

Blake, P. (1964)

God's own junkyard: The planned deterioration of America's landscape. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Peter Blake's *God's Own Junkyard* offers a forceful critique of the capitalist-driven deterioration of the American landscape. Blake argues that billboards, suburban sprawl, commercial interests, and car-centric planning have transformed "God's Own Country" into a vast, systematically degraded environment. He condemns developers, planners, advertisers, and a complacent public for enabling this decline, contending that the resulting man-made landscape is so compromised that only a coordinated national effort could restore civic dignity, visual coherence, and environmental order.

Blake maintains that townscapes, landscapes, and road infrastructures have been overwhelmed by unregulated development, commercial clutter, and visual pollution. He frames this not as incidental decline but as planned deterioration, driven by corporate profit motives and political negligence. While Blake convincingly foregrounds political neglect as the primary catalyst for the commercialisation of the built environment, his argument underplays the possibility that political cooperation, rather than mere negligence, may offer a more accurate account of how such conditions became entrenched.

This text will be a valuable resource for the dissertation, providing a historically grounded and critically engaged analysis of the built environment and the structural power of corporate interests in shaping urban and suburban space.

Carr, T. and Schöne, A. (2024)

Coalfaces: Life after coal in the Afan Valley. Cardigan: Parthian Books.

Coalfaces documents the lives and landscapes of five communities in the post-industrial Afan Valley, combining a photobook format with substantial textual material that outlines the motivations, methodology, and social context underpinning the project. Alongside the photographs, the inclusion of interviews with local residents provides an important oral dimension, allowing the work to function simultaneously as visual record and social testimony. The images and accompanying narratives challenge stereotypical representations of Welsh mining communities, bearing witness to long-term neglect while foregrounding the resilience and strong communal bonds that characterise the valley towns.

The book has been influential in shaping my own practice, offering a deeper understanding of the communities and landscapes that inform my work. Its detailed account of the authors' motivations and working methods provides valuable insight into how other photographers engage with post-industrial Welsh environments, both ethically and aesthetically. As such, *Coalfaces* will serve as a significant resource for the dissertation, enriching the contextual and methodological grounding of my project and informing my approach to representing post-industrial landscapes.

Debord, G. (2025)

The society of the spectacle. S.I.: Rare Treasure Editions.

Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* presents a Marxist-inspired critique of modern capitalist culture, arguing that social relations have become increasingly mediated through images, commodities, and representations. Debord insists that the spectacle is not merely a collection of visual stimuli, such as advertising, but a dominant social organisation in which appearance displaces lived experience. In this system, individuals come to understand themselves and others through curated images, and everyday life becomes structured around consumption, display, and the pursuit of commodified identities.

Debord argues that commodities no longer hold value solely through practical use; instead, their significance is produced through the images and symbolic meanings they project. Clothing, cars, and other consumer goods are selected not for utility but for the identities they help construct. This shift, he contends, alienates individuals from authentic experience, encouraging passive spectatorship rather than active participation in social life.

For the purposes of this dissertation, Debord's work is a valuable counterpoint to the notion of deadpan, evidence-based photography. His argument that all images are politically charged, because they are embedded within systems of representation, raises important questions about whether deadpan photographers, despite their claims to neutrality, also participate in the creation of spectacle. This text therefore provides a critical theoretical lens through which to interrogate photographic intention, viewer interpretation, and the politics of visual culture.

Foster-Rice, G. and Rohrbach, J. (2013)

Reframing the New Topographics. Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago; distributed by the University of Chicago Press.

Reframing the New Topographics is a collection of essays by a range of scholars and practitioners offering contemporary perspectives on the 1975 exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape*. Edited by Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach, both of whom contribute to the volume. The book examines how the original exhibition was conceived, curated, and subsequently interpreted within evolving debates about landscape, urbanisation, and photographic objectivity. Each essay addresses a particular facet of the urban and suburban landscape genre, tracing how the themes foregrounded by William Jenkins in the original exhibition have either persisted or transformed in response to shifting cultural, environmental, and political conditions.

The volume revisits Jenkins' curatorial premise that the participating photographers were collectively redefining landscape representation. Changing the representation of the built, altered, and infrastructural elements of the American environment. Although the exhibition was initially met with limited enthusiasm, it ultimately became foundational, establishing a genre that has shaped decades of photographic practice. Its significance underscored by

the full re-creation of the exhibition in 2009, prompting renewed critical engagement with its legacy.

This book will be particularly valuable for the dissertation, offering insight into the evolution of the genre and the ways its aesthetic strategies operate within a contemporary context marked by heightened concern for environmental issues and the politics of land use.

Walker, A., Moles, K. and Höpfel, J.V. (2025)

‘Nostalgia and the cruel promises of austerity: Neoliberal narratives and post-industrial memory in the South Wales coalfield’, *Memory Studies*, 18(2), pp. 377–392.
doi:10.1177/17506980251320778.

Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in the South Wales Valleys, the authors argue that nostalgia plays a central role in sustaining the “cruel optimism” of austerity. It encourages individuals to internalise neoliberal logic and everyday material practices. Nostalgic activities, such as heritage projects and community initiatives, often reproduce values that align with austerity, creating a complex terrain in which memory can simultaneously empower communities and expose them to further exploitation.

Amid the continuing legacies of deindustrialisation and austerity, however, there is growing scepticism and a clearer recognition of austerity’s failures. This shift has given rise to subtle forms of resistance grounded in community solidarity and practices of care. Such resistance, supported by nostalgic narratives of perseverance and collective identity, holds the potential to foster alternative and more transformative political futures.

This paper will inform both my practical and written work. It challenges image makers not to make images highlighting nostalgia, which are disingenuous to reality. The paper, published only a year ago, offers valuable insight into current thinking on these issues. It provides a contemporary theoretical lens through which to understand the social dynamics present in the communities I photograph.