
Hazard Figures: Heritage, Memorial, and Wasting in Appalachia

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Abstract

At approximately 3:00 p.m. on 5 April 2010 a cloud of methane gas exploded in a mine near Montcoal, West Virginia. Twenty-five miners died instantly, and for the next five days national and international news associations tracked efforts to rescue four miners believed to have sought refuge in a nearby air pocket. It was a familiar story... heard last year in China, five years ago in Kentucky. Judging from reports of survivors and family members the miners had understood that where they live injury, asphyxiation, and death are the conditions of employment. In this article, I explore concepts of value and productivity in close thematic relationship with ideas of 'wasting': literal and metaphoric, human and environmental. Drawing from photographs and news stories, I argue that for Appalachian mining communities the wish for "contained memory" emerges within a context of uncontained toxicity and danger. A discussion of issues connecting cultural heritage sites in Appalachia with the necessity for mourning and memorial provides the backdrop for my scrutiny of these terms. Efforts to contain cultural memory in Appalachia are complicated by an *identity* of environmental and cultural degradation—the direct legacy of the coal industry and its decline. Indeed, this wasted identity persists in two of the region's "growth industries": filling un-reclaimed mine sites with garbage imported from New York and building and managing federal prison facilities. The wasting of the mine region's society and landscape is thus reified in its use as a receptacle for out-of-state "refuse".

Keywords: forgetting, waste, figure, identity, memorial

Introduction

This article explores the idea of memory as *economy*, with particular emphasis on *forgetting* as a correlate to the wasting that is endemic to any economic system. Using Sigmund Freud’s ideas regarding the individual’s psychic economy as a point of departure, I examine the range of meanings and uses of this word “economy” in the context of public memory. If public memory balances what is culturally or politically expedient now against what might return as a haunting cost later, what happens when we think about it in relation to the more familiar economic ideas of exchange and value? Specifically, I will examine the perhaps symptomatic memory economy of the Appalachian coal-mining region of the U.S., and attempt to link metaphoric and everyday ideas of value there to enactments of waste.

Figure 1. Maria McVarish. West Virginia Coal Road. 2004.



While today “economy” is most often understood as a noun for the organisation and exchange of resources (as a system or structure infinitely scaleable), its etymological root lies in the Greek word *oikos*, meaning the balanced management of a household or domestic locus. In common parlance “economy” is also a practice we resort to during hard times, the scrimping and belt-tightening we impose when our finances or systems fall out of balance.

In the context of an ongoing and more or less global recession, we know these meanings of the word “economy” almost too well. Its meanings within psychoanalytic theory, however, may be less familiar. At various times in his seminal writings, Freud explicitly characterised the mental processes as an economy of forces regulating the increase and reduction of *quantities* of “excitation”.¹ In his earlier texts, this regulation functioned between “wishes” and “prohibitions”. Later, it served in relation to the production of pleasure and

the “avoidance of unpleasure”, re-centring the psychic economy in a dynamic of countermining “drives”.²

Within Freud’s economic model of the psyche, memory provides the material for exchange between consciousness and the unconscious, remembering and forgetting. In a slightly different sense, memory also motivates what we are *able* to remember from what we would otherwise forget and, conversely, what we are able to *forget* from what we might too vividly remember.³ Memory therefore resembles an *oikos*—a locus in which various desires, rendered as “quantities”, are sized against countervailing “quantities” of exigency or risk. In other words it is a topos where energies circulate, deviate, overflow, and dissipate—aiming in the overall scheme of things for a tolerable balance.

Yet memory also complicates this analogy between an economy of psychic forces and an economy of home or market. Freud proposed that memory is not simply a tool in the service of consciousness, but a rich if ambiguous cipher for the ongoing drama of our mental regulation. Nor is memory the only record of this drama. When an inassimilable or disturbing experience *cannot* achieve the status of memory—its links with the past not yet known or knowable—it will likely be enacted (and then re-enacted) in a transmuted form.⁴ The original experience, buried in our mental archive and compelling these enactments, cannot properly be said to be forgotten since it resurfaces through repetition and displacement.⁵

Figure 2. Maria McVarish. Mine headhouse, Kaymoor, West Virginia. 2004.



Disaster loops

In the following example, I will attempt to trace one particularly charged instance of public “memory” through various forms of enactment, obfuscation, and idealisation—each being variations of the phenomena of repetition and displacement as they occur within what we might call the public psyche.

At approximately 3:00 p.m. on 5 April 2010 a cloud of methane gas exploded in an underground mine near Montcoal, West Virginia. The initial reports confirmed the death of at least 25 miners, while four more remained trapped in the mine, possibly alive. Access to the area proved unsafe in the explosion’s aftermath with loose rubble obstructing egress; rescue crews clamoured to reach the missing miners. For five days and nights the crews drilled down, and accounts of their slow progress gripped the news. Amidst hourly updates, reports emerged that the mine ownership’s parent company, Massey Energy, and the mine facility itself had been cited for multiple and repeated safety violations before the blast.⁶ When the rescuers finally located the four miners they learned that, like the 25 previously confirmed casualties, the men had died in the initial explosion.

Taking note of the level of interest generated by this story, the media turned its attention from sustaining hope to portraying the grief of the miners’ families. A memorial service was planned; both President Obama and Vice President Joseph Biden would speak there, with Obama delivering the eulogy. Still more news stories emerged after the memorial service, exposing lax regulation of the mining industry at both state and federal levels and the U.S. government’s failure, particularly under the Bush administration, to follow through on mine inspections let alone enforce penalties for known infractions.⁷

Massey Energy was reported in this context to be one of the nation’s most profitable mining companies, clearing \$104 million in 2009 alone (a year during which Republican senators had blocked incoming president Obama’s appointment of a new Mine Safety and Health Administration director).^{8,9}

Figure 3. Rob Dinsmore, Project Designer, Chapman Technical Group. Upper Big Branch Miners Memorial. 2011.



As the tragedy unfolded on the news, I tried to remember the last time I had heard this narrative of underground explosion with trapped miners before. Failing to recall the specifics, I resorted to Google and was able to revive the chronicle of events in Sago, Kentucky in January 2006. My haunted feeling did not subside, however, with this confirmation as I felt I had heard some variation of the story since then. A further Google search indicated that in the last 10 years there have been scores of large-scale mining disasters in China alone—thousands dead with few survivors—and many more in other parts of the world.¹⁰

In the year since the Montcoal explosion, large-scale mining disasters have taken place again in China, Russia, Colombia, Chile, and New Zealand. The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) defines “disaster” as an incident in which at least five people are killed. Internationally dozens, if not hundreds, of fatalities from mining accidents occur monthly without entering public awareness because they fall below this threshold. For instance, since April 2010 there have been at least as many known deaths collectively in American coalmines as there were in the Montcoal disaster.¹¹

The story seems to repeat itself at nearly regular intervals—both within my country and in coalmines around the world—and I am interested in how it appears to fascinate the public anew each time. A lulling ignorance contributes to this cycle of forgetfulness and re-fascination. It is as if the general public cannot *think* the underground cavities of the mines—the spaces themselves—let alone imagine the work that takes place in them. The darkness, the shifting limits, and the interiority of the underground mines come to stand in for the un-image-able edges of popular consciousness. Ultimately they carve an absence within our national memory. In turn, they may contribute to government agencies’ lax enforcement of safety requirements and, likewise, to mine companies’ lack of strict and consistent precautions against accident.

A political economy of memory

A striking quality to the repeating disaster stories is the extent to which both miners and non-miners (including the highest level of federal leadership) seem to understand and accept the risks of mining.¹² It is as if the necessity for coal were beyond scrutiny, an issue of national security and economic vitality, and as if its dangers were inevitable.¹³ Subtending this lies the problem that for miners the perils experienced underground are the conditions not only of employment but of cultural relevance and value. Forgetfulness shrouds the hazards which underwrite our consumption of “cheap” fuel. Thanks to miners, we do not have to know the dangers and costs of our vast and growing need for “affordable” and “independent” energy.¹⁴

In what ways does this national memory problem complicate the mining community’s sense of its heritage and its grief—its regional memory? Historical

monuments pay tribute to the generations of miners who have given their lives to “fuel America’s great Industrial Revolution”—or in more contemporary terms to fuel “our way of life”.^{15,16} However this image of the heroic miner implicitly belies an otherwise conspicuous wasting of the region’s individual, cultural, and environmental resources.¹⁷

Figure 4. Kim I. Hartman. Coal Miner Memorial Statue at the Capitol Building, Charleston, West Virginia. 2010.



The miners’ social value appears irreconcilably ambiguous as two kinds of “economies” diverge around their work. Within the short-term memory economy of the public they are heroic figures; within the scrimping economy of fuel prices they are evidently disposable.

Figure 5. Maria McVarish. Near Fayette, West Virginia. 2004.



In Marxian terms, the economy enjoyed by a company like Massey Energy is predicated on an outbound spiral of surplus value (witness this company's profit in the year before the Montcoal explosion), while the economy experienced by miners is an ever-closing and sometimes surpassing loop of costs.¹⁸

Figure 6. People Incorporated of Virginia. Miner's Pay Sheet. 1938.

CLINCHFIELD COAL CORPORATION			
Transfer No.	House No.		
Period ended on date shown by P-R No.			
EARNINGS			
xx	Tons Coal @		
	Tons Coal @		
	Tons Coal @		
	Cars Slate @		
	Yardage @		
	21 Hrs. Labor @ 80		16 80
	Hrs. Labor @		
	Hrs. Labor @		
	Extra Compensation		
	TOTAL GROSS EARNINGS		16 80
	NET EARNINGS		
	Cash Credit		
	TOTAL CREDIT		
DEDUCTIONS			
	Rent		
	Lights		
	Smithing		
	Doctor	10	
	Benef. Ass'n. Dues	60	
IEE	Insurance	2	
Account	Overdraft		
	Installment A/c		
	Emp. Ass'n. Dues	20	
	Baseball		
	Heat	140	
	TOTAL		8 78
	Ledger A/c		
	Mdse. Orders		
	Coal		
	Board		
	Cash		
	Credit Checks	3	
	Checkweighman		
	Federal P R Tax	17	
	TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	xxxx	8 02
	BAL. DUE EMPLOYEE	xxxx	xxx
	BAL. DUE CORPORATION		xxxxx xxx

Courtesy of Louise Johnson Fields.

This corresponds roughly to what Marx might call the spoliation¹⁹ of labour (meaning labour's incremental and corporeal loss during the production of surplus value).²⁰ What I am particularly interested in is the notion of entropy in this spoliation process.²¹ In other words, I am interested in conceiving of the loss or wastage that is intrinsic to the coal company's system of production²² and the visible, physical and human ways in which the system's accumulation of loss becomes manifest.

The entropy of coal mining, the other side of the company's production and export of value, is evident in the environments the industry has ravaged

and equally in the deaths, physical health problems, and social costs borne by the mining communities directly. We must measure the economic and social containment of miners against the enduringly uncontained toxicity of their environment, and the evidently unmanageable occupational hazards that contribute to their social value.

Figure 7. Maria McVarish.
Creek near Montcoal, West
Virginia. 2007.



Cultural entropy

From a memory perspective, there is a problem of temporal containment as well. Just as the environmental effects of this entropy are not limited to the periods of active mining, we can see their persistence at the level of the coal region’s cultural identity. Since the underground mining industry’s virtual dissolution in the last few decades (very large underground mining companies like Massey Energy aside), its legacy of wasting has surfaced like toxic sludge in some of the region’s recent “growth industries”. These include filling un-reclaimed mine sites with garbage imported from New York and building and managing federal prison facilities.^{23,24} The wasting of the mine region’s society and landscape is reified in its use as a receptacle for different forms of imported “refuse”.

I want to be very clear that this economic by-product—of degradation or waste—is not necessarily internalised by miners. If anything, miners show a fierce pride in their work and align themselves with the image of heroic figures who makes sacrifices for others. Wasting is therefore more of a regional “identity”²⁵ in the Lacanian²⁶ sense of an image-based (or image-oriented) unity of associated signifiers (an idea I will develop below). If we can locate it at all, the identity resides in a more broadly popular unconscious.

Mining figures

Figure 8. Maria McVarish.
Sign near Bobtown,
Pennsylvania. 2007.



This distinction—between a *figure* and an *identity*—is of crucial importance to understanding something of the means by which ideas of social value are transmitted *between* individuals who, while sharing a certain level of experience or belief through their identification with a figure, co-exist in quite different economic circuits. This, in turn, can result in divergences in their “memories”, or in their relationships to what can be remembered and what must be forgotten. A figure is not a person, but a kind of three-dimensional image produced culturally by various modalities of discourse, but equally by the “needs”, stories, and myths that belie cultural operations.

Figures serve socially prescribed *functions*. It is for this reason that we may think critically and politically *through* figures when we interrogate cultural operations that appear “natural”. To think through the figure of the miner, we must examine the ‘ground’ against which he is seen (in the “figure/ground” parlance of conventional pictorial analysis).²⁷ The movements and specific efforts of the miner-figure’s labour process, the technologies that engage and support this

process, the network of other working and consuming figures linked to him, and the environment in which he works all constitute the miner's ground. All of these factors contribute to the idea and role of the figure the miner cuts.

If a *figure* is produced within and operates at a purely social level, an *identity* by contrast works on two planes. It links individuals to society as a whole, often *through* identification with a socially understood figure. It also aligns individuals to other individuals (particular people) and to specific places.

Figure 9. George Bragg Collection. Miners walking to work in Glen Jean. 1900.



In the monuments to martyred miners the miner-figure is often imagined in isolation; culturally-produced figures, while conceptually set-off by a ground (or setting), are in practice severable from the specifics of that ground (identities are not).

Figures are therefore a social means of inscribing individuals with culturally *shared* symbolic meanings, phantasies, and demands and they exclude some attributes or associations in favour of others. The overlooked or excluded parts are real, however, and for as long as what is positively delineated by a figure is socially affirmed the rest—the parts that do not fit which I am calling the waste—will accumulate elsewhere in quantity and form. Like traumatic experiences that, while not ‘remembered’ cannot yet be said to be forgotten, these unassimilated and abjected aspects (in this case of mining) find expression repeatedly in displaced ways.

In the example explored here the miner as a body and as a real person is marked by a socially disavowed identity, the by-product of his status as a working figure in the split (company/miner) economies of mining. As an instrument of the

coal company, the miner is implicated in the toxicity, degradation, and corruption generated by coal extraction. Although the wasting of the mining landscape is explicitly disavowed by mining companies (and all too often by government agencies and the general public), those who live or work in the vicinity of coal mines, even abandoned ones, are statistically more likely to develop life-threatening or chronic health conditions.²⁸

The disproportionate incidence of health problems amongst miners is the consequence of environmental toxins, inadequate healthcare, drug and substance addiction, and poor education outside the mine shafts as much as it is a result of their exposure to dangers within the mines. Rates of systemic political and judicial corruption are also notably higher in coal mining areas.²⁹ These entropic facets of the coal economy are alternately conspicuous and subtle. As the backdrop to their daily life they contiguously link the *real* miners, as distinct from the *heroic* figures, to the waste produced by coal mining.

Figure 10. Maria McVarish. Huber Breaker near Ashley, Pennsylvania. 2007.



Memory markers

The preceding discussion of the social function of figures and identities bears relevance to James E. Young's lengthy apologia for the necessity of figuration in what he calls countermemorials.³⁰ As he concedes, people need an identificatory entry point to public memory and a means by which to understand their own relationship to the loss memorialised.³¹ This is especially true when the people who have died, the environment that has been disfigured, and the community that has been abjected exist outside of one's direct experience.

As already implied, figures may play an important role in affording us, as individuals, a means for understanding and laying claim to social value (in the sense of worth), meaning, and relevance. Produced culturally, shaped by palpable forces within specific economies and marked out through embodied practices, they leave traces in the environments they create.³² Figures may be conjured by their *grounds* or places and particularly through a perception of the *absence* these grounds still evoke.³³

Figure 11. Maria McVarish. Company town now covered in kudzu, Kaymoor, West Virginia. 2004.



Abandoned work sites of the underground mining industry tell stories explicitly within a language of presence and absence, memory, and loss. The visible, above-ground mining buildings describe their use, material history, and position in the progress of technology. They show us how work was done—from the large scale of labour organisation and differentiation all the way down to the specific movements, actions, efforts, and appendages of individual miners. They evoke the real bodies that worked in them, just as they record the specific ingenuity and effort these workers expended. All of which argues strongly for the preservation of what remains of underground coal mining facilities as *countermonuments*, with special emphasis on the critical curation of the meanings and causes for what remains and what is gone.

Figure 12. Laura Hartman. window repair at miner's outbuilding, Eckley Village, Pennsylvania. 2005.



Young reminds us that public memory must be selected, organised, and interpreted whenever it is given form. In Appalachia, the very question of giving memorial or monumental form to a contested heritage/memory may itself serve to focus the mining communities, and even outside stakeholders, on the complications involved in their ambivalent or polyvalent histories.³⁴ Memory sites in these mining areas must serve disparate and possibly competing interests: government, industry, national consumers, tourists, local communities, and (not least) the survivors and heirs of those lost or injured in the mines.

Figure 13. Maria McVarish. Mine conveyor, Nuttallburg, West Virginia. 2006.



The preservation and curation of surviving mine structures would provide an alternative to the kinds of demurring and understated yet glorifying monuments to the miner’s “sacrifice” referred to earlier. The buildings offer no easy containment to the work, meaning, history, and loss of value borne disproportionately by mining communities. Certainly, in the hands of the wrong curators, they may be prone to the same “forgetful” and disingenuous glossing over of social tensions and conflicts that existing memorials to miners exemplify. But such glossing is less tenable when the marker comes with its own palpable and perceptible connection with the history in question. The structures do not cease to evoke the expenditures of real people, the losses, and wasting that paralleled the growth and glory of the underground coal mining industry.

The layers of materiality, technological innovation, use history, and bricolage still evident in surviving structures have the potential to convey the rich and contradictory effects of the industry’s history here. These places act not as unifying vehicles for pat identifications, but in the spirit of James Young’s countermonuments. The buildings continue to confront their visitors with the figure of the miner—one whose constitution implicates all of us. The enduring production of this figure is contrasted by the absence of real people to serve the functions it prescribes. This absence of the particular person may in turn serve as a vehicle precisely for the re-membering of what has been paid or lost here, and the working-through of meanings that build and bind communities.

Figure 14. Maria McVarish.
Miners’ changing room,
Bobtown, Pennsylvania. 2007.



Endnotes

¹Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton Inc, 1961), 1.

²Freud uses the terms “wishes” and “prohibitions” in his first major published works. See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1968). See also Chapters III and IV in Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* for examples of his later terminology of drives and the “avoidance of unpleasure”.

³“In the unconscious nothing can be brought to an end, nothing is past or forgotten ... For the fading of memories and the emotional weakness of impressions which are no longer recent, which we are inclined to regard as self-evident ... are in reality... brought about by laborious work” in Freud, *Dreams*, 617.

⁴Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 12.

⁵This is the fundamental theory behind effects of traumatic memory. See, for example, Francoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudilliere, *History Beyond Trauma* (New York: Other Press, 2004).

⁶See http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/06/west-virginia-mine-explos_n_526810.html accessed April 25, 2010.

⁷See <http://blog.aflcio.org/2010/06/28/mine-blast-probe-moves-forward-massey-energy-sues-msha-over-ventilation-rules/> accessed July 6, 2010.

⁸See <http://www.richmondbizsense.com/2010/04/08/massey-energy-in-the-hot-seat/> accessed October 17, 2010 and <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/apr/07/nation/la-na-massey7-2010apr07> accessed October 17, 2010.

⁹See <http://blog.aflcio.org/2010/06/28/mine-blast-probe-moves-forward-massey-energy-sues-msha-over-ventilation-rules/> accessed July 6, 2010.

¹⁰See <http://www.usmra.com/china/disasterwatch/> accessed July 13, 2011.

¹¹See <http://www.msha.gov/accinj/accinj.htm> accessed October 17, 2011.

¹²See for example <http://www.register-herald.com/disaster/x1687712334/-Dad-died-doing-what-he-loved> accessed April 25, 2010 and http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2010-04-25-miners_N.htm accessed October 17, 2011.

¹³Yet, according to a Preliminary Report issued by the MSHA, “When methane and coal dust levels are controlled, explosions from these sources can be prevented. Explosions in coal mines are preventable.” See http://www.msha.gov/PerformanceCoal/DOL-MSHA_president_Report.pdf accessed October 17, 2011.

¹⁴At the consumer end, coal was used as a fuel and heat source both domestically and industrially, particularly in the steel industry, beginning with its first extraction and continuing through World War II. Since then, it has become America’s primary source of electricity.

¹⁵See <http://www.angelfire.com/pa3/statue/> accessed September 2, 2010.

¹⁶This unquestioning attitude (that coal is necessary to our way of life) may be found, for example, in <http://news.discovery.com/earth/what-caused-the-deadly-coal-mine-explosion-in-west-virginia.html> accessed October 17, 2011.

¹⁷For more on the correlations between the coal industry and the systemic social, infrastructural, juridical, and environmental problems evidenced in coal mining areas see John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence & Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982) and Ronald D. Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

¹⁸“A miner’s wages depended upon how much coal he could harvest daily from the mine, but management’s expectations differed sharply from the realities experienced by laboring miners. In 1888, an anthracite miner could generally fill two carts of coal each day. Average daily earnings across forty-five anthracite mines varied from \$1.31 to \$4.08, with the bulk of men earning between \$2.00 and \$3.50. In that same year, however, Eckley Coxe testified that the Coxe company assumed that a miner produced five carloads each day, at 87 cents/load. Eckley calculated that, from the resulting \$4.35, a miner could pay his assistant \$1.80, plus a portion of various local and school taxes amounting to about \$3.90/year. Coxe miners were then docked at the breaker for the amount of slate mixed with each cartload, and in addition, miners were charged for their own ‘powder and oil, blasting barrel, cotton, and squib’”, <http://www.hsp.org/default.aspx?id=506> accessed July, 13 2011.

¹⁹Karl Marx, “The Limits of the Working Day” in Section 1 of Chapter 10, *Capital, Volume One*, accessed October 17, 2011, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch10.htm>: “By an unlimited extension of the working-day, you may in one day use up a quantity of labour-power greater than I can restore in three. What you gain in labour I lose in substance. The use of my labour-power and the spoliation of it are quite different things.”

²⁰“(S)urplus value, that part of the value of the results of human labour which accrues beyond the amount needed to reproduce the initial labour power.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed October 17, 2011, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.cca.edu/view/Entry/194992?redirectedFrom=surplus%20value#eid19788289>

²¹I am borrowing something of the sense that Jacques Lacan lends this term in his seventeenth seminar: Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XVII*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

²²If we think of the coal company as a production circuit in which, following the logic of basic thermodynamics, the energy consumed in the mining and distribution process is conserved elsewhere, at least at a numeric level, we know that the law of entropy will modify this equation by a measure of loss. “Loss” in this context means that (energy) which is dissipated, absorbed or emitted along the way and is thus not available to re-enter the system or circuit.

²³See <http://hamptonroads.com/2011/06/trash-imports-virginia-increase-report-says> accessed October 17, 2011.

²⁴See http://articles.philly.com/2010-06-27/news/24965186_1_state-prison-populations-inmate-population-prison-costs accessed July 6, 2010.

²⁵Identity (noun) “1. a. The quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed October 17, 2011, http://0-dictionary.oed.com.library.cca.edu:80/cgi/entry/50111220?query_type=word&queryword=identity&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1&search_id=qCDn-HpnwBU-8960&hilite=50111220

²⁶“Lacan places a special emphasis on the role of the image, defining identification as ‘the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image’... To ‘assume’ an image is to recognise oneself in the image, and to appropriate the image as oneself.” Dylan Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 81. I am implicitly including symbolic aspects of the environment in Lacan’s “image”. At this symbolic level, the identification is with the signifier “waste”.

²⁷In the U.S., the coal mining work force is 94% male. See <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat18.pdf> accessed October 17, 2011. In Appalachia, the miner is, almost without exception, figured as male in memorials commemorating mining disasters.

²⁸See <http://www.dailyyonder.com/poverty-worsens-appalachia-so-do-drug-abuse-and-depression> accessed November 5, 2010; <http://www.drugfree.org/join-together/addiction/appalachia-besieged-by> accessed November 20, 2010; <http://www.mountainpeeksmag.com/salobstudy.htm> accessed November 5, 2010; <http://www.dailyyonder.com/what-happens-when-you-dont-own-land/2009/07/03/2205> accessed November 5, 2010; and <http://appalshop.org/ami/issues.htm> accessed April 25, 2010.

²⁹Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*. See also <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/ConductUnbecoming/story?id=6998390&page=1> accessed April 25, 2010.

³⁰James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993), 6-15.

³¹“It is as if figurative sculpture were needed to engage viewers with likenesses of people, to evoke an empathic link between viewer and monument that might then be marshaled into particular meaning.” Young, *Texture of Memory*, 10.

³²In 2007, I visited the Upper Big Branch Mine during the course of a research project I had been conducting with a colleague and fellow architect, Laura Hartman. Over the last seven years, we have been looking at and engaging with coal mining structures in the Appalachian mountain areas of the north-eastern U.S., approaching the structures directly and documenting or re-envisioning them through photography and video. In our work, the photograph has provided a surface, or place, for binding memories—our own and the mining communities’—in the visible. I use the term “memory image” as an extension of Walter Benjamin’s “dialectical image” to delineate a temporal plane which links meaning between past wishes and present “dangers”. See Walter Benjamin, “Convolute N – On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress,” in *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 456-88.

³³As an architect and visual researcher, I am particularly interested in the role that places, memory sites and images may play in shaping the memory-work of a community (or a “public”). My research trips to the Appalachian underground mine regions have afforded me the opportunity to document a range of mine sites, and made me aware of the very rapid pace at which above-ground (visible) reminders of the industry’s heyday are being destroyed and removed. This active erasure and forgetting has its origins in what I am calling the political economy of public memory. The coal economy is founded on non-homogenous and divergent financial *and* memory economies. This has had an insidious effect when it comes to public consensus about (let alone funding for) heritage, preservation, and memorial projects.

³⁴For a good example of one community’s efforts in navigating these disparate interests (to date only modestly successful), see <http://citizensvoice.com/news/huber-breaker-preservation-society-has-plans-for-park-1.604113> accessed July 6, 2010 and “Huber Happenings – The Newsletter of the Huber Breaker Preservation Society,” 1(1): March 2002 <http://huberbreaker.org/home/?p=95> accessed April 25, 2010.

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Biographical note

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