

Mah, A. (2010) Memory, uncertainty and industrial ruination: Walker Riverside, Newcastle upon Tyne. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34(2), pp. 398-413.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article:

Mah, A. (2010) Memory, uncertainty and industrial ruination: Walker Riverside, Newcastle upon Tyne. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34(2), pp. 398-413, which has been published in final form at <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2010.00898.x>

This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with [Wiley Terms and Conditions for Self-Archiving](#).

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/304422/>

Deposited on: 25 September 2023

**Memory, Uncertainty and Industrial Ruination:
Walker Riverside, Newcastle upon Tyne¹**

Author(s): Mah, Alice
Article Title: Memory, Uncertainty and Industrial Ruination: Walker
Riverside, Newcastle upon Tyne
Year of publication: 2010
Link to published article : <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2010.00898.x>
Publisher statement: The definitive version is available at
www.blackwell-synergy.com
Mah, A. (2010). Memory, uncertainty and industrial ruination : Walker
Riverside, Newcastle upon Tyne. *International Journal of Urban and
Regional Research*, 34(2), pp. 398-413.

Abstract: This paper examines how local people's memories relate to processes of industrial decline and ruination in Walker Riverside, Newcastle upon Tyne, based on site observations and thirty semi-structured interviews with a range of local people conducted between June 2005 and March 2006. Much of the recent literature concerning the relationships between memory and place focuses on the contrast between social reconstructions of official and unofficial collective memory. This paper explores a different dynamic between memory and place through the case study of Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne, an area where shipbuilding has long been in decline, but at the time of interviewing, the 'last shipyard of the Tyne' had yet to close. In Walker, local accounts of the industrial past represent 'living memories', embodying complex relationships with the industrial past: many people who have lived through processes of industrial ruination focus on imminent regeneration rather than mourning or celebrating the industrial past. The strength of community solidarity in Walker represents another form of living memory, echoing family and community bonds formed in the industrial era despite the fact that a direct connection with shipbuilding has all but disappeared. This paper argues that living memories relate to the particular social and economic processes of industrial ruination in Walker, where the decline of shipbuilding over the past thirty years has been protracted, leaving a profound sense of uncertainty for people who occupy the precarious transitional spaces of post-industrial change.

¹ The author would like to thank Fran Tonkiss, Richard Sennett, the NYLON (New York University-LSE) Research Network and three I JURR reviewers.

Introduction

Study of the ‘neglected’ and ‘discarded’ poses important questions about the type of society in which we live. While recent analyses of old industrial cities and regions tend to focus on processes of regeneration and adaptation, my concern is with landscapes of industrial ruination which have, for various socioeconomic reasons, yet to be transformed. There are many stories of ‘winners’ in the literature on cities and regeneration, particularly with the growing popularity of the notion of ‘creative cities’ (Florida, 2005; Landry, 1995), city exemplars in arts and culture-led regeneration. However, in the context of an uneven geography of development (Smith, 1984; Harvey, 1999), in which cities and regions compete against one another for government funds and corporate investment, there are also many stories of ‘losers’, of cities and urban places marked by abandoned and derelict infrastructure, social and economic deprivation, depopulation and unemployment. These stories tend to be overlooked in the interests of a progress-oriented view, of moving on in the capitalist process of creative destruction (Schumpeter, 1965), focusing on growth and innovation rather than dwelling on the ‘necessary’ waste left behind.

This paper explores how place-specific memory relates to social and economic processes of deindustrialization and restructuring in the case study of Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne. My research draws on site and ethnographic observations and thirty semi-structured interviews with a range of people who were related directly or indirectly to the industrial legacies of Walker, including local residents of Walker², municipal government officials, community and voluntary sector representatives, and workers and ex-workers in shipbuilding plants conducted between June 2005 and March 2006. The case represents an area marked by industrial abandonment where, at this trajectory, relatively little had replaced the evidence of industrial decline either physically or economically. Moreover, the prolonged decay of shipbuilding in Walker had not resulted in its full closure at the time of the interviewing, and this lack of a clear break with the industrial past has important implications for collective memory. My analysis of memory and industrial ruins is situated in relation to concepts of deindustrialization; collective memory and nostalgia; and place memory and industrial ruins.

² Local residents were recruited initially through snowballing with local government and community and voluntary sector organisations, and then through approaching local community centres, such as the Thomas Gaughan Community Centre in Pottery Bank, the Lightfoot Centre in Walker, and the East End Community Development Alliance. In recruiting interviewees, I paid attention to differences in age, gender, ethnicity and occupation.

Much of the existing literature frames collective memory in terms of a social reconstruction of the past and explores the difference between official and unofficial memory. By contrast, Walker is a case where memories of the industrial past have yet to be officially or unofficially reconstructed. Local accounts of sites and processes of industrial ruination in Walker represent 'living memories' which are defined by a lack of closure with an industrial past. These living memories are situated in the context of 'industrial ruination as a lived process' and unlike simple nostalgia or commemoration, they emerge in diffuse ways. This paper argues that collective memory, defined through the social reconstruction of the past, remains uncertain in cases such as Walker, where industrial decline has been protracted, traces of old industrial activity remain, and regeneration has yet to transform the landscape of industrial ruination.

1.1 Industrial ruination as a lived process

The concept of 'ruins' implies sad beauty, majesty, glorious memory, tragedy, loss and historical import. According to Jakle and Wilson (1992), ruins reflect 'pastness', romance and nostalgia, while at the same time representing risk, commodification and neglect. The authors hit upon a crucial point about the spatially uneven 'violence' of capitalism in the management and treatment of ruins; certain buildings are maintained and even prolonged, whereas others are left abandoned. This has more to do with patterns of capitalist accumulation and expansion than it does with any 'natural' life-cycle of a building. Benjamin wrote of the 'ruins of the bourgeoisie' as the necessary but unfortunate outcome of the progress of history, modernity and capitalism (2000: 13). The framing of ruins as 'wasted places', as the places which have been left behind by an uneven geography of capitalist development, is particularly relevant in the context of industrial ruins. Industrial ruins are produced by capital abandonment of sites of industrial production; they can be 'read' as the footprint of capitalism, the sites which are no longer profitable, which no longer have use-value. Indeed, a number of authors have described derelict or industrial landscapes as 'wasted' cultural, social and economic spaces (cf. Berman, 1983; Cowie, 2003; Harvey, 2000; Jakle and Wilson, 1992; Stewart, 1996; Zukin, 1991). However, industrial ruins as physical sites have mainly been analysed in a more aesthetic and cultural context.

A growing body of literature since the late 1990s focuses on the physical and visual dimensions of urban decay, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom. These

accounts simultaneously mourn and celebrate the landscape of industrial ruins, on the one hand as ‘sad beauty’ and on the other hand as the genuine cultural ruins of ‘great’ civilizations. They range from photo-journalistic studies of industrial ruins to dereliction tourism (also known as urban exploration), represented by a number of web sites devoted to virtual tours of derelict buildings and sites across the globe. Photo-journalistic examples include *American Ruins* (1999) and *American Ruins: Ghosts on the Landscape* (2001), photographic books of abandoned American buildings intermixed with poetic social commentary. Some examples of dereliction tourism include Paul Talling’s ‘Derelict London’ website devoted to derelict spaces in London with over eight hundred photographs including disused railway lines, cemeteries, shops, pubs, waterways and public toilets, amongst other subjects (www.derelictlondon.com), and Lowell Boileau’s ‘Fabulous Ruins of Detroit’ web page which displays photos of decrepit buildings as evidence of the glorious past of the American industrial age, meant to parallel the great ruins of Europe, Africa and Asia (www.detroityes.com). In *Industrial Ruins*, Edensor (2005) examines contemporary uses and meanings of twentieth century British industrial ruins, and criticises the dominant notion that industrial ruins are simply ‘wasted’ spaces. The rise of dereliction tourism and artistic interest in abandoned industrial sites is sociologically interesting in that these sites are formidable enough in their presence to capture the popular and artistic imagination. The staggering social, economic, political and geographical impacts of industrialisation spurred profound sociological and artistic inspiration through the writings of Dickens and Engels, and the paintings of Turner and the Futurists, to name a few. It is not surprising that the impacts of deindustrialization should spark its own sociological and artistic response. This article addresses critical questions underpinning aesthetic and cultural approaches to industrial ruins by examining the relationship between memory and industrial ruins.

This research has provided two related insights about industrial ruination that depart from existing literatures on deindustrialization, the sociology of waste, and industrial ruins: 1) industrial ruins are not simply forms, but rather they are part of processes of ruination, and 2) industrial ruination as form and process is experienced and ‘lived’ by people. Each spatio-temporal moment of industrial ruination is situated somewhere along a continuum between creation and destruction, fixity and motion, expansion and contraction. Over time, landscapes of industrial ruination will become landscapes of regeneration, reuse, demolition or abandonment all over again. Moreover, many people experience industrial ruins indirectly, from a distance: from the window of a moving car, bus or train of an; in an unfamiliar city,

neighbourhood or stretch of road; by looking at photographs; or as an act of ‘tourism’, through deliberately seeking out ruins as sites for art, play or mischief. If both process and lived experience are taken seriously in a theoretical and empirical analysis of industrial ruination, then they present important challenges and modifications to existing theory on the subject.

1.2 Memory and industrial ruins

Collective memory, a term first coined by Maurice Halbwachs (1980 [1925]), describes the shared and socially constructed memory of a group of people as opposed to individual memory. The notion of collective memory has since been used in studies of national and public memories of traumatic histories, such as that of the Holocaust (cf. Williams, 2007), as well as more broadly in relation to complex processes of historical change (Blokland, 2001; Nora, 1989; Samuel, 1994). Other scholars (Connerton, 1989; Fentress, 1992) prefer the term ‘social memory’ to ‘collective memory’ which suggests a less homogenized, more complex interplay between the individual and the collective. The related concepts of ‘place identity’ and ‘place attachment’ have emerged as core themes in human geography, in relation to themes of mobility, community bonds, and gender relations (Massey, 1994; Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976; Cresswell, 1996). Place attachment has also been theorised within the environmental psychology literature (Giuliani, 1993; Gustafson, 2001) to refer to the relationship between self and place, in terms of attachment and socialisation, but also in relation to a notion of collective and community-based identity.

The concept of collective memory has also been taken up in criticisms of the heritage and museum industries. For example, Boyer (1994) argues that the contemporary postmodern city of collective memory is an artificial ‘museum’ made up of reinserted architectural fragments and traditions from the past. Lim (2000) points out that the collective memories people invest in places are often at odds with the forces of economic development, the latter of which tend to erase memories in the race to become modern. In much of the literature, the concept of collective or social memory is linked to a past that is disconnected from the present, a past that needs to be memorialized and made sense of. Other scholars have framed the split between official and unofficial memory in terms of an artificial divide between history and memory. For example, Nora (1989) is critical of the split between ‘true memory’ and historical studies of memory; and Samuel (1994) also argues for a synthesis between history

and memory, linking the concept of memory to ‘contemporary ethnography’. My analysis of memory follows Nora and Samuel through conceptualising memory as a dynamic and embodied force, but in the particular context of industrial ruination as a lived process.

Much of the sociological literature on memory and industrial ruins in particular relates to the social production of meaning and memory, both official and unofficial, and to the commodification of memory in processes of ‘museumification’ and in various forms of commemoration (Savage, 2003; Sargin, 2004; Cowie, 2003; Shackel, 2006; Edensor, 2005). In an analysis of the relationship between social memory and industrial landscapes in the case of Virginus Island, part of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park in West Virginia, Shackel and Palus (2006) emphasize the struggle between labour and capital to control the meaning of the past. Another account of post-industrial conflict over meaning explores the contested politics of official memory-making and forgetting in Ankara, Turkey since the 1950s (Sargin, 2004). In an analysis of commemorative monuments to steel in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Savage (2005) argues for the poetic and symbolic superiority of a residential slag pile (the waste product from the process of making steel) as a monument to steel over officially sanctioned monuments. Edensor (2005) also contrasts official memory with alternative memories. He highlights the recent trends towards ‘museumification’ in the conversion of industrial ruins to homogenous sites of tourism and consumption, and goes on to explore ‘counter-memories’ and ‘involuntary memories’: multiple memories and forms of remembering stimulated by the ‘objects, spaces and traces’ embodied in ruins.

Zukin’s (1991) concept of an ‘inner landscape of creative destruction’, an interior world of rupture reflected through ‘individual perceptions of structural displacement’, provides further insights for situating an analysis of memory in relation to lived processes of industrial ruination. Zukin theorizes how people’s interior worlds relate to the socioeconomic context of shifting away from ‘landscapes of devastation’ towards ‘landscapes of consumption’. As she argues, ‘deindustrialization and gentrification are two sides of the same process of landscape formation: a distancing from basic production spaces and a movement towards spaces of consumption’ (p. 269). ‘Liminal’ spaces, or culturally mediated ‘no man’s lands’, are created in these socio-spatial shifts. Walker might be described as one such space, caught somewhere in the middle of a social-spatial shift. My analysis of the ‘inner landscape’ of industrial decline in Walker explores a relationship between memory and place that is rooted in the lived experience of memory in the present. The literature on nostalgia also suggests that

memory is an experience of the present; nostalgia always tells us more about the present than it does about the past (Davis, 1979; Shaw, 1989). I use the concept of ‘living memory’, defined as people’s memories of a shared industrial past, as opposed to ‘official memory’ or ‘collective memory’. Living memory has diverse expressions across generations and class, and it also manifests in less obvious ways than in varying degrees of nostalgia or loss, through local practices in communities steeped in legacies of industrial ruination. Sites and processes of industrial ruination are deeply connected with the past and the memory contained within them, as they are physical reminders of industrial production and decline, and of the lives which were connected to these spaces. According to Savage (2003: 237):

The deindustrialized landscape, like a ruined battlefield that heals over, is ripe for commemoration. As the physical traces of the industrial age – the factories, the immigrant enclaves that served them, the foul air – disappear, the urge to reaffirm or celebrate the industrial past seems to grow stronger.

One is left with two questions: 1) what happens to memory when the ruined battlefield has not healed over, and 2) what happens when the physical traces of the industrial age linger?

1.3 Walker Riverside, Newcastle upon Tyne

Walker is situated in the East End of Newcastle, and it is one of the areas of the city that showcases the physical evidence of industrial decline: abandoned shipyards, old warehouses, derelict housing, vacant lots and boarded-up shops. The East End of Newcastle developed in the late nineteenth-century to house industrial workers in shipbuilding, engineering, coal mining, iron, and chemical and glass works. Coal mining had collapsed by the mid twentieth-century, and shipbuilding began to decline dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s, with the last shipyard closing in 2006. Walker generally refers to the area between Welbeck Road and the River Tyne. Local people speak of Walker as extending beyond the boundaries of the Walker ward to include the neighbouring areas of Daisy Hill, Eastfield, Walkergate, Walkerdene and Walkerville. Walker Riverside refers to the area of Walker which is closest to the River Tyne, but the boundary between Walker and Walker Riverside is also blurred (Madanipour, 1999). In fact, ‘Walker Riverside’ does not exist independently as a ward or as a neighbourhood, but rather it refers to a proposed regeneration area designated by Newcastle City Council.

The overall picture in Walker has been one of steady decline over the past thirty years, with the erosion of housing, shops and services accompanying the erosion of industries. The City

of Newcastle as a whole experienced significant population between 1971 and 2001, but population loss during the same period was more severe in Walker, dropping from 13,035 in 1971 to 7725 in 2001. The Walker ward ranked the worst of all twenty-six wards in Newcastle and thirtieth worst of all 8414 wards in England against the 2000 English Indices of Deprivation (Noble et al, 2000). At the time of my fieldwork (June 2005- March 2006), seventy percent of the total housing stock in Walker consisted of local authority housing, much of which was built during the 1930s. These houses were built to accommodate people who worked in the shipyards along the riverside, thus the flow between the community and the industrial riverfront was initially integral. That flow has since been disrupted, as the Walker community is now physically separated from the industrial riverside area by a major road and by security gates and fences (Figure 1). Walker Riverside has been the target of Newcastle City Council regeneration efforts dating from 2001, with the stated aim of attracting new population to the area and reversing the retreat of public and private services from the area. After much contestation over proposed demolitions of council houses, Walker Riverside regeneration plans finally started to go ahead in 2006 under ‘option three’, which involved ‘major impact’ in spatial form for the community.



Figure 1 Road separating Walker community and riverside, June 2005.

The Walker Riverside industrial area is symbolically and economically important in the context of both Newcastle and Walker because of its connection with shipbuilding. In particular, the Swan Hunter shipyard serves as an icon of industry in Newcastle as the ‘last shipyard of the Tyne’. However, other industrial sites in the East End were also important for the area, such as the former Parsons factory, located northwest of Walker in Heaton. Although

not technically part of Walker Riverside, this steam turbine manufacturing factory was also historically important for the Walker area in terms of employment. At the time of my research, the Siemens plant was expected to close imminently. Indeed, the Siemens plant since closed its operation, selling the site back to Newcastle City Council, with demolitions of the North end of the plant underway from early 2007. The story of the former Parsons factory story coincides both thematically and temporally with that of Swan Hunter, with the gradual whittling away of a massive industrial workforce from thousands to hundreds, the rise and fall of expectations of recovery, and the prospect of final closure. The concepts of ‘living memory’ and ‘industrial ruination as a lived process’ which emerged in my case study research of legacies of shipbuilding in Walker, could provide insights for understanding other contexts of people’s lived experiences of industrial decline.

1.4 Living memory

The concept of ‘living memory’ suggests that local memories exist within the present as dynamic and changing processes, and that they do not necessarily function as part of the social construction of official or unofficial collective memory. This concept has parallels with Nora’s (1989) notion of ‘true memory’— memory which has not yet become absorbed in official ‘history’. Nora introduces the concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) to subvert what he describes as the separation between memory and history. However, Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* represent a somewhat idealized vision of memory: they are ‘mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death; enveloped in a Möbius strip of the collective and the individual, the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile...’ (1989: 19), and to be created, they require a ‘will to remember’ and a capacity for change. By contrast, my concept of ‘living memory’ in the context of Walker comprises neither a collective willingness to remember or to forget, nor a capacity to accept change. Rather, I argue that living memory in Walker is rooted in complex and varied lived experiences through processes of industrial decline and post-industrial change. More specifically, living memory in this case is complicated by the fact that at the time of interviewing, the last shipyard of the Tyne still remained open, yet the shipyards had been in significant decline for over thirty years. This has interesting implications for living memory in cases which lack both 1) closure from a collective past, and 2) a secure promise of a different future. The following analysis draws on selected interviews which are particularly illustrative of lived experiences of socioeconomic change. First, I will explore two themes of living memory reflecting differences in class and

age; and second, I will explore two themes of living memory at the ‘collective’ or community level.

‘Where are the cathedrals of the working classes?’

Local memory of the shipyards along Walker Riverside stretched beyond the place itself to include not only Walker, but also Newcastle and the whole of the North East. The interviewees who reflected the strongest sense of sadness, loss and disappointment over the decline of the shipyards over the past thirty years were those connected with the shipbuilding industry, either as workers or as close family of workers. I spoke with a local resident of Byker (neighbouring Walker) who used to work in shipbuilding but who was now working at a local charity for asylum seekers in hard-to-let homes in the Walker/Byker area. Recalling his job interview for work in the shipyards, he recounted with irony how the employers had said he was lucky to get in and that he could have a job for life. He expressed a deep sense of loss connected with the decline of shipbuilding, remarking:

Shipbuilding is not like coal mining, unhealthy or unsafe, when there’s both a sadness and a gladness when it goes. With shipbuilding, there is just a sadness, a loss, and there is nothing to replace it... There is a psyche of the North East which is built on the pride of shipbuilding.’ (Interview, worker for ‘Common Ground’ charity and local resident, Byker, 1 Dec 2005)

The comment about ‘sadness and gladness’, regarding the decline of an industry, draws attention to an important distinction between heavily polluting industries and cleaner industries. Although some shipyard workers in Walker have suffered from the effects of asbestos and dangerous physical work in the shipyards, even more dangerous and ‘dirty’ industries such as coalmining tend to have more conflicted associations.

One of the few remaining shipyard workers in the North East expressed similar views. Terrie, the shop steward of the General, Municipal and Boilermaker’s Union, started working in the shipyards of the Tyne twenty years ago and had worked in Swan Hunter for the past few years. He noted that Swan Hunter was a powerful symbol as the ‘last shipyard of the Tyne’, and for this reason, people demonstrated a loyalty to the shipyard itself, if not a loyalty to the company. He emphasised the importance of the shipbuilding industry in particular for Britain, asking: ‘How can an island exist without ships?’ These views were also highly politicised, as he highlighted in the following statement:

Yes, it's of tremendous symbolic and economic importance, and if it goes down under a Labour government we can only conclude that we're not valued as we think we should be. It has been said by elements of government, well let shipbuilding go, the North East doesn't need it, but it certainly does need it. You've got a thousand people working here, well under a thousand work here, but you've got a vast network of subcontractors and suppliers. And if this type of work isn't here, we won't go and find something else to do; we'll just go and work somewhere else which would be a loss to the area and the local economy. We can't all sell each other baskets and jam.

(Interview, 2 Dec 2005)

Terrie repeated this last phrase again later in the interview. His account reflected deep scepticism about the merits of the service-based economy. Terrie's narrative of socioeconomic change was wrapped up not only in doubt about the new economy, but in a sense of injustice and anger over the politics surrounding the decline of manufacturing in the UK. He strongly identified with the politics between Labour and the Tories, and he suggested that it would be bad for Labour's image in the North East if the shipyard closed under a Labour government. Terrie concluded by lamenting: 'There's Durham Cathedral... but where are the cathedrals of the working classes? Our cathedrals were destroyed...' Then, perhaps conscious that his voice represented a certain type of view that researchers might be interested in, he said, 'There's plenty more where that came from, if only there was time.' He had to get back to work. However, for another perspective, he asked me to speak with another man, Bill, Senior Payroll Manager, who had worked for Swan Hunter since 1969.

Bill gained some local fame as the 'last man' and 'first man' at Swan Hunter when the company went into receivership in 1994, closed on Christmas Eve day in December 1995, and then was resurrected under different ownership, a Dutch company, in 1996. Bill was the last person on the books for Swan Hunter when it closed.³ Within the local community, Bill came to be a personal symbol of the near-death and resurrection of the shipyard. At the time of our interview (2 Dec 2005), Bill noted that a feeling of uncertainty was present in the shipyard since the contracts were coming to an end and there was not a great deal of hope for securing future contracts. As contrasted with Terrie, Bill was optimistic about his future. Bill acknowledged that when the next vessel went out within a few months time, he might have to

³ An article in the *Sunday Sun* dated 24 Dec 1995 with the headline 'Will the last man at Swan Hunter please turn out the lights' details his story as the last man at the shipyard. Later, again in the *Sunday Sun* dated 14 April 1996, Bill's face reappeared under the headline 'Return of the Last Man!'

start looking for another job, which was difficult given his age. He said that he might only get part-time work, and he didn't know what to expect. However, he said that he was in a fortunate position because he no longer had a mortgage and could afford to 'putter' until his retirement. Although Bill also expressed sadness about the passing of the shipbuilding era, he was less angry than Terrie. Perhaps this was related to his position as a white-collar, rather than blue-collar, worker within the firm; he was the Senior Payroll Manager rather than a shipbuilder.



Figure 2 Swan Hunter shipyard, June 2005

Narratives of sadness, loss and pride associated with shipbuilding were found in the stories of the relatively few remaining people with direct connections to the shipbuilding industries. These views represent a politics of living memory, as they connect with the wider context of the decline of shipbuilding in the North East and with Thatcherism and the decline of manufacturing in Britain more generally. They also suggest that the sense of loss is more strongly associated with occupation, class and gender, as shipbuilding industry included predominantly male, white, working-class workers (Dogan, 1968; Roberts, 2007). As Terrie so provocatively suggested, there are no longer any cathedrals of the working classes. However, I had the sense that cathedrals of working class memory, in the form of museums, art galleries, or monuments, were not what Terrie was referring to. He was referring to cathedrals of living industry rather than remembered industry, cathedrals such as factories, shipyards stacked with cranes, and flourishing industrial communities: cathedrals which have 'been destroyed'.

Generational nostalgia?

As local people's direct experience of working in the shipyards in Walker has faded into the third and fourth generations, generational differences have emerged in people's memories and perceptions of industrial ruination. One interviewee described these differences in the following passage:

I think probably older, more senior members of the community have a nostalgic view of activity on the Tyne some years ago and I think their attachment is based around a remembrance of that high level of activity and employment, although quite often that may well be through rose-tinted spectacles, as it wasn't easy, that physical kind of labour. (Interview, Regeneration Manager, East End Partnership, 12 Sep 2005)

This interviewee went on to contrast older people's attachment to old industrial sites as romantic and nostalgic with younger people's view of ruins as 'playgrounds' or 'eyesores'. By playgrounds, he was probably alluding to young people's informal uses of space in Walker Riverside, uses that include arson, vandalism, climbing cranes, and alcohol and drug use. However, from other interviews, I found that not all older people held such a nostalgic view as this interviewee suggested.

I spoke with an elderly woman and two upper-middle-aged women at the Thomas Gaughan Community Centre in Walker, and they demonstrated little attachment to old industrial sites. All three women agreed that there was not much going on at the shipyards any longer (Interviews, 22 Mar 2006). When I asked about the history of shipbuilding work in the area, and whether people still remained connected to that history in subsequent generations, the interviewees responded by saying that all the people who worked in shipbuilding were elderly, and that it was up to the younger generation to find something else to do. Even the elderly interviewee, who was in her 70s, did not associate the shipyards with her own generation; her closest relations to have worked in the shipyards were her uncles. This illustrates that for many residents in Walker, shipbuilding long ceased to have relevance as a source of employment for the local community, despite the fact that shipbuilding continued in a skeletal form until quite recently.

During an informal discussion in Byker with an interviewee and two of her family members, we explored intergenerational memories and perceptions of the shipyards. I accompanied Tania, a resident of Walker, to her father's taxi company in neighbouring Byker. Tania's grandfather used to work in the shipyards, and she thought that her aunt and uncle, who were

working at the taxi company on that day, might be able to tell me something about the shipyards. Tania herself had no direct connection with the shipyards, although as a local resident with family connections to the industry and with strong social ties to the community, she had a respect for the industrial past and the stories of her parents and grandparents. The aunt and uncle recalled that there was once a ‘boneyard’ along the riverside (a glue factory), and they described, with a lively sense of humour, how much the boneyard stank. Throughout the discussion, the three relatives would often break into laughter, as they seemed to hold the ways of the past to be funny and odd, as compared with the present. This sense of detachment through humour seemed in part to relate to the passing of time, as they were further from the experience of the shipyards, but it also seemed to be connected to their economic situation, for they had done relatively well for themselves with the taxi business.

Although there were generational differences in local memories and perceptions of sites, this did not occur in a linear fashion, where the oldest generation had the greatest nostalgia and the younger generations were more detached. People from the older generations also expressed detachment from the history of shipbuilding, even if they were related to people who had worked in the yards. Other factors, such as people’s direct socioeconomic relationships to the industries, seemed to be at least as, if not more, significant. The prolonged decline of shipbuilding in Walker, a process which began as early as the 1960s, also accounts for a general acceptance within the Walker community that shipbuilding is an increasingly distant source of pride, and that it no longer has socioeconomic meaning for the community of the present. However, although generational, socioeconomic and gender differences could be traced through different individual lived experiences and memories of industrial decline, memory at the level of the collective or the community was consistent across two diffuse forms of living memory: *regeneration* and *community solidarity*.

Regeneration

The main issue for most local interviewees was the proposed regeneration to the Walker community. The relations between people and the sites of industrial ruination had to be teased out, and the most common form in which the relations emerged was through memory. Those who seemed furthest from thinking about old industrial sites themselves were the residents of the local community. The only way to access their ideas with regard to old industrial sites was through talking about regeneration and change in their community. Most

residents saw the decline of shipbuilding as part of that story, but not as a pressing issue and not as one that could be changed. After all, regeneration was the most immediate and pressing issue facing the Walker community because it involved the demolition of homes which people had lived in all their lives.

The prospect of this form of regeneration at the time of my research threatened the community cohesion and social order so valued in Walker despite its socioeconomic problems. Walker represented a stigmatised area, at least for those who did not live there, which had suffered from decline and deprivation for over thirty years, and regeneration plans to improve the area had come and gone many times without fundamentally changing the area. There was much scepticism and distrust amongst residents in Walker over what sort of change might occur this time around. Many felt that regeneration would not serve the interests of the community but rather, those of developers and 'yuppies'. After all, the regeneration involved the demolition of existing homes and the construction of new riverside flats targeted at attracting higher income groups into the area and the creation a 'riverside village' concept of shops and services to cater to the new population.

The issue of impending regeneration tended to eclipse attachment to the shipyard sites themselves for many residents in Walker. Apart from those who remembered or sustained direct employment connections with the shipyard industries, the sense of sadness, loss, injury and despair was no longer deeply connected with memory of those sites, but had been transferred to the present concern, to the community infrastructure which was at stake. I spoke with an elderly woman who lived in one of the homes set to be demolished, a home she had lived in for thirty-one years, and when I asked about her relationship to, and perception of, the shipyards, she replied:

My uncles used to work there, but they worked there a lot of years ago and I've got three sons that work down in Shepherd Offshore. Apart from that there's only one I know. I mean there's not even much going on down there now in the yards; that's slowly going downhill and all. I mean, there's not much I can say really, 'cause I mean at the end of the day there's not much I can do about it now. It's a done deal. People there won't let me know when, how long's it going to be, before they're coming. But they said they're supposed to build houses on Pottery Bank before they pull them down and I'm hoping they're going to keep that promise. (Interview, 22 Mar 2006)

The interviewee began by mentioning her relatives who work or have worked in the shipyards, but she emphasised the declining importance of the shipyards today and returned to the subject of regeneration and the impending demolition of her home. She described her powerlessness to change developments in the area since ‘it’s a done deal’. I encountered a similar situation when I visited other Pottery Bank residents. It was difficult to get them to talk about anything outside of regeneration, given the emotive nature of the topic. They talked about how the uncertainty of the future of their homes impacted their health, leading to stress, anxiety, poor mental health, panic attacks, and a feeling of inability to do anything with their homes — sell them, re-paint them, furnish them, or anything at all (Interviews, two residents, 12 Sep 2005). Since the regeneration and demolitions have been underway, the ‘Walker Riverside Regeneration Project’ team has started to brand Walker as a ‘location of choice’ (<http://www.walker-riverside.co.uk>), and their recent (2007) ‘Heart of Walker’ campaign emphasises building upon community spirit in the regeneration project, but fails to explicitly mention industrial decline. However, one might argue that ‘community spirit’ in this context is a diffuse reference to Walker’s shared industrial past.

Community Solidarity

If the shipyards have gradually lost meaning for some people in Walker, there has been one thing which has continued to have deep cultural and social meaning: the community. The sense of community in Walker and the collective awareness of the goings-on in and around the community is a theme which also connects with local ‘living memory’. Memory, after all, is not just about the past, but it is also about the present; particularly, how the past filters into the present. The economist Alfred Marshall (1920) was the first to theorise the beneficial effects of industrial ‘atmosphere’ on the workings of nineteenth-century industrial districts. This referred to the solidarity amongst communities of industrial workers. I would argue that a form of ‘industrial atmosphere’ remains in present-day Walker in the character of the community and the relationships within that community.

Many interviewees referred in different ways to the strong sense of community in Walker. A representative from the regeneration partner for Newcastle City Council, Places for People Group, puzzled over the discrepancy between the physical infrastructure and this community spirit: ‘There is nothing physically appealing about the area, no landmark buildings and

indistinct housing and roads, yet there is a strong local commitment to the area based on its industrial past' (Interview, 2 Dec 2005). A Labour City Councillor for Walker, who was an opponent of proposals for regeneration in Walker, also referred to the strength of family connections in the community in Walker, noting that the same families tend to live within the same street for generations, and the fact that local people tend not to travel, even the younger generations. One could 'look at it as a form of stagnation', he said, but also as 'a strength and an asset' (Interview, 30 Aug 2005). During walking tour with a local resident of Walker (21 Mar 2006), the resident illustrated the community and family networks in Walker quite vividly: she knew the people, places, politics and local history of Walker in intimate detail, and she showed me her house and the houses of her mother, grandmother and brother, all within a couple of blocks. Other Walker residents also described the closeness of their family networks, and how their parents, siblings and children live on the same streets as them or around the block. Three interviewees (22 Mar 2006) described Walker as a place of good families and community spirit despite being 'run down'. One interviewee described her attachment to the community as follows:

Yes, it's run down and everything. But there is a strong community spirit and if anything happens to anybody in the community they'll all rally around to make sure they're alright... And we know the people, so that's one of the good strong points about it, that we know the area, we know the people who live in the area. It's alright for some people working here but at the end of the day they get in their cars and they go to their little nice housing estates, but we actually live on the estate. (Interview, 2 Mar 06)

The interviewee started by talking about the mutual support between people within the community, and then drew attention to a tension between local people and outsiders who worked in the community centre. Indeed, it was precisely because of the strong community spirit and history of engagement with local politics, that the regeneration process did not go ahead as planned in 2001 under the Newcastle City plan, 'Going for Growth'.

'Industrial atmosphere' in the form of community solidarity is almost all that remains of a rich industrial heritage which grows dimmer in the collective memory of Walker with each passing generation. However, the notion of strong families and a strong community presents a rather idealised picture of life in Walker, and the tensions within the community are worth reflecting upon in relation to this theme. Traditionally, Walker is a predominantly white, working class area, like the North East as a whole. According to the 2001 Census, 97.2% of

the population in Walker was white, as compared with 93.1% of the population in Newcastle and 92.1% in the United Kingdom. Community solidarity and cohesion is based around these white, working class families, most descended from shipyard workers. A number of families and individuals have left Walker in the past decades, so the people who remain are either those who have chosen to remain, quite possibly out of attachment to the community and to their homes, or else those have been unable to move due to financial or personal constraints. Thus, the resilient character of the community can in part be explained by the fact that its population consists of people who have already remained and persevered through times of economic trouble. In an ethnography of young subcultures in North East England, Anoop Nayak (2003) analyses 'Geordie' identity through the lens of class and race. Nayak argues that it is a fallacy to presume that racism is absent from predominantly white areas, and traces complex histories and trends in race relations in the North East. Indeed, in the case of Walker, the issue of racism and difference has become increasingly integral to an analysis of community since the 2001 Census. The dynamic between the primarily white, working class community of Walker, with its history of close families and a shared culture, and primarily black African asylum seekers who have recently arrived in Walker, sheds light on elements of the community as a whole.⁴

Community cohesion as living memory, as the present-day embodiment of a shared industrial past, is perhaps an overly romanticised concept of what Marshall meant by 'industrial atmosphere'. Surely the industry needs to exist for its atmosphere to remain. Or perhaps one might suggest that all that is left in Walker is a de-industrialised atmosphere, one of decline and deterioration. At the very least, I think it is possible to argue that there is a sense of unity amidst the disarray, a solidarity amongst people, which originates from a shared industrial past. There is an apparent contradiction between community spirit (solidarity and cohesion through strong families and networks) and community decline (as defined through socioeconomic indicators). These two issues represent positive and negative sides of the

⁴ In 2000, the UK government introduced a dispersal system whereby asylum seekers were to be placed in designated deprived areas in 'hard to let' housing. Asylum seekers were 'dispersed' throughout the North East, with relatively high numbers placed in Walker and Byker. However, neither the local population nor the community centres in Walker were prepared for this sudden influx of people. Moreover, as a deprived community in its own right, many residents were resentful that asylum seekers were provided with community housing and other resources, however meagre. The asylum seekers were provided with a basic package, including basic accommodation and an allowance amounting to 70% of income support at £40 a week for a single person. In 2003, asylum seekers lost the right to apply for work, although in 2005 limited permission to seek work was granted. At the time of my research, there were approximately four hundred asylum seekers in the Walker and Byker area.

socioeconomic and cultural impacts of industrial decline: the positive side embodies a less tangible community spirit founded, at least initially, on a community with a strong industrial identity, and the negative side involves material degradation and socioeconomic deprivation. The concept of community cohesion in Walker is not straightforward; it raises an interesting set of questions in relation to the construction of place, both by residents and by policy-makers and planners. Indeed, Amin's (2005: 614) criticism of the political use of the notion of 'community cohesion' by New Labour in the UK as a means of redefining the social, whereby the idea of community and the local 'has been re-imagined as the cause, consequence, and remedy of social and spatial inequality,' is relevant in the context of this case study. With the prospect of regeneration, prolonged processes of deindustrialization in Walker have perhaps come to a turning point. Whether this regeneration will succeed in erasing the legacies of the industrial past, both positive and negative, and for better or for worse, remains to be seen.

Conclusion

The period of my study in Walker captures the uncertainty of a prolonged period of transformation, where the death knell has long been sounding, but the final blow has not been struck, and the life support has not yet been severed. This is a slow and painful process, and it is still underway. The 'inner world of creative destruction' (Zukin, 1991) in the various forms of memory in Walker, articulated with sadness, anger, humour, resignation or transference, is an inner world which reflects many of the difficulties in shifting from a social space of industrial decline towards an undefined 'post-industrial' dream. Walker represents but one example of a place caught between past and future, in which the present is imbued with the past, the present had not moved far from the past, and the future is at best uncertain.

There was no commemoration of shipbuilding in the form of monuments, tourist shops, museums or cultural activities based around old industrial sites in Walker, either along the riverside or within the surrounding community. At the time of my fieldwork, from August 2005 to March 2006, before the closure of Swan Hunter in July 2006, there were no plans to commemorate the industrial history of shipbuilding within the area. The spatial, political and economic context of Walker Riverside was of physical separation from the community (gated entrances, few access points, and a main road acting as a barrier), and the regulation in the uses of spaces. The politics and economics behind shipbuilding in the area as a whole have necessarily shaped the ways in which people relate to the sites and the scope for

commemoration, museumification, and cultural uses of sites. In this context, such processes could really only occur in a top-down, 'official' capacity. Only once the flagship yard of Swan Hunter had finally been 'ruined', did the idea of a shipbuilding museum emerge as a possibility. Before, with 260 workers still employed at Swan's, the myth if not the reality could still be sustained that shipbuilding was alive in the North East. It remains to be seen whether official memory in the future will mesh with local memory in Walker, and whether it can offer any kind of 'closure', any kind of gateway to a future, particularly one without jobs. After all, as Terrie said, 'We can't all sell each other baskets and jam...' The urban development strategy of the regional government agency OneNorthEast is to 'back a number of horses', including mostly 'low value things like call centres', cultural industries and tourism. But there is no single industrial sector that the hopes of the North East are being pinned on (Interview, Robin Beveridge, 29 Sep 2005).

The forms of historical memory in Walker located within my interviewees' accounts were embedded in processes of social and economic change, and how people understood themselves in relation to place and history. Shipbuilding and manufacturing in the North East have long been considered to be in irreversible decline, but socioeconomic and psychological rupture with the past were held out in the maintenance of Swan Hunter as the last shipyard of the Tyne, and in the strength of community spirit shaped by industrial legacy which has remained etched in the socioeconomic landscape of Walker. Boyer (1994: 133) reflects on Halbwachs' distinction between artificial (socially constructed) and 'real' collective memory as follows:

As long as memory stays alive within a group's collective experience, he argued, there is no necessity to write it down or to fix it as the official story of events. But when distance appears, conferring its distinctions and exclusions, opening a gap between the enactments of the past and the recall of the present, then history begins to be artificially recreated.

Following this logic, one might say that memory in Walker is only now entering a stage where it can be called upon and retold as a reconstructed past.

Different forms of memory were reflected in the narratives of local people in Walker. There was a politics of memory which came through in the accounts of former shipyard workers, a politics which was anchored in the wider context of deindustrialization, Thatcherism, the decline of shipbuilding, and the declining voice of trade unions in the North East as a whole.

These accounts were tinged with sadness, loss and a sense of anger, but also, with the passage of time, with a sense of resignation and a sense that this story has become well-rehearsed. There were generational differences in memory, where stronger associations with the industrial past were often reflected in older generations. There was also a localised memory, reflected in the narratives of local residents in Walker, where memories can be both sad and funny, and where the industrial past was folded into the rhythms and fabric of the community. Many residents in Walker have focused on resisting the regeneration of their community rather than lamenting or protesting the abandonment of industry. In a way, they have been protecting their shared industrial memory through the protection of their community. Finally, movements toward public commemoration of industrial heritage in the form of museums, cultural uses of old industrial sites, or the construction of monuments were absent at both the local and official levels during the period of my study. The ruins and the physical traces of the industrial era, including the homes that were constructed to house the shipyard workers, perhaps represent the end of ‘living memory’, and their subsequent demolition or re-appropriation, erasure or reconstitution



Figure 3. Abandoned A&P Tyne Shipyard, Walker Riverside, June 2005.

References

- Amin, A.** 2005 'Local community on trial', *Economy and Society* 34(4): 612-633.
- Benjamin, W.** 2000 *The Arcades Project*, 4th Edition, Cambridge, Mass and London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Berman, M.** 1983 *All That is Solid Melts into Air: the Experience of Modernity*, London: Verso.
- Blokland, T.** 2001 'Bricks, mortar, memories: neighbourhood and networks in collective acts of remembering', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25(2): 268-283.
- Boyer, M. C.** 1994 *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Connerton, P.** 1989 *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cowie, J. and Heathcott, J.** (eds) 2003 *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*, Ithaca: ILR Press.
- Cresswell, T.** 1996 *In place/out of place : geography, ideology, and transgression*, Minneapolis ; London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Davis, F.** 1979 *Yearning for yesterday : a sociology of nostalgia*, New York: Free Press.
- Dougan, D.** 1968 *The history of North East shipbuilding*, London: Allen and Unwin.
- Edensor, T.** 2005a 'The ghosts of industrial ruins: ordering and disordering memory in excessive space', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23(6): 829-849.
— 2005b *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality*, Oxford: Berg.
- Fentress, J. and Wickham, C.** 1992 *Social Memory*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Florida, R. L.** 2005 *Cities and the Creative Class*, New York; London: Routledge.
- Giuliani, M. V.** 1993 'Place attachment in a developmental and cultural context', *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 13(3): 267-274.
- Gustafson, P.** 2001 'Roots and routes: exploring the relationship between place attachment and mobility', *Environment and Behavior* 33(5): 667-686.
- Halbwachs, M.** 1980 *The Collective Memory*, 1st Edition, New York: Harper & Row.
- Harvey, D.** 1999 *The Limits to Capital*, Verso Edition, London ; New York: Verso.
— 2000 *Spaces of Hope*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Jakle, J. A. and Wilson, D.** 1992 *Derelict Landscapes: The Wasting of America's Built Environment*, Savage: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Landry, C. and Bianchini, F.** 1995 *The Creative City*, London: Demos Comedia.
- Lim, W. S.-W.** 2000 'Memories and urban places', *City* 4(2): 270-277.

- MacKenzie, M.** 2001 *American Ruins: Ghosts on the Landscape*, Afton: Afton Historical Society Press.
- Madanipour, A. and Bevan, M.** 1999 'Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne: A Neighbourhood in Transition' *CREUE Occasional Papers Series (No. 2)*, Newcastle upon Tyne: University of Newcastle upon Tyne.
- Marshall, A.** 1920 *Industry and Trade: A Study of Industrial Technique and Business Organization, and of Their Influences on the Conditions of Various Classes and Nations*, 3rd ed Edition, London: Macmillan.
- Massey, D.** 1994 *Space, Place and Gender*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nayak, A.** 2003 *Race, Place and Globalization: Youth Cultures in a Changing World*, Oxford: Berg.
- Noble, M., Wright, G. and Dibben, C.** 2000 'The English Indices of Deprivation 2000', London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
- Nora, P.** 1989 'Between memory and history', *Representations* 26(1): 7-24.
- Relph, E.** 1976 *Place and Placelessness*, London: Pion.
- Roberts, I.** 2007 'Collective Representations, Divided Memory and Patterns of Paradox: Mining and Shipbuilding', *Sociological Research Online* 12(6).
- Samuel, R.** 1994 *Theatres of Memory*, London: Verso.
- Sargin, G.** 2004 'Displaced memories, or the architecture of forgetting and remembrance', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22(5): 659-680.
- Savage, K.** 2003 'Monuments of a lost cause: the postindustrial campaign to commemorate steel', in J. Cowie and J. C. Heathcott (eds) *Beyond the Ruins: the Meanings of Deindustrialization*, Ithaca: ILR Press.
- Schumpeter, J. A.** 1965 *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 4th Edition, London: Allen & Unwin.
- Shackel, P. A. and Palus, M.** 2006 'Remembering an Industrial Landscape', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 10(1): 49-71.
- Shaw, C. and Chase, M.** (eds) 1989 *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Smith, N.** 1984 *Uneven Development : Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Stewart, K.** 1996 *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Tuan, Y.-f.** 1977 *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, London: Edward Arnold.

Vergara, C. J. 1999 *American Ruins*, New York: The Monacelli Press.

Williams, P. H. 2007 *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*, Oxford: Berg.

Zukin, S. 1991 *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*, Berkeley: University of California Press.