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Time and Mobility in Photographs of the Northeast Industrial Landscape

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Abstract: This paper addresses documentary landscape photographs of the industrial and post-industrial Northeast of England from 1983 to 2005. Adopting a “mobilities” approach, this paper addresses these images as revealing a process, in which the movement of things and people, on multiple scales and timeframes, continually adapts space and the subjectivities of the people inhabiting it. The representation of mobility is considered in relation to issues of time in the photograph and it proposes one approaches these images not as static representations of a singular time and place but as part of an extended “event”. This interpretation was suggested by Ariella Azoulay and the approach encompasses the historical circumstances of their making, in addition to the multiple viewing positions of their consumption. As such, these photographs suggest an ongoing relationship between power, movement and dwelling. The paper advocates for a contemplative, relational viewing position, in which viewers consider their own spatio-temporal and socio-political position in regard to those landscapes, as well as a continuum of mobilities.

Keywords: mobilities; photography; mining; Amber Collective; County Durham; Azoulay

1. Introduction

In 1978, Sid Chaplin wrote of his local mining communities:

...the Americans are much more realistic about mining than we are. They know it's a short lived thing, relatively speaking. Even if there's fifty years of coal—what's fifty years? So they talk about mining camps, we talk about villages, which is one of the oldest words in the language. It means a permanent settlement. But most of the Durham villages were, in fact, camps, and they were put down as camps. (Chaplin 1978, p. 63)

Chaplin's statement might prompt us to ponder a British urge to domesticate the harsh realities or politically unruly potential of industrial life. It certainly highlights a contradiction between the assumed permanence of human settlements and the inevitable movement of the world of capital. 1978 also saw the publication of Nicholas Ridley's recommendations to Margaret Thatcher's government-in-waiting to break up the nationalised industries into small, privatised units, suppress wages in those industries, and combat any resulting strike action with swift, decisive measures (Ridley 1977). This “Ridley Report”, leaked in *The Economist* and a foundational document of the emerging neoliberal outlook of the Thatcher era, makes clear that British mining villages could, at a stroke, be fundamentally impacted by changing political ideas about the global movement, and an organisation of industrial capital.

This paper examines photographs of the Northeast industrial and post-industrial landscape, not as static snapshots of how space is arranged at specific historical moments but as revealing continual movement. Therefore, it draws upon a “mobilities” approach, as outlined by Mimi Sheller and John Urry (Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2007; Sheller 2018), which proposes that spaces (and the

subjectivities within them) are not stable and static but continually formed and reformed by the movement of people, resources and ideas. Herein, the photograph is interrogated for its potential to enable the contemplation of longer time frames and interwoven processes of movement.

This paper focuses on landscape photographs of the mining industry along the County Durham coastline, particularly those commissioned by Newcastle's Amber Film and Photography Collective from 1983 to 2004. Movement is implicit in these works, as they capture processes of change. The last collieries closed in the county up to 1993 and the altered landscape thereafter. Moreover, these photographs are explicitly political. Chaplin's sobering observation might infer that all settlements based on extractive industries will inevitably witness the demise of their core employment infrastructure, but one must also recognise the well-documented, devastating economic, social and cultural impact of de-industrialisation in the Northeast. These photographs make an inescapable political point about the agency of Durham inhabitants in the face of economic change. Understanding them through a mobilities approach and in the context of a wider range of imagery of the post-industrial Northeast could enable an appreciation of these landscapes that encompasses a longer historical perspective, as well as a more layered reading.

However, one comes up against two inevitable problems that can imbue industrial photographs with a certain nostalgia. The first is that the still photograph can only capture a moment in time; by definition, it portrays a moment that is passed. This paper examines how a sense of time can be recuperated in the still image. First, by considering Peter Wollen's differentiation of photographic "events" and "states", then employing Ariella Azoulay's concept of the "event of the photograph" (Azoulay 2008), which extends the consideration of the image to the processes which frame its production and consumption. The second problem is that these photographs sit within an extensive visual archive of "old coal" in the Northeast. This archive may provoke the idea that industrial hardship is the eternal condition of the region's communities—a condition that somehow sits outside the passage of time. For example, one might cite the black and white imagery of "the coal-searcher", presented by Bill Brandt during the Depression, by Colin Jones in the 1960s, and again by Chris Killip in the 1980s.

One might also reasonably note that it was to highlight the cultural values and limitations of such tropes and representational processes that the conceptual photography of John Kippin and Chris Wainwright emerged in the 1980s and was revisited in 2012 (in the *Futureland* and *Futureland Now* exhibitions) (see Wells 2012; Wells 2018; Robinson 2018). Indeed, such photography could be analysed in light of the argument that follows. However, it is the aim of this article to suggest that an appreciation of the ongoing movement of things can also be revealed in more "conventional" documentary imagery. As such, it begins by outlining the "mobilities" epistemology, drawing upon Sheller and Urry and the indicative approach of Doreen Massey, as well as highlights its relevance to the visual culture of Northeast England. It then confronts the temporal nature of the photograph and ways to recuperate the appreciation of time in photographic images, through analysis of Amber's projects and Azoulay's considerations of the production and reception of photographs. Azoulay's conceptual approach expands the political potential of the image and Mimi Sheller explicitly links mobility to issues of social justice. Thus, the paper concludes by advocating that viewers undertake a closer and more personal engagement with those photographs in order to appreciate how mobility has shaped the landscapes and inhabitants of the industrial and thus the post-industrial Northeast.

2. Mobilities

From the late 1990s, Sheller and Urry note an epistemological shift in Geography, Anthropology, and the Social Sciences towards a "mobility turn" or "new mobilities paradigm" (Sheller and Urry 2006, p. 208). They assert that these disciplines have traditionally overlooked interweaving systems of movement, to focus on other causal narratives in explaining social, political, and economic life (Urry 2007, pp. 6, 12). This is based in part on an Heideggerian "sedentary" notion of "dwelling" that treats stability, meaning, and place as normal, change as meaningless, and distance as abnormal (Sheller and Urry 2006, p. 208). Mobilities studies complicate these sedentary assumptions. This is

not to discount Heidegger's emphasis on "dwelling", which provides a useful aspect of mobility studies. After all, Heidegger emphasises the close relationship between space and subjectivity and network connections and the social. However, it is to focus "upon movement, mobility and contingent ordering, rather than stasis, structure, and social order"; to understand that spaces are comprised of objects and people intermittently in motion. The movement of objects impact upon a sense of memory, belonging, and dwelling, and the performance of social life is intertwined with the movement of things (Urry 2007, pp. 9, 31, 34). Indeed, Sheller asserts that, "*movement is primary as a foundational condition of being, space, subjects and power*" [italics in original] (Sheller 2018, p. 9).

Sheller and Urry point out that this is not to unquestioningly embrace postmodern proposals that all phenomena are free-flowing and all space is de-territorialised, as forwarded in Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2001) or in Bauman's focus on millennial digital life in *Liquid Modernity* (Bauman 2000, pp. 91–129)—an approach to the movement of things that Doreen Massey would characterise as "all space, no time" (Massey 2015, p. 148). Movement often slows or stalls and phenomena become concentrated in certain "sticky" spaces. Indeed, Massey's work fits the mobilities paradigm: working through the implications of increased global movement (in 2005's *For Space* (2015)), but concluding that globalisation produces "temporary stabilisations", "territories and borders", and "entities" (Massey 2006, p. 40). Therefore, a mobilities paradigm addresses the impact on places, people, things, and processes, in terms of the intersecting, comparative, and relative movement of phenomena (Sheller and Urry 2006, pp. 209–10). "Mobilities" examines flux, rather than flow (Urry 2007, p. 25). As Urry suggests, "All social relationships should be seen as involving diverse 'connections' that are more or less 'at a distance', more or less fast, more or less intense, and more or less involving physical movement. Social relations are never only fixed or located in place but are to very varying degrees constituted through 'circulating entities'" (Urry 2007, p. 46).

Sheller's recent work expands upon the study of mobility to a multi-scalar view, in which material and social phenomena are shaped by movement from the global to the intimately individual level (Sheller 2018). It is an appropriate framework to appreciate how geological, topological, political, economic, and human changes interact in the industrial and post-industrial spaces of the Northeast. As Massey points out, nature itself is not static; on a geological timeframe, landscapes themselves are on the move (Massey 2006, pp. 34–35). In Durham, geological processes resulted in coal seams closer to the surface in the west of the county and this has meant the movement of extraction and exhaustion has been continually eastwards. With industrialisation and the spread of Empire, the demands for a mobile resource demanded the movement of geological strata, from seam to surface to ship. This spurred the movement of people to industrial villages, at distinct times, reshaping spaces previously defined by rural rhythms of movement. New transport routes connected places and bypassed spaces. However, mobilities are relative and can produce stabilities; once installed in these industrial settlements, Durham miners have historically been socially and geographically immobile (Hollywood 2002). The continual movement of coal engendered the stabilising structure of the three-shift work pattern in mining villages and a highly regulated spatio-temporal movement of men from home to pit to social space. Movement thus moulds the geographical shape of space and the subjective experience of time. The movement of individuals through the space they inhabit and the movements of other phenomena within that space form subjectivities (Sheller 2018, p. 10).

Sheller also addresses mobility as a potential site of inequality and injustice: there are inevitable disparities between the benefits and costs accrued by individuals as a result of the movement of things. Urry highlights that objects and spaces have different "affordances" to enable action and movement; people have differing abilities to access or even to perceive those affordances (Urry 2007, pp. 39, 50–51). Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye suggest that individuals have differing "motility capital", which may intersect with other types of capital (Kaufmann et al. 2004). Sheller formalises these into the idea of "(im)mobility": the recognition that any study of mobility considers that individuals have relative agencies and abilities to be determined by the movement of things. In this way (im)mobility is politically impacted and intersectional: "shaped by racial, classed, gendered, and sexual processes that are also about the governance of (im)mobilities" (Sheller 2018, p. 8).

(Im)mobilities therefore encompasses the study of inter-relational interactions between movements, from the macro to micro scale. In terms of the socio-political changes affecting Durham in the Post-War period, one might consider the policies that have determined miners' housing (discussed in more detail below) and the political prioritisation of a free-market energy provision infrastructure separated from State, outlined by Ridley in 1978, and indicative of Hardt and Negri's frictionless, "smooth" world. These movements engender (im)mobilities on other scales. Indeed, the 1984–1985 Miners' Strike that Ridley's plan ultimately provoked revealed how rapid change both highlights and alters (im)mobilities. It highlighted Durham communities' relative immobility, but also increased strikers' contact with other geographically and culturally diverse groups. It gave politicised women access to spaces within their own villages, previously restricted by the gendered roles and shift patterns of industrial life. One could add the mobility of "flying picket" actions and how this was restricted by draconian strategies from paramilitary policing to benefits cuts; or how "mobile" alternative media such as *The Miners Campaign Tapes* highlighted these events. In fact, Amber facilitated photography projects by Keith Pattison and Isabela Jedrzejczyk that evidence the restricted mobility within village space during the Strike. Drawing upon Foucault Urry reminds us that the power of "governmentality" is exercised on "territories" and "subjects"; a main part of this has been the recording and control of the movement of populations (Urry 2007, p. 49). As collieries closed after the failed Strike, the end of the spatio-temporal three shift work pattern disrupted mobile social interactions, rendering place "thinner", as "daily and weekly time-space patterns... are desynchronised from historical communities and space" (Urry 2007, p. 15).

Thus, we may see how movement at the structural level ripples out to movements at the micro level. However, we should be wary of making assumptions of how this might be manifested. (Im)mobility occurs in the everyday, lived experience of space, and the impact of structural change can be unexpected, partial or resistant, as the photographs analysed below reveal.

As such, (im)mobility is an integral narrative aspect of the visual culture of the industrial Northeast, particularly in film and television that focuses on the human impact of de-industrialisation. It underpins Amber's trilogy of films produced around Easington from 1997 to 2005. *The Scar's* narrative interweaves the mobility of infrastructure (in this case the abrupt removal of colliery capital) with the relative movement and stasis of the members of one ex-mining family. The plot revolves around a tense romance between a woman mobilised, both politically and physically by the Strike support movement, where an itinerant mine manager is symbolic of the neoliberal free-flowing economy. The following film, *Like Father* (2001) links character, narrative, and space in the intergenerational relationship between three male members of one family. While one is confined to a limited space, his son is forced into a cycle of sporadic movement and stasis through precarious self-employment, while the grandson floats in an unwelcome spatial freedom that impacts upon his mental health. This is played out against another contrast of (im)mobility as the Grandfather's allotment is unceremoniously destroyed as new capital sweeps in to convert the de-industrialised space into a tourist "heritage coast". In the third film, *Shooting Magpies*, the post-industrial space, in which the mobility of individuals has been further curtailed by the deterioration of housing, education and transport infrastructure, has been colonised by drugs. In a narrative aside the actor Barry Gough explicitly states that heroin has swept into the void left by industry. Here, we have a different aspect of mobility that picks up a narrative winding through much of Amber's filmic work in Co. Durham: that the industrial spaces of regulated movement (and thus behaviour) are now being colonised by the "subversive mobilities" (Sheller 2018, p. 19) of delinquency or the more privileged mobilities of tourism.

Continuing such themes, BBC television's series *The Mighty Redcar* (2018) is centred upon a town historically shaped by fishing, the railway, the resulting Victorian tourist boom, and then the movement of industrial steel-making infrastructure along the River Tees. The forces of global trade prompted the privatisation of British Steel and subsequent investment of capital from the Netherlands and then Thailand. This flow stopped in 2015 and the resulting loss of the town's primary industry saw the repetition of a familiar narrative: opportunities are now elsewhere—movement or stagnation. While narrator Madison Cooper's voiceover eschews melancholia, each

individual story in the series is a study of (im)mobility set within a landscape shaped by the movement of capital (BBC 2018).

The concept of (im)mobility is clear in these narratives of people impacted by the after-effects of de-industrialisation. The impact of the movement of things and people can also be unpicked in landscape photographs of the Northeast, even before the industrial conflict of 1984–1985. One of the clearest examples is in the series of Durham landscapes by John Davies, commissioned by Amber in 1983. The *Durham Coalfield* series documented the remaining sites of coal excavation in the county, from small-scale open-cast and drift-mining operations to the thirteen remaining deep shaft collieries.

Davies's panoramic landscapes, taken from a characteristically high viewpoint aimed to "develop an understanding of landscape that wouldn't isolate individuals and details, but that would try to capture all the interactions that are taking place" (Davies cited in Gee 2010, p. 330). These interactions are between industrial infrastructure, the routes of movement around those structures, the shape of lived space, and the organising systems of the rural landscape, and show "landscapes as specific process-based outcomes" (Davies cited in Gee 2010, p. 330). Yet this is not to be technologically deterministic and instead suggest an inevitability in the structure of lived space. Miners' allotments feature prominently; both as an officially organised provision of leisure space, and as an ongoing process of serendipitous human modification. Heavy industrial infrastructure is accompanied by disorganised marks on the topography of the landscape, some deep, some fading, some overlaid. State-of-the-art mining structures are flanked by Heath Robinson shacks, hastily enclosed pens for animals, or piles of detritus that may have some intended future use.

We can see the organised or organic transport routes that have developed around settlements: in *Church Kelloe*, the everyday ergonomics of a diagonal worn path across a field; in *Westoe Colliery*, a roundabout. Housing may be densely packed or intermittent. The regulated back-to-back terraces of *Easington Colliery* contrast with the ribbon of semis and bungalows in *New Herrington*. One might note the lack of cars on the terraced streets or colliery car parks (even for 1983) or consider how the inter-war semi was built to accommodate increased car ownership (mobility) and the desire for residential gardens (the privatisation of space). These photographs reveal the overlaid processes that have shaped the social character of space: Tim Ingold's "taskscape" (Ingold 1993, p. 152; Urry 2007, p. 32). However, though Davies's images show the intricacies of human shaping of the landscape, we should not focus only on Heideggerian interpretations of dwelling in place. These spaces have been and clearly still are determined by movements beyond the human scale; the human is not necessarily prioritised in the photographs. They take a neutral, non-romantic approach. While the small-scale winding gear in *Private Coal Mine Sacriston*, (Figure 1) is evocative, it occupies the same visual plane as the scrubby trees. The strips of terraced housing in the background extend the diagonals and horizontals of the wilder, natural topography. While Davies's photographs are meticulously visually organised (Glancey 2006, p. 6), this does romanticise or tame the industrial landscape.



Figure 1. John Davies, *Private Coal Mine Sacriston, Co. Durham*, 1983. © John Davies 1983. Reproduced with kind permission of John Davies and Amber/Side.¹

This neutral approach offers an equality of factualness, interactions, and features. This is evident in individual images and as we view the interactions across the larger space of Co. Durham, in the series as a whole. Each landscape and the collected series is a palimpsest of the intersecting movement of things, as well as how that has shaped and been shaped by the human experience of lived space: some fast: some slow–(im)mobilities.

However, we come up against an issue hovering around all these depictions of Northeast industrial life. In the moving image, there is a vivid portrayal of past and present (im)mobilities, but one is left with an understandable, unresolved sense of communities on the precipice of the unknown. The sense of time, of lived history experienced through embodied movement in place, is rich up to this point in time, but truncated or suspended afterwards. This is even more acute in the photograph. Narrative trajectory in film can at least offer possibilities or even inevitabilities; the static image largely cannot.² As the temporal flow is arrested with the close of the shutter, how can we appreciate that mobility is ongoing? How do we see things moving beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of the photograph? As Jonathan Glancey says in the catalogue of Davies’s 2006 retrospective, *The British Landscape*, the photographs “allow us to see the process of change in landscapes that we like to imagine have stayed the same for generations”. He also suggests they “put the brakes on this unholy roller-coaster” (Glancey 2006, pp. 5–6).

3. Photographic Time

Considering the temporality of the photograph inevitably brings us back to Barthes’ observation that the viewer of the photograph is faced with the unsettling realisation that though the photograph offers the realistic depiction of something as it exists as the shutter closes, that scene no longer exists (at least in the pictured form). This dual state of “this is/this no longer is” engenders his “punctum of time” (Barthes [1980] 2000, pp. 94–7). This association of photographic image with the frozen moment

¹ The Durham Coalfield series can be viewed at the Amber/Side Gallery website at: <https://www.amber-online.com/collection/durham-coalfield/>.

² I say “largely” as, when looking at frozen photographic moments such as Robert Capa’s *Death of a Loyalist Militiaman* (1936), it is difficult *not* to imagine the soldier’s body falling to the floor after receiving the fatal shot. The narrative here is inevitable. Indeed, David Company draws links between this image and the cinematic freeze frame on the basis of narrative inevitability (Company 2008, pp. 95–96).

of the now dead is also reflected in the photographic critique of Sontag, Metz, and Batchen (see Van Gelder and Westgeest 2011, pp. 106–7).

Van Gelder and Westgeest adapt Barthes' duality in some contemporary photography to an impulse of "this is/this will be gone" (Van Gelder and Westgeest 2011, p. 66), and this may be relevant to *Durham Coalfield*. The series was commissioned by Amber with an ethos of "salvage documentary" (Newbury 2002, p. 114): the recording of industrial life as it disappeared, in light of the wave of previous colliery closures and the uncertainty engendered by the Ridley Report. This sense of impending disappearance is echoed in the exhibition text from the 1984 exhibition at Side Gallery. Mirroring Chaplin's words, it states that "coal is an extractive industry. From the moment they start, they're looking forward to closure". It goes on to document the successive colliery closures (with miners' testimonies) of a Durham coalfield "slowly collapsing west to east", leaving mining activity as a ribbon along the coast, digging as far as it dares under the North Sea (Rigby 1987). Again, there is a sense of rich, historic movement, that has shaped human lives, ultimately coming up against a physical border, and temporal void.

In *For Space*, Massey asks, "[W]hat might it mean to...question that habit of thinking about space as a surface? If, instead, we conceive of a meeting-up of histories, what happens to our implicit imagination of time and space?" (Massey 2015, p. 4). In some ways we can see both impulses at play in this text. We can certainly see a rich interplay of official, individual, and spatial histories. There is also an abiding feeling of Durham as "a surface" across which mining moves inexorably. The movement is unidirectional and we are left to ponder what has happened to those former colliery villages; surely, they continue to experience intricate (im)mobilities.

The danger is that movement and time fall prey to stasis and nostalgia: that "we are looking at a time and place caught 'in-between'" (Crang 2012, p. 61). While the photographs are both a result of, and could serve to dynamise political protest against Thatcherite industrial policy, they may also play into a Left politics that romanticises an industrial past, and inadvertently emphasises its pastness (Holt 2010, p. 324; Wells 2012, p. 35). The inevitable temporal closure of the photographic moment reflects a cultural closure of industrial life.

However, there are ways to recuperate the flow of time (and a suggestion of the movements of things) through and beyond these photographs. David Company points out that, as documentary photography became subservient to the moving image as the vehicle for communicating events, it became "less about the 'hot' decisiveness of the shutter and more about the 'cold' stoicism of the lens" (Company 2008, p. 44). Further, 35 mm images became overtaken by large format photographs, that capture the accumulation of information, or layers of past-ness over time, "more akin to monuments than moments" (Company 2008, p. 44). This would seem applicable to Davies's large-scale, minutely detailed photographs. The layered evidence of the movements of the past and the flow of time builds up a temporal momentum. This is aided by the historical detail provided about each landscape in Davies's characteristically lengthy exhibition captions (Gee 2010, p. 332). This flow of time then can be assumed to carry on beyond the close of the shutter. Even if the future is unknown, a future is suggested. After all, these images were commissioned and taken with an explicit sense that the future would be different from the captured present, and that the monumental structures pictured are not static, but have been, and would continue to be, mobile.

Perhaps Peter Wollen's response to Barthes might help here. For Wollen, the sense of time provoked by the static image does not have to oscillate between Barthes' binary "this exists/this is now gone"; it rather depends on the photograph. Barthes' example is Alexander Gardner's 1865 image of Lewis Payne before his execution. It is an image saturated with a melancholic atmosphere of death, and predicts a finalising, momentary event (Barthes [1980] 2000, pp. 94–97). Wollen suggests that by examining the signifying subtext of what is offered by the photograph and aligning it to the linguistic "tense" of the past, we can recognise that some photographs certainly aim to convey "events", but others "processes", and some "states" (or combinations thereof) (Wollen 1984, pp. 76–

9).³ Davies's photographs, with their palimpsests of accumulated features and historical captions, suggest "processes"; in their rendering of the social shape of places defined by industry, "states". We must not forget Sontag's suggestion that the photograph can be kept, reviewed, and contemplated (Sontag 1979, pp. 17–18, 23); a contemplation that can imbue the static image with temporal qualities and enrich this appreciation of "process" and "state".

Indeed, in Davies's series, perhaps the photograph that seems most frozen in time is the one taken from an uncharacteristically low angle and that directly focuses on a moving object (Figure 2). While reminiscent of Turner's *Rain, Steam, and Speed*, and directly showing the movement of industry, the train bearing down on the viewer, and dominating the viewer's experience of *Seaham* does seem to arrest time into a momentary "event". While the viewer might try to decode the serendipitously constructed allotment structures to the left, the eye is drawn by strong diagonal lines to the train at the photograph's focal point. The viewer is continually hastened away from these finer details; appreciation of "process" and "state" become overpowered by "event".⁴



Figure 2. John Davies, *Coal Train, Dawdon Colliery, Seaham*, 1983. © John Davies 1983. Reproduced with kind permission of John Davies and Amber/Side.⁵

4. Reviewing

An appreciation of the movement of things (and time) is also recuperated by our multiple spatio-temporal positions as viewers. The photograph is itself mobile: exhibited, reproduced, revisited, reframed, and used in new contexts. It moves through space and time, with a past, present and future, and takes our imagination with it (Urry 2007, p. 47). As Estelle Jussim points out, audiences can only view and image in the "now" of that specific viewing situation, informed by their understanding of the world at that time (Jussim 1989, pp. 49–50). Photographs from *Durham Coalfield* were exhibited

³ Wollen illustrates with the past tense of the verb "to know": "knowing" in the past is not an "event", as knowledge does not cease to exist at a certain point—it is a "state". He also uses Capa's *Loyalist Militiaman* as an example, noting that although it would appear to typify an "event", it has sometimes merely been captioned as *Spain 1936*, more suggestive of a "state".

⁴ However, Estelle Jussim might suggest that the formal construction of the image suspends movement and renders the train symbolic and beyond time. While she frames this as temporally extending the "event" of the photograph, she does imply a similar relationship between image and world as Wollen's "state" (see Jussim 1989, pp. 54–55).

⁵ Note that this photograph is titled *Dawdon* in the Amber collection. Dawdon Colliery was one of three collieries within the wider settlement of Seaham (Seaham, Dawdon and Vane Tempest).

extensively around Durham during the Miners' Strike (Amber Film and Photography Collective 2019, n.p.), and re-exhibited at Newcastle's Side Gallery in 1987. While the pictured landscapes may not have altered much in the intervening time, the perception of the future, time and movement for many viewers may well have done.

They certainly had when Davies vividly recontextualised the 1983 landscapes by re-photographing these scenes from the same position in 2003. These photographs from 1983 and 2003 were paired and exhibited as *Signs of Coal* at Side Gallery in 2004, with captions updated with the dates and details of the pictured colliery's closure. An example is the frequently reproduced pairing of *Easington Colliery* and *Site of Easington Colliery*. The 1983 scene, of the colliery pithead, buildings and car park, is almost completely covered with brick, metal or tarmac. In the 2003 scene, all that remains of this landscape dominated by the man-made, is the corner of a colliery terrace, the odd unidentifiable structure, and a small square of fenced-off concrete covering the former mine shaft. While it is this insignificant feature that provides the visual and conceptual focal point, other features emerge: areas of rough grass, more developed agricultural areas, low bushes and trees that have replaced the row of colliery buildings, and a multitude of paths and tracks that have spread organically from the daily habits of residents.

This pairing was included in *The British Landscape* retrospective, with the caption:

After Easington Colliery closed in 1993, the pit and buildings were demolished, leaving a coastline blackened with coal waste. The 'Turning the Tide' scheme was launched in 1994 to restore the grassland meadows, woods and beaches along the coast. Transformed in under ten years, the coastline was designated Durham's 'Heritage Coast' in 2001. (Davies 2006, p. 110).

While this factual account focuses on the processes of movement over the previous decade, the photographs do not simply render two static points in time. There is a conversation between them, which vividly shows the movement of things and ongoing human actions in that changed space. This conversation also extends the idea of time backwards—the accumulated processes of “blackening”—and forwards: the ongoing and rural (and perhaps symbolically timeless) processes of re-wilding.

Other pairings show the sublime industrial scene of Seaham Colliery and its railway sidings transformed into light industrial units with a half empty car park, or the urban colliery of Monkwearmouth, with its multiple railway lines and dockside cranes transformed into clean, modern riverside developments and Sunderland AFC's Stadium of Light. There is a temporal conversation between the pragmatic movement of industrial resources, and the new, speculative movements of tourism, leisure and start-up or property development capital, mobilised by the favourable business rates of development initiatives.

The series was commissioned as part of a number of projects during Amber's re-engagement with the Durham Coalfield communities, from the mid-1990s onwards. These included the aforementioned feature films, and a number of photographic commissions under the name *Coalfield Stories*. Two of these projects also vividly convey (im)mobilities through landscape, but on rather different scales from Davies's photographs.

Farewell Squalor, by Sally-Ann Norman, documents the architectural heritage of miners' housing in Co. Durham. The project is named after a promotional pamphlet for Peterlee new town, by C.W. Clarke in 1946. Images of the town are contrasted with photographs of the aforementioned demolition of colliery terraces in neighbouring areas; the surrounding dilapidated terraced housing that still includes residents. There is more aesthetic variation between photographs than in Davies's series and while they certainly do not romanticise industrial life, there are invocations of cultural narratives of domesticity and dwelling. We can discern how lived space is experienced in two very different systems of habitation: one manicured and highly organised; the other transient, disorderly, and ultimately one suspects, untenable.

Housing provision is the mobilisation (or not) of resources and impacts on the relative movement of populations. Here, scales and systems of (im)mobility intersect and the wider frameworks are the corporate, then (after the 1947 Nationalisation of the industry) governmental

expectations of what the collier's family required, what they were presumed to do with social time and income, and what was required from them as a mobile labour force. Peterlee, after all, has no pit of its own.

The 2003 Side Gallery exhibition text highlights these official attitudes and cultural narratives and their effects on movement and lived space: Clarke's initial proposal that "a full social, cultural, and educational life cannot be achieved with the village as a unit" (Clarke 1946 cited in Norman and Rigby 2003, n.p.); the explicit aim that Peterlee would become a "sticky" hub to stem post-war migration from the area; Bernard Lubetkin's rejected plan for a high-rise Modernist settlement (impractical due to mining subsidence and local distaste); its replacement by Victor Pasmore's design of Mediterranean flat roofs, winding road system, and open space (Figure 3). In contrast was the designation of some mining villages as "Category D" settlements—marked for demolition or allowed to wither through withdrawal of investment.



Figure 3. Sally Ann Norman, from *Farewell Squalor*, 2003. © Sally-Ann Norman, reproduced with kind permission of Sally-Ann Norman Photography.⁶

Again, we must be wary of assuming that movements at the macro level inevitably result in movements at the level of the everyday. The text also highlights that although Peterlee was requested by delegates of the area's mine-workers, uptake of these residences was low in the 1950s and '60s due to comparatively high rents, that many people have subsequently preferred to stay in ex-colliery villages due to strong social and cultural ties, but that those villages now experience the buying up of property by private landlords and the influx of housing association "problem tenants". As Urry suggests, some systems enabling mobility may be easily replaced or overlaid; some may be powerfully embedded (Urry 2007, p. 53). Looking at Norman's photographs and text through the lens of (im)mobilities enables a thicker description of the interactions between the intricacies of households, the movement of corporate, state and private capital, and political, social, and cultural attitudes.

In Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's *Coal Coast*, this larger framework of state and corporate decisions hovers in the background of a more intimate study of the movement of things in the landscape. In these photographs the detritus and structural remnants of mining are examined in decay; recording

⁶ The *Farewell Squalor* series can be viewed at the Amber/Side Gallery website at: <https://www.amber-online.com/collection/farewell-squalor/>.

in detailed colour, the ongoing chemical and mechanical processes that are transforming them on a molecular level. Detailed captions list the former function of the man-made object, the geological and industrial minerals present, and chemical processes occurring (see Figure 4). We have an interaction of human and material, that reminds us of the agency of things: “vibrant matter” in Jane Bennett’s terms (Bennett 2010). As both Bennett and Sheller (2018) highlight, environmental pollution is both a political issue, and an issue of movement: capital may move; toxicity stays. These landscapes are also linked to memory and place. Konttinen began the series during the research process for *Like Father* and information about these structures, objects and processes was slowly accumulated through conversations with ex-miners who work the allotments along the re-designated Heritage Coast (Konttinen 2003, n.p.). The series highlights that (im)mobilities intersect in this landscape, involving the processes of “dwelling”, the movements of tourism, industrial capital, and the transformation of things, on temporal scales interweaving the geological, industrial, chemical, and human. It also reminds us that landscapes themselves are always on the move; that the notion of a balanced and harmonious nature is a cultural construct (Massey 2006, p. 39). These photographs appear to be asking, “With all these movements, fragments, histories, and ideas: what *is* the Coal Coast?” As Massey suggests, notions of place are only ever temporary stabilisations, in which certain ideas coalesce at certain times. Why they do so, should always be a political question (Massey 2006, p. 39).



Figure 4. Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Hawthorn Hive, afternoon 31 May 2000. Pool of water on a raised plateau of pit waste; piece of flexipipe; boulders coloured with iron oxides (2000), from *The Coal Coast* series. ©Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, courtesy Amber/L Parker Stephenson Photographs.

Konttinen’s photographs were exhibited alongside Davies’s *Signs of Coal*, and Simon Norfolk’s *Goaf* (another *Coalfield Stories* commission) at Photofusion, London in 2005–2006. Indeed, multiple combinations of Amber’s commissioned and group-produced photography and film have been exhibited together, often with imagery spanning two decades, and sometimes as starting points for new projects. Various intersecting vectors of (im)mobility can therefore be constructed, through the movement of things within landscapes, how that stems from and affects human activities, and how the landscape is altered, experienced and contextualised as lived space. There is also an undeniable political materialism and humanism underpinning these projects, which emphasises resilience, but also that industrial bodies have seldom had power over the forces that determine this lived space. Within this context, it is even more appropriate to see that indeed, in these Northern landscapes, “movement is primary as a foundational condition of being, space, subjects and power” (Sheller 2018, p. 9).

Here we may be offered another way to recuperate the flow of time through the photograph. As Ulrich Baer points out, contemporary photography critique takes a historicist approach. The experience of making and viewing photographs is presumed to be relativist and the situation of the photographer and the spectator analysed in terms of prevailing material context, ideology, and cultural narratives. This tends to shape time into a Heraclitean metaphorical perspective: one is not dipping the same foot into the same river, but it is the same flow, in the same direction. Therefore,

while the image presents a static moment in time, we inevitably position it into a historical flow of time, in relation to changing ideologies and material circumstances (Baer 2005, pp. 1–4).⁷

5. The Event of the Photograph

We may be able to wrap these considerations—the historical and ideological positions of the photograph-maker; what the image shows, and how it reflects those positions; and the historical and ideological position of the image’s multiple viewers—into one expansive concept: Ariella Azoulay’s “event of the photograph”.

Azoulay builds upon the Barthes’ premise that the photograph provides evidence that a certain encounter occurred, but always under the stipulation that it may not have occurred as pictured and that encounter did not only include what was pictured. Various forces and powers may not be visible in the image itself but may have manipulated its production. The photograph is therefore evidence of the social relationship that made that image possible, should we choose to investigate it as such (Azoulay 2008, pp. 94, 127). Furthermore, the photograph will have a life and purpose beyond this social situation that also involves an (often) unknown viewer. This viewer may interpret and use that image in unpredictable ways, beyond the intentions of the subject and photographer (Azoulay 2008, p. 129; Azoulay 2015, p. 78).

In this expanded view, the image is not an object representing a “photographed event” that has ended, presented to a distanced observer. Instead it is one representation of an encounter—a social relationship with complex roots, which is not finished but ongoing, and can be reignited by the next encounter with the photograph (Azoulay 2008, pp. 163–168; Azoulay 2015, pp. 25–27). Even if a power intervenes to interrupt this encounter, for instance through censorship or destruction of the image, this too is part of the “event of photography” of that image (Azoulay 2015, p. 21).

6. Mobilities, Inequality, and the Spectator

Azoulay’s concern is with the unequal states and experiences of citizenship, and how this is reflected in photographs of occupied Palestine. Her concept of the “civil contract of photography” proposes a conceptual contract between photographer, photographed subject and viewer. Here, the subject has offered themselves to the photographer with faith in the power of the photograph as a tool of advocacy. While looking at the photograph, the viewer must accept responsibility to contemplate the possible imbalance of citizenship between themselves, photographer, and subject (Azoulay 2008, pp. 85–135).

This paper proposes that a similar level of contemplation should be given to the consideration of (im)mobility when viewing the photographs of the de-industrialised landscapes of Northeast England. This is not to set up a parallel proposal, exploiting the momentum of Azoulay’s concept, nor to directly equate unequal mobility to the unequal experience of citizenship. However, associations are there; this linkage could be a productive tool to examine imagery that focuses on the marginalisation of human subjects due to political and economic change. Urry speculatively links unequal experiences of citizenship to the inequalities of mobility, access to services, and inclusion/exclusion emerging in the changing nation state under neoliberalism (Urry 2007, pp. 185–93). Similarly, Sheller’s recent work examines bodily experience within space in light of the current crises of migration, accelerated urbanisation, and climate change. (Im)mobilities are thus read through inequality, social justice, and citizenship (Sheller 2018).

This paper does not claim that differing experiences of citizenship can be read through Northern landscape photographs. However, Azoulay does diligently show how unequal citizenship can be read through photographs of the lived space, whether that includes human subjects or not. Landscape photographs can, therefore, activate the “civil contract” (Azoulay 2015, pp. 125–195). This paper suggests that photographs predominantly capture the Northeast landscape as shaped by the

⁷ Baer also relates certain photographs to a Democritean conception of time, an approach that is also possible to analyse in terms of the landscapes of the Northeast, but cannot be explored here (Baer 2005, pp. 4–8).

(im)mobility of people and things. Therefore, it advocates that the viewer exercises a similar “contractual” responsibility of looking:

- that the viewer recognises that these landscapes can be viewed as spaces of differing (im)mobilities, both in regard to people and things;
- that they acknowledge their own comparative (im)mobility, and that of the photographer, in relation to those (im)mobilities captured in the photograph;
- that these (im)mobilities continue to shape spaces and subjectivities, beyond the point at which the camera shutter closed;
- that the photograph is also mobile and these (im)mobilities may be read in different ways by different (im)mobile viewing subjects, in an ongoing process.

This approach may overcome the temptation to regard these landscape photographs with an assumption of past-ness. It may serve to combat the inherent tendency to exoticise disorderly industrial landscapes, in a British culture that so vividly links the rural space with dominant middle-class narratives of national identity (Williams 1973; Darby 2000). It may also add depth to the Foucauldian debates around vision, knowledge and power that have been fundamental to British documentary practice since the 1980s (Green 1984, pp. 121–131; Tagg 1988).

While not explicitly stated, these Foucauldian approaches are foundational to both Azoulay’s “civil contract” and Amber’s community practice, which emphasises long relationships and self-representation.⁸ This practice also includes the exhibition of Amber’s photographs and films within the community spaces of Co. Durham, before, alongside, or after their display in distant, specialised gallery spaces. For example, Konttinen’s *Coal Coast* photographs were exhibited at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in 2003 and Easington Colliery Social Welfare Hall in 2004. This process acknowledges that the audiences in these different sites of exhibition have different (im)mobilities (in terms of access, but perhaps other types of capital), and will respond to the images based, in part, on that (im)mobility.

However, under this contractual arrangement, we should not make assumptions about what those responses might be. Urry suggests that the movement of objects, including photographs, has social impact in the active development and performance of memory of places and people (Urry 2007, p. 41, see also Mellor and Stephenson 2005). However, constituencies change and this “development” is not a uniform “preservation”. One might note the comments of one redundant Easington miner in 1999: “The day the pit shut they should’ve bull-dozed every colliery house and then it would have been back to how it was originally, green fields and that would’ve been better for the whole place” (Strangleman 2001, p. 255). Or the very differing engagements with and responses to photographs of Westoe Colliery; its dismantling, exhibited by miners, artists, young students, and health workers in David Byrne and Aiden Doyle’s photo-elicitation focus groups in 2004, despite all hailing from the locality (Byrne and Doyle 2004, pp. 166–177).

These respondents demonstrate aspects of “moving on” from the industrial past and its representation in photographs. They underscore that this expanded relationship between photograph, subject, and viewer is not static, but ongoing, continuously redefined by the movement of things, people and the viewers themselves. In terms of (im)mobility these photographs are not purely informational, but continually relational.

7. Conclusions

In 2019 (im)mobility is often an explicit part of the everyday experience of life. Economic migration, HS2, a changing high street, frictionless global finance, and the “postcode lottery” of welfare services are all commonly understood to be related to the movement of people and things. Indeed, as Brexit rhetoric demonstrates, a focus on movement can overshadow other structural causes underpinning social issues. The Nissan factory, situated in Washington to make use of a

⁸ Amber’s conceptual foundation for community practice is R.D. Collingwood’s *Principles of Art* (1938) (cited in Amber Film and Photography Collective 2015, p. 5).

regional surplus of industrial workers in 1984 and prominent in the employment ambitions of many Durham ex-miners (Strangleman 2001) now faces an uncertain future due to Brexit. Meanwhile, across the southern border of Co. Durham, the residents of Redcar face the sharp end of a familiar process of de-industrialisation, while local MP Anna Turley defies 66% of her electorate to highlight the further damage leaving the European Union could do to Redcar's remaining economy (Helm and Tapper 2018).

As Sheller and Urry suggest, at times capital and people become concentrated in places, movement slows or appears to follow established pathways (Sheller and Urry 2006, pp. 209–10). At others, the systems governing (im)mobility are quickly overwritten (Urry 2007, p. 53) and accepted temporal vectors can accelerate and take shocking turns. Like attributing “industrial” and “post-industrial” to certain eras and structural arrangements, it is tempting to see stasis and movement as fundamentally different conditions. Through an (im)mobilities approach, we might appreciate them as aspects of a continuum—or rather as comparative and relative states in many different intersecting flows. Massey proposes that space is the product of interrelations and always under construction (Massey cited in Sheller 2018, p. 11); that landscapes themselves can be seen as “events”, temporary stabilisations of phenomena and ideas in a certain place (Massey 2006, p. 40). These photographs of Northeast landscapes (and their accompanying and surrounding texts) show that they have never been still. Heavy industrial structures, and chemicals at a molecular level have always been on the move; as have people, shaping and being shaped by the changing space.

The ideas informing our perception of these landscapes have also, actually, never been still, and the photographs discussed here do not ask the viewer to accept a pre-formed message but unpick these changes. While it is essential to understand how the photograph is historically situated, this act of contemplation can position the viewer in relation to what is shown, within that continuum of change. They may then appreciate how (im)mobility intersects with and underpins other narratives that have framed Northeast, and wider industrial life: class, gender, and national and regional identity. By viewing photographs through the lens of (im)mobilities we can avoid accepting them as captured moments of the past, and appreciate thicker interactions of movement, space and other socio-economic structures, on multiple scales—in which the viewer is also immersed. As such, we can appreciate their ongoing political relevance and potential.

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