

Memory Studies Association 7th International Conference 2023

Drysfeydd y Cymoedd (*The Maze of the Valleys): Archiving and Commemorating the Industrial Crisis of the South Wales Valleys.

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In her book *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant looks at unexceptional communal traumas and argues that their precarity is ordinary if not inherent in post WWII geopolitical realms. She then redefines re-occurring traumas as *crises of ordinariness*, instances where our exposure to structured and systemic violence becomes evident (Berlant 2011). Critical discourses of early and late modernity that discuss when and how exceptional traumas become crises of ordinariness offer us the tools to look back at South Wales Valleys as a region of industrial *crises par excellence* and investigate how crises are archived and commemorated.

The presentation looks at the South Wales Valleys and their coalmining heritage as contested and traumatic. It then explores how industrial crises are registered in collective archives and communal memorials. Geographers and trauma theorists argue that traumas' connections to the time and place of their occurrences are fragile and obscure. The presentation looks at how industrial crises are portrayed in miners' memorials across the South Wales Valleys and then dives into informal, collective, analogue, and digital archives, as resources of care and hospitality (Butler 2009).

Through our unpredictable, puzzling, and open-ended encounters with industrial crises, a possibility emerges to engage with histories that are no longer straightforward, affirming or referential; but with histories that arise where immediate understanding may not (Caruth 1996). The presentation suggests that in the South Wales Valleys, formal and informal registers of industrial crises allow us to appreciate that we are implicated in each other's crises and find shared ways to move on.