



Extractive Fictions and Postextraction Futurisms

Energy and Environmental Injustice in Appalachia

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Abstract This essay operates at the intersection of the energy humanities and environmental justice studies to survey *extractive fictions*, a term I use to describe literature and other cultural forms that render visible the socioecological impacts of extractive capitalism and problematize extraction as a cultural practice. The essay first theorizes extraction and examines cultural representations of coal and gas fields in northern Appalachia, including Ann Pancake’s novel *Strange as This Weather Has Been* (2007) and Jennifer Haigh’s novel *Heat and Light* (2015). Each, by rendering visible instances of environmental degradation and economic decline associated with energy development, challenges the deep-seated role of extraction as a cornerstone of regional cultural identity and the mythos of fossil fuel development as a path to economic and social progress. In doing so, they lay bare the epistemological failures of extractive capitalism, a mode of accumulation based on the large-scale withdrawal and processing of natural resources. The final section of the essay turns to the AMD&ART Park in Vintondale, Pennsylvania, and artist-activist John Sabraw’s toxic-art initiative in southern Ohio, both of which address these failures through the articulation of *postextraction futurism*, a critical method that combines environmental science and historically situated aesthetics to remediate ecological and social injustices associated with extraction. Both projects emerge from collaborations among artists, academics, scientists, and local communities to reverse the impacts of extraction through innovative water reclamation techniques and art exhibits that memorialize the region’s coal heritage. These initiatives complement extractive fictions to envision an inclusive, livable Appalachia unencumbered by the dictates of extractive capitalism.

Keywords energy humanities, environmental justice, Appalachia, US literature and culture, reclamation art

In Ann Pancake’s 2007 novel *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, Bant, a teenager living in the heart of Appalachian coal country in southern West Virginia, surveys a ruined hollow above her family’s property after a flash flood. “Anymore,” she notes, “it seemed there was too much water or too little, the temperature too high or too low. ‘Strange as this weather has been,’ people would say . . . And [she] knew . . . the weather was linked

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to the rest of this mess, but [she] wasn't sure how."¹ The extreme climatic flux to which Bant refers, symptomatic of global warming, can be linked to modernity's continued appetite for fossil fuels. This includes coal extracted from places like West Virginia, home to the highest concentration of active coal mines in the United States.² Yet "the mess" to which she refers is not the local manifestation of climate change, but instead the human and environmental costs of coal extraction: collapsed impoundment dams, flash floods, coal slurry mudslides, acid mine drainage, forest dead zones, black lung disease, rising unemployment, and crippling poverty. Extraction, in the novel, is not merely framed as the crucial link within a chain of causality in which fossil fuel consumption drives global environmental change. Instead, the novel maps a complex dialectic between extractive capitalism, environmental change, and regional cultural identity. *Strange as This Weather Has Been* is less concerned with unusual weather than with a grotesque climate of environmental and economic precarity in communities that have historically functioned as key nodes in the United States' extractive economy.

Pancake's novel exemplifies what I call *extractive fictions*, a term I use to describe literature and other cultural forms that render visible the socioecological impacts of extractive capitalism and problematize extraction as a cultural practice. Extractive fictions can be viewed as conceptually adjacent to the extractive frame used by literary critics in recent years to examine how world literature registers the cultural and ecological violence wrought by raw materials extraction on the peripheries of what Jason W. Moore calls the "capitalist world-ecology." Drawing on world-systems theory, Moore maintains that capitalism is a world-ecology (as opposed to a world-economy), a process of environment making dependent on the (un)availability of "cheap nature," or "cheap labor, food, energy, and raw materials."³ Scholars like Sharae Deckard, Michael Niblett, and others have increasingly approached postcolonial and world literatures from a world-ecological perspective to map the violence of extraction as an ongoing legacy of colonialism in the global South.⁴

This essay focuses on extractive fictions that reflect the material realities of a single node of the capitalist world ecology: the central and northern portions of the United States' Appalachian region, particularly energy-rich parts of southern West Virginia and western Pennsylvania. I proceed from what Stephanie LeMenager has called "commodity regionalism," an approach to energy studies that "activates vital historical and ecological frames . . . such that we can see and sense them."⁵ There presently exists

1. Pancake, *Strange*, 101.

2. According to the US Energy Information Administration, West Virginia had 140 active coal mines in 2017, or one mine per 171 mi.². For current figures, see "Coal Production and Number of Mines by State and Mine Type, 2017 and 2016." United States Energy Information Administration. www.eia.gov/coal/annual/pdf/table1.pdf (accessed February 26, 2019).

3. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 68.

4. Deckard, "Ghost Mountains and Stone Maidens" and "Trains, Stones, and Energetics"; Niblett, "World Economy, World-Ecology, World Literature" and "Oil on Sugar."

5. LeMenager, *Living Oil*, 12–13.

a growing collection of scholarship exploring cultural responses to the violences of extraction in “resource-cursed” regions like the Niger River Delta.⁶ Through an attention to literary texts and multimedia cultural representations, such work maps the internal contradictions of resource-rich areas nevertheless beset by environmental degradation, public health crises, poverty, and social conflict.⁷ I focus on Appalachia because of its originary status in the United States energy economy—the nation’s first oil well was drilled in Titusville, Pennsylvania, in 1859—and because extraction has long been central to the region’s cultural imaginary.⁸ As I show, the extractive fictions considered here—Pancake’s *Strange as This Weather Has Been* and Jennifer Haigh’s novel *Heat and Light* (2016)—respond to shifting realities in a region that has witnessed the precipitous decline of one energy regime (coal) and the tumultuous emergence of another (natural gas). By registering the region’s descent into a state of economic and ecological precarity, these texts challenge the centrality of extraction to regional cultural identity and the mythos of fossil fuel development as a path to economic and social progress, thereby exposing the epistemological failures of extractive capitalism.

Extraction, by definition, is an act of removal. The organizers of EXTRACTION, a collaborative, interdisciplinary research project undertaken at University of California, Santa Cruz in 2017, usefully describe extraction as “capitalism’s fundamental logic of *withdrawal*—of value, nutrients, energy, labor, time—from people, lands, culture, life-forms, the elements, without corresponding deposit (except as externalities of nonvalue in the form of pollution, waste, climate change, illness, and death).”⁹ Externalities may also be described as the inbuilt “remainders” of extractive economies, those ravaged landscapes and dilapidated communities left behind by an ever-itinerant instantiation of frontier capitalism characterized by the privatization and enclosure of the commons, dispossession and displacement, boom-and-bust cycles, and the maldistribution of profits.¹⁰ And because extraction disproportionately takes place in communities marginalized along the lines of race, class, or ethnicity, such communities are often relegated to an afterthought, subject to a heightened risk of environmental degradation and economic volatility related to underenforced environmental regulations, a lack of institutional oversight, and volatile energy markets.¹¹ Extractive fictions attend to these externalities and thus represent what Joni Adamson has called “the literature of

6. For examples of such work, see Apter, *Pan-African Nation*; LeMenager, *Living Oil*, 125–133; Wenzel, “Petro-Magic Realism”; Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 68–127; and Caminero-Santangelo, “Witnessing the Nature of Violence.”

7. Helpful overviews of resource curse dynamics include Klare, *Resource Wars*, and Ross, *Oil Curse*.

8. For a useful overview of the region’s energy history, see Black, “A Legacy of Extraction.”

9. “Extraction: Decolonial Visual Cultures in the Age of the Capitalocene.” EXTRACTION. extraction.sites.ucsc.edu (accessed November 20, 2018).

10. Watts, “Oil Frontiers,” 190; Tsing, *Friction*, 31–32.

11. For an overview of environmental injustice associated with energy development, see Hess and Riebero, “Energy and Environmental Justice,” 153–58.

environmental justice,” or works that “redefine environmental issues as social and economic justice issues and that address these concerns as basic human rights.”¹² Moreover, by reinforcing the central tenets of environmental justice—that there is a correlation between healthy environments and quality of life, and that social and environmental issues are inherently intersectional—extractive fictions dismantle foundational myths of extractive capitalism.¹³ They challenge the notion that large-scale raw materials extraction is necessary for economic growth, modernization, higher living standards, and national security—aspirational goals that in much of the global South have been couched in the discourse of “development.”¹⁴

Extractive fictions give a voice to those residing in “sacrifice zones,” landscapes considered expendable in pursuit of what government and industry stakeholders perceive as a “greater good.” Expendability often correlates with an affected community’s racial, ethnic, or economic marginality. I derive the term *sacrifice zones* from Valerie Kuletz, who, in *The Tainted Desert* (1998), coined the phrase “geographies of sacrifice” to describe the disproportionate effects of Cold War-era nuclear testing and hazardous-waste disposal on indigenous communities in the southwestern United States. For government and industry officials, the horrors of environmental degradation and radiation-related illness on reservation lands was a price willingly paid in exchange for nuclear deterrence, national security, and the promise of a robust domestic energy economy. By mapping geographies of sacrifice, Kuletz demonstrated the ways in which “racism, militarism, and economic imperialism have combined to marginalize a people and a land that many within government or industry, consciously or not, regard as expendable.”¹⁵ The concept of “sacrifice zones” inspired Adamson’s theorization of environmental justice literature, particularly her examination of how indigenous writers like Simon Ortiz and Leslie Marmon Silko have responded to the effects of industrial mining in areas like Black Mesa and the Four Corners region, which the administration of President Richard Nixon reportedly sought to designate “National Sacrifice Areas” in 1972.¹⁶

12. Adamson, *American Indian Literature*, 129.

13. For a concise overview of environmental justice and genealogy of critical environmental justice studies, see Di Chiro, “Environmental Justice.”

14. The discourse of development has been extensively theorized, especially within Latin American contexts where developmentalism—an economic model predicated on state-managed industry, agriculture, and raw-materials extraction as a path to modernization and “First World” status—emerged as a favored economic model in the mid-twentieth century. Though the neoliberal shift in global economic policy in the late 1980s and early 1990s reduced the prevalence of state interventionism, extractive modes of accumulation have persisted. For an overview of developmentalism, see Escobar, *Encountering Development*. For an overview of development within the context of extractive capitalism, see Petras and Veltmeyer, *Extractive Imperialism in the Americas*, and Gómez-Barris, *Extractive Zone*, 1–16.

15. Kuletz, *The Tainted Desert*, 6.

16. Adamson, *American Indian Literature*, 52; Churchill and LaDuke, “Native North America: The Political Economy of Radioactive Colonialism,” 163–65. For an overview of the term *National Sacrifice Areas*, which denotes a region willingly—and supposedly temporarily—uninhabitable for the purposes of resource development, see United States National Academy of Sciences, “Rehabilitation Potential.”

By approaching energy from a “bottom-up,” culturally situated examination of raw-materials extraction and its implications for ecologies and communities, I hope to advance existing conversations around energy and environmental justice. My term *extractive fictions* deliberately borrows from Amitav Ghosh’s notion of “petrofiction,” a term he famously coined in his 1992 review of Saudi writer Abdul Rahman Munif’s novel *Cities of Salt* (1984), which fictionalizes an early twentieth-century clash between US oil prospectors and a Bedouin oasis community and the emergence of the modern Arab petro-state. Ghosh viewed literary fiction as largely unequipped to represent this “Oil Encounter.” The problem, he insisted, was one of form. The novel, “most at home in monolingual speech communities” and attached to notions of place-based or national frameworks, is utterly unable to represent the “intrinsically displaced, heterogenous, and international” world of oil.¹⁷ Ghosh’s essay has in part inspired the emergence of the energy humanities, a burgeoning subfield of the environmental humanities that addresses the representational difficulties of energy systems by exploring the extent to which energy has played a “critical role in shaping existing social structures, lived and material infrastructures, and even cultural practices.”¹⁸ The field has produced a number of innovative approaches to exploring oil as a cultural artifact that is best understood by mapping its aesthetic and discursive legacies in literature, art, photography, and other media, as in Stephanie LeMenager’s *Living Oil* (2014) and Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden’s collection *Oil Culture* (2014), as well as literary critic Graeme Macdonald’s work on global petrofiction.¹⁹ Others have explored the entangled nature of energy production and access, dependence, and political economy, as in historian Gabrielle Hecht’s *Being Nuclear* (2012), historian Christopher Jones’s *Routes of Power* (2014), and political scientist Timothy Mitchell’s *Carbon Democracy* (2011).²⁰ Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer describe the energy humanities as an exploration of how humans’ “being-in-relation” to energy is critical to the functioning of modernity and its capitalist underpinnings that preach endlessly upward economic growth, ever-improving living conditions, and the expansion of rights and opportunities for civic participation.²¹

Like petrofictions, extractive fictions represent a critical means of delineating energy’s embeddedness within the cultural imagination of modernity. Moreover, they are up to the formal challenges of representing energy that so tormented Ghosh: because they are preoccupied with energy at *the point of extraction*, extractive fictions permit readers insight into the uniquely local dimensions of extractive capitalism, and as such are well positioned to problematize extraction as a cultural, rather than merely economic, practice. They engage in a sort of politics of introspection, questioning the long-standing

17. Ghosh, “Petrofiction,” 30–31.

18. Szeman and Boyer, “Introduction,” 3.

19. See Macdonald, “Monstrous Transformer.”

20. This is by no means a comprehensive account of work being done in the energy humanities. For an excellent overview of and key writings in the field, see Szeman and Boyer, *Energy Humanities: An Anthology*.

21. Szeman and Boyer, “Introduction,” 4.

centrality of raw-materials development to regional or national identity politics and the conflation of resource reserves with collective wealth and a so-called greater good. Thus, the notion of extractive fiction is also suggestive of a textual landscape from which meaning can be extracted, so to speak—in this case, insight into why there remains a cultural affinity for a practice culpable for historical patterns of social inequity and environmental injustice. Extractive fictions render visible the crumbling epistemological foundations that have historically undergirded the unchecked, often violent accumulationist tendencies of extractive capitalism. To extend the metaphor with a question: Given this essay's working definition of extraction as an act of removal that produces various externalities, or "remainders," what is left behind? What fills the epistemological void once occupied by extraction as a mode of "being-in-relation" with more-than-human nature?

While extractive fictions may not guarantee the emergence of a transformative politics, they make space for the articulation of alternative, restorative visions for a future free from the dictates of extractive capitalism. In the concluding section of this essay, I explore two such engagements in the form of community-based environmental reclamation art projects in former Appalachian coal towns: AMD&ART Park in Vintondale, Pennsylvania, and John Sabraw's toxic-art initiative in southeastern Ohio. Both projects exhibit what I call "postextraction futurist" aesthetics, a critical method that entails the removal of extraction-related toxins from the environment, the recovery of livable spaces for human and more-than-human communities, and the reclamation of extractive pasts as a means of envisioning livable, just futures. Both initiatives encourage communities to experience environmental reclamation as art through a combination of innovative water decontamination technology and art exhibits memorializing the region's coal mining heritage. As I explain, by serving as a bridge between a pollutive past and an equitable, sustainable future, postextraction futurism permits communities to envision a transition to modes of engagement with more-than-human nature predicated on stewardship and care rather than commodification.

Challenging Extraction Culture in Ann Pancake's *Strange as This Weather Has Been*

Ann Pancake's *Strange as This Weather Has Been* (hereafter *Strange*) is largely known for its nuanced exploration of the cultural politics and ecological impacts of mountaintop removal (MTR) coal mining in the Appalachian Mountains of southern West Virginia. Drawing on interviews with survivors of MTR-related social and environmental issues, the novel follows an impoverished family of six living in a southern West Virginia landscape best described as "Vesuvian."²² The novel has garnered recognition for its deployment of southern Gothic conventions to signify "the haunting vestiges of humans' aggressive pursuit of wealth" through extraction.²³ Pancake's protagonists contend with

22. Pendarvis, "Buried Alive."

23. Robertson, "Gothic Appalachia," 110.

dynamite blasts forceful enough to crack the foundations of residents' homes, dwindling and polluted mountain streams, forest dead zones, and the constant threat of catastrophic flooding. The novel begins in the wake of just such an event, known as the "May flood," in which a wave of coal slurry has torn through the community of Yellowroot Hollow, threatening the lives of fast-food worker Lace See, her husband, an out-of-work coal miner named Jimmy Make, and their four children, Bant, Corey, Dane, and Tommy. Though the flood spares human lives, it drastically alters the physical and psychic topographies of the community, washing away lawns and homes and exacerbating widespread economic and ecological anxieties. Much of the novel's plot revolves around an ongoing debate between Lace, who refuses to leave and becomes involved in anti-MTR activism, and Jimmy, who urges her to move the family to pursue a livable future elsewhere.

MTR coal mining began gradually replacing subsurface mining operations in Appalachia in the 1990s after an amendment to the Clean Air Act lowered nation-wide emissions standards. The method was developed as an economically viable means to extract cleaner-burning, low-sulfur coal abundant in southern West Virginia. Ironically, the local environmental costs have been drastic, as MTR has been blamed for the "decapitation" of a once lush, hospitable mountain region. The MTR process involves the literal removal of mountaintops to access hard-to-reach coal seams. Forests are clear-cut, topsoil is stripped, and underlying earth and rock are blasted intensively to remove overburden, which is then placed into a fill, an area used for waste disposal. Coal seams are then plundered using a dragline, a piece of machinery that can approach twenty stories in height.²⁴ The impacts of this process are wide-ranging: in addition to rampant violations of the Clean Water Act through illegal dumping, one of the most pointed effects of MTR has been erosion and water contamination. Digging, blasting, and the construction of temporary infrastructure such as access roads and drainage ditches turn large loads of sediment and chemical waste into watersheds, elevating stream pH to dangerous levels. Fills, typically situated atop streams at the head of mountain hollows, stifle water dispersal, alter seasonal water cycles, and increase the possibility of flooding and the release of coal slurry, a toxic cocktail of chemical waste and sediments typically stored behind earthen impoundment dams.²⁵

The ecological impacts of MTR in West Virginia parallel patterns of economic marginalization that have been unfolding for decades. In the early to mid-twentieth century, and especially during the coal boom era of the 1930s through the 1950s, coal towns prospered and grew rapidly to accommodate workers lured to the region to answer growing labor demands.²⁶ Coal mining was increasingly framed as an essentially patriotic endeavor, vital to the success of the nation. Woodrow Wilson even exempted

24. Burns, *Bringing Down the Mountain*, 5–7.

25. Burns, *Bringing Down the Mountain*, 118–40.

26. Scott, *Removing Mountains*, 140.

coal workers from the draft during World War I, citing coal as critical to the war effort.²⁷ Beginning in the mid-1950s, however, mechanization began to drive down labor demands, spurring worker flight. Combined with coal companies' anti-unionization efforts and increased dependence on out-of-state, nonunion contract labor, unemployment levels in coal country have been rising steadily, turning previously prosperous communities into ghost towns.²⁸ MTR represents a continuation of this trajectory: it requires only a third of the workers required to extract the same amount of coal from subsurface mines.²⁹ According to 2010 figures, coal mining employment levels have declined, in large part due to MTR, by more than fifty percent since 1975.³⁰ Moreover, by promoting a false jobs-versus-the-environment dichotomy to promote its business model, the coal industry has perpetuated what has been described as a form of "internal colonialism" in which wealthy urban centers reap disproportionate benefits from coal extraction, and rural "resource colonies" bear the burden of environmental degradation and unstable employment prospects. Many communities have become economically dependent on coal and are therefore less likely to oppose unregulated or irresponsible extraction and waste dumping activities.³¹ Rich in resources but impoverished, Appalachia arguably bears a "resource curse," a central feature of extractive capitalism in which resource-rich regions of the world nonetheless fail to reap social benefits expected to arise from a burgeoning economy and are instead plagued by poverty, conflict, and environmental degradation.³²

Strange's aesthetics of MTR-related environmental dystopia lend credence to the idea that, as literary critic Heather Houser suggests, the novel ultimately "conceives of activism as a process of making visible."³³ According to Houser, Lace exposes the social and ecological impacts of MTR through "environmental engagement"—by walking the forests, documenting damage, and circulating photographic evidence and letters within the community.³⁴ But the novel's activist propensities arguably extend beyond a documentary function. By framing coal as antithetical to a greater good, Pancake writes against what sociologist Rebecca Scott has called a "culture of extraction" that has long pervaded the coalfields of Appalachia. In a place where the extractive economy has become synonymous with prosperity and central to regional cultural identity, Scott writes, coal "can either be told as an exemplar of a US story of progress and technological development or as a story of social injustice and conflict."³⁵ The former, often viewed

27. Scott, *Removing Mountains*, 139.

28. Burns, *Bringing Down the Mountain*, 19–32.

29. Burns, *Bringing Down the Mountain*, 4.

30. Scott, *Removing Mountains*, 4.

31. Scanlan, "Theoretical Roots and Sociology of Environmental Justice in Appalachia," 21–26.

32. Petras and Veltmeyer, *Extractive Imperialism in the Americas*, 11n5.

33. Houser, "Knowledge Work," 108.

34. Houser, "Knowledge Work," 108–9.

35. Scott, *Removing Mountains*, 28.

as symbolic of American exceptionalism, has been a key part of President Trump's economic nationalist rhetoric in which he has promised to end a so-called war on coal waged by federal regulatory overreach on poor rural coal communities. Yet this deep-seated regional affinity for extraction is complicated by long-standing cultural stereotypes of Appalachia as a region predominately populated by "hillbillies, white trash, and other poor whites," an assumption reified and reinforced in national and regional cultural representations that reproduce tropes of social backwardness and moral abjection. Such (mis)representations have served to stigmatize Appalachians on "quasi-racializing terms," as deviating from the idealized figure of the productive, patriotic (white) US citizen.³⁶ As Scott notes, such "epistemologies of disgust and social distance help create the conditions of possibility for some of the most dangerous environmental exploitation in the United States and the designation of Appalachia as a sacrifice zone."³⁷ In other words, the combination of local cultural pride associated with coal's historical status as an important national commodity and the simultaneous stigmatization of Appalachia as culturally and socially inferior, and therefore expendable, contributes to ongoing environmental and economic injustices associated with extraction.

Water, in *Strange*, signifies both ecological degradation and the erosion of the region's deep-seated ties to the coal industry. Polluted streams and ponds are ubiquitous, contributing to the novel's deployment of what Lawrence Buell famously called "toxic discourse," a mode of writing pervaded by a "fear of the poisoned world."³⁸ The most textured descriptions of toxicity occur in sections of the novel that follow Lace's mechanically inclined son Corey, for whom exploring nearby streams littered with industrial debris is "like walking the aisle of a Wal-Mart."³⁹ By likening a romp in a polluted stream to a gleeful journey through a low-end retail store, Pancake emphasizes a central paradox of extraction culture: coal's simultaneous fetishization by, and exploitation of, the working poor. Throughout the novel, Corey and his younger brother Tommy move about this grotesque "playground" in search of metal scrap, splashing about in the toxicity of a "pigshit-colored creek" and ponds with "water opaque as mustard and colored like the inside of a sick baby's diaper."⁴⁰ In a moment of dramatic irony, the region's perceived expendability is affirmed during a literal scene of sacrifice in which Corey crashes a stolen four-wheeler into a chemical-laden catchment pond and drowns.⁴¹

Other characters experience the horror of degraded landscapes through past trauma associated with industrial disaster. Avery Taylor, a man in his mid-twenties, repeatedly reflects on his childhood experience as a survivor of the real-life Buffalo Creek flood that took place in Logan County, West Virginia, in February 1972. When an

36. Scott, *Removing Mountains*, 33–34.

37. Scott, *Removing Mountains*, 63.

38. Buell, "Toxic Discourse," 639.

39. Pancake, *Strange*, 25.

40. Pancake, *Strange*, 213.

41. Pancake, *Strange*, 343.

impoundment dam collapsed during a period of heavy rain, 130 million gallons of coal slurry gushed through Buffalo Creek hollow, at times reaching heights of 30 feet, and devastated sixteen coal towns, killing more than 125 people and displacing more than 4,000.⁴² In the novel, Avery recalls being washed miles downstream and waking up to take stock of his surroundings after regaining consciousness on an unfamiliar hillside: “The waters have peeled the railroad right off the ground, scattered ties everywhere, then coiled up the rails into lassos. Water did that, [he] thinks.”⁴³ His mother, Mrs. Taylor, is also preoccupied with water, her constant reminisces about Buffalo Creek ending with a refrain that another “wall of black water” will return on Judgement Day.⁴⁴ Flood-related trauma is portrayed as intergenerational, too, as Lace’s emotionally sensitive twelve-year-old son Dane, who cooks and cleans for Mrs. Taylor, begins to “feel the weight. The water hovering overhead” after listening to Mrs. Taylor’s sermons warning of an impending watery apocalypse.⁴⁵

Lace and Bant exhibit the novel’s most pointed anti-MTR rhetoric, but their opposition to coal emerges less from daily encounters with toxic topographies or disaster-related trauma than from a productive tension between their sense of closeness with rural Appalachia and socially conditioned difficulties ascribing its degradation to coal extraction. As such, they cannot be described as conventional environmentalists. Lace comes from a coal family, and as she witnesses her father dying from black lung disease contracted from decades in the mines, she struggles to square her place-based identity with the dangers of coal extraction. Her father’s lungs are “being buried by it, by coal,” but to Lace coal “is earth, which is this place. . . . We eat off it, dig in it, doctor from it, work under it . . . we grow up swaddled in it.”⁴⁶ Likewise, when Bant sees photographic evidence of MTR’s impacts on nearby mountains, she is incredulous, describing the images as taboo items, “like looking at pictures of naked people. Like looking at pictures of dead bodies.”⁴⁷ She is also conflicted when her boyfriend, an older, out-of-state contract miner, urges her to accept things the way they are: “[if] you-all wanna stay in here, you want your brothers to have jobs, your husband, you better just get used to this here.”⁴⁸ On the other hand, both Lace and Bant harbor a deep affinity for their mountainous surroundings based on their time spent foraging—an activity necessitated by their poverty—and fostering a deep kinship with what Bant calls “the deep of here.”⁴⁹ After the May flood, reverence gives way to anxiety; the novel’s protagonists frequently remark about the “threat of rain” or impending precipitation, a narrative tic that betrays

42. Stern, *Buffalo Creek Disaster*, ix.

43. Pancake, *Strange*, 224.

44. Pancake, *Strange*, 75.

45. Pancake, *Strange*, 76.

46. Pancake, *Strange*, 151.

47. Pancake, *Strange*, 58.

48. Pancake, *Strange*, 315.

49. Pancake, *Strange*, 36.

a growing awareness of their residence in a sacrificial landscape.⁵⁰ When Lace visits friends in a nearby community ravaged by floods and dynamite blasts, she describes it as a “beautiful painting that had been ripped in two.”⁵¹ When Bant discovers a second impoundment dam above the family’s home, she imagines the next flood: “Our house would be the first to go.”⁵² In a momentary bid to numb the pain of loss, she tells herself “I don’t care.”⁵³ Here, alienation becomes anguish, as Bant experiences intense feelings of “ecological grief,” an expression that has gained increasing traction in the field of environmental studies to describe “the grief felt in response to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change.”⁵⁴

As Scott notes, a significant aspect of Appalachian identity arises from a deep sense of indigeneity, or what she describes as “other ways of relating to the land” that conflict with the cultural role of extraction.⁵⁵ Though problematic for obvious reasons, the descriptor “indigenous” has often been used metonymically to refer to the supposed primitivism of early European settlers in Appalachia who have traditionally lived “close to the land” through subsistence lifestyles.⁵⁶ While this construction simultaneously enacts an erasure of nonwhite native culture in the area and further marginalizes rural Appalachian communities, some anti-MTR activists nevertheless make claims to indigeneity as the environmental ethos driving their yearning for a pre-extraction past.⁵⁷ Lace and Bant’s activism emerges from this dynamic and as a result both fit the more “nontraditional” profile of anti-MTR activists as white women, first-time activists from coal families who espouse community values, who have no broad environmentalist agenda beyond remediating local environmental and public health issues, and who have come to these insights through their own life experiences and are thus first-hand witnesses to the impacts of MTR.⁵⁸ In the novel’s closing lines, Bant resolves to “tell Lace what [she’d] found”⁵⁹—a second impoundment dam, a renewed threat of flooding—and, in doing so, she overcomes feelings of both skepticism and grief and announces her commitment to fighting MTR. Through this activist turn, the novel does important epistemological work, fostering the conditions of possibility for a reconnection with, and resurrection of, a sacrificed landscape. In doing so, it envisions an important first step toward imagining a postextraction Appalachia.

50. Pancake, *Strange*, 100, 108, 109, 160, 244.

51. Pancake, *Strange*, 272.

52. Pancake, *Strange*, 354.

53. Pancake, *Strange*, 355.

54. Cunsolo and Ellis, “Ecological Grief,” 275.

55. Scott, *Removing Mountains*, 10.

56. Scott, *Removing Mountains*, 227–28n5.

57. Scott, *Removing Mountains*, 212–13.

58. Barry, *Standing Our Ground*, 84–113.

59. Pancake, *Strange*, 357.

**“What Lies Beneath”: Hydraulic Fracturing and Postcoal Extraction Culture
in Jennifer Haigh’s *Heat and Light***

Like *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, Jennifer Haigh’s 2016 novel *Heat and Light* levies a critique of extraction culture by portraying economic precarity and ecological anxiety commonly afflicting Appalachian coal communities. The novel is set in fictional Bakerton, Pennsylvania, a declining coal town caught in the throes of the natural gas boom of the early 2000s, which for many communities represented a potential path to restored prosperity as coal markets continued to decline. As the first serious literary response to the cultural politics of hydraulic fracturing, the complex process by which natural gas is removed from deposits deep underground, *Heat and Light* offers an account of what could be described as a postcoal culture of extraction in which key elements of coal-era extraction culture—the mythos of energy development as a path to progress and grandiose claims as to Appalachia’s centrality to narratives of American exceptionalism—persist even in the face of coal’s decline.⁶⁰ In the novel’s opening pages, an unnamed narrator remarks that “more than most places, Pennsylvania is what lies beneath.”⁶¹ The phrase “what lies beneath” is multivalent, referring at once to the region’s resource-rich topography, the degradation of ecosystems underfoot (aquifers, streams, soil), energy industries that thrive on opacity and concealment, and an internal battle being waged by residents and neighbors over the postcoal future of Appalachia.

Yet *Heat and Light* does not offer such a straightforward critique of the region’s energy economy as does *Strange* or, for that matter, other well-known engagements with hydraulic fracturing. In his Emmy-winning documentary *Gasland* (2010), for example, Josh Fox embarks on a sleuth-like journey to uncover fracking’s impact on local water supplies. Made memorable by a scene in which residents adjacent to a gas well in Colorado light methane-contaminated tap water on fire, the film frames fracking as a public health crisis. Matt Damon’s film *Promised Land* (2012), on the other hand, depicts a monolithically craven natural gas industry willing to spread misinformation and leverage financial desperation to access shale gas deposits regardless of environmental costs. To be sure, these themes do pervade *Heat and Light*. But the novel’s formal elements preclude it from the type of documentary function exhibited by *Strange*. To the extent that it can be said to have a plot, the novel details the experiences of an expansive cast of characters as natural gas interests briefly descend on Bakerton: an ambitious energy company salesman walks door to door persuading residents to sell drilling rights; a debt-saddled family of three grapples with spoiled water after leasing their 40-acre family farm for drilling; organic dairy farmers argue with neighbors over their refusal

60. Jaqueline Yahn argues that ideologies of American exceptionalism driving coal development in northern Appalachia have rendered the region vulnerable to exploitation by the natural gas industry. See Yahn, “Frackonomics.”

61. Haigh, *Heat and Light*, 426.

to permit drilling in their pastures. But the novel's events unfold through a series of disjunctive vignettes and threaded subplots that largely fail to reach unambiguous resolutions. Sources of water contamination are never quite confirmed, lessors never quite receive hoped-for gas royalties, and in the end gas companies depart for more lucrative landscapes.

Writing of the "slow violence" of environmental degradation, Rob Nixon emphasizes a process that occurs both "gradually and out of sight."⁶² In its fractured form, *Heat and Light* functions as a rich textual metaphor for a natural gas industry that thrives on obfuscation. Consider, for example, the growing scientific consensus that fracking poses significant environmental risks. Researchers agree that groundwater contamination is a primary concern; numerous studies have confirmed elevated levels of methane in aquifers and residential wells abutting drill sites,⁶³ and industry watchdogs have become increasingly concerned about dangers posed by leaky, poorly regulated wastewater injection wells.⁶⁴ In Oklahoma, fracking has even been linked to a five- to tenfold increase in seismic events.⁶⁵ Yet the fracking process and its ecological impacts occur largely out of sight. During the drilling process, a water-chemical solution is injected deep underground at high pressures to free up pockets of natural gas, and while 80 percent of fracking fluids return to the surface in the form of "produced water," most of it is piped into tanks, trucked away, and pumped back into wastewater wells deep underground.⁶⁶ Visual indicators of the actual act of drilling are difficult to detect beyond enigmatic drill-site infrastructure dotting the pastures and backyards of gas country. Contamination tends to unfold slowly and unspectacularly, detectable only through anecdote or rigorous scientific studies that take years to complete. In short, while gas extraction represents a particularly strong marker for the emergence of new sacrifice zones, its ecological effects fall short of the visual spectacle—and narratability—of, for example, mountaintop-removal coal mining.

The problem of conjuring a coherent fracking narrative is furthered by an industry best described as operationally opaque. As oil and gas companies seek to access natural gas deposits, they often rely on deception and sophisticated disinformation tactics to persuade impoverished residents to sign legally exploitative lease agreements. Research has shown that gas wells are typically more concentrated in low-income rural communities that lack the institutional support or political capital to engage with oil and gas companies as equals.⁶⁷ Residents face a slew of obstacles when seeking information and industry accountability, including the legally protected reticence of gas companies

62. Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 2.

63. Jackson et al., "Increased Stray Gas Abundance"; Osborn et al., "Methane Contamination."

64. For an overview of fracking-related freshwater contamination and regulatory shortcomings in the US, see Lustgarten, "Injection Wells."

65. Walsh III and Zoback, "Oklahoma's Recent Earthquakes."

66. Jackson et al., "Increased Stray Gas Abundance," 3; Prud'homme, *Hydrofracking*, 85–89.

67. Ogneva-Himmelberger and Huang, "Spatial Distribution."

to disclose chemicals used during the drilling process.⁶⁸ In one study, researchers interviewed over thirty farmers in rural Pennsylvania who had leased land for gas extraction and found that landowners were largely denied insight into or participation in drilling and extraction processes. When environmental concerns arose, most lessors were unable to gain information about drilling processes and chemical usage.⁶⁹ Some contended with corporate bullying tactics; in one instance, a lessor reported that when they organized a meeting at a local church to discuss concerns with gas company representatives, company officials arrived with armed guards.⁷⁰ Moreover, pro-gas public relations campaigns often manipulate public opinion by associating fracking with patriotism and regional pride and citing methodologically questionable and rhetorically deceptive scientific studies that insist hydraulic fracturing is safe and economically viable.⁷¹ This propensity for disinformation is broadly reflective of an industry that has long thrived on deception, even at the legislative level. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 represents one well-known example. Buried in a single, inauspicious paragraph in the vast 550-page bill, the infamous “Halliburton loophole” exempted hydraulic fracturing operations from key provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act.⁷² It was included at the request of then Vice President Dick Cheney, former CEO of drilling supplier Halliburton. Not only was this development harrowing for residents of a region where many depend on private water wells, it also amounted to an egregious instance of gaslighting: if the industry were truly safe, no exemption would be necessary.

Heat and Light's various subplots mirror the industry's enactment of violence through obfuscation and concealment. For example, Rich and Shelby Devlin eagerly sell drilling rights on their property so that Rich can quit his low-paying prison guard position and revive his 40-acre family farm. For them, the presence of gas on their property amounts to what door-to-door gas “salesman” Bobby Frame calls “buried treasure”—a path out of paycheck-to-paycheck poverty.⁷³ However, after their water begins to take on a strong chemical odor, they have little recourse beyond buying bottled water from Wal-Mart. Attempts to confirm fracking-related contamination are largely stifled by a confusing bureaucracy of corporate offices and private contractors. When Rich questions a drill crew in his backyard, they deny responsibility and disassociate themselves from the Devlins' original contract with the gas company. “You'll have to take that up with Dark Elephant,” Rich is told. “We're Stream Solutions. We're subcontractors.”⁷⁴ Results from a water test administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental

68. Prud'homme, *Hydrofracking*, 65; Colborn et al., “Natural Gas Operations.”

69. Malin and DeMaster, “A Devil's Bargain,” 283.

70. Malin and DeMaster, “A Devil's Bargain,” 285.

71. Matz and Renfrew, “Selling Fracking.”

72. US Congress, “Energy Policy Act of 2005.” *Public Laws* 109.58. 2005. www.gsa.gov/cdnstatic/PLAW-109publ58.pdf. Section 322.

73. Haigh, *Heat and Light*, 10, italics in original.

74. Haigh, *Heat and Light*, 260.

Protection prove inconclusive too. The test confirms the presence of methane in their water supply, but the state tells Rich that it “appears to be related to background conditions,” not gas drilling. The raw lab report is no help to the poorly educated Rich, whose “eyes slide over the columns of figures, values for methane, ethane, SMCLs. He has no idea what he’s looking at.”⁷⁵ Unable to obtain answers from corporate and government stakeholders, Rich and Shelby can do little other than “be vigilant,” the only advice provided by state authorities.⁷⁶

Rick’s bewildering experience, from the giddy anticipation of a financial windfall to the frustrating inability to find someone to take responsibility for his contaminated well, reveals a disconnect between the optimistic semantics of industry marketing and the ever-present possibility of environmental catastrophe. Rather than approaching fracking through the spectacle of contamination, as Pancake does in *Strange*, Haigh’s novel is pervaded by speculation and suspicion. When organic dairy farmers Mack and Rena refuse to sign a gas lease to preserve the integrity of their business, for example, the gas company is legally prohibited from drilling beneath neighboring properties. The women are repeatedly pressured and intimidated by neighbors eager to gain a financial windfall; as one frustrated neighbor tells Mack, “Once you start taking money out of my pocket, I got to say something.”⁷⁷ Later, the women lose an account with a farm-to-table restaurant in Pittsburgh whose owner tells Rena that “our customers read the newspaper. They know what’s going on in your part of the world.”⁷⁸ The restaurant owner is less environmentally savvy than attentive, her fear of tainted water the function of a regional anxiety about fracking. Her apprehensions are affirmed by ubiquitous television and billboard advertisements for the services of personal injuries attorney Paul Zacharias who, in his quest to obtain “Frackountability™,” implores the public: “Does your tap water have a foul odor? Is it cloudy or greasy looking? How’s your health?”⁷⁹

Heat and Light’s narrative equivocation functions as a metaphor for the natural gas industry writ large, speaking to undisclosed practices, disavowed aftermaths, deceptive public relations, inscrutable institutional hierarchies, and the absence of corporate responsibility. While Pancake’s *Strange* diagnoses the visible symptoms of MTR through the spectacle of decapitated mountains, washed-out mountain hollows, and toxic streams, *Heat and Light* underscores novel manifestations of extraction culture in a postcoal United States: those who suspect their water has been spoiled by gas drilling are saddled with the burden of proof, forced to navigate a labyrinth of institutions, from state environmental departments to private subcontractors, corporate liaisons, private injury lawyers, and even neighbors and business partners. The novel’s narrative incoherency reflects this

75. Haigh, *Heat and Light*, 326.

76. Haigh, *Heat and Light*, 325, italics in original.

77. Haigh, *Heat and Light*, 77.

78. Haigh, *Heat and Light*, 81.

79. Haigh, *Heat and Light*, 319–20.

reality, functioning as a response to the representational difficulties of hydraulic fracturing. For the novel to proselytize about the ecological risks of fracking would be to undermine its central point: debates surrounding fracking are as much about environmental impacts as they are a battle for the soul of Appalachia in the twenty-first century, the future of which may or may not be defined by novel instantiations of an extraction culture that has pervaded the region for more than a century. If Pennsylvania—and Appalachia more broadly—is “what lies beneath,” then struggles surrounding fracking likewise unfold “beneath the surface” between neighbors, friends, business owners, and community leaders in kitchens and backyards, on front porches and in town hall meetings.

Postextraction Futurism and Community-Based Reclamation Art

Ann Pancake’s *Strange as This Weather Has Been* and Jennifer Haigh’s *Heat and Light* render visible long-standing patterns of social and ecological violence associated with extraction culture in Appalachia. By exposing the epistemological failures of extractive capitalism, both novels make space for the articulation of alternative visions of a region freed from the destructive path-dependence of the modern energy economy. This essay will close by considering two such visions: the AMD&ART Park in Vintondale, Pennsylvania, and artist-activist John Sabraw’s toxic-art initiative in southeastern Ohio. Both projects exhibit an aesthetics of what I term *postextraction futurism*, wherein extraction is repurposed as a critical method to envision livable, equitable futures. If extraction can be understood as an act of removal resulting in an array of externalities or “remainders,” then postextraction futurism harnesses extractive processes to heal ecosystems and communities. For AMD&ART Park and Sabraw’s toxic-art initiative, healing involves the physical removal of coal-related toxins from ecosystems and, through memorial art, prompting communities to link a pollutive past to visions of a healthy, habitable Appalachia. The notion of postextraction futurism connects with the existing impetus within energy studies to explore the social and political changes necessary for a post-fossil fuel energy transition. As a group of thirty-five cross-disciplinary artists and scholars explain in their essay collection *After Oil* (2016), an equitable energy transition is impossible without “changing how we think, imagine, see, and hear”—a task best met by engaging with literary texts, visual art, performance, and scholarship.⁸⁰ Extractive fictions work to enact change by interrogating the value and belief systems driving extractive modes of accumulation and making space for alternatives. Postextraction futurism renders change tactile and tangible.

The AMD&ART Park has been described by founder T. Allan Comp as “art that works” in part because of an innovative water filtration system that removes acid mine drainage (AMD)—groundwater tainted by sulfuric acid and iron oxides—from nearby Blacklick Creek, which has been inundated by leftover toxins from the Vinton Colliery Site since its closure in the 1950s.⁸¹ Completed in 2005 through the collaborative efforts

80. Szeman and the Petrocultures Research Group, *After Oil*, 41.

81. Reece, “Reclaiming a Toxic Legacy through Art and Science.”



Figure 1. AMD&ART Park blueprints. Photo by Stacy Levy.

of Comp, environmental artist Stacy Levy, landscape architect Julie Bargmann, and hydrologist Robert Deason, the park was installed on abandoned mining grounds on the town's western edge. The filtration system itself is a work of art: water is cleansed using passive water treatment methods: contaminated creek water is rerouted into a pond lined with limestone, which naturally filters dissolved iron from water, and is then discharged downhill into other ponds where it is treated further. A thousand trees were strategically planted beside the ponds so that in the fall, changing leaves, depending on tree species, would mimic the changing color of water as it is progressively cleansed during its journey downhill. Levy, part of the park's core design team, describes the filtration system as "doing while telling" by giving a visual indication of the water filtration process in real time as trees, during the fall, "vivify the process from acid to basic" (pers. comm., March 18, 2019). The 35-acre park also functions as a walkable, multi-use community space featuring multiple art exhibits including a wetlands section featuring colliery ruins; the Miner's Memorial, a polished black stone framed by a reconstructed timber mine portal and etched with images of early twentieth-century miners; a recreation area; and a large tile-mosaic map bordered by historical photographs of the mine site.⁸² According to Comp, the park is designed to "symbolize the success of local residents in

82. Comp, "Science," 66–67.



Figure 2. AMD&ART Park holding pond. Photo by Stacy Levy.

healing these waters and this whole site, not only by finishing a job unknowingly abandoned by past generations, but also by developing a new community asset for their families and their families' futures."⁸³

Artist-activist John Sabraw and environmental engineer Guy Riefler, both professors at Ohio University, have taken a similarly innovative approach to confront the legacies of Appalachia's extractive economy. Riefler's research focuses on the chemical and biological dimensions of water pollution, including AMD, which often transforms streams into gaudy hues of orange, yellow, and red. When he discovered AMD was chemically similar to commercial paint, he began working with his students to develop a method for filtering iron oxides from contaminated stream water, converting them into pigments, and returning clean water to streambeds. While refining the process, he began collaborating with Sabraw, a pigment specialist who has long used natural materials in his own artwork. Sabraw has since refined and incorporated the bold, wide-ranging pigments into his paintings, resulting in collections like "Chroma" (fig. 3), which has been featured in galleries across the United States and garnered substantial media coverage as "toxic art." In his artist's statement, Sabraw explains that the goal of

83. Comp, "From Environmental Liability," 420.

Figure 3. *Chroma S4*
Chimaera. Photo by John
 Sabraw (2017).



his work is to understand the “underground excoriations” that are coal mines and the ways in which they affect human-nonhuman relations.⁸⁴ In 2018, Sabraw and Riefler teamed up with a hydrologist to design and build a pilot treatment and processing facility on the banks of Sunday Creek in the small town of Corning, Ohio. The goal is to prove scalability of the process and, through a partnership with commercial paint maker Gamblin, sell pigments and reinvest the proceeds in local stream cleanup efforts. The team crowdsourced over \$30,000 and solicited input from local residents to construct an art wall around the facility featuring AMD paints (fig. 4).⁸⁵ The community, with which the team has worked on a one-on-one basis, has been receptive to the project. Residents are excited at the prospect of a clean-running creek where many people fished and swam before it was inundated with toxins. Working in conjunction with his students, Sabraw (pers. comm., April 10, 2018) hopes the wall will “tell the story about how the pollution got here,” explain the water treatment process, make a case for the necessity of the plant, and highlight the history of Corning, once a thriving coal town that has been declining since the mid-1950s.

84. John Sabraw, “Current Body of Work: Unearthed Topographies.” *John Sabraw*. www.johnsabraw.com/studio (accessed March 21, 2018).

85. John Sabraw, “85%, 7 Days to Go, New Art Wall Design Idea,” post to “Toxic Art: Turning Pollution into Paint,” *Kickstarter*, April 18, 2018, www.kickstarter.com/projects/1068577064/toxic-art-turning-pollution-into-paint/posts/2162221.



Figure 4. Art wall, treatment plant. Photo by John Sabraw (2017).

By acknowledging coal's historic centrality to regional cultural identity, both AMD&ART Park and Sabraw's toxic-art initiative function as zones of transition between a pollutive industrial past and restorative visions for the future. Each engage in a form of what museum studies scholars Jennifer Newell, Libby Robin, and Kirsten Wehner call "material storytelling," which refers to the narrative dimensions of museums, exhibits, and collections that, within the context of environmental change, have "the capacity to reshape and recreate our place in the physical universe."⁸⁶ Moreover, by combining memorial aesthetics with science-based environmental reclamation processes, AMD&ART Park and Sabraw's water filtration plant could arguably be viewed as ecological "counter-monuments" in the spirit of historian James Young's famous characterization of Holocaust memorials in Germany as "brazen, painfully self-conscious memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premises of their being."⁸⁷ As Young explained, the traditional monument—a Nazi-favored propagandistic medium—has historically functioned as a "state-sponsored memory of a national past," meant to entrench national narratives and uphold collective values. By contrast, the counter-monument serves a

86. Newell, Robin, and Wehner, "Introduction," 5 (italics in original).

87. Young, "Counter-Monument," 271.

subversive purpose, both in form and meaning, and celebrates “its own physical impermanence . . . and the contingency of all meaning and memory.”⁸⁸ If coal can be understood as symbolic of a quintessentially US narrative of progress, and extraction culture its epistemological embodiment, AMD&ART Park and Sabraw’s toxic art subvert that narrative, memorializing extraction not as emblematic of some bygone era of “progress,” but as an impermanent, replaceable practice the pollutive effects of which can be extracted, so to speak, from sacrificed landscapes and communities.

Highlighting the region’s extractive heritage is critical to environmental reclamation efforts in a region that has a reputation for being skeptical of outside environmental groups who profess altruistic intentions, where energy extraction remains central to place-based identity, and where communities often display an “appallingly passive acceptance of environmental conditions.”⁸⁹ To overcome these challenges, the AMD&ART Park team took pains to consider the complex cultural and historical forces shaping the region. “AMD is more than just a water problem,” insists Comp. “It is deeply emblematic of the economic and environmental abandonment throughout Appalachian Coal Country.”⁹⁰ While scientific approaches to reclamation can be materially effective, Comp argues, approaching degraded environments as “cultural artifacts” enables a more community-based approach to reclamation.⁹¹ The siting of AMD&ART Park reflects these ambitions: Vintondale has long been defined by coal, in both its heyday as a company town controlled by Vinton Coal Company and its decline after the last underground mine closed in 1950, sparking an exodus and plunging the town into decades of slow economic decline.⁹² By acknowledging local history and working with the community to remediate its worst effects, the project became an opportunity for “civic healing” that mobilizes citizens to prioritize healthy environments and communities over economic development.⁹³ Likewise, Sabraw’s treatment plant and art wall works to connect southeastern Ohio’s extractive past to a more livable future. He explains its anticipated role as a structure that “educates and celebrates” its location in the town of Corning. Though some locals were initially skeptical of their project, by involving the community, Sabraw hopes to emphasize that the wall “isn’t a tombstone for their town, but . . . something that they might look forward to” (pers. comm., April 10, 2018).

While levels of economic prosperity generated by the mid-century coal boom are unlikely to return to the region, extractive fictions and the postextraction futurist aesthetics of Comp’s AMD&ART Park and Sabraw’s toxic-art initiative can be viewed as representative of a broader movement committed to advancing radically inclusive visions of a habitable, thriving postextraction Appalachia. This includes the editorial staff at

88. Young, “Counter-Monument,” 270, 295.

89. Comp, “Science,” 64.

90. Comp, “From Environmental Liability,” 416.

91. Comp, “Science,” 63–64.

92. Comp, “From Environmental Liability,” 418–19.

93. Comp, “From Environmental Liability,” 416.

the *Appalachian Voice*, a bimonthly newspaper that covers environmental and cultural news throughout the region; the Appalshop media arts collective and education center in Whitesburg, Kentucky, which supports community-generated film, radio, music, and performance art that explores environmental, economic, and cultural issues throughout Appalachia;⁹⁴ zine editors of the Queer Appalachia Project and the *Electric Dirt* zine, which shares stories of “queers in nature” and, they explain, takes pride in “foraging for pieces of ourselves within the intersections of coal mines and class, race and religion, food justice and colonialism.”⁹⁵ These community-driven efforts to redefine Appalachia beyond its historical ties to the national energy economy offer models for equitable postextraction futures throughout the region. While extractive fictions challenge the epistemological foundations of extractive capitalism by rendering visible its socio-ecological “externalities,” postextraction futurisms connect a long history of ecological degradation and social marginalization to a reclaimed future unfolding in real time. By striving to change the ways communities think, imagine, see, and hear about extraction, each offer hope, and a roadmap, for equitable transitions into postextraction futures.

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94. For more information about Appalshop, including a list of past and current projects, visit www.appalshop.org/about-us.

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