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Post-Industrial Coal-Mining Landscapes and the Evolution of Mining Memory

Felix van Veldhoven

Abstract
In this chapter an attempt is made to link theories on social memory to the post-industrial coal landscapes of Dutch and Belgian Limburg. The focus is on the interface between the ideas about remembering and forgetting on the one hand, and the specific case studies of the mining districts on the other. The first section of this chapter describes the notion of ‘formative forgetting’, which appears to be very useful for the study of mining heritage. After describing the diverging nature and extent of mining heritage preservation, it is stated that we need to consider a new factor, the so-called ‘evolution’ of memory, when we discuss heritage.

Keywords: landscape biography, mining heritage, remembering, forgetting, Dutch Limburg, Belgian Limburg

Introduction

The landscape tells – or rather is – a story. It enfolds the lives and times of predecessors who, over the generations, have moved around in it and played their part in its formation. To perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past (Ingold, 1993, p. 152).

In his *Snail and Snail Shell: Industrial Heritage and the Reconstruction of a Lost World* (2004), historian Erik Nijhof describes how all traces of the past have disappeared in the former mining district of Dutch Limburg. The era of coal mining appears to be no more than a transitional phase within Dutch economic development. The author argues that Dutch society seems eager
to forget its mining past, especially when compared to Belgium or Germany. This appears to be a leaving behind of a ‘world we have lost’, a ‘trauma’ of the coal. Hardly anything of the once all-embracing industry has survived. Under the idyllic motto ‘from black to green’, remnants like head frames, spoil heaps, winding towers, engine houses, offices, workshops and mine tracks were swiftly and efficiently removed from the landscape.

In this chapter an attempt is made to link theories on social memory to the post-industrial landscape of coal districts. In which way can the ideas on remembering and forgetting be tied to landscape and which explanations can this connection provide to understand the changing appreciation of former coal-mining landscapes? By comparing two post-industrial coal-mining districts (Dutch Limburg and Belgian Limburg), the present study attempts to answer this question. It is stated that linking the ideas of remembering and forgetting with former mining landscapes exceeds the domain of industrial heritage, and can be employed for other forms of ‘painful’ heritage, such as remnants of the Second World War. ‘Painful heritage’ can be described as heritage that is burdened by the past. See for example the different types of ‘dissonant heritage’, as described by John Tunbridge and Gregory Ashworth in their influential Dissonant Heritage: Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict (1996), or the more recent work on ‘difficult heritage’ (e.g. Logan and Reeves, 2009; Macdonald, 2009).

Within the international dissemination of cultural heritage, memory has become a key concept. Heritage has changed into a theme park of memory. Spectators are invited on the rollercoaster of the interpretation, in which the experience of interpretation has soared beyond the interpretation itself. By embracing the concept of heritage, we have condemned ourselves to a new approach to reality in which the material remnants of the past cannot be separated from remembering and forgetting, but form the kaleidoscopic experience of the past.

Heritage can be interpreted by both essentialists and constructivists, and therefore has become ‘uncontrollable’. The heritage cult has left us with a Trojan horse, of which we increasingly face the consequences. The concept of the ‘landscape biography’ (Kolen, 2005) can be seen as a theoretical outcome of the concept of heritage. By linking the ideas of remembering and forgetting to mining landscapes, this chapter attempts to contribute to the aforementioned outcome. Within this attempt, the theory in the first part of this chapter must be seen on the same level as the materiality, i.e. the tangible remnants of the mining era in the Netherlands and Belgium, in the second part.
Remembering and Forgetting in the Landscape

If a child's vision of nature can already be loaded with complicating memories, myths and meanings, how much more elaborately wrought is the frame through which our adult eyes survey the landscape (Schama, 1995, p. 6).

Egyptologist Jan Assmann (1995) describes how social memory can survive for generations by the grace of objectified culture. According to Assmann, the structure of objectified culture and memory are of the same kind: from both, groups (as defined by Halbwachs, 1980) borrow community-forming impulses that enable these groups to reproduce their identity and cultural practices. Historian Pierre Nora's *Lieux de mémoire* (1984) has had a major influence on approaching familiar places as carriers of memory. Art historian Kirk Savage builds on Nora's ideas when he states that both 'internalized' forms of remembering (like a reunion of war veterans) and 'external' remnants (like memorials or archives) can be seen as mutually reinforcing (as cited in Robertson & Hall, 2007, p. 22). Cicero once described this connection as the scratching of a stylus on a wax tablet. Mental images and place together create memory, just like the scribble and the wax tablet together form a message. Place and memory are condemned to each other; a memory will last when it is connected to a place.

In this unique world, everything sensuous that I now originally perceive, everything that I have perceived and which I can now remember or about which others can report to me as what they have perceived or remembered, has its place (Husserl, 1997, p. 163).

In his phenomenological study *Remembering* (1987), philosopher Edward Casey approaches this subject matter by describing the so-called 'intrinsic memorability' of place (p. 186). Memory and place provide a fusion of unlike objects and form a temporary unity. A place forms a solidified scene for remembered content and situates our memories. As Husserl describes in the above quote: 'Everything (...) has its place'. In Casey's view, the 'intrinsic memorability' of place stems from the resemblance in functioning of place and memory. There seems to be symmetry: place and memory respectively merge living environment and time, in a similar way. Philosopher of history Frank Ankersmit (2002) states that the strongest and most reliable support for a memory is to be found in the association with a particular place. By way of illustration, he quotes the much-used phrase: 'Where were you when
you heard about Kennedy’s assassination?” The particular place we were in during that moment (or, for example, during the attack on the Twin Towers) seems to be just as important as the memory of the historic events itself.

The observation above can actually be demonstrated, as described by historians Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (1999). Students who were subjected to a test achieved better results when the examination was held in the same place as where they had learned the subject matter. Apparently, a place can call up memories of events that happened at the same location. One can hardly overestimate the consequences of the above for heritage, defined as the material and immaterial past we value and use in the present. Heritage may function as an anchor, as an aide-mémoire, and can call up strong, personal memories.

For Casey, landscape is the most encompassing and expansive form of place. Landscape is part of our being and our perception of it, as a living process and ever-unfinished construction, can be seen as a way of remembering. This does not mean that memory can actually be ‘grounded’ in the landscape. Apart from everything else, the process requires people, who maintain shared mental images as a collective memory. Within this process, the landscape operates to anchor memories, because of its inherent variegation, sustaining character and expressiveness (Casey, 1987). Landscape can serve as a mnemonic device.


The literature on collective memory may seem like a rapidly rising river, of which the subject of forgetting appears to be a relatively young branch (e.g., Forty, 1999; Carsten, 1996; Connerton, 2008). Little has been written about this matter and the following, about the relationship between landscape and forgetting, can be seen as a careful attempt.

The previously cited philosopher Ankersmit (2001) states that forgetting can have a formative character and may therefore be placed alongside, rather than opposite, remembering. Ankersmit describes the following paradoxical form of forgetting: a painful, traumatic experience, or period in someone’s life, can be both forgotten and remembered, ‘by relegating the traumatic experience to the domain of the unconscious, we can, indeed, forget it. But precisely by storing it there, we will also retain it as an unconscious memory. As an unconscious memory it is a constant reminder that there is something that we should or wish to forget’ (2001, p. 300). By way of illustration, he describes the Death of God, the French and the Industrial Revolution. In these cases, there appears to be a ‘leaving behind’ of an old identity and the entering of a new world. Thereafter, the left identities are carried forth by man, like
wounds, a phenomenon which Ankersmit calls the ‘pain of Prometheus’: it is a situation in which ‘a civilization is permanently aware of the social idylls of the “lost worlds” that it was forced to surrender in the course of its long history, and that will never be returned to it however strong the nostalgic yearning for these lost paradises may be’ (Ankersmit, 2001, p. 302).

It is stated that the process described above applies very well to the end of coal mining. The notion of ‘formative forgetting’, as one can put Ankersmit’s paradox, seems to be applicable to explaining the development of mining heritage. The ‘pain of Prometheus’ may be employed as an explanatory idea for the revaluation of mining heritage in both investigated areas.

To be able to close a traumatic period, to be able to forget, one first needs to remember. In German there is a word for sorting out the past: Vergangenheitsbewältigung. In her book The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place (2005), Karen Till speaks of Vergangenheitsbewältigung in an analysis of the confrontation with and overcoming of the National Socialist past in Germany. Coping with a loss, or leaving behind the traumatic closing of the mines, requires a period of hyper-remembering (Clewell, 2004). It requires the admission of what is forgotten into one’s own identity. Within this context, remembering and forgetting can be approached as two twisted aspects of social culture. Landscape is the objectified result of the daily struggle about what is to be remembered and what forgotten. This functioning as a mnemonic device means that an erasure, for example, by the complete destruction of a mining landscape, will sooner block a successful forgetting than precipitate it. The mining landscape as a whole, consisting of slag heaps, engine houses and pit heads, has a use in the closing of a traumatic mining era. Memory, with both the faces of remembering and forgetting, is closely knit to the landscape in which we find ourselves and which grants us, as an aide-mémoire, the possibility to renew and perpetuate our collective memories.

The Post-Industrial Mining Landscape of Dutch and Belgian Limburg

The first reaction in the period following the closure of an area’s mines is to erase all traces of the past, to eliminate the old landmarks and the scars on the landscape and, as far as possible, to return to the natural landscape of the pre-industrial stage (Jansen-Verbeke, 1999, p. 70).

Thus, the ambivalent character of the coal industry is described. In the heyday of the coal mines, black gold blessed the formerly isolated mining regions with
economic growth, prosperity, employment and prestige. With the transition to the post-industrial period, however, those same regions faced a dead-end situation of merciless unemployment, poverty and social problems. As sociologist Bella Dicks (2008) puts it, the sudden change leaves former mining communities sandwiched between the periods of mining and post-mining. Pit heads, slag heaps and miners’ cottages may function as mnemonic devices for memories people sometimes prefer to forget: ‘Elements of the physical landscape [...] evoke memories of hard work, community and resistance to exploitation to some, while for others they represent a past much better forgotten’ (Abrams, 1994, p. 29). Many workers of the former coal industry identify the period of the mine closures first of all with health problems and unemployment. Preservation and remembrance does not necessarily have to be a community’s priority; see also the contributions in Häyrynen, Turunen & Nyman (2012) on the cultural consequences of changes in single-industry communities.

Two post-industrial mining regions were analysed for this chapter: Dutch and Belgian Limburg. The nature and extent of mining heritage preservation differ significantly. Some of the coal mines were almost fully removed from the landscape, as if the vast influence of the coal had never existed. Other mines still show most of their steel constructions, slowly perishing and rusting away, and allow visitors to experience the functioning of a mining landscape, including integrally-preserved mining villages, offices and slag heaps.

**Dutch Limburg**

The shafts are sealed, the surface structures demolished, the mine terrain has been built over and the slag heaps are levelled or overgrown. The large, underground mine is destroyed by nature, drowned in groundwater, compressed by subterranean pressure. What remains is memory (Messing, 1988, p. VIII, translation by author).

Earlier in this chapter an attempt was made to point out that a memory does not just take root. Memories are interwoven with place and people and last as long as there is an active exchange between both. In Dutch Limburg, not only the mine shafts and chimneys have been dismantled, but entire mining landscapes have been erased. What remains is forgetting, one might say. With striking speed, nearly all references to the extraction of coal were removed from the Limburg landscape. The last coal mine, i.e. the *Oranje-Nassau I*, ceased production in 1974, and already in 1978 there was not a single place left where one could come across a coherent whole
of slag heaps, mine structures and miners’ cottages (Hofstee et al., 1978). The industrial monoculture, which blossomed for roughly 60 years and provided a living for one third of the South-Limburgers in its heyday, lost its tangible legacy in a mere 15 years (for detailed studies see, e.g. Peet & Rutten, 2009; Wind, 2008). Erasing the grey mining structures would give renewed courage to the deprived region. The demolition, later known as the operation ‘from black to green’, was led by the engineer H. Hoefnagels. Tangible mining memories were torn down to establish space for new economic activity, living and recreation areas. 750 hectares of mining terrain received a new destination and the demolishing activities were completed within a decade.

Figure 14.1  Mining heritage in the Netherlands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Concession</th>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Shafts</th>
<th>Preserved?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oranje-Nassau I</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1899-1974</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fully demolished, except for one head frame. A residential area was built on top of the slag heap.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oranje-Nassau II</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1904-1971</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nowadays a residential area. A horse race track was built on top of the slag heap.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oranje-Nassau III</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1917-1973</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nowadays a residential area. Slagheap was changed into a walking park.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oranje-Nassau IV</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1925-1966</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Best preserved, but threatened slag heap.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1905-1968</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nowadays a residential area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1926-1974</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nowadays an industrial area. Some remains of the slag heap are still visible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willem-Sophia</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1902-1970</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Hardly anything preserved. Slag heap was levelled for road construction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domaniale</td>
<td>Lease of the State</td>
<td>1815-1969</td>
<td>6</td>
<td><em>Nullandschacht</em> has been preserved. Remains of the slag heap now form a walking park.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilhelmina</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>1906-1969</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Slag heap was remodelled into an indoor ski run.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>1911-1973</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nowadays a residential area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maurits</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>1926-1967</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Slag heap partly levelled. Property of DSM (the former state mining company).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

J.F.R. Philips (1993), former director of the Social Historic Centre for Limburg (Sociaal Historisch Centrum voor Limburg), states that the few remnants that are still standing above ground can only be valued in their relation to the underground mining. Most distinctive are therefore the objects that strongly refer to the subterranean activities: the head frame and the slag or waste heap.

Nearly all the head frames were pulled down. Philips (1993) distinguishes two types of shafts: the so-called ‘closed concrete’ type and the ‘open steel’ type. The former type, consisting of imposing concrete structures like for example at the coal mines Maurits, Emma and Hendrik, has completely disappeared. The latter, ‘open’ type still has one example that was preserved. It is the brickwork and steel structure alongside the railroad tracks in Heerlen, which nowadays houses the Dutch Mining Museum. Apart from this example in Heerlen, the intake shaft of the Domaniale mine at Kerkrade, called the Nullandschacht, has survived as well. These two examples make up the total of remaining shaft structures in the Netherlands: only two of the 36 head frames that once linked the Limburg landscape with the underground coal fields still remain.

Concerning the slag or waste heaps, the picture is even less rosy. These artificial hills have practically all been partly or fully levelled. The most intact heap, belonging to the former Oranje-Nassau IV mine, is currently being threatened because of the economically interesting quartz sand that is located underneath the hill. Apart from the aforementioned head frames, hardly any of the industrial buildings, such as offices, cooling towers, coal bunkers, washing plants, pithead baths, engine and boiler houses, have been preserved (see Hofstee et al., 1978).

Belgian Limburg

Thyl Gheyselinck, ‘crisis manager’ in Belgian Limburg, announced the closing of the Kempen coal mines with his reorganization plan in 1986. Within a decade, 75 years of coal extraction in Belgian Limburg was put to an end. The last pit, i.e. the mine called Zolder, which had operated since 1930, closed its gates in 1992. The industrial structures left in the Kempen landscape were primarily seen as progress-impeding. These outdated, image-disturbing elements had to disappear as soon as possible, just like the Dutch had managed so efficiently in their ‘from black to green’ doctrine. After the social trauma of the mine closings, inhabitants of the region would first of all have the need to forget. As a consequence of the reorganization plans, much has disappeared. However, compared to the Netherlands a relatively large
part of the mining legacy has survived the demolition. After 1993, Belgian minister Johan Sauwens protected approximately 50 mine structures as a monument. What has remained of the Belgian Limburg coal industry, which dictated the lives of about 300,000 families? What has remained after the struggle between the reorganization plans and the heritage lobby?

**Figure 14.2  Mining heritage in Belgium**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Concession</th>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Shafts</th>
<th>Preserved?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Houthalen</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1938-1964</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Only head frames and office spaces. Slag heaps were levelled. The site now houses a museum and sheltered workshop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zwartberg</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1925-1966</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mine site was almost completely demolished. The slag heap was preserved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisden</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1923-1987</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Only a head frame and the main office were preserved. The second head frame was later reconstructed for tourist reasons. Slag heap is used for recreation. Site is redeveloped into a leisure park, including shopping mall and cinema.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterschei</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1924-1987</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Main building and head frame were preserved. The slag heap is under formal protection. A business and science park are under planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beringen</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1922-1989</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Best preserved coal mine. The washing plant was saved, just like the slag heap. Nowadays the site houses the Flemish Mining Museum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winterslag</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1917-1988</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A small part of the industrial buildings has been preserved. Slag heap is nowadays a walking park. The site is called C-mine, and features a business park, cinema, sports complex, design academy and visitors’ centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zolder</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1930-1992</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A few constructions were preserved and protected. Slag heaps were bought up and turned into a nature park. The site houses several businesses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: Vanvaeck, 2009; Van Doorslaer, 2002 & 2004*
If we turn our eyes to the most powerful symbols of the coal mines, the head frames and slag heaps, there is much left of the mining past in the Kempen. Three slag heaps were preserved in their original shape, namely the ones at Eisden and Zwartberg. When one realises that these hills contain roughly a third of all the material that was hoisted to the surface during the years of production, the immense scale of the subterranean complex of corridors becomes clear (Van Doorslaer, 2002). The artificially hilly country of Belgian Limburg is a powerful representation of the industry that held the region firmly in its grasp for over half a century.

Especially when compared to the Netherlands, many head frames have been preserved. Six of the seven Kempen mines still feature a construction that marked the connection of the subterranean extraction with the surface, sometimes over 200 feet high. Only Zwartberg has lost all of its pit-head frames. The closing of this mine in 1966, forced by the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), meant a drastic clearing of the at the time unloved industrial buildings. The demolition of Zwartberg took place in the same climate as the pit closures in the Netherlands, resulting in the same tabula rasa.

The Post-Industrial Mining Landscape

Without pretending to be exhaustive, two explanations are described below for the considerable diversity in preservation and reuse of mining heritage. First of all, one can look at the gradual recognition of industrial remnants and the spreading of this recognition over Europe. So-called industrial archaeology first appeared in the UK during the 1950s. In its early stage, the discipline attracted only scientific interest, but from the 1970s onwards it reached the horizon of the National Trust and the national government. From that moment on, the interest in industrial remains spread swiftly over Great Britain, as the cradle of industrialisation. With the foundation of the International Committee for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage (TICCIH) in 1975, ‘industrial heritage’ would become the commonly accepted appellation. In South Wales, for example, most of the mines had already closed, but initiatives like Big Pit in Blaenavon and Rhondda Heritage Park in Trehafod arose unmistakably from the increasing interest in industrial heritage from the 1970s onwards.

On the European continent, the British example was followed in Belgium as one of the first countries. From 1976, a new criterion was added to the descriptions in the list of historic buildings and monuments: the so-called
‘industrial-archaeological value’ (*industrieel-archeologische waarde*). From that moment on, 500 industrial structures were listed. When Thyl Gheyselinck presented his reorganization plan, industrial heritage was already widely recognized and from 1993 onwards, minister Johan Sauwens protected 50 coal mine structures as monuments. The Belgian Limburg mine closures between 1987 and 1992 fell in a period in which the recognition of industrial heritage was growing. The belief that coal mine structures were anachronisms and needed to be removed from the landscape as soon as possible met with increasing resistance, and aroused enough opposition to prevent a Flemish ‘from black to green’.

If we turn our eyes to the Netherlands, we find a relatively late interest in industrial culture. Although it was already in 1974 that the Dutch National Authority for the Protection of Monuments spoke of ‘industrial and technical industry’ and a technical college at Delft organised a symposium on the subject matter, not until the 1990s can much public interest be observed. When the Dutch Institute for Industrial Heritage (PIE) was established in 1992, the recognition of industrial heritage transcended the traditional aesthetic, art-historical approach. The catching-up came to a climax in 1996, with the celebration of the *Year of Industrial Heritage*. Compared to the UK and Belgium, however, this was relatively late: the last Dutch coal mine (*Oranje-Nassau I*) had been closed and demolished twenty years before.

A second explanation can be found in the length of the period of mine closings. For example, the period in which the closings took place in South Wales proves to be much longer than in Flanders and the Netherlands. To a certain extent, the short period for which Ghyselinck’s reorganization plan had been designed led to alarmism. In only a limited amount of time, the period stretching between 1987 and 1992, all the coal mines in Belgian Limburg were closed and people actually feared that all the structures would be lost in the process. Many protests were made against the demolition.

In South Wales, the mine-closing period stretched over several decades: as early as 1947, already half of the coal mines had stopped production (Thomas, 2004). The remaining mines would close their shafts gradually until well into the 21st century, with some peaks in the 1960s and 1980s. Panic over the fear that all remnants would disappear in a short period of time does not seem to have occurred in the UK. One might consider this a reason for the relatively extensive loss of mining heritage in, for example, South Wales (C. Williams, interview, 3 May 2011). This explanation is of course in line with the spread of recognition of industrial heritage. The Dutch mine closings took place in a decade, but at that time the recognition of mining heritage had yet to appear.
The Changing Will to Forget

In this chapter's introduction, attention was called to differences in local recognition of heritage, and to the differences in the will to preserve. The focus of this chapter is on the interface between the ideas about remembering and forgetting on the one hand, and the actual case studies of Dutch and Belgian Limburg on the other. For an analysis of the locally present will to preserve, two regional newspapers were used: *Limburgs Dagblad* (Dutch Limburg) and *Het Belang van Limburg* (Belgian Limburg).

After the social trauma of the closures in the Dutch mining district, there seemed first and foremost a 'need to forget'. This can be easily understood by considering the feelings of underestimation, uneasiness and embitterment that dominated the period after the mine closures. Former colliers felt deceived; they saw and felt their world collapse around them; their knowledge and experience had become irrelevant and their wages and status had evaporated. Many of them suffered from severe forms of silicosis, which at the time was trivialized by company medical officers. To gain insight into the 'will' to forget, a brief empirical study was carried out on an illustrative example in the late 1970s.

In 1979, a foundation was established that aimed to erect a national memorial for mine workers in the Dutch city of Kerkrade. The monument would never actually be constructed, but the archives of the *Limburgs Dagblad* give a clear picture of the intense local reactions to the construction plans (also see Geilenkirchen, 2011). The initiative was reviled by a large group of local people. Most of the readers' reactions that were published in the regional newspaper showed the same opinion: the money needed for the monument should be reserved for welfare provisions for the former colliers, and there were already enough monuments within the mining district. The latter idea, that the former mining landscape of Limburg contained 'enough' monuments, returned frequently. One of the reactions in *The Limburgs Dagblad*, by a reader named H.J. van Berghem, stated: 'Who on earth erects a monument for himself? That person must be too big for one's breeches. The mining district holds enough memories of mine workers and coal mines. It is certainly not required to add any more memorials, not in this way' (Van Berghem, 1979, translation by author).

Within a year after the idea was made public, several councils stopped their cooperation on the plans. A spokesman of the municipality of Cadier en Keer wrote: 'It follows from the reactions of former colliers that there is no need for a mine monument. It is reasoned that there are enough monuments already, as is my own opinion' ("Geen Mergelandse steun",...

Twenty-five years later, this view had changed. The initiatives of a local organization by the name Stichting Carboon (‘Carbon Foundation’), which includes the foundation of a coal mining museum, enjoys the broad support of the local population; an indication of the resurgence of a need for preserving mining memories. The redevelopment of a former morgue of the state mine Wilhelmina into a remembrance chapel is another example of this resurgence.

Examining the records of the regional Belgian Limburg newspaper Belang van Limburg resulted in a similar view as before. When the coal mine of Zwartberg closed in 1966, in the same period as the Dutch closures, it led to a storm of protest. During the protest marches, two people were killed, which nurtured the ‘need to forget’ afterwards. The tragedy of Zwartberg, and all the buildings and machinery that would remind people of it, had to be removed swiftly and thoroughly from the Belgian Limburg landscape (Cops, 1970). However, just like in the Dutch mining district, this view changed over time. Local residents increasingly seemed to feel the need to do something about the complete denial of their past. In 2002, about 1000 people attended the unveiling of the coal mine monument in Zwartberg, including a noticeable number of former colliers (C.N., 2002). After years of silence, the wish to keep mining memories alive appears to have come to the surface.

Conclusion

The will to retain mining heritage, to retain living memories of the coal industry, is both multi-coloured and dynamic. For a long time, the heritage of the mining era was not accepted, but many of the former mining districts show a change in embracing their once denied past. The first section of this chapter described how philosopher Ankersmit links a traumatic period with what he calls ‘formative forgetting’. Ankersmit introduces a paradoxical sense of forgetting, which is at the same time formative for a new identity. Radical transformations, such as the end of the Industrial Period and the ‘casualness’ of the coal mine, seem to result in a leaving behind of the old identity. In the case of Dutch Limburg, it seemed as if people were ashamed of the closures, and very suddenly the mines belonged to a ‘world we have lost’. Ankersmit’s notion of ‘formative forgetting’ appears to be very useful for the study of mining heritage and its development. The
regenerated interest in the industrial past, with the sizeable coal industry as the central focus, appears to be a good example of the aforementioned ‘pain of Prometheus’: this constitutes the pain of old, left-behind identities, that have been dragged along since the forgetting of the traumatic closures.

A trauma is processed; with the passage of time there appears to be (a need for) Vergangenheitsbewältigung. Heedless of this, the Flemish expert in mining heritage Bert van Doorslaer (2002) describes how some heritage experts plead for a culture of slowness. Material remnants should not quickly be demolished or put into new use, but should be given a period of repose. How we deal with heritage should be in phase with the developing ‘will’ to preserve. This is a notion that should be strongly employed in regard to mining heritage, and could be carried further to other forms of ‘painful’ heritage from the recent past. The notion of ‘Promethic pain’, of Vergangenheitsbewältigung, has important consequences for dealing with heritage that ‘hurts’, whether this heritage stems from the mining era or, for example, the Second World War.

The dynamics in the ‘will’ to remember are not limited to Western Europe. Sociologist Hideo Nakazawa (2009) describes how the population of the former mining town of Yubari on Hokkaido (Japan) wanted to forget the black page of the closures in their mining past, but also how this view changed eventually. The will to forget the mining past turned out to be replaced by a locally nurtured need for preservation. The temporal structures that result in a revaluation of ‘painful’ heritage seem to apply to this Japanese example as well.

In the decades in which heritage became part of our thinking about culture and space, the question whether we actually need heritage was rarely asked. Why would we cherish a past that ruined the lungs of thousands, that brought about large-scale unemployment, that spread feelings of underestimation, bitterness and grief, and besmirched the landscape with dust? When we gain insight into how the amalgam of remembering and forgetting is linked with our material culture, with landscape, the aforementioned question becomes increasingly easy to answer. Landscape, as the most encompassing and expansive form of place, allows memories to take root. In order to close a traumatic period, such as the international, problematic closing stage of the coal mines, one needs a period of remembering (re-membering) in which the paradox of formative forgetting occurs: that what is forgotten is assimilated into the new identity. To be able to forget, the place, the mining landscape of slag heaps, head frames, washing plants and pithead baths, is all of the same importance.
The recognition of ‘painful’ heritage, which includes the mining heritage that was described in the previous section, appears to be interwoven with the ‘Promethic pain’ as it comes to the surface in former mining districts. Moment and character of the resurgence of an industrial past may vary from region to region, but the temporal structures of Vergangenheitsbewältigung and ‘Promethic pain’ seem to be universal.

This means not so much that there is an urgency to preserve everything (if we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change), but that we need to consider a new factor when we discuss heritage preservation. This factor is the dynamic character of memory: its ‘evolution’. Memory, composed of the decisions of what we remember and forget, undergoes an evolution; an evolution that is tightly tied up with the changes we make in its repository, the landscape in which we stand.

About the Author

Felix van Veldhoven (1 January 1986) received his Bachelor degrees in Human Geography & Planning and Liberal Arts & Sciences from Utrecht University in 2008. During his studies, he specialized in the fields of cultural landscape and spatial heritage. After two internships at the Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE) and an urban planning consultancy firm, he followed the Master’s programme Heritage Studies at VU University. Presently, he works for Geodan, a private company specializing in geo-information.

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