THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ARTISTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF FORMER COAL AND STEEL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

The former industrial heartland of South Wales is a complex mix of urban and rural morphology with a long history of male-oriented employment in the heavy industries of coal and steel. Now, in a post-industrial era, pernicious literary and media representations position the area as suffering from multiple deprivations leading to a pervasive territorial stigmatisation. As my original contribution to research, this thesis explores the nature of community and sense of place to show through arts-based methodologies that people have a rooted connection to their home that can be conceptualised through Raymond Williams' 'structure of feeling'. The work has allowed for a re-appropriation of spaces sometimes regarded as 'Other', placing them unequivocally in the centre rather than on the periphery. Working through a range of qualitative approaches including group encounters, walking tours and co-produced writing and photography activities, the research shows that there is a positive desire to assert that these communities have much to contribute and to challenge negative representations. The project examines the notion of homeland as expressed through the Welsh term *hiraeth*, reflecting Pearson and Shank's assertion that the language of the Welsh landscape is 'folded in the land'. Homeland is also explored through a writing model which addresses notions of belonging and dislocation from place. The work produced speaks to themes of nostalgia and remembering but also articulates a way to come to terms with the reality of life in a post-industrial environment. Drawing on the complex social and cultural histories of the area, the work moves through time, space and place to provide a platform for feelings and emotions that are expressed through poems, prose and pictures. These artistic representations carry an intimation of a utopian vision of communities which is conflated with an ontology of the 'not yet', in which traces of the future can be located in remnants of the past. The temporal shifts in narrative contribute to this perception of a world that moves between past, present and future in an interplay of affect and agency. Through explorations of inter-generationality, the research also shows the level of help organised through ad hoc, familial networks that contributes to the development of social and cultural capital.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 A land of contrasts

'Vanished tricks of dust and light, tapping like snowflakes at the lids of the living': These words were penned by Swansea poet Nigel Jenkins for the National Garden Festival of Wales held on the site of the former Ebbw Vale steelworks in the summer of 1993, and are a reminder that even in a post-industrial landscape the memories of the immediate past are ever present.

It is this knowledge of what has gone before that fascinates and intrigues, and as Connerton (1989, pg. 2) notes, the way people experience the present is predicated on their knowledge of the past. The former industrial powerhouse of South Wales has seen far-reaching and dramatic changes in just a few generations - ex-coal mining and steelworking areas now face particular challenges, not least the often negative representations that have emerged through literature and the media.

This study examines arts projects in the area of Merthyr which have aimed to counter such negative constructions through work which speaks to themes of loss and regret but also articulate the lived experience in a post-industrial environment.

South Wales is a land of contrasts – a place of great pastoral beauty before the Industrial Revolution spread through the narrow valleys, but as Tyneside folksinger Billy Mitchell notes of the coal industry (2005) 'two hundred years and now it's ended' and the land has regained a sylvan beauty. Rivers once again run clear, forests are replanted and the scars of industry cleared away, apart from some prominent open-cast mining operations, and some feel the future of the area could increasingly be linked to tourism. However, this may be an inadequate replacement for the now-vanished high-skill industries which once dominated the area. But even at the height of the Industrial Revolution there were always hills and open countryside to escape to, easily accessible, as now, from the towns and villages that spread through the region.

However, the social history of these settlements makes for difficult reading. In the Bradshaw railway guide of 1861, conditions in the ironworking town of Merthyr were considered so bad that it was suggested that something had to be done for the inhabitants. Bradshaw writes of the 'uncommonly striking effect of the glare from the furnaces at night and suggests that the town is best visited at night for by day it would be found to be dirty and 'irregularly built'. 'Cholera and fever are, of course, at

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home here, in scenes which would shock even the most "eminent defender of the filth", and which should imperatively demand that their Lady owner (Charlotte Guest) should become one of "the Nightingale sisterhood" for a brief space of time' (2014 [1861], pg. 46). Bradshaw remarked on the high level of illiteracy and added, 'We do hope that proper measures will be taken henceforth by those who draw enormous wealth from working these works, to improve the condition of the people' - a remarkable polemic from a mid-Victorian.

The overwhelming changes that overtook the town of Merthyr with the coming of the Industrial Revolution saw a small farming village transformed into a multi-cultural melting pot as people from all over Wales, England, Ireland, Spain and Italy flocked to the new iron-making industries. The region is also home to a coal mining industry that spread through the valleys of the area – an output of 'black gold' that flowed down the canals and railway lines to the ports of Cardiff and Barry and away to power the Victorian world of steamships and railways.

Also out of the area has come a bitter history of industrial conflict – from the Merthyr Rising of 1831, which saw the birth of the Red Flag, to the pit and ironworks disputes of the late 19th Century and through the 20th Century. A heavy price has also been paid through loss of life in pit disasters and foundry explosions. Perhaps the most poignant of all was the Aberfan disaster on October 21, 1966, when a tip above the village gave way and a torrent of slurry poured down the hillside engulfing the local primary school and nearby houses. In total, 116 children and 28 adults died.

However, the area has also seen remarkable developments in education, the growth of the Workers' Educational Association and development of miners' institutes, miners helping their own through a development of cultural capital which has produced generations of autodidacts who have made far-reaching contributions through politics and literary and artistic endeavours. As Rose (2001, pg. 7) comments, 'no disenfranchised people could be emancipated unless they create an autonomous intellectual life'. The development of the miners' institutes became 'one of the greatest networks of cultural institutions created by working people anywhere in the world' (Rose, 2001, pg. 237). While there were similar institutions in all the coal regions, Rose considers there was a special interest in self- improvement in South Wales based on what he described as the 'peculiar cultural environment' of the region - the long tradition of weaver-poets, artisan balladeers and autodidact

shepherds, and the drive for education emanating from Sunday Schools, temperance groups and the eisteddfodau or singing festivals (2001, pg. 238).

I am highlighting aspects of the history of the area because I consider that many of the characteristics of people and place today are rooted in a submerged sense of history, what Gordon (2008) has referred to as 'social haunting'. This is a place where history is always there below the surface although the memories of the past can sometimes surface in unexpected ways. As Lowenthal notes, 'The past is integral to our sense of identity – the sureness of I was is a necessary component of the sureness of I am' (1985, pg. 41), and Anderson (2010, pg. 47) contends that although places change, connections to the past are still tangible. Places do not necessarily evolve in a linear fashion from past to future, but meanings can disappear or reappear as cultural activity impinges on them. Baroness Kay Andrews in her report on *Culture and Poverty in Wales* (2014, pg. 49) warns that in a post-industrial and modernist milieu children are losing contact with the history of their communities, but at the same time they have inherited the collective memory of the places and buildings that make up their heritage. Social memory is a way of expressing the connection between community and the landscape (Degnen, 2005). Gordon (2008, pg. xvi) suggests that 'social haunting' reflects the harm or loss arising from social violence and is a way in which modern power systems impact on everyday life. She considers that social ghosts are 'haunting reminders of lingering trouble' and an indicator that something that has been hidden is still very much in the forefront of experience (Gordon, 2008, pg. xix).

Heavy industry in the area is now a memory, the high-status, highly-skilled occupations of steelworker and miner have been replaced by a plethora of low-skilled, zero hours contract work, part-time patterns of working and, inevitably, unemployment. Bright (2015, pg. 3) suggests that social haunting happens where there's been repression or societal problems and, therefore, the past impacts on the present in ways that aren't necessarily visible. He notes that social haunting is present in all sorts of ways – in the landscape with roads that go nowhere, in former pit sites now grassed over and described as 'country parks', and in call centres named after former collieries where zero hours contracts contrast with high pit wages (2015, pg. 2).

1.1.1 'Complex personhood'
I have had a lifetime's association with the communities of South Wales, through growing up in communities on the outskirts of Swansea, working as a journalist in

Swansea, Merthyr and Cardiff, and subsequently a teacher and also as a musician closely involved with the folk music of the country. Given this background, I was delighted to secure a PhD studentship to explore the complex interplay between literary and artistic representations and the meaning-making representations that communities could utilise in order to find their 'voice'. This project was envisaged as an examination of the contemporary social significance of artistic representations of former coal and steel communities and while the design of the thesis evolved through early discussions and my eventual choice of research methods, nevertheless, the research questions had already been devised by the project team who applied for Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funding for the work, rather than emerging through an initial reading of the research literature in the field. These questions provided a framework for interpretation as the research progressed through a cross-disciplinary approach that while having a sociological basis nevertheless also involved a focus on the arts through an examination of the literature on industrial communities and the subsequent creation of a body of artistic work encompassing literary and visual representations. Indeed, the industrial literature became a key part of the research and was also instrumental in acting as a catalyst for the creative writing that would subsequently be generated.

My epistemological position informed my subsequent academic trajectory for which this PhD thesis has provided the opportunity to articulate my understanding of the nature of community representations. Accordingly, the development of the project has been predicated on my personal history, informing the way the projects were set up and the interpretive approach I employed to the storying of the data that were subsequently collected. Having family from the Eastern Valleys, I have always been aware of the impact of the coal and steel industries on the lives of people in these communities. I have also experienced the networks of family and community life in the Valleys and through working as a newspaper journalist I have gained an insight into these communities through covering stories that reflect the lived experience. I have seen the transformation of the Valleys from working communities to post-industrial malaise and was working in South Wales through the period of the 1984/85 miners' strike so am acutely aware of the divisions and ruptures caused by this divisive dispute. However, I am also aware of the networks and bonds that arose from the dispute, particularly the growth of women's support groups and the realignment of traditional gendered roles as changes in employment patterns have taken effect.

In order to understand the way representations of these communities are constructed I would argue that it is necessary to explore concepts of belonging, sense of place and identity. McMillan (2017) argues that there is a universal wish not to be forgotten. For people who live in an area that is the focus of disparaging and denigratory comments, remaining attached to your cultural fabric becomes more important. 'It's your past and blueprint for how you'll survive, remember and move forward,' he says.

This study makes a plea for the personal: that the hegemonic constructions of community should be set aside in a bid to counter the 'Othering' of groups perceived as 'impoverished', 'unemployed' or 'excluded' and they are allowed to speak for themselves. As Gordon (2008, pg. 4) suggests, even people living in the most difficult conditions possess a complex and sometimes contradictory humanity that cannot be envisaged if they are regarded as either victims or 'superhuman agents'. She conceptualises individuality as 'complex personhood' which means that even those described as 'Other' are never that but a complex mix of contradictions and transformations (2008, pg. 4). Complex personhood is about conferring respect by acknowledging that life and people's lives are both straightforward and enormously subtle (2008, pg. 5).

1.1.2 The new risks

Beck (1992, pg. 19) suggests that Western industrial society is being replaced by a modernity which forces people to negotiate a new range of risks in terms of their representation. In advanced modernity, the social production of wealth is systematically followed by the social production of risk. Beck (1992, pg. 21) argues that the risks negotiated in earlier centuries were visible and perceptible to the senses but today's risks, such as toxins in food and nuclear developments, are hidden from view. In a risk society, unknown and unintended consequences become a dominant force (Beck, 1992, pg. 22). In addition, Mannay (2016b, pg. 9) argues that an increase in social polarisation in Wales has made it progressively harder for working-class people to achieve success in the labour market and this situation finds its roots in an education system which denies social mobility to the children from poorer families. Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of social and cultural capital have meant that children from middle-class families are more likely to succeed, she argues. However, in the seminal sociological study of the miners' existence *Coal is our Life,* Dennis *et al* (1969, pg. 9) say they do not lament the decline of a 'dangerous and health destroying industry', describing the eradication of hard manual labour as a 'step along the path to human freedom' but the eradication

of the mining industry has left communities devastated. Dennis *et al* warned that the result of the abolition of mining would be a group of socially isolated and culturally condemned people (1969, pg. 10) and this is precisely the point made by later commentators (Warwick and Littlejohn, 1992, Dicks, 2000) that the collapse of the mining and steel industries has left a social vacuum in which the inhabitants of former industrial towns and villages struggle to realign themselves.

However, Charles and Davies (2005, pg. 681) assert that in South Wales there are close-knit populations boosted by a shared notion of 'Welshness'. Communities based on close-knit networks of kin also show a particular resilience which Charles and Davies suggest may explain the cultural and political strengths of community in Wales (2005, pg. 687). It is suggested that in Merthyr, the polyglot origins of the town create a sense of shared community that encompasses a diverse range of peoples. English, Spanish and Italians who flooded into the area in the 19th Century have stayed and are now absorbed into the Welsh community, which is now experiencing a new wave of immigration – from Poland and other East European countries. As Phillipson (2012, pgs. 544 and 547) argues, communities are changing, connecting and disconnecting in different ways but identity is often constructed within specified areas and for some groups, neighbourhood attachment is a vital aspect of quality of life.

1.1.3 'Land of the working class'
Representations of South Wales can be linked to Shield's (1991, pg. 213) concept of 'Northerness' which positions areas remote from the economic powerhouse of London as a 'land of the working class' with a wild landscape of moors and hills. In Shield's 1991 work, *Places on the Margin*, a map showing the extent of the British 'North', stretches diagonally from just south of Birmingham and includes the whole of Wales. South Wales' industrial heritage also connects it to this definition of 'Northerness'.

Shields suggests that such north/south themes reflect accepted value systems purveyed by the privileged and reinforced through the teaching of literature and poetry. Dicks (2000, pg. 114) suggests negative portrayals arise out of metropolitan-centred myths which caricature Valleys people as 'backward', part of a 'deprived community' discourse. Information can be manipulated, and political bias expressed through different media outlets, and the inhabitants of the South Wales Valleys have been depicted as victims through an entrenched attitude that seeks to categorise the area through stereotypes of decay, deprivation and post-industrial malaise

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(Thomas, 2016). This can be seen as a way of justifying policies that require scapegoats, of 'Othering' communities, and ignores the rich vein of individuality in these communities and their efforts to tell their stories in a way that runs counter to perceived images. Osmond (2008, pg. ix) suggests that communities in South Wales have been abandoned to face the effects of post-industrialisation 'with less consideration for their needs than that given to the natural world that surrounds them'. He suggests that the physical environment of the Valleys is now a tourist commodification and the people who cannot be commodified as caricatures or museum attendants are no longer required.

> 'They have become a people stranded by history as the great wealth of the coalfield bypassed the communities that produced it leaving them with deep social and physical scars, powerful collective memories and an extraordinary and very necessary social resilience in the face of the constructive indifference of the political elites' (Osborne, 2008, pg. ix).

1.1.4 Mythical representations

As communities change, the old ways of life have vanished. Now if you want to get a glimpse of the physicality of the miners' life you have to visit local museums such as Big Pit in Blaenavon and the Rhondda Heritage Park in Pontypridd, representations that have attracted considerable criticism. Dicks (2000) has warned of the dangers inherent in presenting a romantic, mythologised view of former mining villages which can curb an exploration of what could become positive aspects of collective representation. Some of this mythology is represented through the work of authors such as Lewis Jones, whose two novels *Cwmardy* and *Let Live*, set in the 1930s, reflect his Communist, agitprop agenda and, while indubitably powerful, contribute to a polarised view of community with their themes of exploitation and despair. Similarly, the hyperbole of Richard Llewellyn's *How Green Was My Valley?* (2001 [1939]) conveys similar tropes, a representation continued in the Academy Award-winning 1941 John Ford film of the novel. Who can forget the miners singing in perfect harmony as they walked home from a pit perched incongruously at the top of a hill? In Woodward's view, 'Ford's film spawned a million clichés about terraced streets and black-faced miners' (2006, pg. 54). Ford's Welsh valley, incongruously situated in the San Fernando Valley in Malibu was in Woodward's opinion 'sanitised of all traces of dust and dirt and Hollywoodized beyond all recognition' (2006, pgs. 54 and 55.) Indeed, the stereotypes of South Wales that Llewellyn did much to foster came from a man whose claims to Welsh

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identity have been questioned by researchers (McVeigh, 1999), and Anderson (2014) asks whether Wales' cultural history as encapsulated in *How Green Was My Valley?* is fit for a future which could see the country fragmented and mobile.

Similarly, the humorous, ironic prose of Gwyn Thomas conveys similar pictures of despair and degradation, leading to accusations that he had betrayed Wales and exposed it to ridicule. However, Elaine Morgan, writing in a foreword to Thomas' most famous work *The Dark Philosophers* (2011 [1946], pg. xi) considers that his love of Wales was 'deeply wounded by the ugliness of the Valleys'. Some critics described him as Hogarthian, giving up on literary comparisons and turning to the visual arts which employed exaggeration to reflect horror and despair. In *The Dark Philosophers*, Thomas expresses the view that the arts can only flourish in conditions where basic needs are satisfied, 'The need for beauty comes a long way after the need for food and warmth' (2011 [1946], pg. 123). Modern-day authors such as Des Barry (2002) and Rachel Trezise (2007) also contribute to perceptions of the area as dysfunctional and despairing, but with a considerable leavening of humour.

Media representations can also be remarkably misleading. There was considerable anger in Merthyr after the showing of the Channel Four series Skint in 2015 which subscribed to many myths of a feckless, job-shy under-class. Newspaper reporting can also reflect bias: a news story in 2011 claimed that life expectancy in an area of Merthyr was just 58.8 years for men, less than in Third World countries such as Haiti, whereas in reality the figure related to healthy life expectancy (Byrne *et al*, 2016). This story, featured in, among others, the *Western Mail* and the *Daily Mail*, which illustrated its report with some determinedly grim pictures of a housing estate that belie its appearance today (*Daily Mail*, 2011).

Taking this as a whole, I would argue that much of this representation is partial and biased and has far-reaching effects that impact across a range of platforms. It also fails to reflect the diversity of life in South Wales – the richness of the lived experience, the strength of community and a determination to construct a positive response to such portrayals. These considerations are explored through the research questions outlined in the next section.

1.2 Research questions

As already discussed, these research questions were conceived from the outset as a basis for the project:

- How are ex-coal mining and steel industry communities represented within literary texts and through other portrayals?

- How do these representations affect local communities in the present?
- What kind of stories, narratives and meaning making structures can counter some of these representations?

To answer these questions, critical analysis of literary representations has been undertaken (Chapter 2) and the effect of these representations in terms of prejudice and stigma examined (Chapter 3). The study has had an ecological basis as so much of the data that have emerged emphasises strong connections to place and the importance of inter-personal connections. It was felt that artistic methods were an appropriate response to the cultural imagery which is contained in literary and media representations, allowing for an expression of 'voice' that answers negative and stereotypical depictions of communities.

The aim has been to introduce cultural projects which emphasise a bottom-up approach in which participants have taken ownership of the schemes. The projects were planned to be inclusive, reflexive and participatory, encompassing a range of media with the aim of providing a platform for all interests and abilities. As Lefebvre (1991) notes, constructing imaginative responses to the systemic and structural impact of conceived spaces can initiate a process which opens them up to be challenged and re-appropriated. Because of the creative and participatory nature of the projects, they have been conceived as a means of self-determination. Using creative methods such as poetry writing and photography gives people control over the material and allows for inclusivity in a group.

In view of the current policy thinking on the potential of arts projects to:

- promote social inclusion and help people reconnect with their sense of place;
- provide a model of engagement which can be of lasting benefit to the community;
- improve education prospects and lessen the attainment gap for young people (Smith, 2013);

projects were planned to allow people to play an active role in how they were represented, providing a platform for counter-representations of post-industrial places. A literary project was undertaken with a group recruited from a Workers' Educational Association (now rebranded Adult Learning Wales) branch in Merthyr Tydfil with the aim of producing a collection of poetry and prose which reflected their

views of the past and of current experiences of living in the area.[1] Participants took part in creative writing sessions, working individually but building on discussion and a sharing of experiences. Some of this output was collated and taken back to the group for reflective discussions –a type of ethnographic monitoring described by Hymes (1980). In this study, the output is subject to a form of praxis, an experiential cycle of learning (Kolb, 1984). As Kolb notes, knowledge emerges from a combination of undergoing an experience and then transforming it (1984, pg. 41). The literary project has referenced Wordsworth's 'spots of time' – which suggest that we all have memories of a significant moment or place in our lives to which we can return for inspiration and comfort (Davis, 1992).

The group met weekly for nine months, initially for discussions, starting with a map-making exercise in which participants highlighted areas that were important to them. Warner (2015, pg. 1) sees participatory mapping as a 'bottom-up' approach that allows everyone to create these resources, rather than the conventional 'top-down' approach which depends on those exercising power to devise such constructions. Group members also participated in walking tours of Merthyr town centre and a factory site. As Solnit (2001, pg. 267) has noted, walking can be considered an act of resistance to the mainstream. In a post-modern environment, it can be an antidote to the loss of time, space and embodiment, harking back to the walking practices of pilgrims, meditators, hikers and the French conception of the 'flaneur' - the stroller or observer of life. Participants also examined local newspapers, looking for stories that highlighted good aspects of the community and articles that showed negative representations. They also brought in artifacts that reflected their life and discussed their importance.

A second participatory project involved a group of young people who took part in a Photovoice exercise in which they took pictures and then discussed them. Wang and Burris (1997) see this as a method which allows knowledge to be created by people who are normally a passive part of research processes.

The projects were also planned to involve a cross-generational intervention which has allowed for an exchange of ideas which both groups found informative and beneficial.

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[1] Pseudonyms have been used for research participants to provide anonymity but local place names at the town level have not been changed in order to respect and retain local history, both oral and written. However, local areas and districts have been given pseudonyms.

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Over the course of the sessions, a multi-faceted picture of the town, its inhabitants, and the problems facing people in their everyday lives emerged.

1.3 Chapter outlines

In Chapter 2, as a part of the initial research process, the power of sense of place and attachment is examined through the literary canon of writings on the coal and steel industries which has contributed to a particular representation of these communities, including the work of the 'industrial' novelists Gwyn Thomas, Lewis Jones and Glyn Jones and the post-industrial work of writers such as Rachel Trezise. This writing and other media representations of South Wales has provided the impetus for the body of work which has formed the artistic cornerstone of this thesis as participants provide a positive reaction to the negativity arising from the literature. However, as Anderson (2014, pg. 313) notes, literature can play a vital role in providing a sense of belonging, democratising knowledge away from dominant voices. Fiction, in particular can provide new insights into the relationship between people and place and how plotlines come out of the interweaving of page and place. I argue that much of the imagery constructed by this body of literature has contributed to a picture of these communities that is at best one-dimensional and at worst stigmatising.

An understanding of the positivity of community and an appreciation of why people feel the need to tell 'their' stories is explored in Chapter 3. Here I examine what can be defined as 'community', particularly looking at the image of Wales. I also explore people's affective connection to place through the Welsh concept of *hiraeth* and the related Spanish term *querencia*. The importance of the experience in Wales of 'y filltir sqwar', (the square mile) of landscape explored as a child, is examined, giving an understanding of the motivations for the research group participants to demonstrate their affection for the area. I also discuss how representations of an area are also affected by territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2007) and by the suppressed memories of the recent past through 'social haunting' (Gordon, 2008). This is considered in the context of the community's relationship to place.

In Chapter 4, the methodological basis for the studies is examined. As the emphasis of the thesis was to allow participants to express themselves through a range of artistic interventions, it was considered that an overall approach utilising participatory methods would be the most appropriate medium instead of more conventional approaches such as interviews. I discuss how a range of methods was devised including group discussions, mobile methods and participatory mapping in

order to give a broad picture of participants' views. The methodology involving the creation of the creative writing is also discussed and the various models utilised to provide an impetus for the artistic output are reviewed. The value of the photography project is also examined through a consideration of the Photovoice and photo elicitation methodologies.

Chapter 5 focusses on the discussions and walking tours that took place as part of the process in which impressions emerged of a strong attachment to place, enhanced through the family and community networks operating in the area. The chapter also examines the outcomes of the participatory mapping exercise, an investigation of local newspapers and a discussion on self-selected artifacts. The chapter also looks at the strength of social and cultural capital evident in the family networks operating in the area. Coupled with discussions of life in South Wales both past and present, this output underpinned the body of written work that would eventually be produced, allowing an understanding of the importance of place and belonging in the participants' literary creations.

Chapter 6 looks at the various artistic responses to issues of representation, forming a body of work that affirms the desire for a presentation of positivity that tackles stereotypical negative portrayals of the area. The chapter examines how various devices were introduced into the writing exercises that allowed for the production of narrative that demonstrates a strong attachment to place and endorses Weil's (1978, pg. 41) suggestion that 'to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul.' Using the device of 'letters to home' and postcards, an embodied connection to the locality is demonstrated that also allows for a reflection on the strength of inter-personal relationships, acknowledging Glaeser's (2012, pg. 269) view that the ability to connect is the defining characteristic of our species. Through an affective response to exercises that explored the senses, the writing also reflects Merleau-Ponty's assertion that sensation is central to human perception (2000, pg. 5 [1962]). This aesthetic stance is analysed to locate it in the framework of a considered response to misrepresentation.

Chapter 7 examines the work carried out with young people involved with this study which again involved participatory mapping and writing. I show that the mapping exercise reflects the sense of community shared by the group, again echoing Gordon's (2008) work on social haunting which suggests that while the ghost can indicate loss it can also be a representation of hope for the future. However, the

bulk of the work was a Photovoice project which reflected the young people's connection to place and their own affirmations of identity. The photographs and the responses they elicited are analysed to give an interpretation of the young people's views of their lived experience.

Chapter 8 looks at the inter-generational discussion that took place between the two groups – an encounter that proved instructive for both sets of participants as they discovered common ground in a shared response to the value of community and the importance of place. I also show that there was a scaffolding of ideas as the older generation responded to the aspirational intent of the young people.

In Chapter 9, I reflect on the research questions and how far I have been able to answer these and look at what is my original contribution to research. I examine how the strength of a rooted attachment to place has provided the artistic framework for a grounded response to negative and stereotypical portrayals of South Wales. I also discuss the wider implications of this study both in terms of influence on policy and the opportunities for applying these research models in different environments.

Chapter 2

The industrial literature canon

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out a review of the underpinning context for the study – the literature and other artistic representations that chronicle the mining and iron and steel industries across the country from the 17th Century through to the post-industrial writings of the 21st Century, work that has contributed to a very particular construction of these communities. While in some cases, this may not be an overt misrepresentation of the lived experience, nevertheless, the literature does provide a narrow interpretation of life in which a broader sense of varied cultural experiences can sometimes be missing. It is these representations which have provided the catalyst for the meaning-making activities carried out by the research groups in their quest for more positive representations.

The chapter reflects on the language of the 19th Century chroniclers who depicted industrialisation as a 'hellish' process, and contrasted it unfavourably with the purity of nature (Danahay, 2000), and also looks at the writers who contributed to the industrial novel genre – Gwyn Thomas, Lewis Jones and Glyn Jones, and the post-industrial writings of Rachel Trezise and Des Barry, who reference themes of dislocation, loss and despair. Artistic representations of miners emphasise the concepts of 'black' and 'dirt' (Fuller, 1990, Danahay, 2000) and could be seen as the opposite of the aesthetic, but artistic appreciation, rooted in the notion of the aesthetic includes complex social constructions which Eagleton (1990, pg. 3) argues can provide a powerful challenge to hegemonic practices. The perceived cultural differences between the 'north' and 'south' of Britain are examined with particular reference to Shield's (1991) concept of 'Northerness', and the imagery contained in the work of George Orwell and J B Priestley which portrays industrial communities as a metaphoric black country (Bryant, 2000).

The chapter goes on to look at the power of words to construct images and consolidate representations of communities. The chapter also examines the value of literacy as a social practice (Street, 1993, Rockhill, 1993) and how it can be employed to either reproduce or contest constructions of power and domination.

2.2 Coal, steel and artistic representation

The subject matter of working in coal mines and the life of the mining and steel communities has been extensively covered by poetry, fiction and art from the 19th Century onwards and the subsequent development of photography and film also

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provides a vehicle for exploring the subject matter. Poets such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Joseph Skipsey chronicled the horrors of mining accidents while writers such as G. W. M Reynolds and Emile Zola created works of fiction that urged social reforms. Meanwhile, artists such as J. M. W. Turner and Claude Monet struggle to represent the smoky effects of the industrialised landscapes of Britain. (Thesing, 2000, pg. xv).

Osborne (2008, pg. ix) argues that the traditional pictorial representation of mining communities is well understood both in photographs and paintings, conveying a mix of fear, sentimentality and a mild romanticism. Newspapers in the 19th Century depicted mining communities in much the same way as the dangerous 'Others' - immigrants or asylum seekers - are depicted today (Osmond, 2008, pg. x). Restrictions in printing processes which allowed only black and white photographs, contributed to a formal language of representation heightened by the inevitably dark aspects of coal mining which highlighted 'heroic scapegoats', men sacrificed on 'the altar of capitalistic excess and exploitation (Osmond, 2008, pg. x). Later, more critical examinations of mining communities were explored in the documentary film-making movement that began in the 1930s and from which developed the Mass Observation project that has chronicled material about everyday life in Britain (Osmond, 2008, pg. x).

2.2.1 The black arts
Danahay (2000, pg. 5) argues that because coal is associated with industrialisation it can be seen as the opposite of the aesthetic but he notes in a critique of Turner's *Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight* that this work violates that separation, displaying Turner's appreciation of coal and steam – the dominant energy forces of the 19th Century. However, artistic appreciation, rooted in the notion of the aesthetic, incorporates complex social constructions that go beyond simple awareness of cultural products. Eagleton (1990, pg. 3) notes that the importance of the aesthetic in modern Europe grew because of its acknowledgement that art encompassed issues of freedom and legality, self-determination and autonomy and was bound up with the dominant ideological forms of modern class society. He argues that the aesthetic can supply a strong challenge to these hegemonic structures and in that sense is a contradictory phenomenon (1990, pg. 3). Eagleton argues (1990, pgs. 64 and 65) that the beginning of aesthetics is linked to the commodification of cultural production. Aesthetics can be seen as a form of compensation for this degradation.

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Danahay (2000, pg. 6) notes that Anna Seward's description of one of the earliest industrial sites Coalbrookdale provides a template for much subsequent work which contrasts the spread of industrialisation with the 'pure' aspects of Nature. She writes, 'while red the countless fires/ With umber'd flames, bicker on all thy hills/ Dark'ning the Summer's sun with columns large/ Of thick sulphureous smoke, which spread like palls/ That scream the dead upon the sylvan robe.' Danahay suggests that Seward connects the furnace fires to hell and damnation through her employment of the adjective 'sulphureous' and the imagery of the screams of the dead (2000, pg. 6). Nature, on the other hand, is visualised through the poetic epithet 'sylvan', an antithesis which has been repeated through much subsequent work even up to the present day. Taylor (1967, pg. 13) employs similar imagery in her description of the Cyfarthfa ironworks in Merthyr, noting that the sky at night would glow red, as though a volcano was erupting, while the flames that emerged when a blast furnace was opened created a scene 'like something akin to the inferno of Dante'. Lindop (2015, pg. 8) reviews the work of 18th Century poet Thomas Gray whose visit to Sizergh Castle in 1769 gives an insight into the very beginning of the Industrial Revolution when according to Lindop the activities were viewed as demonic but also sublime, reminiscent of the writing in *Paradise Lost*. Gray writes of the 'calmness and brightness of the evening, the roar of the waters and the thumping of huge hammers at an iron forge' and how at the forge he saw 'the demons at work by the light of their own fires'. While Gray employs metaphor to suggest that the forge workers were 'demons', 18th and 19th Century mine workers were aware of a rich catalogue of ghosts that haunted their workplaces. Sikes (1880, pg. 24) in his extensive 19th Century review of the folklore of Wales, writes of the 'coblynau', fairies who lived in the mines and pointed out rich coal seams through tapping or knocking. While the 'coblynau' were generally regarded as beneficial, less welcome occurrences such as fire-damp explosions were blamed on the 'basilisks', giant snake-like creatures (Sikes, 1880, pg. 27).

Fuller (1990, pg. 200) in a review of an exhibition of British mining in art comments on the 'black arts' of coal, a reference that Danahay suggests indicates an association with guilt and evil. Artistic representations of the mining life lay great emphasis on the concept of 'black' and 'dirt'. This gendered construction portrays mining communities as often exclusively male-orientated and structured around the dominant themes of work and companionship. The representation of black coal often emphasises the negative connotations of the colour, although, conversely, one of the commonest metaphors for coal is that of 'black gold'. Nevertheless, most

interpretations, based on a Newtonian view of the colour spectrum, regard the colour black as an absence, rather than a positive colour (Danahay, 2000, pg. 8).

The representation of black can also become a fetishising accommodation. In the 19th Century, Arthur Munby recorded his fascination with dirt and soot in diary entries that reflected on his relationship with his servant/wife Hannah Cullwick who frequently appeared 'in her dirt' while undertaking menial household tasks (Danahay, 2000, pg. 12). His fascination combined the twin tropes of 'dirty' industrial work and the racist ideology inherent in the colonial system. Anderson sees the employment of the terms 'dirt' and 'dirty' as symptomatic of a pejorative framing of particular people and actions (2010, pg. 58). He suggests that describing people or practices as dirty perpetuates an ordering of culture and the bordering of place, confining certain people and activities to one place, and out of another (Anderson, 2010, pg. 58). Consequently, as Danahay suggests (2000, pg. 14) the class associations of coal and manual labour combined to curtail artistic representations of coal and other industry, with the exception of William Bell Scott's 1861 *Iron and Coal,* a homage to the industry of Tyneside, which like Pre-Raphaelite Ford Madox Brown's *Work,* attempts to portray working men as noble, admirable figures. However, another exception was the work of the Impressionists in the second half of the 19th Century who were inspired by the power of industrial machinery and the architecture of stations and factories (Danahay, 2000, pg. 14). In particular, Monet became fascinated by the smogs in London and developed what Danahay suggests can be described as 'an aesthetics of pollution' (2000, pg. 15).

2.2.2 The concept of the 'North'

Permeating literary sources and other artistic representations is the understanding that there is a cultural divide between the south and north of Britain, a north that, as has been suggested, also encompasses such industrial areas as South Wales. Shields (1991, pgs. 207 and 208) asserts that this north/south dichotomous construction emerged out of a body of literary work in the 19th Century which reflected rapid industrialisation in the north and the development of an urbanised industrial elite which mounted a challenge to the social status of the landed aristocracy domiciled in the Home Counties. 'Regional' novelists and poets created an image of the Northern working class (Laing, 1986) which Shields contends was both spurious and a gross generalisation (1991, pg. 208). Although London's East End had become the largest centre of urban poverty in the country by the end of the 19th century, the stereotypical images of the city as wealthy and the north as primitive and functional had been well established in literary works (Shields, 1991,

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pg. 211). As Shields notes, the northern space myth can also be found in more contemporary works by authors such as Arnold Bennett and D H Lawrence (1991, pg. 211). Bennett (1971 [1902], pg. 25), in *Anna of the Five Towns*, speaks of an area 'long given up to unredeemed ugliness', a 'great, smoke-grit amphitheatre, while Lawrence (2009 [1915], pg. 345) in *The Rainbow* describes the mining areas of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire as 'red brick rapidly spreading, like a skin disease'.

The concept of the industrial areas of Britain as remote, other-worldly places far removed from the experience of the rest of the country was also elaborated in influential literary works in the early 20th Century. Priestley described the 'notorious' Black Country as 'strange' in his *English Journey* (1987, pg. 80 [1934]), an adjective also employed by Orwell in *Road to Wigan Pier* (1967, pg. 98 [1937]) to describe what he termed the 'Industrial North'. As Thompson (2013, pg. 213) notes, Modernist painters such as Henry Moore, Stanley Spencer and Graham Sutherland saw factories, shipyards and mines and the north itself as places that were more primal, more emotional, 'different' and 'other'.

Figuratively, the industrial heartlands of Britain are popularly conceived of as the 'North' but as Dodd explains (1990, pg. 17), it is less a number of particular places with specific histories but a 'place with an agreed iconography'. In Dodd's view, while some places are obviously more northern than others, the relationship between actual places and people and their representation in literature and film is a complex one. Therefore, to produce artistic work on the north entails struggling with existing representations. Accordingly, Bryant (2000, pg. 107) suggests that this means such industrial conceptualisations also include the Midlands, the Black Country and South Wales, indicating an economic margin to London rather than a specific Northerness. Bryant considers this is why the publishers of *Road to Wigan Pier* could include photographs of mining areas such as South Wales in the book.

Concepts of 'Northerness' do indeed appear to be problematic: In *Road to Wigan Pier,* Orwell envisages the north-south divide starting 'a little north of Birmingham, where the 'real ugliness of industrialisation' begins (1967 [1937], pg. 94). Shields (1991, pg. 213) suggests that this literary canon forms an identifiable tradition that consciously distances itself from works suggesting other views. He asserts that this remains true today despite a post-industrial decline which has seen the removal of much heavy industry. The infrastructure of the towns with their pubs and clubs and housing terraces spreading over hillsides reflect the social relations of former

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industrial patterns (Shields, 1991, pg. 230). As Shields notes (1991, pg. 230), 'the past hangs over these towns like factory smoke' and the images of the north revolve around the cultural hub of London where such images are disseminated through the national media. Shields suggests that such north/south themes reflect accepted value systems purveyed by the privileged while also being widely promulgated through the outlets of formal education such as English literature and poetry (1991, pg. 231). Bryant (2000, pg. 107) notes that the descriptions of slag heaps and dilapidated buildings in both *Road to Wigan Pier* and *English Journey* help conceptualise industrial Britain as a metaphoric black country that animates and unsettles. Shifts in production to a more prosperous structure based on electrical power had left the old industrial areas impoverished and Bryant suggests that documentary film making was drawn to places suffering from the Depression which they defined as the 'real' industrial Britain. Therefore, the representation of coal mining through the lens of documentary films in the 1930s points up a discrepancy between economic and iconographic power (Bryant, 2000, pg. 107). The iconography of the 'industrial north' is reinforced in the film-making genre known as the British Realist cinema of the 1950s and 1960s. Shields (1991, pg. 216) notes that these films were known as 'kitchen sink' dramas and supposedly echoed the realism of the 1930s' documentaries. The image of the 'land of the working class' was established not just aesthetically but through the careful framing of landscapes, typically through a long shot which captured a panoramic view of a town obscured by industrial smoke, leading to perceptions of such places as spectacular but empty (Shields, 1991, pgs. 216 and 217). The framing of pylons and old industrial buildings is far from realist and contributes to a 'folksy', one-sided depiction of the Northern working class as a foreign 'Other' in contrast to the socially constructed orderliness of a London-centred population (Shields, 1991, pg. 218). Shields (1991, pg. 221) also suggests that the films rehash old myths about the north (such as industrial hells) which allow British viewers 'in the know' to vicariously experience a re-affirmation of mythological reality. Cohen (1986, pg. 7) considers that these stories aid the symbolic construction of community by differentiating between insiders and outsiders as regards northern myths, reconfirming membership of a 'community of belief'. Shields (1991, pg. 245) suggests that the myth of the British North is an important part of social spatialisation and cultural discourses which positions the industrial working class through the spaces and positions of other groups, specifically the financial hub of London and the pastoral south. Morgan (2006, pg. 191) asserts that the stereotypical image of the North-South divide has its economic

origins in the spatial labour division of Britain which had seen the heavy industries of coal and steel mainly concentrated in northern England, Wales and Scotland.

2.3 The literature of industry

2.3.1 Introduction

The vast body of literature that references life in the industrial heartlands of Britain has created impressions that are far-reaching and all-pervasive. From the work produced by the social reformers of the 19th Century to contemporary novelists, there are certain tropes that are continually recirculated.

Culler considers that subjects can be created by unsought positings of unity and identity which although empowering can result in a gap between the role given to an individual and the lived reality of their lives (2000, pg. 118). This can be seen operating in the industrial novel genre where characters are defined by their work and situation, allowing little room for the development of individual traits and aspirations.

2.3.2 Industrial representation

Some of the earliest literature on the coalmining industry is collated in William Maurice's *A Pitman's Anthology, a* remarkable collection which aims, as he and his daughter Monica say in their introduction (2004), to portray all aspects of mining life, from the depiction of miners as hard-drinking and vulgar to touching vignettes that stress the humanity that surmounts the difficulties of that working environment. The Maurices (2004, pg. 33) note that while there was a vast amount of literature on coal mining produced in the period between 1910 and 1940, much of the work familiar to mining communities was created much earlier, in some cases from the mid-18th Century. The poem *The Collier's Wedding* by Edward Chicken contains the first known record of Geordie dialect (1773, in Maurice, 2004, pg. 114). The poem reinforces the image of the miner as hard-drinking and hedonistic, a view echoed in Dennis *et al*'s (1969) study of mining life. 'Then collier lads got money fast/ Had Merry days while it did last/ They lov'd to feast, drink, play and game/ And swore without a sense of shame.'

However, it is the literature that chronicles the exploitation of miners, the perils they faced and their living conditions that resonates the most powerfully, and contributes to creating images that have passed into the general consciousness, fixing representations of coal mining in a particular and inequitable fashion.

Social concerns over the use of child labour in coal mines became increasingly vociferous as the 19th Century gave way to the 20th, as Wingate's poem *The Collier's Ragged Wean* (1890, in Maurice, 2004, pg. 123) elaborates: 'And ye wha mak' and mend oor laws, tak' pity on the bairn/ Oh bring him sooner frae the pit, and gi'e him time to learn.' However, in Welsh's *The Underworld* (1920, in Maurice, 2004, pg. 122), despite chronicling some of the horrors of pithead work facing young workers, he writes glowingly of how two small children starting out at the pit are 'two bright threads – threads of great beauty and high worth – threads which the very gods seemed proud of seeing there …', a stance which seems at odds with the work of social chroniclers such as Charles Dickens and the stark words of Frederick Boden whose *Out of the Coalfields* (1929, in Maurice, 2004, pg. 128) chillingly notes the death of a young mine worker: 'You never knew happiness, little fellow dead/ You lived in sad times and toiled and suffered so.' Boden sees little good in mining villages as his poem *Beauty Never Visits Mining Places* (1929, in Maurice, 2004, pg. 39) elaborates: 'There on slag-heaps, where no bird poises/ My fellows' wan children tumble and climb/Playing in the dust, making shrill noises/ Sweet human flowers that will fade ere their time.' Boden also conveys his thoughts on the injustice of sending young people down the mines in his poem *A Woman Lies Awake* (1929, in Maurice, 2004, pg. 74). As a mother broods over her son working underground, *'*He stands with shoulders bent, head hung awry/ Bought by a company for his body's worth/ A schoolboy in a tunnel four foot high/ There, fifteen hundred feet down in the earth.'

However, a far more positive piece of work came from H V Morton whose *The Welsh Miner* (1932) describes 'Heartbreak Valley' in South Wales, a mining community riven by the effects of the Depression but where, nevertheless, miners had a passion for intellectual debate, reading and music. As he conjectures: 'Think what reading means to an active mind that is locked away in the dark for hours every day!' Morton comments on the wide range of hobbies and interests the miners had and an ex-miner tells him that it's a reaction to the hard physical work underground and the stimulating effect of coming back up into the light (1932, in Maurice, 2004, pg. 140). Morton's optimistic prose, however, is tempered by some of the other work in this collection. Joseph Skipsey's poem *Get Up* chillingly describes the miner woken for work who notes, 'I with a whistle shut the door/ I may not ope again' (1871, in Maurice, 2004, pg. 142), and A E Tomlinson's *The Mineshaft* describes travelling down the mineshaft 'Straight as a demon down the flues of Hell/ Or Hell's own image in a Durham mine' (1922, in Maurice, 2004, pg.

143). Similarly, the miner poet Joe Corrie also describes the miners travelling down a pit in *A Cage Load of Men* as 'Cogs in the wheel of Corruption/ Grinding so sure and so slow' (1937, in Maurice, 2004, pg. 144).

This theme of exploitation is also explored by W B Northrop (1911, in Maurice, 2004, pg. 165) whose poem *Mining Royalties* about a coastal pit angrily comments, 'They tell us in the books/ No Briton is a slave/ But we are owned, both body and soul/ Five Miles beneath the wave.' J B Priestley on his *English Journey* (1987, pg. 304 [1934]) also found little to admire in the coastal colliery town of Seaham, although his work was less polemic, merely describing it as 'weird as a cart-horse with scales and fins'. In Boden's work *Ling's Pit Yard,* however, his palpable anger at the injustice facing an injured miner is powerfully conveyed, 'He stared unseeing into space/ His face a death-like, livid face/ Living again the wretched past/ A ruined life breathing its last', (1929, in Maurice, 2004, pg. 47).

The high price paid by mining communities is also articulated in Joseph Skipsey's poem *The Hartley Calamity* (1862, in Maurice, 2004, pg. 217) about the burying alive of 204 colliers in 1862, 'But they slept – still sleep – in silence dread/ Two hundred old and young/ To awake when heaven and earth have sped/ And the last dead trumpet sung!' Reviewed by the Pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabriel Rossetti, as 'written, I fancy to be sung like the old ballads', Skipsey recited the poem at fund-raising events for the victims' families (Thesing and Wojtasik, 2000, pg. 38). Skipsey, who himself became a coal miner, was part of a group including Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Thomas Llewellyn Thomas who aimed to give a voice to otherwise ignored sections of the Victorian social framework and awaken social consciences (Thesing and Wojtasik, 2000, pg. 47), a role continued by writers such as Boden, whose 1929 poem *Bringing Out the Dead* begins, 'Out of the reeking shaft the great cage came/ Bearing the broken bodies of the dead/ A clanging, creaking, grinding iron frame/ That swayed and thudded on the black pit-head' (Maurice, 2004, pg. 220).

Priestley also recognised the debt owed to workers whose work fuelled the standards of living enjoyed by the more fortunate. In *English Journey* (1987 [1934]) his description of the giant coal tip at Shotton 'its vast dark bulk, steaming and smoking' is contrasted with 'all of the fine things that had been conjured out of it in time, the country houses and town house, the drawing- rooms and dining-rooms, the carriages and pairs, the trips to Paris, the silks and jewels, the peaches and iced puddings, the cigars and old brandies'.

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However, these social reformist writings were not endorsed by all. The miners' claims for higher wages and the developments that led to the General Strike of 1926 were perceived as part of a general class revolt which created feelings of panic and unease in the middle and upper classes leading to denigratory attitudes and comments and an 'Othering' of working class communities. However, class polarisation and a demonising of miners struggling to achieve a living wage and better working conditions are savagely depicted in Siegfried Sassoon's satirical poem *The Case for the Miners* in which he struggles to convince his middle class friends of the need for social reform. He imagines them asking, 'Why should a miner earn six pounds a week?/ Leisure! They'd only spend it in a bar!' and concludes, 'That's how my port-flushed friends discuss the Strike/ And that's the reason I shout and splutter/ And that's the reason why I'd almost like/ To see them hawking matches in the gutter' (Sassoon, 1926, in Maurice, 2004, pg. 252). Orwell's Road to Wigan Pier (1967 [1937]) also explores the theme of prejudice and denigration, recounting middle class prejudices against the working class, and particularly mining communities.

This resentment of working people's demands for better conditions can give rise to a moral panic which Young (2009, pg. 11) sees as being rooted in class politics. Le Grand (2015, pg. 9) argues that these moralisation processes result in the creation of 'folk devils' in which the moralisers' worries and resentments are projected onto the denigrated minority. This leads to a form of moral self-governance in which the moraliser is obliged to act within respectable norms. Le Grand suggests that this leads to a chronic type of resentment called 'ressentiment' which links a sense of injustice with a feeling of powerlessness and repression. This can be seen operating in the representation of industrial workers, particularly miners.

Women are represented in these pieces as invariably mothers and home makers, but in fact in the 1930s, the number of female workers actually rose in light industries (Bryant, 2000, pg. 107). In Lawrence's *The Collier's Wife* the wife struggles to deal with news of a bad accident involving her husband, 'I do 'ope as it's not very bad/ Eh what a shame it seems' (1994, pg. 12) while in Morton's *The Miner's Wife as Heroine* she is portrayed as an uncomplaining, hard-working home-maker who nevertheless dreams that one day things will be better, 'without such bright hopes, it would be almost impossible to carry on' (1932). It is in Lawrence's short story the *Odour of Chrysanthemums,* however, that the tension of being a pitman's wife, never knowing if there would be an accident or fatality, is realised the most powerfully through an exploration of the woman's reaction to the news of her

husband's death and her realisation that her relationship with him was deeply flawed (1983 [1914]). The chrysanthemums, whose smell fill the room where the dead man is to be laid, are described by Balbert (2000, pg. 100) as a prophetic symbol. In Balbert's view, both of them were suffocated by the morbidity of their pit village (2000, pg. 86) and she was gripped by a terrible dread. 'She knew she submitted to life, which was her immediate master. But from death, her ultimate master, she winced with fear and shame' (1983 [1914], pg. 199).

Lawrence's exploration of working class life holds out little promise of relief from oppressive owners, grinding poverty, uncertainty and fear and has become a much-referenced representation that, as with all such constructions, provides a rigid template that anchors its imagery in the popular consciousness. As Duke (2002) contends, much literature about coal mining presents miners and their families as 'Others' through a myopic view which portrays miners in limiting and stereotypical ways. Duke writes about the American mining industry but parallels can be drawn with European writers when he speaks of a lack of imagination in their creative fiction. As Scott (2003, pg. 857) notes, Duke suggests that some writers objectified and stereotyped miners but did not give them a voice. Nevertheless, Scott (2003, pg. 858) critiques Duke's assertions, suggesting that these writers created work that was intended to develop their own voices and to collate information that could be marshalled into arguments against capitalism.

2.3.3 The industrial novel

The industrial novel genre has contributed greatly to popular perceptions of mining and steel communities. For Raymond Williams (1979, pg. 100), Welsh industrial novel writing was working class writing, created within industrial communities, and making a distinctive and special contribution to the genre. As Culler notes (2000, pg. 93), people become who they are through a series of identifications, therefore novels are an effective instrument for the internalisation of social norms. He suggests that novels have the power to reveal the suffering of oppressed people, allowing readers to identify with situations that can be perceived as intolerable. In this respect, the novels of Gwyn Thomas and Lewis Jones, for example, seek to provide an insight into what they perceive as the injustice and oppression facing working people. Problems can arise, however, when the representation of a community is defined by a specific and narrow approach that becomes one-dimensional.

The work of Jones and Thomas can perhaps best epitomise the concept of the industrial novel. Jones' oeuvre can seem lacking depth and has been likened to agitprop, while Thomas' work is more whimsical and lyrical – his anger over the conditions of life for workers is conveyed more subtly.

Jones' work contributes to stereotypical depictions of miners but he was writing from the perspective of someone who was embedded in the community and was seeking to advance the cause of the miners in their struggle against the forces of capitalism. Jones' writing is unequivocally partisan and is presented as a binary of struggle/exploitation, almost a classic fable of good against evil but it has left a legacy of a perception of the South Wales area that is rooted in misconceptions. Similarly, Gwyn Thomas' work can be seen as a reaction to the oppressive and exploitive nature of industrial work in the South Wales Valleys, but, nevertheless, he has been accused of betraying Wales and exposing it to ridicule (Morgan, 2011). However, Thomas felt that the ravages wrought upon the Valleys affected its people deeply. 'In any fairly ravaged industrial area, the face of love can be clobbered beyond recognition' (Thomas, 1992, pg. 14). Thomas' responses through his work mirror Lewis Jones' altruistic motivations but again contribute to a particular and peculiar view of the area that lacks the nuances that would convey a more balanced representation.

While Jones' descriptions of industrial disputes have the ring of authenticity, his depiction of emotional relationships is considerably weaker. Nevertheless Francis (2006, foreword to Jones, pg. xi) speaks of Jones' compassion and his love of the people, which resulted in his two works of fiction: *Cwmardy* and *We Live*. In Jones' work *Cwmardy*, he makes it clear that, in his view, the industrial environment desensitises and restricts awareness of surroundings: A worker's eyes are unaware of the dawn breaking, and the worker's ears fail to register the sound of the loud pit hooters that 'raped the early morning air with violent echoes', a stark and powerful choice of imagery (2006, pg. 74 [1937]).

He makes considerable use of personification: the clang of marchers' hobnailed boots challenged 'the jealous mumbling of the thunder' and 'crooked lightning cynically blinded the staring eyes' while the thunder 'wantonly joined in the game. Its unholy laughter rolled and crackled, tearing the air in a devil's chorus of reverberating echoes' (2006, pgs.100 and 102 [1937]).

In *We Live*, Jones continues to explore the themes of exploitation and despair, and even when describing the weather, his prose is imbued with a pessimism and sense

of alienation: 'The wind howled over the mountain and swept down on Cwmardy as though chased by a million nightmares' (2006, pg. 405 [1939]). This theme of angst continues with a description of a chimney stack 'too proud to notice the clamour of the storm', a personification that accentuates the angularity and dislocation of the industrial landscape. Jones further elaborates on this theme of the weather as a malign force, describing how the 'heavy wooden droppers on the shaft-head beat back the chasing wind and rain, which sought revenge on the houses lower down the valley (2006, pg. 406 [1939]).

Gwyn Thomas took similar themes but elaborated on them through a prose style whose romanticism masked a zeal for social reform. He will inevitably be compared with the poet Dylan Thomas, perhaps the best-known chronicler of the Welsh way of life. While Dylan had an ambivalent attitude to his homeland and often wanted to get away (although once away he felt the *hiraeth* calling him back), Gwyn's love of Wales was 'deeply wounded by the ugliness of the Valleys,' (Morgan, 2011, foreword to Thomas, pg. xi). Despite his bleak view of his homeland, Gwyn Thomas was unhappy away from Wales, as his recollections of his time at Oxford show (Parnell, 1988). Some critics described him as Hogarthian, giving up on literary comparisons and turning to the visual arts – i.e. exaggeration to reflect horror and despair. His work is certainly very male-orientated, reflecting the masculine, working class ethos of the Valleys that was slow to change until the miners' strike of 1984/5 saw the growth of women's support groups that contributed greatly to the empowerment of women in subsequent years.

In his novella *Oscar*, Thomas writes of a world that many would like to forget – narrow, poor, with no future, only the pit, the chapel and the pub – a view of Wales that feeds into a general overview of the country as an industrial machine, a one-dimensional picture that ignores the human variety that encompasses many other viewpoints and interests. He writes of a world lacking in respectability and presents a bleak picture of a savage, uncaring area. There are strong metaphors for the class struggle, Oscar is a boss and the 'voters' the proletariat. Yet, paradoxically, out of the deprivation and struggles of working communities came the fight for knowledge encompassed in the development of the Workers' Educational Association.

In *The Dark Philosophers*, Thomas expresses the view that the arts can only flourish in conditions where basic needs are satisfied. 'The need for beauty comes a long way after the need for food and warmth' (2011, pg. 123 [1946]). His views are echoed by Maslow (1998) whose Hierarchy of Needs postulates that humans need

to build on the basic requirements of food and shelter before progressing to higher levels of satisfaction, culminating in self-actualisation. Thomas writes, 'We cursed within our own minds the sterile cold and loneliness we had lived in for many years when misery and anger had killed the memory of all such loveliness as that music within us, and we thought sorrowfully of all those many voters lying around about us in the Terraces who had been made numb and stupid by poverty, dead even to the diverse beauty created by man,' (2011, pg. 124 [1946]).

Thomas' third work in *The Dark Philosophers* trilogy is *Simeon*, a black tale of family despair that concentrates more on personalities but is still clearly influenced by the all-pervasive backdrop of the industrialised Valleys.

An altogether more lyrical almost surrealistic view of life in South Wales is found in Glyn Jones' *The Island of Apples* (2011 [1965]). This portrayal of the cusp-of-adolescence experiences of a boy growing up in South Wales around the beginning of the 20th Century mixes fantasy and a dream-like mysticism reminiscent of the 'streams of experience' of writers such as Jack Kerouac, with a pitiless eye for the characters that peopled the streets of 'Ystrad', acknowledged by the author as based on the town of Merthyr, where he was born in 1905. Pikoulis (2011, pg. vii, foreword to Jones) notes that this admixture of fantasy and reality reveals character not through a detailed psychological approach but through shifting patterns of narrative. He considers that Jones' elaborate physical descriptions focus on minutiae that border on the grotesque, suggesting that while he was fascinated by the characters he described he was also repelled.

Indeed, there is a sense that the constricting walls of the Valleys create societies that lacking outside stimulation turn upon themselves for amusement. However, there is also a feeling that despite Jones' description of dysfunctional families, these communities are close-knit, self-reliant and resourceful. The old collier, Mr Raymond, unable to work underground any more, creates beautiful models of collieries which people pay to view (2011, pg. 160 [1965]), and even the outlandish bizarre character of Titus Powell tries many different trades to earn a living. Jones' descriptions of Mr Powell 'so ugly, so fat and covered with long black hairs' and 'his tight red hair shining and the scarlet lines of sealing-wax dribbled in a network across his pale nose' (2011, pgs. 84 and 181 [1965]) echo Gwyn Thomas's portrayal of the brutal father Oscar in *The Dark Philosophers.*

In many ways, Jones' cast of eccentrics and individuals resonates more authentically than the somewhat stereotypical characters that inhabit the agitprop

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novels of Lewis Jones, and its character-driven construction reaches its height with the portrayal of the hero Dewi's mother, a woman 'who always enjoyed making a fool of me' (2011, pg. 31 [1965]) and who was beautiful 'but when she was in one of her moods her hooked nose seemed to come well out of her face, it looked somehow as though it was going to make a nasty snatch at you' (2011, pg. 38 [1965]). Although the novel is devised as an account of a young boy's increasingly fantastical experiences as he approaches adolescence, nevertheless there are clear references to a shared experience of life in a Valleys community which to some extent reinforces preconceptions of life in an industrial urban environment but also faithfully records the social gradations that marked out status and income. Grosvenor Gardens in the centre of Ystrad is 'a crescent of swanky, painted-up houses' where 'all the women drank coffee and wore long earrings and played cards in the parlour with the gaslight on and the curtains open (2011, pg. 15 [1965]). In contrast, a pub is described as 'smelling like masses of dead flowers gone strong, made up of strong beer and old vomit, and tobacco smoke and spit' (2011, pg. 53 [1965]).

As Pikoulis notes (2011, pgs. viii and ix) many of the images of place in Jones' novels reflect the sweeping changes that rapidly transformed Merthyr from a rural hamlet to an industrial behemoth, although Jones himself explained the meaning of The Island of Apples as a version of Avallon, the Celtic island of eternal youth. Pikoulis, 2011, pg. ix) considers that in the novel, Ystrad is Avallon, a place and a state of mind which is under threat as soon as it is discovered. It is noticeable, however, that when the story moves outside the town, the writing takes on a more lyrical quality as though Jones himself saw how the industrial environment restricted and inhibited freedoms. Having climbed a mountain, Dewi sees 'the beautiful shiny masses of fleecy cloud .... moving on the floods of air like mountains of gleaming silk and bubbled ivory' and 'had never known anywhere such limitless expanses of air and sky, such grandeur and freshness' (2011, pgs. 217 and 218 [1965]). Nevertheless, even amid such beauty, Dewi's attention is drawn to the precarious nature of his position with the mountain dropping away into 'a vast black sunless amphitheatre like a gigantic crater', suggesting both personal and social metaphors for the contrasts that have marked the industrial and post-industrial scene in South Wales.

Pikoulis suggests (2011, pg. xxi) that Jones' theme of youthful imagination echoes the Wordsworthian view of childhood as a place of innocence threatened by the restrictions of oncoming adulthood, but nevertheless its version of childhood moves

away from this to foreground the dichotomy of child/mother relationships –the one hand dependent and demanding and the other giving but also taking. It can also be suggested that this could be a metaphor for the relationship between worker and employer, between State and the individual. Jones' individualised view of the characters that crowded onto the early 20th Century scene in South Wales reflects the situated influence of place and mirrors the memorable individuals that peopled the imagination of Gwyn Thomas. Both, however, can ultimately be accused of perpetuating an image of life in South Wales which reinforces preconceptions and denies individuality, leading to what Wacquant (2007, pg. 67) has described as a 'blemish of place'. Nevertheless, I would suggest that Jones' work stands as a masterly evocation of the fears and insecurities of youth, but also explores universal themes which resonate with a zeitgeist of uncertainty that pervades the post-industrial world. As a metaphor for these traumas, the finale sees Dewi sheltering in a storm under a tree which was 'alive and screaming with fright, it reared wildly in the gusts, shying back like a plunging stallion upright against its leading rein' (2011, pg. 289 [1965]). Jones' awareness of the upheavals that convulsed the South Wales area through the industrial era are encapsulated in this imagery.

2.3.4 Contemporary literature

Contemporary writer Rachel Trezise writes of the desire to get away from the Valleys, noting in her first work, *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* that there is still a difference between the metropolitan and the provincial (2000, pg. 68). In her work, we find the same themes of dysfunctionalism and alienation and the same pressures on the jobless and low paid. 'The Rhondda Valley in 1985 was home to 65 per cent unemployment,' and 'it seems that Dare pit closed unknown years before I was born there, unemployment became a fashion which takes too long to die out' (2000, pgs. 21 and 66).

While there is sometimes a lightness of touch in Trezise's writing, both she and Gwyn Thomas write about the problems of living in South Wales and often there are more similarities than differences. Trezise's communities have grown out of the past, a case of history repeating itself. They both depict insular, inward-looking communities and they both display a sense of the injustice wrought by political and social systems. Both look at family dysfunctionalism and both see education and artistic endeavours as a way out of problems.

Trezise's collection of short stories *Fresh Apples* focusses on the culture of youth but the backdrop of the South Wales environment casts a powerful influence over

these tales, anchoring them and giving them a distinctive sense of place. In *A Little Boy*, Trezise uses personification to describe the pine trees on the Rhigos Mountain: they 'stood with their shoulders pinched as though trying to avoid the dew that fell on them, because when it hit it turned instantly to ice' (2005, pg. 136). Metaphor is employed to describe the rain which 'fell like an army of needles, penetrating the cracks in the pavement' (2005, pg. 143).

There is a wonderful evocation of the Italian cafes which once were a distinctive cultural feature of life in the South Wales Valleys. In *Jigsaws*, the narrator remembers 'the smell, tobacco from the old men's strong cigarettes and cocoa butter, its gas at the back of my throat. I'd sit on a green leather bench next to the window, looking out through the multi-colour vinyl blinds' (2005, pg. 148), a recollection that accords with Gwyn Thomas's description of the cafe where the Dark Philosophers congregated.

In the *Brake Fluid at Gina's*, Trezise cleverly contrasts an image of Pontypridd from its industrial heyday with a dystopian vision of the present. The town was 'a lovely Victorian wasteland where miners from the three adjoining valleys congregated at the height of the industrial age for union meetings and rugby matches' but now 'in the weekdays the dirty streets stirred with students and office workers and market traders and tramps. People danced in a fierce festival of living' (2005, pg. 160). This bleak vision of contemporary life is amplified by a post-modern interpretation of dysfunctional youth which sees the heroine hearing glass breaking against walls in her village. 'Young adults' neurotic screams arced into the night, lack of or over indulgence in narcotics – the village had gone to the dogs' (2005, pg. 167).

 I recognise the passion that informs Trezise's work – she speaks, as does Lewis Jones, as an insider, someone who recognises the injustices and inequalities in the area and calls for action. Trezise depicts young people in a Valleys environment in which poor job opportunities and a drug and alcohol problem combine to create a culture with little hope and a great deal of angst. However, this feeds into a pervasive view of life in the Valleys which is echoed in contemporary media views of such communities. As Thomas (2016) has shown in his study of young people in Merthyr, stigmatising representations are viewed as distortions which ignore the rich vein of positivity that young people feel more accurately reflects their experiences of life in their town.

Another contemporary take on life in post-industrial South Wale is articulated in Clive Evans' anthology of poetry (2015) which explores themes of regret and

nostalgia coupled with an irreverent take on life in Merthyr. His *All for a Watch and Chain* (2015, pg. 26) is a savage polemic against the exploitation of miners and the dangers they faced: 'From child to grandfather, father to son/ Never would you hear them complain/ Born to go down in the dust to their deaths/ And all for a watch and chain.' This piece elaborates on the work of 19th Century reformers although it also reflects on the solidarity and camaraderie of workers in the past, with a suggestion that this is no longer the case: 'Values have altered as time has marched on/ Now it's money we all have on the brain/ No downing tools when the union so rules/ But what price the watch and chain.' Evans also reflects on the changes he has seen in the area, the loss of what he sees as a collective childhood experience. In *Where have all the Good Times Gone?* (2015, pg. 27) he writes: 'Where have all the people gone, I knew when I was small?/ Where are all the summer trips that went from Radcliffe Hall?/ Barry every summer, in winter Band of Hope,/ Japs and Tarzan in the wood/ swinging from a rope./ Where are all the toys we had, slings and whips and tops,/ We could play with in doorways of the posher shops?' He suggests that modern young people have chosen a different path, through the use of computer games and their connection to the reality of visceral encounters in a natural environment is severely eroded: 'Children don't play proper games, they're all computer mad,/ They exist in 'virtual' worlds; it makes me feel so sad.' He also laments the changes in Merthyr town centre through the economic upheavals which have seen dramatic changes in the shopping infrastructure: 'When I walk along our High Street, it's full of charity shops,/ Pound stores and kebab bars, that stink of incinerated slops.' While determinedly nostalgic, there is an undercurrent of anger that so much of what he sees of as value has been swept away.

One of the great caricatures of contemporary life in South Wales is Des Barry's *A Bloody Good Friday* which provides a dystopian, although sometimes comedic, account of an anarchic riot that has a suitably dark outcome. It's a picture of a lost generation, befuddled by drink and drugs who live out their violent fantasies on the streets. While it's viscerally powerful and reflects a genuine anger at the lack of opportunities for young people in a post-industrial world, nevertheless, its bleak picture of dysfunctional youth can be viewed as a one-sided and overly bleak representation.

2.4 The power of representation

2.4.1 Literacy and power

The power of words to construct imagery and consolidate representations of a particular community cannot be understated. Lakov (1980) reminds us that

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sometimes people do not have a voice because language is couched in the terms of the status quo. Language is linked to power and the discourse of power (Gee, 2005). Gee argues that the function of human language is to support the enactment of social activities and social identities and to provide support for links within cultures and social groups (2005, pg. 1). He suggests that the use of language is invariably political, involving conceptions of power, status and value, shaping our perspectives on the world through the employment of particular words and grammar, i.e. what is 'normal', what is not? What is 'real', what is not? What is 'possible' or not?

Thoreau considered books to be the 'treasured wealth of world and the fit inheritance of generations and nations', and authors 'a natural and irresistible aristocracy in every society and, more than kings or emperors, exert an influence on mankind', (1997, pg. 94 [1854]). This influence can be perceived in the way that industrial and post-industrial communities have been portrayed in particular and partisan ways.

However, the power of representation in words is not confined to what may be regarded as conventional literacy practices. Street (1993) has shown how literacy is ideologically centred in local contexts, with everyday practices such as shopping lists or form filling constituting part of a literary canon. In a similar vein, the representation of a shared past can be used powerfully in advertising. Tangible representations of the mining heritage in South Wales can be seen in modern advertising. The marketing of the *Collier's Welsh* brand of cheese speaks of the characteristics of the brand: reliability, power and integrity as being exemplified by the Welsh coal miners of the past, who worked in harsh, dangerous conditions (Colliers Welsh Heritage, n.d.). The manufacturers claim the product is a tribute to a proud mining tradition. While perhaps overstating the case, nevertheless this marketing taps into a powerful sense of pride that ensures that the shared experiences of the industrial past are recognised and appreciated by contemporary residents. Similarly, the development in Ammanford of the *Coaltown Coffee Roasters* is said by its promoters to have grown out of the desire to ameliorate the effects of the closure of Ammanford Colliery in 2003 by providing employment to a community with few job prospects. Its publicity speaks of the new black gold – coffee, adapting a social representation of the coal industry to reflect the demands and interests of the 21st Century (Coaltown Coffee Roasters, n.d.).

However, Anderson (2010, pg. 73) notes that capitalist culture commodifies the notion of belonging experienced through a feeling of geographical location. He suggests that through co-ingrediently connecting people and place to a product,

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cultural ideas become linked to material objects, but also material things start to influence views of culture. In effect, capitalism puts a price on cultural life and through highlighting certain desirable attributes begins to influence these traits (Anderson, 2010, pg. 74).

The artistic representations produced in this research study illustrate the views of Street (1993, pgs. 5 & 7) who critiques the idea of literacy as an 'autonomous' model independent of social context and argues for a 'ideological' framework in which literary practices are intertwined with cultural and power structures. Reading and writing are connected to a range of cultural practices and can be employed to either reproduce or contest constructions of power and domination. Bruce and Bishop (2008, pg. 703) argue that literacy is essential to community well-being but they warn that a focus on literacy can be counter-productive as it can lead to a deficit view that notes the ways in which a community may lack the literary skills that are required in a wider society, while Rockhill (1993, pg. 163) argues that literacy can empower through collective action although the dominant ideology that constructs large numbers of people as illiterate often remains unchallenged (Rockhill, 1993, pg. 163). A significant move to challenge the dichotomies of agency/structure and empowerment/power is the suggestion that literature is socially constructed in the structures of ordinary engagement, is multiple and involves different types of communication (Rockhill, 1993, pg. 164). However, Barton and Hamilton (1998, pg. 229) note that detailed ethnographic study has shown that literacy can both support and undermine democratic processes, literacy can open up activities but can also control them. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the importance of literacy as a communal resource rather than just an individualistic skill-set (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, pg. 230), while Wissman *et al* (2015, pg. 3) note that the development of sociocultural perspectives on literacy has resulted in a focus on how literacy practices are shaped by identities. Nevertheless, Brandt and Clinton (2003, pg. 354) suggest that when groups create literary practices out of local resources, this may be less an empowerment and more a sign of isolation and a lack of political or economic incorporation (Brandt and Clinton, 2003, pg. 354).

2.4.2 Dialect

An approach to writing which foregrounds explicit representation and theoretical analysis has resulted in the silencing of other languages and ideas, suggests Anderson (2010, pg. 31). The representation of literature does not necessarily have to be dictated by received notions of grammar, punctuation and conventional lexical usage. Of considerable value in understanding the variety of ways in which

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language can be communicated is to consider the use of dialect. Although this is not a particular feature of oral traditions in Wales, nevertheless a distinctive pattern of speech can be recognised as vernacular South Walian English in which Welsh names are frequently incorporated – a form of communication that has been described as 'Wenglish' (Lewis, 2016). However, Snell (2013, pg. 1) warns that although dialect prejudice has been vigorously opposed since the 1960s, deficit views of the use of non-standard English have started to come to the fore again. Snell, in her work on the language of children in the north-east of England, warns that approaches in schools which problematize non-standard voices may contribute to the alienation of working class children. Even where there are no difficulties in communicating effectively using dialect forms, problems may still arise. As Bourdieu has noted (1991, pg. 55), the ability to produce sentences that can be understood may be quite inadequate to create sentences that are likely to be listened to and acknowledged as acceptable in all situations when speaking. Snell notes that this is where 'voice', the way in which people try to make themselves understood, must be included in a review of repertoire (2013, pg. 20). Snell (2013, pg. 21) contends that different linguistic forms are, therefore, perceived as having different social values, a system of linguistic evaluation that Bourdieu (1991, pg. 52) terms 'symbolic power'.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be seen that the canon of literature relating to representations of life in an industrial environment is a broad church. From the 18th Century, writers who were fascinated by the emergence of a new industrial order, through the 19th Century chroniclers who were motivated by a reformist zeal, to the 21st Century authors who commentate on what they see as a dystopian post-industrial reality, the overall effect has been of a pervasive representation that anchors place and people through a particular and peculiar convention that whatever the realities of the present-day is hard to negotiate. Auto-didactic writers in South Wales were motivated by a need to challenge the hegemony of mine owners and ironmasters, but their enthusiasm to present the 'subaltern' voice has ultimately contributed to a heuristic perception of life in industrial areas.

I have shown how through an aesthetic fascination in the 18th and 19th Centuries with the twin tropes of darkness and light in industrial practices (darkness as a metaphor for the 'black arts' of mining and light often used with reference to 'fiery' furnaces), depictions of mining and iron/steel making areas often show them as areas apart from the rest of society, in effect 'Othering' them. This theme, I suggest, has continued to the present day as I have shown through a discussion of Shields'

work on concepts of 'Northerness'. However, I have also discussed how there is a duality at play in 19th Century representations – social reformers such as Charles Dickens and Joseph Skipsey were motivated to chronicle the horrors of industrial practices and the effect on families, although their crusading zeal also fed into wider perceptions of industrial areas as isolated and different.

I have reviewed the impact of the Welsh 'industrial novel' genre – work that is more firmly rooted in working class experience, with its great advocate Raymond Williams suggesting that this is literature that is created from within working communities as illustrated by the polemical writing of Lewis Jones. However, as I discuss, Jones' agitprop constructions also contribute to a very particular way of perceiving industrial areas, and these perceptions are amplified through the work of Gwyn Thomas. Although writing from an insider's perspective, having grown up in the South Wales' Valleys, nevertheless, Thomas' work came under fire in certain circles for supposedly exposing Wales to ridicule. I would suggest that both writers use exaggeration for effect, a familiar device in fiction, but one that can have unforeseen consequences in creating distortions and reinforcing prejudices.

I have reviewed contemporary writing with a particular emphasis on the award-winning author Rachel Trezise, and suggest that her work has distinct parallels with Gwyn Thomas' writings, work that transcends generations with its themes of despair, alienation and joblessness. I suggest that Trezise's dystopian visions are reinforced by the anarchic imaginings of author Des Barry and both writers create representations that argue powerfully that social structures are under attack. However, their visceral writing contributes, again, to an unbalanced perception of people and place. Finally, having reviewed this body of literature and shown how it contributes to particular views of industrial areas and its communities, I suggest that language shapes our conceptions of power and status. While this can have negative effects in terms of hegemonic practices, people can also be empowered through literacy practices that can be seen as a communal resource vital to wellbeing. It is from this standpoint that the body of work which has formed the artistic cornerstone of this study has been put together.

In Chapter 3, I engage with the broader context of the literature that reflects notions of community, territorial stigmatisation and the political and cultural influences that have shaped the responses of participants in this study. I will also examine how representations can be viewed through the lens of nostalgia, taking as a standpoint the premise that the past informs the present.

Chapter 3

Community, place and identity

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that the concept of community is critical to an understanding of the motivations and output of the participants in these studies. It is also central to an understanding of how representations have affected local communities and what has provided the motivation for their own artistic creations. Accordingly, the chapter examines the notion of community from the early days of the Chicago School which predicted the 'death of community' to later constructions which emphasise the positive aspects of community. The way communities are constructed in the minds of insiders and outsiders is examined through the work of Howarth (2001), Charlesworth (2000) and Ingold (1993) and the sense of place theories of Casey (2001) and Relph (1976) provide an explanation for the importance we attach to belonging, homeland and identity. I also examine what can be defined as 'community' with particular reference to the image of Wales which historically has suffered from negative representations that extend beyond the industrial south and encompass an overall perception of the country as an occupied, subjugated entity. The chapter also explores the concept of Welsh identity, looking at the affective response to landscape through the use of Welsh terminology (Pearson and Shanks, 2001, pg. 141) and the connection to place through past and present (Anderson, 2014, pg. 39). Dicks' (2000, pg. 104) conception of communities as a binary of 'the good community' and the 'vanishing other' is also examined. An understanding of the positivity of the power of place and community and an appreciation of why people feel the need to tell 'their' stories is explored.

The chapter also aims to show how representations of 'Othered' communities are mediated by the effects of territorial stigma (Wacquant, 2007) and by the negative constructions attached to council house estates (Hanley, 2007). Territorial stigma is created through the application of power through dominant groups (Anderson, 2010) and attempts to resist these hegemonic structures are considered through the lens of Fraser's (1995) plea for a restructuring through political and cultural changes. She argues for a politico-economic restructuring and a symbolic or cultural change which she terms 'recognition'. As a way of countering stigmatisation, the different interpretations of culture are also examined, taking as a standpoint Williams' (1958, pg. 89) assertion that culture is ordinary.

As much of this study involves a reflection on history, taking a position that the past informs the present, the work of Bright (2012) on redemptive remembering, who argues that the contested past of former mining and steel communities can become hidden, is examined. I also look at how representations of an area are affected by the suppressed memories of the recent past through the work of Gordon (2008) on social haunting. This is considered in the context of the community's relationship to place, encompassing a temporal progression from past to present and also to the future. Degnen's (2005, 2013) position on social memory is also reviewed. Her work on the 'three-dimensionality of memory' – space, time and relationality provide a lens for understanding the temporal and spatial shifts in the work of this study's participants.

While I am aware that the work I am referring to makes reference to a number of theorists, this broad approach reflects the multi-faceted nature of the research and is more appropriate than employing a unifying framework. I feel that this wide-ranging evaluation of particular theorists allows for an in-depth reflection on the themes of the thesis – the key ideas of place, community and identity are better considered through the lenses of the different theorists I elaborate on rather than focussing, for example, on Gramsci's views on hegemony or exploring the research questions just through a Bourdieusian or Foucauldian perspective, which I felt would be restrictive, although I acknowledge the key contribution of Bourdieu to debates on cultural capital. The wide-ranging methodology - discussion groups, walking tours, discussion of artifacts and the poetry and prose writing sessions demand a greater theoretical variety than a single approach. The theories of sense of place, structure of feeling, social haunting and sensory perception also allow me to critically reflect on the themes of the thesis, particularly the relationship between past, present and future, through a phenomenological lens which also takes into account Bloch's metaphysical construction of the 'not yet' in which traces of the future may be located in the past.

However, while employing a broad approach to theory allows flexibility and a wide-ranging consideration of issues, reflecting the diverse range of the methodology, it could lead to a lack of clarity, and an obfuscation of the aims of the thesis through a too disparate perspective. Nevertheless, I consider that the position I have chosen allows me to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the themes of the data. This broad approach reflects the diversity of work in the field. While it could be argued that focussing on a particular theoretical approach such as Bourdieu's would have allowed me to reflect on how the study has contributed to that body of knowledge, the aim of the work was never to advance a particular theorist's ideas

but instead to create an intervention that relates to policy and practice in the South Wales Valleys.

3.2 The notion of community

3.2.1. Contested constructions

As the concept of community is a *leitmotif* that will resonate throughout this study and is a powerful driver for the artistic output of the research groups, it would be apposite to consider how this can be defined. Is a community a bounded territory defined spatially in which the inhabitants cohere into a unified representation, or are there more complex factors at play here? Is a community linked by shared political and socio-economic ideas which have a historical basis? Is community defined by what it is or by what it is not?

Williams (1976, pg. 66) notes that unlike any other social organisation, community invariably seems to be defined as positive; the complexity of community relates to the interaction between a sense of common concern and the materialisation of common organisation. However, later writers have emphasised the darker aspects of communities as sites of exclusion, inequality and oppression (Hoggett, 1997; Crow, 2002). Gilchrist *et al* (2010, pg. 4) note that community is often linked to notions of warmth, nostalgia and feelings of belonging but the term can be used both in an exclusionary and inclusive fashion. This point is emphasised by Dicks (2000, pg. 31) who, in outlining the development of tourism in the Rhondda Valley in the 1980s, argues that the image of a positive, self-sufficient community was at odds with the Wales Tourist Board's projection of the area as deprived and in need of change. This resulted in a dichotomy in which the area's attributes were both promoted and denied. Indeed, this is a feature of the research area where many constructions emerge, both positive and negative, from the official figures which portray the place as a site of multiple deprivation - 32 per cent of areas in Merthyr and Rhymney are in the 10 per cent most deprived areas in Wales (Welsh Assembly, 2010, pg. 7), to my participants' own views of community which positions them as a resource-rich group with significant social capital. Charles and Davies (2005, pg. 674) consider that the Welsh Assembly has privileged an ideal of community in which people construct the concept of community in their everyday lives.

The conceptualisation of a community as 'connected' suggests positive associations with transformative change, but Crow and Mah (2012, pg. 9) warn that for the term to be effective, then it is important to confront its contested and contradictory

dimensions. Gilchrist *et al* (2009, pg. 26) suggest that informal and formal networks boost communities, providing opportunities for discussion and feedback, however, Crow and Mah argue that the concept of connection can sometimes be problematic as many positive yet conflicting ideas can coexist which creates disagreement (2012, pg. 14). The differences between communities can be socially and culturally positive but can also be related to social exclusion and inequality (Crow and Mah, 2012, pg. 14). Moje (2000, pg. 77) believes that the concept of community has to be perceived not as a reified fact but as a complex and contested concept. Moje suggests that it is important to define what is meant by community and to acknowledge that they are complex groupings that often overlap, converge and conflict (2000, pg. 82). Moje also warns that communities can suffer from conceptualisations that position them as one distinct group, ignoring the many complex social and cultural factors that may be operating (2000, pg. 99).

Communities can be linked through shared concerns, problems or a particular interest in a topic, what Wenger *et al* (2002, pg. 4) have described as 'communities of practice', while Moje (2000, pg. 103) notes that communities are not necessarily linked to permanent sites but may come together for particular purposes. However, unless we are describing cyber-communities linked together by shared interests across the Internet, then visualisations of community are invariably linked to constructions of place, although Massey (2005, pg. 94) suggests that communities or networks communicating common interests can easily be set up at a distance. However, Walkerdine (2010, pg. 94) asserts that there has been much debate in the social sciences about whether the concept of community can be used at all. While community had been understood as a fixed entity, more recently the importance of social networks has been emphasised. Walkerdine argues that the concept of 'communal beingness' is fundamental to an understanding of community (2010, pg. 674).

The idea of community is a much shared construction. Bauman (1991, pg. 246) envisages community as a type of group therapy for everyone and suggests that we are living in the age of the community exemplified by 'the lust for community, the search for community, invention of community, imagining community'. Howarth (2001, pg. 16) agrees with this contention, saying, 'We cannot but live in communities, we need to be in and of communities in order to realise a distinct sense of self, attachment, individuality and communality.' This contrasts with the position of the Chicago sociologists Park, Burgess and Wirth in the early decades of the 20th Century, who postulated a 'decline of community' suggesting that the social

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bonds created in small communities were being fragmented as large urban neighbourhoods developed (Warwick and Littlejohn, 1992, pg. 4). The 'decline of community' theorists drew on the work of Tonnies (1887) whose concept of *gemeinschaft*, usually translated as 'community', was the term used to refer to what he called the 'moral order of the countryside', the structures and norms of village life in which roles were clearly defined and social control was applied through networks of family and friends (Archer, 2013, pg. 131). Archer considers that the term 'community' encapsulates notions of humanity and ethics which have become fractured through processes of industrialisation and the development of cities. Tonnies' vision of *gesellschaft* (society) was a response to the creation of ever-larger industrial cities in which traditional social norms were replaced by formalised forces of regulation such as the police and law courts (Archer, 2013, pg. 133). Nevertheless, Archer notes that even in big cities the concept of community operates, as most people inhabit only a small section in which the traditional social norms of village life can be replicated (2013, pg. 135). This assertion has been demonstrated through this study which has found that in the town of Merthyr, many of the research participants identified first with their local area and secondly with the wider town.

Warwick and Littlejohn suggest that a definition of community is the probability of people settling in a locality with social networks ensuing (1992, pg. 14). Nevertheless, the concept of community is a fluid entity in which there may be a shift from networks of workers to a more traditional kinship-based grouping. However, Cohen (1985, pg. 37) suggests that the reality of community change is rather more complex. Rather than a switch to a more homogenous network of social relations based on industrial capitalism, old institutions have adapted rather than disappearing and have become the media for the assertion of community boundaries. At all stages, community boundaries will delineate 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (Warwick and Littlejohn, 1992, pg. 14), a concept elaborated by Relph (1976) with his phenomenological constructions of 'insideness' and 'outsideness': people are validated by their connection to a place. For him, the ultimate alienation of people from place is summed up in the phrase 'existential outsideness'. For Relph, it appears that social exclusion is an inevitable outcome of the construction of communities.

3.2.2 Community and the Welsh identity
If there are strong community links in the South Wales Valleys today, then it is suggested these have their origins in the bonds formed in the difficult and

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dangerous conditions of work in the mines and steelworks. Dennis *et al* (1969, pg. 73, 79) note that pride in work was an important part of a miner's life and the social relations created through solidarity over a lifetime of work and leisure together had a powerful effect on lifestyle patterning. Dennis *et al*'s (1969) study of a coal mining village in Yorkshire highlights the cohesive effects of men working closely together but by the 1980s, Warwick and Littlejohn (1992, pgs. 130, 131) note that there had been significant social and cultural change in mining communities. Changes in communities resulted in divisions structured along employment lines and the development of public sector involvement in the provision of services reduced the self-help networks which had been a feature of these areas (Warwick and Littlejohn, 1992, pg. 131).

However, the changes wrought through the later decades of the 20th Century and the far-reaching impact of the divisive 1984/85 miners' strike have culminated in a very different set-up. In Derbyshire, Bright (2012, pg. 319) notes that wards around the former collieries are among the one per cent most deprived nationally. He suggests that the ruination of the coalfield has been perceived through negative and neglectful representations, in which the dominant reaction is one of disdain or distrust. He sees the residents of these communities as abandoned to a 'dystopian' end of history 'once loved, but now loathed as fallen occupants of a contemporary grotesquery' (Bright, 2012, pg. 319). However, Archer (2013, pg. 135) argues that many of the more adverse comments about city culture 'reflect more of the prejudices of the commentator rather than the actual goings on within the city'. This remains particularly the case today when poorer neighbourhoods such as the areas covered by this research study are singled out for criticism.

For Dicks, cultural identity is defined by reference to community conceptions: communities share similar values through a collective experience of working and living in a certain place; through an awareness of solidarity and the requirement of collective action; and through popular images of a deprived community (2000, pg. 104). This analysis allows her to frame two concepts of community reflecting separate strands of social scientific discourse: the socio-political envisaging of community, 'the good community'; and the socio-anthropological creation: the community of the 'vanishing other' (Dicks, 2000, pg. 105).She asserts that the depiction of a mining community mixes sections of the political aspects of a 'good community' with aspects of the 'vanishing other' (Dicks, 2000, pg. 105). From the 1970s, there was an increasing move away from a focus on work experiences as a

pattern for community to a wider appreciation of community as a shared cultural encounter (Dicks, 2000, pg. 106).

However, Savage (2008, pg. 151) notes that concerns over community decline resonate with the population at large and it is evident that there is a powerful nostalgia for old ways of neighbourhood living. Nevertheless, Phillipson (2012, pg. 547) considers that while people's ties may well now extend beyond geographical borders, loyalties and identities are still often constructed within defined territories and for groups such as older people and some ethnic minorities, neighbourhood attachment is an important factor for quality of life and security. This 'nostalgia' shows a regard for a belief in the past that informs and enriches ideas of place. The area researched has had a strong sense of the richness of its past, expressed through social and cultural capital and Williams (1975, pg. 21), in his review of literary treatments of community, concludes that there is a strong inclination to link community to concepts of the past, supporting the suggestion that social change involves loss.

The consideration of community also needs to be evaluated in the context of the broader concept of nation state. In the past, Wales has been envisaged as a 'folk oriented' collection of communities, (the gwerin) out of step with modern life. This concept, focussed on the rural heartlands, contrasts with images of the South Wales Valleys as communities in which the potential for collective, political action is envisaged (Dicks, 2000, pgs. 100 and 101). For Plaid Cymru activist Saunders Lewis, the ideal Welsh nation would be a 'community of communities' in which these two constructions were combined (Dicks, 2000, pg. 82). Clarke (2009) suggests that the concept of nation is a powerful way to delineate distinctions that 'Other' places and people, constructing, imagining and continuing a sense of Wales and being Welsh. While sport, particularly rugby, can be a powerful unifying way of symbolically representing Wales, Mannay (2016b, pg. 5) suggests that other factors such as nationalism, literary and cultural imagery, historical and geographical ideologies and the Welsh language have to be considered when considering what contributes to a sense of national identity. Pearson and Shanks (2001, pg. 141) argue that the Welsh language is 'folded in the land' – the words *tirwedd* and *tirlun* show an affective response to landscape which has no equivalent in English; *tirwedd* describing the geographical physicality of the land, while *tirlun* encapsulates a pictorial image of landscape rooted in a cultural and social appreciation of its values. Intriguingly, Tyler (2015, pg. 125) notes that the majority of Welsh place names predate mapping and their descriptiveness may be the result of a shared

recounting rather than a reliance on inscribed maps. Garton Ash's (2004, pgs. 18 and 29) concept of a Janus dilemma over geographical and cultural identity in Britain can be applied to Wales, suggests Anderson (2014, pg. 30) with one face looking inward to the past and the other looking out to the future. Lowenthal considers that historical knowledge boosts local and national identity and that communities with no sense of their own past resemble people with no knowledge of their parents (1985, pg. 44). Hayden (1995, 227) agrees that preserving the history of space and places allows for a recovery of the collective self; understanding the past encourages people to conceptualise their ideas about the present and the future. Hayden adds that the urban landscape is not a text to be read but a repository of environmental meaning far richer than any verbal code (1995, pg. 227). For conquered people, identification with a national past can reinforce a sense of worth (Lowenthal, 1985, pg. 44). The loss of Welsh history 'hath eclipsed our Power, and corrupted our Language, and almost blotted us out of the Books of Records', lamented a 17th Century chronicler (Jones, 1972, pg. A3 [1688]). To combat this oppression, Welsh learning and family tales were collected, leading to Vanbrugh's condemnation of Wales (1702, pg. 21) as 'a Country in the World's back-side, where every Man is born a Gentleman and a Genealogist'.

3.2.3 The hidden past

As has been suggested, the past informs the present, and much of the artistic work produced in this study has emerged from a nostalgic lens which is rooted in the concepts of place and community. However, this temporal progression also involves a consideration of the future. The way the past affects contemporary experience has been explored by Gordon (2008, pg. xvi) who has developed the idea of 'social haunting' which reflects the harm or loss arising from social violence and is a way in which modern power systems impact on everyday life. She considers that social ghosts are 'haunting reminders of lingering trouble' and an indicator that something that has been hidden is still very much in the forefront of experience (Gordon, 2008, pg. xix). Bright (2015, pg. 3) says that social haunting occurs in places where there's been societal problems or repression and, therefore, the past influences the present in ways that are not always visible.

Gordon notes that her conceptualisation of ghosts has allowed her to frame an examination of modern systems of abusive power, drawing on Foucault's concept of subjugated power (1980, 2002) which suggests that subjugated knowledge names what official knowledge suppresses but also refers to fugitive knowledge produced on the margins. Jacobs (1974*, pg. 68)* argues that a community experiences identity

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through an amalgam of time and space and when a shared background is lost then it becomes necessary to formulate a conscious vision of tradition. This theme of a community under threat is powerfully articulated in Owen Sheers' play *The Passion*, which reworked the Christian story into a tale of company greed and the efforts to combat it. Sheers' vision of place is that it is shaped by recollections of everything that has transpired in the past. As the 'Teacher' is crucified, he remembers the vanished parts of the town of Port Talbot. The narrator recalls, 'Like a torrent it was, a flow of the gone town pouring from his mouth. Everything that had been taken, back' (Sheers, 2012, pg. 164).
He adds,

> *'We came out of the ground. Our memories, our parents'*
> *memories, their parents' memories. And with them our stories.*
> *Everything that made us, everything that made the town more*
> *than just bricks and glass and concrete'* (Sheers, 2012, pg. 165).

As Sheers suggests (2012, pg. 45),'How can you talk about a future without a past?' However, Weil (1978, pg. 49) takes the view that the past never returns once it is obliterated and preserving what little is left should become almost an obsession. Massey (2005, pgs. 124 and 125) suggests that it is not possible to 'go back' home or anywhere else because both the place and you will have changed through an imbrication of time and space.

Gordon avers (2008, pgs. 7 and 8) that the study of social life involves confronting its ghostly aspects and experiencing a reality predicated not on stark knowledge but as a transformative recognition. In a bid to articulate how hauntings may be transmitted and received, Gordon uses Williams' (1977) conception of 'structures of feeling' which tries to capture 'felt' social experiences as they intersect with formal, official and fixed social forms (2008, pg. 19). Gordon suggests that a structure of feeling 'articulates presence' (Williams, 1977, pg. 135) as a 'tangled exchange of noisy silences and seething absences' (2008, pg. 200). This tangle is haunting, an articulating of experiences which more structured forms ignore. Edensor (2005b, pg. 835) suggests that ghosts haunt the regulated city as disembodied entities which provoke strangely familiar memories but also mysterious ones, as embodied in the notion of the uncanny or *unheimlich* in which things that are familiar and homely suddenly become strange. For Edensor (2005b, pg. 835) ghosts are also sought to remember what has been erased either through political strategy or because the trauma of the recent past is too painful to confront.

Gordon notes that broadly sociology is concerned with both the production and interpretation of stories relating to social and cultural life but a disciplinary division places stories/fiction in literature and facts in social science (2008, pg. 25). However, Gordon suggests that this is not a complete segregation: the origin of sociology is closely connected to literature and its disciplinary methods and theoretical assumptions are in a constant struggle with the fictive (2008, pg. 25). In this study, the production of artistic representations mirrors this conflation between the disciplines of sociology and literature, and the exercise of a nostalgic turn can produce unexpected results. As Eagleton (1990, pg. 203) notes, an evocation of the past can have the revolutionary aim of summoning the dead to aid the living, taking from them some of their dangerous power.

This recovering of a people's history is a powerful theme. As Prendergast (1992, pgs. 213 and 214) argues, obscurity or illegibility may be a characteristic of the qualities of the lived experience of urban dwellers but is also the result of the application of concealed powerful interests who benefit from an inequitable distribution of power. Soja (1996, pg. 192) suggests that by recovering the history of places and spaces it is possible to preserve the collective self more effectively than if the past is ignored, and mistakes and injustices repeated. The ghost can point the way to what has been missing, which is sometimes everything (Gordon, 2008, pg. 58). The ghost can represent loss, sometimes of a life and sometimes of a path not taken, but it can also represent the possibility of hope for the future (Gordon, 2008, pgs. 63 and 64). She suggests that ghosts are not just a negative reflection of loss and trauma but articulate the need for something to be done. This is not a return to the past but an acknowledgement of repression in the present a 'reckoning with that which we have lost but never had' (Gordon, 2008, pg. 183).

In a similar vein, Bright's (2014, pg. 3) research into inter-generational experiences of educational disaffection has revealed what he calls 'affective intensities' that are never quite visible – an uncanny form of knowing without knowing that is more than embodied collective memory. Bright notes that people from former coalfield areas often speak of a type of haunting that goes back through a classed community history, 'about fixated repetitions in a halted time where things viciously "rubbed out" still make themselves palpably present' (2014, pg. 3). Bright's work in Barnsley (2015, pg. 2) as part of a wider Working with Social Haunting project has seen people collaborating with artists to revisit memories of the demise of the coalfields and the trauma of the 1984/85 miners' strike. The project focusses on how former social and political upheavals remain firmly in contemporary consciousness despite hegemonic efforts to suppress them (2015, pg. 2). This awareness of an industrial

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past may contribute to people's perceptions of themselves as rooted in a working class tradition. In Wales, many people have grown up through a period when older stereotypes of class were much in evidence and the past has been a persistent influence (Open University, 2016). That past may contribute to the strength of the Labour Party in Wales and the support for trade unionism now in decline. 'The living are haunted by ghosts of the past' (Open University, 2016). This traumatic past is highlighted by Walkerdine (2010, pg. 93) who has shown how the closure of a steelworks had a traumatic effect on a South Wales valley community leading to 'a fear of death' which resulted in survival techniques that included silence. Walkerdine elaborates on the theories of Bick (1968, *cited in* Walkerdine, 2010) regarding the experience of skin as a physical concept of 'being held'. Walkerdine suggests the psychic skin, or ego-skin is as important as the physical because it provides an affective notion of boundaries. Walkerdine argues that the steelworks community provided an ego-skin with the works as a central object, backed up by notions of community as family (2010, pg. 97). Walkerdine suggests that the skin held the inhabitants in a rigid containment which supplied a powerful sense of continuity of being, but also created strict rules about conduct, opposition to outsiders and a reluctance to leave the community. The breaking of that skin caused by the closure of the steelworks brought huge anxiety and fears of annihilation (Walkerdine, 2010, pg. 98).

Similarly, Bright (2012) uses the concept of redemptive remembering to argue that the contested past of former mining and steel communities can become hidden and this could have an effect on the educational progress of young people today (Bright, 2012, pg. 318). Bright draws on the work of Reay (2009) who suggests that alienation from school is rooted in historical class experience, using the metaphor of sedimentation to show how a sense of powerlessness and educational inferiority is transmitted not only through the children's own experience but through the sedimented experiences of older generations (2009, pg. 27).

Bright articulates Bloch's (1986 [1938], 2000) ontology of the 'not yet', in which traces of the future can be located in remnants of the past. Giroux and McLaren (1997, pg. 146) examine this in terms of the development of a 'concrete utopia' – the real conditions which are required to make utopia achievable. Concrete utopia aims to locate a possible future within reality and is always something that is in a state of becoming (Giroux and McLaren, 1997, pg. 146). Siebers and Fell (n.d., pgs. 5-7) note that the 'not yet' is particularly apposite when investigating the connection between community and future. Communities need to negotiate at least two futures

– the real projection of the present and an aspirational hypothetical future. The future is full of richer possibilities than the present reality it will become.

Gordon (2008, pg. 127) sees utopia as the perception of the fundamental difference between the world as it is and the just and equitable world that could be created. One of the ways to achieve this is through redemptive remembering in which history is treated as a 'lived discourse' and remembrance is filtered through a critical analysis which confronts 'the social amnesia of generations in flight from their own histories – the subjugated knowledge of the marginalised' (McLaren and Tadeu da Silva, 1993).

A further aspect of remembering – social memory - is conceptualised by Degnen (2005, pg. 730) who suggests it is predicated on factors such as place, relations and the recounting of experience. This provides a lens for understanding the temporal and spatial shifts in the work of this study's participants.

She describes a 'three-dimensionality of memory' in which space is the first dimension, time the second and relationality a third (Degnen, 2005, pgs. 737 and 738). Degnen shows in her study of the post-mining village of Dodworth in South Yorkshire that the recapturing of places and absences through memory talk means that such sites are remembered for their symbolic representation of meaning which encompasses loss and change and may act as a way of ameliorating the effect of the immense social and economic changes in the area (Degnen, 2005, pg. 742). However, Degnen warns that although memory talk can create a sense of belonging, in its differentiation of people and place it can also become a means of exclusion (2005, pg. 742).

In her view, knowing links social experience and memories in a temporal and spatial connection (Degnen, 2013 pg. 560). However, she counsels that knowing, while implying a connection, can also disconnect (Degnen, 2013, pg. 562). Knowing is also bound up with the past and the post-industrial present, situated in a 'shared experience of rupture between the then and now' (Degnen, 2013, pg. 563).

These links are emphasised by Anderson (2014, pg. 39) who agrees that connections to place are not just a product of the present but are affected by the past. In his work on contemporary Welsh authors, he suggests that their narration of places and events can be followed in a series of plotlines which represent places as coincidences of events, memories and artifacts which are both simultaneous and linked across generations. He warns that modern cultural life can create feelings of alienation which can be countered through alternative person-place relationships or a reimagining of the past (Anderson, 2014, pg. 40).However, as in all places, certain myths arise that come to be perceived as 'given' truths. For an area such as South

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Wales there are powerful narratives that document the workers' struggle in the face of the demands of employers and the assumptions around a political framework that is popularly supposed to have a left-wing bias. The reassurance provided by the 'known' aspects of a connection to place can be amplified and extended through recollections that draw on a mythologised knowledge. Indeed, Anderson (2014, pgs. 188 and 194) has suggested that realities of the past can be excised through the process of retelling and remembering and that for people to be fully develop a sense of belonging then the myth of memory could become more important than factual reality.

3.2.4 Sense of place

As I will argue throughout this thesis, cultural representations are contingent on the specific nature of an attachment to place which can be conceptualised through a phenomenological standpoint as exemplified by Casey (2001, pg. 684) who asserts that there is 'no place without self and no self without place'. Casey's work elaborates on the theories of Tuan (1977, pg. 4) who devised the concept of topophilia to describe the affective connection between people and places in which place is envisaged as 'a field of care'. Sense of place in Wales can be operationalised through cognitive mapping, starting with *y filltir sgwar*, the square mile of landscape experienced as a child, *cynefin*, the habitat we live in through the impressionable years of 5 to 15, and *y fro*, the home neighbourhood or district (Pearson and Shanks, 2001, pgs. 138 and 139). Cynefin, however, is more than just landscape and scenery but it is a bonded sense of community. An indication of the importance of sense of place in Wales can be gleaned from the word *hiraeth* which Anderson (2010, pgs. 35 and 40) describes as a sense of belonging and yearning that almost defies translation. He says there is no direct equivalent in English although the concept of 'hearth' is an approximation, but it fails to convey feelings of loss and nostalgia. The deep attachment to a homeland is something that can be experienced across the world (1977, pg. 154). This strong connection is conceptualised by Lopez (1992, pgs. 39 and 48) as *querencia* – a secure place that provides the basis for the development of character and can provide a grounded response when communities are under threat. Lopez (1992, pg. 40) suggests that the search for a *querencia* can be applied to the challenges faced in the modern world and is also a desire to find out who we are, based on an awareness of sense of place or the relationship between people and the place they occupy. Lopez (1992, pg. 41) reflects on the Spanish settlement of the New World and notes that the imperial framework of exploitation they initiated can be observed today with the

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physical destruction of local landscapes to boost the wealth of people who do not live there, something that has been a feature of the South Wales industrial landscape.

As Weil (1978, pg. 41) notes, 'to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul'. An active participation in community life forms the basis for a rooted attachment, contends Weil (1978, pg. 41). However, Anderson (2010, pg. 129) argues for a position in which an individual sense of place transcends local, national or even religious standpoints. A sense of place is therefore defined not just by geographical borders, but by cultural imaginaries (2010, pg. 130). Ingold (2008, pg. 1808) contends that although, as Casey suggests, we are in place as embodied beings, nevertheless this embodiment is not bounded but extends along pathways of 'entanglement in the textured world'. In Ingold's view, to be is not to be in place but to be along paths which are the primary condition of becoming (2008, pg. 1808). In a similar vein, Shield's (1991, pg. 30) concept of 'social spatialisation' suggests that space is socially created through literary processes such as metaphor which link certain associations to places. Harvey (1996, pg. 293) also considers that places are not just simple fixed entities but are always being socially constructed by strong institutional forces. He sees a search for an authentic sense of place as a reaction against the forces of capitalism, with an emphasis on a sense of community. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the importance of place as an imaginative catalyst. For him, place is envisaged as a 'locus of collective memory' where identity is fashioned through the creation of memories connecting people to the past (Harvey, 1996, pg. 306). However, he argues (1996, pg. 62) that while collective memory is often articulated through a connection to place, this can be contested in terms of a power struggle to represent certain memories at the expense of others, as can be seen in the portrayal of ex-mining and steel communities. Similarly, in his analysis of working class life in Rotherham, Charlesworth (2000, pg. 88) feels that there is a tension between local and external constructions of community and landscape. Charlesworth considers that the physical aspects of Rotherham are of little importance to the residents and the town may have little objectified or representational meaning for them. 'Their feelings have nothing to do with the physical and material structures of the space in which they live and emerge from cultural relations that are not themselves in Rotherham' (Charlesworth, 2000, pg. 93). Charlesworth's views find support from Massey (1993, pg. 151) who suggests that the linking of place with community is a misidentification. She considers that what is special about place is not a pre-given

collective identity but a 'thrown-togetherness' (Massey, 2005, pg. 140). However, what Charlesworth, Massey and Harvey fail to recognise is the human need to be rooted. Their bleak regard for the power of place is countered by Schama who argues that national identity would lose a lot of its power if it was not connected closely to a landscape tradition. 'It's topography mapped, elaborated and enriched as homeland,' he says (2004, pg. 15). Similarly, Ingold (1993, pg. 152) argues for a 'dwelling perspective' on landscape in which place is conceptualised as a record of the life and work of previous generations and the impact they have made. The landscape is the story and its visualisation can be construed as an act of remembrance, a perceptual engagement with an environment 'pregnant with the past' (Ingold, 1993, pg. 153).

3.2.5 Territorial stigmatisation

While it is argued that a sense of place is a powerful catalyst to develop attachment and identity, what happens when that sense of place suffers from negative misrepresentations? For areas suffering from economic deprivation, poor life chances and health challenges, a new categorisation has emerged as communities struggle to cope with the post-industrial malaise. Wacquant (2007, pg. 66) has highlighted the emergence of a new regime of advanced marginality reflecting territorial fixation and stigmatisation, spatial alienation and the dissolution of place. Wacquant suggests that stigma has a territorial basis, particularly in isolated urban or semi-urban areas which are envisaged by both residents and outsiders as 'social purgatories' (2007, pg. 67). When these spaces become permanent, discourse of vilification spread 'from below' in day-to-day interactions and 'from above' in political, bureaucratic and journalistic disciplines (2007, pg. 67).

Territorial stigma is often seen operating in areas of multiple deprivation in the UK such as social housing estates, for example, an estate in Merthyr, often vilified in the media and the subject of a television reality series *Skint* (2015). Other TV series such as *The Valleys* (2012-14) and *Valley Cops* (2017) have contributed to negative perceptions of the area. These constructions add to the negative impact of the literary and artistic representations already reviewed. However, according to an exhibition on the history of the town, this reputation has been largely perpetuated by a hostile press (Redhouse, 2014). Byrne *et al* (2015, pg. 81) agree that the media can reinforce representations of place as 'Other', adding to perceptions that they are dangerous. In particular, television's portrayal of social housing estates has posited them as run down, with the inhabitants morally defunct. However, the positive and negative aspects of living in such an area are shown in Mckenzie's restudy of the St

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Anns estate in Nottingham which notes that while media portrayals often present a negative and stigmatising depiction of such estates, the residents speak of a textured existence in which there is adaptation, co-operation and heterogeneity (2012, pg. 459). Similarly, Charles and Davies' restudy of community life in Swansea, which includes areas classified as deprived and working class, finds that local social relations are highly valued, creating a sense of community belonging. While studies in other parts of Britain have shown that a sense of community is declining, in South Wales, the relatively stable population has created close-knit networks of 'traditional' working class communities strengthened by a shared concept of Welshness (Charles and Davies, 2005, pgs. 687 and 688). Day (2016, pg. 29) notes that membership of these close-knit networks is often felt to be a distinctively Welsh characteristic, indicating that 'community' is still an active force in Swansea.

However, Hanley (2007, pg. 22) suggests that the most deprived estates in Britain are affected by a sort of social disease which denigrates the people living on them and implies they are unable to act positively to improve their lives. Hanley (2007, pg. 148) brings personal experience to bear on the complexity of council house life and applies the German construction of 'der mauer im kopf' (the wall in the head), first coined to describe the differing expectations of former East Germans in the reunified Germany, to an analysis of the restrictions facing council house tenants in the UK. In her view, to be working class in Britain and resident on a council estate results in not only a 'wall in the head' but also a 'heavy and strong' invisible wall around their homes which restricts ambition and opportunity (Hanley, 2007, pg. 149). For Hanley, 'the trick is to find a crack in it and whittle out a little escape route, but that takes strength from your side and help from the other' (2007, pg. 149). The 'escape route' is the social capital networks that can provide help and advice in getting jobs and accessing other opportunities in the wider world. Hanley suggests that social capital is vitally important for people living on class-segregated estates, dictating your level of social mobility (2007, pg. 150), and Putnam (2000) notes that social capital plays an important part in how successful people are in negotiating opportunities. The importance of social and cultural capital in the development of individuals and the way in which networks of people can either help or hinder progress can be illustrated through the difference between bridging capital, where groupings can facilitate a cultural and social advance, and bonding capital where the nature of such in-groups creates barriers to upward mobility. Although he doesn't use the same terms, Hoggart (1957, pg. 64) discusses the solidarity of

groups in his analysis of working class life, noting the 'group-sense' which makes people feel less of an individual and more part of a shared experience, although he stresses the avoidance of the term 'community' as he considers that its overtones are too favourable and would mask the tensions inherent in working-class groups. His analysis of educational opportunities, in which parents would sometimes refuse to let their children take up scholarships partly because of doubts about the value of further schooling, illustrates the constricting effects of bonding capital. As Hoggart notes (1957, pg. 68) some of this opposition emanates from the power of group-sense. The group is inherently conservative and may try to stifle any attempt to quit the group and strike out on a different tack, exerting a strong pressure to conform.

Many of these housing developments have been created in an artificially constructed environment, what Cresswell (2002, pg. 26) describes as an 'intersection, a particular configuration of happenings' in which Back (2015, pg. 824) says there is 'a convergence of desires, moralities and structures physically set in concrete'. Hanley (2007, pg. 20) considers that council estates can make people feel worse about themselves because they are aware that they are cut off from the advantages enjoyed by people living in better-off areas, while Keene and Padilla (2014, pg. 393) suggest that people may come to embody the perceived negative characteristics of such areas, a stigma of place that may impact on their sense of self, mobility outside their communities and their relationship with 'outsiders'.

However, Reay (2007, pg. 1199) calls for a greater attention to be paid to working class notions of locality and place in a bid to counter hegemonic middle-class representations of deficit and pathology, something that this study has been addressing through the artistic representations of the research groups. Byrne *et al* (2015, pg. 79) suggest that, as in many other neo-liberal economies, there has been a move away from welfare dependency to an emphasis on job creation, albeit with little work available. People not allied to the economic recovery have been demonised through a programme of sanctions and a symbolic construction of place that legitimises inequalities. This makes it hard to challenge stigmas associated with place particularly when allied with the removal of solidaristic organisations connected to working class existence (Byrne *et al* (2015, pg. 81), while Shildrick and MacDonald (2013, pgs. 300 and 301) argue that the lack of a collective focus means that poverty and exclusion are experienced in isolation. Keene and Padilla (2014, pg. 398) agree, noting that one of the ways the residents of stigmatised places try to create positive identities is through symbolically distancing themselves from their locality and its inhabitants, withdrawing to the privacy of their homes and

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minimising contact with neighbours. Castro and Lindbladh (2003, pg. 267) describe this as 'detachment discourse': a way of disconnecting identity from a negatively perceived social environment. However, Shildrick and MacDonald (2013, pg. 291) note that their study participants emphasised a pride in coping with hardship and constructed a positive self-identity in contrast to unspecified 'Others' who were labelled as work-shy, unable to manage and taking part in blameworthy consumption habits which stigmatised them as poor. Rather than using the term 'poverty', people tended to use phrases such as 'hard up' and 'things being tight' and stressed their ability to manage, an emphasis being given to qualities of fortitude and resourcefulness (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013, pg. 289), a viewpoint expressed by some of the research participants in this study. Shildrick and MacDonald (2013, pg. 299) suggest that when impoverished groups seek an identification with 'the ordinary' and disassociate themselves from 'the undeserving' this results in the construction of phantom 'Others' – an underclass positioned as financially, culturally and socially below them.

A basis for the creation of territorial stigma is the exercise of power by dominant groups. As Howarth (2001) suggests, the meaning a community acquires is something that is always disputed between those who inhabit a community and those who sit outside its material and symbolic borders. However, Howarth argues that while it is true that some communities have representations imposed on them, no representation is unchallengeable. However, the exercise of power can have an effect on the construction of identity. Law's (1994, pg. 95) actor-network theory explores the processes of ordering, deletion and profit and focusses on the ways in which powerful interests acquire their status. Law (1994, pg. 95) suggests that the 'large and powerful are able to delete the work of others in part because they are able for a time to freeze the networks of the social'. Nevertheless, there are ways for communities to assert their individuality. Howarth suggests that social representations (Moscovici, 1976) can be manipulated either to back up a 'legitimate' version of the status quo or they can be used to disrupt injustices and inequalities. In articulating the social reality of communities, social representations have the capacity to exclude and include (Howarth, 2001, pg. 21). Howarth feels that even extremely disparaging representations of a community can be appropriated by the subjects to assert their own identity (2001, pg. 22), while Culler suggests that groups can take the identities that are imposed on them and turn them into resources (2000, pg. 117).

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Anderson (2010, pg. 54) suggests that a study of place enables an identification of the people who have dominating power and can make people act in specific ways, perhaps through the threat of cultural exile or 'othering' through an inability to conform to conventional mores. Dominating power is about definitions – constructing what is deemed acceptable and normal until people can no longer imagine any alternative (Anderson, 2010, pg. 56). Haylett (2003, pg. 63) suggests that 'problematic' behaviours have often developed as ways of coping with severe problems in daily life, and the negative consequences that arise can impact unequally on groups that have the least resources to deal with them. However, Haylett notes that an aspect of contemporary working class culture which has received little attention is the fact that cultural differences can be viewed as positive (2003, pg. 63). Among the behaviours viewed as problematic are positive values which differ from hegemonic cultural values but are ones in which people take pride.

Fraser (1995, pgs. 69 and 71) warns of a coalescing of economic disadvantage and cultural disrespect in which not only are people forced into inadequate work, or not offered work at all, but are also culturally dominated through non-recognition by hegemonic figures and are frequently disparaged in stereotypical public cultural representations. She calls for a political-economic restructuring involving what she terms 'redistribution' and a symbolic or cultural change which she terms 'recognition' (Fraser, 1995, pg. 73). Employing a Marxist model of worker/capitalist relations, Fraser argues that a restructuring of the political economy is required with the ultimate aim of abolishing the working class rather than recognising its difference (1995, pg. 76). She also argues for a further division of action on injustice into 'affirmative' and 'transformative' remedies (Fraser, 1995, pg. 82). For example, in remedying economic injustice, affirmative measures would allow a redistribution of economic assets while leaving the system of production untouched. Transformative remedies, on the other hand, would allow for a restructuring of the political-economic system which would affect everyone (Fraser, 1995, pg. 84). Class injustices addressed using affirmative methods divert attention from the class division between workers and capitalists and focus on the division between employed and non-employed. Such measures do not address class disadvantages but make surface reallocations with the result that the most disadvantaged groups are labelled as deficient and insatiable and in time almost appearing privileged and in need of special treatment (Fraser, 1995, pg. 85). Transformative measures, on the other hand, encompassing social-welfare programmes, a large public sector and economic policies focussed on creating full employment reduce social inequality

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without creating a stigmatised class (Fraser, 1995, pg. 85). However, Fraser warns (1995, pg. 91) that the deconstructive and socialist measures she is advocating can only work psychologically and politically if people can be persuaded to abandon current cultural constructions of identity and interest.

3.2.6 Cultural responses

Fraser's more far-reaching measures call for a political will that seems unobtainable outside a utopian framework, but cultural reappraisal is an achievable goal. As Williams (1958, pg. 89) notes, 'culture is ordinary and that is where we must start'. He says that culture is one of the most complicated words in the English language, straddling distinct intellectual disciplines and diverging thought systems (Williams, 1976, pgs. 76 and 77). While the word can be used in the sense of nurturing, the most widespread use today is in relation to intellectual and artistic activity (Williams, 1976, pg. 80). Hurdley (2013, pg. 7) also notes that culture is not incidental to the economy or simply an esoteric part of socio-economic analysis. 'Culture is not something that posh people do, while everyone else watches the soccer and gets drunk,' she writes. Culture as ordinary is one of the tenets that has informed the educational development of the working class. As Rose (2001, pg. 7) comments, 'no disenfranchised people could be emancipated unless they create an autonomous intellectual life'. However, Hoggart, writing in the mid-20th Century, sees in the development of a mass art of newspapers and other publications a process whereby working class people are culturally robbed (1957, pg. 217). Contrasting this with economic discrimination, Hoggart considers that cultural subordination is stronger and more difficult to escape from (1957, pg. 217).

However, Marsh (2010, pg. 13) suggests that a definition of culture as ordinary is particularly important as it can be used to counter notions of culture as an elite practice leading to a higher state of being, an assumption that denigrates participation in mass culture. Elitist approaches to culture are attacked by Williams (1985, pg. 4) but Bourdieu (1984, pg. xxv) notes that 'to the socially recognised hierarchy of the arts….corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of class'. In Bourdieu's view (1984, pg. xxx), the denial of natural, vulgar enjoyment affirms a superiority to those who enjoy 'refined' pleasures, meaning that art and cultural consumption function as a means of legitimating social differences. Similarly, Ortega y Gasset (1925, pg. 66) suggests the public is divided into two with regard to an appreciation of art – those who understand and those who do not. He suggests that art is not for everyone but is restricted to a gifted minority. This perceived cultural divide is examined by

Cresswell (2004, pg. 124) who notes that the study of culture is closely connected with the study of power. Dominant groups will try to impose their own construction of experience as an appropriate culture for everyone.

Byrne *et al* (2015, pg. 83) note that emergent arts-based research schemes can encounter dilemmas that are exacerbated through occurring in what Parker and Karner (2010, pg. 1451) have described as places with 'reputational geographies'. The construction of representations can call attention to what can be perceived as a stigmatising deficit, and while it is important to focus on the positive, there is also a need for discovering ways of understanding the problems such communities may face in a way which gives agency to the people living there (Byrne *et al*, 2015, pg. 83). In a similar vein, Jones *et al*'s (2013, pg. 18) study of a theatre project on a council estate in the Midlands notes that participants formed a 'community of practice' (Wenger *et al*, 2002) to produce performances about their home area, but there was also an acknowledgement of the importance of contributions from 'outside'. One way to bridge the gap is through what Wenger and Snyder (2000) have termed 'boundary spanners' - people who span different worlds and are able to create connections across varying organisations and cultures, brokering and interpreting a range of perspectives (Hart *et al*, 2013, pg. 282).

This sharing of expertise across researchers, artists and community members was illustrated in the creating of a participatory theatre performance in Merthyr in 2016. *The People's Platform* challenged negative representations of the area and created an encounter in which policy issues such as health and well-being could be discussed through a performative representation of local concerns (Byrne et al, 2016, pg. 715).

One potential problem with arts-based research that aims to produce representations that counter negative connotations is that potentially problematic issues may not be foregrounded. As Byrne *et al* suggest (2016, pg. 729) in their review of *The People's Platform,* there is a possibility that dissent can be silenced and difficult ideas neglected.

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to anchor views of the construction of place and identity through a lens that evaluates present-day concerns but also has a regard to the representations of the past that still inform the present.

While Chapter 2 looked at the literature of the industrial and post-industrial regions and concluded that it contributed to a very particular representation, this chapter has broadened the debate to show how contemporary communities are defined through

various theoretical lenses. It is clear, as I have shown, that the notion of community is a contested term, yet while commentators argue over its supposed positive and negative aspects, it is evident that 'community' is a concept that provides a structure for the exercise of social and cultural capital. While I agree with Crow and Mah (2012) that it is possible for communities to create social exclusion and inequality, in general, the term lends itself to concepts of cohesion and togetherness, the basic foundations of society. The concept of community, per se, is a valid one, and particularly in South Wales, there is a sense of togetherness that emanates from the social structures created by industrial development, a feeling that goes some way to dispel the negativity associated with official figures of multiple deprivation, another form of 'Othering'. For example, the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (Welsh Government, 2014) finds that there were pockets of high relative deprivation in the South Wales Valleys, with parts of the Merthyr Tydfil area being given low ratings in employment and health.

As I have discussed, any contemporary analysis of South Wales has to consider the influence of the past as conceptualised by Benjamin's 'angel of history' whose face looks to the past but is also forced to acknowledge the future (1992, pg. 249). Contemporary attitudes are affected by the recent past – memories of the divisive miners' strike of 1984/85 and the wholesale eradication of heavy industry from the landscape of South Wales are conceptualised through theories of social haunting and remembering (Bright, 2014, Gordon, 2008 and Degnen, 2005). This suppressed knowledge of the recent past is something that can be felt palpably in any exploration of this area and is a powerful driver in the creation of any artistic response and what Anderson (2014) describes as a reimagining of the past.

There is also a sense of unity created from notions of a shared Welshness and from the structures of the Welsh language in creating a sense of place. As I have shown, another potent factor in evaluating a connection to habitat is a sense of place, a rooted link that can be conceptualised through the Welsh term *hiraeth* or the Spanish word *querencia* (Lopez, 1992). As I discuss, Pearson and Shanks (2001) have demonstrated how cognitive mapping gives us the tools to understand how a connection to place can be conceptualised through 'y filltir sqwar', the square mile of landscape experienced as a child. However, as I suggest, sense of place can be threatened by the notion of territorial stigmatisation, something that can be reinforced by the negative constructions of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Media constructions also contribute to a deficit view of communities which has sparked a powerful backlash as people struggle to assert notions of co-operation

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and heterogeneity, developing the social and cultural capital needed to create more positive representations. I have examined how territorial stigma reflects the exercise of power by dominant groups and how representations can be challenged. As Howarth (2001, pg. 18) says, 'Recognising prejudice in the eye of the other, resisting this prejudice and learning to construct more affirming versions of the community are difficult challenges,' she says (2011, pg. 18). As I suggest, these challenges can be met through the 'redistribution' and 'recognition' theories promulgated by Fraser (1995). These far-reaching proposals would ultimately involve a restructuring of the political-economic system but she also suggests symbolic or cultural changes which I have considered through the lens of Williams' assertion that 'culture is ordinary'. I reflect on Bourdieu's classification of culture as an indicator of class (1984) and have shown that his classed distinctions can be countered through participatory arts projects that have empowered working class communities. It is this agency that was a crucial factor in the development of my own artistic projects.

I would argue that the concepts discussed in this chapter are critical to an understanding of the motivations of my research participants and in the next chapter I will discuss the methodologies created to support the notions of belonging, identity and sense of place, a methodology that has been constructed to reflect the artistic aspirations of the groups involved in this study.

Chapter 4

Methodology and participation

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodological basis for the studies is examined. As this study has aimed to provide a platform for counter-representations of post-industrial places, it was considered necessary to design a qualitative methodology that allowed for an expression of 'voice' through the media of writing and photography. Accordingly, I considered that an overall approach utilising participatory methods would be the most appropriate medium instead of more conventional approaches such as interviews. The chapter also looks at how the writing group and photographic research groups evolved and provides an observational description of the participants and analysis of my positionality in relation to the research process, and the reflexivity involved in negotiating selfhood.

4.2 Research design

4.2.1 'New ways to see'

This research is a multi-aspected qualitative study that seeks to understand the social significance of artistic representations through exploring the research questions: How are ex-coal mining and steel industry communities represented within literary texts and through other portrayals? How do these representations affect local communities in the present? What kind of stories, narratives and meaning making structures can counter some of these representations? The task was to design a methodology that would adequately answer these questions. One approach has been to consider exploring these questions through the lens of interpretivism which considers reality to be pluralistic, constructed in language and interaction and replacing a hunt for facts with a focus on inter-subjective meanings (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, pg. 732).

I had considered using participant observation as a methodological tool, but while Becker and Geer (1957, pg. 28) speak of the 'completeness' of data collected in this way, I felt that the evolving design of the project with artistic interventions did not allow for such an approach. In addition, the fact that the groups would be created for the purpose of the study did not, I felt, lend itself to an observational format. This approach can also be affected by what Guzzo (2003, pg. 237) terms 'the observer's paradox' – that the act of observing and the awareness of being observed and recorded is likely to distort responses, with an unnatural choice of words or pronunciation being employed. I also considered using semi-structured interviews

but again I was interested in collecting data through a wide range of methods that would allow the participants' stories to evolve and I came to the conclusion that the somewhat formulaic construction of the interview schedule would be restrictive. I was also concerned that an interviewing bias might creep in: Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008, pg. 238) warn that respondents can give potentially misleading answers because they are trying to please the interviewer.

In choosing a methodology that would answer the research questions I was also mindful of Bochner and Riggs' suggestion that traditional social research studies of people often lack a 'humanness' (2014, pg. 198), thus I was mindful of working with methods that would emphasise the aesthetic and the sensual.

To begin the process of design, I had initially comprehensively reviewed and analysed the literature relating to the mining and iron-working industries. While this is a huge body of work, nevertheless, it became possible to discern a pattern of representation that created a very particular impression of these communities, 'exoticising' them through a process of 'Othering'. These conclusions suggested that the best way to approach the research questions would be through a methodological design that utilised qualitative approaches employing artistic methods which would allow for counter-representations through the creation of literature and photography. As Leavy (2015, pg. 27) says, the greatest strength and potential of arts-based research is that it should be useful and part of social justice work.

I was particularly interested in the utilisation of creative methods such as poetry writing as an appropriate response to the requirements of the research questions. As Leavy (2015, pg. 90) points out, where there is an affinity between a research project and poetry this 'captures a unique aspect of the human condition'.

I also felt that as one of the aims of the study was to allow participants to actively take part in counter-representations then an essential part of the process would be to devise a participatory approach. However, I was also concerned that my directorial input could detract from this participatory ethos but as Freire (1987, pg. 102) suggests, hierarchy can never be removed completely. 'Dialogue does not exist in a political vacuum. Dialogue takes place inside some programme and content,' he says. Indeed, Bishop (2012, pg. 267) considers that the best examples of participatory art practice provide this 'programme and content', rather than what she calls a utopian arena in which collaboration is undirected. Nevertheless, Chambers (1998, pg. xv) suggests that participation demands a move from teacher to facilitator, and from lecturer to listener and learner, something that evolved as the project progressed. Indeed, what had initially been conceived as a conventional

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academic exercise quickly became something more personal as through a re-involvement in the place and through the development of relationships with the participants I was able to reflect on my own positionality. While the participants were able to reflect on their sense of place and identity through the various artistic devices employed, this process ensured a concomitant response that led me to re-evaluate my own connections with the area, reflecting on a life story that owes more than I realised to the power of local place.

Initially, I had hoped to focus on young people in youth clubs and schools, extending similar work in the area, but attempts to work in these settings came to nothing. I had a sense that this area had been over-researched and potential participants did not want to be involved with any more research projects. However, an early contact came through an offer of involvement with a pilot hyper-local journalism project which had been trialled in two primary schools in Merthyr. Through this project I met a community development organiser in the town, who proved to be an invaluable help, suggesting possible future contacts. Through him I also became involved in the Communities First[2] summer holiday play schemes in local schools. These initial gatekeepers paved the way to making further contacts including local historian Caradog. As Hammersley and Atkinson note (2007, pgs. 63 and 65) gatekeepers are often the first point of contact with a research environment and are often concerned with how their organisation will be represented by a researcher, having, understandably, an interest in seeing themselves and their group presented in a favourable light. From these contacts, a group was recruited from the Workers' Educational Association (Adult Learning Wales) whose primary focus would be writing activities. From the beginning I considered that the groups selected would need to meet on a regular basis, preferably weekly, to allow for a development of interaction and reflection as the research studies progressed.

Initially, a collaborative process of writing was envisaged. I considered the possibility of suggesting a project similar to a Bristol and Cardiff university joint study which had aimed to reimagine futures for low-income families through a 70,000 word novel created by participants. This sort of collaboration may have proved an involved and difficult process - as Law (2003, pg. 3) notes, research is inevitably messy and heterogeneous because that reflects the way the world is constructed, nevertheless, I felt that this approach could ultimately be productive and rewarding. However, when this was suggested to the writing group, the idea

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[2] The locally-focussed programme that supported the Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty agenda.

found little favour. The group decided that they wanted to work as individual writers rather than collaborating on a shared project.

However, it became evident as the participatory sessions progressed that some interventions were needed that would provide a stimulus for artistic development. As the writing group developed its own character and momentum it became clear that they would welcome the introduction of exercises devised to encourage creativity. However, I feel this is still in the spirit of co-production. As Studdert and Walkerdine (2017, pg. 11) say, 'Co-production doesn't mean you are never allowed to contribute or have suggestions yourself – it's more about sharing the decisions so that everyone feels ownership.' The sessions developed into regular writing exercises sometimes inspired by pieces of poetry I had selected. I also planned discussions around themes of sense of place, identity, changes in work patterns, memories of town/village life, the contrast between present and past, ghostly memories of people and places, and an imagined future. This choice of methodology was also informed by my background as a writer for newspapers and magazines and my own interest in the literature and history of the South Wales area. What I came to realise as the project developed was that the important issue was not about the level of researcher-led input but more about how the various group interactions helped in counter-representation. As Janes (2016, pg. 82) argues, a 'full model' of participation is not only oppressive but conflicts with the way different skills and interests can be used in a complementary way. However, as Leavy (2015, pg. 95) also notes, the employment of arts-based practices demands flexibility and an open mind, and this has indeed proved to be the case.

As the project began to take shape, I realised that it would be important to extend the focus through recruiting another group that would allow for a range of age-related experiences and also for an inter-generational exchange of ideas. I believed these different perspectives would enhance the study and also provide a link between past, present and future. Accordingly, a group was recruited from an arts organisation operating in Merthyr. Through participatory decision-making, their focus was on the creation of a Photovoice project (Wang, 1999) in which pictures taken by a group are later selected for discussions. I considered that employing visual methods in the study would provide a different aspect of artistic expression. O'Neill (2002, pg. 70) suggests that portraying data in artistic form can allow for a deeper understanding of the complexities of the lived experience, illuminating broader social structures and processes. Such work, she adds, can also reach communities outside academia, allowing an understanding of social issues which

may precipitate action. Similarly, Banks (2001, pg.8) suggests that the application of visual methods utilises the Hindu philosophy of 'darshan': the ability to comprehend multiple points of view and different philosophies.

While artistic work would allow an opportunity to review the participants' imaginative responses, it was also considered that a broader range of qualitative methods was required to enhance the research. This triangulation enables a fuller study of what Cohen *et al* (2008, pg. 141) call 'the richness and complexity of human behaviour'. Accordingly, a range of qualitative methods was also devised including mobile methods and participatory mapping. My interest in both these methods had been stimulated by attending university courses. Mobile methods particularly appealed to me as an application of Debord's (1956) psychogeographical *dérives*. This improvisatory technique seems to mirror the processes of artistic creation through inspirational developments. One of the advantages of using mobile methods is that the interaction between researcher and participant can be in a more relaxed format as opposed to the more formal strictures of interviews, while participatory mapping, allows for the creation of a highly personal response that allows people to reflect on their own knowledge, ideas and perceptions. This is something that Warner (2015, pg. 2) considers is of particular value in areas where residents have experienced socioeconomic and cultural disempowerment.

While many of the sessions were planned to involve artistic work, I also wanted the meetings to act as a vehicle for group discussion. These sessions, sometimes involving discussions based on selected poetry or reactions to contemporary issues, were seen as an opportunity to broaden the already eclectic responses and were part of an evolving process that was often suggested by the dynamics of the group and their 'felt' reaction. Again, this method was preferable to simple interviewing. As Berg (2001, pg. 115) points out, because discussions between group members generally replace any input from the researcher, more emphasis is given to the participants' viewpoints.

While it could be considered that this wide range of methods might prove methodologically taxing and might make it difficult to extrapolate a clear set of responses, nevertheless I agree with Leavy (2015, pgs. 290 and 291) that methodological innovation is not just about adding new methods for the sake of 'more' but can be regarded as a fresh way to think about knowledge creation, providing 'new ways to see'. Leavy notes that arts-based practices are 'cutting edge' and are about 'composing, weaving, orchestrating, creating tapestries of meanings and producing knowledge in new shapes'.

The methodology that eventually emerged essentially came out of an iterative process in which one approach pointed the way to another (pages 59-63). As I have discussed, I provided some suggested themes to start the process and subsequently the discussion groups focussed on particular topics such as sense of place and identity which were then explored in the writing sessions. I also took part in the discussions, bringing my own sense of self and identity to the dialogue, reflecting on my own positionality. The ideas of walking tours, discussion of newspapers and the analysis of artifacts evolved out of the discussion groups. As I have outlined, this research had several stalled progressions as we explored the directions the project could take, but this is the nature of co-produced research in which there is a process of working together – you can't define it in advance. As the sessions continued, ideas that surfaced in one session were the catalyst for subsequent developments. Similarly, the direction of the photography sessions was dictated by the choices made by participants.

Some of the work such as the walking tours were a metaphorical and literal journey of discovery in which both the participants and I rediscovered connections to place and self as we experienced a 'constitutive co-ingredience' of place and human identity which demonstrates that each is essential to the being of the other (Casey, 2001).

4.2.2 Positionality and reflexivity

Initial meetings with the research groups involved establishing a rapport with the participants, however, Guzzo (2003, pg. 237) suggests that researchers will always be looked on a strangers, while, conversely, Pahl (2005, pg. 622) notes that some researchers claim an 'inner correspondence of spirit' with their contributors. People who are linked to the communities they study tend to reflect on the values associated with such an upbringing, while external researchers may find that the culture is barred for them and their points of reference may be very different. In Bourdieu's view (2003, pg. 287) nothing is more false than the premise that the researcher should put nothing of himself in the research. References should continually be made to his own experience but not 'in a guilty, unconscious or uncontrolled manner' (Bourdieu, 2003, pg. 288). A similar viewpoint is expressed by Reay (1995, pg. 212) who notes that while the research process positions participants as partners in a research exchange, they are also a means to research ends and have little control over the end product. Reay considers that she has learnt from her own research that it is the researcher rather than the researched who is at the centre of the process (1995, pg. 212). Mannay notes that outsider myths suggest that only objectively and emotionally distant researchers will be

effective, whereas insider myths suggest that these very attributes militate against a true understanding of a group's interactions (2016a, pg. 27). Nevertheless, Mannay suggests that familiarity can become a barrier when researching any field where there is an element of previous knowledge (2016a, pg. 28). She argues for a concept of making the familiar strange (2016a, pgs. 31 and 32; Delamont and Atkinson, 1995). However, Banks (1995, pg. 1) has noted that the dichotomy between observer and the observed has gradually disappeared in social sciences research with an increasing emphasis on a collaborative process with social actors. This collaboration between researcher and participants is at its most humanistic when it involves working on a project that not only provides information for the researcher but assists participants in achieving a goal (Banks, 1995, pg. 3). Pink (2007, pg. 57) argues for a process of collaboration, or what she terms 'giving something back'. In this model, both researcher and participants invest in the project and experience a positive outcome. As Pain *et al* note, 'Participatory approaches cannot circumvent the paradoxes of power in research and representation, but through closer integration of theory and practice, they extend the processes of theorising and knowing beyond campus spaces' (2012, pg. 121). Similarly, Walkerdine *et al* (2002, pg. 179) note it is important to recognise that the narratives of researcher and participant develop in a more complex way than the mere telling of different stories.

One approach is to view universities as an 'imagined other', realising that university areas of expertise are not always what communities require (Pahl, 2016, pg. 1). She suggests that the dialogic relationship between universities and communities can produce positive results but can also generate conflicts which, while sometimes difficult, can result in fresh insights. She argues for methodologies that permit collaborative reflection in which uncertainty and unknowing are acknowledged (Pahl, 2016, pg. 1). In Pahl's view, the university does not have the right to make sense of the field or to claim that its narrative is definitive and coherent. Instead, a dialogical relationship between 'community' and 'university' allows for a reciprocity based on an inter-subjective exchange with the 'other' (Pahl, 2016, pg. 6). Tuck and Yang (2014, pg. 3) are clear that much research into colonial communities and 'Othered' groups can be viewed as 'inquiry as invasion' through the university's continual demand for original findings. They also argue that the assumption that research will contribute to improvements in communities needs to be challenged. They foreground a television programme that purported to reveal the extreme poverty of an Indian reservation in Oglala Lakota and which was subsequently

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described as little more than 'poverty porn' (Schmidt, 2011), a description that finds echoes in the criticisms of programmes such as *Skint*, which featured areas of Merthyr. Tuck and Young say the programme exposed negative aspects of representation and inclusion by allowing the participants to be seen, but only as damaged, and for an implicit assumption that they were responsible for their own damage (2014, pg. 7). These conclusions accord with my own views of Merthyr, the town chosen as the focus of my research. I worked for some years in a newspaper group that produced the local paper the *Merthyr Express*, and developed an informed notion of what was going on in the town. At that time, the turmoil of the 1984/85 miners' strike was having a huge effect and I sense that this is still being felt. Sometimes the present sits uneasily with the past.

What I have found from discussions with the groups are points of contact where the close-knit communities they describe evoke memories from my own past. I could describe it as a binary of affection and disaffection: in the past I noticed the dereliction of the townships, and what I perceived as a narrowness of ambition. Listening to relatives talking of family networks made me want to distance myself, but this research has made me realise the value of such contacts – the bonds that connect communities and the everyday kindness that permeates Valleys' towns, what Hall and Smith (2015, pg. 11) refer to as social repair and everyday kindness and what Thrift (2005, pg. 143) describes as a city's 'structure of kindness'. Thrift suggests we need 'an affirmative micro-politics of productivity which attempts to inject more kindness and compassion into everyday interaction' (2005, pg. 144). As Back notes, (2015, pg. 832), stories of social damage, hopelessness and injustice always make for a good sociological narrative but the result is that what is often ignored are the instances of repair and hope which make possible a liveable life. 'This is why an attention to everyday life matters because it offers the possibility to admit such ordinary virtues to serious attention' (Back, 2015, pg. 832). And it is these minor details: anecdotes about family life, stories of support networks and an appreciation of the different people who have made up this particular society which have emerged from the discussions in my group which have led me to re-examine my own positionality and my place in this process. As Takacs (2003, pg. 36) argues, you have to be aware that your positionality might bias your epistemology before you can understand that there are different voices and other ways of knowing the world. He suggests that when this is understood we can interact with others to explore and value their differences through a position of respect which aids reflexivity (Takacs, 2003, pg. 38). However, there is a concern that at times I may

have unquestioningly accepted accounts at first hand without considering further ramifications. Is what I was told what I wanted to hear and did the participants' stories reflect my own sense of identity and self-worth? Am I following what Hollway and Jefferson (2003, pg. 2) term a 'tell it like it is' approach, blindly accepting narratives that may be a superficial response? They suggest that treating people's own accounts as unproblematic doesn't take into account what is known about the contradictory and confused connection that people have to knowing and telling about themselves (2003, pg. 3). In their view, current theories about communication and language emphasise that any kind of account can only be a mediation of reality (2003, pg. 11).

I also worked alongside the participants producing my own work, although as Bourdieu (2003, pgs. 281 and 282) notes there is an inherent difficulty in trying to be both subject and object. He argues for a process of participant objectivation which O'Reilly (2012, pg. 522) suggests involves positioning the researcher so that they experience the same process undergone by the research participants, an approach which will help them to understand other people's standpoints. However, Walkerdine *et al* (2002, pg. 194) warn of the inevitability that power differentials between researcher and researched produce 'a deeply uncomfortable gulf'. Nevertheless, as Skeggs (2002, pg. 363) asserts, most empirical research is undertaken to learn from others, not to exploit them.

As Walkerdine (1997, pg. 15) argues, the process of social science research 'provides not only ways of seeing others, but ways of understanding ourselves' and this research has turned out to be a journey of rediscovery – a reconnection with a past that I had thought buried in my memory. Having grown up in South Wales, with family across the Valleys, I have always been aware of the impact of the area, with childhood memories of colliery waste tips and coal drams moving on endless cables to the top and back. However, I grew up in Cardiff and Swansea, very different locations, far removed from the narrow valleys of the Rhondda and my connection to the area was through family visits although for six weeks I went to school in New Tredegar. As a facilitator I have been a catalyst for a range of literary work that has explored emotions, a sense of place, a wistful re-examination of the past and a strong conviction in the strength of the town as it faces an uncertain future, but this powerful body of work has also impacted on my sense of self and an examination of how I am perceived. Am I, as a researcher from the 'university' perceived as a superior outsider or am I able to engage with people on an egalitarian footing in which there is mutual respect and appreciation? In addition, there have been

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concerns that the work produced reflected the participants' awareness of the research questions. As Barry (1996, pgs. 417 and 418), notes, it is impossible to adopt a position of neutrality when approaching inquiry through the context of symbolic representation. '...the inquirer enters the research scene full of hopes, aesthetic learnings, preconceptions, stereotypes and media preferences, all of which strongly influence the research endeavour', he says. Furthermore, is my analysis of these pieces reflecting my own positionality? Am I seeing the answers I want to see? Am I looking for a particular narrative that could possibly ignore the subtleties that are inherent in any account of people and place?

A further concern was the issue of 'voice'. Luttrell and Chalfen (2010, pg. 199) suggest that the plethora of participatory media projects has not resolved the aim of 'giving voice' and an unresolved problem is that of whose voice is being spoken and whose voice is being heard. Mannay (2016a, pg. 46) says that it is a common practice in social science research to talk of allowing communities to speak for themselves but as Barrera (2011, pg. 4) notes, this 'masks the awkward question of how it was those voices were silenced in the first place'. Mannay stresses that participatory projects which aim to allow people to express their authentic voice need to address power relations, not only in the research context, but also in the wider world (2016a, pg. 46).

The iterative and reflexive approach to the research design also influenced the subsequent analysis. The process of analysis was essentially discursive - a dialogic process in which my voice and the voice of the participants were interlinked, reflecting the reality of the discussions. The question of voice was a reflection of the collaborative and inductive nature of the research. Participants' comments were informed by the literature and by my own analysis, contributing to reflections in accord with the design of the project, a circularity to the essentially ecological and holistic process. The discussions formed part of the synergetic analysis in which all voices contributed to provide a deeper understanding of the issues being confronted. I suggest that one voice informs the other and while it might lead to a mosaic approach, the bringing together of different perspectives is in accord with the wide-ranging construction of the theoretical framework and the research methods.

Some sections of the analysis were discussed with participants and the evolving thesis as a whole was made available for perusal. They were also made aware of the themes I was following: sense of place, identity, past, present and future. These themes, which fed into the analysis, also stimulated further discussion – a reflexive

process. The poetry, prose and photographs were also discussed between participants. The written work was shared verbally at the end of the sessions and the pictures analysed as part of the Photovoice methodology. The research process also saw a developing awareness between myself and the participants as we exchanged ideas and discovered shared points of contact.

4.2.3 Ethics

Reflexivity has allowed for the framing of an ethical framework for this study. Skeggs suggests there is a need to return to reflexivity as practice and process, paying regard to resources and positioning, not a property of the self (2002, pg. 369). She calls for accountability and responsibility in research, 'not for self-formation and self-promotion' (Skeggs, 2002, pg. 369), a position in accord with Guillemin and Gillam's view (2004, pg. 275) that the interactions between participant and researcher are 'the substrate of the ethical dimensions of research practice'. Guillemin and Gillam suggest that participatory research is a powerful way of respecting autonomy but that not all participants may want to take on an active role and reflexivity is required in order for an ethical response to be constructed (2004, pgs. 275 and 276).

Following ethical approval for the project from the ethics committee of Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences, potential participants in the study had been given an outline of the project's aims and were invited to take away a permission form, read it and sign it. The forms were drawn up having regard to the stipulations of the ethics committee[3] in which potential participants acknowledged that they had had opportunities to ask questions about the project and were happy to take part in audio-visual recordings and for their artistic output to be used as part of my research. However, Flewitt (2005, pg. 556) considers that the notion of 'informed' consent is problematic and a more appropriate term would be 'provisional' – agreement is dependent on the research being carried out within a negotiated framework and developing in line with participants' expectations. Anonymity for participants was stressed and pseudonyms have been used for all participants. However, Richardson (2015, pg. 618) argues that it may not be ethical to anonymise people's stories, and may create tension and make the participants uncomfortable. Richardson (2015, pg. 620) suggests that in conducting research ethically the concept of anonymity needs to be replaced with a focus on reciprocity. As Heley (2012, pg. 11) notes, going too far to conceal participants' identity can result in disembodied voices and locations devoid of any social, spatial or historical

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[3] (http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/research/researchethics/guidance/index.html)

context. However, contextualising a participant makes it relatively easy for someone to be identified, as one of my participants subsequently pointed out. As the study areas are quite small, it was considered that a position of complete anonymity was unachievable for as Heley notes, the use of pseudonyms often fools no-one, particularly local residents. Major place names such as Merthyr and Aberfan have been retained as their size aids anonymity but smaller areas in the region have been given pseudonyms. Consideration has also been given to the use of photographs of the participants, with issues of safeguarding explored bearing in mind that that once a visual image has been created it is very difficult to remove it from public view if a participant should decide at a later stage that they do not want it to be in public view (Mannay, 2016a, pg. 110).

4.3 Initial research

Through meeting the historian Caradog, I was invited to an autumn 2016 meeting of the Workers' Educational Association (Adult Learning Wales) in Merthyr. The venue is a converted chapel, Canolfan Soar, with a modern extension where Welsh language courses are provided. It's a comfortable space and the group of mainly elderly attendees fill the tables arranged in a rectangle which facilitates interaction. In all, five members agree to take part in the research: Margaret, then aged 74, June, 75, Caradog, 66, Helen, 69, and 70-year-old Alice.

Margaret is a former journalist, university editor and proof reader, council officer, Italian teacher and one-time councillor who spent many years away from Merthyr, returning nine years ago.

June is a former nurse and community health worker who has played a major role in projects involving young people and families in the area. She was awarded an MBE for her work in setting up support projects in the community. June had never written poetry before joining this project and her journey provided an opportunity for reflection and contemplation.

Caradog has spent his life in education, particularly working with adults, and is a great talker, erudite, full of information on local history. Caradog has been a catalyst for much of my research and is happy to help out with his vast knowledge of local minutiae. On our walkabouts, he takes the role of informed guide. He also introduces me to my other research group - young people involved in an arts project in the town.

Helen is another former nurse who had worked alongside June in a local hospital. For Helen, our writing project proved a particular challenge as it emerged partway through the sessions that she is dyslexic and initially appeared reluctant to participate in any writing activities.

The fifth member of our group, Alice, had spent many years working in the local library service before moving into education, initially as a volunteer. Now retired, she has been able to indulge her passions in local history and creative writing.

Before my first research group meeting with the WEA members, I call into the centre and speak to Caradog who warns me that some members of my group are forceful personalities and to make sure that I lead the project. As Holland *et al* (2010, pg. 372) note, in group-based research, there can be a danger of stronger voices dominating quieter and younger members of the group. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier in this chapter, I aim to start off the process with an open approach that will allow everyone to have an input into the way the research should develop. The meeting takes place in a large room on the first floor of Merthyr library, one of the Carnegie libraries that have provided an intellectual service for the people of the area for many years – part of a network of organisations that includes the miners' institutes which provided such important opportunities for self-improvement. Its prominent design speaks of the importance of cultural growth – this is no hidden-away space in an anonymous council building but a clear statement of intent as to the power of intellectual curiosity. The library has the usual array of books on offer, a children's section and a computer room used by a wide variety of people, from local history researchers to job-hunters. It is also a hub for people to come in and get information from the staff, emphasising Pahl and Allan's contention that the library can be a site for social interaction (2011). The meetings take place weekly from October 2016 to June 2017. In all, there were 30 get-togethers, lasting from an hour to two hours. While most discussions took place in the library, there were three walking tours of the town. While attendance varied throughout the sessions, nevertheless the group stayed committed to the study until it finished in the summer. As one of my participants noted, it was clear they had enjoyed the experience or 'we would have voted with our feet'.

4.4 Methods

4.4.1 Mapping the community

With both the WEA and youth groups, the sessions began with a participatory mapping exercise to gauge participants' perceptions and interpretations of their life

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growing up in the area. This self-created mapping technique was chosen as a way of gauging initial responses to place attachment and to provide an unthreatening approach to the whole research process. This methodology was chosen after I had attended a qualitative mapping workshop and a symposium on evaluating outdoor learning experiences (2016) which used participatory mapping as a methodological tool. Warner (2015, pg. 1) sees participatory mapping as a 'bottom-up' approach that allows everyone to create these resources, rather than the conventional 'top-down' approach which depends on those exercising power to devise such constructions.

I was interested to find out what participants regarded as important and significant in their life histories. Everyone was provided with an A3 copy of a map of Merthyr and Aberdare which showed key roads, landmarks and green features and participants spent about 20 minutes recording their recollections.

The device of looking at the map encourages a reflective approach to disseminating the information that may not have been so readily forthcoming in a conventional face-to-face interview that can sometimes have an inhibitory effect. Participants are also considered to be creating and producing data rather than being passively involved in data collection. The data are produced 'with' participants rather than them being merely subjects in the research process (Mannay 2016a, pg. 22). This participatory analysis (Kindon *et al*, 2007) allows people to reflect on their own knowledge, ideas and perceptions. As Lynch has shown through his work on cognitive mapping (1960, pgs. 131 to 135) people construct a view of place which is more complicated than the simple depictions of a conventional map and the participants created a view of the area which encompassed representations of nostalgia, childhood and education and a recording of sites now vanished from the contemporary scene. As Rambaldi (2005, pgs. 1 and 2) notes: 'Maps are more than pieces of paper. They are stories, conversations, lives and songs lived out in a place and are inseparable from the political and cultural contexts in which they are used.'

4.4.2 Mobile methods

The topographical and spatial connections explored through participatory mapping were then extended through a visceral encounter with place that involved a series of walking tours in the Merthyr area, a multi-sensory experience that by its particular nature yielded some thick descriptions. The routes chosen arose out of discussions in group meetings that reflected the interests and professions of the participants.

The tours encompassed a walk around the shopping area of Merthyr, an exploration of the semi-derelict Hoover factory to the south of the town and another town

walking tour that encompassed the now derelict Merthyr General Hospital. The process was recorded on Apple iMovie software for later transcription and analysis, allowing for what Gallagher and Prior (2014, pg. 269) term a more-than-representational aspect of the encounters, the ambiences and acoustics of the place itself, 'the hubbub of the high street'. Indeed, Hall *et al* (2008, pg. 1030) reframed their walking tour encounters as soundwalks, the 'mobile exploration of (local) space and soundscapes' after acknowledging the productive effect of movement and noise. They see soundwalks as about reactivating the sense of hearing by concentrating on the everyday sounds which are usually perceived as background (2008, pg. 1031). As Ross *et al* (2008) note, the mobile experience allows people the time and space to experience closeness and distance. Conversations can take place when walking or sitting side by side, allowing for direct eye contact to be avoided and contributing to a more relaxed atmosphere (Ross *et al*, 2008). For our tours, the recording process mainly involved people 'speaking to camera' which introduced an element of performance into the process, perhaps leading to a more formalised delivery. Interaction amongst the participants was initially somewhat limited, with information being presented in self-contained sound-bites. Nevertheless, as the tours progressed, the participants relaxed into the process, adding to an understanding of the 'lived environment' (Lefebvre, 1991) or what Solnit (2001, pg. 267) considers to be an act of resistance to the mainstream, a reaction in the past to the sweeping changes of the Industrial Revolution, and now in a post-modern environment, an antidote to the loss of time, space and embodiment, harking back to the walking practices of pilgrims, meditators, hikers and the French conception of the 'flaneur' - the stroller or observer of life (Benjamin, 1992). For Jenks and Neves (2000, pg. 1 and 2), the flaneur provides a phenomenology of the urban centred on the fragmentation of experience and commodification, facilitating a micro-sociology of day-to-day life in an urban environment. We are also carrying out a version of Debord's (1956) *dérives* (a psychogeographical 'drifting') with me taking the role of a stranger and the others as informed guides who construct stories that reflect not only their identity but also their role as informants. They provide information that they think I want to hear – their narrative is constructed around a series of tales which I could choose to accept or not, depending on my belief system. As Bendiner-Viani (2005, pg. 467) notes, walking, while a spatial practice, also allows for personal life to be emotionally constructed in a public space, the performative act of the body's movement leads to an opening up of narrative discourses. Similarly, Pink (2008, pg. 179) suggests that researcher and research participants are inscribed on 'place-as-event' as it is both

experienced and constituted. However, Anderson (2004, pg. 255) considers that places are not just passive areas where actions take place but also an outcome of those actions, producing and being produced through human agency. Humans attribute particular meanings and significance to certain places with the result that memory and identity are linked to places. This results in what Casey (2001, pg. 684) has labelled the 'constitutive co-ingredience' of people and place. Moles (2008, pg. 2) considers that the mobility of walking allows for the construction of meaning, allowing people to link up times and places through the grounded experience of the environment. However, Hanley (2007, pg. 125) warns that the experience of walking can differ according to your environment. While some open environments contribute to a feeling of well-being and liberty, walking around council estates, for example, involves negotiating dark corners and passing through walkways and subways which channel people from building to building. As she notes, 'You can't be a flaneur of the estate, though you are welcome to try' (Hanley, 2007, pg. 125).

4.4.3 Good and bad news

To extend an awareness of what is involved by a connection to place and to understand what local issues are important for participants and how they make these choices, a participatory analysis of a local newspaper was carried out. This methodology was based on a Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD) research project on redefining civil society in an age of global connectivity. To get a feel for a locality, it is a good idea to read the local newspapers. Into its columns are packed local (and sometimes national) news; stories of achievements, presentations, businesses opening, businesses closing, entertainment pages and adverts, both classified and display. Of course, newspapers today have to compete with smartphone instant news, social media and 24-hour rolling news programmes on television but in many areas they still continue to provide a specific local service that answers a need for people to see their localised, lived experience recorded. To see a friend or neighbour in its pages, or to have your family's exploits recorded is a validation of a situated local existence and a celebration of the minutiae of daily life. As playwright J O Francis noted, 'A local paper…is a genial chronicle of the small things we know familiarly' (1924, pg. 15). The local paper, the *Merthyr Express*, was once more clearly visible in the community. Its offices in Glebeland Street in the heart of the town provided a focal point for the exchange of news and the placing of ads. Now, however, the paper is written, designed and produced from a base in Cardiff but it still constructs a picture of the town's life today. As an exercise to examine the content of the paper, I asked

my WEA research participants to study a specific issue (November 3, 2016) and to highlight stories that gave a positive impression of the area and stories that were negative in outlook. Positive stories were highlighted in green and negative in black.

4.4.4 'Ephemerality of being'

As one of the foci of this research is the importance of meaning-making, it seemed appropriate to extend this holistically through 'going beyond text' in an examination of how affect 'circulates through things' (Lertzman, 2009, pg. 122). WEA participants were asked to bring in artifacts that were of importance to them, what Anderson (2014, pg. 131) has referred to as 'the ephemerality of being', and reflecting what Gould and Shah (2018, pg. 50) see as a move away from meta-narratives when exploring social history to an emphasis on 'singular' cultural reference points. In their view, the 'stuff' of such histories – the private and familiar – is about material artifacts in the home, some of which may have remained hidden and not fully appreciated by families. Gould and Shah (2018, pg. 50) suggest that many historians have regarded such artifacts as ephemera of marginal oral histories, but I would suggest that the selection of artifacts in this study reveal a nuanced appreciation of positionality and an affirmation of identity evinced through the importance attached to the artifacts and their role in facilitating a recapturing of the past and an indicator of the factors that inform the present realities of the lives of the participants.

4.4.5 Group discussions

The group also met regularly to discuss particular issues and these discussions were recorded and the content of the transcripts analysed using a phenomenological approach - how people make sense of the world around them (Matthews and Ross, 2010, pg. 39). These discussions allowed the group dynamics to be highlighted and provided a rich account of the group's experiences. As Flick (1998, pg. 116) notes, group discussions, unlike formal interviews or surveys, correspond to the way in which comments and opinions are aired in everyday life. As Bryman (2016, pg. 502) suggests, group discussions allow the researcher the opportunity to develop an understanding about why people express certain views and also permits a discussion over the reasons for holding a particular view. Listening to other people's answers may also provide an opportunity to modify a standpoint. Indeed, Flick (1998, pg. 116) also considers that another feature of group discussions is that they can allow for the re-evaluation of views that may be unfavourably regarded.

Analysis also took an ethnographic stance providing 'contextual, interpretive accounts' of the social worlds of the research participants (Wilkinson, 2016, pg. 88). Some of these discussions were also analysed thematically. Some accounts were also made available to the participants for as Riesmann notes, they may not like how they have been depicted and may or may not recognise their experience (1993, pg. 14), but as Rabinow and Sullivan (1997, pg. 13) say, every text is 'plurivocal, open to several readings and to several constructions'. Riesmann argues that ultimately, it is unclear who is really the author of a text – 'the meaning of a text is always meaning to someone', and it is impossible to speak with authority for others (1993, pg. 15). Another issue to be considered is the veracity of the accounts, but as a research group linked to feminist studies at the University of Minnesota (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, pg. 261) argue, when talking about their lives, people sometimes lie, forget things, exaggerate and get things wrong, but they are revealing truths – an account of experiences rather than an objective recounting of the past. Similarly, Lieblich *et al* (1998, pgs. 7 and 8) suggest that while people are storytellers by nature and stories provide continuity and coherence to experiences and are central to interaction with others, nevertheless, the construction of a story, while rooted in facts, does allow for a certain freedom in creativity and interpretation. Lieblich *et al* take the view that stories can provide a key to understanding identity both in its 'real' core and as a narrative construction (1998, pg. 8). However, they assert that a life story is only one example of *the* life story – a hypothetical account which can never be full accessed because stories change through time and each text is a snapshot suspended in time. Furthermore, each story is influenced by the context through which it is told and could be influenced, for example, by the audience it has been created for, the relationship between teller and listener or the mood of the storyteller (Lieblich *et al*, 1998, pg. 8). This means that any particular story is just one example of the polyphonic versions of possible constructions of a person's life but despite this it constructs individual and cultural meanings.

4.4.6 Poetry methodology

In this research project, the aim has been to produce a body of work, both prose and poetry that answered to the themes of identity, community and a sense of place as a way of producing counter-representations through a bottom-up approach. This grew rapidly to become a sizeable anthology and this section outlines the creative processes that went into the making of this powerful and effective corpus. As Rasool (2018, pg. 123) suggests, poetry as a research methodology can be a way of accessing thoughts, feelings and emotions and is a way to capture the knowledge

held in communities, providing a different lens to confront everyday interactions and conflicts. She contends that the arts are a methodology for fighting oppression and power balance and allows a dialogue at a more personal, emic, level (Rasool, 2018, pg. 126) and Leavy (2015, pg. 91) suggests that poetry magnifies the reality of social life. The activities endorse Barton and Hamilton's contention that literary practices are situated in time and space, a social activity 'which people do, either alone or with other people, but always in a social context – always in a place and time' (1998, pg. 23). The project has also referenced Wordsworth's 'spots of time' – which suggest that we all have memories of a significant moment or place in our lives to which we can return for inspiration and comfort (Davis, 1992). This can also resonate with the concept of 'kairos' – a disruptive event or time when something is revealed (Hetherington, 2008, pg. 278) and also De Quincey's 'involutes', a similar conception that focusses on times of great significance (Wilson, 2016, pg. 32).

Participants produced a series of poems/prose arising out of creative writing sessions, working individually but building on discussion and a sharing of experiences. The sense of place evident in this work reflects something that is uniquely Welsh. As referred to earlier (Chapter 2), Pearson and Shanks (2001, pg. 141) argue that the Welsh language is 'folded in the land' and although none of the present work is written in Welsh, nevertheless, there is a connection to the language through place names and through the use of occasional words and phrases. This connection to place is encapsulated in the Welsh word *hiraeth* – the sense of belonging and yearning.

Some of these exercises were suggested by creative writing texts including *The Creative Writing Coursebook* (Bell and Magrs, 2001) and ranged from literary responses to prepared texts to an affective exploration of the senses. The process began with an exercise that saw poems created from 'what's in your bag', a warm-up activity that allowed for an exploration of creativity particularly useful for people unused to creative writing (Alexander, 2016).

Sensory stimulation was also used to facilitate literary creativity and I suggest that this approach to writing allows for a shift in perceptions which stimulates and reinvigorates the creative process. Through an affective response to exercises that explored the senses, the writing reflects Merleau-Ponty's assertion that sensation is central to human perception (2000, pg. 5 [1962]). One exercise involved thinking of a place and describing it using the five senses in a sequence of sight, taste, sound, touch and smell, an approach that accords with Merleau-Ponty view that sensations

could only be realised when linked to other elements. Sensations could not be defined as pure impression but needed to be 'overlaid with a body of knowledge' – pure sensation would amount to no sensation and therefore to no feeling at all (Merleau-Ponty, 2000, pg. 5 [1962]). Senses can also be combined through a literary technique known as synaesthesia, with one of the best examples being a line from Emily Dickinson's poem *Dying* (1896, in Johnson, 1974, pg. 358) which describes hearing a fly: 'With blue, uncertain stumbling buzz,/ Between the light and me;/ And then the window failed, and then/ I could not see to see.' Here the sound of the fly is illustrated through the visual element of blue. Cytowic (2010, *cited in* Pink, 2010, pg. 332) notes that our synaesthetic understanding of how senses operate needs to be drastically reappraised in that 'the five senses do not travel along separate channels but interact to a degree few scientists would have believed only a decade ago'.

Continuing the theme of sensations, participants were also asked to listen carefully and write down five sounds they could hear and then describe the things they associate with those sounds (Bell, 2001, pgs. 4 and 5).

Extending the work on sensory reaction by a focus on the haptic, artifacts were introduced which encouraged a visceral response to the stimulus. Participants were asked to close their eyes and explore an object initially by touch alone, then to open their eyes and explore the object further using the other senses, making notes which could then be expanded through considering any memories or thoughts triggered by the object. Participants were then asked to write a story from the object's perspective. Touch is something that is easily neglected in writing. As Morgan (2001, pg. 35) suggests, we are dominated by the visual. The ontological position of the participants was also highlighted through the introduction of artifacts which allowed them to construct their self-identity as they 'narrated their life experiences' (Popay *et al*, 2003, pg. 56). These aesthetic stances locate the work in the framework of a considered response to misrepresentation.

Various devices were also introduced that allowed for the production of narratives that demonstrated a strong attachment to place. Using the artifice of 'letters to home' and postcards, an embodied connection to the locality can be demonstrated that also allows for a reflection on the strength of inter-personal relationships. This concept was explored through an exercise which came out of the Dear Homeland model (2017) established by a group of therapists, psychologists and artists which shows how writing letters to and from our homelands can facilitate reflections about

concepts of home and community relationships. This involved the participants asking themselves two questions: where do you live and where is your home? This immediately raises an existential question of belonging and attachment and precipitates a reflexive examination of identity and affect. To extend this reflection, an exercise involving 'postcards from home' was devised. As an artifice to create the impression of writing a real card, blank postcards were used. The constrained nature of the postcard format encourages concise writing, complex ideas have to be compressed into few words, but this limiting form also allows for a precise focus.

In many ways, these sessions placed big demands on the group and while the option was there to take work away and revise it, frequently poems were produced within the short timeframe of the workshops, a pressure that appeared to stimulate some of the group to achieve some very effective work. However, some of this output was collated and taken back to the group for reflective discussions –a form of ethnographic monitoring as outlined by Hymes (1980). Hymes emphasises the importance of sharing findings, allowing the different voices involved in the process to be heard (1981).

4.5 Exploring young people's perception of place

4.5.1 Introduction

It was decided that as a contrast to the WEA group it would be important to recruit a younger cohort to provide a more rounded sense of the lived experience in the area, but also to enable an inter-generational encounter. This project evolved out of my connection with Caradog who introduced me to Aled, his partner in an arts venture in Merthyr that encourages young people to help develop their musical skills. Caradog had said he thought some of the young people in the arts group might be interested in my project. Five young people agree to take part: Emma, then aged 15, who is from Coedlewis in Merthyr, sisters Sophia, aged 13, and Lucy, aged 11, who live in Aberfan, Ellie, 14, from Merthyr Vale, and Carlos, 10, who lives in the centre of Merthyr. In all, the group meets 13 times.

As with the WEA group, we discuss various artistic options but a consensus emerges for some sort of photography project although through the course of the sessions we also do some participatory mapping and writing, both poetry and prose. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008, pg. 503) suggest that using tools such as drawing and writing stories familiar to children from school could imply that researchers are taking advantage of children's schooled docility (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008, pg. 504). The writing exercises in this project could fit into this conceptualisation but I

consider that the work, although suggested by me, was nevertheless appropriated by the young people through their evident enthusiasm. Pool (Pahl and Pool, 2017) warns that many projects operate to a pre-scripted format which leaves no room for collective ideas to take shape but in this research there was an active dialogue between researcher and participants.

Vasudevan *et al* (2010, pgs. 54 and 55) note that the arts such as drama and painting, have the 'ability to inspire the as yet uninspired or render visible the unseen', motivating students to use personal experience to demonstrate expertise and develop confidence, confounding labels of academic inferiority. Such projects also provide an opportunity to discuss issues that could be ignored or silenced in other discourses. However, Gadsen (2008, pg. 33) warns that arts subjects suffer in a 'high-stakes testing culture' and when schools are facing difficult budget decisions. This results in what Jones and McIntyre (2014, pg. 322) describe as 'the narrowly defined curricula of neoliberal contexts' which has contributed to a poorer lived experience for many students who are also cast within a deficit discourse which has limited inter-generational interaction. In the course of this study, this point was emphasised by some of the young people who have sometimes found difficulty in accessing arts-based subjects.

The mixture of methods allowed for a range of artistic expression that by its multi-modal nature captured a greater breadth of response. While the photographs provided one dimension to the young people's interpretation of place, community and identity, the literary efforts amplified their response. As with the WEA group, there is evidence of an awareness of a recent past that manifests itself through social haunting (Gordon, 2008), and Bright's 'affective intensities' (2014) but they bring a different dimension to the project. These young people are 'becomings' (Uprichard, 2007, Renold and Ivinson, 2014) who emerge through the continuing practices that are intertwined with place, history and landscape (Renold and Ivinson, 2014, pg. 364). In Uprichard's view, children and childhood are always 'being' and 'becoming', as time itself is always being and becoming in the physical and social world (Uprichard, 2007, pg. 303). However, Tisdall and Punch (2012, pg. 254) assert that the view of children and young people as human 'becomings' is flawed, nevertheless, Lee (2001, pg. 19) argues that as adults lack finished stability in terms of their work and relationships then they are always human 'becomings', and therefore, children and young people are equally so.

The resulting work provides evidence that chimes with Ivinson and Renold's (2013, pg. 371) contention that not only do young working class people not lack aspiration

but they take part in a range of activities that allow for a re-examination of previous norms. For many young people, the problem is often one of recognition, because there is a history of stressing what young people can't do rather than searching for what they can do (Ivinson and Renold (2013, pg. 371).

As with the WEA group, I had to consider the issue of whether I would inadvertently take on the role of teacher, and again, I realised that some input from me was necessary to start the process, despite the overarching methodology of the project that it should involve participatory methods, although Mannay suggests the techniques of creative methods of data production are not participatory in themselves and will not excise existing power relations (2016a, pg. 52). One way to counter this is through taking into account the alternative epistemologies of young people, working with what they consider to be important (Pahl and Pool, 2011, pg. 18). Freire (1970, pg. 72) has argued that the dichotomy between student and teacher needs to be resolved so that both are simultaneously teacher and student, and Mannay says that it is essential for research to be 'with' rather than 'about' children (2016a, pg. 21). Morrow and Richards (1996, pg. 98) argue that the biggest challenge for research involving young people is the imbalance between adults and children in relation to power and status, while Franks (2009, pg. 4) considers that for research to be non-exploitive then it has to be worthwhile for participants (Franks, 2009, pg. 5). Holland *et al* suggest that if participants are contributing to the research then their experiences are part of a more complicated whole; the reciprocal relationship between participant and researcher and the way the researcher is both part of the story and recording it further complicates the issue of voice and demands reflexive methods which deal with power relations and ethics (2010, pg. 371).

4.5.2 In the picture

Initial discussions focussed on the techniques of photography, particularly composition, emphasising the value of 'the rule of thirds' concept and the foregrounding of important visual markers. Consideration was also given to the participants' safety while out recording images. After discussion about the type of equipment to be used, disposable cameras were ruled out as I felt that they gave out the wrong message: that the work was ephemeral and of little value. Eventually, I brought in some high-quality digital cameras.

Through the project, the group has taken photographs during walkabouts in the town centre, they have photographed places near their homes that have interested

them and have taken pictures of themselves, demonstrating their interest in music. A photo-elicitation exercise saw discussions on a variety of pictures supplied including contemporary scenes and vintage photos. Harper (2002, pg. 13) has suggested that the effectiveness of photo-elicitation has a physical basis because the parts of the brain that process visual signals are evolutionarily older than the verbal information sections meaning that images evoke deeper consciousness levels resulting in a different kind of information. Nevertheless, despite the effectiveness of photographs as a communication medium, Mannay argues that the visual needs to be combined with narrative forms for a more in-depth understanding (2016a, pg. 20). In this project, the pictures were analysed by the young people through verbal and written responses and also through the creation of poetry.

The young people also took part in a Photovoice project in which, in contrast to photo-elicitation, the photographs are produced by the participants (Mannay, 2016a, pg. 23). Photovoice techniques are based on Freire's bid to shift research relationships from regarding communities as objects of study to viewing them as active agents able to transform their environments through praxis (1970). Photovoice allows people to identify, represent and enhance their community (Wang, 1999, pg. 185). In particular, the involvement of young people can reflect their desire to exercise autonomy and be creative while recording their lives (Wang, 2006, pg. 159). Research group discussions were facilitated through a process of self-selection of the pictures taken. As well as discussing the resultant choices verbally, the participants also complete pre-formatted 'photo' technique forms in order to help craft a response to the photographs. However, Barker and Smith (2012, pg. 98) argue that there are limitations to this sort of research. Sometimes children involved in Photovoice projects may find it hard to remember the motivation for taking certain pictures and may also lack the vocabulary to accurately describe what they have captured. Nevertheless, Pink (2007, pg. 91) feels that when participants in a study take their own photographs they are of value through reflecting a meaningful moment in a particular event narrative, and when discussing them the pictures are situated within fresh narratives which reinvigorates their meaning. These multiple meanings can provide a rich source of data. Barker and Smith (2012, pg. 96) agree that photographs are more than just a representation of reality. They are socially produced artifacts created within particular social contexts and the process involved in creating photographs and their setting are just as important as the finished product.

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I endorse Seamon's (1990) contention that photographs can create an interruption to the taken-for-grantedness of the world, or as Bendiner-Viani (2005, pg. 461) suggests, photographs that emotionally present themselves as objects outside the world pictured can call attention to the important but often overlooked minutiae of the everyday.

4.6 Inter-generational meeting

A key part of this project was to bring the two groups together for an inter-generational exchange which allowed both sets of participants to discover and share information. For the older group it was a chance to discover what young people felt about their town and what their aspirations were, and for the younger group there was the opportunity to understand some of the background and motivations of the WEA group. These are discrete groups that might not have been expected to readily understand each other, separated as they are by a generational divide, but despite an initial shyness and apprehension from the young people, the discussion developed into a relaxed and extended session which benefited both groups. The perceived schism was never going to be as inflexible as might be imagined. The young people were accustomed to working with an older mentor and the older group were connected to young people either through extended family or through educational associations. Nevertheless, the young people decide to formalise a series of questions:

- Why did you want to take part in this group?
- What sort of jobs have you had?
- Do you think Merthyr is a good community?
- Do you like the area you live in?
- Do you think there is a lot going on in Merthyr?
- Is Merthyr a diverse community?

While this device allowed the young people to feel in control of the conversations and helped allay initial nervousness, the formulaic construction tended to stifle interactions between the two groups, resulting in long statements from the WEA group which met with little response. However, as the session progressed, a more dialogic interaction ensued.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has set out how the research process evolved, elaborating on how the participants were recruited and providing a brief pen-picture of them. I have

reviewed the wide spread of methodological tools utilised, involving, among others, participatory mapping, mobile methods, poetry writing and photography. I consider that this broad sweep of qualitative methods allows for a wide-ranging response to issues of representation and also allows for the production of an effective body of artistic work that speaks to a sense of place, identity and belonging.

I have reviewed my epistemological approach through an analysis of my positionality, reflecting on the dichotomy of the position of researcher and participants and how my insider knowledge of the area has positioned me in a particular relationship with the research partners. I also suggest that while a process of collaboration is an ideal model, it is difficult for the researcher to avoid some element of control and direction. I have also reviewed my ethical response to this project and suggest that reflexivity is an integral part of the process, leading to accountability and responsibility.

In the next four chapters, I analyse the responses that arose in my fieldwork from the application of these methodologies.

Chapter 5

Identity, space and belonging

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter Four, I have outlined the methodology that has shaped the development of this study. In this chapter, I analyse the responses that arose out of the methodology – encompassing personal mapping, walking tours, a discussion of newspapers and artifacts and a wider review of the past, present and future in the area. This output is analysed through an approach that focuses on how people make sense of the world around them - a phenomenological lens that also allows for a thematic review of the content. The analysis draws from the work on memory and nostalgia (Degnen, 2005, and Reay and Lucey, 2000); Anderson (2004) and Ingold (1993) on mobile methods; positional identity (Popay et al, 2003); the elective belonging explored by Paton (2013) and the struggle to strengthen social and cultural capital explored by Hanley (2007) and Shildrick and MacDonald (2013), as explored in Chapter 3. Consideration of these theorists allows for a drawing together of the key themes being explored of place, community and identity.

Through analysing the participatory mapping, I show that there is a rooted sense of space at play with the participants and what Ingold (2008, pg. 1808) describes as an embodiment of 'entanglement'. Discussions quickly established unexpected connections and much of the output emphasised the importance of the networks of social and cultural capital that operate in the area.

The pedestrian tours, whose routes were agreed in group discussions, have been described in narrative form as it was felt that this best allowed for a *gestalt* treatment of the data in which an organised whole is perceived as more than the sum of its parts. Much of the discussion centres on memory and belonging but as Savage (2008, pg. 151) notes, anyone researching local belonging will become aware of the power of popular nostalgia, something that can be linked to Williams' 'structures of feeling' (1977). In Tannock's view (1995, pg. 456) nostalgia is a reaction to discontinuity, that agency or identity is somehow impeded. In the project, the participants reflect on the way they inhabit space and time through affective and sensory experiences which demonstrate how they are affectively 'held in place' (Walkerdine, 2013, pg. 757).

The theme of community togetherness is explored through an analysis of the function of the many Italian-founded cafes in the area, some of which are still operating. The value of popular entertainment as a vehicle for cohesion is also

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explored. Walking tours also produced insights into the functioning of Merthyr's one-time biggest employer Hoover, whose paternalistic influence extended to sports and social provision. The changing attitudes to health care are highlighted through an exploration of the now disused Merthyr General Hospital. Through these discussions the desire to provide positive representations of the area was clearly evident, allowing an understanding of the centrality of place and belonging for the participants.

I also reflect on the discussions prompted through an analysis of local newspapers and their representational practices out of which emerge stories of positivity that counteract what Byrne *et al* (2016, pg. 716) describe as negative representations of certain areas in the national media. I also examine the strength of social and cultural capital evident in the family networks operating in the area. The chapter concludes with an overview of participants' experiences growing up in Merthyr and also examines their views of contemporary life in the area.

5.2 Reflections on place

The introductory device of participatory mapping locates the participants in space and time, illuminating their connection to place and allowing an interrogation of their temporal relationality. The map exercise allowed people to talk at length about their experiences of growing up in Merthyr through highlighting areas that were important to them or indicating what it is that made some places special. What emerges from the process is a high regard for education, an awareness of the lack of opportunities in the local area but also an acknowledgement that literate and numerate persons would be able to progress. There is an acknowledgement that social mobility was a distinct possibility, an egalitarian view that has been increasingly challenged in a post-industrial environment.

As Margaret recalls,

'I think I had the most brilliant education because there were sort of no-holds barred on it, you could work at the pace you wanted to.'

For Margaret, it is clear that there was an expectation that educational opportunities would allow for advancement. As Morgan (2002, pgs. 252 and 253) notes, Raymond Williams considered that the greatest achievement of the working class was the setting up of social institutions based on equality and collective struggle engineered by the development of an education process constructed to answer the needs of working people. The spread of miners'

institutes also helped workers in their pursuit of knowledge (Rose, 2001). Williams suggests that education is ordinary (1958, pg. 98) and helps ordinary people to achieve an equality based on individualism, a standpoint reflected in the experiences of Margaret and June who respectively went on to long careers in journalism and the health service. June, Alice and Caradog went to school at the Cyfarthfa Castle site and Caradog, in particular, commented on the advantage of going to a grammar school set in a park with a museum (the castle, now a museum and art gallery was built in 1824 for the ironmaster William Crawshay, a dominant force in the development of the iron and steel industry in the area). For Caradog, the cultural assets encapsulated in the museum became an inspiration that would shape his future career path. 'Fancy going to a grammar school in a park with museum intact there, and I've been going back ever since, more so of late, for all kinds of heritage, cultural reasons', he says, reflecting Williams' contention that culture is ordinary (1958).

What emerges from this discussion is a confidence in the educational system that, at that time, hard work and perseverance would pay dividends, strengthening social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984, Putnam, 2000). Post-school, June trained at the old Merthyr General Hospital and then moved into community work developing European funded community projects and 'seeing and getting to know the people better'. She notes how, in Coedlewis housing estate, for example, people were interested in education but a rift had developed between the school and the parents and they tried to address that and 'make it a community', developing what might be termed a 'community of practice' (Wenger *et al*, 2002). She and her colleagues' intervention saw them acting as 'boundary spanners' (Wenger and Snyder, 2000). She also played a similar role in developing connections with the different culture of Traveller families.

Analysing the maps saw the participants recall ways of life that were very different from today and a pattern of habitation strongly rooted in the local with clearly defined understandings of boundaries and opportunities. Alice recalls growing up in a street facing a small arms factory and a stocking factory with her outlook constrained by a stone wall in front of her house, 'but it was home'. Alice sees her childhood home area as self-contained, providing for many of the locals' needs. Margaret notes that many homes in the developing estate of Glyn Nant housed key workers who moved to the area to work in local factories such as ICI and Keyser Bondor (a ladies' underwear factory) and today would be regarded as almost middle management. She recalls a Glyn Nant very different from the present day with good

employment prospects, a place she lived in for 44 years, first moving in when she was 11 months and only moving out on the death of her father in 1988. Margaret's strong attachment to place is reflected in Lopez's conceptualisation of *querencia* (1992, pg. 39). However, Margaret laments the changes in the town centre. In her view, old buildings were demolished because of an inertia over their future.

 Alice welcomes the greening of the area but laments the loss of an infrastructure that catered for all the inhabitants' needs. 'What I deeply regret is that nothing has replaced the thriving little town that I remember as being Dwrfawr, so packed in with shops.' She recalls her father saying that when he was a child going into the centre of Merthyr was like going to Cardiff. Caradog also recalls a self-imposed regulation of geographical space, never going to the bottom end of Merthyr beyond the railway station. 'So the lower end of town, which was a foreign scape to me, we never had need to go that far into town.' He remembers Dwrfawr as being self-sufficient and considers it still has a wide variety of shops, including fruit and veg shops, butchers and newsagents. For Alice, environmental improvements in the area have created a pleasanter living experience but dwindling employment opportunities mitigate against these benefits.

Caradog recalls that the open spaces of Dwrfawr provided some of the happiest memories of his childhood and what he calls his 'viewscape' leads northwards to the Brecon Beacons and the outstanding beauty of the national park. 'I just sometimes tell people up on Pen-y-Fan, well this is my back garden, and you can see the Brecon Beacons from my house.' He employs the metaphor of walking to link both physical connections and an embodied connection with childhood. 'So I look northwards and westwards, of course, we all went to Cardiff which is south, but that was a journey for a purpose and that was transient. I should walk more of this again, the trails are welcoming and available going south, going west, going north and on reflection going back on a childhood and teenage years growing up in this area.' This imagery accords with Ingold's contention that the embodiment of people in place is not bounded but extends along pathways of 'entanglement in the textured world'. He adds, 'Thus to be, I would say, is not to be in place but to be along paths' (Ingold, 2008, pg. 1808). Caradog's visualisation of his connections with the present and the past through a series of pathways can also be explored through Soja's (1993) concept of thirdspace – a reimagining of spatiality, historicality and sociality in a notion which is both real and imagined. Caradog sees Merthyr in a positive light. 'It's got a vitality which other Heads of the Valleys towns have lacked, it's got an image deficit which needs addressing and is being addressed.'

June also recalls Dwrfawr as being a lively place, going to the Pentecostal chapel and experiencing 'the clapping, the shouting and the singing', although she was born in the town of Merthyr. Her recollections of Merthyr are also of it being a bustling place but not all of the town was regarded as a safe environment for a youngster. June recalls that her father, although originally a miner had become a milkman, and with his horse and cart used to deliver to a place called 'Under the Arch' which her family told her was a 'place where you must never go near'. When I asked why, she explained, 'Because the people were so poor there that was where all the criminal elements were. It was notorious, it was where the Civic Centre is round there now, and it was an arch and you went in and there was terrible poverty.'

What is interesting about these recollections are the barriers imposed both through self-imposed curbs and through the family over which areas were visited and which were out of bounds. They reflect Cohen's (1985) suggestion that communities are constructed symbolically through the marking out of boundaries, although this can create a tension between insiders and outsiders. Anderson (2010) suggests that borders both keep people out as well as in, and contribute to the ordering of culture in a particular place. June's family's injunctions to her to keep away from 'Under the Arch' shows how places are perceived through everyday talk (Shields, 1991). The attribution of place characteristics leads to decisions over whether to visit the area or not and place images are created through over-simplification and stereotyping, contends Shields (1991). Basini (2008, pg. 151) notes that the 'Under the Arch' area was a successor to the notorious China enclave, once the home of prostitutes and pimps, who having been forced to quit their previous centre of operations moved to 'Under the Arch', making it 'the target of denunciations from innumerable pulpits'. Perhaps, June's parents' warnings were well-founded. Clearly, the area's reputation was powerful enough to shape people's reactions and perceptions well into the 20th Century.

What emerged from the post-map discussions was a sense of connection that reinforced for the participants' feelings of belonging and attachment. It was clear from the conversations that a recognition of a shared past was something to be acknowledged positively. June had been recalling the excitement of moving to a new estate with modern houses:

'And, of course, we had a bath, which was absolutely wonderful.'

Caradog: 'Where was this, June?'

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June: 'The Twyn estate.'

Margaret: 'Oh, that's where my nanna lived.'

June: 'Oh, I probably know her.'

Margaret: 'Yes, Morgan.'

June: 'Oh, I knew the Morgans well, you're joking!'

Margaret: 'No I'm not'.

June: 'They were wonderful to me as a child, I lived in their house. James?'

Margaret: 'James, yes, James is still alive.'

June: 'Well, we'll talk about that again.'

Margaret: 'This is Merthyr, though, you know the six degrees of separation? In Merthyr it's one.'

This level of connection illustrates Degnen's conception of the three-dimensionality of memory: space, time and relationality to people and places (2005, pg. 737). June and Margaret's discovery of a shared link with the past and present is embedded in a connection to place, a temporal awareness through recollecting childhood memories and a relationality to a specific interpersonal connection and a particular street. Their shared realisation comes at a time of post-industrial adjustment from the coal and steel-making industries of the recent past to a world of new working patterns that frequently involve commutes to bigger centres, a world of part-time working and for some unemployment. Degnen (2005, pg. 742) suggests that memory talk such as that articulated by June and Margaret reproduces the close inter-personal bonds of yesteryear and can serve as a buffer in the face of the social upheaval experienced by many. June and Margaret have known each other for some years but their meetings have been through shared voluntary work in which personal details of their lives remained hidden as their interactions were based on work-a-day requirements. The focussed recollections that emerged from discussing their maps provided a more personal view of their lives showing that identity can be a source of solidarity and comfort (Gilchrist *et al* (2010). June's recollections of the kindness of the neighbours whose house she was able to spend time in almost as if she were in her own home allowed her to conceptualise a benign construction of her social and geographical environment through 'being known' in which the awareness

of the support network of family and friends inculcated feelings of safety and reassurance (Reay and Lucey, 2000, pgs. 442 and 443). Their exchange also conveys a particular quality of social experience that is encapsulated in Williams' 'structure of feeling' (1977) which Back (2015, pg. 827) sees as a 'tacit but socially alive pattern of culture'.

5.3 Embodied experience

5.3.1 Introduction

Having explored participants' constructions of place through the participatory mapping exercise, it was felt that a series of walking tours would allow for a greater understanding of how participants regard their town through the embodied experience of physically walking through the spaces and through the narrative that would flow as sites of importance were encountered and analysed. In effect, the participatory mapping expanded into a visceral encounter with the physicality of the landscape. The tours provided a catalyst for an analysis of the past and present in Merthyr and an awareness of how the recent history of the area has informed the present. Participants' subjective responses to the area are situated through a physical embodiment with place that reflects on past, present and future.

5.3.2 Interaction through mobility

The first walking tour is through Merthyr town centre. We gather in the town's High Street outside the main library. The town is busy and the sounds of traffic and passers-by add to the experience of traversing the streets. This multi-sensory engagement shapes the nature of the encounters as cars have to be negotiated, other people stop to talk and the group becomes an entity with a shared awareness of what is transpiring. Margaret remembers cafes that once stretched through Merthyr and across the South Wales Valleys, the product of hard-working Italian immigrants whose names became, and in some cases still are, iconic evocations of refreshment places, the windows steamed up from the warmth inside, and the huge, spluttering Italian coffee machines dispensing refreshment – oases in the drab streets of mining and steel towns. As Gwyn Thomas writes of an Italian cafe in The Dark Philosophers, *'This room was cosy and cheerful, having sawdust on the floor and a large stove in the middle'* and standing on the counter was *'a big shining cistern…. This cistern, when the taps were opened went off with a sharp hiss …* (2011, pgs. 118 and 119 [1946]). Margaret recalls the Queen's Cafe, now a convenience store plastered with adverts in the window, and remembers that when she was a young reporter working for the *Merthyr Express* weekly newspaper in the

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early 1960s the staff weren't allowed to drink tea and coffee in the office but had to go out for a cup of coffee every morning and everybody without exception had to come back with a story. 'So you relied on meeting somebody on your way back to the office or on your way here,' she said. In itself this could be seen as a proto-typical walking tour – encounters with potential story providers occurred in the open-air environment and interactions grew out of these embodied encounters. Ingold (1993) argues for a 'dwelling perspective' in which landscape is seen as a record of past generations and telling a story is a way of guiding the attention of readers into the world. Margaret's informants can be likened to Ingold's concept of the person who can 'tell', 'one who is perceptually attuned to picking up information in the environment' (1993, pg. 153).

This theme of interaction through mobility is expanded when Margaret recalls another cafe, (still functioning), Zanelli's, in a side street off High Street. 'On Saturday morning all the chairs and tables would be pushed together in the back room and it's where local politicians used to meet, you'd find councillors, my dad (a councillor) would be there and towards the end of the morning, S O Davies, the MP, who had done his street surgery by just walking up and down, he would come in and take over most of the conversation.' This practice appears akin to Anderson's concept of 'bimbling', which aims to facilitate a dialogue between body and mind and body and place (2004, pg. 258). In Anderson's view, this practice opens up the senses and creates a bond between the participating individuals. In this case it would appear that the encounters between the MP and his constituents were facilitated by the informal and accessible method of casual walking. The cafes appeared to have flourished on several levels: as a physical safe place, providing warmth and refreshment, and as a vehicle for inter-personal communication and social interaction. Linked to the traversing of town spaces, the cafes could be said to reflect the functioning of the Greek *agora* or market place in which knowledge was produced through an interactive exchange (Pohl *et al*, pg. 269).

Our tour also takes us past the Temperance Hall, which had also served as a theatre and cinema, and Caradog points out that every town in South Wales had such a venue, the Temperance movement acting as 'the counter thrust to alcohol and the pubs', prompting Margaret to reflect that the growth of the anti-alcohol movement was a major reason for the development of the cafes. 'People had been used to meeting in the pubs and once the pubs became out of bounds to them because of the alcohol they had to find somewhere,' she says. She notes that the cafes were known as the Bracchi shops and Caradog adds that all the cafes were

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labelled with that generic term although not every cafe used that name. This employment of a generic appellation which came to signify all Italian cafes in the region can be seen as a form of social representation (Moscovici, 2000) in which the implied features of the cafes can be conveyed through an all-embracing name. Here a model of Italian cafe living has become integrated into a very different environment, but one in which it flourished so well that these names live on today across the area. As Carradice (2012) notes, the Italians have made a significant contribution to the culture of Wales, bringing colour to the lives of people who desperately needed it.

Margaret also points out the Viazzani Cafe which she notes was always called the Station cafe because the old station used to be opposite it. She notes that some of the grandchildren of the cafe's original owners have now returned to the Italian town of Bardi, the home of many of the Italian families who had arrived in South Wales. 'It seems strange … that they have actually gone back to their grandparents' roots … back to Bardi,' she says. In these instances, it appears that the attachment to homeland is a powerful driver, illustrating again Lopez's (1992, pg. 39) concept of *querencia*. Lopez argued that in the development of North America this sense of security was missing as people tended to treat the land as a resource for advancement rather than as a place to put down roots (1992, pg. 41). In one respect, this migration away from South Wales and back to Italy can be seen as an example of this. Margaret's use of the word 'roots' is an indicator of attachment and belonging that transcends generations; the pull of homeland appears stronger than more recent connections to place. On our tour, Margaret points out Hong Kong Alley, which Caradog says got its name from a Chinese laundry that was once situated near there. This physical reminder of something that is no more endorses Anderson's view (2014, pg. 94) that street signs can continue to evoke recollections of vanished aspects of the town's life.

5.3.2 Popular culture

Walking past the site of former cinemas in the town prompts memories of the days when this was the main form of entertainment, a shared experience which united people who for a few hours could escape the worry and tedium of everyday life. As Carr (2016) has noted, at one time Merthyr had four cinemas, all within a few minutes' walk of each other.

The visit to the Temperance Hall prompts Alice to recall her memories of when it was a cinema, 'a bit of a flea-pit', that experienced a makeover and reopened as

The Scala showing the James Bond movie Thunderball. Prior to that, Alice recalled that as a music hall, the venue had played host to Charlie Chaplin and even Pat Phoenix, then a star of the TV series Coronation Street. Moving up the street, we arrive at Penderyn Square, the site of the now demolished Castle Cinema. Margaret remembers the 'absolutely amazing' Wurlitzer organ and the Saturday morning gathering of the ABC Minors. 'It was absolutely great fun,' she says. 'We'd be there for two-and-a-half hours for something ridiculous like sixpence'.

Although written in the 1930s, Dannie Abse's *Welsh Valley Cinema, 1930s*, (2008) echoes Margaret's recollections of the cinema organ:

In The Palace of the slums,
From the Saturday night pit,
From an unseen shaft of darkness
I remember it: how, first, a sound took wing grandly; then the thrill
of a fairground sight – it rose,
lordly stout thing, boasting
a carnival of gaudy-bright,
changing colours while wheezing out
Swelling ronchi of musical asthma.

Abse's lines convey a multi-modality of experience – both the sight and sound of the instrument are described, echoing Merleau-Ponty's work on the phenomenology of perception (2000, pg. 4 [1962]). Merleau-Ponty positioned sensation at the centre of human perception but it could only be achieved when it was linked to other elements, so 'to see is to have colours or lights before one, to hear is to encounter sounds, to feel is to come up against these qualities' (2000, pg. 4 [1962]). Indeed, Newell and Shams (2007, pg. 1415) assert that different sensory sensations can be amalgamated into a 'coherent multi-sensory world, where sounds, smells, tastes, lights and touches amalgamate'. It is suggested that the communality of cinema-going is enriched by this multi-modal experience. Contributing to this multi-sensory experience were the novel and varied ways cinema managers found to advertise upcoming films. Alice recalls a story her father had told her about a promotion at The Castle for the silent film *Ben Hur,* released in 1925*.* 'I think to me it's an illustration of the kind of showmanship that was maybe around in Merthyr,' she says. Alice says that her father recalled that to promote the film, the manager hired 'half a dozen men to strip to the waist and be chained to each other and another big fellow with a whip would be whipping them up the High Street as a kind of living

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advert of what you were going to see on the screen.' While this would seem to endorse Dennis *et al*'s (1969) suggestion that cultural pursuits in mining areas could be regarded as frivolous, it must be remembered that this would have taken place just a few years before the Great Depression, a time of high unemployment in the South Wales Valleys as demand for coal exports slumped (BBC, 2014). In these circumstances, the chance to earn a little money from film promotion would have seemed very attractive.

Caradog recalls the comfort of The Castle and Margaret remembers the 'luxury' of the cinema with a 'wonderful' area upstairs to sit and have a drink. In its heyday, there was a concierge on the door and the place, with its connections to the former Castle Hotel, site of the Merthyr Rising, was 'the centre of gravity of Merthyr Tydfil', said Caradog. And as well as The Castle, there was also the Theatre Royal and The Scala, all well-patronised. Their importance reflects what Hoggart (1957, pg. 123) has recognised as a working class love for the ornamental, of a rococo extravagance which 'in general suggest a splendour which may be Eastern or European, but is never shy'. He writes of commissionaires dressed 'like Ruritarian generals' and 'the moulded false-fronts' of cinemas such as the Plaza and the Regal (1957, pg. 123). In J B Priestley's *Angel Pavement* (1968 [1930] there is also an awareness of the deception practised by the architects of the cinemas and theatres in the first half of the 20th Century to create a spurious impression of luxury. Priestley railed at what he saw as the Americanisation of British culture and the spread of this model across the world so that national identities were subsumed through a process of globalisation, a practice which continues today. However, Priestley recognised that this spurious comfort provided an antidote to the pressures of existing in 1930s Britain. Inevitably, however, this shared entertainment had to come to an end. As Abse (2008) writes,

'Then from The Palace, the damned Fall,
The glum, too silent trooping out
into the trauma of paradox:
the familiar malice of the dreary,
unemployed, gas-lamped street
and the striking of the small Town's clocks.

Abse stresses the contrast between the fantasy experience of the cinema and the harsh reality of the 1930s street. In a time of mass unemployment, dole queues and soup kitchens, the cinema would have seemed an oasis of warmth and light.

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However, the era of the cinema as the most popular form of mass entertainment began to wane in the 1970s. As Alice recalls, when she was in her teens in the 1960s the cinema was full of her peers 'and we were in the stalls and it was a fabulous place to be'. However, she notes, 'By the 1970s, films were falling out of favour and I mean I used to be upstairs and, you know, it was chilly and rather cheerless.'

Nevertheless, there is a sense from the participants' talk that something valuable has disappeared from the town, an unease that, perhaps, reflects the uncertainties of the present day. As Jacobs has argued (1974, pg. 68) communities construct identity through an amalgam of time and space and when something is lost there is a need to formulate a conscious vision of tradition. Sheers' (2012) reworking of the Passion Play examines this loss through a recall of vanished streets in the town of Port Talbot and I sense that there is a feeling of nostalgia for the community that thronged to the cinemas, filled the Italian cafes, and shopped in the narrow streets, articulating the views of Gordon (2008, pg. 19) on social haunting. Nevertheless, Margaret enthuses over the number of events running in Merthyr weekly and highlights the increasing popularity of the Redhouse, the town's exhibition and performance space, emphasising the importance of culture as an integral part of people's ordinary experiences (Williams, 1976, Anderson, 2010, Hurdley, 2013). Alice also notes the importance of the Redhouse as a part of the town's college, training students in acting, singing and media skills, an important skills provision with the growth of Cardiff as a hub for BBC programme making. Margaret suggests that the way forward is for the centre to work with other cultural venues in the town such as Canolfan Soar and the St David's Hall community centre. 'I think it's really important to have some sort of strategy for the whole of the town, not individually,' she says. This development would accord with Andrews' vision (2014, pg. 1) of culture and heritage as a source of power for the future, building on the views of Rose (2001, pg. 7) who suggests that an autonomous intellectual life is a necessary prerequisite for the emancipation of disenfranchised people, and Hoggett's assertion (1992, pg. 352) that as social beings people look for benign socially bounded spaces to develop collective internal capacities.

5.3.3 Politics of local care

A politics of local care could be seen operating effectively in Merthyr in the immediate post-war years. On our walking tour, Margaret suggests we visit the Redhouse to see an exhibition of the history of the town that features her father, a Communist councillor elected in 1968, who lived on the Glyn Nant estate just

outside the centre. Margaret has contributed an audio recording about her father to the exhibition. In it she recalls that her father 'believed in people the way that a lot of people believe in God and he believed that everybody was as good as he was' (Redhouse). She notes that he was totally dedicated to helping people and refused to move from the estate where he lived for 45 years. This ethos of care contrasts with Wacquant's assertion (2007, pg. 69) that communities have now been reduced from supportive 'places' to mere 'spaces' in which there is a battle for survival, and Handley's suggestion that council estates can make people feel worse about themselves because they are aware that they are cut off from the benefits enjoyed by people in more affluent areas (2007, pg. 20), although she does suggest that social disintegration can be countered by well-organised residents (2007, pg. 168). In this way, the efforts of community organisations in the Merthyr area to provide organised support for residents has had many positive outcomes in recent years, continuing the work of Margaret's father whose efforts to help his constituents echoes Soja's view (1996, pg. 87) that the differences created by hegemonic practices aimed at reinforcing existing power structures can be countered by people drawing on their positioning as 'Others' to create an opposition. His work on the estate accords with Fraser's notions of 'affirmative' remedies in dealing with injustice (1995, pg. 76), and this walking tour of the town also accords with Soja's (1996, pg. 313) assertion that a 'view from below' or a micro-viewpoint of the urban environment realised through the localised 'flaneurs/flaneuses' is preferable to a macro-viewpoint that reinforces dominant hegemonies that silence subaltern voices.

5.3.4 Narrative of the macabre and the Monkey Parade
The second walking tour encompasses another part of the town further north of the centre and also includes a visit to the derelict site of the former Merthyr General Hospital, a place of particular significance for two of the participants as they had once worked there. The site is now facing an uncertain future. One possibility is it could be converted into flats. Even now it is an imposing structure – built in 1888, it is a fine example of the Victorian obsession with balustrades, finials and arched windows. Even with the boarded-up windows and general air of decay it is not hard to envisage what the building was like in its hey-day and for June and Helen, this tour is a return to their place of work some years ago. We walk through an archway that leads to a courtyard where the mortuary was once situated. 'That's the morgue, yes,' says June. With the health professional's love of discomfiting the rest of us through sharing medical matters, she recalls that she made frequent trips to the morgue to return false teeth to their owners. 'With the wrong false teeth as was

often the case,' she says. With a few words, June creates a narrative of the macabre, something that seems to reflect the gloomy, almost Gothic feel of our surroundings. This is enhanced when both June and Helen point to the old entrance to what had been the casualty unit and recall how arrangements were made to deal with victims of the 1966 Aberfan coal tip disaster. June and Helen reveal that nurses were issued with morphine to deal with the expected casualties but they never arrived. It is sobering to stand in the ruins of the hospital and hear these matter-of-fact recollections of one of the worst disasters in the South Wales coalfield. The ghostly past comes vividly to life, recalling Derrida's (1993) concept of hauntology. As Glazier (2017, pg. 2) notes, by invoking the trope of ghost, hauntology helps to show how, despite an absence, something is still present, a spectral element that is more real than its bodily counterpart, a view in accord with Gordon's (2008) theory of social haunting.

However, as with all narratives, a light-hearted sub-plot is always welcome and June and Helen's recollections of the black pats [4] that infested the hospital have an element of farce. Helen recalls putting the light on in their kitchen to scare the insects away.

June recollects, 'You put the light on and give it five minutes to clear but the worst part about it, we used to do the bread and butter there for the patients at half past four, we'd have to do all the bread and butter and then cover it in paper and then run out.'

While Helen notes, 'Well, you'd have to put your feet on the enamel bread bin on the floor to keep them off the floor when you were eating your supper.'

Despite a tolerance of infestation which would be unacceptable today, June notes 'there weren't nearly as many infections' but these accounts hint at an almost Victorian attitude to hygiene, a link with the recent past and a window into another world, a Gothic narrative.

We move round to the main entrance where June recalls the door being locked at 10pm. If you were late, she says, you had to ring a bell, explain your tardiness and were then escorted over to the nurses' home. However, both June and Helen recall alternatives – being able to get back in through an open window on the main road. It is clear that there were many ways to subvert the rigid rules laid down to regulate the nurses' lives. It is a pattern of disobedience familiar to employees of large

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[4] A South Wales term for cockroaches.

institutions, a challenge to the status quo and an affirmation of personal identity within the autocratic regime of the National Health Service. Individuality is necessarily subsumed into the requirements of any organisation and this rule-breaking is a reassurance that there is a creative space for an expression of free will. However, June clearly found nursing a fulfilling experience. As a part of the community in the town, she enacted the role of carer but equally received a benefit from the transaction. June acknowledges that nursing as a profession has changed, with more emphasis on qualifications, but she stresses that the values of care and compassion are still just as relevant today.

Leaving the hospital, we walk back to the centre of town along The Promenade, once part of a tram road that linked the ironworks to the canal head. However, for the group it appeared it was better known for other associations.

Caradog: 'Then this was known as the Monkey Parade in the 1950s, of a Sunday evening after chapel and known in the 1950s as the Monkey Walk.'

June: 'We'd all walk up and down.'

Caradog: 'Where lads in their Sunday best and lasses would parade up and down, promenading on The Promenade, strutting their stuff.'

This performative display as a means to facilitate interaction with members of the opposite sex and to reinforce social ties among different generations has distinct parallels with the Spanish *paseo* and the Italian *passeggiata* and may indeed owe its popularity to the influx of workers from these countries, although Monkey Parades appear to have been prevalent not only in South Wales but across the country, particularly in the working class areas of Manchester and Salford (Knight, 2014). It may also be based on the interaction created by the closeness of the workers' homes – lines of terraces where as Hoggart (1957, pg. 45) suggests, home may be private but frequently the front door opened straight out on to the street 'and when you go down the one step or use it as a seat on a warm evening, you become part of the life of the neighbourhood'. Such patterns of housing, still in evidence today, may indeed contribute to a sense of community and an understanding that people are part of a shared, collective experience. Today, different social spaces mark the grouping of peers, sometimes becoming a contested issue between forces of authority and young people. Parks, urban squares, arcades and, notably, shopping malls are today's focus of open-air interaction. Helen, however, remembers a different social milieu, the chapel, noting that she met her husband at

one such site and recalls linking up with youngsters from other chapels, sharing experiences and activities akin to a youth club.

An unexpected statement of individuality is encountered further down the street. We come across an example of street art – a white cat stencilled at the bottom of a wall. Caradog notes, 'No-one knows who or why, but that's the white cat of Merthyr but there are four black ones…. Somebody's got a stencil 'cos they all point to the right.' He says no-one knows the reason for their appearance, they're just 'a bit of street art'. Nevertheless, the stencil reclaims a city space and is an interesting example of graffiti – it conveys no overt message, it's apolitical, mysterious and enigmatic but is a powerful expression of individuality. It is unassuming yet highly visible. Anderson (2010, pg. 144) suggests that graffiti can send out a message that someone who is rejecting a particular culture still has a right to express themselves, challenging the orthodoxy of street bordering by replacing it with new rules, but this graffiti seems to have a very under-stated message, an affirmation of identity through a gentle piece of street art. The piece seems to function as an artifact on its own, its purpose is its lack of purpose. It is quirky, innocuous and a representation of an alternative way of thinking, a challenge to hegemonic practices.

Further along the street is the now closed-up Theatre Royal which also functioned as a cinema. Caradog recollects a story that John Philip Sousa and his band played there and the floorboards gave way because the audience stamped their feet so enthusiastically. American writer Paul Bierley, however, has a different version of this story. In his book *The Incredible Band of John Philip Sousa* (2010) he reproduces the diary of saxophonist Albert Knecht who chronicled the band's world tour of 1911. At the concert in what is described as the Drill Hall in Merthyr, (which may have been the same venue) Knecht (2010, pg. 95) related how an extension to the stage collapsed, hurling Sousa and some of the band members to the floor, fortunately leaving them uninjured. Knecht added, 'We learned afterwards that the contractor who built the stage has a double business, carpenter and undertaker. Never again will he build a platform for Sousa's band.' It is unlikely there would be two such incidents involving Sousa so it is interesting how the story has changed, perhaps through a process of telling and retelling. As Edensor (2005a, pg. 141) notes, stories which emerge from urban places can be contradictory and surprising. The basic elements of the story are there in both versions but there are detail differences; the event of the collapse is fundamentally the same but the causes are different. As Calvino (1997, pg. 13) suggests, towns function as a honeycomb, holding memories and histories that can be accessed through imaginative

processes. Here, the story has been accessed through different lenses, on the one hand, a tale of positivity and enthusiasm, and on the other, a more prosaic account of what could have been a much more serious incident.

5.3.5 Paternalism and jobs for all

The third walking tour concentrates on just one site, the former Hoover factory in Pentrebach. Now owned by Hoover Candy, the site is still used as a distribution depot, but at one time it was Merthyr's biggest employer, opening in 1948 and closing in 2009, with the loss of 300 jobs. The factory had a major impact, introducing a different working element to the area – a replacement for the declining mining and steel industries and an answer to the burgeoning levels of unemployment. It provided a guarantee of job security in the immediate post-war years and it is important to understand its value to the town in terms of representation – Hoover's paternalistic mix of philanthropy and secure employment provided a base for the inhabitants to enjoy a standard of living which engendered a sense of confidence and positivity in the town, a situation at odds with some of the pervasive constructions of the area as a site of deprivation and poverty. However, part of the complex is now a ruin and this seems a good opportunity to observe a remnant of Merthyr's history. As Edensor (2005a, pgs. 58 and 59) has noted there is an increasing desire for the 'fabric of the past' to be demolished or converted into new uses. He considers that ruins 'rebuke normative aesthetic orderings' and, therefore, are frequently regarded as unattractive but in his view, this very difference gives them an aesthetic charge (Edensor, 2005a, pg. 76).

For Caradog, the importance of the factory could not be over-stated. Established with the help of American financing, 'it made a colossal impact on the town in terms of job security…it provided good jobs for a lifetime and Hoover's social fund helped no end of employees with scholarships to send sons and daughters to university.' Caradog revealed that he himself he had been the recipient 'unknowingly' of Hoover money.

Indeed, Hoover seems to be cast in the mould of the paternalistic employer of the 19th Century, similar to the efforts of Titus Salt to establish a model workplace in Saltaire and the benevolent efforts of the Cadbury firm in Bourneville in Birmingham, whose Quaker-inspired ethics led to the establishment of a company suburb that catered for the every need of the workers and their families. Caradog notes that Hoover built an outdoor pursuits centre, and promoted a cricket team, providing sports facilities that are still there.

Our passage along the perimeter road recalls Solnit's (2001, pg. 72) assertion that what makes roads and paths so unique is that they can't be envisaged as a whole, but they unfold in time when travelling along them in the same way as when reading or listening to a story. Because life can be imagined as a journey, symbolic walks resonate with a passage through space but also an unfolding of time that also becomes a journey (Solnit, 2001, pg. 72). This is powerfully articulated by June's memory of the road in the 1970s as 'a black sea of workers', filling the road at the start and finish of shifts, so that people learned to avoid the area at those times.

As we walk along, the story of Hoover and its connection with the town emerges. June's memories also reflect an engagement with the factory that extended beyond simple employment. It was her family's main source of income when her children were growing up and also a big part of their social lives. 'Very many a happy occasion was spent in the Hoover's dances and they were just so very well attended and a chance for everybody to get together socially.'

This viewpoint is endorsed by Helen, who stresses the importance of the factory social life and the dances. This exchange of ideas as we walk along also recalls Anderson's 'collage of collaboration', an unstructured dialogue in which emotions and beliefs can be discovered in addition to intellectual thought (2004, pg. 260). The development of connections between workers, their families and the employer replicate the shared camaraderie of the pit workers and ironworks employees. Indeed, Hoover was seen as the answer to the post-industrial restructuring of the South Wales area which led to the eventual demise of the coal industry and a much-reduced steel operation. A network of connections also operated between workers and the extended community of Merthyr. As June recalls, most people in the town had a Hoover washing machine or tumble dryer. 'It would last for donkey's years, 15 years, but you always had someone you knew who could repair it for you and when you would ask them, they somehow or other always managed to get the parts for you as well.'

This perhaps unofficial system of maintenance nevertheless provides a fabric of support for residents across the town. For Thrift (2005, pg. 137) this extends beyond the physicality of repair to an idea of social repair through kin and friendship networks which is a practical political expression that is more than just social capital. These unofficial networks of self-help are also illustrated by a story Alice tells of when her mother worked as a nurse at Hoover's and when men felt like a break from the line they would ask for an aspirin and a cup of tea 'and they

would have to stay there for about half an hour to let the aspirin take effect and they'd enjoy a little chat with the nurse'.

However, when Hoover began to lay people off, June notes that it became difficult for young people to start out in jobs. She says,

> 'I remember when our boys got to the age when they were coming to work, 17 or 18, that was probably the first time it hit me, it was really difficult for them to get a job and it was a worry. Whereas when I was young and right up to that point, because of Hoover's, you always found work somewhere but it was then becoming difficult.'

We now travel by car over to the disused part of the factory. Edensor (2005a, pg. 163) notes that post-industrial ruins are sites from which 'counter-memories can be articulated', the ghosts of the site facilitate the transmission of stories 'which are not merely inarticulate but suffused with affect'. As the Open University (2016, pg. 59) notes with reference to post-industrial sites in Wales, 'the living are haunted by the ghosts of the past' and indeed the participants not only reflect on the past but look to a dystopian future in which the building can be reimagined as a symbol of industrial decay. The two parts of the plant are linked by a walkway. It is a significant journey, a bridge between present and past, a bridge between what has been and what could be. The almost elegant, art deco lines of the original Hoover building are left behind and here is an example of 20th Century functional architecture, an office block that could be replicated anywhere across the country. Now the windows are smashed, rough breeze blocks fill some of the gaps, trees are filling in the empty spaces and rubbish litters the approach road. The participants are clearly shocked by its appearance – a visual reminder that the town's fortunes have slumped and a temporal and spatial shift from the recollections of a prosperous past to a post-industrial vision.

As Helen gazes up at the windows some birds fly out and Caradog notes, 'There's a film set in the making here.' Helen remembers that a film has indeed been shot at the Hoover site, with her son appearing as an extra, because he was working at the plant at the time. She remembers the title is *Made in Dagenham*, a 2010 film that chronicles the 1968 strike by sewing machinists at Ford's Dagenham plant which led to the introduction of the 1970 Equal Pay Act. The visualisation of a now-closed factory as a filmic interpretation of another industrial centre can be seen as a metaphor for the decline of industry in the area. The ghosts of the past are replaced by celluloid ghosts in which the

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industrial disputes of long ago are played out in a building which once echoed to the reality of industrial manufacture.

As these recollections show as we tour around the factory sites, memory is not part of a continuous, smooth narrative but rather a fragmentary collection of what Edensor terms a 'continually shifting collage…some appearing, others disappearing' (2005a, pg. 140). As factories are demolished or renovated, that smoothing over of space also involves the erasure or commodification of the past suggesting that urban development is progressive, discounting the possibility that things might be otherwise and that elements of the past 'might have conspired to forge an alternative present' (Edensor, 2005a, pg. 141). The participants' reaction appears to be one of regret at the changes to the industrial framework but also a pragmatic realisation that the situation has irrevocably changed, that the certainties of full employment after the post-Second World War boom in industrial production are over.

The walking tour facilitated an embodied reaction to place that allowed for the articulation of memories and stories that provided a nuanced insight into life in the factory. As Ingold has noted, through feet connecting with the ground people are in touch with their surroundings in a fundamental way and if it is accepted that perception is a function of movement then what is perceived is partly dependent on movement (Ingold, 2004, pgs. 330 and 331).

5.4 Stories of positivity and negativity

The participants' cartographic positioning and their embodiment in place through mobile explorations has provided one way of analysing their responses to place and identity. In an attempt to broaden this perspective an analysis of the representational practices of local newspapers has been undertaken. As well as the plethora of literary and media representations of the area, the local paper can often provide an unique picture of a community through its news and feature pages, sport and advertising columns. Priestley (1987 [1934]) regarded a strong regional press as an important part of local identity and while there have been enormous changes to news media and a contraction in traditional print journalism through rationalisation and centralisation, nevertheless, for many, the local paper is a trusted source of information.

As a way of evaluating the way the area is represented through the local media, participants were asked to examine a copy of the *Merthyr Express* and highlight the stories they regarded as positive and negative. As the findings show, there is a

preponderance of positive stories and the participants were keen to point them out, perhaps as a way of countering many of the negative media stories that have emerged in the region. Clearly, this is not an exhaustive study of local newspaper representations but nevertheless it provides a snapshot of stories in evidence in that particular week, and in addition has allowed me to analyse participants' reactions to the events.

5.4.1 The positives

Dominating the front page was a picture of Cyfarthfa Castle with the news that there were 'exciting new plans for Merthyr's most beautiful landmark'. Caradog says this is a very positive story for the town and a long time in coming. He describes the site as the most important building in Merthyr's history, and into the present day, with a landscape that was 'one of the finest anywhere to be found within South Wales'. It is interesting that the house that was once occupied by the Crawshays, the iron-masters of Merthyr, whose influence was so far-reaching in the town, should be regarded with such affection by Caradog, Margaret and Alice. Although the property had been sold to the local council in the early 20th Century, it remains a potent signifier of the hegemonic practices that so divided the town, what Fraser (1995, pg. 71) has described as cultural or symbolic injustice or a lack of recognition through the communicative and interpretative practices of the culture. Fraser's solution for this injustice is for some sort of cultural or symbolic move which could involve a recognition of cultural diversity (1995, pg. 73). The appropriation of such an iconic landmark can be seen as a way of neutralising its former power and reaffirming its importance to the local people, descendants of the men and women who once laboured for the Crawshays. This can be seen as a symbolic cultural change.

Another story perceived as a positive was the returning of a stolen note from the wreath laid by Prince Charles during the events arranged to mark the 50th anniversary of the Aberfan disaster. For Caradog, this was 'bad that became good', a form of redemption and what he called the 'nobility of the human', yet another story on an event which had dominated the local press. For Caradog, the prominence given to the story seemed excessive but the power of the name 'Aberfan' ensured its place on the front page of the newspaper. 'Aberfan is Aberfan and for the moment it will always remain so,' he says.

The Aberfan coverage prompts Margaret to note that an exhibition at Cyfarthfa Castle showed the disaster through the newspapers produced in the week after the tragedy, and what she noticed was the huge amount of text on the front pages of

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those papers compared with the emphasis today on massive headlines and pictures. In her view, there was a move away from literacy. However, Street (1993, pgs. 5 and 7) suggests that literacy cannot be viewed as an 'autonomous' model independent of social context, and Scribner and Cole (1981) argue that literacy is not equated with knowledge of reading and writing but is linked to social activities in which that skill is used for specific purposes and in clearly defined contexts. As Barton and Hamilton (1998, pg. 149) have shown, literacy can be envisaged in a broad conceptualisation that includes activities such as compiling shopping lists, dealing with bills and reading instruction manuals. Similarly, Marsh (2012, pg. 191) challenges claims that there is a lack of literacy in the lives of children living in low socio-economic neighbourhoods. Marsh (2012, pg. 186) suggests that developments in the use of new technologies have led to a range of on-line literary practices. Coincidentally, another positive story picked out by Caradog was the launch of an 'app' to give visitors to the town information about shopping and events. This move to harness mobile phone technology to promote the area was felt to be something that would appeal to 'the young and the not so young as well' and can also be seen as an extension of literary practices. For Barton and Hamilton (2005), such literary artifacts incorporate specific social and cultural practices and create shared meanings. As Yates (2015) has suggested, digital inclusion has to be an integral part of constructing communities that reinforce social networks.

Alice also focusses on two positive stories: Christmas gifts for homeless people and the announcement that the local health board is the third highest performing board in Wales, a fact she felt was worthy of celebration given the demands placed on the health service in Merthyr. However, Caradog wonders how much of this good news would be widely shared and whether the following week it would be back to bad news again. He reflects on what he sees as the unfair representation of the area by the national media, referencing the interest of Sky News in Coedlewis and the making of the Channel Four series Skint. He says that in response to the negative impression created by the programme, he had been involved in setting up an arts initiative with groups of young people to produce work that countered these representations. It would seem that the negativity surrounding some media representations of the area has produced a reaction in people determined to counter such imagery with a more positive message. The group's keenness in sourcing the positive stories in the newspaper are a clear indicator that there is a strong desire to redress negativity and to suggest a scenario of optimism and forward-thinking.

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However, one way in which attachment and connection to neighbourhood networks has diminished is through the way the local paper operates. The paper no longer has a base in the town and in a list of staff provided inside the paper, three reporters are listed, all with Cardiff phone numbers. For Margaret, this lack of local connections points up the importance of contacts with local people on the ground:

> 'I mean the Merthyr office is closed and I think that is a shame, because as a journalist you need to foster, I don't want to say friendship, but knowing people that you can go to when a story breaks or who will give you a tip-off about something.'

5.4.2 The negatives

Caradog highlights a story about animal cruelty and a report of youth gangs causing trouble but notes that this story actually refers to towns in the Rhondda Valley. Margaret highlights a story about problems with rail services, but again this refers to a town outside the area. In Caradog's opinion, there are more pluses than negatives by a ratio of three to one.

5.4.3 A 'textured existence'

Perhaps this was simply a positive week for news, but it does seem as though there is a conscious decision to disseminate stories that record achievements and successes, countering what Byrne *et al* (2016, pg. 716) describe as negative representations of certain areas in the national media. While the *Merthyr Express* is now part of a larger group of newspapers produced outside the town, nevertheless it does reflect the hopes and aspirations of the local community and is contributing to a perception of place that counters some media representations of Merthyr. As Keene and Padilla note (2014, pg. 397) in their study of Chicago migrants moving to Iowa, their vilification in the local media was based on claims of crime and drug activity that centred on the negative representations of Chicago. This negativity can be linked to territorial stigma (Wacquant, 2007) and Parker and Karner's work on reputational geographies (2010). The construction of place in these stories in the *Merthyr Express* contribute to a positivity that goes some way to countering certain media stories that Byrne *et al* (2016, pg. 718) suggest support a 'no hope' narrative for residents of particular areas. Similarly, Mckenzie's study of the St Anns estate in Nottingham (2012, pg. 459) suggests that media negativity is countered by residents' assertions of a textured existence in which there is adaptation, co-operation and heterogeneity.

5.5 Positional identity

Having gained an understanding of participants' views on their community through the analysis of the local newspaper, it was felt that a discussion centred around a selection of artifacts brought in by the group would provide another way of comprehending their positionality and sense of self. The objects that were produced allowed participants to reflect on their past and allowed for an understanding of their identity. As Popay *et al* (2003, pg. 56) has noted, self-identity is constructed by people as they 'narrate' their life experiences. This form of identity has been conceptualised by Taylor (1998, pg. 349) as having an ontological basis – providing a coherent sense of self, as opposed to a categorical classification which is related to common experiences of difference and social categorisation.

Alice's choice of her father's Voightlander camera provides an illustration of the two types of identity outlined by Holland *et al* (1998): figurative (related to culture) and positional (apprehension of social position). Alice talks of how it was the best her father could afford, a positional appreciation of his status, and the camera also provided a cultural record of the family growing up. Alice's father's positionality was also indicated by his membership of the Merthyr Camera Club. Alice describes a cohesive group that met in the 1920s and 1930s, sometimes posing for themed pictures such as American gangsters. As Alice notes, you could see the influence of the films of the 1930s era impacting on their choice of subject material. It is interesting to consider that the club seemed to be influenced by the American images that were then flooding the cinema screens across Europe. Priestley (1968 [1930]) comments on the Americanisation of the English youth in the 1930s and laments what he sees as the eradication of a specific sense of nationality and its replacement with a homogenised imagery that he equated with the growth of mass production and a reduction in cultural standards.

I wonder if the camera club shied away from a reportage technique to document the travails of South Wales in the 1920s and 1930s and used photography more as a form of escapism. Interestingly, Alice notes that her father's interest in photography waned with the coming of television. I suggest that film representations seem to allow space for another interest but the arrival of television created a different experience, an all-enveloping encounter that seems to have stifled creativity. As Alice notes, she was delighted when she found her father's camera which had disappeared from view after several house moves, reflecting its diminished importance in his life. Taking a wider view, the camera can be seen as a metaphor

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that Alice has used as a way of recalling her life with her parents. Its lens provides an insight into family life, as Alice comments, it supplied a record of her childhood, a way of fixing memories of the past into a contextualisation of her position. She describes the camera as 'good working-class', not top-end but imbued with the status of German engineering. 'It was all my father could afford, anyway,' she says, noting that she was not allowed to handle it, conferring on the product an exclusivity, reflecting the importance her father attached to it. This cultural leisure pursuit could be viewed as atypical in terms of Bourdieu's (1984, pg. xxv) social stratification of leisure pursuits but there is clear evidence that communities enjoyed a wide range of recreations including music and art.

Indeed, the production of the camera has contributed to what Proust has described as 'memoire involontaire' (*cited in* Edensor (2005a, pg. 145), a series of recollections that Edensor sees as a powerful examination of experiences that may have been entirely forgotten – rooms lived in, objects we have handled and people we may have known constituting 'a storehouse of mundane and extraordinary events'.

Artifacts connect us with the past but the recollections and associations contribute to who we are today. Margaret has brought in a picture of her form four class in her old junior school and her school report. She recollects that her teacher had been a brilliant musician and talks of 'no-holds-barred' music lessons but says that her reason for bringing the report was to illustrate another of what she calls 'those Merthyr coincidences'. Many years later she had been contemplating buying a house in Merthyr which she found out had been originally owned by her former music teacher. Margaret frequently speaks of these encounters with people who after initial conversations discover they have shared pasts. This 'knowing' can mean a great deal more than just an exchange of information or a recognition of established relationships. Degnen (2013, pg. 557) sees it as something shared that is connected to experience, emotion, pace, sociability, work patterns and where you live. For Margaret, who had worked away from Merthyr for many years, it can be seen as an affirmation of her connection with the town and its people, an acknowledgement that bonds and ties forged a long time ago can be still be valid and efficacious, an endorsement of the value of social capital (Putnam, 2000). Growing up in Merthyr through the massive changes in industrial practices that affected the region and then returning to a post-industrial situation in which employment certainties have evaporated may have led her to experience what Stewart (1996, pg. 90) has described as a 'process of being hit by events, an

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aggravation that stirs a relentless scanning and chronicling'. Stewart's work on the former coal mining areas of West Virginia finds a parallel in the ravaged landscape that characterises some of the former industrial areas of South Wales where pit heads have been bulldozed and industrial estates and new-build housing estates now fill former industrial spaces. For Margaret, the rediscovering of connections could be part of what Degnen envisages as 'memory talk', reproducing interpersonal bonds that provide a buffer against the upheavals that have affected the area.

The second artifact that Margaret has brought is a gold chain, referred to as 'the family heirloom' –that had been presented to her great uncle who had emigrated from Wales to live in Australia. She has had the chain incorporated into a necklace 'so that I've got something that I can remember'. This treasuring of such personal items is another indicator of the value Margaret attributes to family ties and the expression of emotion. As Pahl and Roswell suggest, the experience of talking about an object can open up new worlds and domains of practice (2012, pg. 51).

5.6 Past and present

5.6.1 The price of coal

However, there is a darker aspect to the industrial communities of Britain – the ever-present danger faced by miners and ironworkers and, ultimately, a threat to the community itself. These issues were raised by participants following the playing of a song by Tyneside folk-rock artist Billy Mitchell called The Devil's Ground (2005). Billy's work is a powerful polemic against the harsh conditions faced by miners. Billy contrasts the land affected by mining, now fast recovering its former beauty, with the stark reality of what still lies underground using a powerful alliterative phrase 'Devil's Darkness' to emphasise the Satanic nature of the pit. As Danahay (2000) has noted, artistic representations of coal mining lay a great emphasis on the concept of 'black' often emphasising the negative connotations of the colour. The song is a catalyst for reflection on the rigours of the mining industry out of which emerged the close-knit bonds amongst workers that have become part of the sedimented memory of today's inhabitants,

'*Two hundred years and now it's ended*

God retains his northern crown

This pitted land its scars soon mended

Ten million years till next time round

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But down below ten thousand miners

Of their flesh he's claimed their pound

Long will they lay in the Devil's Darkness

And they'll be coal in the Devil's Ground.'

The song prompts Margaret to recall the experiences of a relative who worked above ground at a colliery recasting broken wheels. 'He always said that the only day he would go underground was when they put windows down there. He was very, very much aware of the awful conditions that people worked under.' Margaret agrees with the sentiments of the song. 'Oh, yes, it's absolutely right, it was hell underground, wasn't it?' She notes that folk songs have an ability to get to the heart of the matter, 'a brilliant way of story-telling'.

For Alice, the horrors of mining have to be weighed against the attractions of high wages and full employment. She feels that the sentiments of the song come from people who have never been miners. 'Yes it was awful, it was a dreadful job, I would take nothing away from what they suffered not just through accidents, just from getting dust which killed them far too young,' she says. Alice recalls that both her grandfathers came to South Wales to seek work, one from Wiltshire and one from Dorset, and it was the attraction of high wages that tempted them to leave beautiful areas of England and work as miners and in the ironworks, 'I mean my grandfather came here and he was married within the year and raised his children here and never thought of going back to Dorset, to beautiful Dorset because as I've always said, you can't eat grass. Yes, mining is dreadful, but you've got to eat.' Alice uses a visual signifier to recall the horrors of an industrial landscape defiled by the iron industry. 'Why would anybody come to this, and it does look like hell, when you've seen the painting, the famous one, where it's just lit up like Dante's Inferno?'

However, the dangers of mining were offset by the close bond forged underground, a theme explored by Dennis *et al* (1969, pg. 9), who note that pride in work played an important part in the life of the miner. Old men delighted in telling stories of their skill and strength when they were young miners. 'A man's assertion of pride in being a miner is often partly an attempted self-assurance that he does not care what non-miners think of him' (1969, pg. 73). The importance of close inter-personal relationships is also stressed by Dennis *et al* who say that solidarity is a very strongly developed characteristic of social relations in the mining industry (1969, pg.

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79). Similarly, Warwick and Littlejohn (1992, pg. 84) suggest that in the late 20th Century mining communities operated as distinct social entities unlike the urban neighbourhoods more commonly encountered. They suggest that the dominant local culture operated as a form of social capital passed on, sometimes in modified form, from generation to generation (Warwick and Littlejohn, 1992, pg. 84).

Margaret also recalls the camaraderie of the mining life but also the heavy toll taken on the miners' lives, including that of her own grandfather:

'I can remember … when I was a very little girl and he was coughing so hard that he brought up a lot of blood, but he said, 'Oh, it's all right, I just accidentally hit myself with the broom handle' but it wasn't, it was what he was bringing up from his lungs, and when he died they tried to say he had died from tuberculosis.' Margaret notes that her father contacted a firm of solicitors renowned for fighting industrial cases and they managed to get the verdict changed to pneumoconiosis. 'My grandmother did get some compensation but he was ill as long as I can remember,' she added. 'I can think of people getting off the bus in Glyn Nant absolutely covered in coal dust and they were jolly and they were happy people but they were the same people who in later life became very ill and they weren't the ones who made the money it was the coal owners who made the money.' Her recollections of miners as contented workers rather than as exploited individuals as emphasised in the agitprop work of Lewis Jones, are echoed by the views of Oliver Kilbourn, one of the miners who became part of the famous Ashington Group of painters from the north-east of England in the 1930s who developed their artistic endeavours to a high level (Thompson, 2013, pg. 207). Kilbourn noted, 'I am sick of miners being portrayed like lumps of wood – all downtrodden with work. We tried to bring realism to the portrayal. In some of my paintings that quality comes over: the miner is quite happy to get his work out …' (Feaver, 2011, pg. 105). Kilbourn noted that one of the group's avowed aims was to paint realistic mining scenes that depicted miners as alternately courageous, happy, tired, skilful and hungry (Thompson, 2013, pg. 213). Stereotypical depictions of working class figures as uneducated and resentful of outsiders are further challenged in Lee Hall's play (2007) about the Ashington Group (Thompson, 2013, pg. 208). In Hall's play, Thompson suggests their representation emphasises the self-determination, autodidactism and 'a politicised sense of entitlement to knowledge and culture that runs through working class culture' (2013, pg. 208). This desire to avoid negativity is endorsed by Margaret who comments on the friendliness of Merthyr. She says: 'Having been away for such a long time and then coming back, people are friendly, people are kind and it's not the

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image that is out there for most of the newspapers, most of the awful programmes that they've run about Merthyr. People will go out of their way to do something nice for you.' This accords with Reay and Lucey's contention that constructions of class have a powerful effect on the experience of place and that there is a need to move from hegemonic middle class understandings of locality to a position where working class perceptions are taken into account (2000, pg. 425). Back has also argued that despite class stigmatisation, working class areas share a pattern of class feeling (2015, pg. 828). He suggests that because accounts of urban living often lay a stress on the negative, moments of repair and hope are frequently ignored. He advocates an attention to everyday living which allows for an appreciation of these virtues, showing that people refuse to be crushed by the destructive forces of injustice and exclusion (Back, 2015, pg. 832). Wacquant's assertion that that some urban areas can be regarded as 'social purgatories' both by residents and outsiders (2007, pg. 67) is at odds with the social capital networks alluded to by Margaret. Similarly, Shildrick and MacDonald's argument (2013) that working class solidarity and sense of community has been 'reduced' to networks of family and friends runs contrary to the experiences of the participants in this study. Certainly, prejudicial portrayals of an area can now be insidious and ubiquitous. Using an Internet search engine and putting in the name 'Coedlewis' will bring a series of images which are rooted in the recent past and convey an atmosphere of despair and decay. This is at odds with the refurbished house fronts and improved shop facades which now give quite a different impression of the area.

5.7 The contemporary scene

5.7.1 Family networks

In the light of the negative discourses that have emerged through media constructions of the area, what are contemporary impressions of Merthyr? Are the strong working-class networks of self-help that provided invaluable support in the past still operating and in what form? It is out of these discussions that some of the themes that have informed the subsequent artistic work of the participants can be discerned: a concern for community and a view of family relationships that continue to provide support and security through an informal system of self-help for people who are restricted in their ability to access social, economic and cultural capital. There is also a strong emphasis on the importance of support from the extended family, with particular emphasis on matriarchal relationships and a positive view of the strength of community linkages.

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Alice speaks of a friend who looks after her daughter's children at holiday times and herself gets help from friends who take the family out in cars to tourist attractions. The daughter now lives away from the area, and June comments that even where people have made their lives elsewhere, there is still a strong identity and closeness.

> 'I mean, the mothers, the grandmothers, play a huge role still in Merthyr and as a health visitor for many years, there used to be this view, "Don't talk to the grandmothers, it's nothing to do with them", but if you wanted to make changes you had the grandmother on your side first and then it all fell into place.'

This challenges the dominant discourse to emerge from representations of steel and iron-working areas as a masculine hegemony (Bulmer, 1978; Massey, 1993), aligning with the position taken by Warwick and Littlejohn (1992) and Anderson (2010), although Beddoe (2000) considers that a powerful patriarchy in Wales has resulted in a gendered inequality. Nevertheless, there has always been a strong relationship between female members of a family: Barker (1972, pgs. 573 and 582) in her seminal study of the relationship between young people and their parents in Swansea notes how girls would develop 'companiate' relationships with their mothers and would stay close to their family even years after marrying. Mannay's revisiting of Barker's work in 2013 (pg. 96) notes that identities of working-class Welsh women were traditionally based on the concept of 'the Welsh Mam', an archetypal image of a hard-working home-maker and Mannay argues that while today women can aspire to be something else this is not to denigrate the level of ingenuity that is called for in the private sphere.

June widens the discussion to include both grandmothers and grandfathers, noting that it was frequently younger health visitors who dismissed the importance of grandparents, whereas she and Helen, both being grandparents, recognised the importance of older family members. 'Grandmother and grandfather would move heaven and earth…..they were often the ones with the most sense.' June recalls one dysfunctional family where the grandfather drove them everywhere and the grandmother cooked. However, while Helen stresses the importance of family connections on the estates, she also recalls how difficult it had been to help some families. 'My husband's got an expression: if you haven't got socks you can't pull them up, right?' she says. 'And some of them didn't have the socks, you see.' In other words, Helen saw problems created through family dysfunctionality, poverty

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and a lack of social capital, what June describes as 'a cycle of deprivation'. In Hanley's view (2007, pg. 163) something has gone wrong with the safety net that should protect the most vulnerable 'causing the very worst-off to fall through to a place so low that teams of social workers, teachers, counsellors and mentors have immense difficulty in pulling them back.' Helen notes that some people have not had the chances she and June had been given. 'They haven't had our parents and opportunities,' she says. This familial help, propelling children on a trajectory that will break the deprivation cycle, is alluded to by Alice who recalls a mother who encouraged her daughters to study to get ahead, helping them to break through Hanley's 'wall' which restricts ambition and opportunity (2007, pg. 149). Breaking through the wall requires social capital networking, suggests Hanley (2007, pg. 149) but Helen is concerned that a lack of ambition can be self-perpetuating as children model themselves on out-of-work parents.

The importance of older family members is also stressed by Margaret who observes that she has never been in a place where there are so many grandfathers pushing pushchairs around. When I ask why she replies,

> 'Because it's very important that the parents of those children need to be able to work, and, therefore, the next generation up facilitates that and I think than now it's more important than ever that the grandparents see we have to make sure we help in order that they can have a decent life.'

June also suggests that one reason for the preponderance of men aiding in family situations may be because of the high levels of ill health in Merthyr. Men with chronic airway diseases were being managed in a home environment because of the closeness of families.

> 'It becomes the norm, you see guys with oxygen on, they're still living, and they've still got the role, because if they were the boss, they're still the boss,' she says.

June notes that it is now acceptable for men to take their children to school. In a post-industrial world, their roles are reinvented as they struggle to confront what can seem like a loss of manhood (Walkerdine *et al* (2001, pg. 21). The loss of heavy industry has eradicated the need for what Cohen and Ainley (2000, pg. 83) term 'the musculature of the labouring body'. Caradog also reflects on what he calls the changing nature of the time, with grandparents living longer, so there are now more of them. With the male being made redundant, they are taking grandchildren to

school because the sons and daughters have to make a living and even with a dual income they are JAM (just about managing). Caradog's use of the acronym JAM reflects Shildrick and MacDonald's findings (2013, pg. 289) that people used terms like 'hard-up' and things 'being tight' rather than saying they were poor, but also emphasised their ability to 'get by' and 'cope' with limited resources. 'Managing' in particular is a term that carries great resonance and is frequently used as a counterfoil to 'being poor'. Caradog also considers that the grandparents are the last fixed points in family structures which may now have siblings with different fathers. 'So grandpa and grandma are the bedrock of a previous time that has disappeared in terms of weddings, family structure.'

Therefore, it can be seen that despite the territorial stigma that has been attached to some parts of the area, the high levels of inter-personal care and the close, supportive family networks reflect Mckenzie's study of the St Anns Estate in Nottingham which found adaptation and co-operation (2012, pg. 459). It is clear that many families are functioning within a framework of self-help, with outside agencies lacking a visible presence, something akin to Hoggart's notion of 'group sense', which makes people feel less of an individual and more part of a shared experience although he notes that the group can be limiting through exerting strong pressures to conform to norms (1957, pg. 68).

5.7.2 Changing times

For June, community relations could be judged by how long people had lived in a particular spot. She believes that newcomers simply do not want to know. However, June considers that there is still a lot of camaraderie in the town. 'People are, in the main, proud to come from Merthyr still and, you know, talk about it really affectionately.' She says that in her view, people haven't changed but society has. Nowadays it is no longer acceptable to knock on a neighbour's door at 9pm to ask for sugar. 'I would like to think that people haven't changed that much,' she says, and Alice agrees, noting that it is circumstances that change. This exchange prompts Margaret to recall the huge level of support for the local co-ordinating body for charity work – Voluntary Action Merthyr.

> Margaret: 'And we are not a rich society but we are a giving society, and we give of money and time as well.'

Margaret is keen to stress the positive qualities of the town which accords with her generally optimistic view of the situation in the area, but she is saddened at the necessity of food stations set up in the High Street. 'We shouldn't have to be doing

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it, it's not something that comes easily, but they recognise there is a need there and they are getting on with doing it,' she says.

This provision of voluntary help through networks of socially aware people seems to be part of a culture of tackling problems piecemeal: Fraser's (1995) 'affirmative remedies of injustice'. It is clear that individuals are making a difference in small but effective ways, but for a town that has a long history of political activism, there seems a reluctance to take a broader view of what might need to be done to redress levels of inequality. However, June still sees the town as 'exceptional'. 'I think it's very thriving and I'm optimistic about the future,' she says. Nevertheless, Margaret is concerned that the community spirit she experienced in the past maybe not be so prevalent today:

> 'I mean, I live on a newish housing estate, I know the neighbours either side and that's it, because everybody gets in their car and goes. When I think of the community spirit that there was up in Glyn Nant where no-one was ever turned away from our door, anybody who needed help and it's the way society's moved on, I realise that. Personally, I blame Margaret Thatcher, because she actually fostered the idea that you're responsible for yourself, you get on with and you do it and bugger the people next door who haven't got any money at all.'

Margaret's affective response to what she perceives as changing patterns of social capital through the neo-liberal policies of the Tory leadership in the late 20th Century endorses Walkerdine's (2010) notion that the reorganisation of structures following the closure of heavy industry in South Wales led to residents experiencing a 'rupture' of the bonds holding communities together.

However, for Helen, getting older has brought a sense of contentment about where she lives although years ago she thought the town 'was a bit of a rubbish place', but now 'Merthyr is where I live and I'm very happy to live here and I can't think of anywhere really, here or abroad, that I would rather live'. Helen's comments are in accord with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1963) in which contentment comes in later life through reflecting on achievements through the life course. Helen's life journey has allowed her to come to appreciate the advantages of her home town.

Alice also suggests that the growth of the car as a form of transport is the reason for a reduction in community cohesion, but nevertheless asserts that 'community is still

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there'. Referring to where she lives, she says, 'I mean there's six little houses. Alright, I'm not in and out of their homes as we used to be, because I have my interests and they have theirs, but I know if I want to go away one of my neighbours will feed the cat, which is great….'

However, she also says that there needs to be a redefinition of the word community. For her, the community is the history classes she goes to and the university short courses she used to attend around the country. 'I mean my big thing was education holidays, so over weekends or in the holidays I would go to universities around the country and this to me was, I mean, just opened my eyes. I wouldn't have been terribly happy with just a Merthyr community.'

Alice agrees with Helen that when they were younger they wanted to leave Merthyr, but for her, the chance to get away on short breaks was enough for her to remain content at staying in the town. 'I'm not as hopeful for Merthyr as a town, I think the able will leave. I don't know who will remain to maintain it as a town,' she says. Margaret has a different perspective, influenced by the fact that she had been away for so long, and has the returning exile's enthusiasm for her home town:

> Margaret: You know, more than half my life I lived in Reading. I got on very well with people there, it was all very nice but I came back and Merthyr gave me a hug, I can't say anything other than that. I mean, my dad died in 1988 and people still come up to me and shake my hand and say, "it's really good to see Harold Evan's daughter"…. and I think that's the thing about Merthyr, they remember.'

The synaesthetic metaphor, 'Merthyr gave me a hug', is a perfect cameo of an experience that Margaret finds deeply reassuring and heart-warming. Her connection to place is reinforced through human contacts but also through a situated awareness that a return to scenes of childhood and young adulthood provide a sense of security and contentment. This is also illustrated through a story Margaret recalls about a popular entertainer in South Wales whose parents kept a pub and had little time to look after him. On many evenings he was sent off to the Castle Cinema in Merthyr where Margaret's Aunty Renee worked. Margaret noted that her aunt would not let him in until he had shown her he had done his homework. 'That is so Merthyr,' she says. 'Somebody else prepared to take responsibility.' This level of care, with different people prepared to take a hand in supervising and monitoring children contributes to Reay and Lucey's (2000) concept of 'being known'. The knowledge that support networks of family, friends and

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neighbours are available fosters feelings of safety and reassurance which allows children to fashion a more favourable construction of their social and geographical environments. The use of the word 'Merthyr' as an adjective also constructs a set of values and characteristics embodied in the place.

For Caradog, growing up in Merthyr in the immediate post Second World War years created a sense of self that was rooted in a system of support and care in which people were part of a distinctive place. As Tuan (1996, pg. 445) notes, places have personalities and Anderson (2014, pg. 81) argues through living in a particular place, people develop their own personalities. However, Caradog feels that times have changed. 'We're living in the most desperate of times,' he says. He suggests that their generation had the best of childhoods, 'an identifiable childhood' with free education up to university level, and what he calls anchor points of society – the chapel, the church, Boy Scouts and a caring school. He suggests that today there is much less interaction between people, with more commuting and less utilisation of local services. However, the group, in the main, agree that there is a positive future for the town but this may depend on the political and cultural will needed to bring this about.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how sense of place and the value of social and cultural capital are key factors in understanding the motivations of participants and also provide an insight into the inspiration for their subsequent artistic work. Here, it becomes clear that their views are part of a shared knowledge, an understanding of the value of community and also an awareness that there is a strong link to the past. Casey considers that places gather experiences and histories, languages and thoughts and suggests that place is not fixed but is, in fact, a constantly changing event and provided with a 'gathering power' that attracts different entities (1996, pgs. 24 and 44). This has been illustrated through this chapter.

Participatory mapping allowed for a focus on what the participants considered important cartographically, not what a prescriptive conventional map would necessarily identify as a priority and enabled dialogues to be created that provided an insight into the inter-connectedness of the community as shown by the 'one degree of separation' dialogue. As Casey (2001) asserts, 'there is no place without self and no self without place' and it was clear from the conversations that a recognition of a shared past was something to be acknowledged positively. The mapping also demonstrated the high regard the participants had for education – an

insight into the meritocratic ethos that operated at the time. The mapping also revealed how places can acquire negative connotations through stereotyping and everyday talk.

Having established how participants view place through their mapping, I go on to show how the visceral activity of walking through selected sites in Merthyr provides a multi-sensory experience of the environment, what Ingold (2008, pg. 1796) views as a 'zone of entanglement'. The walking tours reveal the multi-culturalism in evidence in the town, as the influence of the Italian cafes that once extended across South Wales are discussed. Today, new groups of nationalities such as the Portuguese are arriving, continuing the process of assimilation and adding their own diverse characteristics to the town's ethnic mix.

The theme of interaction is also demonstrated through a discussion of the entertainment venues once operating in the town, with importance being attached to the revitalising of the arts scene through the development of the Redhouse cultural centre and Canolfan Soar. Nevertheless, I show that there is a perceived nostalgia for the immediate post-war years when the town enjoyed high employment levels.

My participants also recall another form of interaction – the social exchanges known as 'The Monkey Parade' – a working class 'rite of passage' series of encounters that arose out of the constructions of towns, closely-packed, terraced streets with little space indoors to socialise. Many of these street patterns survive today and contribute to the shared experience of such communities, although interactions today among the young tend to be more focussed on shopping centres and fast-food restaurants.

The walking tours also provided an understanding of the impact of the arrival and subsequent withdrawal of the town's biggest post-war employer – Hoover. As I have shown, the factory was not only the most important entity in terms of employment but its paternalistic influence extended to the social fabric of the town, in fact, it could stand as a metaphor for community both on micro and macro scales. Its organisation calls to mind Foucault's (1980) concept of 'heterotopia' – the way people are distributed through space and Hillier's suggestion (2007, pg. 302) that 'space is the machine'. Here again, Gordon's theory of social haunting is relevant: the closed sections of the factory speak of a recent past now excised from current consciousness.

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A sense of community and a regard for the local was also evident in the analysis of a local newspaper and an examination of artifacts self-selected by the participants gave further insights into their positionality and their connection with the area, both past and present. As Degnen notes (2006, pg. 6) the past and the present are inextricably linked.

The chapter concludes with an examination of the strength of social and economic capital which shows that informal networks of self-help appear to be one of the main drivers in sustaining families. I also show that in a post-industrial world there is a realignment to the gendered roles of the past and a new function for grandfathers as helpers within the wider family that is JAM (just about managing). The town is presented as a friendly space, 'Merthyr gave me a hug' says one participant, and this synaesthetic metaphor perfectly encapsulates the themes that the participants have been conveying: that the shared experiences of the past have contributed to the present-day construction of communities and that the future holds out the promise of a more robust and positive experience.

These 'locational narratives' (Paton, 2013, pg. 85) can be seen as people's residential biographical stories about how and where they live. Through these accounts, it can be perceived how social locations are constructed and also how hierarchies, boundaries and categories evolve. People's actual physical location can also be envisaged in relation to their material reality. Paton (2013, pg. 85) argues that working class place attachment reflects a powerful 'elective belonging', a term that has frequently been associated with middle-class desires to express identity through place-based choices. Paton considers that working-class identity and position can also be expressed through place-based attachment although what she calls 'elective fixity', the ability to stay rooted in a neighbourhood, is being weakened through economic and social forces (Paton, 2013, pg. 86).

A concern for the area is reflected in the participants' discussions as they socially construct meanings from everyday experiences that Fuller and Loogma (2009, pg. 77) suggest create expectations and knowledge concerning the future. These reflective exchanges provide a rationale for the body of literary work that was subsequently created and contribute to an understanding of the motivations of the group, for a nuanced awareness of how their individual personalities are constructed in their creative output and for a re-storying of place grounded in their experiences, histories and relationships. As Appadurai (1996, pg. 7) notes, 'the imagination, especially when collective, can become the fuel for action'. Collective

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imagination is what creates ideas of neighbourhood and nationhood, he suggests. In the next chapter, I will review the poetry and prose that was created as part of the project – the participants telling their stories in their words. While, conventionally, extracts from this work would be used for analysis, I have considered that the work needs to be read in its entirety to do justice to the aspirations and intentions of the writers.

Chapter 6

Poetry and prose as counter-representation

6.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the poetry and prose produced by the writing group which aims to provide a representation of responses to issues of identity and belonging, through work exploring the senses, pieces exploring connection to place and reflections on the town's past, present and future. I consider this chapter to be the heart of the thesis, a drawing together of the themes explored in the literature (Chapter 2) and through previous discussions and activities resulting in a personal aesthetic statement that demands a reappraisal of how South Wales is perceived externally – a view that often fails to appreciate the value of community connections and the strength that people derive from these connections. The work elaborates on a positivity that centres the writers in their world, rather than the 'Othered' position externally constructed. In this study, participants sometimes use constructions that are firmly anchored in a particularly South Walian 'voice'. While not using a form of dialect per se, they nevertheless employ idiomatic phraseology that conveys a vernacular interpretation of their lived experience.

The poetry and prose, where possible, has been examined as a whole, so that again a *gestalt* approach to the data is employed. Throughout the chapter, the output has been analysed and related to affective responses which have challenged stereotypical depictions of the area. Again, the data have been analysed thematically using an inductive approach – themes emerged out of the dataset which themselves suggested further progression. Other themes had been suggested to participants, as has been outlined. The varied nature of the poetry methodology also allowed for a wide range of responses and as the corpus was essentially a highly personal collection of poetry and prose the analysis had to be sensitive to the nuances being expressed. Simply coding references to themes would have lessened the impact of the work so a holistic approach was required that explored the inter-connectedness of the material through considering the works as entities in themselves rather than taking sections for piecemeal analysis and also exploring the sensual and aesthetic elements of this creative process. This allowed the emotional range of the works to be properly appreciated.

Some of the work was inspired by established works from the pens of Idris Davies, Alfred Noyes and Robert Frost – an eclectic mix but one that nevertheless covers many of the themes integral to this study: connection to place, metaphysical notions

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of life and death, the impact of industrialisation and the experiences of employment, welfare provision and housing in post-industrial societies in Wales.

The work produced speaks to themes of nostalgia and remembering but also articulates a way to come to terms with the reality of life in a post-industrial environment. Drawing on the complex social and cultural histories of the area through the lens of Gordon's (2008) concept of social haunting, the work moves through time, space and place to provide a platform for feelings and emotions that are expressed through poems and prose. These artistic representations carry an intimation of a utopian vision of communities which is conflated with the Blochian (1986 [1938]) ontology of the 'not yet', in which traces of the future can be located in remnants of the past. The temporal shifts in narrative contribute to this perception of a world that moves between past, present and future in an interplay of affect, agency and oppression. The existential question of belonging is examined through the lens of Weil's (1978, pg. 41) suggestion that 'to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul.' An embodied connection to the locality is demonstrated that also allows for a reflection on the strength of inter-personal relationships. As Hoggett asserts, as social beings people look for benign socially bounded spaces to develop collective internal capacities (1992, pg. 352).

6.2 Poetry debut

To begin the process, the participants take part in an initial poetry writing exercise, reading Ruth Fainlight's *Handbag* (1988, see appendices), which explores themes of relationships, love and grief through a description of her mother's handbag. The participants are asked to make lists of the things in their bag and then write a poem about what they would like to put in their bag. The list-making is a preparatory activity to engage the brain and stimulate the creative writing process. June says that she has never written a poem before and seems pleasantly surprised that she has produced one. She shares her poem:

Oh if my bag were big enough
And it would really need to be tough
Because Charlie would live there
(no, he is not a bear)
But a cuddly Westie
Although on second thoughts he could be a pestie.
Instead I'll have raspberries and a drink for my

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cool grand-daughter, I think.
I could also have a train ticket
to the big city and drink champagne and be witty.

June reveals that the raspberries and drink are in her bag anyway, although not her dog! To laughter, she says that champagne is included because it is the only drink she likes. 'Very, very poor taste. I don't drink it very often, either, but I do like champagne.'

June's selection is a mix of the practical and the fanciful, from the everyday refreshment for her grand-daughter to the idea of escaping to the big city, drinking an expensive drink and being witty. The impression is of a person who looks occasionally for diversions that would act as an antidote to the routines of everyday life.

Margaret's poem, however, speaks to themes of pleasure and loss:

I slide open the zip and hear,
Beethoven's Romance in F
A Classic FM Top Three.
Bryan's beautiful blue eyes light up at the sound
Suddenly I'm in La Scala
Overwhelmed by gold
And Jonas Kaufmann is begging,
'Non ti scordar di me' (Don't forget about me)*. Never!*
He holds a bunch of freesias
Their scent brings back
Tabitha, such a wise woman,
And Harold's infectious laugh.
Can't find my phone
Or a lipstick
Who cares?

For Margaret, the pleasure of listening to 'her favourite tenor in the whole world' coupled with the scent of freesias brings back memories of her parents and her late husband, and as with June's poem there is a shift from one register to another: from practical to fanciful in June's case, and with Margaret, from pleasure to loss, what Degnen (2013, pg. 563) has called an 'experience of rupture between the then and now'.

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Margaret's evocation of classical culture enables her to transcend the mundane, everyday world. Ordinary artifacts such as a phone and lipstick are dismissed as unimportant in the experience of bitter-sweet recall. Her evocation of high culture as emphasised by the performance at La Scala, the Milanese opera house, again serves as a contrast between the reality of life in South Wales and the pleasure of a sensuous encounter.

Both poems display an appreciation of family ties which resonate with affection and connection. However, Alice's poem explores a different aspect of familial encounters: the unanswered questions that will remain a mystery as the generations advance. As she says, 'the one thing I would like to put in my bag is my parents to answer questions':

Why, Mam?
Why, Dad?
Why did you leave London, Mam?
You loved your life there.
Dwrfawr must have seemed so dull
compared to Richard Tauber, Boo Laye[5],
Hutch, Ascot, the Boat Race.
What was your father like, Dad?
You never mentioned him.
This man with his Dorset accent.
You were young when he died,
Was that why?
But 19 years – that's long enough
To store up memories.

The two very short opening lines, like staccato interjections, set the scene for a stark examination of family that asks more questions than it answers. Alice contrasts the liveliness of London with the perceived dullness of Dwrfawr, on the outskirts of Merthyr, and then comments on the unanswered questions between her father and grandfather. The dysfunctionality of their relationship hints at a void which may be a metaphor for the events occurring around them – the vagaries of the steel and coal industries between the two world wars and the post-war restructuring of working lives, or on a personal level the void may represent a

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[5] A theatre and film actress.

ghostly imagining, a figure faded into the past, a figure unfleshed out, through a reluctance to validate his existence through a family dialogue. But this ghost retains a power which Gordon (2008, pg. 58) has suggested can point the way to what has been missing. The ghost can allude to a loss – sometimes of life but also for a path not followed (2008, pgs. 63 and 64). Alice's poem hints at a sense of loss and denial which Gordon (2008, pg. 207) avers is always present in hauntings along with 'the exile of our longing'.

6.3 The Road Not Taken

As a catalyst for considering the impact of choices and how the past informs the present and the future, I read out Robert Frost's poem *The Road Not Taken* (1971 [1916], see appendices) which contains the stanza:

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

According to Robinson (2016), Frost wrote the poem as a light-hearted attempt to highlight his poet friend Edward Thomas' inability to make decisions when they were out walking, but the piece can be read as a reflection on the consequences of choice and a celebration of individualism. However, sometimes the paths that are travelled are dictated by economic or social pressures. Margaret ponders on the changing patterns of employment in Merthyr, with jobs being provided by the Welsh Assembly and a mobile phone company. She wonders how many of these people live in the town, suggesting that people are commuting in from Cardiff and then going back home in the evenings. Margaret expresses fears about the development of a new retail complex out of town which could result in more empty shops in the centre. 'As it is there are lots of empty shops, there are shops which are pound shops, discount shops, etc. and the worry is that the town centre as a commercial venture may actually go by the board,' she says. However, Alice takes a different view, suggesting that the pound shops and the twice-weekly markets are a big attraction for shoppers with people coming from all over the area to shop in the town centre.

Margaret argues that not enough has been made of the historic value of Merthyr. Despite its huge industrial history, it has failed to achieve the status accorded to, for

example, Blaenavon. [6] She suggests the possibility of a 'Heads of the Valleys status' which would incorporate towns from Brynmawr in the east to Neath in the west and take advantage of road improvements in the area.

Inspired by the comments she has made about the future of the town, Margaret writes:

We walk from Pontmorlais and find empty shops,
beautifully refurbished thanks to the Lottery,
but who will occupy them after Trago Mills[7]
moves the customers away from the town?
The town centre is moving,
no Smith's or Woolworth's,
only Millward's and Crosswoods remain from my childhood.
Going south, the new bus station, Aldi and Farm Foods, Castle Bingo and Rhydycar,[8]
the new temptations.
How do we move on?
Soar and the Redhouse[9], Penderyn Square, a Jewish museum?
Is Merthyr's future in its past?

Margaret's piece is almost a work of reportage, a factual listing of the changes that have been wrought on Merthyr, but she also poses a familiar question – what happens to towns affected by the growth of out-of-town superstores? The new store, she conjectures, 'moves' customers away from the town, a passive use of the verb which suggests that the consumer lacks agency and is at the mercy of market forces beyond his or her control.

She is also concerned with shifts in space and time, noting that the town centre is moving south with familiar store names disappearing. Again, the verb 'moving' is employed to suggest an almost animalistic sense of physical relocation but there is also a sense of loss, of a connection to the past disappearing. The 'new temptations' of bingo and leisure centre are there but are these enough to sustain a cultural life in the town? Margaret cleverly re-employs the word 'move', but this time conflating it with what could be meant by progress, an example of a homonym. Its

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[6] Blaenavon, on the eastern side of the South Wales Valleys, has been classified as a World Heritage Site.
[7] A discount retailer.
[8] The town's leisure centre.
[9] Canolfan Soar and the Redhouse are cultural centres.

meaning emerges from the context - she lists cultural attractions in the town, the revamped square and the possibility of reinvigorating the old synagogue as a museum to Jewish people. These sites may appeal to the cultural consumer, the tourist, the academic; they are the replacements for the heavy industry of the past but are they enough to sustain and fulfil a population?

Almost wistfully, she poses the question, is Merthyr's future in its past? Is a past marketed for capitalist consumption an adequate substitute for high-waged industrial employment?   Paradoxically, concerns for the present and future may indeed in the end be tied to constructions which reference the past. The future of the area could well be bound up with a burgeoning tourist industry that looks to heritage for inspiration. As the eminent Welsh historian Gwyn Alf Williams remarked in the seminal TV series *The Dragon Has Two Tongues,* 'Wales is being turned into a land of museums' (1985). However, this is not to negate the importance of a historical perspective. As Basini (2008) suggests, a knowledge of history allows Wales to define its present as well as the past, and to forge an equitable future. As far as Caradog is concerned the past is a vital part of the present as this piece shows:

Pathways and diverging places

The past informs the present and the future – at least certainly so for a town and experience like Merthyr Tydfil's. A simple history until the 1920s would be précised as:

Come in, get a job, settle down, affordable accommodation, marry.

Such is our shared ancestry, but who cares about all this today? Now it is a case of:

You are not welcome, getting a job is nigh impossible, what are you doing here anyway? No affordable accommodation, marriage is just unfashionable.

Now there is at work a complex inter-woven connectedness driven by social media as part of 21st Century living. Merthyr Tydfil is not immune to these global forces. Money is paramount – public, private, individual, benefit.

Caradog's take on social history is unflinching, the contrasts are stark in his terms: the security of work and accommodation has been replaced by uncertainty and unemployment and *'marriage is just unfashionable'*. However, he is aware that new social ties have been created through social media with Merthyr *'not immune to these global forces'*. He appears to lament the move to a society where money is all-important, replacing the communality of existence with globalisation. He shares

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Massey's view that what makes a place special is a 'thrown-togetherness' which necessitates a negotiation between both human and non-human (2005, pg. 140). In other words, places work through a negotiation of space and time. In Caradog's view, social media networking is not seen as an adequate substitute for inter-personal relations and he laments what he sees as the lack of role models today.

6.4 Towns then and now

Participants continued to explore their affective responses to life in the area through a series of works that encapsulated themes of identity and belonging that reflected the area's past, present and future. As June has made clear, she is writing from a partisan approach. She sees the good in the town, but also the problems that have beset it in recent years. Three Generations is a snapshot of the town's recent history which looks optimistically to the future. This piece shows June's gift of insight into the life of the town through an account of the vicissitudes of development that although referencing the past also allows a perspective of hope for the future:

Three Generations

It's the '50s and we need a job,

this is so easy though you may

only earn a 'bob'.

Unemployment one per cent, young people

enjoy chasing their preference.

All are working, enjoying life,

growing up with great delight.

The coming of Hoover's keeps up the dream

and most families feel secure and preen.

It's now the '80s and things are bad,

few jobs, no future for the girls and lads.

Families are poor and the future looks black

and we worry about putting clothes on our back.

Our factories have gone, so what will we do?

There is nothing in Merthyr, so we

must go to Cardiff and other places, too.

But lo and behold, things are now

looking good up here in the hills,

with the new arrival of Trago Mills.

Not only that, but there are many new shops,

bringing people and work to this wonderful spot.

Young people are happy, the future looks bright,

they can study AND work to their great delight.

Full employment is our aim,

so Merthyr Tydfil can be great again.

June notes how easy it was to get a job in the 1950s. She paints a picture of a happy time, of low unemployment and new housing. She notes the huge influence Hoover's had on the town as a paternalistic employer providing not only jobs and security but also a thriving social scene. She paints an idyllic picture of growing up at that time, but the hyperbole is carefully constructed to emphasise the contrast with the subsequent slump in the town. However, she sees a positive future for the town with new shopping developments and with more jobs 'Merthyr Tydfil can be great again', she writes. In this piece there is an affection for place that transcends the difficulties experienced as post-industrialisation has taken hold. June has an unfailing confidence in the people and the town born out of a lifelong commitment through her existence there.

June's themes of identity and connection to place are also evident in a piece she wrote about the nearby town of Pontypridd, a poem that came out of an exercise in which I read the group two poems: Idris Davies' *Queen Street, Cardiff* (in Sheers, 2009, see appendices) and Alfred Noyes' *The Waggon (*1915, see appendices*)*. While the subject matter of both poems is very different, nevertheless both works explore issues of belonging and how the past, present and future are linked through reflections on mortality. Davies writes of the generations that have walked through Queen Street, one of Cardiff's main shopping streets, while Noyes pictures a summer farm scene and imagines that same vista experienced by someone

hundreds of years ago. Both poems have a vivid evocation of place and inspired June to write:

When Ponty was busy many years ago

We all went down there to say hello.

The market traders selling their wares

On the bustling streets, all along the squares.

Ponty Park was exciting, it had a pool and a playground that everyone enjoyed and thought was cool.

Marks & Spencer was a favourite place and a real treat to buy some goodies to cook and eat.

The market has changed, no longer so busy, and M & S has moved, that's a pity.

But lo and behold, the park is outstanding with a new playground and lido.

Other plans are in place and although things change, Ponty will soon be swinging again.

We may not be here to see this change but others will enjoy the experience of Ponty again.

In the poem, June reflects on the changes in the town, noting the streets are now much quieter but is optimistic about new developments in the town. Clearly inspired by Davies' musings on mortality, she notes that although her generation may not be there to experience the changes, others to come will be able to enjoy the town's attractions. She notes that the town 'will soon be swinging again', a metaphor that evokes images of the 1960s. June recalls the bustle of life on the streets with traders 'selling their wares'. She again employs an idiom from contemporary parlance to describe the park as 'cool' but notes that the new pool developed on the site is 'outstanding'.

As with many of her pieces, she sees positivity in the future, although her writing may reflect a gesture of hope as much as a concrete awareness of the realities of a post-industrial future. June clearly wants a positive future for the area and her work reflects this. However, in contrast, Alice produces a forthright piece of work that envisages a bleak future for Merthyr:

Merthyr never had an agricultural past.

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A few hundred sheep were tended,

A homestead or three.

Then the ironmasters exploded into the Valleys,

industry wherever you turned.

A seething cauldron of Welsh and Irish and Spanish and English.

The Valleys shook and thundered with life.

But that was then.

The sheep have returned, they never left.

The people have left, those that could.

Merthyr has fallen silent, bewildered by the fog of the future.

She contrasts the quasi-agricultural past with the coming of industry, the ironmasters 'explode' into the area creating a 'seething cauldron' of different nationalities and the Valleys 'shook and thundered with life'. This is writing in the style of Richard Llewellyn or Lewis Jones: the language is stark and powerful, but the present and future is depicted more bleakly, suffused with a dystopian imagery. The people who could get away have left and Merthyr has grown silent, 'bewildered by the fog of the future'. These figurative phrases convey messages of negativity and despair, a sharp contrast to June's upbeat prose but give a broadness to the group's work that would be lacking if the output was unfailingly positive.

In contrast, Margaret's work has taken the theme of generational change looking at school clothing:

Clothes We Wore

I wore a used raincoat,

A leather satchel that was a gift

A gym slip made by a friend's Nan the day I walked into the grammar school.

My son wore a grey suit, shirt and tie and carried a briefcase the day he went to grammar school.

My grandson wore a polo shirt, grey trousers, black shoes, slung a backpack over his shoulder, the day he went to Afon Taf.

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My clothes were given by friends and relations. My son had no problems, we were rich. My grandson's clothes, paid for mostly by me.

Have we made any progress in 60 years?

There is a circularity in her argument, and again she expands on themes that she has referenced before: that history is repeating itself and the problems of her generation are being reproduced today. It is an affectionate piece, her school items were provided through the generosity of friends and family, another example of the close ties amongst communities, while as a successful career woman, her own son's clothes were provided by her. However, her grandson was dependent on her for a school uniform. As she says, 'Have we made any progress in 60 years?' While happy to help her family, she is also emphasising the unpicking of State provision, and the erosion of the safety net that has protected families.

6.5 The politics of food

Themes of inequality and oppression are also explored through a discussion of the Idris Davies poem *Mrs Evans Fach, You Want Butter Again*, a seemingly simple piece about a request to a grocer but one that is replete with sub-texts that explore concepts of gender inequality, politics and class. The poem is part of *The Angry Summer* collection (1993 [1943]) which examines the effects of the 1926 General Strike and as with much of the literary input to these sessions the discussion widens into a consideration of how the past informs the present – that the problems of hunger and food shortages are replicated today:

Mrs. Evans fach, you want butter again.
How will you pay for it now, little woman
With your husband out on strike, and full
Of the fiery language? Ay, I know him,
His head is full of fire and brimstone
And a lot of palaver about communism,
And me, little Dan the Grocer
Depending so much on private enterprise.

What, depending on the miners and their
Money too? O yes, in a way, Mrs. Evans,
Come tomorrow, little woman, and I'll tell you then
What I have decided overnight.
Go home now and tell that rash red husband of yours

That your grocer cannot afford to go on strike
Or what would happen to the butter from Carmarthen?
Good day for now, Mrs. Evans fach.

Margaret comments that the construction of the poem reflects the speech patterns of people living in the South Wales Valleys, and she is concerned that it might not be so easily understood when read by people from outside the area. 'For people who are not from the Valleys, um, it might be quite difficult for them to understand because it's the lilt, of the way that the language goes that's important,' she says. While the words employed in the poem are from a standard English repertoire, unlike the dialect phrases favoured by the pastoral poet John Clare and some writers from the North of England such as Arthur Eaglestone and Barry Hines, nevertheless the voicing of the piece conveys the cadences of everyday conversation in Wales, and particularly in the Valleys. Houston (2016) considers that Davies' free verse 'takes on a heightened colloquial vigour' in the way that he comments on social and commercial divisions created by the General Strike, and that his Anglo-Welsh idioms capture affection but also allow for a satirical emphasis. Houston (2016) also suggests that Davies' connection to place is as sensitive and complete as Clare's writings on his home village of Helpston[10]. Read aloud, the poem becomes a performance piece, akin to a passage from a play, reminiscent of the work of Dylan Thomas, and as Blommaert notes, voice is 'the way in which people manage to make themselves understood or fail to do so', (2005, pgs. 4 and 5).

It is clear from reading the poem that status of the two characters is established early on. In Margaret's view the shopkeeper is being both aggressive and patronising. The opening three words, *Mrs Evans fach[11]*, immediately suggest an element of condescension; in Margaret's view 'he's putting her down'. This gender politics in the poem prompts her to recall that on returning to Merthyr nine years ago after being away for 40 years, she discovered that bowls clubs at that time would only accept female members if they guaranteed to come along and do the teas. 'Sometimes I get quite offended by the language and I think that's probably because I've been away and I've experienced something completely different,' she says. She recalls that she was the first girl from her council estate to go to university, and the reaction of neighbours was one of bewilderment. 'Oh, fancy your Margaret still in

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[10] John Clare's birthplace near Peterborough.
[11] The Welsh for small or little, often used as a term of endearment, but can be construed as patronising.

school at 21,' said one to her mother, a reaction that Walkerdine *et al* (2001, pg. 159) describe as infantilisation. In Margaret's opinion, these views were ingrained, girls were simply not expected to pursue a course of higher education, but she had parents who understood aspirations. 'But there must be thousands and thousands of young women with the potential who were kept down and I get so annoyed about it and he's actually captured the way that people would speak,' she says. Disturbingly, it appears that in some cases not much has changed, even in the 21st Century. Hanley (2007, pgs. 152 and 158) talks of a 'council-estate education' where the opportunity of going to university is simply not considered, and comments that her secondary school offered girls the 'choice' of a hair and beauty vocational course.

Margaret also notes that the shopkeeper refers to his potential customer as 'little woman' and June remarks that he says, disparagingly, 'you want butter again', again demonstrating the power imbalance in this exchange. However, while Davies paints an unflattering picture of the manipulative shopkeeper, Lewis Jones, in *We Live* (2006 [1939]) expresses sympathy for the traders who extended credit to striking miners but themselves faced economic ruin as their wholesalers remained unpaid (2006, pg. 583 [1939]). Jones' appreciation of the plight of the beleaguered shopkeepers appears all the more powerful when considered against his overall position on the conflict between his 'heroic' workers and the oppressive forces of employers and police.

An exercise of power which allowed shopkeepers to exercise control over the people was the credit arrangement operating in shops. Both Margaret and June recall the tab system in shops - a system of credit which was settled when people were paid. 'And, of course they had complete control then, you know, they could treat you as they wanted really,' says June. Margaret recalls that grocers would decide on credit limits and refuse to extend them. 'You might have four days to go before pay day but there was no more food on the tab,' she says. She recalls the late Saturday evening trips to shops to find cheap, marked-down goods and the Crosswoods store which would sell boxes of broken biscuits cheaply, reminiscent of the reduced-price counters in today's supermarkets.

For Margaret, the poem is a catalyst for her remembering the difficulties of life when she was growing up on the Glyn Nant estate. Her recollections echo the work of Gordon (2008, pg. 183) on social haunting who suggests that ghosts are not just a reflection of loss but show the need for something to be done. Margaret's memories

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reflect the situation at the time but her experiences allow her to reflect on social and economic situations today. She recalls that her father had been sent to Merthyr during the Second World War to work on aircraft engines but post-war was unable to find a job locally because of his Communist politics and trade union activity. 'Eventually he had to go away to work and he used to go off from the Cardiff bus stop…and he was working on aircraft engines all over the country….and my mother was having to manage on what she could earn which was not a great deal of money,' she says. This situation led to problems with paying the rent. June agrees, remembering rent men knocking on all the houses in an estate in a bid to get their money. Margaret recalls that her father was a 'one-stop shop for people to come for help' and she believes that people were more supportive of each other then. 'I just think of the way that we were on the Glyn Nant estate, everybody did something for somebody and there was no nonsense about it, it's just what happened,' she says.

Margaret recollections reflect the exigencies of the time when a series of coping strategies had to be employed to make ends meet but she also notes that similar scenarios are being enacted today, for example, through the provision of foodbanks, helping people working in the public sector. 'No-one has any savings and some of them need to borrow to get to the end of the month,' she says. She recalls that occasionally she will be asked to help her son pay his mortgage. This 'making do' is part of what Mckenzie (2012, pgs. 459 and 473) sees as the utilisation of local systems that add value through local networks and shared cultural understandings, a form of bonding capital; but while these systems create a sense of status and power, they also, in her view, create barriers, constructing an inside but also an outside from which people are excluded.

The most intriguing recollection is Margaret speaking of the 1971 move by the then Education Secretary Margaret Thatcher to stop free milk in schools. 'Well, it was my dad who coined "Maggie Thatcher, Milk Snatcher",' she says. She also says that for a whole term in Merthyr the children had free milk as her father had discovered a loophole in the law which allowed flavoured milks, so the pupils were provided with strawberry-flavoured milk. 'So, a whole term he defied the Government,' she says. In Margaret's view, her father is constructed as immensely powerful, a strong character who got things done, a worker hero, a humanitarian who saw good in everyone, admired by the people but blacklisted by employers for his views. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that a phrase that became embedded in the national consciousness would have originated from this source. Hunt (2013, pg. 26) suggests that the Sun newspaper coined the phrase in 1971. At that time, the paper

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wasn't an avid supporter of Thatcher, says Hunt. It had backed Labour policies in the early 1970s and its swing to the right would happen later, in the mid-1970s. Perhaps Margaret's father was aware of the phrase from the newspaper stories, or perhaps this is an example of an idea simultaneously surfacing at several points.

In the writing session following, Margaret submits a piece that reflects our discussions on poverty and food inspired by Davies' poem:

Breakfast club

'Where is your card?

Can't give you anything without it.'

Sally, from the chapel, spoke to Dai in a friendly way.

She'd been there herself when John had his accident.

'Here it is,' said Dai, 'took half an hour of questions from the social to get it.'

Without the breakfast club, Darren and Rhian would go to school hungry.

'The wife and I don't bother with breakfast.'

Sally started to pack the box: cereal, fruit, spread, cheese and eggs,

But Dai would be back again next week when his wages ran out before pay day.

The piece is a perfect cameo of a modern-day encounter with charities, impersonal bureaucracy replaced by a caring interaction. Dai has struggled through an interview with social security, but Sally is kind to him as she herself has experienced the necessity for the food bank. It is another example of what Thrift (2005, pg. 143) describes as a city's 'structure of kindness'. But there is a reminder that this is a harsh existence: 'The wife and I don't bother with breakfast', a phrase that recalls the hungry years of the early 20th Century, and Dai would be back again when the money ran out before the next pay day. As Margaret has noted, there is never enough money to go round, but taking action to resolve these matters is not straightforward. Haylett (2003, pg. 59) warns that the contradictory nature of working-class cultures created out of economic inequalities raises the question of how to speak against poverty and discrimination without speaking against who you are and where you originate from. Haylett suggests that a politics of social justice

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needs to look at more than structural or distributional notions of inequality but needs to ascribe positive values to working class people that move beyond a labour-market utility so that welfare can be repositioned with a focus on cultural dignity and economic justice (2003, pg. 69).

6.6 A sense of belonging

6.6.1 Rooted attachment

To get an overview of how participants constructed a connection to place both in the present and the past, writing exercises that allowed for the production of narratives that demonstrate a strong attachment to place were introduced using the artifices of 'letters to home' and postcards. What emerged in the work was a strong sense of rooted attachment to place. June's letters, one to the town and one to her house, demonstrate a powerful sense of belonging. June is comfortable with her relationship to place both on a micro and macro level. In her letter to the town she writes:

Dear Merthyr Tydfil,

As long as I live here I will be happy.

I go away for holidays but I am always so glad to come home.

I have always lived and worked here and so maybe I have a narrow view, but I really do not care.

I love the people, I love the town and I love the sense of belonging and I love the sense of identity.

Close friends have left recently to live in the big city and I actually sense the loss they feel living away from the area they knew as home.

They have a lovely house, new ventures, a beautiful grandchild but the joy they experience on their frequent visits to Merthyr is palpable.

Many changes have occurred over the years in our town and it has had much bad press for many reasons. Yet it continues to survive and go from strength to strength. The roots are deep and the sense of community is always around you.

This work emphasises a strong connection to the town through repeated use of the verb 'love'. Friends who have moved away feel a sense of loss assuaged by their frequent return visits. June also alludes to the negative reporting concerning the

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town but sees a positive future for the area based on a strong sense of community as emphasised by the metaphor of 'deep roots'. The strength of connection to place is enhanced by the temporal shifts in this piece's register – again the past informs the present. June seems aware that her commitment to place may lay her open to criticism as she admits that she may have 'a narrow view' but she is happy to deflect this imagined rebuke with a defiant 'but I really do not care'. Her attachment to place is powerful enough to surmount such obstacles, endorsing Anderson's belief that an individual sense of place transcends local, national or even religious standpoints (2010, pg. 129).

In her letter to her house, June writes:

You were my first house, I lived in a flat with many corridors and when I was five years old I moved to you in Twyn with my parents and my sister. The excitement stays with me, there was a front door and a back door and we had two toilets, one inside and one out. There were three big rooms downstairs and upstairs. It had a large garden and the house was in the middle of a 'posh' housing estate, it wasn't posh, it was posh to me. I lived there until I left home at 18 years and have many happy memories of sitting quietly by the coal fire, making myself invisible, while listening to the gossip between my mother and my sister. I also remember the close friendships I made and the birth of a further two sisters and a brother. Many happy hours were spent playing outside, ball games such as King, Queenie, hopscotch and marbles. Monopoly was a great favourite and we would actually spend days playing the game. My parents lived in the house until they died in their '80s and caring for them over the last few years was a privilege. My son then bought the house ... and we continue to have many happy moments there and I watch my grandchildren grow into adulthood. ... You will always be a special place in my heart.

June's move would have been in the late 1940s, a time of great change as the post-war rebuilding programme began to gather pace and new housing estates were built across the country. While the development of council estates has attracted much criticism, with Hanley (2007, pg. 97) considering that housing is the one great failure of the Welfare State, nevertheless other commentators suggest that while council housing is often subject to negative and stigmatising depictions, residents often speak of co-operation and adaptation (Mckenzie, 2012, pg. 459, Charles and Davies, 2005, pg. 688). Certainly for June, the 'excitement' of the move stays with her. The sense of space in the house coupled with a garden seemed luxury indeed

to the young girl. She describes the estate as 'posh' but then notes, 'it wasn't posh, it was posh to me' – whatever outside views of the site were constructed, for her it was a place to be valued and appreciated. As Reay and Lucy argue (2000, pg. 425), constructions of class have a powerful effect on the experience of place. June's Wordsworthian 'spots of time' are memories of sitting by a coal fire, 'making myself invisible' listening to family gossip. She adopts the role of the observer rather than participant, looking for anonymity, content to listen to 'adult' talk, although inter-personal relations are clearly well developed in the family as they 'would spend days' playing Monopoly.

In later life she speaks of the 'privilege' of caring for her elderly parents and is clearly delighted that her son now lives in the house 'and we continue to have many happy moments there' as she watches her grandchildren grow up. 'You will always be a special place in my heart' she tells the house. For June, the house provides a link with the past and a connection to the future that contributes to her present contentment and provides a physical *aide memoire* to reflection. The physicality of the house is entwined with a metaphysical awareness of existence and the strengths to be derived from a rooted connection to family which again can be related to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1963) – June's contentment demonstrates a wisdom that comes from an awareness of a fulfilled life.

For Caradog, where he lives and where is home are now one and the same place, the family house in Dwrfawr, a place where 'the happiness of a childhood is based' although as a teenager he could not wait to get away. Despite living for 10 years in London, the house 'was always there as an anchor' and he has now returned. The metaphor of an anchor is used by Relph (1976, pg. 39) to illustrate his belief that having roots in a place provides a secure anchorage and strong psychological and spiritual attachments. Unlike June, Caradog has spent periods away from Merthyr but always with the knowledge that the place is there to return to. In his letter, he comments on the level of litter in the area, 'Litter is everywhere, bins, black, blue and green are everywhere, full or empty. Disposable rubbish is everywhere. Dwrfawr is untidy for sure.' While it is clear Caradog is aware of some of the negative aspects of living in the area, nevertheless his commitment to place is such that he can overlook these faults.

Alice also appears to draw strength from her childhood recollections in her letter to home:

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You are in my head, I come home when I am alone. I remember your rooms, the kitchen always filled with sunshine, the radio playing songs by Peggy Lee, Burl Ives, Danny Kaye. Some place called BFPO.[12] Another room, weekend afternoons in the garden, my father is in his shed, my mother soaking up the sunshine in her deckchair. I am playing with a kitten, I throw the ball again and again and off she goes then suddenly she flops, oh, pussy's tired. Would you like a saucer of water? Water is lapped eagerly, then amazingly off she goes again chasing that elusive ball. Another room, in Kent University, I'm surrounded by voices from many countries all speaking English fluently. One large circle consists of American men who all fought in World War Two. The low drawl of their voices makes me long to join them, to sit at their knee as I had at my father's, to hear their memories.

For Alice, the family home is a place to return to in her mind. The piece references a secure past, a childhood idyll, again recalling Wordsworth's spots of time. The sun is always shining in the kitchen and the radio playing popular songs of the day. The imagery is of comfort, stability, reassurance, but it seems there is a suggestion of wistful longing for a long-ago period of family togetherness. '*You are in my head, I come home when I am alone'.* The imagery of sunshine is repeated when weekend afternoons in the garden are recalled but she also shifts the narrative in an almost filmic plot device to recalling adult memories of listening to American veterans speaking of their war-time experiences. She 'longs to join them' and to recapture the experience of sitting at her father's knee. There seems to be a yearning to return to the simplicity of childhood interactions, shorn of the complexities of adult communication. Alice reveals that she has incorporated two childhood homes and one in later life into the piece, a highly personal evocation of her life.

Helen also writes of the comfort of being at home and liking the feeling of familiarity.

I feel comfortable with being at my home and I have no particular desire to live anywhere else. I like the feeling of familiarity and while I enjoy travelling and visiting other places the need to return to my comfort blanket and familiar surroundings is quite strong. Some may say this is sad or a limited way of thinking, then so be it, this is how I feel. Busy cities, dusty roads, long sandy beaches, I've visited many but still feel that it is a visit and not where I want to live. My main comfort blanket is my family who are in and out of my home like a revolving door. Without that interaction it would not be my home.

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[12] British Forces Broadcasting.

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Helen also shares June's slightly defensive position. Aware that her avowed connection to place may lay her open to charges of narrow-mindedness, she is again confident in her position. Holidays away are welcomed. She evokes images of 'busy cities, dusty roads, long sandy beaches' to imply someone who is well travelled, but the 'comfort blanket' of familiar surroundings is a powerful pull, reflecting Paton's concept of 'elective fixity', the ability to stay rooted in a neighbourhood. However, this has been weakened through economic and social forces (Paton, 2013, pg. 86) and Savage (2008, pg. 156) notes that in the middle of the 20th Century large numbers of people from areas such as South Wales did, in fact, move to the more prosperous South and the Midlands. 'It was never the case that the apparent power of kinship-based attachment to place meant that the population was static and immobile,' he says (Savage, 2008, pg. 156). Nevertheless, for June and Helen, their attachment to place is palpable and visceral, it is an affection that also recognises the close familial bonds that make the area attractive to live in. Savage's review of place-based attachment amongst working class communities in the north concludes that these are not warm and cosy communities but collections of people born out of pragmatic necessity (2008, pg. 156), however, this is not the impression gained from June and Helen's accounts – there is an appreciation of the benefits of social capital but also a love for the actual place.

Helen returns to the image of the 'comfort blanket' to reinforce the importance of family. '*My main comfort blanket is my family who are in and out of my home like a revolving door. Without that interaction it would not be my home.*' The comment gives the impression of constant interruptions but ones that are clearly welcomed, an acknowledgement that life can be messy and unfocussed but that interpersonal interaction is all-important. Here place is inextricably enmeshed with the human. As Massey suggests, what is special about place is not a pre-given collective identity but a 'thrown-togetherness' which entails negotiating a here-and-now between both human and non-human (2005, pg. 140).

An embodied connection to locality features strongly in these letters but also an awareness that the human and personal are interwoven with the stories of place. Far from the dysfunctional future predicted for the area in the Depression-hit 1930s, it appears from these letters that the town has retained an inter-personal vitality that all the writers draw strength from. Place and personality are inter-woven to provide a rooted sense of belonging.

6.6.2 Postcards from home

Writing to a place proved an effective way of exploring affective connections, so this idea was extended through writing postcards about the town to former residents. The resulting work emphasised the wide-ranging changes the town has experienced and provided an opportunity for a reflection on the past, present and future as summed up in Alice's postcard to a former school-friend who left the town for university and subsequently a career in teaching:

Dear Joan[13],

Keeping myself busy with history classes and family history research. Merthyr vastly improved in appearance, though a bit patchy. Jobs situation is stagnant. Shops opening and then closing a year later, reopening under a new owner, closing again. Charity shops present an attractive appearance in the High Street, putting conventional retailers to shame. On the whole, Merthyr is still a cheerful place to live but the bus station area is frequented by drunks and druggies, a terrible image of hopelessness. Really don't know where the town will be in another 40 years. Hope you're well.

Alice.

Alice sees the town in a state of flux, as retailers come and go. She writes of contrasts: the 'attractive appearance' of charity shops, the town 'a cheerful place to live', but compares this to the 'terrible image of hopelessness' of the bus station, frequented, she asserts, by 'drunks and druggies', an alliterative phrase that provides a powerful image of decay and despair, albeit employing a touch of hyperbole. The town is a contrastive space, reflecting a problem common to all urban spaces, that such places bring people together in large numbers but not always, as Hall (2017, pg. 8) suggests, one big, happy family. Economic conditions also play a part. Glaeser (2012, pg. 268) suggests that the global recession shows that urban development can eradicate value as well as creating it.

Taking a more optimistic view, Caradog's card is short and to the point:

Dear (Caradog has no-one in particular in mind)

Town is on the up, a retail hub nowadays, colourful buildings, but too much car traffic. Come and see.

Caradog.

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[13] All addressees' names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

He sees a positive future for the town, with an influx of retail outlets. However, Helen's postcard to a cousin who had moved away from the town to Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk, is less enthusiastic about the developments:

Dear Lucy,

Lots of changes since you left Merthyr Tydfil. Many of the principal buildings and shops have been replaced with new, modern retail outlets and buildings and our old school, which was in need of repair, is currently undergoing some work. The grandsons told me the roof was a big problem. One of the good things I know you will be pleased with is that there has been renovation of some old buildings, for example, the town hall. Much of the old town, as you knew it, is in disrepair, i.e. the High Street etc., which is common in many areas of the country. Send you some photos.

Helen.

Helen notes that many of the town's main buildings have been swept away to be replaced by modern units, a familiar pattern repeated in towns and cities everywhere, the result of what Jacobs (1992, pg. 13) has termed 'the pseudoscience of city planning'. However, Helen is pleased that some of the town's old buildings have been renovated but writes that much of the old town is 'in disrepair'. As with Alice's comments, Helen's card again emphasises contrasts: how the process of urban development has irrevocably altered the town's appearance. For those who have left, the return is envisaged as a potential shock, a jarring of the senses through a realisation of loss and change, a theme continued in June's card:

Dear Tina

Hope you are well, it is good to hear from you and I look forward to seeing you after 20 long years. You will not recognise a lot of the place. Much has happened in our home town of Merthyr Tydfil. We have a new retail park, a posh, renovated town hall, a new college and the epic Trago Mills. New road links are present and the old town is thriving. Cyfarthfa Castle, our favourite school once, is also being developed. However, some places which you will remember fondly are still there although in a dilapidated state. Do you remember our monthly dances in Hoover's factory, the Friday nights in the Miners' Hall and the live shows in the Theatre Royal? The Monkey Parade is also still there, just. Sad news, our place of work is

being pulled down, yes, Merthyr General Hospital. This is where we became who we are.

June.

June tells her friend she 'will not recognise the place' with all the new developments but is positive about the state of the 'old town'. However, she expresses regret over the dilapidated state of sites that clearly would resonate affectionately with both her friend and her. She recalls a vanished social scene: dances, shows and the walks along the Monkey Parade[14]. This is nostalgia but coupled with a genuine feeling that something that was valuable has disappeared, the social 'glue' that operated in the town has vanished replaced with different forms of amusement. Clearly, however, the most traumatic news she has it that the old hospital is to be pulled down[15]. 'This is where we became who we are', a philosophical reflection but also a poetic one – place and custom and practice have the ability to develop character; the building and its inhabitants, doctors, nurses and patients embody a set of values that June still cherishes.

The theme of drastic change is continued in Margaret's card but here there are no regrets for the vanished social customs that June laments. Her post-card is addressed to the boy who lived next door when they were growing up:

Dear John,

You won't believe how Merthyr has changed since we both lived here as teenagers. Always thought it was a bit dull and dreary, not now. I live near the site of the old Kayser Bonder factory. Every day I drive up the slip road and into Goat Mill Road. They have just cut back the hedges so you can see as far as the Cefn viaduct and at night there are lights as far as the eye can see, past Swansea Road, over to Penydarren, up to Dwrfawr Top. Some things have gone, like Gellifaelog School and the Castle Cinema. Do you remember going to the ABC Minors? But we now have a posh Vue cinema and a leisure centre and a souped-up Penydarren Park. Just so glad they demolished the Gwaunfarren Baths. Why don't May and you come down for a few days? I'm sure we can still find some of our old haunts intact. The Blue Pool is still there. We could have a picnic.

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[14] The now-forgotten social tradition of young people interacting on Sunday promenades (see 5.3.4).

[15] At the time of writing, plans for housing were still to be realised.

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Margaret embraces change, the new cinema and leisure centre are welcomed and she is delighted that the old baths have gone. The 'dull and dreary' town has been altered and she paints a vivid picture of the night-time scene with the street lights stretching away into the distance. It is landscape as art, an aesthetic statement of appreciation. Merthyr, once lit by the glow of furnaces, is reinvented as a picture of attractiveness. This awareness of the landscape is important in understanding the connection to place in South Wales. As Priestley (1969 [1929]) noted in his Good Companions, it is not possible to understand the relationship with place in the North of England without appreciating the importance of the surrounding countryside, the close proximity of moorland and hill to the manufacturing towns and this is also something that can be found in South Wales.

However, Margaret lapses into nostalgia when wondering if they could still find some of their old haunts intact, a hankering for childhood idylls, a return to spaces of adventure which despite the relentless spread of urbanisation are still apparently available. 'The Blue Pool is still there. We could have a picnic.' This is a return to Eden, a poetic reflection on lost childhood – the continued presence of the pool is an enticement to return and to celebrate with that most childish of culinary adventures – the picnic.

The postcard is normally a fleeting communication – messages home from holiday-makers, but also a snapshot of time, a moment captured forever. Here, the accounts are more reflective, this is after all a writing exercise not a genuine holiday communication, but nevertheless there are messages of affect, of regret for lost buildings, lost youth, an awareness that times have changed but also a hope that the new world of the town is full of possibilities. As Glaeser has it, the resilience of cities is a reflection of the social nature of humanity (2012, pg. 269). 'Our ability to connect with one another is the defining characteristic of our species,' he says, and these postcards have provided one way of effecting that connection.

6.7 Sense and sensibility

6.7.1 Senses of place

Much of the discussions and subsequent writing have concerned a sense of place and community, but I was interested to explore a more personal dimension to sensation that emphasises the importance of the psychosocial nature of affect. As

Merleau-Ponty notes (2000, pg. 14 [1962]), finding a meaning for something that is sensed can only happen through other sensations, whether actual or virtual.

Thinking of a place and describing it using the five senses produced some powerful and imaginative work. Caradog, in describing the site of an abandoned farmhouse on the outskirts of Merthyr, writes of *'the sound of the beech trees wishing loudly on the wind'* and employing the metaphysical, describes *'the place where I touch history and touch the families that have long since gone'*. He likens it to *'a dappled haven … the last oasis before, on a walk, you reach the high plateau of limestone beyond the tree line ... it's harsh, it's upland Wales.'* Caradog describes it as a place for contemplation and relaxation with the sun 'dappling through the beeches'. His descriptions are not part of a finished poem but there is an intense, lyrical quality to his writing and a positivity that belies some of the literary references to the area which portray it in grimmer terms. This outlook reflects a view widely held locally but not necessarily perceived by a larger audience that the region can be an area of superlative beauty. As Billy Mitchell reminds us, 'two hundred years and now it's ended' (2005), and even for areas scarred by coal, iron and steel development, rapid reclamation by nature is now ensuring that the Valleys are beautiful once again.

Caradog reveals that this is a stop for him on a long walk to Felinfach beyond Brecon, a distance of about 30 miles. The place is clearly important to him and he values the tranquillity and the opportunity for reflection. Caradog touches on this in the piece he produces subsequently:

Blaencallan Farmstead

The name is intriguing: there is no direct, obvious translation from the Welsh. After some local research and inquiries, the best hunch is simple: that it is descriptive of the place – on the brow (blaen) *alongside a field or even place* (cae'r lan). *The place is evocative because of the name and its remoteness. It is the last inhabitation on this side of the limestone plateau on the southern approaches of the Brecon Beacons. Yet it would have been within sight of the Dwrfawr Works, the noise of the train running through to Brecon, the crunch of limestone extraction from the nearby Trefil Quarries. Forget the deliberate plantation of conifers, forget the deliberate drowning of the Taff Fechan Valley into two reservoirs either side of the year 1900.*

The places possesses everything necessary for life to endure: a shelter below the highest ground, ample protection from the prevailing winds by planted tree breaks, plentiful, clear running waters which drain away. This would have been a well-

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travelled route linking Dyffryn Crawnon, end on to the plateau, and this hillside leading downwards towards Pontsticill and Pontsarn and so into Merthyr Tydfil town proper. Brecon and Merthyr Tydfil before the railway line would have been connected thus: sheep trails across the limestone and descending into the fertile Vale of Usk and so by canal south to Abergavenny or north to Brecon or straight into mid Wales. Registers of deaths particularly survive in the local library to flesh out a picture of who lived thereabouts. Dolygaer House is re-inhabited, Parkwood is the new owner at the outdoor centre, the railway runs again and Trefil occasionally becomes a film set. Walk it, feel it, see it, and pause at Blaencallan Farm to take in what once was.

Although much of the piece is an evocation of the past, he also references the present with a series of positive statements: houses are re-inhabited, the old railway line has now reopened as a tourist attraction and the quarry can occasionally be used as a film-set – notable productions using this barren site have included *Wrath of the Titans*, *Dr Who* and *Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy* (moviemaps.org, n.d.). The British Realist film-making genre of the 1950s and 1960s that carefully portrayed working class areas through what Shields (1991, pg. 218) describes as a 'folksy', one-sided view that creates a foreign 'other', has now been subverted by a fantasy and sci-fi genre that looks to dysfunctional landscapes for inspiration but, paradoxically, continues to present an image that is equally distorted.

June recalls family holidays in West Wales in her poem. She writes of *the dancing sea in the distance*; using an alliterative device by describing the *sight of seagulls shooting through the sky;* and of *almost touching the joy of the seaside on the faces of the people around,* what Shields has noted could be compared to a liminal experience, representing a liberation from the regime of normative practice and performance codes (1991, pg. 84). Nevertheless, June recalls seeing a photograph of her father taken in a group on the beach at Lavernock near Penarth and they were all dressed in suits and ties – for them respectability was a more powerful driver than a relaxing of dress codes. In public it appeared to be important to conform to normative standards that could perhaps be eased in a home environment.

Margaret produces a simple, elegant piece of work, an imaginative, embodied construction that speaks strongly to identity and a sense of place through an imagery that is economical but powerful.

Cynon Villa

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Four windows and a central door,

Toast cooked on an open fire,

The organ playing in the parlour.

Cuddled in a woollen blanket,

Smoke going up the chimney,

'Rub this Vick to make you better',

Thermogene to warm your chest,[16]

Dacu plays hymns on Sunday,[17]

Gooseberries from the lofty garden,

Two houses now fill the space.

The poem looks to a secure past, again recalling Wordsworth's *spots of time*. It is a homage to a vanished era but is nevertheless not a lament for the past but a reflection on a childhood idyll that informs a sense of community that is operational today. In its structure, with short five to seven word lines, it recalls the work of Owen Sheers who powerfully explores notions of boundary and identity in contemporary Wales. The poem shows that there is a universality to the human experience rooted in the tropes of home, comfort and security. There is a plethora of sensations – the smell of toast 'cooked on an open fire', the visual and olfactory reaction to 'smoke going up the chimney' and the sound of the 'organ playing in the parlour'. But while these are obviously intended to evoke a scene that is clearly set in a particular time and place, nevertheless, these images could just as easily be reimagined in a contemporary context – the smell of cooking, the sound of music and the warmth of a home remain as indicators of a comfortable domesticity, both to be experienced as a lived sensation and to be encountered in literal and figurative representations in Western literature. While most of the poem references the past, the last line 'two houses now fill the space' introduces a jarring, discordant note into what has been a romantic, contemplative piece. Margaret evokes a feeling of nostalgia but cleverly confronts modernity through this device and reminds us that nothing is constant, a metaphor perhaps for the changing face of the South Wales Valleys.

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[16] Thermogene was a warming bandage.
[17] Dacu is the particularly South Walian Welsh word for grandfather.

6.7.2 Sound of silence

Writing inspired by sounds allowed for an examination of the value of silence and a feeling that today this is an under-valued commodity. As Caradog notes, most of his students say they can't work in silence. 'I think they fear silence 'cos they don't live in a silent society,' he says. Caradog remembers Dwrfawr being 'very, very quiet on a Sunday afternoon, no shops, no pubs, barely any traffic', what Copper (1975, pg. 38) has described as 'the serenity of Sunday' in the early 20th Century 'almost impossible to imagine for those who are not old enough to remember it', and Margaret agrees that the lack of cars in the Glyn Nant estate when she was growing up contributed to the quiet. It does seem as if even at a time when Merthyr would have resonated to the sound of heavy industry, there were periods of comparative quiet. She writes:

I live in a cocoon where there is little noise, the house is detached, backing on to a culvert, sideways on to a local football ground. I can go for a whole day without speaking to another human being except on the phone but I cannot truly describe myself as lonely. For five years I've been the sole human occupant of the house … However, compared with the rest of my life it's rather an oasis. It's probably what gives me a balance in my life. Lectures, classes, meetings, arguments and quiet, my choice of television and music; the fact that I can change into my pyjamas when I want; I can play Classic FM all night if I wish, get up and wander round the house.

Here it is the absence of sound that is valued; Margaret lives in 'a cocoon' of silence, a solitary existence, but still not one that she considers lonely. Busy outside the home, she sees domestic life as a foil to her many activities and values the freedom of choice that comes with living alone, although the situation had been forced on her – her husband died five years ago. Now the dysfunctionalism of an un-ordered life is what appeals to her. She can change into pyjamas when she wants, play Classic FM[18] all night and get up and wander around the house if she wishes. The compromises of married life have been exchanged for solitary free will in her 'oasis' which provides 'a balance' to the rest of her activities. She is keen to stress the positivity of her experience and subsequently argues that the sort of activities she takes part in: WEA meetings, lectures, shows and charity events, can make an important contribution to keeping an ageing population active and healthy.

Sound itself is an under-utilised sense in research; Gallagher and Prior (2014, pg. 269) argue that it has the potential to complement written text and images,

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[18] A British classical music radio station.

supplying an additional sensory dimension. For example, sounds can evoke a picture of domesticity. Margaret remembers her father coming downstairs, clomping on every stair and then opening a door and speaking to the dog whose response would ensure that no-one could stay asleep.

6.7.3 Musical memories

Another way of exploring 'sounds' was through a talk given to WEA members including my participants on the popular music of Merthyr from 1955-75 by Professor Paul Carr from the University of South Wales which provided a stimulus for recalling impressions of musical life in Merthyr.

Caradog, while admitting to missing out on the 'Swingin' Sixties' in the town because he did not feel part of the scene, recalls a concert celebrating Merthyr's 1,500[th] anniversary in 1980 which saw male voice choirs combining under the baton of Glynne Jones. Writing about the event, he comments, 'Glynne's management of the whole evening was typically in his style: precise, flamboyant and joyous.' Caradog ponders whether there is still such huge support for that style of music. 'Charismatic figures like Glynne are fewer in number; who attends such concerts today? All is not lost, however, the tenors of Dwrfawr are still singing... CD sales of such music are available, some concerts are sell-outs. Music is still made within the town. It has always, and always will, provide a rhythm to the place just as the puddling at the furnaces, the clank of the railway engine on wheels, the colliery hooter, provided all those years ago,' he writes.

Caradog's conflating of the rhythm of music with the rhythm of industrial processes is interesting – both rhythms measure progress but of very different kinds, the one providing the underlying framework of the creative process and the other the mechanical repetition that marks the organisation of workers into what Foucault has termed 'docile bodies' (1977). For Foucault, organisational practices could be envisaged as a discipline of individuals through their distribution in enclosed spaces such as a factory (1977). The sounds of industry demonstrate how these organisational practices can be effected. Indeed, all these sounds provide a rhythm that represents the area, as the burgeoning interest in research into sounds can demonstrate. Gallagher and Prior (2014, pg. 268) suggest that audio can tell different kinds of stories to other media such as text and images. 'We suggest that phonography is particularly useful for highlighting hidden or marginal aspects of places and their inhabitants,' they say (2014, pg. 268). Rhythm can be integral to an analysis of a town – we talk of the 'heartbeat' of a place in a bid to describe the

affective and performative turns that constitute the core ethos of a community. The sounds of music and of industry combine to provide a powerful aural picture of life in the South Wales Valleys. The colliery hooter, for example, was a distinctive feature, regulating not only the workers clocking on and off at the pits, but was also used by others in the area to regulate their routines. As Priestley (1969, pg. 122 (1929]) noted in his novel *The Good Companions* set in the fictional northern town of Bruddersford, many citizens did not own a watch and the sound of the factory hooter was their timepiece. Indeed, factory hooters were elevated to musical instruments in a Russian experiment, the *Hooter Symphonies,* which saw them incorporated in a 1922 performance to mark the anniversary of the Revolution, something described by Bishop (2012, pg. 65) as a 'mind-boggling cultural gesture'.

Caradog's affection for music-making stems, it is suggested, from an awareness that shared activities such as choral concerts provided a powerful response to the demands of the heavy industries such as mining and steel and allowed for an assertion of a cultural identity, a sharing of artistic experiences, both from the aspect of performer and audience. It is an expression of cultural capital (Putnam, 2000) that can be replicated through many other shared experiences: brass bands, the 'kazoo' bands that once marched across the area and the concerts put on in churches and chapels, reflecting Williams' assertion that 'culture is ordinary' (1958), and refuting Bourdieu's claims (1984) that the social hierarchy of arts corresponds to a social hierarchy of consumers. Today, as Caradog notes, such music-making continues: there is still the need to come together to share cultural experiences in a time of zero hours contracts and unemployment. The camaraderie of the choir and the brass band continues to provide the social interaction once experienced by miners and steelworkers, the 'communities of practice' defined by Wenger and Snyder (2000). This camaraderie is captured perfectly by a poem Margaret wrote some years ago, *The Singing Men*, about the Dwrfawr Male Voice Choir which suggests that the world of choral music is still thriving:

In concerts they wear fine-badged blazers or bow ties,
pillars of the community, full of discipline, they sing in perfect harmony.
Yes, the tenors are still singing in Dwrfawr.
In the afterglow in the Farmers' Arms,
larynxes oiled with soothing bitter,
they sing like angels.

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While the concerts are enjoyable experiences, she suggests that the best expression of music-making is to be found in the pub afterwards. Here, a sense of community is reinforced through a shared experience in which performance and participation become melded together in an inclusive rendering of songs, capturing what Hoggart (1957, pg. 144) has described as the 'feeling heart' of melodies. 'They touch old chords, they suggest values which people still like to cherish,' he says.

The strength of the cultural networks operating in the town is illustrated through Margaret's introduction to the world of opera, not through going to opera houses in Cardiff or London but through experiences at 'celebrity concerts' in a local chapel. However, she feels that today people are less inclined to perform at such concerts perhaps from a fear of making a mess of it. Coupled with people's reluctance to engage in a highly professionalised world as perceived through audio and film output, there is also a decline in the number of venues, particularly for popular music. As Carr (2016) points out, it is difficult to realise just how much music was performed in the town in a period from 1955 to 1970, something that will probably never be repeated.

So it can be seen that a simple analysis of musical recollections can nevertheless be a way into understanding the deeper meanings that validate a sense of community – the importance of shared music-making, strengthening of cultural capital and an assertion of cultural individuality that provides a rooted response to the economic and social forces that are creating more and more pressures for the area. Indeed, it could be argued that without the social cohesion provide by the networks of musical groups, communities in the area would be in a far more invidious position. The unemployed miners who marched to London in the 1930s drew strength from their choral tradition, perhaps today music can still be a sustaining force.

6.7.4 Haptic encounters

Another approach to perceptions that provided an opportunity to re-examine the nature of belonging and identity was haptic encounters with artifacts. The first artifact produced for examination in a writing session was a Welsh love-spoon, once popular in the 18th and 19th Centuries, when they were carved by young men to express their love and devotion (National Museum of Wales, 2012). As an artifact to be used as an inspiration for creative writing, the love-spoon is a potent symbol of Welsh identity but it also reflects the changing nature of the social fabric of the country – originally a product of a predominantly rural economy, its popularity waned through the upheavals of the Industrial Revolution but in a post-industrial

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context it has been reinvented as a tourist souvenir but also as a restatement of the cultural strengths of a nation re-examining itself through a shift to self-governance. The sensory encounter with the love-spoon provided an inspiration for the writing that followed. As Kuby *et al* argue (2015, pg. 6), 'knowing and being (with materials) are not isolated from each other but are mutually implicated'. Histories and contexts are sedimented on the writing produced (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010).

Alice produced the following poem:

The Love-spoon

I am being carried in the rough hand of a young man.

I have spent many hours in the hands of this young man.

He ripped me from my mother,

took me home and applied a sharp blade to my tender skin.

I felt my shape changing,

where I had been straight I was curved,

blunt, now sharp points emerged.

Once full, spaces opened.

He held me in front of a mirror once.

I was two hearts meeting, topped by a crown,

Ending in a tear drop.

The cutting and carving

stopped today.

He has stopped in front of a door.

The door opens and a young woman stands there.

'For you, Rosie, cariad.'

'Oh, John.'

I pass from his hand to the plump touch of the young woman.

Now I realise what I suffered has been done in the name of love.

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I am satisfied.

Alice employs personification to give weight to the suffering endured by the wood as it is 'ripped from my mother' and a 'sharp blade applied to my tender skin', powerful images that contrast with the emerging beauty of the finished product: 'two hearts meeting, topped by a crown, ending in a tear drop'. This can almost be seen as a redemption narrative, as the finished product is passed to the man's sweetheart as an affirmation of love. 'I am satisfied,' says the spoon, past suffering endured for a reason: the end justifies the means, a narrative development that can also be likened to a religious message of suffering and eventual release. The stark imagery at the beginning of the piece recalls some of the more graphic writing of Lewis Jones in his descriptions of mining life, but there is a tenderness at the conclusion that gives a lyrical quality to the work.

The other artifact to be used in this exploration of senses was a miners' lamp and again participants were invited to close their eyes and touch the object. The lamp is another iconic symbol and although it had long been superseded by more modern lighting, it is instantly identifiable as a representation of the work in collieries, the answer to the suffocating darkness, a metaphor for hope, the light showing a way to cope with exigencies of working underground. A nice synergy with Margaret's *Cynon Villa* poem was achieved through this exercise. The lamp is stamped with the insignia of Ferndale Colliery in the Rhondda and for Margaret it provides a connection with her Dacu in *Cynon Villa* who worked in that colliery. The lamp can be envisaged as a metonym which looks to the past but can also be seen as a guiding light for the future. It articulates memories of an entire industry now passing into the realm of Barthian myth, another example of social haunting. As Welsh politician and former miners' leader Kim Howells says, 'I know for certain that the ghosts are still out there, haunting abandoned mineshafts, winding-sheds and chapels' (2017, pg. 3).

Kindly Light

I was brand-new,

shining in the early morning light

sitting on a shelf with dozens of my brothers.

Dai came along, picked me up and handed me to

a tall man, black, but not from coal.

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With 20 men we went into a cage

plummeting below ground

to a blackness I helped to light up

and then it started.

'Sing, Paul' shouted one of the men

and all through the day he sang

'All Through the Night'

as they filmed 'Proud Valley'.

The poem references Paul Robeson, the American singer and activist who became aware of the miners' plight in the 1920s and starred in the 1940 film Proud Valley which told the tale of a black miner who moved to the South Wales Valleys, an uncompromising piece of work that remains a strong political statement from the Left. Nevertheless, it too suffered from a distorted presentation of the miners' life through the Ealing Studio-shot scenes of 'ersatz pit-head winding towers and improbably-enlarged terraced houses' (Wales Arts Review, 2013). The bond between Robeson and South Wales' miners was seen at its most poignant when, although banned from travel outside the USA during the McCarthy era, his voice was transmitted to the Miners' Eisteddfod in Porthcawl in 1957, conversing with miners' leader Will Paynter and performing some of his songs, joining in with the Treorchy Male Voice Choir to sing the Welsh national anthem *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* (The Ancient Land of My Fathers) (Sparrow, 2017). The travel ban was lifted the next year and Robeson appeared at the National Eisteddfod in Ebbw Vale, an event Margaret witnessed when she was 15, and in 2010 she again went to the eisteddfod when it returned to Ebbw Vale to see Robeson's grand-daughter in the audience. Again, although the poem refers to the past it carries a contemporary message of hope, of triumph over adversity and the enduring strength of these communities. As the title suggests, the light is a positive force in a pit where men 'plummet' down to darkness – a powerful imagery that depicts a rapid descent into something that has been likened to Hell: 'He goes down in his (cage) to Hell' (Mitchell, 2005). Margaret also cleverly juxtaposes day and night as 'all through the day he sang All Through the Night', reinforcing the representation of an industry where it is always perceptually 'night' underground. Margaret reveals that Robeson is one of her heroes and the reference to him singing 'all through the day' also suggests his

commitment to both the film and the miners' way of life that started in 1929 when he met miners from the Rhondda Valley marching through London, 'stragglers from the great working-class army routed during ….the general strike of 1926' (Sparrow, 2017). Robeson sang to them and made a donation, the start of a friendship that would endure for many decades.

Caradog has produced a similar piece:

The lamp journey

I hate this journey each morning, or is it afternoon?

It's into the darkness and I get the blame if the darkness overwhelms all of us.

It's a jostle, collisions, bump, nudge, direct hits, sometimes a fall to the floor

(my glass protection is mercifully strong).

But usually, just jostling against the roughness of the colliers' garments, the heavy jacket or the moleskin trousers.

Always a dirty grasp of manly hand, gripping or groping, but rarely ever letting go, however.

The smell and feel of the oil, the paraffin, you get used to that.

The contrast in temperature in the course of a few minutes, you get used to that.

Then the sensation of sitting on the most uneven of surfaces or hanging from some makeshift wooden or steel hook.

Noises come from everywhere.

Outside a definable pool of light, all is darkness and noise.

Maybe it beats hanging around all day in the lamp room

in company with hundreds of others, unlit,

but the shifts come and go, and so too the rows of lamps.

It lays emphasis again on the darkness and the inability to know whether it is morning or afternoon underground. Again, the personification required through the exercise allows the lamp to 'hate' the journey into the dark – it speaks for the generations of miners for whom daylight had to be sacrificed to the exigencies of

earning a living. Through the juxtaposition of short almost onomatopoeic words such as 'jostle', 'bump', 'nudge' and 'fall' he conveys the atmosphere of a group of miners, close together, heading into the pit. There is the 'dirty grasp of manly hand', the smell of paraffin and 'noises come from everywhere'. This is a harsh, masculine world and the language reflects the large body of literature that describes coal-mining in extreme terms, emphasising the adjectives 'dark' and 'black'. The end of the piece, with the lamp suggesting that it is better to be at work rather than 'hanging around all day in the lamp room' can be read as a metaphor for the spectre of unemployment that hovered perpetually over the mining communities. For all its dangers, the mine offered what was frequently the only source of employment in the area.

Alice's poem captures similar thoughts although she says the idea was inspired by the plight of the young children in the 19th Century who sat in the dark in the mines opening doors to let the coal drams (trucks) through.

Hanging

Shadows pass across my light,

my flame blazes out through glass encased by bars.

Voices, steel against stone,

far-off a door opens,

I twist in the wind.

time passes,

iron against iron,

now louder noises.

The poem constructs a vivid picture of the noise and bustle in a pit but also the emptiness and darkness faced by the young people who frequently had no lights during their long shifts underground. There is an almost Gothic sense of horror to the piece as 'far off a door opens' and the lamp twists in the wind. Her image of 'iron against iron' can be interpreted as a metaphor for hardness, for the unyielding processes of production in the iron, steel and coal industries, for the determination of owners to maximise profits and for the desire of workers to achieve a living wage.

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6.8 Conclusion

I consider that the various techniques employed to stimulate the creation of the body of poetry and prose proved very effective. The pieces speak with an intensity of meaning that draws on experiences that while not first-hand nevertheless are a reflection of the identities of earlier generations within their families. Most of the participants had parents and/or grandparents who had worked in heavy industry and this sedimented knowledge (Reay, 2009) has been passed down through the generations and accords with Williams' theory of 'structures of feeling', which suggests that there is an alternative to hegemonic ways of dominant thinking. Williams argues that new ways of thinking are constantly struggling to emerge as a challenge to official discourses of policy and regulation (Williams, *cited in* Oxford Reference, 2017).

The work produced has provided many references to the themes of nostalgia and remembering. It is perhaps inevitable that a writing group drawn from an older section of the population would use the opportunity to reflect on times past, but as I show, this knowledge is also employed to provide a grounded response to contemporary issues. With tourism being seen as a major source of employment in the future, how well does this sit with a population rooted in an employment history of heavy industry? Margaret asks, 'Is Merthyr's future in its past?' and Caradog considers that 'the past informs the present and future'. Their work reflects an awareness of change; that the area needs to escape from representations that position it as an 'Othered' victim of economic and social forces. June has written how 'there are many new shops, bringing people and work to this wonderful spot'. Through her work, she has constantly struck an optimistic note: 'Merthyr Tydfil can be great again' and 'Ponty will soon be swinging again', phrases that could appear clichéd but they emanate from a deep-rooted concern and affection for the area. Perhaps her views are something of a gesture of hope but recent commentaries have supported her stance: as of the summer of 2018, Merthyr overall now has an employment rate of 74 per cent, higher than the Welsh average (Dickens, 2018).

Their meaning-making is rooted in a sense of place, these are straightforward pieces but nevertheless their economical constructions convey strong messages. As suggested, the writers draw on nostalgic recollections to illuminate their work. Margaret's *Cynon Villa* is a perfect homage to a vanished way of life, a simple construction but with a sympathetic turn of phrase that shows how universal notions of comfort and security can be present in areas sometimes portrayed as under-

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resourced and subject to forms of exclusion. Other participants allude to memories of domestic comfort: June writes of 'sitting quietly by the coal fire' while Alice remembers 'the kitchen always filled with sunshine' and Caradog remember his boyhood home as an 'anchor'. Again, these recollections speak of a comfortable existence, but perhaps nostalgia here is more rooted in the imagination than in realism. However, Degnen (2006, pg. 6) suggests that nostalgia is a word that could have negative connotations and wonders why English has no verb tense which describes a past within a present. Without this verb construction, which would stress that what used to be is still alive and in existence, there is a danger that recollections could be read as nostalgia.

These rich recollections illustrate the strength of communities linked by a strong connection to the past. Surprisingly, one of the great 20th Century champions of the working class voice, Hoggart (1957), argued that working-class people had little sense of the past and their education would have ill-equipped them to understand the broader spread of history and the notion of a continuing tradition. Hoggart (1957, pgs. 167 and 168) suggested that judgements on the past were frequently based on group-apophthegms or aphorisms. Similarly, he argued that there was little real sense of future, with people frequently living in a constant present in which time had been lost yet was a dominant force through an ever-changing yet meaningless pattern. Hoggart's harsh judgements, arising out of his contention that British culture was under attack by mass media, are gainsaid by the work created here. The 'strong collective culture' (Pahl and Crompton, 2018) of the former mining and steel communities has fostered an awareness of how the past, present and future are intertwined.

I have also demonstrated how belonging and identity are a crucial theme in the work produced and how this is linked to a sense of place. As June wrote, 'I love the town and I love the sense of belonging and I love the sense of identity', and Helen wrote of liking 'the feeling of familiarity' and the need to return to her 'comfort blanket'. Here the town is manifested as an almost physical presence, a construction that extends beyond pragmatic notions of bricks and mortar, an all-encompassing 'body', recalling Bick's theory regarding the experience of skin as a physical concept of 'being held'. The existential concept of 'belonging' is regarded as a critical part of life experience, an embodied connection to place that provides reassurance and stability and also, crucially in this study, a groundswell of creativity.

Writing letters to 'home' and postcards from 'home' explored the complex relationship between belonging, sense of place and identity. There was an

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awareness of change, some positive and some negative, but their embodied sense of place was clearly evident. This sense of place is also imbued with the knowledge that any space contains a myriad of stories. Massey (2013) talks about space being alive, intersected with narratives so that space and time are inextricably linked. It is this intersection of space and time that provides an understanding of much of my participants' work. Change is sometimes regretted: 'You won't believe how Merthyr has changed' wrote Margaret, but this nostalgic remembering has been countered by affirmations of positivity that again echoed Massey's assertion that places have multiple identities.

While place-based theories have occupied a large part of the approach to the creation of literary counter-representations, an important part of the work has also been influenced by a focus on sensual impressions, taking as a starting point Merleau-Ponty's view that sensation is central to human perception (2000 [1962]). This micro approach allowed for some lyrical writing that provided some very personal insights. These affective responses positioned the writers as emotionally literate, reacting to the various stimuli introduced with an aesthetic sensibility that embraces metaphor and idiom. Margaret wrote of being 'cuddled in a woollen blanket' and Caradog reflected on the rhythm of the sounds that made up the industrial backdrop to his home, the 'clank of the railway engine'. These writings evoke thoughts and memories through the use of sense signifiers that are remarkably effective.

This chapter has evaluated and analysed participants' literary work. In order to broaden the understanding of how representations are understood, in the next chapter I review the output of the group of young people recruited to the project whose pictorial and literary work provide a balance and counterfoil to the WEA group output.

Chapter 7

Young people in focus

7.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have focussed on the interactions with and the work produced by the WEA group. However, to provide a contrast with their experiences as a mature group, it was felt that the participation of a group of young people would help provide a heterogeneous contrast and balance. I suggest that their connection to place is as well founded as the older participants – they exhibit a similar affection for their communities and demonstrate the importance of familial and peer connections. They also show an awareness of the aesthetic importance of the area and its history.

Accordingly, this chapter examines the work carried out with young people involved in this study which again included participatory mapping and writing. However, the bulk of the work was a Photovoice project, derived from Freire's (1970) idea of praxis, which reflected the young people's connection to place and their own affirmations of identity. The photographs and the responses they elicited give an understanding of the young people's views of their lived experience. The varied output of the young people added to the overall expression of cultural identity in the study. Many photographs also reflected the individuality of the participants and their social bonds.

Developing out of group discussions on the direction of the study, many photographs were of the participants themselves as they explored their identities through taking part in various musical activities and performing. The photographs are analysed to explore the strength of their friendships, and capture not only their artistic aspirations but also their inter-personal relations. The camera almost intrudes on their personal spaces to convey the interaction between the participants opening up a dialogic interplay between subject and viewer.

As the Photovoice project was conceived as a participatory exercise with the choice of photographic venues and the subsequent selection of pictures for discussion initiated by participants, this dictated how the themes of self, identity, aesthetic awareness of place, spirituality and conviviality emerged. Thematic analysis was, therefore, predicated on this self-selection by participants. Some of the themes allowed for a reflection on Gordon's (2008) theory of social haunting, as discussed

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in Chapter 3, and Bendiner-Viani's (2005) concept of 'being at-home in the place' (discussed in Chapter 4), while the cohesion of the group endorsed Wenger and Snyder (2000) and Barton and Hamilton's (1998) conceptualisations of community groupings (reviewed in Chapter 3). The written work produced by the group shows that young people have a 'voice', endorsing Reay and Lucey's contention that despite stigmatising representations, young people's lives are complex and nuanced (discussed in Chapter 3).

7.2. Community focus

To start the process, as with the WEA group, I introduce the concept of participatory mapping asking the young people to mark on maps what they consider important to them about living in the area. Two sets of maps are provided, one of Merthyr and the other of Aberfan to reflect the home sites of the participants. The participants take a lot of care over their maps, devising colour-coded keys to highlight the places that meant something to them.

Carlos has highlighted his school, recreational facilities such as parks and also the town's college. He emphasises the positives, the places where children play, where he goes to school and where he plays rugby. This is town perceived as a safe space, a place of opportunity. When I ask him why he has put the college down, he replies, 'Because it seems a good place to go to, when people grow up to go to the college and learn more.'

He appears to recognise the value of education but there is always the possibility that he is representing something that he feels I would approve of. While I tried to step back through our sessions and not be seen as overtly directing the proceedings, nevertheless my positionality can sometimes see me represented as a teacher figure, and indeed that has been my career recently, so perhaps Carlos was simply giving me what he might regard as the 'right' answer. Similarly, when I ask him if he'd like to go to the college when he is older, he nods an affirmative.

Emma shares a similar view of the value of education, but focusses more on practicalities. She says she emphasised the college on her map 'because I think it's a good way for people to get better jobs and qualifications, like, when they're older.' On her map she had written 'I really want to go to the college', a commitment to the value of education which would be stressed in subsequent sessions. She also highlights a local retail park 'because, like, there's loads of people go there, so like the community all around'.

The awareness of a community focus to the activity of shopping is also reflected in her highlighting the fast-food restaurant McDonald's on her map, noting that she

goes there three or four times a week. Although describing the food as 'very tasty', she is concerned about health implications, but it is clear that these visits function as a social activity, this is a meeting ground for social interaction.

Emma points out that she had highlighted the town's name on the map because this was where she had been brought up and she was 'proud to be part of Merthyr Tydfil'.

Emma's commitment to place is firm and unwavering, she recognises the value of community and is at ease living in the area. While some of the WEA group's endorsement of the area stems partly from experiences in the past, from a linear connection that acknowledges the strength of community through past problems, Emma's attachment is rooted firmly in the present and by extension, in the future. She adds, 'I just enjoy living in Merthyr Tydfil, the community, like, always comes together through bad times and good and everyone's there for each other.' However, Emma's awareness of 'bad times and good' endorses Reay's (2009) view that this knowledge is transmitted through the sedimented experiences of older generations, and also provides a framework for Bloch's (1986 [1938]) ontology of the 'not yet' in which the future is connected to fragments of the past. As Sheers (2012, pg. 45) suggests, 'How can you talk about a future without a past?' Emma is too young to have experienced post-industrialisation changes but she would be well aware of their repercussions, however, she is cognizant of the strength of community, something that has emerged out of the collective struggles of the past. Again, Gordon's (2008) work on social haunting, suggests that while the ghost can indicate loss it can also be a representation of hope for the future: in Emma's words, 'The community... always comes together'.

Haunted memories of a different kind emerge from a discussion of the maps produced by Sophia, Lucy and Ellie. The sisters both live in Aberfan and Ellie in nearby Merthyr Vale, communities that are inescapably defined by the coal tip tragedy of 1966. While aware of the disaster, noting that a chapel in Aberfan which had pictures of the tragedy had been destroyed in an arson attack, Sophia highlights the Aberfan Cemetery because of a personal trauma - a sister is buried there. However, Lucy specifically references the disaster, 'I've got this cemetery where I don't like going because of the Aberfan Disaster and people buried there.' Ellie has also highlighted the cemetery on her map, although her responses are different. 'I've got the cemetery because that's where my granny and grandpa and all my cousins from the Aberfan Disaster is buried,' she says.

On her map, she has written 'love cemetery', she appears to regard it as less something fearful and more a place to be approached as a site where

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remembrancing the dead provides a sense of continuity, reassurance and a connection with the past.

The three are clearly articulating a response to an event that has had a huge emotional impact on the area. To live in a place whose name is synonymous with such a traumatic episode is to be forced to confront painful memories.

Bright (2014, pg. 3) speaks of 'affective intensities' which he says are never quite visible, an uncanny type of knowing which is more than an embodied collective memory. This emotional intensity clearly permeates the fabric of life in the area, but the girls also emphasise the positives of living in the two villages. 'Well, it's alright, like, here's loads of people around so I don't have to go far away to knock on my friends and like it's really quiet,' says Sophia, while Ellie also stresses the advantages of the sports centre and has highlighted the river 'where I go with my Nan for walks'.

She acknowledges the trauma of the past but also values the strength of community, 'You get to know a lot of people and understand why they still live here through all the bad times and everything.' When I ask if she feels here is a sense of community, she replies, 'You feel a part of something bigger.' As Reay and Lucy (2000, pg. 411) suggest, children's lives are complicated and nuanced and their links to their homes can be a mix of belonging, longing and also abhorrence.

Ellie speaks in negative terms of people near her home staying up all night partying and walking past playing loud music, her positive connection to place is tempered by the temporary disadvantages of disruption by late-night revellers, although Ellie creates her own ad-hoc social circle through meeting up with school-friends at the nearby train station.

Lucy also enjoys going swimming in the sports centre and says it is really good living in the area 'because there's loads of, like, places to go, there's loads of parks, and, like, you can go for walks and that.' Lucy's responses again transcend the overarching construction of the area as a place of tragedy, as a site of grief and despair. While much has been written on the effects of the disaster on those who experienced it first hand and on subsequent generations, nevertheless there is also a school of thought that contends that the village should not be defined by that one tragedy. The responses of Sophia, Ellie and Lucy suggest that while there is an awareness of a problematic past, nevertheless, there is a sense that the community is functioning positively.

7.3 Poems and pictures

As an introduction to picture analysis, I distribute a range of pictures of the Merthyr area for the participants to interrogate, using question sheets that will form the basis of the Photovoice analysis. The pictures they eventually select include contemporary street scenes in Merthyr, the suburb of Georgetown in the 1970s and a

Figure 1 River Taff Bridge, Merthyr. Picture: Lesley Davies.

tinted old picture of the town hall in the High Street. It is an eclectic collection but the pictures are selected to enable a range of decoding tools to be employed, including the age of the pictures, their composition and their intention.

Participants are also asked to create a short poem to reflect their impressions of the photographs. Carlos' picture (Figure 1) shows a new bridge crossing the River Taff in Merthyr and his poem reads:

The white and black bridge arching over the navy blue river.

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The cold winter breeze howling in people's windows and the heavy metal strings attaching one by one.

He conveys the starkness of modernity, the new bridge is part of a revamped town centre, its 'heavy metal strings' supporting a roadway that symbolically leads to the future, for as Carlos records in his notes, the bridge provides access to Merthyr College. In the sleekness and simplicity of the design, the bridge could be seen as a metaphor for the regeneration of the town but there is a reminder of the human and the personal in the haiku-like depiction of the 'cold winter breeze howling in people's windows'.

Ellie's picture (Figure 2) is quite different and seems to catch the town at a very transitory period – the 1970s. Here old and new in the Georgetown area of Merthyr are juxtaposed and Ellie focusses on the demolition of some of the older buildings. The picture also
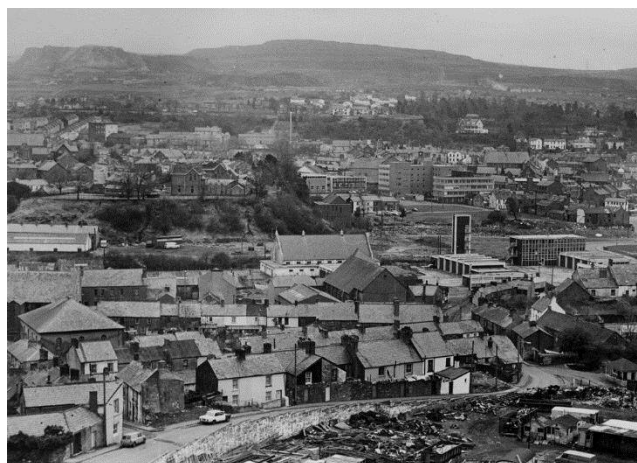
Figure 2 Georgetown, Merthyr. Picture: Alan George's Old Merthyr Tydfil.

stirs recollections for her of what her Nan had told her about working in Hoover's, assembling washing machines, something her Nan had said she enjoyed. The reflections on factory work inspire Ellie to write:

Georgetown lies in the valley of Merthyr town.

Factories are blooming at six o'clock in the morning.
People yearning and moaning, getting into assembly lines to connect the washing machines. All together, ready for dinner to get to speak together.
One local goes with a lot of noise. The women and men sat in their den.

Despite her Nan telling her she had enjoyed factory work, Ellie paints a vivid picture of the industrial machine, and divisions of power (Durkheim, 1984 [1893]), what Foucault (1977, pg. 141) has described as 'the distribution of individuals in space'. This regimentation, with 'people yearning and moaning' is challenged through the socialisation of dinner time with people *'ready for dinner to get to speak together'*. *'The women and men sat in their den'* - a refuge from the demands of work.

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Sophia's picture (Figure 3) is quite different: a tinted postcard of the town hall and High Street in Merthyr Tydfil which is undated but appears to have been taken around the end of the 19th Century and was clearly an exciting occurrence at the time as most of the subjects are staring intently at the
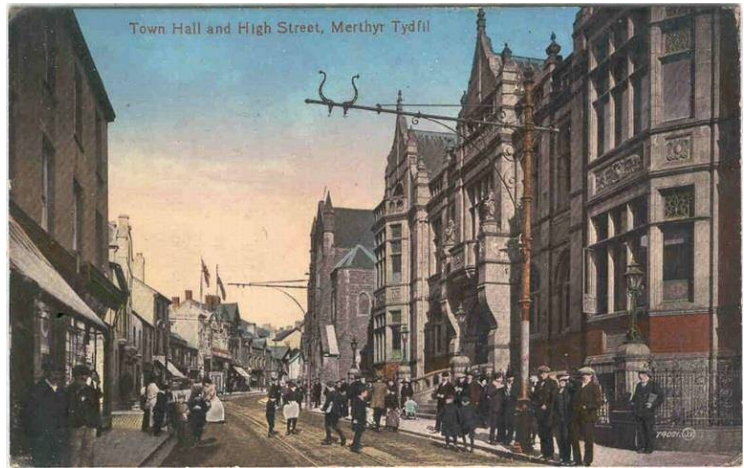
Figure 3 Merthyr High Street in another era. Postcard courtesy of Malcolm Johnson (Alan George's Old Merthyr Tydfil).

camera. Sophia recognises that the subjects are not in modern dress but suggests that the picture may be from the 1980s, a confusion that may have arisen because of the colouration in the picture, something that Ellie queried. 'How is yours done in colour then and mine not?' she asks. Concepts of time can remain elusive as children develop (Stubbe *et al*, 2015, pg. 108) and this inability to grasp the concep*t* of timelines is a familiar one to teachers.

Sophia's poem captures some of the excitement of the occasion:

The roads are full, full of joy.

There are loads of girls, girls and boys.

They gather round like a family, all together, they're so happy.

The building stares, everybody glares, waving past the airy air.

They are having a chat with all your lads.

Chatting about the goods and bads.

Sophia recognises the sense of community evident in the picture. This is a bustling

scene and, in the days before motor transport, the road is a safe place to encounter fellow townsfolk through the collective pattern of repetitive interactions that Seamon (1979, pg. 59) describes as 'place ballets'. There is a chance to exchange views on the *'goods and bads'* but behind them 'the building

Figure 4 Merthyr's High Street. Picture: Lesley Davies.

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stares', its elaborate stonework, crenellated windows and statuary an imposing reminder of late Victorian power and dominance, but here this is power for the people – the home of local democracy in the town.

By contrast, Emma's picture (Figure 4) is a contemporary one of Merthyr's High Street, which nevertheless bears similarities with Sophia's choice. The modern, pedestrianised street allows for a similar level of inter-personal communication, something that Emma brings out in her poem:

A very busy high street, people like to meet and greet.

There are a number of shops where they sell different tops.

A town full of girls and boys, where they all bring lots of joy.

People talking all day long, things they say are never wrong.

The workers are very nice, maybe they like to eat rice.

All their money is spent, it is spent on buying tents.

Emma also paints a picture of a thriving community where people '*like to meet and greet'*. While the poem seems to have been constructed to reflect her desire for a strict rhyming scheme, nevertheless, the imagery is one of a perceived positivity. The town *'full of girls and boys'* all '*bring lots of joy'*. This is a place that Emma sees as thriving, where the traditional town centre still functions as a commercial and social centre, despite the effects of out-of-town shopping. As Byrne (2001, pg. 83) notes, most of the social interactions that people experience are usually local, and this poem and the scene that inspired it appear to reflect this, with *'people talking all day long'*. This is a social exchange rooted in place and of place. Emma also appears to be creating an almost utopian scene as she writes *'things they say are never wrong'*. In her world, there is no place for conflict, *'the workers are very nice'* and society functions effectively in what Giroux and McLaren (1997, pg. 146) describe as 'concrete utopia', the possible future that has a basis in reality.

Lucy's picture (Figure 5) is taken at the same site but there is less of an impression of a crowded thoroughfare although it still appears a site of purpose. Lucy's poem reads:

The town looks very busy, there are lots of shoppers

Figure 5 Merthyr's High Street. Picture: Lesley Davies.

walking around the town centre.

There are lots of shops that people go in and get what they want.

They are all gathered around nice and peacefully looking for what things that they desire,

and they go to the shops to get their food.

She also focusses on the busyness of the town and how it functions effectively as a commercial centre. 'There are lots of shops that people go in and get what they want,' she writes. Lucy stresses the cohesiveness of the community as the people *'are all gathered around nice and peacefully'*. As with Emma's poem, Lucy appears to be creating a world which is free of dissent, a utopian vision of positivity which they may have constructed as a response to the negative representations that have cast the area in a stigmatised light. Theirs is a world of harmony, where relationships are productive and the social fabric is strong. They are creating stories that, while rooted in the present and material, nevertheless subscribe to Gordon's (2008, pg. 127) view of utopia, that is the basic difference between the world as it is presently constructed and the just and equitable world that could be constructed. As Bendiner-Viani (2005, pg. 460) notes, places and stories create senses of dwelling, what Heidegger (1971) terms 'being in the world'.

7.4 'From the olden days'

As an aid to develop visual analysis skills, I have brought in the miners' lamp (Figure 6) used with the WEA group. After letting the group look at it, I take it away and then ask them to write a description from memory. This is an object they are unlikely to have come across, so it is interesting to note their attempts to decode the artifact. As Bendiner-Viani (2005, pg. 467) observes, objects in the environment have little meaning unless they are understood through their social context so the lamp appears initially to be perceived by the group as an exotic entity although eventually the discussion allows the item to be given a greater specificity and for it to be anchored in a localised context. Their initial ignorance of its purpose and its relevance to the area finds an echo in the

Figure 6 Miners' lamp.

work of Bright (2012) who has explored the disconnection between young people and the recent coal mining past in Derbyshire. In Bright's view, a conflicted past can become unspeakable and collective transmissions of affect can play a large part in this process (2012, pg. 318), while Reay (2009, pg. 27) argues that a century of class domination has created a 'historical legacy of working class children being the inferior 'other' that resonates in the present'. In other words, the participants' disconnection with the relevance and importance of the miners' lamp may stem from a pervasive move to ignore the recent past through what Walkerdine (2010) has identified as 'silencing practices'.

Sophia recognises that this is an object from another era, 'It's a lamp from like the really, really olden days,' she says. 'It's like those torch things, we've got torches now, but they never had torches in the olden days so then they used them.' She perceives the functionality of the object while still unclear as to its use, which becomes clear as the participants work to decode the lettering on the side of the lamp, Emma eventually reading out the words 'Ferndale Coal and Mining Co'. 'Oh, it's for the miners,' says Sophia. Lucy also reads out the words 'colliery no' and serial no' – these have been left blank as the lamp was never actually used in the mine, but the workaday minutiae of the detail gives a sense of purpose to the object, it can be understood in terms of its function.

There is some discussion about the fuel for the lamp, Sophia suggests coal and Lucy petrol but eventually we settle for paraffin. As they now have a good idea of

the purpose of the object, I explain that it is a safety lamp invented as a response to the plethora of explosions set off in mines due to the use of naked lights.

Their subsequent writing uses the idea of artifactual literacy which, as Pahl and Rowsell suggest (2012, pg. 114), allows for the development of identity. The young people's descriptive text demonstrates their new-found awareness of the purpose of the lamp. However, all use the adjective 'gold' as an introduction to their description of the object, a word that invests the lamp with a certain status, a strength and importance that has an almost a fairy-tale quality about it although its practical purpose appears to be clearly understood. *'It was for the miners so they could see what they are doing,'* writes Sophia. Ellie and Emma record the writing on the lamp's identity plate, 'Ferndale Coal and Mining Co', words that obviously anchor the object to a particular place and context: the complex of collieries in Ferndale and Tylorstown in the Rhondda Valley.

Emma's piece concludes, *'I think that the lamp was used as a safety lamp down the mines so that the miners could see what they were doing and where they were going.'* Her understanding of the purpose of the lamp allows her to craft a succinct explanation that connects her to a collective experience that nowadays could be classified as a folk memory. Emma has no direct experience of the mining industry but has already expressed a pride in the sense of belonging to the community and it is argued that that sedimented memory of an industrial past is ever present, if not overtly. All the participants struggled to locate the lamp in its social and cultural context at first, but quickly came to an awareness of its function and purpose that allowed for coherent and apposite accounts of its importance. Their situation, living in communities where the lamp had been a potent symbol of a life rooted in heavy industry, allows for that unconscious awareness.

7.5 In focus

Through the project, the group has taken pictures during walkabouts in the town centre, photographing places near their homes that have interested them. Discussions were facilitated through a process of self-selection of the pictures taken.

Initial photographs taken by the group arose out of a trip with their mentor Aled around Merthyr. These include the local attraction Cyfarthfa Castle, a fast-food restaurant, a tourist railway and buildings in the High Street.

Most of these photographs appear to have been chosen for their aesthetic value, they reflect a concern with the picturesque rather than a focus on reportage. Other

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picture-taking excursions followed and the subsequent photographs have been analysed in themes including place, identity and spirituality.

7.5.1 Connection to place

Sophia's picture (Figure 7) is cleverly composed so that the statue is off-centre. 'I thought it looked very cool and nice,' she said, Ellie suggests that it looks like 'it was taken by a professional' and Emma likes the way 'it has been set out'. Sophia says that 'I didn't know what I was doing, so I just took some

Figure 7 Statue, Cyfarthfa Park.

pictures' but there is a subtle message being conveyed here. She has intuitively created a harmonious scene, the statue looks across the picture, framed by the stark winter-time trees, although there is a hint of spring in the daffodils at the base. This is a place for contemplation, a pastoral scene at odds with many perceptions of the town as unloved and unlovely. It is a source of civic and local pride – the Cyfarthfa Castle and grounds, once the home of the Crawshay family of ironmasters were appropriated by the town council in 1908, the building eventually becoming a school, attended by three of the WEA group, and it functions as a cultural and social space for the townsfolk, a riposte to Soja's (1996, pg. 87) suggestion that

hegemonic power produces spatial divisions. This re-appropriation of what was once a power base for an elite is a spatial response to the way power is applied in lived spaces (Soja, 1996, pg. 87).

Sophia has also taken a picture of the castle

Figure 8 Cyfarthfa Castle.

(Figure 8), a striking photograph that again underlines the power expressed through its battlemented walls. This is a fortress, once a bastion of privilege, now a museum and art gallery available to all. Despite the scaffolding in place as renovations were then underway, the message underlying its construction can still clearly be perceived. This is hegemony writ large. Sophia has framed the picture so that the building appears to loom over the onlooker on the ground, its perspective reflects the power imbalance that permeated the industrial communities of the 18th and 19th Centuries; the picture provides a metaphorical representation of the binary of capitalist/worker.

As a contrast, Sophia has also taken a picture of the tourist railway that runs from just north of Merthyr (Figure 9). This is re-appropriation of a different kind, a disused

Figure 9 Brecon Mountain Railway.

railway reimagined as a tourist asset. Again, Sophia is drawn to the aesthetic appeal of the building, 'I like the colour of the house, so I thought art, I take the picture.' Emma suggests the building looks modern and, in fact, it was built in the 1980s but to a design that references the past. While acknowledging the attractiveness of the building, Sophia also reveals that she took the picture partly because nearby is a blocked-up railway tunnel that she would like to visit. 'And it's got, like, old cars and everything in it, and I've always wanted to go there, but, no, my friend's too scared to go in there'. Sophia has constructed a narrative of unease and even fear out of this description. She wants to visit this proscribed site but claims this is impossible because of her friend's 'fear', a statement that adds to the frisson of danger that surrounds this idea. It is creating a dramatic interlude

Figure 10 Hillside entrance.

inspired by the picture which itself is safe and unexciting, although visually

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appealing. Sophia inserts an element of risk into what would otherwise be an uneventful photo expedition. Sophia also submits a picture which illustrates her almost Gothic love of the macabre (Figure 10). 'It

Figure 11 Merthyr architecture.

shows I like abandoned stuff,' she says. Sophia describes it as an 'abandoned crypt' but we never really find out its purpose. It remains a mystery, perhaps intentionally so. As Sophia says, 'I'm so a weirdo and I like weird stuff.' She seems almost embarrassed to show this picture to the group but clearly has an interest in these archaeological curiosities.

Lucy has photographed a street scene near to their arts group meeting place (Figure 11). Lucy says she took the picture 'because it's near to the studio and I think they look cool'. These are imposing buildings at the bottom of the High Street in Merthyr and Lucy's photograph emphasises their architectural merit, the shot angled so that the buildings tower over the passer-by in the street. They provide a link to the past, the buildings reflect the fact that the town was once the largest in Wales, but are now reinvented for the 21st Century. Their continued presence is an assurance that there is a positivity in the town although other renovated buildings in the centre have remained unoccupied. Lucy thinks the buildings are 'cool' and they provide a physical indicator of the functioning infrastructure of the town. Sophia also invests a quasi-religious significance to one of the buildings, noting that a bracket which may have once supported a shop sign is in the shape of a cross. For Sophia and Lucy, the religious iconography, whether justified or not, adds to a perception that the building has value, that it is an important part of the *mise en place* of the urban framework.

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Emma has chosen to photograph The Crown in the centre of Merthyr (Figure 12). She says the picture 'means something to her' and she loves 'being in The Crown, being around all the people'. She adds that she has 'met loads of new friends' and she gets on with 'literally everyone that works and goes there'.

Figure 12 The Crown Inn, Merthyr.

She recalls the names of the people who are part of the social fabric of the pub. Emma clearly values these social connections that allow her to feel part of an extended community, something that anchors her in this particular place and time. Interestingly, she describes the site as 'a very modern building' despite the date being clearly visible in the picture. For her, perhaps, modernity is equated with positivity; this is no old-fashioned pub but a renovated, welcoming place, an eclectic social space.

Many of the photographs taken reflect the reality of urban life, but a surprising number focus on the attractiveness of the countryside. Lucy has selected a picture of a bridge (Figure 13) near her home which illustrates the beauty of the area. In the photo, the bridge spans a river gleaming in the sunshine. It is a sylvan view, a reminder that the pastoral is a significant factor in perceptions of the area. Lucy's picture can also be read as a metaphor: for her,

Figure 13 Bridge near Aberfan.

Figure 14 Hillside near Aberfan.

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the bridge functions as a connection in time and space. Similarly, Sophia has taken a picture of the mountains near her home (Figure 14) 'because it looked very nice'. Again, there is an awareness of the aesthetic appeal of the view, the picture conforming to the Picturesque construction of landscapes. The lush grass in the foreground gives way to striated bands of colour, the brown of the reeds contrasting with the white ribbon of houses and the brown sweep of trees above. Sophia has intuitively created a harmonious juxtaposition of shapes and colours that convey an impression of bucolic charm, an image that is again at odds with popular representations of the area.

Figure 15 Waterfall.

Carlos has selected a picture of a waterfall (Figure 15) that has an element of the mysterious about it. The slightly out-of-focus water gives an impression of latent power, the skeletal remains of a tree stretches across the centre of the photo and there is a sharp contrast between the greenery on the left and the harsher rock faces on the right. There is an almost staged feel to the construction but this is something that has been created entirely naturally over time. Carlos says he chose the picture 'because when I was three years old once every week in Portugal I would go and see a waterfall'. The rural beauty in South Wales provides a visceral link with the very early childhood memories he has of coming from a different country.
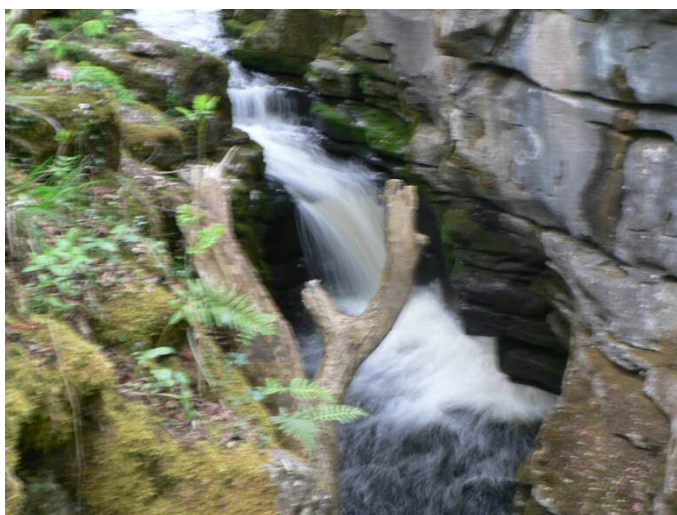
Figure 16 River near Aberfan.

Sophia has photographed a picturesque water feature near her home (Figure 16). When asked why she took it, she replied, 'Because I like waterfalls' – a simple answer but one that clearly conceals a regard for the

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aesthetic. Sophia says the site is about a mile from her house and the area appears to function as a recreational space. I sense that the site does mean something to Sophia – it is peaceful, an almost rural idyll, and a reminder of how attractive the area can be. Through the photograph, Sophia is articulating a response to some of the negative portrayals of the region but is also making a personal statement about her regard for an amenity that enhances her home place.

7.5.2 Food, glorious food

Photographs of restaurants provide another indicator of a sense of community. Lucy has taken a functional picture (Figure 17) that reflects her own personal tastes. It is a blurred photograph of a fast-food restaurant snapped through a car window but it

Figure 17 Fast food restaurant, Merthyr.

was taken 'because I love McDonald's and I just think it's cool and I just wanted to take it because it's my favourite place to go'. As with Emma's comments on fast-food restaurants that emerged from her map work, it is evident that the place functions as more than a eating place – it is a social hub, a chance to interact with peers in a safe space, a precursor, perhaps, to the adult venues of pub and club. As Bendiner-Viani (2005, pg. 469) has pointed out, neighbourhood spaces such as supermarkets and restaurants house 'people's senses of self, comfort, and, importantly being at-home in the place'. The restaurant functions as a community resource, perhaps fulfilling the role of the Italian cafes of yesteryear.

Figure 18 Fish and chip shop, Aberfan.

Ellie has chosen a picture of a fish and chip shop in Aberfan (Figure 18). As with Lucy's photograph of McDonald's, this reiterates the concept of 'being at-home in the place'. Ellie likes the shop 'because they've got good food'. It continues the tradition of providing hot meals for the local community, something that has long been a popular choice, Hoggart (1957, pg. 27) commenting that fish and chips retains its 'high favour'. Ellie, significantly, also loves 'the friendly people

that work there'. Again, the shop functions as a community hub, with the inter-personal skills of the staff an important component in making the place attractive. The photograph conveys an image of dependability, the closely-cropped picture with its rectangular shapes speaks of steadfastness and continuity. It is functional but, nevertheless, possessed of its own aesthetic sensibility, this is a place of refreshment and repair.

The power of food to provide reassurance and comfort is also stressed in Lucy's picture (Figure 19) of a pizza parlour in Merthyr. Lucy says she loves going there, 'It's lush, I so much like pizza,' she says. As with her McDonald's picture, this is another social safe space, a site where, for young people, the organisational

Figure 19 Pizza restaurant, Merthyr.

demands of schooling can be countered through an expression of individuality. There is a chance to interact, in the queue for food, and at the tables overlooking a square in the town. In Lucy's picture, the lights inside the restaurant shine invitingly, a suggestion that there is warmth and comfort inside, but the shot also captures the stark functionality of the building – this is a site that could be replicated anywhere. As with other modern food outlets, it is a metaphor for a particular sort of consumerism. Lucy delights in the taste of pizza – it is hot, nourishing and affordable and fulfils a function noted by Orwell (1967, pg. 86 [1937]) that food such as fish and chips provides a level of comfort for people. Lucy also selects another picture that reflects her eating habits (Figure 20). She says she chose the picture because the shop 'has nice sweets and

Figure 20 The Village Store, Aberfan.

chocolates'. But again it is clear that the shop provides a community resource and a safe space. Lucy enjoys the confectionery but taking a wider view, the shop has a

local resource value. It fulfils the role of what (Van Auken *et al*, 2010, pg. 379) term 'gathering places' or 'sites of formal and informal interaction that can be so critical to the formation of community'. Lucy's photograph captures the range of facilities on offer. A post-box stands dead centre flanked by adverts, this is a resource-rich space, clearly advertising its message that this is a focal point for the community. The message is 'noteworthy', according to Van Auken *et al* (2010, pg. 380) because everyday places and the social meaning inferred from them can be overlooked in traditional interviews where more contested subjects are often preferred.

7.5.3 Spirituality

A sense of spirituality was engendered through this series of pictures. Ellie comments on a picture which for her has a deeply spiritual meaning (Figure 21). 'I took this picture because my grandmother before she died used to love daffodils so for her funeral, my Nan and my mother and all that bought her daffodils and put them on her grave,' she

Figure 21 Daffodils, Merthyr.

says. The aesthetic appeal of the picture is enhanced by its function as a remembrancer; Ellie values the picture as it conveys a message of calm through the formalised arrangements of the flowers, a contemplative space in the middle of the busy town. Tellingly, there are also no human figures in the photograph, this is a portrayal that speaks of absence, of loss, but also of reflection.

Figure 22 Cemetery, Merthyr.

Sophia has taken a picture which also reflects her awareness of mortality (Figure 22), a shot of a cemetery which she says means a lot to her as her grandfather and grandmother are buried there.' I don't go up there much though,' she says. Sophia's choice emphasises her attachment to family and an awareness that there is a continuity of connection through the generations. Although she doesn't go to the site very often, she is aware of its importance as a place for remembering and reverencing. Interestingly, she has photographed the entrance to the cemetery, it is almost as if this is a portal between the living and the dead, between the everyday occurrences outside the site

Figure 23 St. Tydfil's Church, Merthyr.

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and the sombre functionality of the place itself. Emma also reflects on spirituality through a picture she has taken of St Tydfil's Old Parish Church (Figure 23). 'Well, basically I took this picture because the church interests me,' she said. 'I think it's the history behind the church and the religions you can learn about and stuff like that.' Emma senses the importance attached to the building but she also reflects on the picture itself, noting that she likes her photography skills. Indeed, she has constructed the photograph carefully, with the angularity of the building framed by the more natural shapes of the wintry tree branches.

She depicts the strength of the church as building, but also as a symbol of the power of faith, something that is also alluded to by Carlos with his picture of the same building (Figure 24). Carlos is aware of the mystical properties of the place; in his view, the building 'contains lots of secrets'.

He adds, 'This is precious to people, so it's precious to my school and we go there sometimes.' Carlos visualises the church as an important place, a valid part of the community, but also a place for reflection. Sometimes they go there to see shows and 'to see the flowers'. The

Figure 24 Church, Merthyr.

church functions as a social space with performances taking place but again there is an aesthetic awareness: the purely decorative flowers enhance the appreciation of

the site as a place of religious significance. Ellie also attaches a great deal of importance to the pictures of the church. 'I have always wanted to go to church,' she says, adding, 'I have a dream to attend Sunday service'. Ellie expresses a nascent spirituality, a desire to engage with the metaphysicality of existence.

Figure 25 Church, Merthyr.

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Carlos also took another picture of the church (Figure 25). Recognising it as an ancient site 'that tells a story', Carlos speaks of the church as a place where people go 'to join God' – the spiritual connection between the mortal life and a perceived after-life - and he is aware of the symbolic import of the site as somewhere to mourn the dead. Carlos has angled his shot to provide a hint of mystery, accentuated by the daffodils in the foreground. These colourful plants and the other greenery suggests that this is an organic site, a place for the living as well as the dead, a site where there is a harmonious concord between spirituality and temporality. Carlos displays a strong awareness of the religious import of the place, his language is couched in terms of reverence for what the building symbolises.
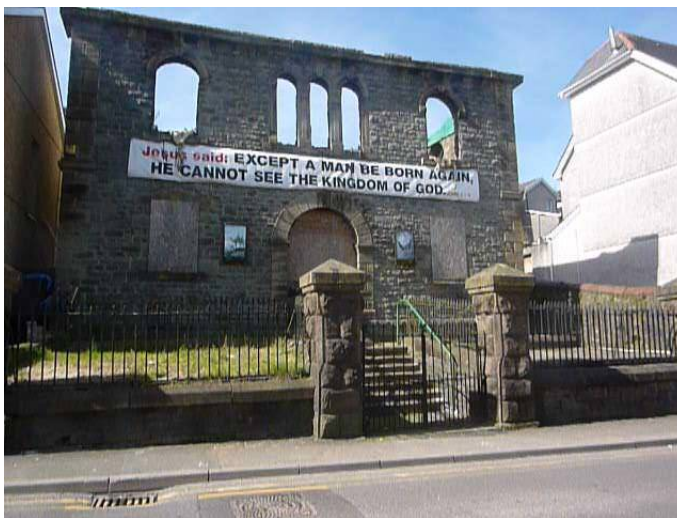
Figure 26 Fire-damaged chapel, Aberfan.

Sophia took a striking photograph of the burned-out chapel in Aberfan (Figure 26), something she has already referred to her in her participatory mapping exercise. Her photograph captures the stark reality of the gutted building. Light streams through the windowless spaces and a banner still carries a religious message. 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.' It is a message that remains as a defiant riposte to the destruction that engulfed the chapel. As Sophia comments, 'What it says on the banner is really interesting.' Sophia says she took the picture because the church 'meant a lot to my community'. Destroyed in the blaze were pictures of the Aberfan Disaster, the building having been used as a temporary mortuary. Sophia clearly empathises with the community, recognising the effect that the destruction of the chapel has had on a village already living with the effects of the disaster. She has framed the picture so that the viewer is almost being invited to attempt to enter the space, ascending the steps, to view the destruction, but the shut gates and boarded-up door also tell a different story, that this is a space that has been violated and its function negated.

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7.5.4 Aspirations and identity

Figure 27 Aber Arts sign.

After discussions about the direction the project is taking, it was decided that the group would take pictures of themselves in the studio as music and performing is one of their big interests. They are enthusiastic about this and the photographs reflect their commitment to the art form and allow an exploration of the complex relationship between appearance, identity and representation.

Figure 28 Lucy playing drums.

Emma's initial picture of the studio sign is also a statement of her social connections (Figure 27). This is a place 'which means loads to me', says Emma. She adds, 'I spend nearly every day in the studio, it's my life.'

Figure 29 Sophia at the keyboard.

Again, Emma draws strength from this reassuring connection. Her life has a focus based on the creative arts projects she is involved with. As Smith (2013) notes, arts subjects boost communication skills, socialisation and self-esteem. However, as Price (2012) warns, without financial input, the experience of arts education could become limited to a very narrow range of privileged students. As already remarked on, Williams (1958) notes that culture is ordinary, it is not the preserve of a privileged few. The networks of support and

Figure 30 Ellie playing guitar.

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encouragement that Emma draws on again reflects Reay and Lucey's (2000) contention that such groupings create feelings of safety and reassurance that allow young people to construct a more benign view of their social and geographical environment.

The picture of Lucy (Figure 28) shows her behind a drum kit and she reveals that she has ambitions to be a professional drummer. Her sister Sophia is also pictured playing a keyboard (Figure 29). She wanted the picture taken as an illustration of how much she likes music, and this affection was also stressed by Ellie, whose picture (Figure 30) shows her
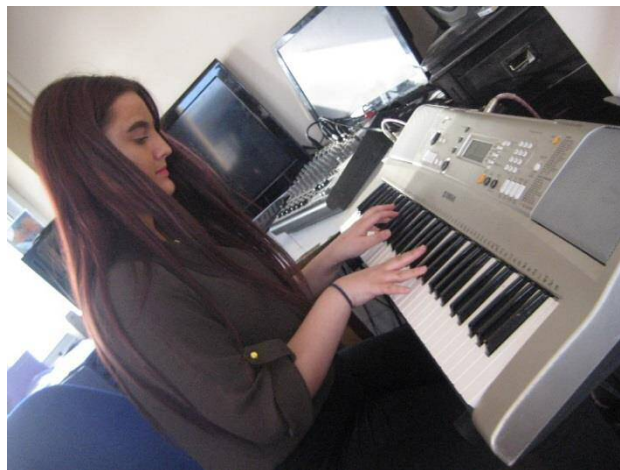
Figure 31 Emma at the keyboard.

playing the guitar. 'I love the guitar' she says, noting that the picture shows that she is part of a music community. Similarly, Emma also stresses her love of playing the piano (Figure 31) and the importance of the studio to her. She clearly values the place as a central part of her life but also recognises its wider importance to the community as a rich resource, providing music lessons for people in the area. Emma also notes the value of music as a distraction. 'Playing the keyboard is something I do in my spare time, it can take my mind off things,' she says. The pictures reflect an absorption in the moment

Figure 32 Striking a pose.

and are a statement of commitment. The studio has given them a creative outlet for their musical talents and allowed them to be part of a 'community of practice' (Wenger and Snyder, 2000, pg. 1), or what Barton and Hamilton (1998, pg. 251) call a 'community of interest'. However, there is also a closeness between them, a bond which they briefly allude to in their comments. As well as allowing them to develop musically, the studio also allows them a space for socialisation. It is a haven away from the stresses and strains of everyday life - the demands made of them in school

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and elsewhere. It is a site where they can be themselves in a safe space. And this is captured in a picture I took of them in the studio (Figure 32) just before they went to The Crown to perform a song they had recorded as part of a fund-raising campaign for a local girl suffering from cancer. They strike a pose, one favoured by teen groups everywhere. They enact a ritualised stance that speaks of emergent aspirations, but there is also a shared strength through friendship: together they can achieve anything. As Ellie says, 'I like the way everyone's posing.' She recognises the cohesiveness of the group elaborated through their stylised posture.
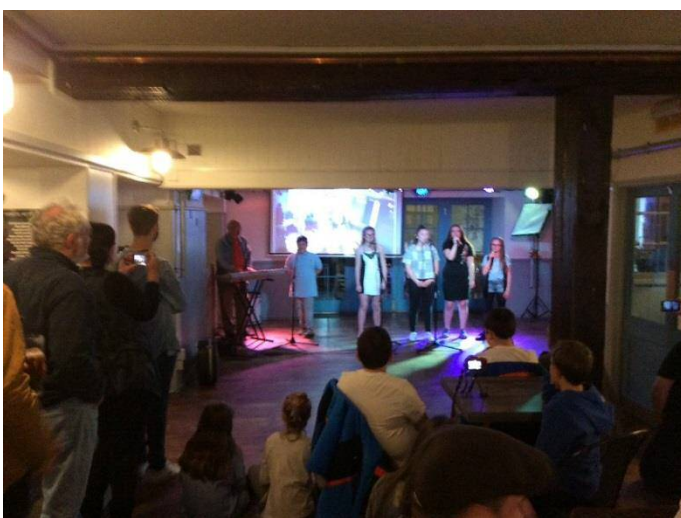
Figure 33 Performing in The Crown.

All five of the young people in the Photovoice project have performed together and later that evening I took a photograph (Figure 33) of them performing in the pub. Emma particularly approves of this picture. 'I like this because it shows what we do,' she says. The photograph shows the community of practice

meeting the wider community, coming together for a shared purpose, raising money for a charitable cause. It is an expression of solidarity, an example of what can be achieved through concerted action. In fact, on one of our walks around the town, Sophia had taken a picture of the one of the multi-coloured

Figure 34 A charity fund-raiser.

Figure 35 The Big Heart, Merthyr.

bows that had been sold across South Wales to raise money for the campaign (Figure 34). Sophia is aware of the depth of feeling across the area as the community responded to the appeal. 'It means loads to us,' she says. She adds that the campaign demonstrates how the community cares for others. She says that the

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picture shows 'that we have a friendly community'. Her comments acknowledge the strength of community and she understands that she is part of that social network. Others in the group have also made references to community and there appears to be a shared knowledge, an understanding that they are not isolated and acting individually but can draw on shared resources. They do not particularly elaborate on what they understand as 'community' but are nevertheless cognizant of its existence. Howarth (2001, pg. 16) suggests that people need to be connected to a community, and as Ellie says, 'I'm a part of the Merthyr community.'

This connection to community is illustrated through this picture of Emma (Figure 35) sitting on the new Big Heart sculpture in Merthyr. Emma says that the picture represents the town and how 'Merthyr comes together'. She adds that the photograph shows that 'Merthyr has a big heart and is a vibrant community where people support each other'. Emma makes the connection between the reality of the heart and the fact that it is a visual metaphor for the community working together. She sits contemplatively on the statue, dwarfed by the curving metal, unconsciously creating another visual metaphor – the power of the iron and steel industries to control and dominate the population. However, this is a sculpture that while referencing the past, looks to the future; the town promotes itself as big-hearted, something that emphasises the value of community, an understanding that problems are shared and that solutions come from bottom-up thinking.

Figure 36 Sophia running.

Lucy's photograph of her sister (Figure 36) captures a moment of action. 'I took a picture of this 'cos I thought it was really cool because she was about to jump and I'm really happy I got that shot,' Lucy says. It is an arresting shot, the graffitied alleyway and the shuttered shop are a sharp contrast to the energetic figure poised on the edge of action. It is a visual metaphor for the power of youth to make headway in the world. Sophia appears full of a controlled energy, striding confidently out of the picture. The photograph unsettles through its contrasts, calling to mind Barthe's (1981) notion of the 'punctum', the off-centre view that according to Mannay (2016a, pg. 132) creates a bruising or piercing of the viewing subject. Lucy is aware that the photograph is well-constructed. 'I thought it was a really good shot,' she says. This is an affectionate picture: Lucy demonstrates her close connection to her older sister, reflecting a knowledge that Sophia's strength and agility provides a comforting reassurance, a protection embodied through sibling familiarity, but there is also an affirmation of independence that demonstrates the 'aliveness' of her body in a way that ruptures (hetero) normative femininity (Renold and Ivinson, 2014, pg. 363).

On one of our walkabouts around town I also took some pictures including this one of four of the group pictured in front of a mural depicting workers from the past (Figure 37). The picture 'breaks the frame' (Harper, 2002) through allowing a re-examination of what friendship and togetherness can mean.

Figure 37 In front of a mural, Merthyr.

The stylised figures in the mural contrast with the relaxed pose of the young people

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and the juxtaposition forces a reflection on the nature of inter-personal connections. Sophia comments that the picture shows that they are part of a friendship group but again it can be construed as a metaphor: the four stare out confidently at the camera – they are the future and behind them the industrial past overlooks them, but the strengths of the past are the foundation for today. The community today draws inspiration from the past, the group is part of a wider configuration, what Hoggart (1957) refers to as a 'landscape with figures'. Sophia particularly likes this picture as it shows her friends 'who are like family to me' and also her sister. She is also pleased that the picture shows her in school uniform, demonstrating her commitment to the education process. 'So it shows I go to school and I don't bunk' she says. For Sophia, the wearing of her uniform is an assertion of respectability and conformity. She takes pleasure in the status that this confers and appears to be keen to be judged as someone who is not rebellious or disobedient. In the picture, she presents an image of neatness and precision, her stance is confident and her wry smile suggests that she is keenly aware of her positionality – she is dressed for the school and conformity while the others wear more casual garb.

Figure 38 Lucy, Sophia and Emma.

Lucy selects a picture that for her sums up the close personal ties she clearly values (Figure 38). She says she picked it 'so everyone who looks at this photo will see how much fun we were having'. She adds, 'we were having like a lark … it was really funny.' The picture was taken on a day out for the group. While the picture doesn't seem to convey an overt sense of fun, nevertheless there is a suggestion of a wry humour underneath. The girls stare quizzically at the camera almost as if they do not want to share this closeness. They are enigmatic and there is a suggestion that the camera is intruding on their shared experience. They are remote from the other figures in the picture, who have their backs turned to them, but this emphasises their own cohesiveness. They present a united front to the world, drawing strength from their shared understanding.

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Figure 39 Ellie and Sophia.

Ellie has also selected a picture showing her and Sophia (Figure 39). She says she chose it because it shows her friendship with Sophia and also 'this was one of the only photos I looked good in'. Ellie notes that they are both 'posing' in the picture and said she wanted it taken 'because she was bored'. Ellie's perception that this is a good photo of her may come from an awareness of the confident pose she strikes that demonstrates her closeness to her friend. Ellie smiles enigmatically, their demeanour displaying a sense of trust and sharing.

Lucy has included a picture of herself (Figure 40) which she says she chose 'because I like myself'. She strikes a pose, looking straight at the camera. She presents herself as full of confidence, she is nominally part of a supportive group, part of a cohesive community that encourages her to find modes of self-expression that allow her to develop. However,
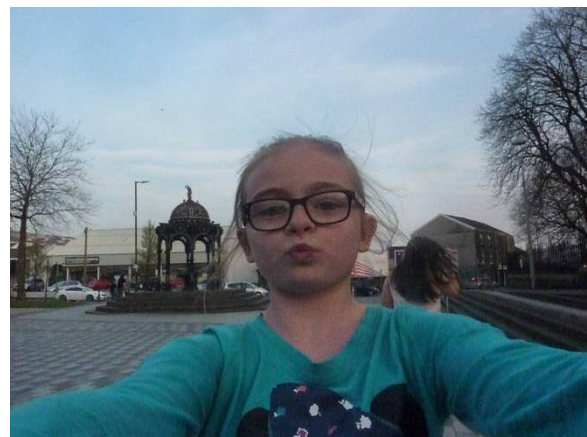
Figure 40 Lucy.

there is also a fragility here: Lucy is making a plea for individuality, that she is a person in her own right and demands to be recognised as such. Her assertive stance demands that she be noticed, her personality fills the frame.

Ellie selects a picture taken by Lucy (Figure 41) which shows her and Emma 'pulling weird faces'. Ellie says she chose the picture because Emma is her cousin 'and she means a lot to me'. She says the picture shows 'my friends like me and your family can be

Figure 41 Ellie and Emma.

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close, too'. This is a light-hearted moment, the two friends display a confidence that they can play the fool; they are at ease with each other, comfortable in their relationship. They are also at ease at striking a pose – familiarity with the use of the camera in mobile phones has created a whole sub-genre of contrived gestures and stances that will be familiar to many young people. Lucy's picture captures an embodied corporeality. Here the body is not just a source of experience that will subsequently be processed by the mind, but is itself a source of knowledge and, accordingly, agency (Pink, 2015, pg. 26). The picture captures a moment of fun but also a serious restating of the importance of relationships.

7.6 Creativity and literacy

7.6.1 The 'Haunted House' stories
Creativity and imagination is
explored through a story-telling
exercise based on a set of photos
produced on one of the group's
walkabouts of an impressive
ruined building which Sophia
dubbed 'the haunted house'
(Figure 42). Initial discussions
about the house see Sophia get
more and more excited: 'I am
ambitious to go in this house 'cos I

Figure 42 The 'Haunted House'.

like haunted stuff, that's got to be my life's goal.' Ellie is also fascinated by the
house: 'It's basically a house that is haunted. I like this picture because I want to
know more about it.' As they were so fascinated by this house, the group wrote a
story inspired by the photographs. This proved to a most productive exercise –
given the chance to allow their imagination to have free rein, they produced some
extended pieces of writing that were remarkable for their imagery, the sophistication
of the plotlines and the interweaving of dialogue and description.

Sophia reads out her story to the group:

*There it was, just looking at me with its big black eyes. I thought I was dreaming at
first but then I realised I was in my neighbour's house. I didn't understand what was
going on but that thing was still looking at me. I didn't understand what he tried to
say so I just walked away and explored the house. I couldn't see really 'cos it was
dark but, however, I could still hear everything, every step and every movement.
Then, all of a sudden something touched me on the shoulder. I was going crazy.
Then my phone rang and I couldn't find it. I started to cry but, then I saw Tegan. I
ran to her but she had no reaction. She just stared at me as if she had seen a ghost
and then she walked away as if I was never there so I just left her. I had a feeling
that someone was watching me. I was so hungry, I wanted something to eat but
there was no food so I just stopped thinking about it. I just sat down as my feet were
hurting and I wondered how I got here.*

Sophia creates an atmosphere of unease and uncertainty – her story has the
elements of a nightmare – nothing is made clear and nothing is resolved. A friend

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doesn't recognise her, she is hungry but there is no food, her feet begin to hurt. There are no explanations, just a *'thing'* looking at her *'with its big black eyes'*. She emphasises the sensory reactions to being in this confusing space: it is too dark to see properly but she can '*hear everything, every step and every movement',* building up tension to the point where 'something touched me on the shoulder'. The stark and gloomy lines of the building in the photograph have clearly inspired her to create an emotional response. The building could almost be part of a movie set and the image may well resonate with the group as they draw on prior knowledge of films to craft their responses. Sophia's imaginative response is a remarkable piece of work. In previous discussions, Sophia had stressed how she was not in the top set in school. 'I'm like from one from the thickest set,' she had said, but this piece demonstrates a nuanced awareness of story-telling in both its oral and literary forms that is well-constructed and rich in detail. Sophia's work draws on the tradition of the classic ghost writers but her tale could be seen as an allegory for other embodied experiences. As Pahl (2014, pg. 306) suggests, lived experience can become shaped by genres such as the fairy tale and the horror story and Sophia's story can be seen as part of a wider search for meaning and clarity in her life.

Sophia's story goes down well with the group and there is a burst of spontaneous clapping. Next, Lucy reads out her story:

An ordinary day. I was sleeping in my bed. It was a rainy, miserable day like it always is, 'cos it's Wales. There was a strange loud bang. At first I thought it was just my imagination because I had watched a horror movie before I went to bed, so I just went back to sleep. But then there were all creepy things happening. People were screaming, I was so scared I sprinted to my mum's bedroom and told her what had happened. She told me, 'Don't worry and go back to sleep'. I could not go back to sleep but then I saw an old man walking in my bedroom. I screamed so loud, my mum said, 'Get back to bed' but then my wardrobe flew from one side of the room to another. My mum soon believed me, but then we ran out of the house and rang the police. The police told us to stay right where we were, so that's what we did. Then the police arrived and checked the house, the chair was flying in the air. They soon ran out of the house. The next day we moved out of the house but I left my journal there that I wrote everything that had happened to me in there. Five years later, there was a new family who had moved in. They were my aunties and uncles and cousins. Loads of weird things happened to them, to like loads of noises and they found a dead man in the cupboard. And also they said to me on the phone that

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there were lots of weird noises happening and there was a black thing in the corner just looking at them. They were so scared.

Lucy's piece has a different feel, it is more active, the scenes are described pragmatically and there is less of an air of mystery, although she does introduce an element of humour*: 'It was a rainy, miserable day like it always is 'cos it's Wales'*, a representation that can be perceived as a negative stereotype of the country, a popular caricature of the place. Clearly, Lucy can visualise the scene in her head. As with Sophia's story there is a clear sense of narrative and she also introduces a chronological development to the plot as the story shifts forward five years to allow a new set of people to experience the terrors of the house. Lucy's story is again an extremely finished piece, well composed with a clarity of development. The story is presented as a ritualised and exaggerated narrative that references horror story tropes and again displays a maturity in its construction, but she also draws on the human, emphasising the inter-personal through her desire to seek reassurance from her mother, who tells her not to worry.

Carlos has given his story a title: '*Haunters and Humans*':

In an enormous terrifying house, two friends went to check the house. They were called Emma and Sophia. They stepped in the front garden and a window from an old car dropped. The girls shouted and then from nowhere this couple appeared behind them. They asked, 'Are you OK?' 'Yes,' they answered. As the girls went on to the doorstep it had a creaking noise. When they got to the door, the creaking noise was still going. They opened the door and voices from everywhere were saying, 'Come in, if you dare'.

Carlos again builds a tension in his story, employing the familiar device of the 'creaking' doorstep to create an atmosphere. As with Sophia's story, there is a filmic quality to his narrative as developments happen quickly and without warning. A couple appear *'from nowhere'* and when the door is opened there are voices *'from everywhere'* daring them to go inside. It is a clever point at which to end the story, the reader is left wondering what is inside. Carlos leaves it to our imaginations to answer the question.

The last story is a performative narrative in which Emma and Ellie combine forces to present the story with sound effects adding to the drama. Emma reads out her story with Ellie interjecting at points that were marked on their writing sheet except where they both chorus, 'enter if you dare'. This again employs filmic devices and is clearly

devised as a performance piece but it also stands alone as a story. The piece is entitled *'Hidden in the Dark'*:

It was a very dark and misty afternoon in a quiet countryside. However, there was something unusual about a mystery manor house. We were driving through the countryside until we approached the huge house. There was a car parked by a big tree. The car was full of black bags and boxes which suggested that someone was moving out. We sat in the car for a few moments until Ellie said, 'Come on girls, we need to take a look inside.' We all got out of the car and discovered that there was a padlock on the gate, so to get in we climbed over a brick wall. All of a sudden there was an unusual bang that came from inside. Lucy got really scared and went back to the car but me and the two girls carried on walking. We approached an open doorway and automatically went in. In front of us was a flight of stairs. Sophia thought she'd be brave and climbed them first and Ellie and I followed. We came to the top of the stairs and in front of us was a door full of blood. On the door, it said, enter if you dare. The sign sort of had us thinking; I didn't really want to go in, however, Sophia peer-pressured me. I didn't like the idea of entering, but I couldn't show that I was afraid. As Sophia opened the door, there was a loud scream. There was something moving in the corner but we couldn't quite picture what it was. Suddenly there was a knock at the door, all three of us froze and were too afraid to speak.

The story employs a classic horror device of opening with a seemingly innocuous scene, a dark and misty afternoon in 'quiet countryside', and then introducing out-of-character incidents that build tension: there is an 'unusual bang' and a 'door full of blood'. As in Carlos' story, there is a warning, but whereas with his piece there are voices taunting people to dare to come in, in Emma's story, the door sign says 'enter if you dare'. This is a challenge to the characters, but in both pieces it also could be visualised as a metaphor for the risk-taking that can be a part of young people's lives and the peer pressure that can be applied to encourage young people to take part in potentially hazardous escapades. The embodied experience of peer pressure finds expression in this story and can also be visualised as a way of apprehending the world (Pahl, 2014, pg. 306) and as part of William's 'structure of feeling' (1977). In Emma's piece, Sophia *'peer pressures'* her to go through the door. *'I didn't like the idea of entering, but I couldn't show that I was afraid,'* she writes. Emma is persuaded to embark on a course of action which she doesn't approve of, a story-line which would resonate with the others in the group. The story also ends unresolved – we don't know what is in the room or who or what is at the

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door. It is the classic cliff-hanger device to leave the reader and viewer wanting more. As Lucy says at the end of the reading of the story, 'I really, really want to find out what happens now.'

7.6.2 Beyond school

A high level of creativity and commitment was shown by the group in crafting their stories. Whereas they had previously confined themselves to a few words in their picture analyses, here, inspired by the photograph, they blossomed and expressed themselves confidently both orally and in their literary work. They showed an awareness of meaning-making devices rooted in a strong cultural tradition, filmic, oral and written. This work acknowledged its sources but there was also a clear thrust of individuality and a confidence to see the story progress to its conclusion. Their writing also draws on contemporary social experiences: the disturbances that could involve the police, and the young peoples' concerns over peer pressure and its sometimes damaging consequences.

However, there is also an aesthetic element to their responses to the Gothic fantasy of the photograph. They have identified elements of mystery, terror and suspense and are able to express these feelings through their prose. Their writing is also visceral, enmeshed in place and in bodily interactions with imagined forces. This is narrative that is sometimes sparse but always clear, people react to events, real or imagined. This is a version of aesthetics that emphasises the value of sensuous and bodily engagement (Eagleton, 1990).

As the work was presented through the medium of a collaborative project in which the participants had all invested time and energy rather than through the prescriptive curriculum of the school regime, there was no fear that they would be compelled to produce a certain level of work or a certain quantity. Accordingly, imaginations could reign unchecked bolstered by the knowledge that this work would be not be subject to assessment or critique other than through peer opinion. While the construction of the stories is clearly rooted in school practices that demand a defined structure, nevertheless, the sophisticated use of language patterns and the employment of 'cliff-hanger' devices betray a knowledge and love of the art form that transcends what Barton (1994, pg. 178) describes as 'schooled literacy'. Barton (1994, pg. 178) warns that other literacies can be in danger of being marginalised, while Fecho (2011, pg. 2) suggests that much writing created in schools is seen as belonging to teachers rather than making meaning for the individual.

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There is also a performative element in this project. All the stories were constructed in the knowledge that they would be read aloud and there are cadences of speech in the stories that reflect this. Additionally, in Emma's work, aural interjections were scripted into the piece, making it a theatrical performance. All the participants displayed confidence in reading their stories, boosted by an awareness that they are part of a supportive friendship group. Additionally, the photo project has given the young people a heightened awareness of the visual which has allowed them to construct an imaginative literary response based on a multi-modal, multi-sensory representation.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has reflected on the work undertaken with young people, work whose themes echo the findings from the other group studied. I would suggest that these similarities show that knowledge can be transmitted through the sedimented experiences of older generations. This sedimentation was in evidence as participants interrogated archive pictures of the area and catalogued their responses to an initially unrecognised artifact – a miners' lamp. Their reactions illustrate a hidden knowledge, what Bright (2016, pg. 144) has termed 'knowing without knowing'. In other words, the young people, while not having a clear knowledge of this particular artifact were, nevertheless able to articulate a 'felt' response.

Work on participatory mapping demonstrated an awareness of the value of community coming together through both positive and negative periods, a recognition that the area has had a troubled past but that the strength of social capital networks provides an adequate riposte to such vicissitudes.

As a complementary approach to the literary activities of the WEA group, the young people's Photovoice project provided visual statements that enhanced the written work. Photographs of Georgian and Victorian buildings in Merthyr asserted that the town has a presence that conveys a sense of stability although they also show how power can be applied in lived spaces (Soja, 1996, pg. 87). Photographs of the scenic attractions of the area function as a visual marker of how the region can be categorised as sylvan and rural – a reminder that the pastoral is a significant factor in perceptions of the area notwithstanding many literary representations depicting the area as an industrial 'wasteland'. These scenic images also demonstrated the aesthetic awareness of the participants and a regard for areas of natural beauty as places of reflection and calm.

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I have also suggested that participants' photographs of restaurants and shops demonstrate their own sense of community, that ad hoc groups of young people find a sense of togetherness and social interchange through meeting up in such places as fast-food outlets. This performance of self functions as a means of cohesion. These places house people's sense of self, comfort and 'being at-home in the place' (Bendiner-Viani, 2005, pg. 469). This corporeal functionality was complemented by expressions of spirituality that showed an awareness of the importance of memory and links with the past but also an aesthetic sensibility, a mature reflection on the power of imagery to convey important messages.

I also show that with this particular group, performances of self and cultural capital are intertwined through their shared interest in music-making and drama. This grouping enhances their sense of self-worth but also provides a shared experience of enrichment. The photographs also show such assemblages can be utilised in the service of the community, as the group performed in a fund-raising concert for a local youngster. While the bulk of the young people's work was visual there was also an element of writing, particularly in the construction of stories inspired by a photograph of a derelict house in the area. Here, the response to a visual artifact through a form of photo-elicitation produced a sophisticated response that demonstrated a high level of creativity and aesthetics. Perhaps these stories suggest a need to invent something more exciting than mundane reality, but they are also an accomplished product, a meaning-making that speaks to the group's creativity and 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1977). Their stories, inspired by the horror genre, also illustrate what Bird (2002, pg. 525) has suggested is an attempt to explain ambiguity, something that is out of place.

What emerges clearly from this work is that the young people have a 'voice'. As Reay and Lucey (2000, pg. 411) note, it is often assumed that children are unable to reflect adequately on their situation, so it is the parents' views that are listened to. However, in this research, the young people have a clear agency. In addition, territorial stigmatisation can result in views of place that construct a story of negativity and apathy, but as Reay and Lucey (2000, pg. 411) suggest, while some areas are perceived to be part of a process of social exclusion and subject to stigmatising discourses in the media, nevertheless, the reality of young people's lives is more nuanced and complex than such depictions suggest.

In the next chapter, utilising a heterogeneous approach, I examine the interaction between the two groups of research participants.

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Chapter 8

An inter-generational exchange

8.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I consider the way in which the project brought the two groups together for an inter-generational exchange which allowed both sets of participants to discover common ground in a shared response to the value of community and the importance of place. As noted (Chapter 4), the young people had created a pre-scripted set of questions to facilitate discussion and this allowed for an examination of motivations for taking part in the research, an analysis of what community means, the recreational amenities of the town, what the future plans are of the young people and a reflection on the diverse nature of the community.

For the older group it was a chance to discover what young people felt about their town, and for the younger group there was the opportunity to understand some of the background and motivations of the WEA group. There was also a scaffolding of ideas as the older generation responded to the aspirational intent of the young people. In many ways this analysis reflects the themes already covered in the earlier chapters on place, community and identity although the inter-generational nature of the encounter endorses Moll *et al*'s work on 'funds of knowledge' (1992) – although not previously discussed, this work seems particularly relevant to the analysis. The analysis has also allowed a reappraisal of Reay's views on inter-generational transmissions of powerlessness and worthlessness (2009), as discussed in Chapter 3. Indeed, the aspirations of the young people can be anchored in the context of Guattari's views (discussed later in this chapter) on the importance of imagining a future that will enable them to surmount Hanley's 'wall in the head' (2007), as explored in Chapter 3.

8.2 Connections

Ellie starts the discussion off by asking the participants why they wanted to take part in the research group. Alice says it is because she is nosey and wants to know what is going on. Margaret reiterates her love for the town and says that the project has been an opportunity to do something a bit different, getting the chance to write and talk about subjects that she might not have done otherwise, while June says it was out of a curiosity to see what creative writing involved. Caradog, meanwhile, recalls how he has been the catalyst for the setting up of both groups.

The discussion broadens when the group is asked what kind of jobs they have had. The participants recall their varied careers, their narrative accounts recalling

Fecho's (2011) 'texts of their lives'. Alice recalls working as a librarian for 25 years, leaving when she got bored, and then getting involved in adult learning, while Margaret describes her years as a journalist and then as a university proof reader and editor. She establishes a connection with the group when she tells them that she was the first girl from Glyn Nant to go to university, and June also makes a connection with the young people when she recalls her Saturday jobs as a 15-year-old in Woolworth's and W H Smith's. 'Those two jobs really set me up for the rest of my life because I learnt about people and how to work with people,' she says. June recalls her 52 years working in the health profession and tells the young people about her award of the MBE. Emma says 'wow' several times as June says she was given the award for her work in the community, including setting up an innovative coronary support group. She tells them how she had to keep the news a secret for six months before receiving the award. 'I had a wonderful day in London when I had the MBE,' she says. June's sense of pride in her achievement impresses the young people who regard her with respect but they also sense the underlying compassion which had made her so successful in her profession. Later, Lucy confided that June 'was awesome'.

Caradog also recalls his years in adult education and tells the young people jokingly that he never wanted to work with young people but this was what he had ended up doing. His light-hearted comments get all the young people smiling, his rapport with them acts as a bridge between the various disparate elements in the two groups and strengthens the performance of inter-generationality. As Hopkins and Pain (2007, pgs. 293 and 294) suggest, regarding inter-generationality as an aspect of social identity implies that people's sense of themselves and others is based partly on generational sameness or difference. The identities of young people and other groups are created through inter-generational interactions and are constantly fluid. The young people reference older family members as a source of information and display a confident awareness of their position in family structures. The information about the WEA group's careers also allows the young people to draw on these 'funds of knowledge' which can be used to deal with changing social and economic circumstances (Moll *et al*, 1992, pg. 133). However, the WEA group also benefited from the funds of knowledge of the young people, a reciprocal practice based on mutual trust (Moll *et al*, 1992, pg. 134). The WEA group present as role models to the young people and they seem to take their cue from their attitudes to work and community in the subsequent discussion on aspirations.

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8.2.1 What makes a good community?

The discussion over whether the group thinks Merthyr is a good community allows for the expression of a range of views that mirror some of the earlier WEA deliberations and emphasises again that constructions of 'community' are varied and diverse. Walkerdine (2010, pg. 94) suggests that the notion of a fixed entity of community has been supplanted by an emphasis on the importance of social networks, and this is stressed by Alice who says that the town is made up of many communities. For her, the community is her neighbours, the educational classes she attends and the school she volunteers in. 'On the whole I think it's a pretty good place,' she says. 'Obviously, it's a deprived area and I'm worried about its future.' Margaret recalls that she had always wanted to return to her home town and it was her son moving back that acted as a spur, although she notes, as she has commented previously (Chapter 5), that where she lives now has a restricted community feel due to the fact that people travel out in their cars. Relph's (1976) concept of 'insideness' is less evident here – the mobility of the population contributes to a dislocation of sense of place.

June stresses that the town is a really good place to live. 'I think the people are wonderful and I'm very confident about the future and I say that because I know a lot of young people. I've got a grand-daughter of 16 and I know a lot of her friends and they come back and fore to my house.' June has an extensive network of connections to young people and this situated knowledge establishes her as a sympathetic point of contact and as a 'boundary spanner' (Wenger and Snyder, 2000) – a link between different worlds.

Caradog also emphasises the diverse nature of community, 'You should know there are something like 65 different definitions of the word 'community', depending on who you speak to,' he says. He says that many people would say that community has broken down with streets of people who do not know each other, but he suggests that communities now operate in different ways. 'So, Merthyr is a series of good communities and now and again they all come together, commemorating events,' he says. As Moje (2000, pg. 82) suggests, community groupings often overlap and converge and Caradog's conceptualisation of community as a series of diverse and sometimes discrete groupings would appear to endorse this view. As Moje (2000, pg. 82) points out, many different social groupings, some based on culture and others on neighbourhood, can be associated with the notion of community.

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8.2.2 Community closeness

A related question is do you like the area you live in? Ellie is unfailingly positive, 'I like the area that we live in because you find out something new every day about someone else, uh, your family's actually pretty close and you learn something different about the whole community, it's amazing.' Ellie displays an awareness of the close-knit ties in a small community and the richness of inter-personal exchanges. Her views echo that of Hoggart (1957, pg. 65) who, writing 60 years ago, saw similar small communities as friendly, co-operative and neighbourly. She views her relationship with place and people as an exciting journey of discovery. Her language is couched in terms of superlatives and she displays a confidence and assurance that she has a positive relationship with her community. Lucy also conveys a positivity about her home, 'Yeah, I really like the local area I live in because it's like lots of things to do, like you can go to the park and stuff like that and it's quite near shops and that, so, yeah, I do like living there.' Again, Lucy is keen to stress the advantages of life in her area – the amenities of park and shops combine to create a notion of community that provides a comfortable reassurance that she has a rooted connection to place.

Emma, on the other hand, is less positive, saying that she feels there is not enough to do in her home area. 'People talk badly about Coedlewis but it is a good community and everyone gets on with everyone. It's just that there's not much to do and I would rather live somewhere else in Merthyr,' she says. Emma is torn between loyalty to her home area and a desire to get away, to experience a more varied life. She is ready to exchange the certainties of life at home for a more adventurous experience – a step into the unknown. This need has been captured perfectly by Laurie Lee (1969) who, recalling his own move from small village to the wider world, speaks of the forces that have motivated generations of young people to move away from home.

Alice encourages Emma to try somewhere else but June notes 'that the grass is not always greener on the other side' and Ellie recalls that her Nan moved to Aberfan from Coedlewis but didn't like it because she missed the people she knew. Alice says that Emma reminds her of herself and her friends at that age who all wanted to leave Merthyr and Emma says that she can't wait to be old enough to leave. Alice reiterates her view that Merthyr is a narrow, closed community but nevertheless, her experience of Open University courses and summer schools had allowed her to experience a different life, and reflecting on this she takes on the role of advising the young people. 'Don't tie yourself to this town. It's a good town, it's not a bad town,

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carry all the values that you have learned in Merthyr out with you into the wider world,' she says. However, Alice is worried that young people will, nevertheless, be forced to leave the town because of the lack of jobs and she warns Ellie that she may not be able to teach in the local area and may have to move away. She also varies her stance on the town noting, 'certainly, if there were job opportunities you stay in Merthyr because it's a fine place to be.' As has happened frequently through our discussions, Alice seems to present a dichotomous view of the town. Her own experience suggests that she would have liked to move away to have a more exciting life and the fact that she had stayed sometimes is reflected in a negative view of the town, but on other occasions she stresses some of the positives. In this exchange, Alice positions herself as an adviser and mentor. She is concerned about the young people's future and, inevitably, her advice reflects her own sets of experiences. Here, I believe she can see elements of herself in the young people and is concerned that they do not follow the same narrow path. Later, she would send me an email, saying she was so glad that the young people had enjoyed the evening. 'I was delighted to meet them and felt uplifted that they had such hope for the future,' she wrote. 'I wish them well in their endeavours and feel sure that determination will carry them through.' Alice is the older figure of experience and is a conduit for what Connerton (1989, pg. 38) has described as the collective memories which are passed on from one generation to the next.

Interestingly, Margaret also reflects on her choices and notes that her biggest regret was leaving Wales 'because you have more chance of being a big fish in a small pond'. This regret while expressed as a pragmatic concern for career choices would appear to mask a deeper concern for the fact that she moved away from the area – a dislocation from place that has been reflected in many of her comments and writings. As a returning exile, she displays a close commitment to the town. Her recall of past events shows how nostalgia operates as a search for continuity (Tannock, 1995, pg. 456) and she draws from this experience to demonstrate to the young people the importance of place.

June also reiterates her commitment to the town. 'I have never been from Merthyr and I don't think I missed out. I think I've been very open about life generally, and, you know, I think Merthyr is a great place and it's OK.' Caradog, meanwhile, says he has enjoyed travelling to different places and has been happy wherever he has been 'but it's always nice to come home again.' This commitment to place recalls the work of Heidegger (1971) who saw the centrality of human experience as rooted in the concept of dasein or 'dwelling' – that a sense of place is rooted in location.

In a way, much of this discourse focusses on nostalgia: the older participants recreate a sense of the opportunities that were presented to them and reinterpret them for the young people. As Tannock (1995, pg. 454) suggests, nostalgia involves a returning to the past to discover sources of agency, identity or community that are felt to be under threat in the present, although this past may not have been thought of as unfailingly positive. However, Tannock suggests that a return to the past allows for a replenishment of self and sense of empowerment and justification (1995, pg. 456). As the participants recall their past career paths and their connection to place, their nostalgia creates a positivity that allows them to inform and inspire the young people. As Tannock comments, a recall of past struggles in the fight for community identity is a strategy favoured by subaltern social and cultural groups. 'Nostalgia here works to retrieve the past for support in building the future', he says (1995, pg. 459).

8.2.3 Perceptions of recreation

When asked whether there is a lot going on in the town, Alice suggests that people may have to travel away for leisure interests but Margaret disagrees, noting that she could find something to do at least once a day. She cites the history societies and singing groups available but notes that the lack of buses in the evening might be a problem for people, particularly young people trying to get from the suburbs to places in the town centre. She recalls walking into the town after school choir practice and having a coffee in one of the cafes but she notes that with a perceived awareness of 'stranger danger' there was now more reliance on parents taking young people to places, which might not always be convenient. 'There are things, but you have to have the facility for somebody to take you which was something we didn't have to do, we could do it on our own,' she says. Margaret's observation reflects contemporary concerns over the level of freedom accorded to children balanced with worries over perceived dangers.

June says that from her family's point of view there is a lot going on, bands, a cinema, pub events and the local park, but she worries that there is not very much for 14 to 16-year-olds to do. The local fast food restaurant appears to be the main meeting place. 'That's the only place that young people are actually welcomed, can go at the moment, isn't it?' she suggests. Emma agrees and Ellie points out that a new trampoline park and bowling facilities in the town 'keeps us off the streets'. She says there are lots of parks 'but you can't go out there all the time'. Lucy's choice of photographs have already indicated the importance of the town's fast-food restaurants as a site of socialisation and as a community space, and in the absence

of other formal gathering places for the 14-16 age group then their popularity would appear assured. They act as another form of 'community of practice' (Wenger and Snyder, 2000, pg. 1), providing an opportunity for social interchange in an informal setting, a refuge from the vagaries of the climate and a safe space. As neither domestic, educational or organised leisure sites, the restaurants function as an 'in-between space' (Bhabha, 1994, pg. 2) which he says can 'provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular and communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation'. Within the confines of the restaurant meeting place, young people can affirm their identities through peer group interaction. As Lucy's photographs have shown, these sites are perceived as safe spaces where the rituals of youth identity are performed, established and re-established.

Emma notes that a community resource in Coedlewis provides leisure facilities for young people including a dance and a recording studio, while Ellie suggests there is a need for a new community centre which could provide a pool and a gym. June asks Emma what she thinks of the town. 'I think Merthyr is a good community we all come together, help one another, but I don't think there's a lot to offer, I really don't,' she says. Emma notes that her school provides extra sports activities but she would like more arts-based activities, while Ellie says that in her school groups have started up catering for creative writing, information technology and mainly local history.

There appears to be a sharp contrast in the extra-mural activities provided at Emma and Ellie's schools and June suggests sharing best practice in an attempt to improve the overall arts provision in the area. However, the group is shocked to learn that in both schools, access to the library is restricted for older pupils. 'They say that we're a certain age now and we should be able to read and buy our own books to read if we want,' says Ellie. As an ex-library worker, Alice is shocked, repeating, 'buy, buy, books?' and Margaret tells them, 'You don't have to buy books.' She reminds the young people that they can all use the local council libraries and is clearly concerned over this problem. Ellie reassures them that she is aware of the library service. Margaret suggests it might be possible to set up a junior book club to meet once a month to discuss a set text. Margaret and Alice appear to be worried over what they see as an erosion of cultural assets. The growth of an intellectually informed working class through the 19th and 20th Centuries was predicated on a ready availability of books and any diminution of this provision appears to be viewed with alarm. Margaret and Alice are concerned that

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the opportunities provided for them should be readily available now. As Bruce and Bishop (2008, pg. 703) suggest, literacy is essential to community well-being.

While the young people are involved in their own music group in Merthyr, they would also clearly like to see more arts provision in their schools. As Smith (2013, pg. 50) has suggested, proper provision of arts education will permit children to contribute effectively to the future of Wales, although this raises the question of whether the young people are 'being' or 'becoming' (Uprichard, 2007, pg. 303). Are they playing an active part in constructing their childhood or are they adults in the making, lacking certain skills? Emma and Ellie have a clear idea of what they want in terms of arts provision and have a clear awareness of the part they can play in this.

8.2.4 Looking to the future
The notion of 'becoming' is linked to aspiration and the young people were asked what they would like to do when they grow up and whether they saw their future in the local area or would want to leave.

Ellie says she wants to become a teacher in the Aberfan area. 'I want to teach there because like all my family's been there and everything and the Aberfan Disaster, my family was in it. So, I want to go and teach there, like kids in nursery and reception. So, I'm going to go to college and university,' she says.

Ellie appears to want to put something back into the community, she is aware of the tragic legacy of the past and clearly feels that she could make a contribution to improving the life of the area. 'I don't ever want to leave Merthyr,' she says. 'That's wonderful,' says Margaret, perhaps reflecting on her own years away from the town. She appears to value Ellie's commitment to place and is impressed by her desire to work in and with the community, perhaps again articulating a certain regret that she moved away from a place that she had been connected to through a strong network of friends and family. Emma, perhaps feeling that Ellie's ambitions are a little prosaic, announces, 'I'm going to America, I am,' a contribution that causes lots of laughter. Perhaps she felt that something a little more adventurous was called for but she qualifies this by saying 'no, I'm not really'. She says she wants to be a translator and had studied Spanish but her school was unable to continue the GCSE course. 'Yeah, I was speaking to my teachers, I was really upset that I couldn't do Spanish for my GCSEs and they said I could do it for my A-levels in college,' she says. Emma also reveals that not many people enjoyed the Spanish classes and because she had shown an interest and had done well on the course 'I

had loads of hate for being interested in Spanish'. Bowing to peer pressure, Emma says she dropped out of the lessons for a while but 'then I was spoken to by my headmaster and he spoke to everyone and he said if somebody's interested in Spanish let them get on with it, because I could go far in life'. Emma is well aware of the problems in negotiating a way through the education system: achieving the best for herself but balancing this against the pressure exerted by classmates. She has already referenced peer pressure in her story on the 'haunted house' so has clearly been considering the problem for some time. Ellie shows a sophisticated understanding of this problem, 'They don't like the fact when other people are good at one thing and they can't do it, they want to be like you,' she says. Ellie reveals that she has confronted a similar problem with music lessons in her school. Classmates were not interested in the subject and asked her to help them do the work. When she refused she was subject to criticism. 'They were all having a go at me because I like music,' she says.

Both Emma and Ellie have persevered with a commitment to their subjects despite adverse pressure. They have had the emotional strength to resist pressure from their classmates, but others may not have been so fortunate. Emma and Ellie are aware of the issues and have developed a mature response supported by the comments at our meeting. 'Yeah, it's envy, that's what it is,' says Margaret, and June adds, 'You stand out for doing something different.' Their determination lends weight to Hanley's (2007, pg. 153) contention that an aspirational future is not something that is easily attainable for children from working class backgrounds. Her concept of the 'wall in the head' suggests that for many children there is a lack of awareness of what could be achieved away from their immediate environment, or a belief that it is irrelevant to them. What Emma and Ellie demonstrate is a strength of mind that will allow them to climb over that wall.

Lucy says that she would like to learn Italian and maybe teach it, while Carlos says that he wants to be a vet. These ambitious plans run counter to the gendered expectations that can pervade post-industrial communities in which young people could be expected to develop in specific ways that are rooted in the past and predicated on place (Ivinson and Renold, 2013, pg. 376). These imaginative aspirations may not always be realised, but as Guattari (1995, pg. 18) notes, it is the act of imagining something in the future which is the most important. Walkerdine suggests (2013, pg. 763) that through this imaginative visualisation, other possibilities might emerge which could become achievable, resolving a conflict between feasible aspirations and fantasies of success.

8.2.5 A diverse community

As a basis for examining the multi-cultural nature of the area, participants consider the question, is Merthyr a diverse community? Margaret recalls the influx of people from the start of the Industrial Revolution, from West Wales, England, Spain, Italy and Ireland, who flooded in, changing what was a small village to a large town. Alice also notes that now there is a new wave of immigration with Polish and Portuguese people arriving 'and working marvellously hard'. This prompts Ellie to ask, 'So, you welcome all people?' 'Absolutely,' says Margaret. Perhaps Ellie had never been made aware of the ethnic diversity in the town, as she poses the question almost as an outsider, although she reveals that she also has a diverse background. Ellie says she has an Irish grandmother and an English grandfather. Caradog attempts to get Lucy to talk about her background. She is reluctant to speak but allows Caradog to reveal that she comes from a Travelling family, although they are now settled in Aberfan. June notes that as a community nurse she used to visit Traveller families in their caravans and later in the homes they moved to. 'They were a very good, caring community,' she says. 'They looked after each other.' She asks Lucy for her surname and then says that she thinks she knows her relatives. June's recall categorises Lucy - by revealing her surname she is then linked to a web of connections that locates her in a specific space and place. Ellie also says that one of her grandfathers was a Traveller and tells Lucy that she's now a 'Gorja' Traveller as she lives in a house. Ellie has adapted the term to suit her own definition as the accepted meaning is a non-Traveller (Proud Gipsy Traveller website, n.d.) but by inference it means someone living in a settled place, so in this case her description might be apposite.

8.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have suggested that despite large differences in age, the two groups expressed remarkably similar viewpoints in which concerns for the area were expressed and there was also a restatement of positivity.

It was possible that an exchange of views between people of such varying ages and experiences may not have turned out to be a happy collusion. As Hopkins and Pain (2007, pg. 295) suggest, inter-generationality can often be constructed in terms of crisis, conflict and fearfulness, rather than cohesion, hope and ambivalence, yet this encounter seemed to be conducted in a relaxed atmosphere although there were times when the responses became somewhat formulaic based as they were on pre-scripted questions. Nevertheless, there was a rapport and empathy between the participants. Ellie, in particular, seemed very at ease, joking with the older group.

The older participants were keen to share their experiences and fell easily into the role of mentors, anxious to provide guidance for the younger ones. Equally, there was a desire on the part of the younger participants to understand the older group's viewpoints. These are successful people in their own terms, people who have come from working class backgrounds to become teachers, nurses and library workers. While the economic background has changed greatly, Alice recalling the 'jobs for life' of her younger days, nevertheless the WEA group provide a message of hope and encouragement – that everything is possible and achievable. In this respect, they diverge from Bright's (2012, pg. 318) contention that problems with schooling can be linked to what Reay (2009, pg. 27) has termed a sedimented process which involves an inter-generational transmission of powerlessness and worthlessness engendered by a historical class experience of a conflicted past. Here, the feeling is one of optimism – opportunities are there, albeit having to be negotiated through the familiar paths of peer pressure and the counter attractions of youthful entertainment.

In many ways, the discussions in this encounter endorsed the outcomes of previous deliberations, contributing to an overall conclusion that despite perceptions of negativity regarding the way the area has been represented, meaning-making activities provide a positive riposte. As the young people demonstrated in the previous chapter, they are aware of these representations and they are keen to provide positive constructions through their work in this study and through their musical activities. The exchanges with the older group validated their outlook and provided encouragement.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I review the thesis as a whole, revisiting the research questions in the light of the substantive findings. I also look at the implications for policy and how the research could be developed further. I have examined the following research questions:

- How are ex-coal mining and steel industry communities represented within literary texts and through other portrayals?
- How do these representations affect local communities in the present?
- What kind of stories, narratives and meaning making structures can counter some of these representations?

This chapter will show how these questions have been answered through an examination of the implications of literary and other artistic representations and through a review of the work produced as part of this study.

In this chapter, I reflect on the findings that have emerged about the strength of place attachment and identity and how that has provided the artistic framework for a grounded response to negative and stereotypical portrayals of South Wales. As already outlined, the work has allowed for a re-appropriation of spaces sometimes regarded as 'Other' and peripheral, re-emphasising their centrality. This is evident through the discussions that took place involving the WEA group. In this series of interchanges, impressions emerged of an appreciation of the family and community networks operating in the area and, in the main, a belief that with a favourable economic basis, there is a positive future for the area.

I note that from the beginning there was an interplay between past and present in which memory and a sense of the past informed contemporary opinions and views. The participants' performance of identity and connection to place echoes Gordon's (2008) theory of social haunting and Bright's (2012) concept of redemptive remembering, which suggests that events in the recent past can be suppressed. As Pahl and Crompton (2018, pgs. 25 and 26) note, the relationships that characterised areas of heavy industry were never recognised by Right-wing ideologies but their research in Rotherham shows that there is still a pattern of strong family bonds, a rooted connection to place and a desire to stay within particular areas. It is suggested that these patterns are also evident in Merthyr, something that was

demonstrated through the walking tours and discussions that the group undertook, and also through their artistic output. Through the poems and prose, the participants performed an affirmation of self and also demonstrated an embodied connection to place grounded in an admixture of affect and agency. Cultural representations are, therefore, contingent on the specific nature of place, an affective connection conceptualised as a 'field of care' (Tuan, 1977, pg. 4). The representations created in this study make a positive impact on perceptions of the area and assert that these are vibrant, active communities, gainsaying the deficit model that neo-Liberal constructions have applied to these places. The participants' responses reflect a local concern but can also be viewed in terms of a national, and indeed, global perspective. The research period encapsulated such momentous events as the Brexit vote for Britain to leave the European Union - indeed, many parts of the South Wales Valleys voted decisively to leave, despite having received large amounts of EU aid (Scully, 2017). There was also uncertainty over the future of the steelworks in nearby Port Talbot. All this contributed to a focussed awareness of change and uncertainty that was reflected in a re-examination of cultural values and of the wider issues of economic instability that have been affecting the area.

I also reflect on the photography group's work which again foregrounds themes of community, identity and shared bonds. The participants are part of a community to which they contribute their skills, but they are equally supported by the wider grouping of which they are a part and these bonds are a continuing feature of such communities.

Sense of place as articulated by my participants reflects the conceptualisations of Relph (1976), Casey (2001) and Cresswell (2002, 2004) who see place and belonging as essential part of the human condition. I see connection to place as an essential underpinning of the responses outlined in this thesis. The artistic representations produced as part of this study are an affirmation of an embodied link that shows the strength of a rooted connection to a particular locale. I have also contributed to a more nuanced account of how place can be bound up with a poetical and literary approach, showing that artistic methods demonstrate a powerful sense of belonging and identity that also resonate with Gordon's work on social haunting (2008) Massey's work on the intersection of space and time (2013) has also been a key influence and provides an understanding of how my participants' work is constructed. Massey herself acknowledges the influence of Raymond Williams in contributing to her understanding of space 'being a pincushion

of a million stories: if you stop at any point in that walk there will be a house with a story' (2013, page 2). This storying of place has been a key feature of the thesis. I have also shown how a sense of community is an essential facet of my participants' lives and provides a reassuring sense of connection that enables them to position themselves as people who can draw on these notions of social and cultural capital to allow them to maintain a confidence in the face of the negative representations that they have sometimes experienced, endorsing Howarth's view that even very disparaging representations of a community can be re-appropriated by the inhabitants to assert their own identity (2001). I also consider that I have contributed to the argument that Fraser (1995) makes for a recognition of cultural injustice through my analysis of artistic representations and through the discussions of my participants. Fraser's remedy for this injustice – some sort of symbolic or cultural change – has, in my view, been achieved in this thesis through the production of the body of prose, poetry and photographs that make up the dataset. As an original contribution to knowledge, I have shown that despite disparaging representations, people have demonstrated through their own artistic interventions that their sense of place and notions of belonging act as powerful drivers to articulate a restatement of positivity that challenges and questions received constructions of the area. While other work in this field has explored aspects of representation in the Valleys, this study has provided a unique and subjective exploration of the lived experience through personal and distinctive reflections. Analysis and discussion of these representations formed the basis of how the first research question has been answered and this also led to an evaluation of the second research question: how do these representations affect present-day communities? Discussions took place on the exaggerative prose of Gwyn Thomas and Lewis Jones and there was much condemnation of newspaper reporting and TV programmes such as Skint which have contributed to a stigmatising portrait of South Wales communities, creating Le Grand's 'folk devils' (2015) in which the worries and resentments of a moral majority are inflicted on a perceived denigrated minority. This reporting has also created what has become known as 'poverty porn' (Tyler, 2015; Schmidt, 2011). These discussions led to a consensus that such representations should be countered and constructing an adequate response led directly to the way that question three was answered through the creation of a body of poetry, prose and photographs.

9.2 Summary of chapters

Chapter 1 introduced the concepts behind the study and began to outline the complex representations that construct a particular view of the former coal and steel communities in South Wales, representations that encompass literary, film and other media. I also began to reflect on my own positionality within the process – a personal connection with the area that has shaped my own responses and also contributed to the selection of the methodological tools used in the study through my own interest in the literature and photographic output of the area.

In Chapter 2, I have reviewed the extensive literature that chronicles the life of people in the industrial areas of Britain from the 18th Century through to the present day. From the beginning, the literature has frequently used metaphors that focus on the 'darkness' of industrial practices. Industrial processes are presented through an imagery that emphasises the 'hellish' conditions: Blake's (1810) 'dark Satanic mills' are a good example and Seward's description of 'thick, sulphureous smoke, which spread like palls' acted as a template for much subsequent writing (Danahay, 2000). As I have suggested, this writing has contributed to an 'Othering' which has been reinforced by much later authors. From the romantic hyperbole of Richard Llewellyn's *How Green was my Valley?* to the lyrical prose of Gwyn Thomas in *The Dark Philosophers*, stereotypical imagery and exaggerated caricatures contribute to a narrow perception of these communities that pervasively influences attitudes. As Williams (1981, pg. 144) notes, while the 'industrial' novelists of the early 20th Century produced a remarkable body of work aimed at presenting a positive picture of the working class, commercial interests and stereotyping produced the opposite effect. I have also suggested that some contemporary writing continues to exploit these stereotypical representations although I acknowledge that the work of authors such as Rachel Trezise is anchored in social realism.

In Chapter 3, I extended the literature review to engage with the notion of community, arguing that this concept was fundamental to understanding the rooted response of participants in the study to the representations discussed in Chapter 2. I have discussed how 'community' can be seen as a positive description (Williams, 1976, Howarth, 2001) but also how community can be used in an exclusionary fashion (Gilchrist *et al*, 2010). Nevertheless, I would argue that the notion of community fosters a sense of belonging and a sense of place, articulated through the notions of *hiraeth* – the affective connection to a Welsh homeland, and *querencia* – Lopez's (1992) description of a safe refuge.

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A crucial concept in constructing this project has been the notion that the past informs the present as demonstrated through Degnen's (2005) work on remembering. It is this interplay between past and present that informed much of the subsequent work of participants. There is a sense in South Wales that the past hangs heavy in the air – remnants of the industrial past are all around. 'Vanished tricks of dust and light, tapping like snowflakes at the lids of the living', as Nigel Jenkins wrote in 1993. Connerton (1989, pg. 2) suggests that experiences of the present to a large extent are based on a knowledge of the past, with the connection between past and present multi-dimensional. As T. S. Eliot (1922) notes, 'The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past'.

I have also considered how these positive concepts of community can be undermined by the effect of territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2007), something that can be exacerbated through the literary representations discussed in Chapter 2. I have also shown how territorial stigma reflects the use of power by dominant groups and how representations can be challenged. The struggle to effect cultural change takes strength from Williams' suggestion (1958) that 'culture is ordinary' and this positioning of culture as both a way of life and as literary and artistic representation also matches the parameters of this study. While I am not arguing that the effects of literary representations are all-pervasive, nevertheless, as Parker and Karner (2010) have shown, places develop positive or negative connotations through constructions that position them as 'good' or 'no-go'. However, I agree with the contentions of Byrne *et al* (2015) and Mckenzie (2012) who suggest that there is a dichotomy between external perceptions of a place and the constructions of the local inhabitants.

How these perceptions can be represented has been examined in Chapter 4 through a discussion of the methodological choices that have informed the study. I have discussed how a multi-aspected methods approach seemed the appropriate way to progress. The range of methods employed, including group discussions, participatory mapping, mobile methods and artistic work including poetry and photography has allowed for a triangulation that has enriched the nature of the research data and allowed one procedure to serve as a 'stepping stone' to another (Sarantakos, 2005, pg. 146). I have discussed how the choice of arts based methods seemed an appropriate choice for a study that has been considering the effect of artistic representations and another key factor has been the utilisation of a participatory ethos. As one of the aims of the study has been to facilitate counter-representations of place, I have argued that a participatory approach has allowed

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for the demonstration of agency and for the participants' voice to be heard through a platform that demonstrates their artistic sensibilities. This approach has been predicated on Freire's (1970) work on research relationships which has repositioned participants as active agents rather than just objects of study.

In Chapter 5, I reviewed the discussions with participants showing how sense of place and the value of social and cultural capital are important factors. Overall, a powerful relationship to place was emphasised, focussing on memory and belonging, something that can be linked to Williams' 'structures of feeling' (1977). The participants moved easily between discussions of contemporary issues to recalling key moments in their lives. The wide-ranging discussions and the variety of methods employed in this study allowed for a comprehensive insight into the motivations of the group and what was clearly evident was a strong sense of self, an awareness of the multiplicity of interlocking relationships in the area, and, in general, a strong desire to present a positive image of the area while allowing 'their' stories to be told. This project has given a voice to the participants who have used the opportunity to reflect through a series of discursive opportunities facilitated through our encounters in a 'safe space'. While not suggesting that these are voices which would not have otherwise been heard, nevertheless, the collective experience allowed for a dialogic interchange in which social and cultural assets were re-appraised and re-presented. As Burnell (2013, pg. 143) suggests, cultural action can build resilience and can convey complex ideas in a uniquely accessible way. Culture, notes Burnell (2013, pg. 146) is an important resource for facilitating change and is an intrinsic part of how societies operate.

Comments at the end of the project suggest that the weekly meetings were valued as a way of allowing self-expression and were an opportunity to reflect on past and present, to consider how the issues of the 21st Century: the lack of worthwhile job opportunities, the development of food banks and other manifestations of a Neo-Liberal approach to post-industrial communities, could be considered through the lens of the past. The project could be said to have created what Tuan (1977) describes as a 'pause', a hiatus in which participants were given the opportunity to reconsider their attachment to place and the symbolic meanings which explain it (Jones *et al*, 2013, pg. 18). Specifically, through participatory mapping, layers of connection were uncovered, leading to the assertion that the 'six degrees of separation' theory could be reinvented as 'one degree' when applied to Merthyr. This exchange implies a pride in the strength of relationships in the town but also points to a deeper meaning: that there is a shared understanding of social

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cohesiveness that informs people's conduct. As Shields (1991, pg. 277) points out, while margins can be conceived as exclusionary they can also be places of power and critique. Concerns about discrimination are minimised, as there is a perception that the town is regarded as a 'centre'. This positivity helps to counter the effects of dominant forces in industrial development which have overseen the exploitation of the area leading to the situation Lopez (1992, pg. 41) has alluded to where the landscape has often been destroyed for the benefit of people who live elsewhere.

However, the cultural and social fabric of the area was described in positive terms by the participants: they saw the place as more than a functional site for labour. Again, mixing past and present, they referenced the rich cultural associations that the town has enjoyed, some achieved through the efforts of the autodidactic associations that have enriched the area. This continues today with a wide range of artistic activities leading to what Haylett (2003, pg. 69) has described as cultural dignity, something that is a necessary component of what he calls 'a politics of social justice'. He suggests that working class cultures are sometimes represented as problematic and unable to provide anything valuable to dominant centres of worth (2003, pg. 57), while Fraser (1995, pg. 69) sees a close link between economic disadvantage and cultural disrespect. Challenging this situation has been one of the main aims of the thesis, informed by Fraser's (1995, pg. 73) concept of redistributive justice, both as a form of political-economic restructuring and also as some sort of symbolic or cultural change.

Social and cultural assets were also examined through the walking tours around the town which allowed for a re-appropriation of the sites encountered through temporal and spatial shifts that illuminated the interplay of past and present. As Foucault (1980, pg. 252) notes, 'space is fundamental in any exercise of power'. Through his concept of heterotopia, Foucault (1977) contends that individuals are disciplined through their spatial distribution and social classifications. This can lead to a conclusion that the working classes are essentially described as 'Other' (Walkerdine, 1977, pg. 25). This is extended through Hillier and Hanson's contention (1984, pg. 18, pg. 257) that space is a paradox of capitalism, developed with the aim of forging a 'quiescent working class'. A re-appropriation of this space proceeded through an exploration of the town's history coupled with aural and visual encounters with the present-day place, a multi-sensory assemblage that allowed for a process of cognition and reflection, what Solnit (2001) has called the rhythm of thinking and walking. It is suggested that this provided an array of experiences which could then be utilised in the subsequent writing sessions. As Ingold (2010,

pgs. 15 and 16) notes, reading and writing can be regarded as having parallels with the footprints and tracks left on the ground and the process of walking creates an imprint not just of physical impact but also provides a creative stimulus.

Examining place through the visceral approach of walking was amplified through a wider discussion on the issue of representation which stemmed from examining the local newspaper for positive and negative stories. In addition, the disquiet over 'poverty porn' (Tyler, 2015) programmes and misleading stories in newspapers (Byrne *et al*, 2016) prompted a desire to counter these negative representations. Tyler (2015) argues that such programmes establish new guidelines for the regulation of precariat populations through what Ranciere (1999, pg. 29) terms 'visible and sayable' policing. A consensus emerged that such representations presented a constrained and denigratory view of the area, part of the 'Othering' that positions these communities as part of a discourse that reinforces prejudice and stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2007). These negative representations contribute to a prescriptive view reinforced by the wider body of literature on the industrial and post-industrial scene.

In addition, a review of the contemporary situation in Merthyr and the surrounding area ascertained that informal networking through familial and friendship groups provided a level of support which emphasised the importance of feminine relationships, challenging the notion of a dominant masculine hegemony (Bulmer, 1978; Massey, 1993). The discussion also centred on the support provided by older generations for struggling families 'just about managing' (JAM). What emerged was that in a post-industrial society what Haylett (2003, pg. 63) calls the strictures of dominant cultures were challenged through positive behaviours. These differ from hegemonic cultural values but are viewed as a source of pride. People need to be understood through a social and psychic subjectivity rather than as 'duped masses' or 'proto-revolutionary fodder' (Walkerdine, 1977, pg. 23). What our discussions have shown is that the social structures described by the participants present a picture of community as a positive, functioning series of networks in line with community studies in other working class areas (Charles and Davies, 2005, Mckenzie, 2012). Mckenzie (2012, pg. 469) speaks of a notion of belonging to a neighbourhood and also of the neighbourhood belonging to the residents, and this is evident from the participants' comments. They take an active approach to the concept of belonging. As well as drawing support from the area, they also contribute to the social and cultural fabric of their societies, operating perhaps from a sense of duty but also from the knowledge that they are intimately connected to their

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communities. What has also emerged is an affective connection to place perfectly illustrated through the synaesthetic phrase 'Merthyr gave me a hug' – here emotion and metaphor are combined to suggest a rooted affiliation which provides reassurance and an affirmation of identity. In other comments, the town's appellation functions as an adjective to convey notions of comfort, responsibility and reassurance which are embodied in the name.

All these representations informed the artistic work, and in the next section I will consider the themes that have emerged from this corpus and assess the value of the writing sessions. In Chapter 6, I have reviewed the poetry and prose produced by the writing group which aimed to provide a representation of responses to issues of place, identity and belonging. The writing has again positioned the participants at the centre of their worlds, providing a powerful response to the notion of 'Othering' in their performance of identity. Their subaltern voices answer constructions of the area as territorially stigmatised but also provide an aesthetic dimension that extends and amplifies their positioning. The poems subvert hegemonic, impersonal representations of industry through deeply personal accounts that take the minutiae of experiences and foreground them in powerful evocations of working life. The pieces also provide an overview of life in the area through themes that examine concerns about employment and welfare provision but also draw on recollections from the past that inform concerns about the present and the future. They stand as a body of work that forms a counter-representation to the literary and other artistic representations that have provided a partial account of the area, showing the writers as secure in their appreciation of the strength of social and cultural capital in their communities. As Jeffery (2018, pg. 247) notes, neighbourhood belonging can be a powerful source of identity formation, based on a shared history, family networks and class culture. As I have suggested, this work has been created through a particularly South Walian 'voice', a voice that refuses to be silenced by an approach to writing that favours what Anderson (2010) refers to as explicit representation and theoretical analysis.

The various techniques introduced into the writing sessions facilitated these sessions. The examination of artifacts encouraged a visceral, emotional response, giving the opportunity for some powerful writing. They prompted a nostalgic review of the past but also contributed to a situated appreciation of identity. As Hurdley (2006, pg. 718) suggests, constructing narratives around objects makes them important parts of the formation of identities. They allowed for a reflection on family life and social connections that would not otherwise have been forthcoming and

contributed to what Gurewitch (1988) describes as defamiliarisation, a slowing down of perceptions. The writing emerged from what Anderson (2004, pg. 4) has described as the sensual 'intertwining of objects with the non-rational modalities of emotion and affect'.

The 'letters to home' and postcards revealed an embodied connection to the locality that also allowed for a reflection on the strength of inter-personal relationships. Imaginative literary responses were also facilitated by exploring the concept of Wordsworth's 'spots of time', important memories, both pleasurable and painful, that could easily be recalled. The inspiration of poets, including Robert Frost and Idris Davies, produced a variety of literary work that reflected contemporary concerns over employment, welfare provision, housing and choices over the future. In particular, Davies' poem *Mrs. Evans Fach, You Want Butter Again* allowed an examination of the hegemonic and gendered power structures that have operated in the past, but are also applicable today.

The use of sensory stimulation facilitated literary creativity through the theoretical standpoint of Merleau-Ponty (2000, pg. 5 [1962]). With work created from visual and aural stimuli, it is suggested that this approach to writing allowed for a shift in perceptions which stimulated and reinvigorated the creative process. As Garry (2001, pg. 85) notes, good creative writing is based on using the senses effectively. The sensual provides a powerful way to encapsulate emotion and affect in writing and as Eagleton (1990) has argued, aesthetics should be situated within a sensuous framework. This recognises the contradictory nature of cultural meanings (Pahl, 2014, pg. 293).

The conclusion of the writing sessions allowed for a reflexive examination of their value to the participants. The merit of introducing a sensual element to the process was stressed favourably as this allowed an aesthetic response to be crafted which allowed for an imaginative exploration of feelings. While the writing sessions did not usually allow for careful redrafting and polishing, nevertheless, it was considered that the pressure of producing a piece of work in a short space of time gave the work an immediacy and power which spoke directly to the reader/listener. The work can also be considered as being produced through a situated social practice (Street, 1993, Barton and Hamilton, 1998) and drawing on 'funds of knowledge' (Moll *et al*, 1992). The process has also helped at least one member of the group to discover a hitherto unrealised talent for creative writing and to allow a time for reflection and

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contemplation. This empowering development added to the general aim of the project to allow people 'a voice'.

However, it would be unreasonable to assume, even with a small group, that this 'voice' spoke with one accord. While views of living in the area were generally positive, there was dissension about the value of community and the future of the town, although even here comments did not remain consistent, there were changes of view throughout the process. At times, it seemed that a Kleinian (1975) approach was being taken on the economic state of the town, splitting the good from the bad, and transferring negativity to different causal factors.

In Chapter 7, I discussed how a group of young people were also recruited to the project to provide a more balanced picture in terms of representation and to allow for an inter-generational approach. They brought a different set of experiences to the discussion, although there were many convergent themes on the question of place, identity and belonging. The young people exhibited a pride in their communities and displayed a sophisticated awareness of issues such as peer pressure. Although ranging widely in age, the young people were already familiar with each other through their connection to a local arts organisation, so perhaps they had already self-selected themselves as people predisposed to certain cultural similarities.

The core of their project, the Photovoice exercise, explored their relationship to place and identity through a hermeneutic circle of narrative. The project was not conceived as a prescriptive exercise with pre-set themes. Although initial discussions had centred on sense of place and what constituted a community, nevertheless there was ample opportunity for the young people to create their own subjective interpretations and what also emerged was a focus on themes of self, identity and spirituality. They were aware of some of the unfavourable representations surrounding life in post-industrial South Wales and in discussion were keen to stress the positives about their communities. Their pictures also captured the range of amenities in the area and the beauty of the landscape and it is suggested that some of this work is an aesthetic response to their internalised notions of negativity surrounding the area. The work indicated an aesthetic awareness of landscape which revealed a set of values that conflicted with stereotypical constructions of young people.

Some of the pictures had a religious theme, and the spirituality of the young people was expressed partly through their comments and partly through the visual

iconography. They understood the importance attached to sites of worship and their function not only as places of reverence but also as ones of community focus. Some of the young people also displayed a nuanced awareness of their own responses to spirituality. Some photographs reflected a sedimented knowledge of events, particularly the 1966 Aberfan colliery tip disaster, a tragedy whose magnitude has meant that memories are sometimes articulated through Gordon's (2008) concept of 'social haunting'. For the participants who lived near this site, there was a situated awareness of what had happened in the past, and the disaster was referenced again in the map-making exercise, highlighting the cemetery that contained the victims. Their feelings over this site varied from sorrow and fear to a viewpoint that regarded the place as a reassuring connection with the past which saw remembrancing the dead as providing a sense of continuity.

Other photographs of restaurants and take-away cafes showed that they clearly functioned for the young people as places where they could gather free of the strictures of home and school. Here, their performative identities could be inscribed through space and place as they engaged with the stimuli of food, light and warmth. Their photographs of fast-food eateries conveyed a desire to find a safe place where conviviality could be expressed through a shared experience - an economical space for their inter-personal exchanges.

Many photographs were of the participants themselves as they explored their identities through depictions of them taking part in various musical activities and performing. These pictures captured not only their artistic aspirations but also their inter-personal relations. Their work also conveyed their sense of togetherness, their functionality as a group of music-makers. They projected a notion of creativity and purposiveness that conveyed a positive message. Some of the pictures also captured the supportive nature of the community as the participants engaged in a performance to help raise money for charity. This is a cultural exchange which has social benefits, the participants are part of a community to which they contribute their skills, but they are equally supported by the wider grouping of which they are a part.

Photography proved an ideal medium to engage the young people, allowing for independent creativity, reinforcing their sense of self-worth through a process which they felt they were in control of and demonstrating their commitment to place. It also allowed them the freedom to experiment, allowing their individual personalities to come to the fore.

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Other artistic activities included poetry writing which reflected the participants'
response to photographs of Merthyr street scenes. The poetry captured a sense of
place as thriving and positive, the participants responding to pictures of busy streets
with imagery that captured a spirit of optimism. The multi-disciplinary nature of the
project was further widened through the creation of a set of stories inspired by a
picture of a 'haunted house', employing a multi-modal approach which allowed for
multi-faceted representations. As Kress (2010, pg. 96) suggests, different modes
can represent the world differently. The literary work amplified and extended the
visual messages, giving them a greater import and the young people's creativity
was allowed a freer expression. Using a cross-disciplinary approach to methods
also allows what Thompson Klein (1996, pg. 51) describes as 'trading zones' – the
collaboration on the fringes of disciplines. What emerged clearly from the work on
the 'haunted house' pieces, was the high standard of the work. This was literature
untrammelled by the constrictions of school. It was free writing, or what Pahl (2014)
refers to as 'out of school' literacy in which the imagination is allowed full rein. The
work was voiced across different epistemologies (Pahl, 2014, pg. 307) with
knowledge communicated and represented through the utilisation of multiple
expressive modalities that included writing and voices for story-telling (Vasudevan,
2009, pg. 357).

In Chapter 8, I demonstrated how the project was also enhanced by the inter-
generational exchanges that resulted from the meeting of the WEA group and the
young people. This inter-personal interaction proved illuminating for both groups
with an empathetic understanding arising of the problems both groupings
experience. The WEA group were able to share their experience of education and
work but were themselves interested in what the young people had to say about
their schools, peer pressure and entertainment. Both groups developed a mutual
respect for each other. It was at this session that some of the young people
developed a confident and assertive manner, enjoying the inter-action with the older
group. As the discussion progressed, their individual identities emerged. In addition,
the varied experiences of the WEA group endorse Hopkins and Pain's (2007, pg.
299) contention that rather than following fixed predictable life stages, people
experience dynamic and varied life-courses which have different situated meanings.
This variegated range of experiences acted as an inspiration and catalyst for the
young people.

9.3 Implications for policy and practice

In conclusion, engagement with arts practices as participants rather than as passive research subjects (Byrne *et al*, 2016, pg. 730) aids the development of 'intangible assets'– the ambitions that through human, social and cultural capital create resilience (Burnell, 2013, pg. 139). Burnell adds, 'Owing to its highly personal and innovative nature, cultural action expressed through the arts can assist in unlocking these practices' (2013, pg. 139).

The development of this type of arts project can help answer the problem of how such qualitative measures can effect policy changes. As Burnell notes (2013, pg. 139), intangible assets are often difficult to measure. In contrast, tangible assets such as financial, physical and natural resources lend themselves more easily to a structured analysis that finds more favour with policy-makers. As Byrne *et al* (2016, pg. 730) have suggested, artistic representations of community challenge the narrative forms employed by policy makers which are often constructed in quantitative terms based on a deficit approach (Byrne *et al*, 2016, pg. 730). This can allow for new understandings of possible futures in which forms of utopian thinking can be reintroduced (Byrne *et al*, 2106, pg. 730), the Blochian (1986 [1938]) ontology of the 'not yet'.

However, research into areas facing economic and social challenges can be perceived as contributing to public representations of place by judgemental outsiders (Byrne *et al,* 2015, pg. 81). For example, Hirschorn's *Battaille Monument* in Kassel, Germany, has been criticised for the exoticisation of a Turkish community, contributing to a sort of social pornography (Lind, 2004, *cited in* Bishop, 2012, pg. 22). To counter this, Byrne *et al* suggest that it is important to take a reflexive and egalitarian approach to research (2015, pg. 81).

I would suggest that despite some direction from me in the construction of the literary and photographic projects, the work developed as a participatory form of engagement, resulting in an original contribution to the artistic landscape of the area, creating as Kesby (2007, pg. 2813) says 'new spaces for critical engagement beyond the academy'. The introduction of specific stimuli related to the activities ultimately created a rich resource of poems, prose and pictorial representations which reflected the epistemological and ontological position of the contributors. This work answers representations of South Wales that fail to take into account the value of cultural and social connections in communities and the strength that people find from such connections. Their work for this thesis has allowed the participants to demonstrate this strength. As Matarasso (1997, pg. 17) suggests, 'One of the most important outcomes of the public's involvement in the arts was finding their own

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voice, or perhaps, the courage to use it.' This 'courage' has been further demonstrated through the production of a booklet, *Kindly Light,* which showcases examples of the groups' creativity, serving as a positive counter-representation to negative representations of South Wales. I feel it is important that there is a tangible outcome for this project beyond a PhD thesis that acknowledges the creative effort that the participants have expended and is a fitting endorsement of their commitment to telling 'their' stories. As Bishop (2012, pg. 9) suggests, participatory art can focus on the meaning of what is produced, rather than concentrating on the process, providing a link with a secondary audience not involved in the original production. Taking a broad perspective, participation is an enabling process that ultimately allows a cross-fertilisation of ideas that confers mutual benefits.

This participatory approach changed my own thinking as the project evolved and my own notions of place were re-examined. My connection to the area was reinvigorated through the contacts I made as the research progressed. I realised that this was a journey of discovery not just for my participants but also for me. As the research evolved, I became more and more aligned to Soja's (1993) concept of thirdspace, where spatiality, historicality and sociality is reimagined. The dichotomy I faced as an insider/outsider became increasingly resolved as the activities such as letters to home and sensory perception enhanced my own appreciation of the power of place and community. This has included a desire to become more at ease with the Welsh language. On my father's side of the family Welsh was very important but I grew up at a time when Welsh was not perceived as a useful cultural tool. Although the Welsh language is not used per se in the study, its influence is pervasive and important. Some of the study participants are fluent Welsh speakers and although they have written in English for this project there is a distinctively South Wales voice at play here and it is suggested that a connection to place can be understood through the language both with an idiomatic approach and through a morphological understanding of place names.

While it is acknowledged that these are very small-scale studies, nevertheless, it is considered that the principles established in terms of participatory arts methods could be re-employed with different groups to produce similarly positive results. There is undoubtedly a wealth of material that could be produced – work that could reflect the opinions and aspirations of the diverse communities that make up the South Wales Valleys and chime with the aims of the Welsh Government's unique *Well-being of Future Generations Act* (2015).

Working with more/larger groups would allow a greater range of opinions to be canvassed, resulting in a more representative analysis of what the lived experience

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means in South Wales although the findings would nevertheless still be particular and subjective having regard to the qualitative methods employed.

I have also been aware, as discussed, that some of the project involved activities I have suggested. As I have argued, I feel that these particular groups needed some sort of catalyst for inspiration but, on reflection, I consider that perhaps I could have allowed them more time to construct their own arts projects which would be more akin to the ethos of participatory research. This, of course, could result in a stalled, unproductive dialogue which would not fit easily with the demands of a PhD project but it might allow developments in unexpected ways.

It was also difficult to decide how long the creative sessions would continue. In order to fit in with the demands of writing up the thesis I had decided to finish fieldwork in the summer of 2017 although there had been suggestions from participants that I should continue to run some sort of writing workshops. On reflection, I feel this may have been a good idea – putting something back into the community beyond the requirements of the thesis, although I have kept up a connection with the participants, attending and speaking at various events.

It would also be advantageous to create more of a dialogue between different groups. I was aware in this project that apart from one meeting the groups remained discrete entities. Collaboration could be extended to create a multi-generational project that would reflect a wide range of opinions. In terms of artistic projects it would also be extremely beneficial to utilise professional artists/photographers/writers/producers to create an assemblage that would have widespread impact, both as a creative experience in its own right and as a statement of social policy. Cross-disciplinary approaches utilising the fields of geography, the humanities and social sciences could also be very productive.

Another part of the community missing from this process were schools, and while it could be argued that my participants were able to participate without the pressure that sometimes comes from schools to take part in projects, nevertheless, it would be good to involve as many young people as possible. Much of the work carried out in this project could easily be adapted to fit into curriculum requirements.

While issues of gender, ethnicity, class and age could have been explored through this thesis, these were not lenses that I concentrated on as my primary focus was on the nature of belonging and community. Nevertheless, the nature of this study could lend itself to an exploration of these issues, and further co-produced research would be an appropriate way to do this.

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9.5 Final thoughts

While there are many ways of understanding a community through a sociological lens, it is suggested that the employment of qualitative, arts-based methodologies has allowed for a subjective insight into the minds of people which has allowed for a nuanced evaluation of responses to stigma and prejudice and the artistic representations reviewed in this study. As Pahl and Crompton (2018, pg. 21) say, 'We can make sense of a place through feeling it and learning about it as an imaginary space'. It is this sense of feeling that has shaped this thesis, from poetic constructions of things past, from evaluations of the present to intimations of a utopian future; from photographs of scenic beauty to the performance of self, it is the human and personal that comes to the fore, but it is a standpoint that is rooted in belonging. Not all have shared this positive view of post-industrial landscapes. Charlesworth (2000) considers that the town of Rotherham's physical spaces had little effect on the feelings of residents whose cultural relations originated from elsewhere, but this bleak picture of a dysfunctional post-industrial space is not the image created by the participants of this study, for whom the centrality of their lived experience in these spaces provides a positive affirmation of existence. Naturally, there has not always been a unified voice of positivity, the post-industrial pathway has not always been easy and for some there has been a desire to leave their familiar environs and challenge received notions of community, but overall, there remains an affection for place that is encapsulated in this artistic output. In a society facing deep divisions, this expression of resilience acts as a cultural marker that affirms a commitment to place and people that plays its part in transcending the negative effects of a neo-Liberal approach to the economy on the individuals who make up our society.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Town impressions

I describe the area through an auto-ethnographic tour of Merthyr which reflects Pink's (2008) assertion that if ethnography is understood as place-making then a reflexive approach involves understanding how a researcher is emplaced and involved in the constitution of ethnographic places. This is a town that has known disease, despair and crippling poverty when the demands for a living wage fetched up against the inflexible, autocratic ironmasters and colliery owners. Between the First and Second World Wars conditions were so bad that the Political and Economic Planning 'think-tank' recommended that the town should be relocated to a more favourable position 'as close to the old as is consistent with securing a suitable site for economic prosperity' (1939. pg. 247). They commented, 'The sole justification for a large town on this site has been the abundance of profitable coal and iron deposits, and no detached person would be likely to favour going to live at such a spot after the minerals have ceased to make it worthwhile … The fact that iron and coal once supported the population of Merthyr is no reason for keeping it all there when they have ceased to do so' (Political and Economic Planning, 1939, pg. 247). This blatant disregard for local sensibilities makes for chilling reading today, but it echoes a widespread feeling that these areas exist only for their industrial value and little regard is given to the community values that have emerged.

The town sprawls down a wide valley. Unlike the narrower valleys of the Rhondda further south, there is a more spacious aspect but the town is still bounded by hills now dotted by housing spreading up from the valley floor. Coming from the north, you drop steeply down to the town through council housing estates now refurbished in contrast to the images that emerge through Internet searches for areas of Merthyr. And this can be part of the problem – outdated images and representations persist in conveying a negative view of the area in contrast to the residents' own view of their environment. The immediate environs of Merthyr are surrounded by spectacular mountain vistas, the southern boundary of the Brecon Beacons National Park being situated just north of Merthyr. Coming up from the south, the aspect is much wider, industry hugging the banks of the river, including the vast bulk of Merthyr's once biggest employer, the Hoover factory, part of which is now semi-derelict. Also here is Merthyr's first out-of-town shopping centre, now over-shadowed by larger developments flanked by the main Cardiff By-pass, one named

after Merthyr's very own saint Tydfil and the other after the Crawshays' home Cyfarthfa. These centres have the well-known brand names familiar across the country and in a well-rehearsed pattern have taken some of the trade away from the traditional centre.

The old town is small, several main streets snaking up from the town's old parish church, with the High Street mainly pedestrianised. When the town's outdoor market sets up on Tuesdays and Saturdays there's a feeling of bustle and enterprise in the air. Traders' cries echo down the street, vying with the passers-by who network enthusiastically across the crowded spaces. Parked up a side street, a butcher's auction van is busy selling cuts of meat. The shoppers enjoy interacting with the auctioneer, who carefully cultivates a friendly atmosphere, his amplified Midlands accent a contrast with the South Wales speech. This scene recalls the town's prosperity days, when workers on high wages kept the local economy booming. But when the market has gone, the closed-down shops, the charity stores and boarded-up offices tell a different story – of people struggling to make ends meet.

In the centre of town, a clock tower presides over the building known as Samuel's Corner where the eponymous jeweller once had a business. Next to this is the closed office of the *Merthyr Express*, still the local paper but now produced in Cardiff and no longer offering a service to passers-by to drop in and tell a story to the reporters once based there. Other buildings have been reinvented: the shopping chain that once clothed the Valleys, Hodges Menswear, is now the headquarters of a training consortium with the old Hodges sign now restored. Echoes of the past reverberate through names that recall past traumas – the new Penderyn Square is named after the man many regard as a martyr – Dic Penderyn, hanged for his part in the Merthyr Rising of 1831, accused of stabbing a soldier with a bayonet. A campaign for a pardon continues to this day. A memorial to Dic is outside the town's library, built in 1936 with money from the American industrialist Andrew Carnegie. Fronting the square, is a new pub, called appropriately enough the Dic Penderyn. The square was once the site of the old Castle Hotel, replaced by the Castle Cinema, which was itself demolished in 2011. Just over the road is one of Merthyr's most striking buildings –the former town hall now dubbed 'The Redhouse' – an arts complex, cafe and home to the performing arts department of the local college. The Redhouse is where the past, present and future combine. It offers local people a range of cultural events, and it provides an opportunity for young people to find fulfilment in careers that may take them away from their Valleys' homes to the big employment centres of Cardiff and Swansea, and perhaps even further afield.

Names provide a connection with the past throughout the town: One of the Labour Party founders Keir Hardie was elected an MP for Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare in 1900 and served that constituency until his death. His name lives on in the Keir Hardie Health Park in the town and the Keir Hardie housing estate. Other streets in the town are named after prominent figures in the emerging Labour Party. A little road off the main street is named Hong Kong Alley because of a connection to a Chinese laundry nearby, and running parallel with the High Street is Tramroadside which recalls the work of Richard Trevithick, whose monument adjoins High Street. Here the first steam locomotive to run on rails set off in 1804. Now a model of Trevithick's locomotive sits on top of a plinth. Intriguingly, next to the monument is the mysterious stencilled outline of a white cat. Apparently, there are others across Merthyr, although these are black. Further up the road is the red-brick shell of what was once Merthyr General Hospital, now a target of vandalism. Ambitious plans involve creating housing on the site but for now it is windowless, barred, shuttered and abandoned. Once busy with patients and staff, it is now the haunt of birds and rats, an almost Gothic fantasy, whose ornamental Victorian excrescences are matched by the nearby closed-down Jewish synagogue perched at the top of a hill in the centre of town.

Appendix 2

Poems and prose

Handbag

My mother's old leather handbag,

crowded with letters she carried

all through the war. The smell

of my mother's handbag: mints

and lipstick and Coty powder.

The look of those letters, softened

and worn at the edges, opened,

read, and refolded so often.

Letters from my father. Odour

of leather and powder, which ever

since then has meant womanliness,

and love, and anguish, and war.

                Ruth Fainlight (1988)

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

Though as for that the passing there

Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

      Robert Frost (1916)

Queen Street, Cardiff

When the crowds flow into Queen Street from the suburbs and the hills

And the music of the hour is the music of the tills,

I sometimes gaze and wonder at my fellows passing by

Each one with dreams and passions, each one to toil and die.

And I almost hear the voices of a throng I never knew

That passed through this same Queen Street, and under skies as blue,

And they too had their laughter, their sorrow, in their day

And they too went a journey with an unreturning way.

And other generations in distant years to be

Shall walk and crowd through Queen Street, in joy or misery,

And they shall laugh and grumble and love and hate and lust,

Their living flesh oblivious of our eternal dust.

But banish all such brooding, for May is in the air,

And Jack from Ystrad Mynach loves Jill from Aberdare,

And however Life shall use them, they shall talk in years to be

Of when they were young in Queen Street in the city by the sea.

      Idris Davies (Sheers, 2009**)**

The Waggon

Crimson and black on the sky, a waggon of clover

Slowly goes rumbling, over the white chalk road;

And I lie in the golden grass there, wondering why

So little a thing

As the jingle and ring of the harness,

The hot creak of leather,

The peace of the plodding,

Should suddenly, stabbingly, make it

Strange that men die.

Only, perhaps, in the same blue summer weather,

Hundreds of years ago, in this field where I lie,

Cædmon, the Saxon, was caught by the self-same thing:

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The serf lying, black with the sun, on his beautiful wain-load,

The jingle and clink of the harness,

The hot creak of leather,

The peace of the plodding;

And wondered, O terribly wondered,

That men must die.

Alfred Noyes (1915)

Jerusalem (And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time)
And did those feet in ancient time

Walk upon England's mountains green:

And was the holy Lamb of God,

On England's pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,

Shine forth upon our clouded hills?

And was Jerusalem builded here,

Among these dark Satanic Mills?

 Bring me my Bow of burning gold:

Bring me my arrows of desire:

Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!

Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,

Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand:

Till we have built Jerusalem,

In England's green & pleasant Land.

William Blake Preface to Milton a Poem *(1810)*

The Taff: The River That Made Wales
'For centuries our insatiable demand for coal drew people to this valley.
Communities were created and the environment was changed forever. The guts of
this landscape have been torn right out of this valley. I can't imagine a place that's
been exploited to such an extent as this place has been. So, so much wealth and
yet it has all been flushed downstream and gone elsewhere. While the industry and
much of the wealth it created may have gone, the people and their pride are still
here.'

Will Millard (BBC Wales, 2016)

Appendix 3

Photovoice analysis form

Describe your picture --

What is happening in the picture? ---

Why was this picture taken? ---

What does this picture say about your life? ---

What does this picture tell us about your community?-------------------------------
----

The social significance of artistic representations of former coal and steel communities

How do you picture former coal and steel communities?

Like this?

Or
like
this?

My name is Peter Davies and I am a PhD student at Cardiff University. My project aims to examine how former coal and steel mining areas in South Wales and Yorkshire are represented in literature, film and other media and how these representations might affect communities. I have been looking at a wide range of novels, poetry, non-fiction, photographs and other visual media to build up a picture of how communities are portrayed. I am particularly interested in the way certain areas can become stigmatized through one-sided portrayals such as in the recent Channel Four series Skint. I take the view that artistic practices are not independent of social context but are situated in a framework in which reading and writing are intertwined with culture and power.

 I am also keen to find out what memories people have of their experiences working in industries such as steel and coal, and their recollections of growing up. I also aim to explore people's sense of place, and their feelings about the big changes that have occurred through the demise of heavy industries and the industrial unrest that accompanied this process.

I aim to work with groups of different ages, from teenagers to older folk, and to engage in a range of participatory creative activities that will be a co-production. Activities could include creative writing, a photographic project, a film about community life, walking tours (which could explore

the industrial heritage of the area), creating maps, and an oral history project which could see young people interviewing older members of the community. The exact format will be decided following talks between members of the research group.

This project is linked to the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD) Civil Society research centre in Cardiff and will contribute to two projects in the Arts and Humanities Research Council Connected Communities Programme: *Representing communities: developing the creative power of people to improve health and well-being* and *Imagine: connecting communities through research.*

If anyone would like more information about these ideas, I can be contacted on 07585 361813, or by email at daviesph2@cardiff.ac.uk.

Consent

You understand that you are taking part in a research project which will include a range of activities

You have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

You are happy to have what you say audio-recorded and to take part in video recordings (only when you are asked if this is OK). You understand that this data, and any field-notes and interview material, may be used in the research report and analysis.

You understand that any 'data' (e.g. field-notes, photographs, video and interviews) that are collected for use in the project will be anonymized to protect your identity and the identity of others.

You are happy for the writing/photographs/artwork that you create during this project to be used in the research report and analysis.

You know that you can decide to withdraw from the project at any time. You do not have to give a reason for doing this.

Name………