

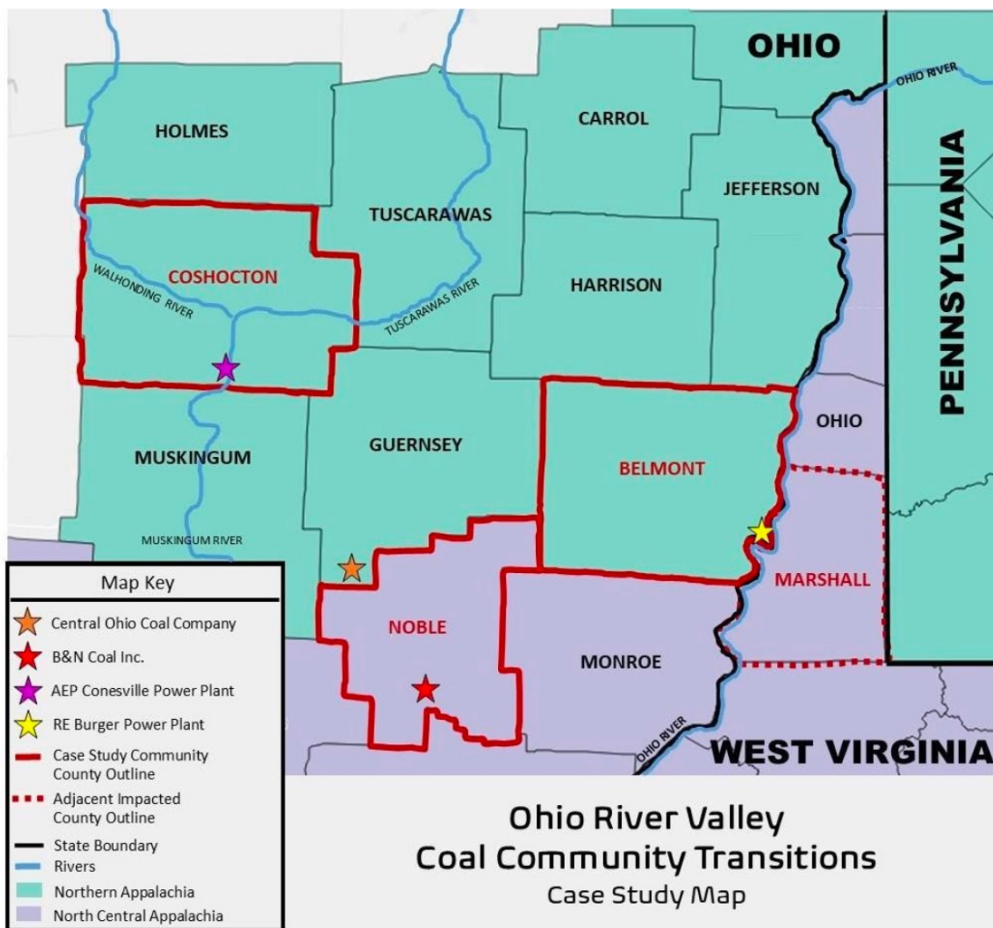
SOLASTALGIC ENERGYSCAPES:

Industrial Ghosts

of the

OHIO RIVER VALLEY

Kat Finneran



Case Study County	County Foci	Coal Facility	Operation Timeline
Noble	Caldwell	Central Ohio Coal Company	1946 - 2001
		B&N Coal Inc.	1962 - Present
Belmont Marshall	Shadyside Moundsville	RE Burger Power Plant	1944 - 2011
Coshocton	Conesville Coshocton	AEP Conesville Power Plant	1957 - 2020

Cover Art:
Text and collage by Kat Finneran
Photo of power plant by Will Sharp
Background print art by Dr. Becky Mansfield

Solastalgia

A means to better understand the existential psychological impact of the increasing occurrence of environmental change. Solastalgia mediates the relationship between ecosystem health, human health and control, resulting in a constriction of possibilities and quiescence to the logic of capitalism. It is the lived experience of a physical desolation of place, or simply, that ***feeling of homesickness one gets when they are still at home.***¹

When Glenn Albrecht coined the term Solastalgia he argued that we need new words for a new world. As old languages meet the collapse of our climate, we are so often unable to find the right ones to describe what lies around us and within us.¹ Time and place become strangers as history repeats and folds in on itself in real time, resulting in a normalization of crisis that has dulled the senses in response to acute stressors like natural disasters. Collapse, it seems, is neither behind us nor ahead of us. Rather it is always-already here, persistently haunting us with both real and alternative histories. Yet, Western culture runs on forgetting. We are locked out of our memories by an epistemology of energy that has ensnared our sense of self within the idealization of work and production efficiency. There is no time to witness, to reflect or to grieve our losses for there is still so much work to do and we are always-already behind.

Through this restless hyper-separation, environmental externalization and illusions of safety and boundaries, we have long been able to keep our ghosts and the grief they channel buried deep. However, what happens when we run out of room in the soil to bury the bodies, or when soil erosion, advanced by climate change, begins releasing ghosts, old and new? How much longer will the gospel of labor be able to prevent us from noticing the evidence of accumulated taking, the consequences of it? There are many places on this Earth that have long been constructed as sites of acceptance for a steady stream of industries of last resort. Places where the contradictions of transnational extractive capitalism have been pushed to a breaking point. Places brimming with industrial ghosts. Places like the Ohio River Valley.

Stretching from western Pennsylvania to southern Illinois, the political ecology of the Ohio River is about as well known for its richness of cultural and natural resources as it is for the extraction and destruction of them. An old marriage between the Rust Belt and Appalachia, it is a landscape that has long been defined by intensification. A spectrum of industries from chemical, electric power, coke, steel iron and more have flocked to the river basin to take advantage of the commercial opportunities available through proximity to such a colossal, combined source of energy and transportation. Today, the valley still acts as this bridge between mineral superpowers, even though the players and game continue to change. The discovery of the Marcellus and Utica shale formations has introduced unprecedented levels of hydraulic fracturing. This has caused a boom in natural gas and petrochemical production which has effectively hammered the final nail in the coffin of coal production in the region.

While this may be one of the last shifts away from coal, it is certainly not the first. The industry has been experiencing a slow and steady death in the region for decades. Mines have closed from exhaustion, jobs have been lost to automation and longwall mining, and contracts have moved out west where coal is not nearly as sulfuric. More recently, a wave of closures have come in the form of the retirement of coal fired power plants and subsequently the transportation sector that connected them to the mines. These plants are some of the last remaining vestiges of the coal industry and their closures will prove fatal to a way of life that has been, for better or worse, a core ingredient in the fossil fueled glue that held countless communities together for over two centuries.

In the valley, children are leaving and not coming back, and the population is some of the oldest in the country. Schools, hospitals, and a whole web of social service safety nets are shutting down. Simultaneously, multiple crises of care continue to unfold in the form of declining youth mental health as well as a massive wave of deaths of despair and industry related disablement. Moreover, with an older population that is increasingly facing rates of respiratory illness that are much higher than the national average, the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly devastating. A time bomb of chemical exposure also haunts the human and non-human bodies of the entire regional watershed. The river is full of DuPont PFOAs, the streams are laden with acid mine runoff, the liners on coal ash ponds are unstable, and the topsoil is littered with mercury, lead and more from coal plant emissions. The fracking boom continues to inch towards a major disruption of Ohio's water resources and the petrochemical and plastics industry is actively regenerating, yet again, the false promise of jobs and economic development.

There is a sense of terminality in the region that persists. One that is being fought by economic developers with deep-rooted grand delusions of liberatory industries coming in to rescue the economy at the expense of the ecosystem. It is also being fought by the environmental left with a different type of toxicity via an at times cruel sense of optimism that seeks to save, heal, cure and protect the valley that we love, but at any cost.⁶ Both sets of rhetoric, however conflicting at the outset, often just end up reinforcing neo-extractive development strategies. At one end you have developers missing the forest for the trees and at the other you have environmentalists missing the trees for the forest. At all ends of the conversation though there is a refusal to see death, to actually sit with it, and a belief that anything short of rescue is a fundamental failure. With that then, how can we really deal with those important questions around vulnerability, risk and fragility when terminality tends to obfuscate impulses to act, to cure, to save?⁶

Death does not always imply an end to life, a knowledge that I believe boom and bust communities have embedded in their bones. The mines have been closing for centuries, the schools have been closing for decades, and the hearths are filled with family photos that are missing grandfathers, uncles and fathers lost to coal in one way or another. Today it is the power plants that are retiring, tomorrow it is the gas wells going dry, but still the souls of these communities linger like ghosts with unfinished business in the uncanny, strip-mined foothills of the Ohio River Valley. Communities whose relationship to collective agency has always-already been predicated precisely on both this shared sense of terminality and the simultaneous refusal to see it as a condition of futurelessness.⁶ This too is a quality of the culture of coal. It's not just a job it's a way of limbo between nostalgia and anticipation that still manages to function as a both a solastalgic energyscape and a place of possibility and temporary relieve amidst collapse.

“Poems of lamentation allow the melancholic loss that never truly disappears to be given voice. Like a slow solemn musical refrain played again and again that as we work for change our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting.”

*bell hooks, Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place*⁵

My hope for this zine, was to curate a first-hand reflection of the liminal and ghostly character of the ongoing transition away from coal that I had witnessed throughout my time interviewing community members in the valley starting at the height of the pandemic in 2020. What you'll find in the following pages of this work consists largely of quotes derived from those conversations. Interviews were conducted in Noble County over the 2001 closure of Central Ohio Coal (a surface mining operation), in Belmont County over the 2008 closure of the R.E. Burger Power Plant, in Coshocton County amidst the ongoing closure of the AEP Conesville Power Plant and then finally in the Little Cities of Black Diamonds, a pre-electrification coal micro-region in southern Perry County that transitioned away from coal much earlier than the rest of Appalachian Ohio. Many of the folks talked to were miners and plant workers. Some are social workers and county political leaders. There are administrators to schools that have now been closed and there are daughters of coal miners that have since passed. There are economic developers, historians, gossips, folklorists, and 'movers and shakers.' Nevertheless, while the people attached to these quotes possessed a diversity of identities and opinions on coal and the transition away from it, there was always a common thread of grief and unknowability that was woven throughout every conversation.

"The willful crip rejoinder to 'it gets better' is 'it's always something.'"

*Lisa Johnson*⁷

This unknowability was something that I slowly, but surely embraced in how I found myself relating to these spaces. Going into the project I had to manage my expectations and take into consideration the critiques of how Appalachia is often talked about. One of the main cautions I received from the left was to avoid focusing on the 'deindustrialized decay' of it all. A reaction that I think in large part is understandable considering the negative impact of JD Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy*.⁸ Yet, as the project progressed, I increasingly found myself sitting with this growing pile of stories that were inherently ones of survival amidst loss, abandonment, and grief. I started off being so worried about upsetting folks by hyper-focusing on the death of coal that I wound up frustrating them by tip toeing around it. So, I stopped. I came to understand that decay and growth are not mutually exclusive temporalities but, are instead co-constructive.

Yes, it is important to include encouraging stories about communities that have struggled with this industry so as not drown them in despair. No, I do not mean to encourage a fatalistic mindset to the onslaught of corporate harm that seems to never sleep in the valley. However, as simple as it sounds, it is also important to just let people be sad sometimes.

The region has earned a bit of nuance here. It should be given the space without shame to grieve an industry that, however harmful, also catalyzed the in-migration of largely disadvantaged folks from all over the world to find common cause along this river. There is something particularly painful here for these communities in knowing that the loss of their livelihoods and subsequent kinship networks are being celebrated as collateral to an environmental win. In many ways, it adds a whole new dimension to the reality of being a so-called sacrifice zone.

Communities are brought together not just via a mission for health (be that environmental or economic) but also through a respect for death. Regional analysis of places that are on decline have long been criticized as a type of 'corpse watching.'⁵ A morbid display of community loss that desensitizes the reader to extractive violence and perpetuates stereotypes in ways that translate to policies that only lead to further investment in fossil capital. However, Sarah Ensor in her essay *Terminal Regions: Queer Ecocriticism at the End* offers a different and less reductive perspective:

*"Corpse watching can be the occasion for intimacy, can bring people together into paradigms of relation where saving is not on the table and yet meaningful futures and ethical patterns of investment are constantly being built. Regionalism urges us to acknowledge that saving is not the only way to make things better, or to make life - however long it lasts - livable, viable and meaningful. A non-salvific model of care, for a set of practices that manages to understand stewardship outside the rhetoric of saving, and to cultivate forms of communal and planetary investment that exist outside of -and persist beyond- the temporality of crisis in which the environmental movement so deeply invests."*⁶

So, I offer this zine up, as a form of gentle acknowledgment that coal is dead and dying in the Ohio River Valley. That I see the violence that the booms and busts of extractive capitalism have wrought on my beloved state and its inhabitants. I hold, in traditional open casket form, both a call to witness and finally accept that coal was never going to be king forever as well as a caution to not be too hasty to crown another. To accept this ending for what it is, rather than continue to exist in fear of loss or in opposition to transition. This is an invitation to stop for just a moment and to watch this corpse be lowered back into the earth from whence it came.

For the sake of privacy (& research restrictions) interviewees are mostly left anonymous. See below for guidelines on how to locate quotes.

Quote Code:

(B Int. 7) = 'Belmont Interviewee 7'



Interviews with regional experts were given the designation MISC and then a corresponding number.

Interviews from the Little Cities of Black Diamonds are listed by name.

"Coal built this town ...

"Many individuals had opportunities to go to work for a relative who could get them into an aspect of the coal mine. Trucking, mining, hauling, recovery, you know, reclamation. There was just so many different parts to that world that if you could just get your foot in the door, you were good for 40 years, and I don't think anybody ever gave a second thought. It was a great way to make a living, raise your family." (N Int. 1)

"Coal was going to be king forever, and there was no need for an exit strategy. There was no need for a backup plan because there was no end for coal, and you know, let's be honest, the cities were using electricity like it was going out of style. So, there was no lack of consumerism, they just kept turning lights on.

As this started to go through not just Ohio, but Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, and Tennessee. Community after community after community was left with their, you know, we spent 40-50 years mining. 60 years mining. That's all our families have ever done." (N Int. 1)

"I mean very close to Jesus/Coal Company. Coal Company/Jesus."
(N Int. 1)

"History as deep as the mines and as vast as the nation!"

"I'll repeat the story till the day I die. We all knew a month in advance how close the Big Muskie Bucket was getting to operating across the county line. Everybody knew that other counties and other school districts were getting mining taxes for their schools. We were just waiting for the day that the mining operation cross the county line and came into the Noble local - the Shenandoah school district." (N Int. 1)

"Coal wasn't just a job; it was a way of life." (B int. 1)

The People, Places, and Events That Built a Nation

"You kind of find that there was more of a sense of purpose, or a medial sense of purpose, because it wasn't exactly a high IQ job. I'm not tumbling numbers in the stock market. I'm not doing an open-heart chest surgery. There's a very medial quality to hauling coal - doesn't take a lot of brains just takes, you know, a lot of grind, a lot of effort. But you missed that because you felt like you're contributing to kind of a bigger picture. You're not just keeping the lights on, the heat. You're keeping everything on for not just your community, but for Columbus and whoever else they're distributing to, so you know it's a different feeling man." (C Int. 12)

... coal broke this town."

"We've not only allowed them to control our narrative, corporate ventriloquism is probably the best definition because I can remember being in college in the 90's and I had a marketing class. In a book I remember reading about steps that you take, and I wasn't a marketing major, but I took the class. It was like 'you need to go in and sponsor things like ballfields and this community type of stuff because when something bad happens you can be like yeah, I know we polluted the creek, but they sponsored Johnny's uniforms.' Its almost like they get permission to abuse us because they've thrown pennies at us." (M Int. 5)

Evidence of accumulated taking

"Control what they learn, and you control what they think. It's an intentionally bad education, it's an intentionally bad environment."

(B Int 7)

GRIEVANCES

"The coal industry or the gas industry, whatever it is, there's always this idea of boom and bust. If I am looking at it from a community, 30,000 feet kind of perspective, **it always puts our community in a state of fight or flight.** Ya know, that constant feeling of 'if you have it, you have to keep it.' You have to take whatever they give you and be happy for what you get." (M Int. 5)

"We're always kind of in starvation mode. So that's what it feels like in West Virginia. It feels like here, you either starve or, its **feast or famine.**" (M Int. 5)

"Then you have the, as it turns out, nothing accidental about the opioid epidemic. Purdue Pharma had to own that one." (B Int 7)

"It's the most polluting resource we have and there's a premium in getting rid of it." (MISC Int. 5)

LABOR JUSTICE

COAL BLOOD.

Do coal companies weaponize hiring and layoffs to sway elections?

"I think its kind of like they starve us and blame us for dying."
(M Int. 5)

Censored consent

For several decades, the Ohio River was polluted with hundreds of thousands of pounds of PFOAs by the DuPont chemical company from an outflow pipe at its Parkersburg, West Virginia, facility.

The Ohio River has consistently led the nation in toxic pollutants.

“The “cause disability, then criticize disability” angle hits a (still pinched) nerve with me because it was exactly the excuse a couple of opportunistic doctors used to taunt and abuse me.

I’d never seen them before, but they were convinced I was a homeless woman they knew who had a severe disability and didn’t deserve help. Next time I nearly die, I’ll be sure to do my hair, put on my nicer nightgown, brush my dentures, and fall on a clean surface, not the driveway (the gravel embedded in my knees was ever so funny to them.)

It reminds me of the high point of immigration, when people had dragged themselves off the overcrowded, no washing facilities, bucket toilet that can’t be emptied holds of ships only to be mocked for being dirty and smelly.

Har de har har, do whatever you want with them! In the words of D.R. Baer, “they don’t suffer, they don’t even speak English.”

(B Int. 7)

“We’re given credit as these people that are so pro-energy and pro-oil and pro coal.

Well, what was our other choice!? We don’t have one!

We don’t have a baseball team to stimulate our economy. We’re not pro-oil and gas for any other reason, other than that’s all we’ve got to help us.

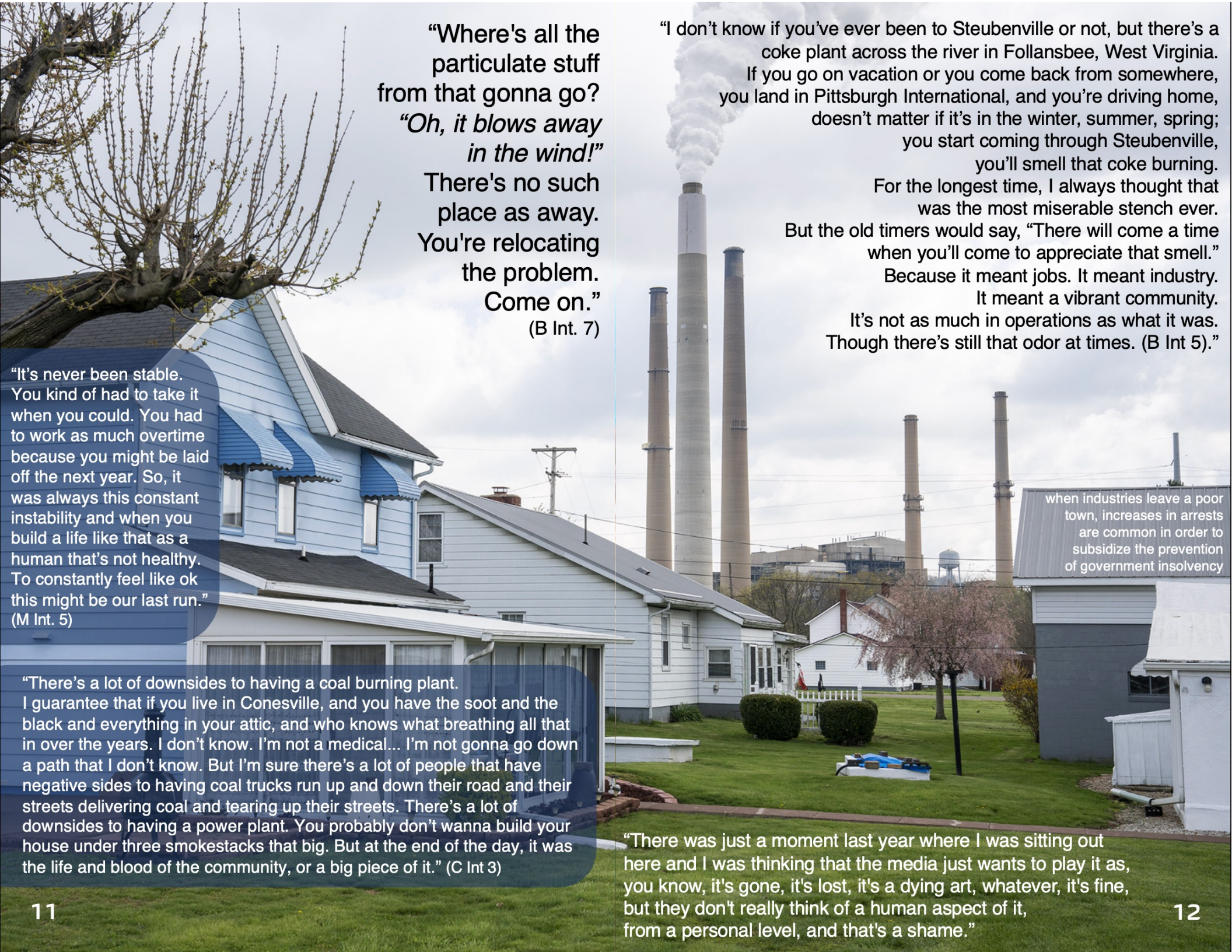
And I don’t feel like that handicap has ever really taken into consideration of that being our only option to stimulate our economy.

We don’t have the population for 75% of other options that would help stimulate our economy. So, we use what we got, and we go to work, and we dig what we got.”
(N Int. 7)

The opioid epidemic has killed hundreds of thousands of Americans over the past two decades.

Purdue Pharma targeted Appalachia because that region had higher-than-average workplace injuries due to coal mining, logging, and farming.

More than 76,000 miners have died of black lung since 1968



“Where's all the particulate stuff from that gonna go?
“Oh, it blows away in the wind!”
There's no such place as away.
You're relocating the problem.
Come on.”
(B Int. 7)

“I don't know if you've ever been to Steubenville or not, but there's a coke plant across the river in Follansbee, West Virginia. If you go on vacation or you come back from somewhere, you land in Pittsburgh International, and you're driving home, doesn't matter if it's in the winter, summer, spring; you start coming through Steubenville, you'll smell that coke burning
For the longest time, I always thought that was the most miserable stench ever.
But the old timers would say, “There will come a time when you'll come to appreciate that smell.”
Because it meant jobs. It meant industry. It meant a vibrant community.
It's not as much in operations as what it was. Though there's still that odor at times. (B Int 5).”

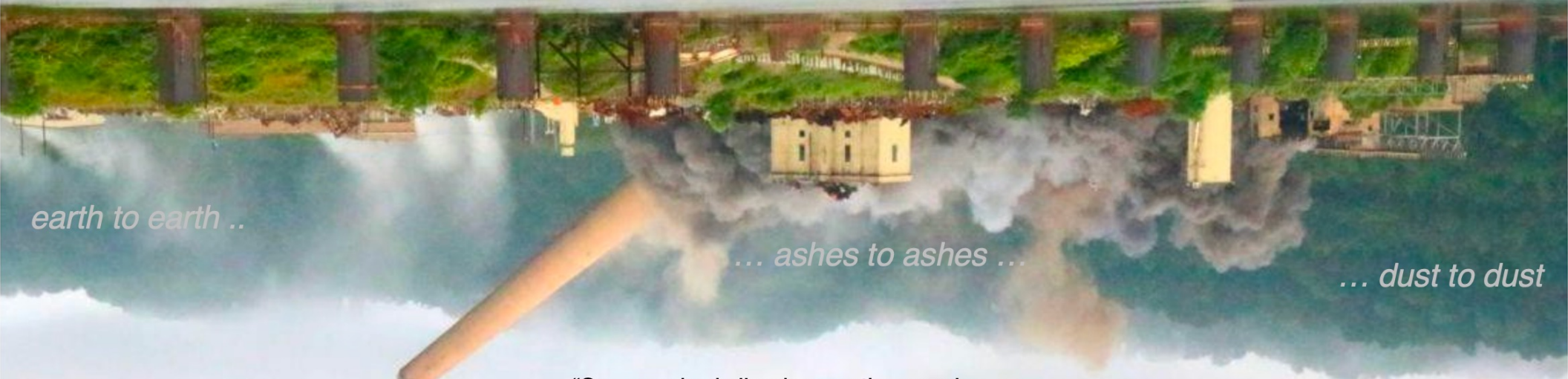
“It's never been stable. You kind of had to take it when you could. You had to work as much overtime because you might be laid off the next year. So, it was always this constant instability and when you build a life like that as a human that's not healthy. To constantly feel like ok this might be our last run.”
(M Int. 5)

when industries leave a poor town, increases in arrests are common in order to subsidize the prevention of government insolvency

“There's a lot of downsides to having a coal burning plant. I guarantee that if you live in Conesville, and you have the soot and the black and everything in your attic, and who knows what breathing all that in over the years. I don't know. I'm not a medical... I'm not gonna go down a path that I don't know. But I'm sure there's a lot of people that have negative sides to having coal trucks run up and down their road and their streets delivering coal and tearing up their streets. There's a lot of downsides to having a power plant. You probably don't wanna build your house under three smokestacks that big. But at the end of the day, it was the life and blood of the community, or a big piece of it.” (C Int 3)

“There was just a moment last year where I was sitting out here and I was thinking that the media just wants to play it as, you know, it's gone, it's lost, it's a dying art, whatever, it's fine, but they don't really think of a human aspect of it, from a personal level, and that's a shame.”

A just transition away from fossil fuels needs to be green, but it must also be red



earth to earth ..

... ashes to ashes ...

... dust to dust

“So, everybody lined up on the morning.

I still kick myself because I can't stand for a long time and wait for something to happen, but the news was covering it. Well, unfortunately for us they didn't have any cameras actually on the smokestack. They were just talking to everybody. Good, ole WTRF. Dag Nabbit, Brenda! Get some coverage of live events! But I realized they weren't gonna cut away in time. So, I bolted out to the front porch because I knew they were starting. 10, 9, 8, even this fat old rheumatic body can make it to the front porch in 10 seconds and I felt it, I felt the shock wave, the primary. It was actually far enough. It's about 2.5 miles, 3 miles from home. So, you could actually feel that slight break between the primary and secondary waves and the distant boom coming through. I thought they'll be sad about that, already been gone. Yeah. “It blows away in the wind” *laughs* Now it did!.” (B Int 7)

“It's gonna be weird when the stacks and everything come down because really you could see there's so many different points around here and you could be up to 30 or 40 miles away and at certain points when you see those stacks, you know where home is. Even my three year old son, he sees those stacks, he's like, “oh, that's home!” That kind of hits close a little bit because, you just, it is home, and I think that's what we all look forward to in our daily lives ... is getting home.”

(C Int 11)

“Now in the last few months because of where they're tearing down, like I said, they got some flood lights out there which kind of adds a little bit to it, but there for a while it was dark ... as pitch dark as you could get and I mean, it was a strange feeling of like this giant ... you know this giant is sitting there, but it's so quiet. It's ... its God, it is so weird. It's just the weirdest thing, cuz you're so used to hearing it running, operating the pile drivers out there, moving the coal around. There's none of that now. I mean, it's so quiet, it's almost a scary feeling, in a way.”

(C Int 11)

Paradise Lost

"We weren't a trade where you could easily just go home and catch your son's ball game, catch your daughter's recital, that kind of thing. What gets lost in all that is the people that gave up family to do this. It's a hard thing, divorces from all this, marital issues. Seen so many great guys lose their kids, their wives from this, that hit home. It wasn't their fault. They were trying to provide for their families. To me, that's something that shouldn't be forgotten either in this, and that makes the tearing down of the place to me that much harder to see when you think of it in that aspect. Guys gave it so much over there." (C Int 11)

"We the township nudged folks in different positions that once that plant was done it needs to come down. Whether you have kids going in there or whatever, a lot of bad things can happen. It's so funny, you use the analogy like a funeral, because that's basically what it was." (B Int 5)

You lose your family to this industry, so you end up finding family in the other workers, but in the end, you lose them too.

"Coal isn't the valley's greatest export, our children are."
(B Int. 1)



"Here lies the debris of capitalist waste, the unspectacular afterlives of discarded things" 10

"The brotherhood was a big part of it, you know I think that's been the hardest thing for me to transition from over the last year and a half has been being by myself being so quiet. Sure, I talk to people because we're selling insurance, but you're talking to them about business. It's not the come in at first thing in the morning, having a cup of coffee and bullshitting over the radio, you know, you're talking about what your kids did last night or what your plans are for the weekend. So, you lose out on all that fun stuff, what comes to the conversation that trying to keep up with these people I work with you know forever its just doesn't happen. It's become a very, very lonely Transition."

(C Int 12)

the transition away from coal and into isolation

"Covid made it more difficult because you never got to say goodbye to anybody."
(C Int.13)

"Survival. It's almost survival. It's so hard to put things into perspective right now because you also have COVID-19 on top of everything. Right? Our plant closed in 2020. Was it in the spring? Yeah, at the same time, we had a pandemic. So, it's hard for me to even separate what we're going through right now because both things are huge. I don't know that we've had a chance to handle IT yet because we're handling a health crisis on top of it. That's maybe overshadowing some of the effects of it at this point." (C Int 3)

"I related it to a slow goodbye, it was just sad, it was very, very sad. We didn't get to do a celebration; we didn't get to include the community because we definitely weren't planning on having the community involved in it because we've got a lot of retirees." (C Int. 17)

"The plant closure was horrible, no question of it, but this Covid in our area... it's just, it's hard right now. As I speak to you, I have a friend in Riverside who's fighting for his life that I worked at the power plant with for 30 some years. I took him out when he retired. I took him to his car that day and had a little cry myself, watching him leave. Today, it is Covid that's about to take his life and Covid is probably today more battle for us than anything I know." (C Int. 1)

The 'Just Enough' Transition

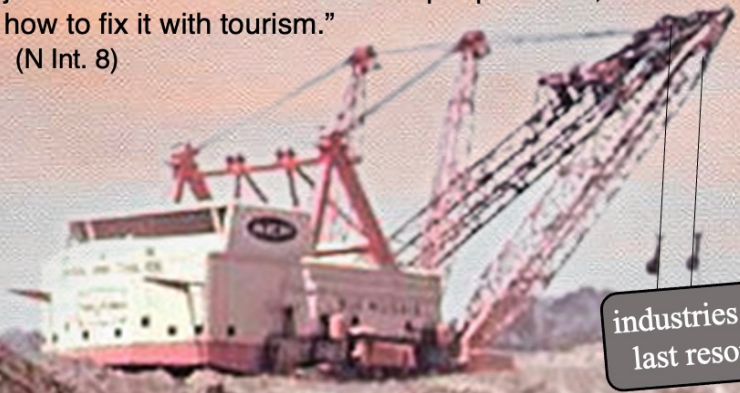
"As far as a transition period. What are we going to transform ourselves into? Never a thought, and that goes back to that original question, the coal culture of a whole entire region. Never ever believed coal wouldn't be king." (N Int 1)

"Its hard to say that to people in some towns, I'm sorry but you don't even come up to snuff for salvation. It's like not having enough of the vaccine to go around and you say to people who are probably so old and close to death anyway "I'm sorry, but we gotta use this on people who have a future." (MISC Int. 5)

"I think that they, one thing they think is that the people aren't as intelligent as a lot of people are so they can push policies down that don't amount to anything and they're not really helping them. I think that's just the way it is." (N Int. 6)

"I'm just trying to figure out how we're going to get jobs here, you know what I mean. Everyone just leaves! It's like all the smart people leave, and I don't know how to fix it with tourism." (N Int. 8)

There's a lot of money in poverty if you aren't poor.



industries of last resort

OHIO PUTS BUSINESS FIRST

Ohio has a 0% state tax on corporate income.

We have an efficient start-to-finish process including a swift permit issuance by the Ohio EPA within 180 days of receipt of a completed application as required by law

A humble, driven workforce. .
LOW-COST BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Asset-Based Approach to Economic & Community Development

Tourism is big business in OHIO'S APPALACHIAN COUNTRY

deregulated energy market

#1
 In polymer and plastics output

Tourism Sales are \$5.3 billion up 3.5% from 2015

OHIO HAS ATTRACTED **\$74 BILLION** in investments along the entire energy value chain

NATURAL GAS & PIPELINE FIELD

"We're not going to have complete control over what happens when hundreds of people start showing up in a town of 500 or 600 people, you lose control really quick but if we can keep our sense of who we are and tell our story and keep our authenticity and be about the Wayne Forest and about the diverse ecology around us and about the history of the community. If we can keep those things elevated to the point that that's who we are, we'll be a lot better off in 15 years."

- John Winnenberg
 (Sunday Creek Associates)

"Even when you think about the Green New Deal and people use the phrase 'Just Transition', frankly it just functions more as a concept or even a sentiment than it does as a plan that a county commissioner can implement or a community can adopt. How do we take a sentiment and bring it down to a level that is actionable?" (MISC Int. 5)



"We've seen an increase in rent, since fracking itself started and what used to rent for \$400 to \$500 could be anywhere from \$1200 or \$2100 a month." (B Int. 4)

"The problem is when you're in some of these small towns and the mine or the power plant is the primary employer, the employees in that plant may only represent maybe 10% or 20% of all the people in town. So just solving the problem for them, even if you do does not necessarily solve the problem for the town. In fact, it almost certainly does not. It's whole communities that are at stake here and that are affected by these closures. So, I work pretty hard to try to keep the, not that I don't want them to focus on the workers or on a particular piece of property, but I don't want them to focus ONLY on that." (MISC Int. 5)

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Rising rates of houseless folks

Rising cost of living

Rising cost of housing

been here vs come here

Extractive Tourism
Eco-Tourism
 Over-tourism

Everybody wants to be a hillbilly, but nobody wants to drink the water



JobsOhio
 County Commissioners Association of Ohio

On the 1944 Powhattan Mine Disaster, 66 miners lost:

"They got talking specifically about 1944 and the heartbreaking deal that they knew those guys were sitting there and they knew, they realized it was an accident. Somebody closed the door, the hard and fast rule in coal mining is that you shut off the doors. Well, somebody had managed to shift the ventilation pattern to keep smoke away from where the guys were. The details on the fire are in the books, so I'm not gonna repeat all those, but they realized when the fire kicked back, and they tried to get around through B north and realized they couldn't - they knew they were dying. What does a man do when he's sitting in the dark, his wife and kids at home, and somebody's got a notebook and some pencils and everybody's carrying some stuff with them to make notes related to the job, whatever, what do they do?"

The second one is "I want you to move in with my parents or your parents they both got room and it'll save money. So, we don't know when the state money's coming in. You can sell the furniture if you want to, you probably won't really want to keep it anyway." They just bought new furniture. "Make sure Norman gets to the doctor about his leg." I talked to Norman years later, he said, "Yeah I fell off my bike and messed my leg up and he wanted to make sure it healed alright." But the letter said something like, "I don't want him to be stuck working as a coal miner. If he doesn't really want to do the job, get him a good education by doing this, this, and this. You can sell the car if you don't wanna learn to drive. Right now, that ought to get you a good bit of money. Don't get married again unless he doesn't work for the coal mine because your pension would stop, take the money." He said, "What else you do about it is your business."



Well, they write goodbye letters. It wasn't just "goodbye, honey. I love you" though. That was the striking part of it. And some of 'em were kind of funny because it's - George Emery's wife and Ralph McClosky's wife, can't think of George's wife's name and they used to wait on her at the bank all the time. But Sophie McCloskey I remember cause she was so sweet. She made an impression on everybody, Sophie and Mrs. Emory insisted that the paper print their husband's last letters just to show us - that this is what these men are made of. "Okay, honey. It's whatever time I don't think I'm gonna get outta here. First of all, I love you and the kids." the routine first paragraph.

What else she did about it turned out to be nothing. She never did remarry. She never even went looking for a boyfriend. She said "I was never gonna find one like that again." But I mean, that was the kind of detail. My neighbor had his dad's. Mel had Myron's last letter and I never did get up the nerve to ask him. I mean, he had the original, I never, never got up the nerve to hold the thing in my hands. I don't know if I could have or not, especially when I was a little kid. But that's what got me thinking. That happened?! Why didn't I know about it? And of course, that was about 30 seconds before the whole Tony Boyle mess erupted. Tony Boyle ... boy, I bet that's an interesting conversation he's having with Bob Murray about now, cuz I'm pretty sure they're in the same place and I just hope it's not too toasty. *laugh* (B Int. 7)

"I could name you over 200 guys that I worked with there. I can't remember all the names, but that's all I could conjure up last night was over 200 people and I know there's so many more than that. There's so many more, but I just can't remember 'em all anymore. I can remember faces, but I just wish I could remember the names that went with them now because a lot of 'em, even though you might have only seen 'em for a couple months or a couple weeks they were still a big part of being there and watching out for each other. To me, that's big." (C Int 11)

"By the 1990's the UMWA basically saw their interests, or decided, I think incorrectly by the way, that their interests were aligned with those of the industry and they both became part of this thing called 'coal.' So, people talk about 'is this good for coal?' or 'is this bad for coal?' as though the interests of mine owners and politicians and families of miners were all aligned. Which is a notion that would strike the Mother Jones of the world as inherently absurd." (MISC Int. 5)

"I've been around it just for the fact of friends' dads who worked at Central Ohio Coal and I'm going to tell you, when it went out, we had a lot of friends that were just gone." (N Int 9)

"My experience with true, almost lifelong coal miners is the belief overtime that the union would always rectify the situation. Make it right and bring everybody back to work. That death of philosophy is probably what killed the hope of the coal generation." (N Int. 1)

"Like I said it would have been an older population of men, for the most part that were losing their jobs. It had been something that their family would have done, their dad did, and the only life they knew." (N Int 3)

"We would laugh when we would meet with the company on different issues. We would remind them regularly, they thought that plant was theirs, it wasn't. It was ours. They just received a revenue, but it was ours. It truly was like a home. That is another family for those that worked there, especially for smaller plants. Which the Burger was a small plant, so when that finally went down, it was difficult." (B Int 5)

"You always had somebody to talk to on the radio and even with the road guys coming in, you had either them coming in every couple hours so it's kind of fresh blood for the conversation. It's kind of a really nice communal aspect to it that, like I said, you don't see anymore." (C Int 12)

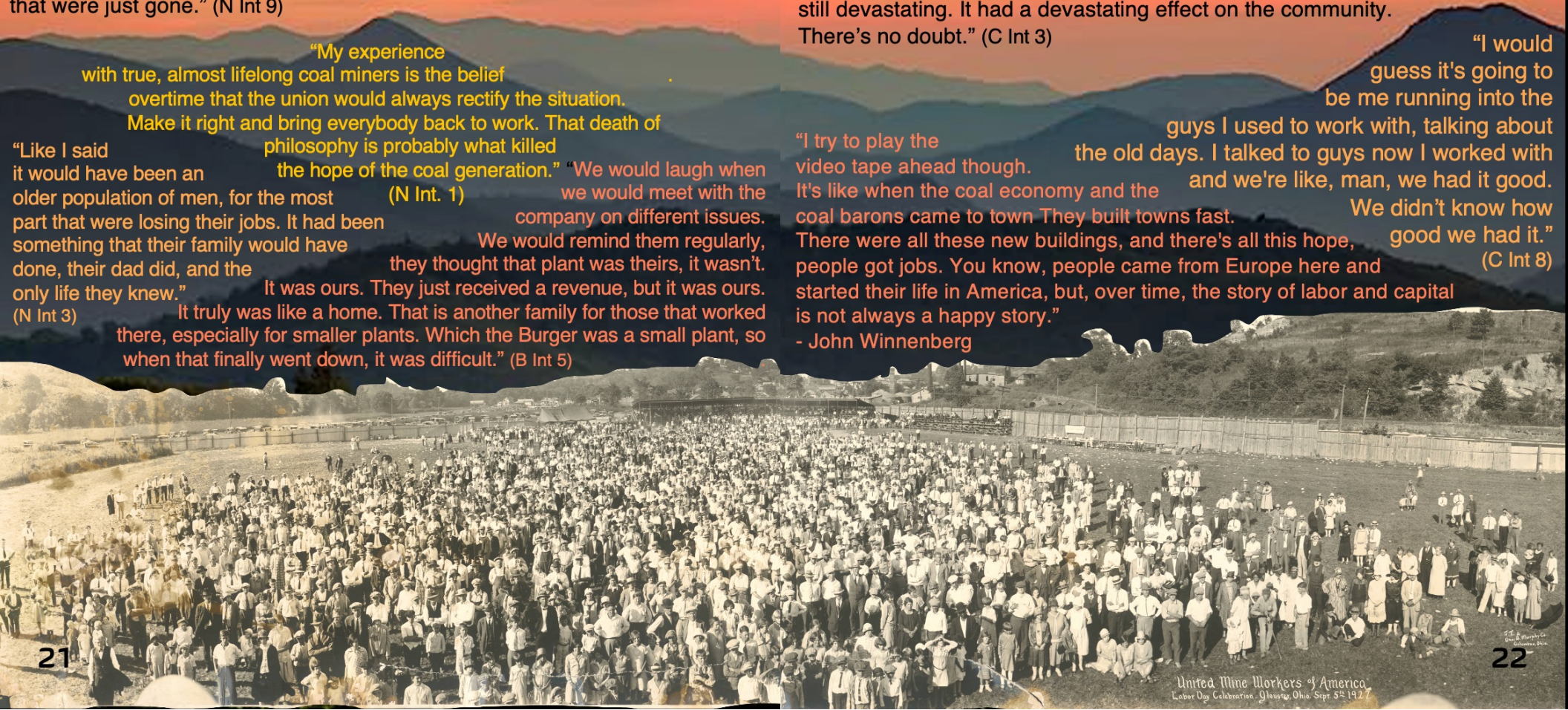
"Working at the power plant was a good time. A lot of close knit, we were all friends; we hung out together, especially in our department. Then it was that way in a lot of the different departments. We raised our kids together, went to ball games together, we had parties together, we spent Christmases together. Just, you know, everything." (C Int 2)

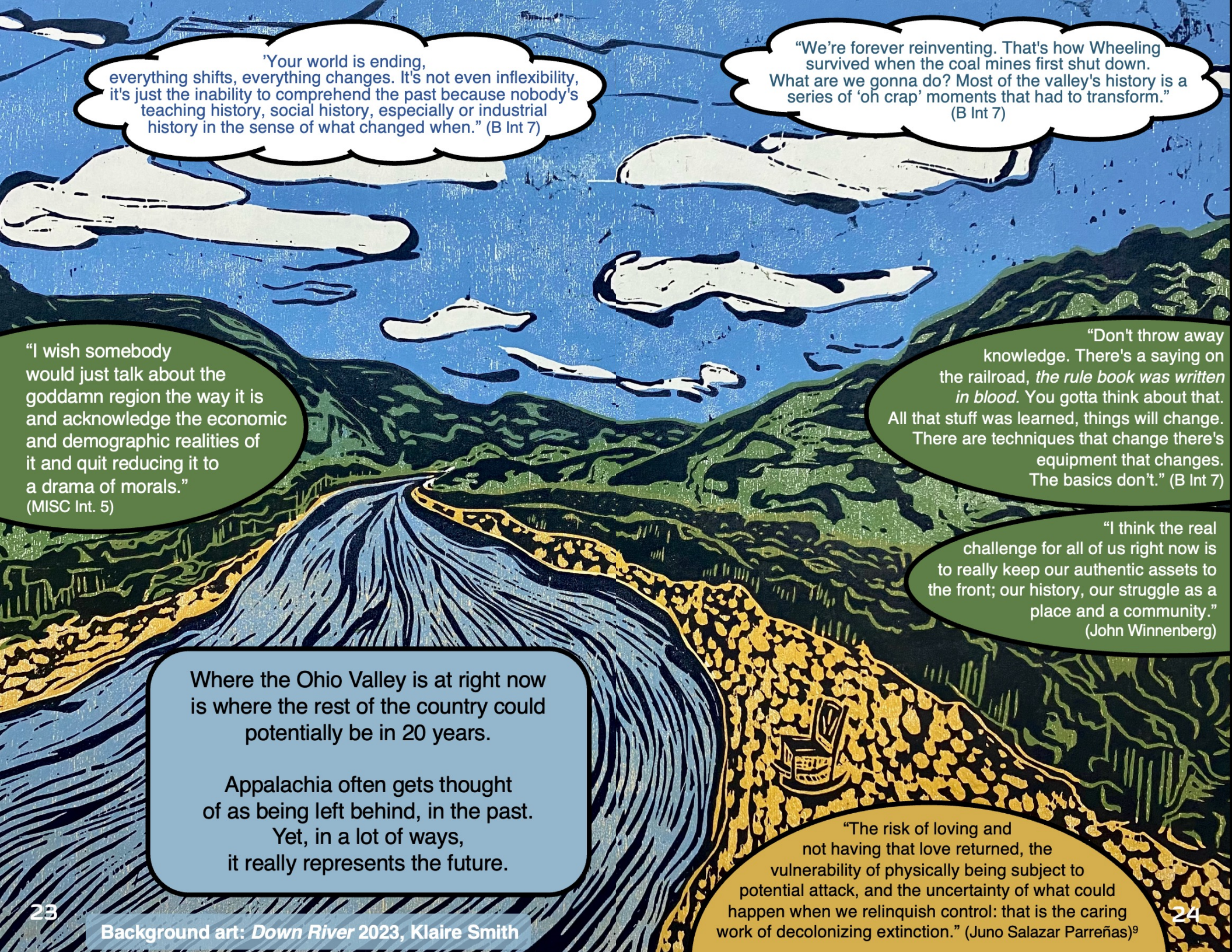
"It's a dying town, it's a dying community. It's very unfortunate because they really are good, salt of the earth people here. You're talking about the foothill Appalachians, and they really look out for each other. So, it's been disheartening, to say the least, to see that go but it's not the first hit that we've taken." (C Int 12)

"There was some anticipation of it, at any time, this could close. There had been a generation of one or two or three had went through with their grandpas, dads, and offspring working there. So, it was only a matter of time. But it was still devastating. It had a devastating effect on the community. There's no doubt." (C Int 3)

"I try to play the video tape ahead though. It's like when the coal economy and the coal barons came to town They built towns fast. There were all these new buildings, and there's all this hope, people got jobs. You know, people came from Europe here and started their life in America, but, over time, the story of labor and capital is not always a happy story." - John Winnenberg

"I would guess it's going to be me running into the guys I used to work with, talking about the old days. I talked to guys now I worked with and we're like, man, we had it good. We didn't know how good we had it." (C Int 8)





"Your world is ending, everything shifts, everything changes. It's not even inflexibility, it's just the inability to comprehend the past because nobody's teaching history, social history, especially or industrial history in the sense of what changed when." (B Int 7)

"We're forever reinventing. That's how Wheeling survived when the coal mines first shut down. What are we gonna do? Most of the valley's history is a series of 'oh crap' moments that had to transform." (B Int 7)

"I wish somebody would just talk about the goddamn region the way it is and acknowledge the economic and demographic realities of it and quit reducing it to a drama of morals." (MISC Int. 5)

"Don't throw away knowledge. There's a saying on the railroad, *the rule book was written in blood*. You gotta think about that. All that stuff was learned, things will change. There are techniques that change there's equipment that changes. The basics don't." (B Int 7)

"I think the real challenge for all of us right now is to really keep our authentic assets to the front; our history, our struggle as a place and a community." (John Winnenberg)

Where the Ohio Valley is at right now is where the rest of the country could potentially be in 20 years.

Appalachia often gets thought of as being left behind, in the past. Yet, in a lot of ways, it really represents the future.

"The risk of loving and not having that love returned, the vulnerability of physically being subject to potential attack, and the uncertainty of what could happen when we relinquish control: that is the caring work of decolonizing extinction." (Juno Salazar Parreñas)⁹

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About the Author

I explore energy geographies through an eco-crip theoretical and methodological lens, focusing on embodied experiences of energy and alternative epistemologies of social movements inside communities at different intersections of the energy commodity chain. Growing up in an oil community, I was surrounded by the ways in which this complex substance has become intimately entangled in our lives through systemic and everyday material and discursive encounters. I have come to utilize the energy humanities to critically engage my own petro-subjectivity as a means to challenge the logic of oil and deindustrialize my sense of self.² From the carbon trapped in our atmosphere, to the politicians captured by fossil capital, to the petro-plastics nested in our blood, our fossil fueled present continues to reshape us in every conceivable way. Yet, as it reshapes, it also buries damaged bodies, polluted ecosystems, extractive histories, and alternative futures. My work largely deals with digging up these graves and considering the impact of how the violence surrounding them have become so profoundly decontextualized.

