappointments are not all smoothed over.

### **Cyclical patterns of representation**

This part of the chapter ends with another view of 'us' and 'them' which outlines attitudes to miners, the "enemy within" and how they were represented at times of political crises. They are easily marginalised as they "hold the country to ransom". Colliery closures, largely perceived as unnecessary, were inflicted upon communities by outside agencies. For various reasons 'they' sought to chastise mining people, either for fear of organized labour, or simply for revenge or spite. These notions are echoed through history and can be represented cyclically.

Robson (1976) reported the view that

"human solidarity and compassion towards the needy are the only motives that can effectively appeal to people of developed nations. Neither seems to be much in evidence nowadays [...] in Britain. We were told nearly two decades ago that in Sweden social policy had developed into a vested interest for strongly organised groups, especially those representing labour and management. Everyone in Britain has for some years been unpleasantly aware of the fact that the power to make the public suffer is the most important

factor in collective bargaining and the chief weapon in both official and unofficial strikes. The colder the weather the more effective will be the miners' strike" (p34).

The representations of British coal miners during strikes also follows a particular pattern. Blame - direct political affront - misery of suffering old people - blame. But the cycle of blame described in politically biased media reportage does not necessarily have currency in real experiences.

## **Water**

Mining and non mining respondents agree that whatever attitudes people held it was as well that Westoe closed when it did. Working under the sea many people believed that water would ultimately close the pit for good, and take lives with it.

"They said it was underground lakes. They must have been the biggest lakes, cos they used to run for ever and ever".

"And I honestly believe Westoe was lucky closing. Cos I am convinced! There was a seam Dennis had, and they went further up the bank. What was it that last place, and Jimmy Cawley came and the water came in, was it 'fiftysevens'? [the number of a coal face] And the water came in. I went on week end inspections. I looked at the water I say Jesus Christ it was just gushing like a river. And I says this face is closed. I says they're risking it further and further, for my knowledge. I was off for two or three weeks, they were seeing if it would stop, the water coming out the goaf. And it was torrential. It was getting millions and millions of gallons a day pumped out. Jimmy C, I seen him in the lamp cabin one day, the deputies office and he says Ah they're gonna start coaling again. I said they're joking, aren't they. He says well they are the experts. I says what's their theory. Well they think if they keep coaling as it advances as the goaf crumbles behind them more the water'll stop. Yer bugger they coaled two days - whoosh - it came in double. They closed the district. And that was the one that was nearest to the sea bed - and it would eventually come in. They would have took their chance that much"

"E. Well Westoe nearly closed because they were going North weren't they, if I remember correctly. J. And that water was tremendous that came in on that district, lad".

"Can you remember when we put a heading underneath Whitburn? Old Whitburn's North. And they had made a water standage. And we drove underneath it, fired a shot and we were cleaning up, put the rings in. The water started coming up like that. They had to gan and put pipes in and draw all the

water off. That happened at Whitburn. G. If he had have fired that there would have been hundreds of men killed. When it did come away me and Jimmy were sitting in the tail end getting were bait. And Bob R and Tommy C was the officials ... could hear this bloody noise... looked along the face. And there's coming along . Within half an hour the whole Mullergit five hundred metres in was flooded completely. Reet along the face, reet along the tailgate. E. Something similar happened at Whitburn when they were drifting. And they fired it and they just got the inrush of water. And it came virtually to the shaft. And it was Geordie L was the deputy, in the East drift. And it just flooded and they all had to run like hell. I was on two in the afternoon and we had to go in and put the pumps in. And it took six weeks to pump down. When they got there they found an underground lake and also stone archways, which wasn't on the plans at all. And they hadn't a clue where these archways came from. And to get to the other side they built a raft. We had a boat. called the Enterprise. The Flying Enterprise. It was when that ship the Flying Enterprise went on her side and they tried to save it. G. Captain Neilsen was the man. He was a mate of mine, him. C. There was a swally in one of the gates. And you had to jump on the boat to get through the water”.

These suppositions about the danger from water are borne out by an elite interview with Tom W, the last manager of Westoe Colliery.

“The other concerning thing in later days at Westoe was the amount of water that really was a worrying time. It really is because Westoe was underneath the Permian, there's a lot more water associated with the dykes at Westoe, because of the proximity of the Permian, water bearing strata. This Permian, it didn't only stay in the one line, it intersected the seams. And the Permian's very wet”.

In these remarks we are apprised of the supposition of the danger that the miners themselves believed they were working in. They are concerned retrospectively for the unforeseen yet ever present reality of the dangers of geological anomalies and the potential for mass death in undersea mining.

### **Looking towards the future / then**

The final part of this chapter returns to value judgements related to personal notions of stability: ideas which were once held about employment security and



the future. Through the developments of the 1950s Westoe Colliery was perceived as the pit of the future. These projections and plans for coal output were the foundations upon which the future was based. The manager explained that

“the infrastructure, and Westoe, we all thought was a pit that had been set up for the twentieth century [sic]. The money that was spent in the fifties and the sixties. The infrastructure was absolutely brilliant. Three thousand ton stapple bunker right at the shaft bottom. Twenty-two ton skips that could play with the output - conveyor belts that were an absolute picture - five thousand ton of underground bunkering - man riding capabilities such a long way under the sea that could get men onto the job fairly quickly. We just thought if you get a job at Westoe it's there for your kids and for your grandkids”.

As I have stated the look of modern mining broached the future with confidence. The abandonment of reserves of coal is emphasised in remarks by miners and non miners alike in focus groups. An image of the abundance of coal from focus groups can be compared with the description given by Heslop above.

“Thirteen fifty level [the horizon at the shaft at 1,350 feet] and they sent us down for to drive further in. And we went about a mile and a half in and the coal seam was about six foot six high, all coal, beautiful coal!”

This image identifies an attitude towards coal as material with an aesthetic quality based in its practical worth. It is beautiful because it is useful and because it is the object of the miners' quest. Another miner takes up the theme of beautiful coal.

“And that was the reserves of coal. J. That was the reserves of coal that they could of had. And it was about six foot six, all good coal, beautiful coal. And they just left it. Never bothered”.

A moral judgement is being levelled at 'them' for their failure to understand the beauty and worth of this material. This compounds the sense of polarity in terms of aesthetics. Each of the preceding anecdotes identifies understanding or



**D**ON'T GO DOWN THE MINE, DAD (1)

A miner was leaving his home for his work,  
When he heard his little child scream,  
He went to his bedside, his little white face,  
"Oh, Daddy, I've had such a dream  
I dreamt that I saw the pit all afire,  
And men struggled hard for their lives,  
The scene it then changed, and the top of the mine  
Was surrounded by sweethearts and wives"

appreciation of coal in terms of taste and value judgement. 'They' discard the functional material coal because of the problems it causes 'them': dirt, blight of subsidence, the locus of political engagement and subsequent instability. From the alternative perspective coal as an object with inherent worth and beauty is discarded by 'them'. The colliery manager concurs but is in a position to understand the reasons that these prejudices are levelled against the mining industry. The most poignant set of data which illustrates this from a personal perspective is from the woman whose brother was conscripted to the mines as a Bevin Boy and later died from emphysema.

### **Danger**

Danger, like darkness and dirt, are supposed to lurk in coal mines (Fig. 7:5). The business students discussed their abhorrence at the idea of working in coal mines. As well as the places themselves being dirty, and effusing an aura of dilapidation to the whole region because of their "chimneys"[sic]. On being challenged many of the ideas they held about dilapidation were attendant on the sense of the landscape *after* industry. Danger was clearly understood in personal terms. The business students discussed the degrees of consent to violence in various sports. The disaster of Aberfan or the murder of children in their school in Dunblane cross a threshold of liminality making the future uncertain. A respondent from the women's arts group talked about her father.

"He used to get extra money cos it was one of the dangerous jobs. And you had to get your name down to get a dangerous job, for a few shillings extra a week. You know, when you come to think. No wonder we are tough. When he

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Fig. 7:5 Notions of danger: sentimental postcard.

was reading his morning's paper. And he used to sleep over. And my ma said 'Come on, Ralph, get to bed'. And he was like this poor sowl".

Many of the themes which I have developed in this chapter are an attempt to reconcile how the world viewed the miners with how miners supposed the world viewed them. This short anecdote returns to miners gathering at a funeral in peculiar circumstances. As with most such reports it is underpinned with mining humour.

"Geordie used to hate wet working. And the day of his funeral, it was during the Miners' Strike. It was chucking it down. We were at the gates of the cemetery, all wor badges on. And an aad couple came along. 'Huh. They're picketing the cimitiry noo, you knaa. We Cannot bury wor dead'. And we followed the hearse up and Geordie's coffin was ... water actually came awer the top. It's a wonder he didn't wake up and yell. He hated water. G He wouldn't get a wet note off Wilfy A".

The importance of colliery closures to people who are defined in terms of their occupation is fundamental to understanding that identity. This identifies colliery closures as the point of liminality. Liminal places are places at the edge - on the border. Hell has status as the dwelling place of darkness, the other, evil. Limbo, unlike Hell, is nowhere. It is sometimes a condition of waiting or transience, otherwise a state of perpetual oblivion. The liminality I am describing concerns the point of transition from one state to another: from the state of participating in activities which construct identity to passing from this identity. But unlike the enculturation described by Reid there is no guarantee that culture will be passed on. It may be in transit or it may be gone for ever. Sherry Turkle describes a "liminal moment" as the point in time after which uncertainty arises.

"As we stand on the boundary between the real and the virtual, our experience recalls what the anthropologist Victor Turner termed a liminal moment, a moment of passage when new cultural symbols can emerge. Liminal moments are times of tension, extreme reactions, and great opportunity" (Turkle 1997.268).

## **CONCLUSION**

The key themes of this chapter have been the identification of community of experience in working life, and the liminality of events which have created distanciation through time in a basic relationship of the past with the present as a retrospective consideration. Memory is an active process in which people engage with past events as continuities. Some representations become central and dominate perceptions; others are excluded. Presentation of the understanding of events in which people have participated, and which have shaped their lives, provides the locus for examination of the sense in which 'mining communities' fulfil descriptions of 'Imagined Communities': the image of a community conceived as a deep consciousness. Images and ideas which contribute to hegemonic consent through acquisition of representational dominance are not necessarily believed in or agreed with. The idea that 'identities' are created through classification of a 'natural order' can be traced to notions that situations are not chosen but given. The institutions of power which shape the way in which fictions uphold and reproduce culture through history do not always concur with actual experience. There are real processes of domination in the fields of heritage and culture. These fields are crossed by competing constructions of narratives of events, community and working life experience, and notions of the past which do not necessarily agree.

Focus group and conversational accounts can challenge received wisdom. They constantly review and challenge suppositions which leads to the identification of them as an authority vested with responsibility to uphold and develop cultural norms. This chapter has dealt with how respondents reconstruct events and

suppositions about the past. The next chapter is concerned with what these observations mean in terms of present participation and future involvement. I have noted the central importance of a museum image of a miner in the development of popular perceptions. History, working through museums, invest centrally apportioned authorities as the guardians of tradition in which events and people have only one clear place. This leads to a mapping of historical events bounded in convenient territorial units. People who made history and lived history and who are capable of making a contribution to its understanding do not participate in its representation.

I shall investigate people's understanding and suppositions about museum and other cultural representations in the next chapter in which a central concern is how images represent the colliery aesthetic. It is concerned with memorial and monumentality.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **REPRESENTATIONS INTO THE FUTURE**

The last chapter was concerned with why and how people remembered, and how the sense of place is effected in recollection. Accordingly it investigated how people remember and construct identity. Its concerns were with relationships with the past, real or imagined. The ultimate colliery closures present an event after which the discourse of mining in the North East is now history and nothing but. I have examined people's attitudes to the processes and eventuality of this as a significant event which impinged on all local mining communities - real or 'imagined'. This chapter continues analysis temporally, taking up the narrative where colliery closures have left off. The highly visible structures in the landscape are gone. In chapter four I pointed to the difficulty in expressing this absence visually. What does this absence mean to people for whom these structures had meaning? How do people imagine mining communities now? In what way does the narrative of mining communicate with the future and inform future activities? How are mining and mining communities remembered and memorialised? In what way does a colliery aesthetic continue to manifest itself?

The effects of changes often remain visible in the industrial landscape in which they happened. Industrial processes have left their mark. These scars are part of the way in which the history of a place is known. They can provide visual clues and stimuli to pictorial representations which identify place and change. This is

not so with mining in the North East. The necessity for reuse of land and the removal of industrial blight has been an integral part of the process of physical regeneration. But through this meaningful industrial heritage, especially mining heritage, has been cleansed from the landscape. I continue my enquiry into how these processes have left their mark on the people who live in this landscape and whose working life actively engaged with these changes.

Many focus group narratives are based in interpersonal examinations of relationships of power and conflicts. Respondents engage with the contest for cultural representation. There is an overwhelming sense of 'ourness' and an expression of indignation, of wrong having been done, which contributes an emotional edge or strength of feeling to what is being said. Observations about culture in this contested terrain come from the heart. Many people described the 'indecent haste' with which 'they' removed all semblance of mining from the landscape. This is often combined with observations that the whole mining narrative is an embarrassment to 'them'. There is a sense of incompleteness, that coal remains under the earth in abundance, and that 'they' have made a serious mistake, in underestimating the worth of miners and even coal itself.

To continue analysis of focus group data this chapter takes up the temporal themes of the present and the future. I have looked at what has happened. Here I investigate what these images mean to people now, and the ways in which images are conceived as important into the future. The first theme of this chapter is the look of the landscape, equated with squalor, dilapidation and absence, which is upheld by many focus group respondents. Following from this the look



of the place is imagined; what it will and ought to look like. Mining has gone. People adapt to changes. They are reflecting upon what the changes effected by the removal of industry means, and what will become of the place. There is considerable speculation as to how the site of Westoe Colliery will be reused. An important theme of many discussions was the sense of absence or emptiness afforded by the removal of industrial structures. What then must be put in their place? Discussions took place concerning uses for the site of Westoe Colliery, for instance, a vast area looking over the sea front. Respondents supposed that these and other tourist initiatives would compensate for the loss of industry. Perhaps the history of the site could be incorporated into some form of leisure use. Perhaps the significance of the place, its meaning - real and imagined, can be engaged with as a means to regeneration: 'cultural regeneration'?

This leads to the theme of the second part of this chapter: versions of group remembering. Even where an event is described from different points of view suppositions seem to concur. Stemming from the apportioning of a collective memory to a group of people who have worked and lived co-operatively, the work here examines how presentation of history of its previous activities can be harnessed as a resource for the future. I investigate these suppositions in contrast with the reality of the presentation of historical pastiche elsewhere.

The third theme, again concerned with representation into the future, is about *what is memorialised* and *how things are memorialised*. What parts of the past are deemed important for representation? A number of focus group respondents had a background in art. The discussion shows respondents clear and articulate

understanding of problems of representation and the licensing of art in public places. Our discussions turned to manifestations of public art and the social processes these signify. The aesthetic competencies of respondents is drawn into the frame where discussions surround how monumental art reconfigures the landscape. A key concern of this thesis has been the use of art as a tool of regeneration. Observations here are concerned with the power to valorise art and how and why it is deployed. This leads to discussion about the specific aesthetic conflict with the power to impose reality, about what deserves to be represented and ways of representation.

Representations of reality and imagination is a significant recurring focus group theme. A central concern of this chapter is how things that are remembered are commemorated. This leads to concepts of memorial and memorialisation. I examine memorials and their purpose. This chapter looks at how mining is memorialised, and in which ways. Here I examine codes of representation as public art forms. Since the commencement of this thesis changes have been effected through the developments in information technology which make the publication and presentation of memories possible to vast audiences via the www. Presentations can now be made without the interlocution of cultural intermediaries. Memories stimulate the production of memorials to miners and mining communities.

The last chapter indicate the degree of emotional engagement presented in conversational representations of self. Does future participation evince similar emotional charge and strength of feeling? The last chapter was about people's

relationship with the past. The past informs identity. Does this identity continue or matter? The intention of this chapter is to project ideas about representation as a means of understanding how reality is defined and signified. As personal narrative is at the core of this thesis many focus group respondents discussed stories as a means of transcending time. I end this section with observations about how cultural activities have engaged with their own potential representation into the future.

## **PART ONE**

### **THE LOOK OF NOW**

This chapter continues analysis of focus group data as it is articulated around ideas about the present and the future. The first part revisits concepts of community, then and now. To begin with I present observations about what is perceived and how this perception has changed. It investigates what these representations mean to people now. I identify data from conversations which are concerned with the look of the place now, and what this look can tell us about how people are responding to changes in this familiar landscape. Having previously discussed visual competencies this chapter brings appreciation of images to bear on questions of representation of identity.

At the core of this enquiry is an attempt to understand what images mean to people. The meanings which events, places or objects impart can be investigated through painting and photographing them. In relation to industrial activity images can be engaged as a means to an awareness of vastness. For coal mining

this represents the scale of activities which remained relatively invisible. There was a visual presence in the landscape in structures and scarring which was interesting and often beautiful to look at. The notion that these images are beautiful contrasts with suppositions about doom and gloom, disease, disaster and violent death. Through symbolic imagery 'past futures', ideas that people held of their future, can be investigated. This has a corollary in plans for coal production as represented in physical structures which were present in the landscape. Respondents present their images of what the site of the colliery can be: its possible aesthetic into the future.

### **A pictorial analogy**

Commonplace relationships and understandings are the landscape in which everyday life carries on. The last chapter considered unique, extreme, or extraordinary elements of experience are delineated as different from the commonplace. They are figures in the landscape. Background and commonplace expectations serve to make the habitus and social structures of everyday activities observable. Common understandings and background assumptions are made visible where exchanges reveal implicit understandings between respondents with continued relationships such as work or friendship although these do not necessarily consist of agreement on particular topics. The semiotic emphasis on the relationships of signs to their 'signifieds' is determined through learned social conventions. I am investigating images as signs and their meaning as they are understood. This concerns how the figure is apprehended in the landscape. What do these images signify in terms of the present and the future?

The liminal event which comprised a highly public spectacle was the demolition of the Crown Tower: the figure removed from the landscape. The event means different things to different people. I present this as a symbolic temporal marker as a visual representation of our temporal location as a region in relation to mining. After this event we not only *are* afterwards but it is *told to us* through a significant event that we are afterwards. We are post-mining, post-industrial; are we post-mining-community? - post-industrial-outlook? The landscape without the figure is the canvas waiting to be repainted - the palimpsest ready for re-writing. My investigation uses images of the landscape from conversation to identify how people experience the sense of place now.

### **Immediate aftermath of colliery closure**

The Crown Tower was demolished in a controlled explosion in March 1994. I have reported conversations which describe coal as beautiful. The tower was emblematic of functional architecture but by any aesthetic criterion it could not be considered as beautiful. An indication of the strength of feeling with which miners held for the emblem of their working life is expressed in a public presentation of themselves with parallels in previously cited responses indicating manifestations of personal grief. Focus group respondents noted that at the time of its demolition people cried! The structure may not have been beautiful but the demolition was both spectacular and moving. Thousands of people turned out to witness the historical event. Prior to the explosion there was almost a carnival



atmosphere. The actual event lasted a few seconds. After the bang and the dust there was complete silence. (Fig. 8:1).

### **What happens now? The space now and in the future**

Through time the powers that be will come to their senses, but by then it will all be too late.

“In ten years they’ll look back on what they done to the coal mining industry in the North East, because although they done it to the shipbuilding and the steel, they never done it on the scale they done it to us”.

Oakeshott (in Adam 1994.45) states the characteristic marks of identity which discerns historical from other types of enquiry is an exclusive concern with the past. This demolition, more than any other event, marked the turning point, the end of mining. From this point onwards any enquiry into mining is an enquiry into history. Attributes associated with mining communities are consigned to that past. Ethnographic enquiry into these communities investigating what *made* them different, what they *were* about. They were here, now they are gone. The ‘remembered past’ is located in the continuity of consciousness and identity. The space had an identity as a coal mine. Its future use redefines it as something else.

Many people remarked at the fact that the colliery site was cleared with indecent haste.

“They were pretty quick pulling it all down, weren’t they. Just to make sure that nobody’s going to start it up again. Cos once the buildings - if they’re still there there’s still the chance that somebody will open it up again. They’ll find that there’s still thousands of pounds worth of coal down there”

Another respondent noted that:

“They were really quick at pulling Westoe, the buildings down at Westoe Colliery. They closed it one week the buildings were down - within six months I bet - those buildings were down”.

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Fig. 8:1 The demolished tower.

At the time of the closure of Easington Colliery Frank S spoke of 'them' - the Local Authority - in their half hearted quest to collect artefacts from the pit, mentioned in chapter six marking the location of the colliery with the halved pulley wheel for commemoration at the location of the former colliery. As well as signification there is the more pragmatic question of what is to become of the site? It is to be borne in mind that the site is a wide and valuable expanse of land in the middle of the conurbation.

"That site, I think, Westoe Colliery, should be developed for tourism. Definitely, on the sea front, it should be tourism".

"They shouldn't build factories".

"It should be something for tourism, definitely".

"Something to replace the work that was taken when the mine was closed".

"Often the weather's not very good down there, is it? With our easterly winds I think should have a beautiful leisure centre or something".

"A proper swimming pool - not one of them fatty little sort of walk around".

"I wrote to the council about that and told them it should be for leisure. Like they should have a lovely perspex dome where you've got palm trees and everything inside".

But what should happen is not necessarily what will happen.

"It'll go to the highest bidder though, won't it?"

And the idea that because this space has been instrumental in forming popular identity is taken up in addressing the site's potential use. It has to continue to contribute meaning. Also the significance of the colliery in terms of the town's economy ought to be reflected in any future use. One of the business students supposed that tourism would create jobs, and that the local authority, in its appraisal of future use of the colliery site, would give consideration to this approach.

"There's been a loss of jobs and the council are sitting back and saying we'll think about doing this ... that. Nobody's decided. Nobody wants a wasteland



all their life. If they build something on there then the town's booming again. Same here, derelict grassland. There's no point to build houses there. There's too many new housing sites. To build something for tourists creates jobs - helps the economy".

## **Tourism**

Tourism as a stimulus to local economy was a theme which was constantly reviewed in focus groups.

"I think it should be something to benefit South Shields. Not just houses. There's plenty of them. There's some talk about factory units being built. There's so many trading estates with empty units. Why build another one. It should be built.. I mean they've spent so much money on trying to bring tourism to the area. Why don't they build something that ... maybe some sort of a museum. Maybe on a smaller scale to Beamish, or something like that. But also with facilities for tourists to come and stay. When the weather's bad there's nowhere for them to go. Apart from travelling up to the Metro Centre. Because there's nothing in Shields town centre for them any more, you know. So why not build something on there. Not shops and things. Maybe leisure things incorporating museums with maybe an exhibition similar to Beamish, with all the mines. Not just mines. It could incorporate the shipbuilding as well".

But the idea that 'they', the local authority, will uphold its responsibility to the site is questioned.

"Obviously the system doesn't function in that respect. You just sort of feel that there's this huge area of land that used to be men's jobs, you know, families livelihood. It's gone. It's [off in] a place where they were going to put factory units there and whatever. You've got a big space. The big question is what do you do with it. And I don't think there has been a good answer yet. You want to give something back to the community. Almost a vague attempt at trying to create jobs, which the units would probably be".

This important space facing onto the sea front is both challenging and an opportunity as valuable real estate. But for many respondents the significance of the space in terms of cultural identity demands judicious consideration as to its significance in the future. A real opportunity is created by the empty space

afforded through the demolition of the colliery. But this will not necessarily serve as a nexus for cultural contribution.

“I think because that being in the spot that it is something related to tourism, you know, is best choice. They’re spending all this money. They’ve done up all that promenade or what they call it with the walkways and what have you. Well people used to come to South Shields to see the beaches. And to play on the beaches and all the rest of it. You can’t see the flaming sand now. Because of these horrible monstrosities that get vandalised every five minutes. You know, I mean if there was a nice big leisure place across the road they could all go there. I remember before they built the leisure centre where it is now on Temple Park, they were talking about building it on the Leas beside Trow Rocks”.

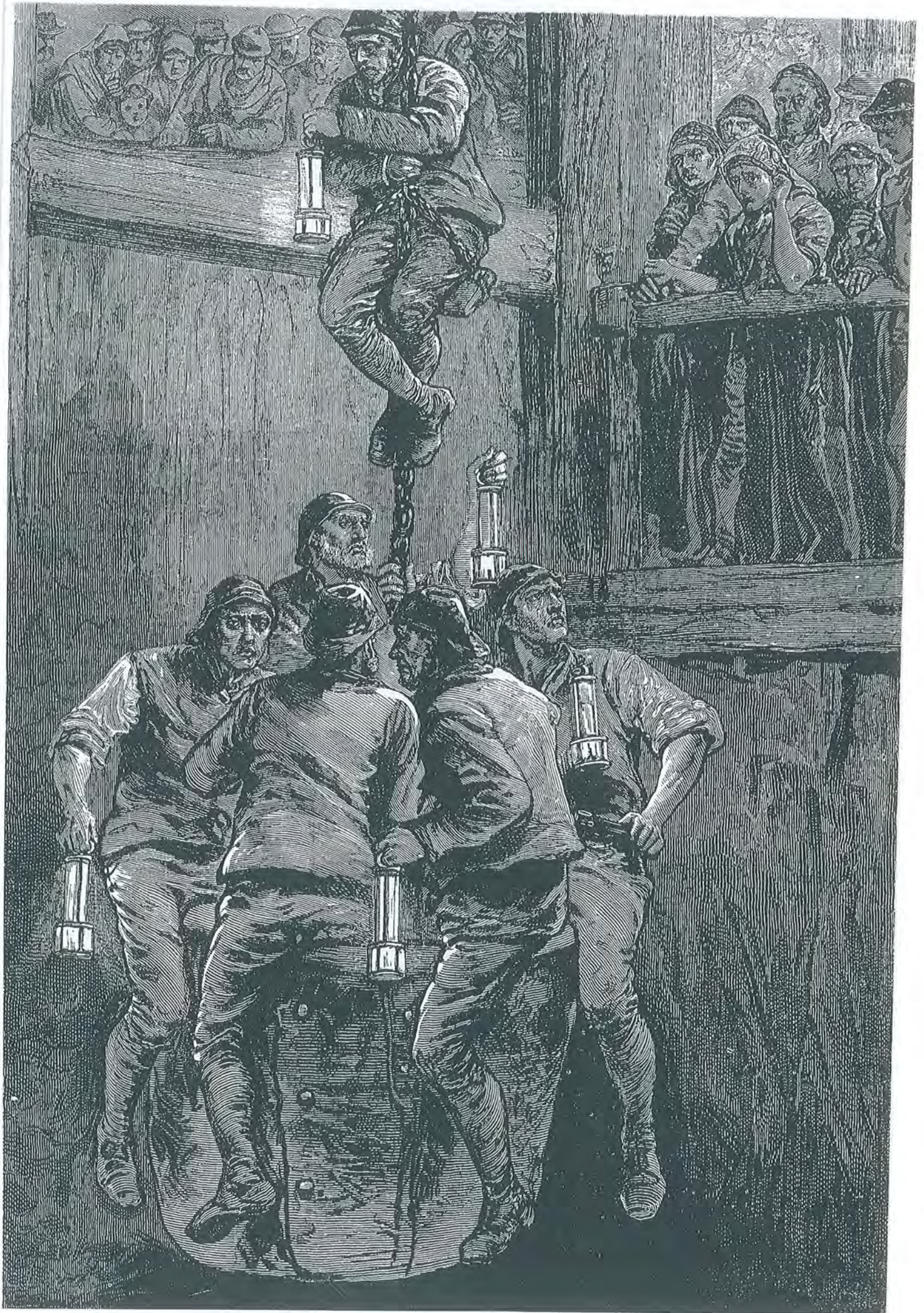
“Oh no, it’s a green belt, can’t build it there. Definitely needed something. So what did they do? They built it on Temple Park [distant from the town centre]. It takes some people AGES to get there you know. And I mean the tourists that come don’t know where the hell it is. They don’t know what busses to get there or anything. There’s nothing for them. They spent so much money they need to carry it through and attract more tourists to the area. Otherwise they’re just wasting their time”.

Tourism as the great panacea is identified in various guises as the mode of economic regeneration for the town. The problem is then identified that “the jobs there aren’t going to pay nearly as well as coal mining jobs”. “They’re never going to get jobs as well paid as the mining industry”. “They’re never going to get that”.

## **PART TWO**

### **REMEMBERING AND REPRESENTATION**

The need to memorialise bravery and contribution has parallels with military service. War memorials exist everywhere. This part of the chapter looks at several themes that were proposed which examine theories about what is remembered and what ought to be remembered. Images which people hold of mining form an essential part of this potential representation. The importance of



the colliery site is associated with the need to remember or memorialise identity. This is also identified in an attitude to miners and the personal contribution they made in terms of personal bravery. (Fig. 8:2)

“I don’t think it should be forgotten how brave these men were, and I don’t think they even realised how brave they were. Cos it was just a sort of matter of fact way of life to them. And I don’t think for one minute that they consider themselves as brave. But I really think that there should be something left for to sort of state that generations of men gave their lives ... by the time they retired they weren’t fit to live, really, were they?”

### **Catherine Cookson Country**

Several focus group respondents associated the narrative of the past with fictional representations. Catherine Cookson was repeatedly referred to in this context. Cookson’s images inform opinions both about mining and representation. One respondent explained that part of her understanding of mining conditions was obtained from Catherine Cookson novels. “When you think as child stuck in darkness on its own”. Another rejoins “I’ve read about them. In Catherine Cookson books”. These representations provoke real and imagined memory. Cookson’s real memories and personal life experiences are represented as fictional accounts in her stories.

“It’s like that Catherine Cookson page in the Gazette you often pick up. You say ‘oh remember that when I was a kid’”.

The Cookson representation is looked to to present the reality of the sense of place.

“Before mechanisation and that, many many years ago, it must have been a horrendous job, awful job, terrible. When they had children and that working in. Eh it must have been awful. A. Well it was a full day, it was nearly twelve hours they had to work E. When you think as child stuck in darkness on its own.”.

Here the child of the mines strikes a haunting posture in the imagined memory. This may be the child of the “no son of mine” observations. They are representations of reality, but not lived experience. Is a haunting image such as this capable of positive attitudes towards regeneration? One respondent supposes that the Cookson past is capable of revitalising the economy of a now run down part of the town.

“I’m annoyed because they tried to get together the traders in Frederick Street to make it a Catherine Cookson street of old time shops. We’re now a place where we’ve got holiday makers coming, and we want to make money out of holiday makers”.

Once again Sontag’s image of tourism in other people’s misfortune is invoked. Put bluntly how can the image of abused children contribute to regeneration? Tourists can visit Cooksons imaged abused children and take pity at a distance, they are fictional realities after all. Practicalities of this representation are considered. This implies a sense of the look and feel of the representation already existing as an image in the respondent’s mind. ‘They’ as arbiter of cultural representation, are pre-empted by local shop traders and stall holders whose vision of the future is tied up with their own personal economic well-being.

“They had a plan. The old fashioned gas lamps would be left, but they would be electric, and they’d put some cobble stones and what have you. And the shops done up with the *olde worlde*. And a Catherine Cookson bookstore there selling just Catherine Cookson books. I mean they have the Catherine Cookson trail. I went on it. It was so laughable, so farcical. This was where she lived. There’s a little notice saying this is where she lived. Nothing there. And then they took us past where she used to work, the hospital. And it was hilarious if you were from the town and you see what the visitors were seeing. It was very poor. And I thought if it could culminate in going to Frederick Street with this Catherine Cookson age and little tea shops it would be fabulous. I get that upset about it. The traders are fighting for it”.

Due to Cookson’s popularity this respondent was convinced that a Catherine Cookson strategy would be successful.

“And a shop selling all her books, and all memorabilia of Catherine Cookson with the pictures on the walls of her grandmother and her childhood and everything. We’d have them coming in in droves”.

The theme of the failure of Catherine Cookson initiatives was taken up by respondents in other focus groups also. The tourist representation is taken to task for its shortcomings. Saint Hilda Colliery is an important point of reference for tourists.

“‘Catherine Cookson Country’, ‘Follow the Catherine Cookson Trail’, you know, that pit is actually part of that era, and I think it is part of her books. So make that a definite part of the trail, so that the coach actually does take people there. They get off the coach - have a bit play about - take home a piece of coal”.

“Well I mean it’s ridiculous. Parts of the trail - I mean they take them past the garage where the arches used to be at Tyne Dock”.

“They come for miles to see it”.

“It’s a coach trip round Shields”.

“They see empty plots of ground that there’s been nowt on for years. They take them past the hospital of which I think there might be one original building left out of the whole place. The old workhouse”.

“And I mean there’s only about one building left out of the original workhouse there. And even that’s due to be knocked down. They can’t knock the whole lot down because the boiler room’s underneath part of it”.

There is a relatively important cultural industry which relies heavily on Catherine Cookson imagery. The promotion of nostalgia via the Catherine Cookson film creates employment for local actors.

### **Stereotype**

Representations of this nature returns my argument to concerns about stereotype community. Baudrillard mockingly investigates representations of places and events that never existed, describing them as simulacra. Jenkins (1992) expressed

concern for the sanitising process which presents an innocuous picture of a stereotype community where 'uncomfortable' elements and themes are simply ignored. The caricature which asserts our collective ontogenesis serves the function of invented tradition. The 'deformed' caricature of pitmen creating stereotyped mining history, assists in their consignment.

Catherine Cookson Country approximating 'reality' the reality which it approximates glows with nostalgia for something we are desperately wanting rid of. The Cookson Country project is critically taken to task by one respondent, identifying the stereotypical nature of all such representations. A respondent from the women's health group was concerned:

"Isn't there a danger of it being part of the Catherine Cookson Trail of becoming a kind of romantic ideal rather than what the reality was?" "Well possibly, I mean, but it's a start. Give something back to mining". "You don't want to end up with some of the old cloth cap and muffler miner, touch the forelock and hello governor and this sort of stuff, you know". "Which is like Beamish. That's what Beamish does".

The theme park effects entertainment by a process of erasure of the real by turning it into virtual image with no depth, but it also seeks to create distance with time where periods and cultures are synchronised into a single consumable spectacle through juxtaposition of past and present. An important feature of syncretism is its pick and mix approach to religion and the same approach can be applied to cultures not ordinarily available to this class of 'experience'. A guide book to Orlando and Disney (Fromer 1998) genuinely promotes this mosaic of 'cultures'. On the menu an "ethnic meal" at one of the World Showcase pavilions is part of the "Epcot experience" (p91). The participant can dine in Mexico, in an inn which "evokes a hacienda courtyard in the shadow of a crumbling Yucatan pyramid and dense jungle foliage", in a 14th century

Norwegian castle, or in Morocco, where the decor “represents 12 centuries of Arabic design”. Future World restaurants provide an “ecology-awareness theme, and many menu selections feature produce grown in its on-premises greenhouses” (p97). These ‘experiences’ do not sit comfortably with the reality of the cultures they are exploiting. For Disney

“fantasy, if it’s really convincing, can’t become dated, for the simple reason that it represents a flight into a dimension that lies beyond the reach of time ... nothing corrodes or gets run down ... And nobody get any older. We have never lost our faith in family entertainment—stories that make people laugh, stories about warm and human things, stories about historical characters and events, and stories about animals (p141).

Warmth is promoted through anthropomorphism, in a genre stolen from Aesop cute animals teach us moral tales. Sitting at the core of the morality is the philosophy of old Walt himself: “Never get bored or cynical. Yesterday is a thing of the past” (loc. cit.).

### **Becoming someone else**

Crang equates the contest for the value use of the symbol of the landscape and its association with history with an underpinning of various claims to legitimacy. Tourism can happen without taking cognisance of heritage. Focus group respondent Bill C is a local councillor, and for many years he has sat on museum committees, engaging with culture related strategies. He noted

“what has the British Tourist Authority said? ‘It’s time we sold Britain, but not on heritage. It has it’s part with the trooping of the colour and heritage sites and all the rest. But we have to market it up to date’. So it’s a question whether the Union Jack might go by the board. They need to up market the image. They’re saying there’s too much of the heritage. Now the reason Chris Smith wants to alter the Department of Heritage is to have a percentage of the past, but we need to bring ourselves up to date. that’s why they’re calling it Media, Culture”.



Bromley (1988) discusses the removal of history in the service of political schemes. These may be identified with processes indicating a desire for different forms of history. Some people, by dint of their own personal aspirations, wish to turn their backs on their own former identity. The idea of progress, becoming someone else, is taken up by Billy S, a colliery craftsman.

“There’s too many working people think they’re middle class noo. That’s what happened to the Co-op. I can remember Jacky H, can you remember Jacky H? At Westa. I came from here [Harton Colliery] in 1969, I was still an apprentice, you knaa. I remember him.. he used to flee all awer. I used to say to him ‘Jacky why do you flee all awer? You’re no better thought of man’. He says ‘I’m going to be colliery overman at this colliery and’, he says, ‘I don’t care whose toes I stand on till I get there’. Once he got the colliery overman’s job that was a joke gan’ round the pit. His lass went to the shop and asked for a pair of colliery overman’s pit socks”.

Having discussed suppositions people hold concerning the reasons why the collieries closed - the politics of spite playing a major part - I combine observations by respondents as to the probability that representations of the mining industry will continue to present problems. One person articulated the problem that

“The whole history of the mining even the miners are controversial. Because they played such a central role in the struggle of the working class in the political sense. That anything to do with mining is going to be controversial. There are power groups within our society that would like it to disappear.

They don’t want it recorded. They would like to see the whole issue forgotten. Not only the strike but the whole mining industry”.

### **Who records history? For whom?**

Historical representation through art encompasses an assimilation or marking of territories in the future. Chomsky (in Peek 1987) was disturbed to discover a stained glass window in a college celebrating the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

He discusses this as a key to understanding the processes which adapt history as a means of the legitimisation of victors in war and the expiation of their portion of guilt for complicity as criminals.

“The process of creating and entrenching highly selective, reshaped or completely fabricated memories of the past is what we call ‘indoctrination’ or ‘propaganda’ when it is conducted by official enemies, and ‘education’, ‘moral instruction’, or ‘character building’ when we do it ourselves. It is a mechanism of control, since it effectively blocks any understanding of what is happening in the world.” (p124).

Historical narrative can be recycled for entertainment use where the real is erased, creating a virtual, depthless image. The postmodern commodity use nostalgia applies experiential cultures and makes these available as a ‘pick and mix experience’. In Beamish we visit the past. In theme park representations distance with time is created through synchronising periods as juxtapositions in single atemporal tableaux, located just out of reach of memory. This representation works for Disney. Why not Cookson? Different temporal strands of reality were identified in analysis of focus group conversation. The one concerns a representation of the past which is tied up with nostalgia and museums. Catherine Cookson grew up not far from Harton Colliery and many of her stories are representations of the place. Her influence, in terms of how the past of the place is perceived, is clearly felt. Her novels form the background to a theme park type representation which has never fully materialised. The next part of the chapter investigates memorials and how they work. It presents mining memorials and how their mission is defined.

## **PART THREE**

### **MEMORIALS**

A well as a recognition of the need for memorialisation in terms of representation to tourists - for economic reasons - focus group respondents identified ways in which representations of identity reciprocate with the future as a sign of appreciation for the contribution miners made in the past. The culture which they created can continue to contribute through contributing to an understanding of its reality. A woman from the art students' group

“I think something that people who in a way that space belonged to. It's something they can be involved and get something out of is maybe the only. Be true in a way. Give something back to them”.

This programme would address a real felt absence. The hiatus of the distance of the recent past is seen as creating a real need: a crisis in inter generational communication. An art student noted:

“There seems to be a situation. I mean I just feel that generations have lost touch with one another. It used to be that you know. A family would live together or live close together and stories like that would pass through families, you know people weren't together. It was a natural thing. Stories were just handed down. That's gone. You look at kids today and you do feel that they are devoid of heritage. They don't understand the enormity of something like this, or the impact. It's just gone!”

The locus for transmission of culture across generations is removed, and with it heritage is erased. A series of monumental artworks are erected to herald the new culture which has come to replace the outworn, dirty, dark satanic past. These are the images of the future aesthetic.

## Art as memorial

In the exhibition the earlier images, such as Hair's views, had no bearing upon anyone's personal experiences as such, stemming from a time of over 160 years ago. A building indicating Saint Hilda Colliery still stands on the site of the 1826 sinking. The Hilda was the last shaft connecting to a deep mine the length of the River Tyne. As such it connotes immemoriality. Remembering and commemorating are at the core of representation. Focus group respondents indicated that the contribution that the miners made to their society should not be forgotten. Memorial as public manifestation is a highly sensitive issue. The use of the colliery site had been discussed in most focus groups. Many people saw the future of the place bound up with industry servicing tourism. The site could be a part of this type of strategy or used as a memorial space. The idea of erecting memorial works of art signifying the sense of the place was often touched upon. (The comments over the following four pages are all from arts connected respondents).

"I think as well what you memorialise it with has to be so carefully chosen. People will resent a piece of art when they've got no future ... no nothing. If you put something there that to them is not functional, not going to do anything for them, and not going to bring any money into their community. What they want is jobs. What they want is their life back, in a way. It's almost as if you feel you have to offer them something that can slightly compensate in that space. But really it's going to be a drop in the ocean, you know. You have to be careful that there's something there that they don't resent".

This need for commemoration was discussed in terms of some sort of physical object in the landscape. A work of monumental art for example. Here I alter the emphasis on the word 'them' where 'they' are clearly identified as the people with the capacity to commission, and therefore valorise, art, reintroducing the

notion of cultural gatekeepers. But the 'them' who are responsible for locating works of public art have 'their' sights set on other forms of representation.

"I think it does. It's been so much part - maybe not Westoe but all of them. Been so much part of our past it needs to be. I mean, was it last week we were talking about putting those bronze figures at the sea front. That Spanish artist. They asked the local people if they wanted this. It was going to be a million pound lottery money or something, for these 23 bronze figures.

B Well supposedly, with lottery cash. And this guy wanted a million for these 23 bronze figures. And it looked as if the top half ... I don't know ... people. But the bottom reminded me of Weebles - remember weebles wobble but they don't stand still? That's what they reminded me of. I mean I've got no opinions one way or another. But why not, instead, why not commission. Well apparently he's got plenty of places to go for this, you know, plenty of places want it. But he's giving us first offer, because he thinks it's a suitable showcase for his work. So. But I mean if 'they're' going to spend ... why can't 'they' get local people".

'They' are identified as the local authority and 'their' spending on works of art is seen, like Smith's attempt earlier, at attaining a cultural 'credit balance'. 'They' are trying to join the art clerisy.

"South Tyneside's insularity. Going out and spending half a million quid on some Spaniard's weebles is probably symptomatic of the fact that they've got this money and they want to spend some money on some art to join in with the others that also have a lot of art about the place. They ain't got much of it".

Like the "overman's pit socks" this aspiration must be taken with a pinch of salt.

Highly visible public art projects are identified with practices that are symptoms of class hegemony.

"... look at Damien Hirst. The guy's making a fortune on the back of an old Etonian who knows how to go about it. Isn't he, somebody called Fellowes. There is an old Etonian behind Hirst. He's in the papers all the time standing behind Hirst all the time. That's his agent".

Playing this game will lead to local resentment. Again this reflects Smith's thoughts for Pasmore's work in the Rates Hall.

"And Spanish weebles as well! I mean you know, what's wrong with local artists? It does build resentment even if people don't thoroughly understand a

work of art. Or whatever the piece that's put there. To have something, you know".

In keeping with other observations about propriety a work of art or whatever, commemorating the miners has to be dignified, appropriate and sophisticated.

"And I think anything that commemorates the miners has got to be more sophisticated than that. More sophisticated than a wheel in the ground. C. And more sincere! If you put a wheel in the ground what is it? Nothing. If the council has anything to do with it or any element of government they owe them something. In their minds they feel that they are owed something. A. That's all over County Durham though, isn't it. There's not many winding gears left. They're all planted into little hills all over Durham".

Spanish Weebles do not need to aspire to the consent of their consumer as memorial. Artworks which do not commemorate can be facile, neutral, objects of fun, expensive, internationally important, but they must be locally insignificant. If works of art have to be 'about' something they have to fit a whole set of criteria, and represent a series of meanings to different people. If they are about nothing they can simply exist. The problem with art in respect to cultural regeneration is that so much is expected from it that it has to signify.

### **Narrative as memorial**

Working through possibilities of memorials and their uses the art student focus group arrived at a solution joining meaningful memorial with collection and dissemination of the narrative of mining This narrative stands as a work of art in its own right. The recording is the memorial.

"To record them and make a record as a monument is more of a monument instead of a sculpture. That monument itself is something from which people can work. I am just saying this bit in the middle, the stories themselves, could be the art work. That's the kind of thing that commemorates. Students are going to have a better idea of what it was about. C. Your grandfather died and all those stories you heard when you were young go. There's no record. It is such a loss".



Many respondents noted that mining communities had a continuing way of commemoration through continuing educational and social welfare provision and that this activity is much more significant than works of art. Art work is a kind of confection which fails to signify in the way that real social structures do. Again the use of the colliery site is referred to.

“So do you think that that’s a site for a potential art work, or a piece of social work? A community effort to make something happen at that site. It always strikes me as being quite funny that miners’ memorial halls. People get money from various things and they end up building a hall for it which is quite good. I saw one up at Wideopen. The Wideopen Memorial Hall. It’s the Great War Memorial Hall. Instead of building a statue and spending a fortune on a bit of brass or a bit of bronze they built a hall for the community to use. I mean is that the kind of thing which you could be putting on the top of that”.

“It’s interesting your saying that, because we’ve got war memorials everywhere. And at Shields we’ve got that particularly interesting one, which is the merchant navy one, which, if you like, was people killed doing their job. But we have no memorial where there’s a list of miners killed in a pit”.

“I mean who would the memorial be for? Does anybody want to remember the place that they used to work? Is it important for future generations?”

“I think that’s quite interesting. I have got my head clear of what I was trying to say before. The monumental images of heroic miners, you know the Stalinist images. I personally wouldn’t find appropriate. Perhaps the miners wouldn’t find appropriate. Who would want to be reminded of pretty filthy horrible work that they did boringly day after day. Perhaps they themselves wouldn’t be happy about that. I think the mining.. the contribution the miners made was important in a social and political sense. That certainly in the fifties and the early sixties the miners, the NUM particularly were the backbone of the trade union movement and the political movements in the town. I mean the town was run by the miners on the council, because they were the dominant union of the time. I think the miners have left their monument in a sense. The monuments to the miners are the council housing estates and the education system. Those are the two elements which they had contributed most strongly”.<sup>(Fig 8:3)</sup>.



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## Banners and heroic imagery

One respondent joined the research programme because she had something to say concerning her brother being conscripted to the mines. Alongside other trade union iconography miners' banners share imagery with war in the context of heroism and struggle and aspiration. I understand the supposed 'Stalinist' images of miners to be heroic representations of people in working situations. Hobsbawm (1984. 92) discusses the iconography of labour in which images of women depict allegories of *Truth* or *Justice* or *Progress*, pointing to the rising sun of progress, bare breasted or wearing flowing robes and a Phrygian cap. Muscular men swing hammers to break chains of oppression or are represented as exponents of their craft. Their stylistic counterpart is exemplified in the work of Walter Crane. These images are described as the "true folk art of nineteenth century Britain". (Fig. 8:4) It is worth remembering that the images on the banners were bought from Tutill, a fairground artist, where this consciousness was constructed out of a catalogue or off the peg (Gorman 1973). Industrial working class heraldry designated by a manufacturer's catalogue. Chaplin saw this differently: from within. For him the banner represented community.

"So the banner which was very beautiful represented something very solid and substantial indeed, and while one recognizes that all things have to go, and mining as it was in the North East has gone, and perhaps in many ways has gone for good, one also has to recognize that there was a great achievement, and the greatest of achievements was with the poorest materials, in the poorest circumstances, fighting a battle underground and fighting against bad housing and bad sanitation on the surface and poor wages, people banded together and built in their villages little communities which were quite something to live for" (Chaplin in Moyes 1974).

Arguably they are neither folk art nor solely representative of industrial labour aspirations. This imagery has much in common with propaganda of all kinds. It is

depicted even by Chaplin, who clearly identifies with it as a standard or gonfalon: the tribal flag to follow at the beat of a drum. But in the passage I have cited it represents a commonality of aspiration towards fellowship and common decency. These are transcendental notions about how our current actions inform the future.

### **Miners' memorials**

Most focus group discussions included concern for the need to memorialise. Around the North East in various church yards a memorial stone stands to the memory of people who were killed in mining disasters such as those at Easington, Felling, Heaton, Scotswood and Hartley. Each of these were erected at the time of recovering and burying bodies from mining disasters and mass funerals. In Durham Cathedral a miner's lamp is kept lit in perpetuity for those who labour underground. Each day a page is turned in the book of remembrance kept there. This records lists colliery by colliery the names of men and boys who died underground, with their ages and dates of their death. These correspond with most church yard memorial forms in recording items included on an epitaph, name, age and date of death: all marks of personal identity about which the person identified has no say. These are memorials after death. The core subject of this thesis has been how industry is considered at the time of its demise. Mining is finished and the final event of colliery closures and demolition are indicative of an ending. But its narrative untold does not present posterity with a neat and tidy, justified package. It is not a three line epitaph. Wholeness, for bell hooks (1998) comes at the end of a narrative when "neatly resolved all conflict and everything was back in its happily-ever-after place ..."

I have reported speech which does not accept that the narrative is complete. For some respondents mining is not finished yet. hooks notes that justified narratives locate events as entireties:

“From high culture to low, so much art betrays its themes, the movement of its own narrative. Often these betrayals are there to please a consuming public that can only bear coming face to face with things out of order, with chaos and disruption, if in the end order is restored”.

Where the museum presentation proposes to ‘take us back’, to transport us temporally into the past as a foreign country where “they do things different” it functions on discrete, entire parcels of narrative. It must present a whole picture, and depends for its wholeness on historical distance. Witness testimony as an informant of a cultural whole, by contrast, is primarily concerned with the recent

### **Justification through memorial**

People remember and commemorate. The presentation of meaningful memorials is made increasingly easy with availability of information technology. Mining memorials are presented on the www mostly for the same reason, although stated in different ways. I review here examples of mining memorials which state their mission or purpose. Many of these point to physical memorials erected to miners and mining communities, by (former) mining communities.

*The Altus Arkansas Area Coal Miners’ Memorial* (<http://cinetworks>) website indicates a memorial statue and monuments engraved with 2,000 miners’ names. An asterisk denotes miners who were killed in mining accidents.

**Online Coal Miners' History Book. Franklin County, Arkansas,** (<http://Frame>)

points to a growing awareness of the www as a tool for communicating, noting that:

“The more we get out on the Web the more people will hear and write something. There is a great history there on the coal miners, everyone has a story to tell, they just need help to tell it”

**Remembering Coal Miners who were Killed** (Black Diamond Coal net) is a group memorial for coal miners that were killed working in the Lynch District coal mines of the U S Coal & Coke Co. U S Steel Corp. Kentucky between 1918 and 1990. Their stated mission is:

“to provide a place for coal miners who lost their life seeking a new beginning in America only to have lost this precious life in the endeavor of a dangerous occupation in that they were providing for their family of loved ones.

“These cherished coal miners and their names have a permanent home in cyberspace where they can dwell in rest and peace with the Lord”.

**Carnegie Medal. Springhill Nova Scotia.** (Baillargeon <http://>). In 1959, the Carnegie Medal was awarded to the officials and workmen of the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation and local doctors who risked their lives to rescue 174 miners who were trapped underground in a mine at Springhill the previous year. The only other group to receive this award were the rescuers of the Titanic passengers. The Medal is on permanent display in the Town Hall.

“The Miners Monument is a constant reminder of the hazards of coal-mining. On the granite pedestal, sixteen feet high is a life size model of a coal miner ready for work. The monument contains the names of 125 victims of the 1891 explosion and is surrounded by other memorials and tablets commemorating the explosions of 1956 and 1958 and the names of more than 200 fatalities in everyday workings”.

After the end of the large scale coal mining in Springhill, the town extracted geothermal energy from the warm water contained in the abandoned mines.

**Nova Scotia memorial. ‘Their Light Shall Always Shine’** (Martin and Riverton [html](http://)). This memorial adopts the theme of light prevalent in mining memorials.

The Westray Families Group works to support a monument and Memorial Park “honouring the 26 miners killed by Westray Corporation in May 1992”.

*An Ethnic Coal Miners Cyberspace* (ethnic.htm) lists immigrant family names of miners that worked in the Lynch, Kentucky Coal Mines. “These early ethnic coal mine settlers should be considered as pioneers and we should think of them with reverence”. The site asks “what do we hope to learn by looking back over our shoulder?” and answers itself, “understanding of some of the forces that have shaped us”.

*Coal Monument. Baxter, Kentucky* (harlan.htm). Harlan County, part of the extensive coal field in the Appalachian Mountains where miners lived in the company owned town. Many collieries operated here during the peak years of 1917 - 1960. Like the North East the county severely contracted its mining activities in the 1960s.

“It is a symbol of all the coal miners who worked in the coal mines and coal mining industry in the county and was placed here to commemorate the lives of the Harlan County Coal miners who are loved, revered and respected”.

This website gives its reason for remembering. “Flowers grow in yards now with never a hint of the passage ways that lie underground”. And the people who animated the county are gone: “coal mine families of Americans, Afro-Americans, Hungarians, Italians, Russians, Polish, and Yugoslavians are now gone just as the signs of the coal mines”. Memorial is intended as a celebration of the “unique mining history of Harlan County Towns and the rich cultural contributions of its sons and daughters give the mine communities a character all its own and a place in the history of the American Dream”. Each of these websites identifies the need to understand and that there is an important story to be told. The important aspect of these memorials to this thesis is that they are

founded in an insistence that what these people have done must be both remembered and proclaimed.

### **Narrative as memorial**

Turning from physical and cyber memorials I turn to comments made by focus group respondents to the potential use of narrative content of conversation as memorial. Some observers noted in conversation that narrative is as a means of transcending time.

“I was suggesting that we get those miners who can tell the brilliant stories and sit them down and get them to tell the stories. From the stories you make something to house the stories. Something that’s right now that will be able to be listened to and appreciated well beyond their lifetime. Maybe a learning centre. One of the things the miners were good at was to look after their own. They educated them. They brought them on. They gave them things. Knew they were somebody who was going to be looked after for a long time which was *why a lot of people wanted to get their sons into the mines*. Once you were into the mines you were into a job for life. And you were into a caring society, even if it was a hard job. But something like a vocal archive that could be listened to people and appreciated time after might be another way to do a commemoration. There’s plenty of Shields miners still live here”.

This suggestion was taken up by several respondents. The reason for representing the narrative is didactic.

“I think it’s something that teaches young people or whoever and gives them something back. Gives them some idea of the past and some way of making decisions ... making them think of something that has gone on like that. Making them take a slightly different course in their life, you know, influencing their decisions, their future. That’s got to be better than something static. Something that doesn’t give ... doesn’t do anything. To people who say let it go, it’s crap, people died, let it go. At least you’re doing something positive. That will develop in the future. That will give to the future. Not just, you know, remain for now and be seen in the future. For those people.. who have died.. in a hideous job. You feel that you’re honouring it in a way”.

The emphasis from this set of data is a juxtaposition of temporalities, not unlike Lampedusa: pass on understanding, learn by mistakes. But there is something

more to this. It is that young people are able to acquire a fuller understanding of themselves through listening to the narrative of the place. One respondent explained that his fascination at the stories an old man told him.

“ I was talking to this guy that gets in the pub. A bit deaf now. Got a gammy leg and you know. And he’s in the pub every night with a big beer belly. But it’s the first time I’ve ever really spoken to him. And I found out he went down the mines when he was fourteen. After his first day he went home and cried his eyes out and said I’m not going back. And he ended up he was there till he retired. But just the tales he used to tell. The changes that he saw. And it was just absolutely fascinating. What started it off was he was moaning. He had got a rise in his pension and it didn’t even cover the cost of a stamp. It’s a shame that the younger people, the younger kids, can’t talk to these older ones. Even if they go round the schools. Incorporate them into the schools somehow. Just to listen to them ... ask questions”.

This story telling would be educational for more than just the children. The respondent himself would be keen to know more.

“What about educating, because to be honest I’ve got a limited knowledge of what happened in the mines apart from people used to dig for coal but. Something like the fascination of how they dug right underneath the sea.

The idea that the narrative is important to young people addresses an absence which they may or may not feel, but experience nevertheless: an absence of their own memorable experience. The narrative of the hard life supplies a kind of readymade experience for young people.

“They don’t have a collective memory either of what it is to sit around. What they are talking about in their collective memory will not be putting pennies on railway tracks.. but something entirely different.. the day they got their *Game Boy*”.

This implies a generational absence of value. It also points to the ‘privatisation’ of children’s play. Why would this young, vacuous, characterless person be interested in listening to an old person? What could be possibly found to interest





the youth? This points to either a real paucity of authentic experience on the part of the young person or a supposition on the part of the respondent that the young person is lacking in this dimension. This observation is both borne out and partly mitigated by the observation of the following respondent.

“I think the kids would listen because - just little snippets you get when you listen to them. Some of the ideas that come from them. Some of the questions they ask. They’re not all bad. In my class, I did an A level last year and I went in with a class of 16 and 17 year olds and it was fascinating just to listen. They were all shy of me. They were so naïve. Some of the things they actually talked about were deep subjects. And they did have opinions. They didn’t know what they were talking about but they thought they knew. They had opinions on things. I’m sure their opinions would have changed. They wanted to know more but the opportunity wasn’t there for them. I’m sure they would be fascinated. They could listen and get their own impressions and maybes go away and make a sculpture”.

Sculptures and landmarks have been discussed. Memorials to tragedies or heroic deeds are commonplace. Memorials to war dead share iconography with miners banners, one depicting a path to glory and death, the other to a bright future in socialism. They are led by winged evangels, fluttering banners and the beat of a drum. W Goscombe John’s Great War Memorial of 1922 in Newcastle presents heroic working men marching to a fate which, by the time the work was commissioned and executed, was assured (<sup>Fig 8:5</sup>). The people depicted in this sculpture are walking into a future which we now know. Miners still march behind their emblems (as in the painting on the banner depicted opposite to page 45) towards a future which no longer exists for the mining industry. The imagery is the same. I present a familiar image of a (mining) community marching to the future with banners and flags, to the beating of a drum. I draw attention to the visual congruencies of these images. (<sup>Fig. 8:6</sup>).

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Fig 8:5 Goscombe John’s War Memorial. Heroes marching to a certain future

Fig. 8:6 Colliery band.



The advent of information technology has made cyberspace available to anyone - to memorialise anything. Representations are increasingly less dependent on the sanction of a clerisy. The final part of this chapter is concerned with the kind of memorial which fits the dual role of celebrating mining culture in memory and as a cultural form which projects into the future. As well as the narrative itself informing memorial activity people identified welfare and education provision as memorial. Hospitals, reading rooms, necessary things, This is different from the way that memorials are being made now.

### **Welfare**

I have previously discussed the future provision of comfort and dignity for retired members of the community and this was discussed at length by Bill C and other respondents who pointed to the important cultural work of the Aged Miners' Homes Association.

“And the Joseph Hopper Durham Aged Miners' Homes. Which is over a thousand houses now. They have just established some more”.

Memorial as welfare provision was considered at various points as an important node of future enculturation.

“I think that's a very good memorial that they have created that kind of welfare state, that kind of decent arrangement. If it's not there any more. The houses are still there, they're still vastly better than the kind of houses. The real memorial is the achievement of the political organization. Well it got the health service. They haven't got the power remotely to build on the scale of the housing estates they were building. One of the things that's gone is the power. The power to make things happen. I am all for asking the questions about how we record what it was. But one of the things that has gone is that power to create”.

The memorial which is identified by the miners themselves is the Welfare organisation. It is represented by the sports grounds and hall where the focus group meetings took place. This organisation has had to be fought for through history, just like the simple sanitary provisions it requested of the mine owners as a matter of common decency. Ron S explained that ...

“that’s how we keep it going. There’s 6 football teams there’s 2 bowling clubs there’s 2 cricket clubs. We have youngsters over. We’ve got a weightlifting fitness section. So there’s quite a few. G. Can you not get the weightlifters to cut the grass? J. We can cut the grass if you donate money for petrol. But we’re going on a shoestring since the pit finished. And keeping it going is done with labour of love and volunteers. And it would cost about twelve pound a week to keep this grass down. So what we do we wait till it’s right lang and somebody comes and cuts it and takes it for his horses for free. And we say while yer on cut the football pitches”.

This representation of practical solutions to problems is a core informant of the colliery aesthetic: making good and making do. It is underpinned by the colloquial expression ‘nigh enough for pitwork’. Ron S explains the look as it is represented through the cannibalisation of the colliery. There is more to this than merely taking something because it belongs to the employer. Some of the materials acquired, such as the colliery gates and the minecar are highly charged with symbolism. The clubroom is ordinarily filled with items which denote identity: photographs of miners in groups, electrical gauges from underground equipment. The Welfare members have an outlook which is concerned for future representation. It takes cognisance of the errors and failures of other local representations.

“Wor bike stand, that is the bike shed from Westoe Colliery. When Ronny was looking after the pit in the last few months, and the electricians had nowt on, he was sending them up here. These are the wall tiles from the band room. We’ve kept gan’. We’ve done well. I think when the pit shut we had eight thousand pound and we’ve got about five thousand five hundred now. That’s four years so. It’s dribbling away, but we’ve kept going. But that’s with the

will to, we'll still be gan, and hopefully wor dreams will be realised within the next twelve month. And what everybody's fought for we'll keep. Because as this gentleman correctly says Whitburn. We don't want to go that way. E. It was a rip off that. G. It was a greasy road to start with".

Ron S explained to the group of colliery officials the continued remit of the Welfare. I represent this long speech almost entirely as it encompasses the sentiments of the active participants in the Welfare cultural activities. It constitutes a cultural manifesto.

"The plan's been since the pit finished you knaa wor forefathers fought for this. It was something we didn't want to give up. The bloke tried a bit of skulduggery wanted us to give it up, cos we couldn't get a hold of the trust deeds, and we eventually got them and we found we were one of the few Welfares that we owned. Well we found out that if we had have sold the lot the whole of the money would have went to national CISWO and we would have lost. And we kept asking this Bill M for trust deeds. We wouldn't give in. He asked us to resign and they would hand it over to the council or sell it. They would have getting the money. Our own solicitor found out owned it. It was in charge of the trustees.

"The Welfare And the management committee. We also found out that if we sold the lot it goes to charity commissioners, the money, or national CISWO. If we maintain part of it for recreational facilities we can put the money in a trust fund and live off the interest to keep it going. And that's what we've said we fought for this Welfare our forefathers and we wouldn't give it up. In fact my statement was, you knaa, Thatcher and them, they took wor pits off we they'll not gan' take wor Welfare".

"G. Oh I'll agree with you there".

"And I said this is a bastion that'll stand even fifty years time people driving up the John Reid Road kids'll say what's that and they'll say it's the Miners' Welfare - Harton and Westoe Miners cos we've stated that name must not change".

"F. That was the trouble with Whitburn Welfare. They gave it free gratis to the local authority. And the people that run it now have had nothing to do with the mining industry. It's a bowling club, pure and simple. Jack Clark"[the name of the welfare ground].

"B. Jack Clark was a shipyard man".

“E. Jack Clark. He never even worked in a coal mine. He was a shipyard man. It was named after him. And if anything it should have been named after anyone who had something to do with the mining”.

Ron continues ...

“We learned with that. We said it isn’t going to happen here. And it’s been a battle. It’s been a battle. Wor finances stopped when we left the pit but we run raffle, a weekly draw. And we get income off that. And we run a dance which usually gets we seven eight hundred pound profit every year. And people like Aidan hisself, he’s gave we donations of some sketches and photographs to put in for a raffle. We always get a good turn out. That’s at the Whiteleas club. As I say the weekly draw and renting the place out. We’ve keep going. Wor money’s, we’ve always been on the bottom, we’ve never been high up. But we keep going. We’re on a shoestring. And we’ve always known, at the end of the day we could sell it. And we did intend a supermarket. Because you get big money, you’re talking about four million. I even drafted a letter up to the council stating we’ll sell for houses and we’ll get about nine hundred thousand. If we sell this top half, we keep the bottom half. And we relocate dressing room, bowling green, new club house and that. So it’ll still be a smashing little sports ground. But the council is opposed to a supermarket. So as a last chance I wrote and I said look we don’t need four million. Two and a half million we’ll have the best Welfare in the country. And we’ll be able to have it free for pensioners and children, that’s the aim. And we’ll have a million and a half surplus which we’ll give to yous. Either you want to build a new library community centre or something for the school kids. Turned it down, didn’t they? Didn’t even offer to speak to we. We’re here every day. We’ve getting thousand pound jobs done for fifty quid and that. But that is wor aim. We don’t give it up. We’ll try and get a retired members club. So I hope I see yous all in the future. But even though we’ve got nowt wersel’, you see, *were miners*”(my emphasis).

Ron identifies many of the problems which the Welfare is facing and locates them within the *continuing* exigency of struggle. He is saying that we have never had it easy and at this point in time things are no different. Across the spectrum of responses conversational material has pointed to the provision for education, taking care of aged members and such like - basic welfare provision - as being at the core of colliery culture. This particular speech (and it is a *speech* - it addresses the microphone and posterity) articulates these attributes around a

tradition which is rooted in progress. In this respondent's understanding the culture which represents miners continues to look at the future where it will still find representation.

### **Cultural response to problems across time**

The spectrum which encompasses welfare provision such as hygienic needs, sporting facilities, making music and convivial meeting are all fundamentally cultural. From an anthropological point of view Malinowski interpreted cultural responses as addressing specific needs. The Welfare group respondents indicate an understanding that there is no guarantee that these needs will continue to be addressed by them. The group must continue to agitate for these provisions themselves (ourselves). What is interesting is the way in which welfare members insist that their cultural project must continue to inform cultural practices. These (hard won) realities are not negotiable. Harton and Westoe Miners' Welfare is "*a bastion that'll stand fifty years*".

### **CONCLUSION**

The background to familiar analyses of aesthetic judgements are incorporated in people's understanding. The selections I have presented represent on the one hand suppositions about culture and on the other cultural transcendence of time. They are concerned with whether and how various artistic media refer to or represent the world beyond immediate experience. Respondents' dismissive assessment of figurative or representational art as 'Stalinist' can be interpreted as discomfort with the concept of the use of images as surrogate representations of



political debates. Symbols function to synthesise various qualities and attributes of people's lives, world views and aesthetic approaches. When these are charged with personal significance cultural in particular structures stand out against a background of imposed cultural conditions. Some art illuminates and informs attitudes from the past as exemplified in the imagery on miners banners. These continue to be cherished as representations of aspirations for the future.

Important 'high cultural' representations, on the other hand, by definition need to keep a low profile in terms of what they signify, otherwise their content becomes uncomfortable. They *have to be* trivial. In chapter three I presented the notion of tragedy, in the form of the sublime, as a mode of consumption. From this point of departure I have been able to develop a field of enquiry into the status of fictional representations of reality. Much of what is discussed in terms of representation (Catherine Cookson, *Close the Coalhouse Door*) relies on an aesthetic appreciation which is founded in consuming a sublime 'other'. The paucity of representation of cultural experience is impugned by respondents as a shortcoming against young people who have no knowledge of this experience. But without the locus for the transmission of this culture and understanding how can they know that they are missing something? The transmission of this culture in story form is identified as addressing this shortcoming.

Anthropological concepts of culture, such as that of Geertz, denote patterns of meaning transmitted historically through symbols, inherited conceptions expressed symbolically, and through which people develop knowledge and communicate and perpetuate attitudes toward life. Focus groups identifying this

lack in young people also identified the idea that telling stories is a means of furthering the cultural project of understanding. But, returning to my central argument, these stories are confounded with fictional representations. These attitudes can be manifest in public art forms or other types of memorial. But they are not a part of the culture which regenerates. Much public art was considered both thoughtless and too trite to do justice to its historical memory.

Respondents were concerned that the important historical dignity of the place should be retained. Art in this instance does not dignify the space it occupies, so much as trivialises it. But then again the tourist alternative will likewise dehistoricise and ultimately trivialise historical experience. The reality of the historical space has greater cultural gravity than its high cultural counterpart. In this formula low culture is important - high culture is trivial. For all respondents who expressed opinions in the matter any memorialisation must encompass this gravity.

Most groups expressed an understanding of the 'game' of representation as it is being played by 'authorities', the museums, the arts bureaucrats, local government officials - people who have assumed the mantle of making various representations of culture: 'them'. More than any of the other responses the approach of the Welfare group clearly indicates a strength of reservation about the capacity of 'them' to provision cultural needs. This returns to a central theme of this thesis. Why should 'they' (the cleresy) be entrusted with the custody of culture?

Commonly held images and associations contribute to the closure on the culture which has largely been purged with the physical evidence of mining and cognate industrial activity. Respondents have indicated the way in which collective memory of people who have worked and lived co-operatively, can be reused as a resource for the future. It is important to stress that this is colourful narrative rather than some form of orthodoxy. The nation is for Arendt 'that curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance' The privatisation of culture of experience functions to distance real from imagined experience.

## Chapter Nine

### CONCLUSION

Through this thesis I have addressed questions about culture as lived experience and how this is represented. This concluding chapter presents what this culture means to people and how the theories with which I am engaging are expressed in the realities and experiences of respondents to my research. I have attempted to examine information which this culture stores, and addressed means of interrogating it from different perspectives. I have obtained information in a deliberate yet informal way. Knowledge has been presented anecdotally.

My central concern has been with a colliery aesthetic. Much of the spoken word narrative of colliery working life informs and is informed by this aesthetic. The writer Sid Chaplin (1987.114) explained that when he began writing stories he was “going against the grain of the social mores - bucking against the system which laid down that son should follow father”, but he wrote nevertheless. Artistic representations of mining working life stand out against its traditions and is a product of dynamics at this interface. His writing was in the spirit of the narrative of everyday pit parlance. His material was gleaned from the wonderful tales told by miners working underground.

“Men would put their lamps face down in the dust and say, ‘I mind once...’ and you’d get a story. It was absolutely great. Taking my material from miners like that strengthened my resolve to be true to the spirit as well as the letter of what I was writing” (op cit. 116).

Both the attitude of his engagement and the material he engaged with are key components of this colliery aesthetic. My research has been guided by the same

imperatives as those of Chaplin. Presentation of mining working life in its own vernacular is a verbal demonstration of the colliery aesthetic.

I have tried to demonstrate the extent to which images structure popular perceptions of mining and mining communities and how these are inked with notions articulated in fiction. Mining communities are traditionally depicted as being 'close knit'. This perception is investigated from within'.

### **The structure of this chapter**

This concluding chapter moves from the presentation of focus group data, analysed in the last two chapters, to a reflection on this material as it concurs with the theories of the thesis. The first of these is concerned with high and low cultural forms. Museum, art gallery and other cultural representations are sustained through public funding. Focus groups considered the appropriate weighting to the presentation of mining and other local industrial culture in respect to public spending on public cultural forms. Respondents sought a heroic representation of miners, but wished to distance these representations from 'Stalinist' representations. What are these? With the end of industry we are witness to a liminality which is located between the past and the future. Respondents expressed a series of concerns surrounding representations of culture now and into the future. There were worries that the 'story' should be passed over and forgotten about, and proposals that the story could be used to teach young people, or as a part of tourist strategies, supposing that tourism would play a major part in the representation of the area to the outside world and effect regeneration. What strategies engage with these

suppositions? The image of the place and the image of mining are considered in their capacity as colliery aesthetic and regenerative material. This chapter attempts to reconfigure these disparate themes. It will also consider ideas about the 'aestheticisation of everyday life'.

### **The research: indications and implications**

Obtaining information through research into cultural understanding invests respondents with the role of cultural representatives; expressing their understanding of this culture in their own way reveals their concerns about culture and its representations. To arrive at this multi-perspectival understanding I have demonstrated a reflexive technique structured so as to gain insights through narrative. Issues are framed through 'telling the story'. Interpretations are shared and shaped via informal conversation. This research is not about the use of focus groups to generate data which characterises ideals, nor how potential consumers think, and are therefore likely to act. My concern is not an understanding of an ideal or abstract community; it concerns how people conceive of themselves as part of a group, or react with other group members in a conversational way. A wide range of unstructured thoughts and personal and inter-personal points of view emerge from these discussions. Perhaps most significantly these interpretations often challenge received wisdom and allows a presentation of personal understanding. What does a colliery closure actually mean to the people whose lives are impacted by it?

### **Patterns of narrative as history**

I am interested in how heritage and culture, in its association with "common meanings and directions" (Williams 1958), co-exist with high culture. In order to impart culture symbols must have meaning to their consumer. Symbols become



cultural through processes which engage with meanings. Using a painterly analogy specific or unique incidents referred to in focus group findings can be described as 'figures in a landscape'. The background is given by generalities, the topography of the landscape itself, and by those themes which recur in a form of pattern. A pattern is an arrangement of forms: arrangements, rather than the specific components, create the pattern. Pattern underlines narrative and can be an arrangement of emotions or social processes that permits understanding by putting them into a general context (Bohannan 1995.79). "People perceive cultural dynamics primarily in the form of stories." The historian's 'art' is to turn past events into stories (p77). Neutral observers, such as ethnographers, must translate other people's stories without inserting their own patterns. The narrative of history or ethnography is mediated as it is presented as patterns. Narratives are essentially aesthetic descriptions, as they are capable of being apprehended objectively. "Aesthetic descriptions, whatever else they may be, are of the 'it is' rather than the 'I am' character" (Walsh 1970.238). They are "verdicts about objects" belonging to the object being described rather than personal likes or dislikes about the object. The colliery aesthetic, then, is prefaced in the distinction between how its attributes are apprehended objectively, rather than personal associations or tastes. A photograph of working boys carries suppositions about the narrative content of the image. The subjects become tragic: objects of pity (Fig. 9:1).

Dewey asserts emphatically that "what is not immediate is not esthetic" (1934.119), and that it is a mistake to suppose that only *special* things can be immediately experienced. There is an everyday, immediate aesthetic reality, but it is not

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Fig. 9:1 Boys on their way to work in a coal mine.



experienced as important because familiarity induces indifference. “Aesthetic emotion is [...] something distinctive and yet not cut off by a chasm from other and natural emotional experiences ...” (Dewey p78). The aesthetics of the ‘everyday’ on which Lewis Hine focused his camera, followed a “procession of child workers” (Trachtenberg 1977.132) and the way in which we apprehend these images as a function of liking or disliking them, engages with the realities they depict. Hine’s photographs can be apprehended as beautiful images without being about beautiful events.

### **Hell and the abyss**

We become familiar with these images in a background understanding derived from melodramatic images of mining. Hellish notions of the coal mine were not confined to tourists and strangers. Sid Chaplin saw the pit as a “... kind of purgatory. You descended into a kind of inferno ” (1987.84). Zola used fiction as Hine used the documentary photograph, to protest against human abuse in the workplace. His miners were “ghostly forms” and he saw “a savage face” which was “blackened as if in preparation for a crime”. These are dramatic and lead the viewer to suppositions about the mine as a place of terror. Burke (1778) considers the excitation of passions, astonishment, and the need for obscurity in making things very terrible. His ‘Sublime’ systematised poetic elements that existed outside the scope of representation. The Sublime is essentially something which is sought but is unattainable and, as a poetic component “... satisfaction has been commonly attributed, first to the comfort we receive in considering that so melancholy a story is no more than a fiction”. As the story of mining passes through a medium such as a novel, which creates a temporal distance, reality is set apart. Images once again play

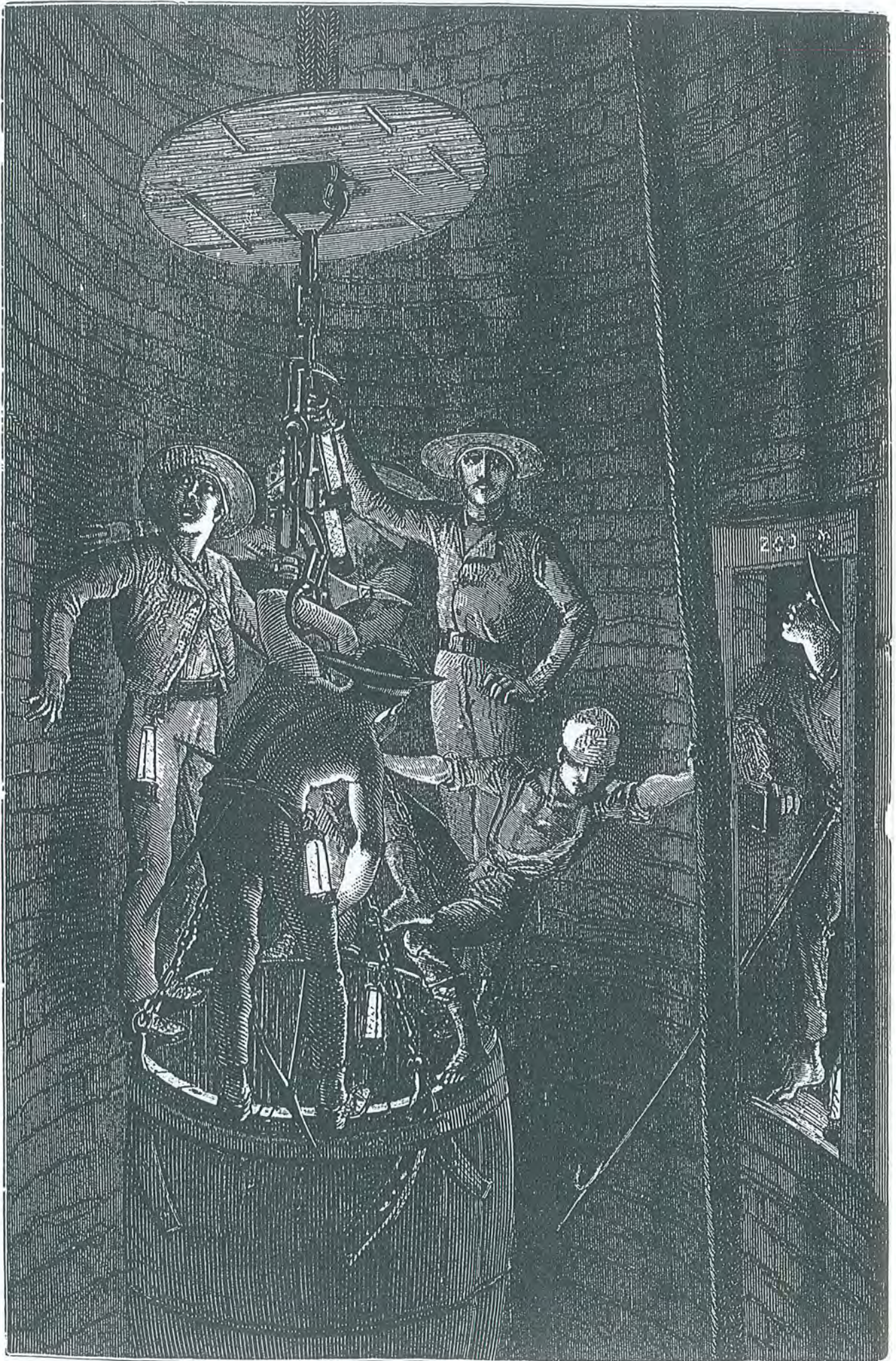


Fig. 59.—Miners going down a Shaft. After an engraving by Bonhommé.

an important part in developing this understanding. Zola was introduced to the reality of the mine through dramatic illustrations in Simonin (Fig. 9:2).

Factual documents, such as photographs, which concern a “morbid attraction to human suffering and what is most horrifying in human existence” engender a form of “demonic curiosity” (Friday 2000.363). This has its corollary in actual and fictional representations of mining. It also has intimations in what Lennon and Foley (2000) describe as ‘dark tourism’, elements of which will be considered later in this chapter.

### **Art and cultural regeneration**

The economics of projects which supposes that art galleries will attract business investment and lead to regeneration have not been discussed in this thesis. What I am concerned with is the alignment of aesthetic understanding which underlies this supposition. Art might attract business to an area after industry - fine. I am more interested in the possibilities afforded by the exploration of ideas about regeneration which engages with existing culture. Operas and poems and sculptures create an economy of their own, and the Catherine Cookson industry is an important employer of cultural producers. But planners’ drawings with yachts (or art) bobbing about in the river do not create the economic reality which they depict. I see this as a fallacy akin to cargo cult, a celebration of the “myth of an earthly paradise of never ending consumption” (Illich 1971.46), an expression of belief expressed in a ritual by which if observers “put on a black tie over their naked torsos, Jesus would arrive in a steamer bearing an icebox, a pair of trousers, and a sewing machine for each

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Fig. 9:2 Miners descending a shaft. Illustration from Simonin.

believer”(p44). Dan Smith’s insistence upon social inclusion in an arts economy is not disputed here; and the bellicosity of his linguistic turn is a product of its time, providing a key to understanding its optimism. His attitude identifies the presentation of socially valorised high culture which reduces local actors to passive consumers of imposed aesthetics. And this attitude continues to inform agencies with the power to endorse public representations of culture. Its consequences are clearly understood by the arts oriented focus group respondents.

### **Pioneers o pioneers!**

Many focus group conversations explicitly examined culture and identified the time as being one of profound change, and considered the great loss associated with the demise of mining. Walt Whitman, promoting the culture of everyday life, was writing poetry at a time of significant change. The urgency of his programme was a question of turning the actions of people of an “agitated and turbulent” “cultural present” into language, thus “wording the future” (Folsom 1994.2) at a time when people were being painted out of history. He was aware of living in a time of crisis when the United States were “either destined to surmount the gorgeous history of feudalism, or else prove the most tremendous (spiritual and social) failure of all time” (Metzger 1961.55). Simpson (in Bhabha 1990) has argued that Whitman’s ‘omnivorous’ ‘appetite for identity’ failed to assimilate the “facts of ethnic, social, political, occupational and sexual differences within the [... society he was] celebrating” (p177), and is “silent on the key problem of Native American rights” (p178). In his epic poem *Leaves of Grass* he was more concerned with the nascent present than the immediate past; writing about the

“swarms of stalwart chieftains [...] As flitting by like clouds of ghosts, they pass and are gone in the twilight [...] No picture, poem, statement, passing them to the future [...] unlimn'd they disappear [...] Blank and gone and still, and utterly lost” (p524).

Folsom (p78) is concerned that “what Whitman laments here is not so much the loss of the Indians as the fact that there is “no picture etc [...] no mechanism by which they [can become] absorbed into the [culture of the future] America.”. In the vastness of the poem they appear only in a few lines (p79). His ‘Pioneers’ are pursued by “swarms upon our rear ... those ghostly million frowning there behind us urging”. But Folsom notes (p65) the absence of Indians in his poem which “tells us much about his conflicted and conflicting response to the American natives...”. These natives disappear “unlimn’d” (p74) into a “melange of savagist stereotypes”... who were “doomed to extinction, doomed to evaporate before the inexorable progress of civilization, to which they could never accommodate themselves” (p75). His writing is defining the culture, yet he laments the absence of representation of the culture in retreat. These observations are central to the concerns of this thesis which examines how mining is represented after it has ceased, at a time when images are at the core of the definition of the incoming culture, and the outgoing, although lamented, has few pictures other than those of belligerents or savages.

Cultural regeneration programmes are acts of temporal conquest of the social and political struggles of the past. Bourdieu’s (1999.9) describes relationships of power in which the alteration of the balance marginalises cultures across time as “the logic of political life, that of denunciation and slander, ‘slogанизation’ and falsification of the adversary’s thought ... ”. This marginalises any claim that the former culture

may have to reproduction into the future. If the past is filled with labouring and brutalised children then it is wrong to want to 'go back' to it.

### **Past and future**

Stemming from representations at a time of liminality questions are raised about the nature of the relations of past and future and how they can be presented as images. Hobsbawm (1994) considers Benjamin's appreciation of the tangibility of the weight of history as it is defined in a painting by Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, in which the angel's "face is turned to the past where we see a chain of events before us, he sees a single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon ruin ... a storm blows from the direction of paradise...(driving) him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris grows into the sky. This storm is what we call progress" (Benjamin 1971:84-5 in Hobsbawm 1994:189). Arendt (1945.10) describes a similar embodiment of this relationship as presented by Franz Kafka:

"The scene is a battleground on which the forces of the past and the future clash with each other; between them we find the man [...] who if he wants to stand his ground at all must give battle to both forces. ... [The future as well as] the past is seen as a force, and not, as in nearly all our metaphors, as a burden man has to shoulder and whose dead weight the living can or even must get rid of in their march into the future. [...] 'the past is never dead, it is not even past'".

As I have demonstrated in the context of heritage as inheritance, this past comes back to haunt us in various guises (gasses, poisoned water, etc.) whether we accept its narrative or not. Abraham (1987.387 in Armitt 1996.312) explains that "what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others", and this describes a failure to address realities of the post industrial landscape.

### **Distance of time**

In presenting questions about the culture of mining as a thing of the past, and as emergent presentations of culture, museums cannot take into account the causes of the historicisation of discourses. This is not their job. But this historicisation is at the core of understanding social and cultural conflict which creates commonality of interest and activity, and which gives Haacke the “reason to fight” and Chaplin “something to live for”. The ‘reality gap’ which the museum augments is further amplified through distancing of time. Dewey (1929 pp319-354) presents the theme of artificially induced isolation from the subject. Timmins (1995.444) discusses the propagandist nature of the history which is taught in schools as the idea that events more recent than twenty years ago are not history. This creates an artificial end to history, returning to Heller’s descriptions of postmodern teleology.

### **Miners and Stalinist iconography**

I present a key to understanding ideas about aesthetics and representations as it is suggested in the remarks of respondents about Stalinist images of miners. In asking questions about representations this is a useful device for examining dimensions of art in the public domain, and who or what it is made for.

The Bolsheviks were masters of visual propaganda. Political posters took the place of religious icons as a means of unifying the people. Its iconography presents the world as good and evil: black hats versus white hats. With the ascent of Stalin artists were ordered to ignore present realities and imagine a glorious socialist future. In this art time is transcended; depicted as it proceeds from the present. The artist’s task was one of presenting an optimistic future utopia: things were not

described as they existed in the present but as they would exist in the future (Bonnell 1997). Goncharenko (1965. 193) identifies the problem of aesthetics in the context of the part which art occupies “in perspectives of development for the future”. *Socialist Realism* was defined 1934 at the *First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers* as both a style and an ideology enforced by the state as the official standard for Soviet art. Its simple principle was that art must promote the political and social ideals of the state. As a mode of visual representation *Socialist Realism* involved a temporal shift; presenting the future as it appears in the present. Stalin presented his future plans and wishes as present fact. He is ever present in these images and his presence is a concomitant of accomplishment of heroic feats. “In the system of signification of political posters, perspectival distortions served to identify heroic figures” (Bonnell 1991.103). Magnification accentuated the superhuman effort of Bolshevik heroes: their deeds made them giants. The heroic Soviet shock-worker acquired a central place in Stalinist iconography. Stalin prizes were inaugurated in 1939 to reward high achievement in the arts and sciences. These conferred considerable prestige and a large sum of money on artists. All awards were agreed by Stalin. Essentially Stalin exerted the full authority of the state in matters concerning art, and consequently cultural reproduction.

Jartsev (html. cpsu) apologises that Soviet public art arose from necessity at a time when the country was at war, politically, with the whole world, and as such the margins for the interpretation of art were reduced to a minimum. Unambiguous clarity was the only possible means of expression. Art was intended to serve a function like weaponry - it had to be as direct as rocket artillery. People were presented with models with which to anchor their identity in order to stabilise their





situation and make it tenable. Images as icons needed to be simple, direct and 'on-message'. In the rewriting and overwriting of Soviet history inconvenient characters are often deleted (King 1999). History is rewritten as the canvas is overpainted.

The incarnation of the hero worker held up as an example for workers of the time was the 'ideal' miner, Stachanov, (Fig. 9.3) achieving incredible production figures. Prodigious outputs have their counterparts in British mining imagery. Colls describes the pitman 'Bob Cranky'; "[t]he rumbustuous 'canny' collier" (1977:57). Stachanov and Cranky share attributes associated with boasts of productivity, but essentially their common characteristic is that they are idealised figures: they are caricatures. Stachanov is a caricature of the future.

### **The museum and representations from cultural industries**

Respondents explained their understanding of the processes by which the local authority engaged with the valorisation of art. I consider these observations important in the way I propose to address the presentations of art as high culture and art in public places. Which art for whom? I move from caricature to other parallels; between this Soviet art of the thirties and the present Saatchi endorsed art of the *Sensation* exhibition. The missive nature of Stalinist art, simple, direct, on-message - has a congruency with the work of the yBas. To develop this theme I begin with the narrative of the museum in its theme park mode; the simulation in which the public participates, which is derived from the culture of experience. Its representation moves from lived narrative, through the legend of idealised reality,

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Fig. 9.3 the miner Stachanov.

to 'accommodating' fiction. Should its entrance be prefaced with the reminder that all characters displayed within are fictitious? They are not a picture of real experience of the past any more than the 'shock worker' depicts the reality of the projected future.

I revisit themes of the endorsement of works of art and the power to confer status of importance on what is represented - what should and should not be allowed honorific status - by way of examining ideas developed in conversation from an arts practitioners' focus group. In this respondents discussed an 'X rated' museum where much of the language and humour of the pit can be presented to a sufficiently adult audience. By and large this humour concurs with 'low culture' as explained at the end of chapter one. It is scatological, blasphemous, coarse. High culture representations, in the mode of *Sensation*, make these forms of representation promiscuously, irresponsibly, without thought for the sensitivities of its consumers. Arguably often their deliberate (or sole) intention is to create sensation through giving offence. High culture can attend to sordid things that are left out of the experiential representation.

Some elements of high culture, as it is endorsed and promoted by the artworld, illuminate an inversion. Stallabrass (1999) has termed the 'project' of the yBas 'high art lite'. It is art that "looks like but is not quite art, that acts as a substitute for art" (p2). It uses the spaces afforded to art, galleries and public plazas, and some of the materials and visual appurtenances of art. It is manufactured to suit its market place. Celebrity is bestowed on artists like Damien Hirst or Tracey Emin. Hirst's primary subject is horror. An important detail is that his paintings are made with

'household paint' (Stange 1999.229): inviting parallels with the 'everyday'. Emin makes art centred upon herself, "symbols of salvaged, passionate and painful experience" (Titz 1999.146). Through self-indulgence as art, the appropriation of subject matter from horror movies, the use of non-specialist materials, an inversion occurs, or an invasion. Works which embrace the more base aspects of human relationships and concepts bring high culture to trespass in the terrain of low culture. This is not a two way process. This is not an aestheticisation of everyday life but an abstraction of motifs - ready to wear - from the lower, seamier side of life. But this is not new. Art engaging with populist forms has its antecedents in the humanism of Renaissance painting in Europe, and is central to the art of 'folk' societies. Jameson (1994) notes how the culture described as 'aesthetic populism' removes the boundary between high and commercial culture as a postmodernist fascination with the 'degraded landscape of schlock and kitsch'. I propose that the real inversion occurs at the point of the demarcation of roles of two hosts of cultural industries, the art gallery and the museum. The important casualty of this demarcation is the presentation of the recent past as it is massively homogenised to fit an ideal stereotype.

Artist Jeremy Welsh (2001 / [html](#)) makes his work about the taken-for-granted interstices between art and the cult of the self; the space which re-configures the personality status of the artists. He traces the establishment of this relationship with Warhol's magazine *Interview*, which provided a vehicle for gossip about art and celebrities - and in doing so conflated the two. The 'inter-view' is an

"interstitial position between two views [...] What is the relationship between gossip, celebrity, notoriety and visibility in the artworld? When a curator interviews the artist with whom he is working, what lies behind this strategy?"

Welsh identifies the fact that “the interview, the conversation, the exchange of ideas and opinions” constitutes the actual art object. Again the agenda and the addressee posit the core questions of cultural reproduction - who is investigating what, for what purpose?

### **How cultural regeneration is identified**

The focus then turns to ways in which high culture can claim to regenerate.

“Funds from the National Lottery have been important in funding the spectacular projects that are supposed to draw new economic activities to areas. Newcastle is a model of this development; with the opening of its [sic] new centre for contemporary art in the huge Baltic Flour Mills building. [...] Such regeneration is supposed not to be merely economic, but social and even spiritual”(Stallabrass 1999. 192-193).

Cultural Secretary Smith is cited (op cit.6) “no government can stand idly by and ignore the potential this has to uplift the people’s hearts ...”. Central to this notion is feeling, rather than thought. This is also the theme of Prime Minister Tony Blair who outlines the importance to his project that people must adhere to his system of beliefs. “I asked for you to be with me head and *heart* and *I believe* you are” (Blair 1996.51) (my emphases). His appeal, to the *faithful*, is one of reciprocating and reflexive *belief*. We have no need to understand - we only have to believe.

The reality of the local is ignored or put to one side in favour of a high art whose principals can be defined by their aspirations, redefined in presentations such as the *Sensation* exhibition. The artists I have cited may be extreme examples, but insofar as they are presented as the *best of* (in the Arnoldian sense) then they are setting the standard. *Sensation* succeeded in bringing Saatchi “thousands of column inches, stretching his name beyond advertising or money” (Stallabrass 201). The RA set out

to court controversy, earning Saatchi celebrity. Inverting Welsh's observation celebrity becomes art. Saatchi and Stalin concur in the task of endorsing art which endorses them. Whatever supposed 'aesthetic' imperatives drive this collection of art the outcome of its presentation can be anticipated. Engaging with "subjects which to many ordinary people are extremely offensive" (Bowker 1997) people are "apparently eager to be shocked or offended" or by the works. The success of this kind of work can be measured in its notoriety. When the yBas went to New York the success of the show was guaranteed. Barstow (1999a) explains

"It was a museum director's fantasy: hundreds of people waiting on a clear, crisp morning for the doors to open on a new exhibition. Enough reporters buzzing about to cover a small war. A line of art patrons that grew longer and longer, even after the doors opened and the cash registers began to rattle and hum".

Another trespassing into different realities has been effected by the advertising media as it tries to keep pace with the sensationalism of high art. This trespass is directly concerned with the social meaning of commercial images. Portraits of people sentenced to death by photographer Toscani are used as images in an advertising campaign for clothing manufacturer Benetton (urls). The campaign chose to set aside any "social, political, judicial or moral consideration, this project aims at showing to the public the reality of capital punishment". The company claimed to have torn down "the wall of indifference contributing at raising the awareness of universal problems among world's citizens". But more importantly they add that "at the same time, they have paved the way for innovative modes of corporate communication". *United Colours* 1996 advertising campaign 'Horses' depicted two horses copulating. "ANIMAL PORNOGRAPHY! What the Hell are you guys thinking? ... All I want is a shirt!" (Benetton htms).

In *Sensation*, which "blurred the line between art and commerce to a highly unusual degree" (Barstow 1999b) Harvey's use of the image of a child murderer - the Chapmans' use of sexualised child mannequins - "not only upsetting but hold a

certain fascination, though we may not like to admit it" (Ribettes 1999.98) - Hirst's obsessive representations of horror imagery - realigns the (ab)usive potential of horror with child imagery. Damianovic (1997.html) asks the Chapmans if they are deliberately using "ugliness as a formal device [...] to provoke a disturbing set of tensions", to which the Chapmans reply that they are "really, really, really [sic] interested in this kind of socio neurosis". The newspapers (and the art galleries) had a field day. On its arrival in New York the exhibition's notoriety preceded it.

"Mayor Giuliani ... accus[ed] the museum not only of recklessly staging an exhibition of vulgar and sacrilegious art, but also of conspiring with the owner of the *Sensation* collection, Charles Saatchi, to inflate the value of the works on display" (Barstow, D. 1999b).

In the words of Plater's song "Close the coalhouse door lad, there's blood inside - there's bones inside - there's bairns inside"(1969). These are reason to close the door on a chapter of the past because they are unpalatable realities. But blood and bones and bairns can be annexed as images of the extreme as a consumer sublime through high culture.

### **Narrative and memorial**

In investigating miners' memorials in cyberspace I concluded by drawing the inference that these memorials have been created to inform our understanding of identity. Stories produce communities. Stone investigates the way that people invent new personae for projection via the internet.

"As I listen to the stories by which we produce our communities ... my stakes are high in understanding who is telling them and for what reason. [...] things about ourselves that we thought of as given and immutable have proven to be quite plastic and malleable" (1996.84).

Identity and community are disposable commodities. In lieu of buildings or landforms or artefacts the stories themselves, as the principal component of the

colliery aesthetic, are a highly significant cultural representation. As they constitute the core representation of a culture they should be given equal status and entitlement to access to support for their upkeep and development. The Durham Mining Museum (which is not publicly funded) website is a significant contribution to understanding mining heritage. It lists thousands of names of people who died in mining accidents. It presents images of mining disaster memorials. Its principal concerns are with the dead. It is an epitaph.

Public art re-images the identity of the landscape as a part of a wider process. As manifestations of public culture monumental art works are closely associated with notions of cultural regeneration. Some monuments differ from works of art in that they attempt to address specific experienced realities. War memorials, for instance, share (heroic) imagery with mining representations.

### **Men cried**

It was a moving experience. Thousands of people had turned out to witness it. I was there. Prior to the event there was almost a carnival atmosphere. The controlled explosion and fall of the tower lasted for a few seconds. In the moment before the bang was heard a flock of seagulls exploded from the top of the tower. After the bang and the fall there was a thick pall of dust and complete silence. Men cried! Different witness sources attest to the tears that were shed over the end of the industry. "Men cried" when the Crown Tower was demolished, people "cried their eyes out" at the performance of *Close the Coalhouse Door*, "grown men cried" at the prospect of killing horses in Lynemouth Colliery, and digger drivers tell me that men cry when lambs are killed on the foot and mouth fields. Is this inappropriate behaviour? The emotional gestures of the men crying, as attested to, differ strongly



from presentation of Springer type demonstrations of personal tastes on television. They are not characterised as “‘performative’ utterances” (Reddy 1997.327) and are not founded in choice. They are not a display of personality presented for consumption by others. This is simply private emotion expressed in a public place.

### **More mining memorials**

Elsewhere the importance of industrial identity is understood, and public resources are put at the disposal of mining heritage representations. Part of West Virginia has been designated by a government bill as a heritage area, and it is jointly administered by divisions of culture, tourism and history, with \$1M annual grant aid for 10 years.

“It was deemed that it was in the national interest to preserve, protect and interpret physical remnants of lands and structures with unique and significant historic and cultural value associated with the coal mining heritage of the state for the educational and inspirational benefit of present and future generations”. (<http://msha.gov>).

Another museum is dedicated to preserving the social, cultural, and technological history of the energy industries, in West Virginia. (<http://wvu.edu>). A bronze memorial has been erected in memory of the coal miners who perished from mine accidents or lung disease. The artist responsible for the work noted that ... “ ‘As we got deeper into it, we realized that if we didn’t do this now, it would never get done’. He feels the younger generation is too busy to accomplish it”. The plaque on the Memorial tells sums up the ‘why’ and the ‘who’ of the Memorial’s existence. It recognises: “Those who built our small towns; labored and died in the mining industry to provide for a better tomorrow”. (<http://coalcracker.com>) (<http://msha.gov>).

### Site specific art and placelessness

All places have locally special attributes, which is a product of and produces its uniqueness. This is its *genius locus*, its spirit of place (Garnham 1985:7). Lynch (1960:6) develops this understanding into the argument central to his thought on city design and planning. Plans concerned with either preservation or change should give equal weight to understanding things which give a place its identity, otherwise it is in danger of becoming a “placeless geography, a labyrinth of endless similarities” (Relph 1976:141). I contrast art as memorial and its specificity to place, and relevance to lived experience, with the art at the core of cultural regeneration. Creators of monumental art works lay claims to the works’ specificity to site, but few public art works can genuinely have a significant association with the landscape. I argue that they are not ‘site specific’, nor do they reciprocate with the site.

The work of art referred to in the focus groups as the ‘*Weebles*’ is called ‘*Conversation Piece*’ by Juan Munzo and is located at Littlehaven Beach, South Shields. It comprises 22 life size bronze figures (<http://littlehaven.com>). ‘*Art on the Riverside*’ publicity material ([url](http://www.artontheriverside.com)) describes this work is part of a wide programme which has been “created by both *local* and *internationally renowned* artists” (my emphases). I emphasise the differentiation with which this language instils the sense of distance afforded by the importance of local and international renown. It is concerned with scale of importance. However, it proposes inclusion. “Art on the Riverside is an exciting programme of art in public places; it is also something local

**Art**  
on the  
**RIVERSIDE**



**An International Programme of Public Art  
for Royal Quays, North Shields**

communities can truly be part of". The website quotes the chair of the Public Art Joint Committee:

"Successful public art blends the imagination of the artist, with the views and feelings of the local people through a rich process of dialogue, to create artworks which are about enhancing the sense of uniqueness in our communities, for our own generation and adding the rich heritage from the past to impart to future generations" (html art - riverside).<sup>(Fig. 9:4)</sup>.

These words are empty rhetoric, because this art works in entirely the opposite way. The exclusion created through engaging with 'internationally renowned' artists is not lost to focus group respondents. To explain this further I present the three most expensive riverside works of art with claims to monumentality. They were commissioned by Tyne and Wear Development Corporation and financed by Arts Lottery Board, and installed in 1999, through the agency of the '*Art on the Riverside*' project: the "largest programme of public art in the UK, funded by a £3.5 million National Lottery grant and £2.7 million from the public and private sectors taking place in North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Newcastle and Sunderland" (loc cit.).

Together with Munzo's '*Conversation Piece*', '*Ambit*' by Alison Wilding, and '*Tyne Anew*' by Mark diSuvero, are the three most significant recipients of funding. '*Ambit*' was built in Sunderland and located in the River Wear in September 1999 on the site of Austin's shipyard "where, until 1966, the vast structure of [the shipyard] Pontoon was regularly submerged and re-floated in order to raise huge ships from the water for repair". The work "allud[es] to Sunderland's maritime past". Mark di Suvero "is considered [by the commissioning agents] to be one of the finest and most influential sculptors of the 20th century". His work '*Tyne Anew*' is described as a "*site specific* work installed on the edge of the River Tyne adjacent



to the International Ferry Terminal and some of the heavy industry yards. The steel structure is a *monument to artistic engineering* and balancing skill [sic]"(my emphases). These two structures make direct reference to the industrial legacy of the site for which they were made. As they are located in places to which their form alludes they can be compared with the existing aesthetic of structures which have been removed. The art stands in for the missing industrial structure.

Wilding's work collected river borne detritus, the lights stopped working and it ceased to hold its shape. It became the subject of strong anti-feeling in the city. It has been relocated and now alludes to Venice's maritime past. Shipyard cranes are more beautiful than 'Tyne Anew' (Fig. 9:5). This is a statement of qualitative judgement. It is an aesthetic fact. The cranes looked better and signified more. The visual joke of works like '*Conversation Piece*' wears thin. Works like this present a "strong inclination to make no comment" (Stallabrass 1999.128).

Post-industrial spaces in cities are being reconstructed as centres of consumption rather than production (Lash and Urry 1994.216) and this is effected through "repackag[ing] and reposition[ing] themselves according to the global economy, often by "normalising" their public image" (Bianchini 1991.37). As well as the obvious occupational transformation (the creation of 'Smurfmen' or telephone call centre operatives out of metalworkers in Lorraine or Teeside) cultural change can be identified as it engages with "expanded numbers of low-level or seasonal jobs; the increased use of flexible forms of work organization; ... weak levels of

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Fig. 9:4 Riverside sculpture *Tyne Anew*.

Fig. 9:5 Shipyard cranes, now demolished, on the site now occupied by *Tyne Anew*.

unionization; the transformation of the built environment so that it comes to symbolize pleasure and fun..."(Lash and Urry 217) and so on.

### **Cookson Country and the dilemma of representing past dreariness**

'*Conversation Piece*' is an important part of local tourist strategy. Focus group respondents made projections about what ought to happen with the colliery site. In selling South Tyneside as a tourist package official tourist guides (html) introduce the high lights of South Tyneside as: its coastline, including the rock, its parks, its beaches, Saint Bede, Munzo's sculptures and Catherine Cookson as its principal referents.

"In an area renowned for the warmth and sincerity of its hospitality ... with its outstanding coastline and beautiful beaches the area is a visual delight at any time of year. ... Families can have fun on the beach, visit one of the area's beautiful parks and see for themselves the intriguing '*Conversation Piece*' sculpture".

"Each year thousands of people follow the Cookson Trail and explore the area where Dame Catherine grew up, enjoying the scenery and settings described in her stories. The life of Catherine Cookson, ... was as dramatic as anything she depicted in her many best-selling novels. Her literary prowess and international fame has placed South Tyneside firmly on the tourism map".

Defending the idea of heritage against the core criticism that it is essentially conservative (e.g. Samuel 1994 1996) I argue that the reactionary nature of much of the heritage 'project' stems from an absence of information and access to the means of representation. This is especially evident where the history of a place, in this case industrial South Shields, is identified as it is mediated through the work of an author of fiction who bases her narrative in poverty, child abuse and doom. The caricature which this presents a different approach to the same subject, connecting with the monstrous, and the horrific. This is not the place anyone would wish to visit

for real. Deploying my questions 'by and for whom?' the correspondence between the presentation of culture in the form of theme park and the missing locus for informing narratives can be identified through its absence.

The logic which the Cookson Trail fails to acknowledge is the recent proximity of culture as a way of life which came to an end in 1993, not 1913. Somhairle Mac Gill-eain (1985) discusses the flight of romantic fictional or poetic representation as a form of escapism - Scott fled to the Highlands and the Middle Ages, distancing space and place, and Coleridge, Tennyson, Keats and the Pre-Raphaelites presented the same form of escapism because the poet found the reality of industrial capitalism so sordid that escape to the past or the exotic was necessary.

The new culture industry museology reinforces functional neo-romantic approaches. Realism as the opposite of romance, escapism, fantasy, however it is not the opposite of poetry or art or beauty. Dealing with notions about hell, I am concerned with popular perceptions of culture as they are informed by cosmologies. The underworld has a fanciful yet tangible reality in popular imagination. To what extent must we accept the barbarous 'reality' as it is afforded through culture industries mediated image: the Benetton advert claiming moral neutrality.

### **Tradition**

We become bound to a place and time through doctrines, compulsions, habits. Seamus Heaney (1987) discusses the way in which a place is known and cherished as a relationship which is lived (unconscious), or learned (conscious). The sense of place has a "religious force, especially if we think of the root of the word in



*religare*, to bind fast". A binding which transcends time and provides us with a "marvellous or a magical view of the world", offering an introduction to that past and a sense of continuity with it. This understanding of the past is necessary to read the full meaning of the landscape and flesh out the topographical record with its human accretions (p132). Places that are steeped in associations colour individual and group sensibilities; meshing the personal sense of who one is with where, and when, one is. The concepts of place, city, location, environment, architecture, region, territory is tied to identity (Soja 1994). Adaptation to environmental problems create vernacular forms which dramatise the differences inherent in the natural patterns of the land. Cultural and natural history thus combine to create visible variety (Hough 1996.36). Dennis *et al* (1956) consider how events of a particular time in history give a place its distinctive character. For them the overwhelming feature of the village is its domination by the 'spoil heap' which they also describe as a 'slag heap'. Naming the landscape in this way characterises an attitude to the landscape. These are not neutral observations. They describe a despoiled landscape.

### **Cultural regeneration**

Participation in historical understanding is an essential part of cultural reproduction. Adam notes that "[t]he past preserved in the present is the legacy of our predecessors' transcendence. The thoughts, stories, writings, sacred buildings, and art; the inventions, cosmologies, and institutions; the communication networks that now span the earth and the space surrounding it; all are monuments to past people's relations to their future"(1994.145). Suppositions about industrial working

and community life have been examined in the context of the social and cultural conditions of their reality.

Focus group respondents indicated that the contribution that the miners made to their society should not be forgotten. "A work of art or whatever, commemorating the miners has to be sophisticated". Stories themselves are a constituent component of the colliery aesthetic. "There are plenty of miners around to tell the tale". As well as the narrative itself informing memorial activity people have identified welfare and education provision as memorial. These enculturate and transcend time. Focus groups identified the telling of the story, especially that of hardship, as a means of furthering the cultural project of understanding.

Chaplin's image of the banner representing aspirations as "something to live for" also invites a series of considerations about transcending the present.

Non mining focus groups constantly returned to the image of the tin bath. To what extent might this be reinforced by the Beamish Museum brochure which identifies the region to outsiders? One take on the museum is the response of a young woman focus group respondent. "I hadn't been to Beamish since I was little, and I was there a few weeks ago, and HEY, you just wish you could move into one of them houses and just live there!"

Miners identified strongly with miners elsewhere. Les T. explained to a colliery manager that miners the world over made an extra effort to get a drink on pay day: "Something you'll find out about the mining industry Mr. Collins ... even in the



Don Valley in Russia they're running down the pit path half bathed on a Friday night trying to get an extra pint, one leg black". Mr. J. M. Amezaga, from the Asturias coal mining region, supplied this pers comm.

"In San Juan de la Arena when they put the first baths in the social flats there, the guys were keeping the coal they collected from the river to sell later, instead of bathing themselves. It must have been in the fifties or the forties because my father remembers it. It is true. I heard it on TV afterwards".

These suppositions were expressed in Gainford's attitude to sanitary facilities. This supposition recurs. Barr discussed the notion that people in mining districts had become used to dilapidation and squalor in their surroundings as a symptom of the "same middle-class philosophy which once concluded that there was no need to give the working classes baths as they'd only use them for storing coal" (1969.25). This illustrates the international nature of suppositions and the translocation of concepts. "Most of what we know, or think we know, from various visual signs is based on associations we make or have been taught to make about signs and what they signify" (Berger 1989.33). "Images are [...] connected to information, values, beliefs, attitudes, and ideas people have" (p39) and that this connection is learned, not natural. Suppositions are an obstacle to genuine enquiry.

The reality of mining and mining disasters is not a thing of the past: miners still enter and emerge from hell. This newspaper photograph of 20 August 2001 depicts the aftermath of a colliery explosion in Donetsk in which 38 men were killed. It is captioned "escape from hell" (Fig. 9:6).

### **What became of the site?**

A new use for the site was discussed in most focus groups. The future they projected was invariably bound up with industry servicing tourism. But “the jobs there aren’t going to pay nearly as well as coal mining jobs”. The site of Westoe Colliery is to be redeveloped (Porter G. and O’Brien G. [http](#)) through the

“construction of around 650 homes [sic], a school and community centre, as well as live/work units, affordable (housing association) housing units, and provision of other community facilities including doctors, dentists and other retail and small business facilities”.

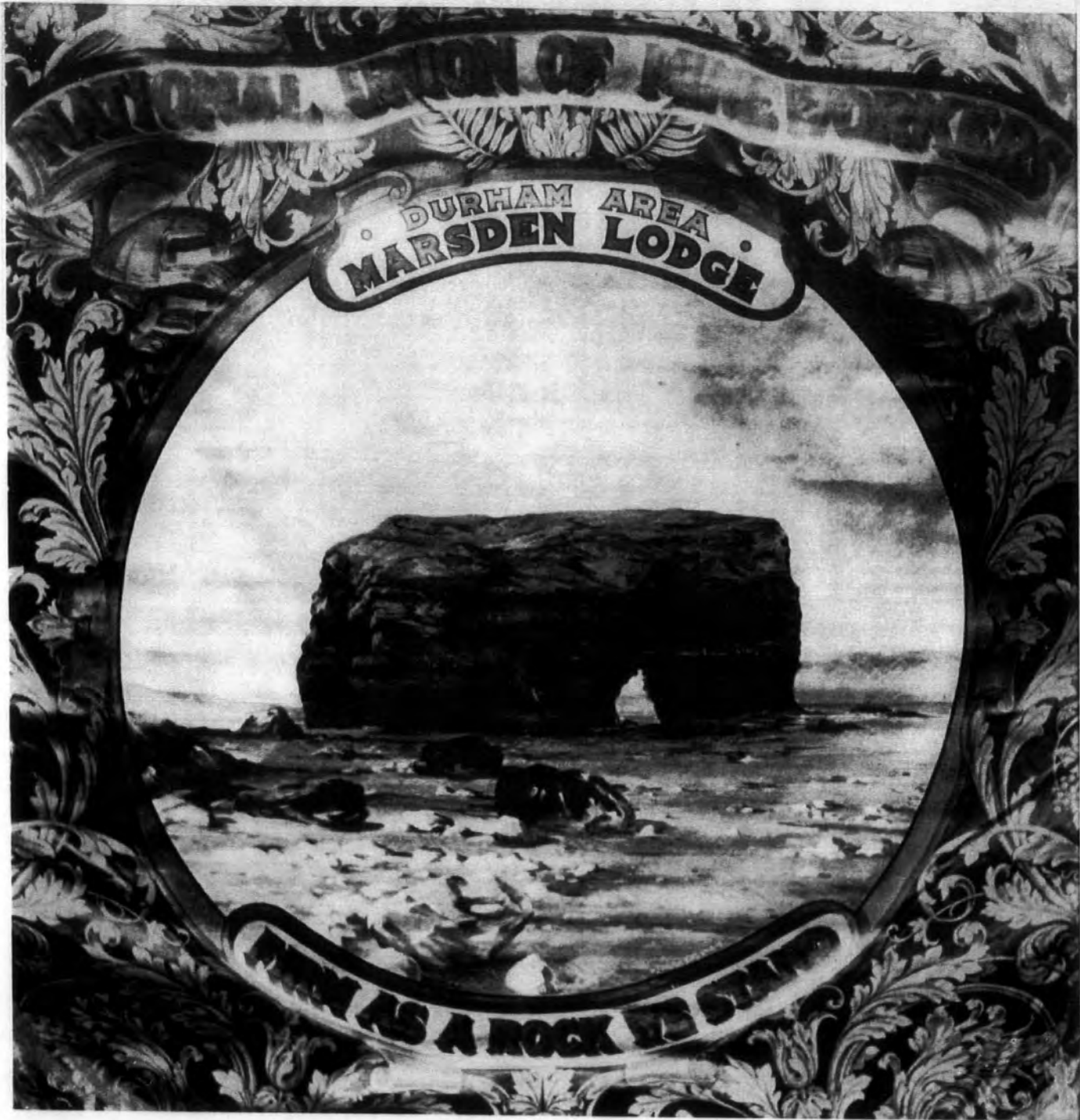
The Sustainable Cities Research Institute at University of Northumbria is working for the developer, Wimpey Homes, in evaluating the project and their approach will include the “perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders”. “The ... design includes energy efficiency, cycleways, pocket parks, art work and play areas ...”.

### **FIRM AS A ROCK WE STAND**

The collapse of part of Marsden Rock on the night of February 9th 1996 was an event in its long history. It is not the structure that it was, but it remains a rock - part gone but standing firm. (Fig. 9:7).

### **Conclusion**

I have described the distance created through conceiving a culture of way of life as something separate. At the same time culture as art becomes encumbered by the demands of its special market. I have demonstrated this through focusing on issues of reproduction in the public realm and the production of new narratives which underscore relations of systems of power which represent and reproduce culture. Moving beyond the recognition of the absence of new openings within the formal



system of cultural representation, the museum, the art gallery, and accountability of its gatekeepers are circumvented through information technologies. The artist no longer requires permission from the gatekeeper to present her work. These new openings unfold potential loci of conversation and discourse but material to inform this representation must be sought in sifting through the wreckage. In presenting a case for an appreciation of the colliery aesthetic I am able to make an argument with high cultural forms because everyday life has a greater engagement with aesthetics. Madden explains that “aesthetic experience is distinguishable from other experiences in that it is pleasant, stable, relevant, and common” (1973.203), and stresses the importance of the imagination “which is the mind considering possibilities” (developed in Arendt’s theories of ‘natalities’ etc.). In this definition the aesthetic dimension has always been an attribute of lived experience, and contributes to possibilities afforded through communication. Throughout this work a central concern is who makes what presentations for whose consumption.

Exchanging the words ‘art’ and ‘culture’ poses the question in a different way. Lewis (1990) investigated publicly funded art as it became something other than the minority pursuit that it used to be. Culture communicates, or sustains social value and meaning. All forms of public communication are modes of cultural transmission and can be allocated the same status, and hence support, as high art. High art practices have elucidated this possibility through their own colonisation of the cultural spaces occupied by low culture.

“If we propose the public funding of ‘culture’ rather than ‘art’, how on earth do we decide which cultural forms to publicly fund? We might legitimately use the

freedom of the term culture to fund people to roam around pubs and launderettes encouraging people to talk to each other". Why not? Even if this is meant rhetorically art world practices invite this way of thinking. Its values are not neutral, yet public subsidy follows private investment in supporting one form of art. In Becker's (1982) discussion art becomes art and is nurtured for its status; culture is designated by Arnold (1932.6), as "being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world". Ratified in this way the art which is held up as the most important - Harvey's image of the child murderer, Hirst's flyblown cadavers - narrows the possibility for communicative inclusion. The dumbing down of the Royal Academy is a symptom of a process which valorises specific cultural systems. Bronze *Weebles*, however seemingly innocuous, are emblems of the valorising economic hegemony through which the artworld confers monumental status. They invite questions about representations which are bound up within the contested cultural space of 'who represents what culture for whom?' As emblems of experience, which created meaning, are removed some personal, intimate experiences are reified; others are overlooked. This presents caricature and stereotype, not cultural reality. On the other hand art, in keeping with its historical prerogative, triumphant in the service of the winner, compounds alienation as it assimilates aspects of the local - local colour - under the guise of objectivity.



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## Chapter Nine

### CONCLUSION

Through this thesis I have addressed questions about culture as lived experience and how this is represented. This concluding chapter presents what this culture means to people and how the theories with which I am engaging are expressed in the realities and experiences of respondents to my research. I have attempted to examine information which this culture stores, and addressed means of interrogating it from different perspectives. I have obtained information in a deliberate yet informal way. Knowledge has been presented anecdotally.

My central concern has been with a colliery aesthetic. Much of the spoken word narrative of colliery working life informs and is informed by this aesthetic. The writer Sid Chaplin (1987.114) explained that when he began writing stories he was “going against the grain of the social mores - bucking against the system which laid down that son should follow father”, but he wrote nevertheless. Artistic representations of mining working life stand out against its traditions and is a product of dynamics at this interface. His writing was in the spirit of the narrative of everyday pit parlance. His material was gleaned from the wonderful tales told by miners working underground.

“Men would put their lamps face down in the dust and say, ‘I mind once...’ and you’d get a story. It was absolutely great. Taking my material from miners like that strengthened my resolve to be true to the spirit as well as the letter of what I was writing” (op cit. 116).

Both the attitude of his engagement and the material he engaged with are key components of this colliery aesthetic. My research has been guided by the same

imperatives as those of Chaplin. Presentation of mining working life in its own vernacular is a verbal demonstration of the colliery aesthetic.

I have tried to demonstrate the extent to which images structure popular perceptions of mining and mining communities and how these are inked with notions articulated in fiction. Mining communities are traditionally depicted as being 'close knit'. This perception is investigated from within'.

### **The structure of this chapter**

This concluding chapter moves from the presentation of focus group data, analysed in the last two chapters, to a reflection on this material as it concurs with the theories of the thesis. The first of these is concerned with high and low cultural forms. Museum, art gallery and other cultural representations are sustained through public funding. Focus groups considered the appropriate weighting to the presentation of mining and other local industrial culture in respect to public spending on public cultural forms. Respondents sought a heroic representation of miners, but wished to distance these representations from 'Stalinist' representations. What are these? With the end of industry we are witness to a liminality which is located between the past and the future. Respondents expressed a series of concerns surrounding representations of culture now and into the future. There were worries that the 'story' should be passed over and forgotten about, and proposals that the story could be used to teach young people, or as a part of tourist strategies, supposing that tourism would play a major part in the representation of the area to the outside world and effect regeneration. What strategies engage with these

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[http://www.salon.com/people/feature/2000/04/17/toscani\\_int/](http://www.salon.com/people/feature/2000/04/17/toscani_int/)

**Eighth Air Force urls:**

The 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Memorial Museum Foundation WW II weblinks.  
The 94<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group  
<http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Quarters/9758/>  
<http://freeserve.virginnet/anne.welch/favourite.htm>  
<http://www.azstarnet.com/nonprofit/8thafmmf/>

**Mining memorials urls:**

Martin A and Riverton D, Nova Scotia [www.nsi.com/~amartin](http://www.nsi.com/~amartin)  
Baillargeon A [econdev@istar.ca](mailto:econdev@istar.ca)  
Frame Fronframe@gtennet  
Black diamond Coal net  
[Http://home.earthlink.net/~bela1/mem.htm](http://home.earthlink.net/~bela1/mem.htm) Remembering  
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[Http://www.cinetworks.com/~jacobs/atusar/killed.html](http://www.cinetworks.com/~jacobs/atusar/killed.html)  
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[www.s-tyneside-abc.gov.uk](http://www.s-tyneside-abc.gov.uk)  
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[www.universalstudios.com/tv/jerryspringer/](http://www.universalstudios.com/tv/jerryspringer/)  
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Unattributed photographs are by the author.

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- 9.3 The miner Stachanov. Lebeshev. 1936. *We do like Stachanov!* Publ. Baku. Izo-Azernesr. In Bonnell 1990.
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