Lights! Camera! Fire! Centralia, Pennsylvania, on Film

By Philip Mosley

Among true stories of manmade disasters in the United States, few have run as long or caught the public imagination as much as the Centralia fire. For over half a century the fire has burned beneath and all but destroyed this small Pennsylvania town in the old anthracite coal mining region.

Centralia became notorious in 1981 after twelve-year old Todd Domboski barely survived falling 150 feet into a scorching sinkhole that opened up in his backyard on St. Valentine's Day. The subsequent national media spotlight turned the town and its fire into a cultural curiosity that persists to this day. In addition to much trivial and often vulgar coverage in print, on television, and now mainly on the Internet, the story has attracted journalists, scholars, and artists working in various forms.

The first three serious print studies of the disaster were by a reporter assigned to the story by the Shamokin *News-Item*, David DeKok, in 1986; by photojournalist Renée Jacobs, also in *1986*; and by academic authors J. Stephen Kroll-Smith and Stephen Robert Couch in 1990.[1]

These accounts are notably predated by the first two documentaries on the subject—*Centralia Fire* (1982) and "Baptism by Fire" (1983)—made independently for PBS, both of which appeared shortly after the Domboski incident. *Centralia to Remember* (2004) and *The Town That Was* (2007) recently picked up this documentary thread on the Internet and on film respectively, while elements of the story found their way into three commercial fiction films: *Made in USA* (1987), *Nothing but Trouble* (1991), and *Silent Hill* (2006).[2]

Centralia and the Fire

Once the largest producer of hard coal in the world, the northeastern Pennsylvania anthracite field covers a relatively small area, 125 miles

long, a mere 35 miles wide, and 484 square miles in all. The field is divided into the northern region centered on Scranton/Wilkes-Barre, the eastern middle in the Hazleton area, the western middle in the Shenandoah-Shamokin area, and the southern region centered on Pottsville.

With an area of 0.2 square miles, Centralia lies in Columbia County, in the western middle field along the path of Pennsylvania Route 61, which runs northward from Reading before turning westward near Centralia and onward to the bank of the Susquehanna River at Sunbury. In its heyday as a mining town, Centralia had a population of over two thousand residents with at least another five hundred living in adjacent neighborhoods. By 1962, this number was down to around eleven hundred; by 2005, as a consequence of continued exodus and relocation, it had dropped to twelve.

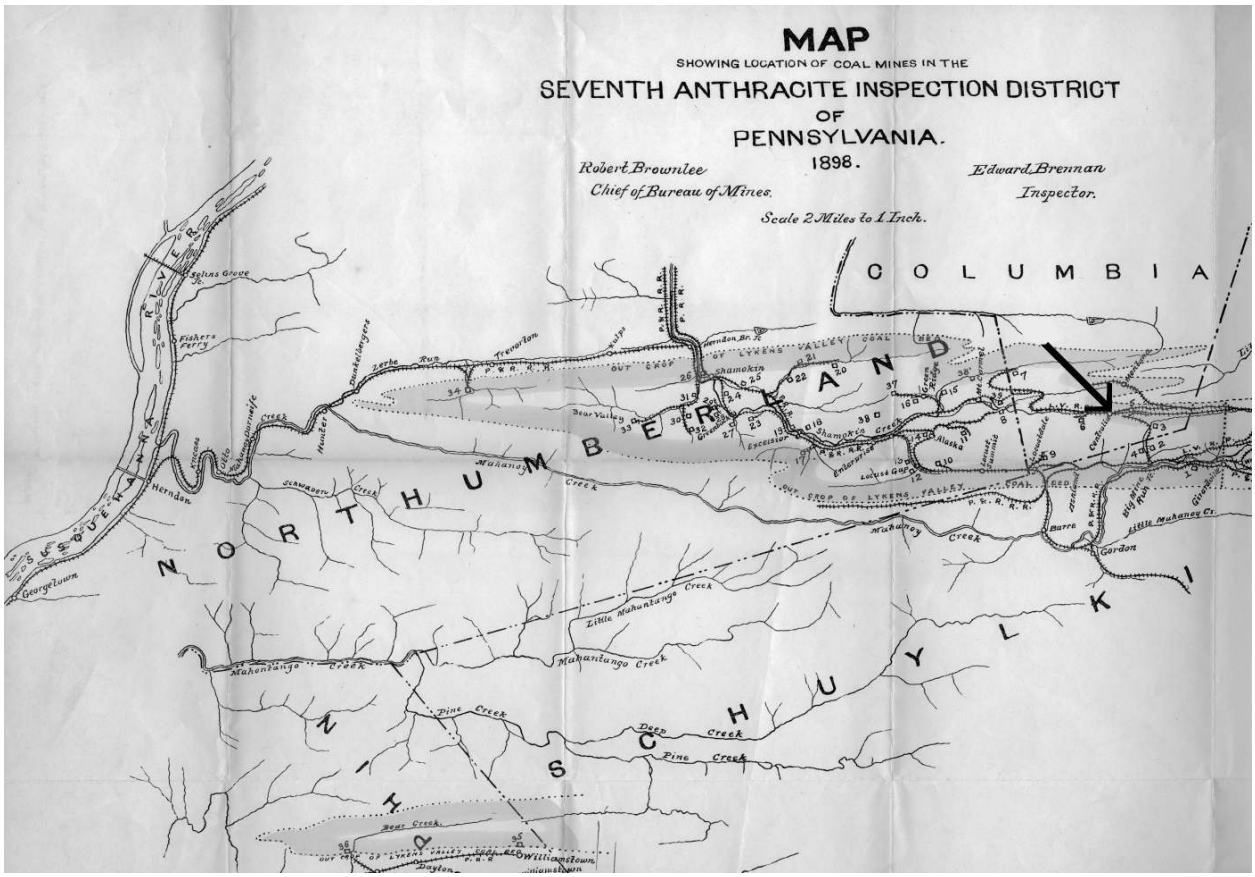
Centralia, Pennsylvania, in relation to major eastern cities. (Courtesy of David DeKok.)

In his book, DeKok outlines the history of Centralia. With an anthracite rush already underway across the region, the Locust Mountain Coal and Iron Company owned most of the Centralia valley by 1842, within a year of its settlement. However, mining did not come to Centralia until 1854, when a minor railroad built nearby permitted coal to be transported out of the area. Five mines duly opened between 1856 and 1863; a branch of a major railroad, the Lehigh Valley, reached the town in 1865; and the borough was incorporated in 1866.

The earliest miners were Welsh, English, and German; later came the Irish, followed by Poles, Russians, and Ukrainians. By the time of the Great Anthracite Strike of 1902, all mining in Centralia was run by the powerful Lehigh Valley Coal Company. The local miners were solidly United Mine Workers' unionists, and their gains in pay and working conditions—following the creation of President Theodore Roosevelt's 1902-03 commission that forced the coal companies to back down—were retrospectively almost the high point of their fortunes.

After 1917 the anthracite industry began a steady decline due to labor shortages during World War I, persistent strikes and labor unrest, competition from fuel oil, and the Great Depression. During the Depression, bootleg mining took place in Centralia in mines that had been temporarily closed by their owners. A common bootlegging technique in Centralia, where the companies practiced room-and-pillar mining, was pillar robbing; i.e., progressively taking out the coal pillars left to support the rooms carved out when removing the coal. This practice led to roof collapses and debris accumulation, which would later complicate efforts to fight the Centralia fire.

After World War II, as the use of fuel oil and the competition from bituminous coal ruined the anthracite market, the Lehigh Valley Coal Company pulled out of Centralia and the Centralia town council acquired the rights to all coal below the town in 1950. Despite the independence this



1898 map of section of the Western Middle (anthracite) Coal Field, Pennsylvania, showing Centralia at the far right (arrow). (Courtesy of the Anthracite Heritage Museum, Scranton.)

ownership brought to the people of Centralia, they nonetheless faced an uncertain future devoid of the industry that had made the town and sustained it for so long.

On the fateful day of May 27, 1962, at the behest of the council, the Centralia Fire Company set a fire in a municipal garbage dump located in a pit formed partially from an abandoned mine stripping close by a cemetery on the edge of town. The aim was to clean up the dump ahead of Memorial Day ceremonies at the cemetery. DeKok states that "perhaps there is no way to prove that [this fire] became the Centralia mine fire, but the weight of the evidence supports that conclusion."[3] The fire could have been extinguished properly but instead was allowed to spread to an underground labyrinth of abandoned mines, almost certainly via holes in the landfill pit. Two decades of multimillion-dollar expenditure by the state and federal governments failed to put out the larger conflagration. By the 1970s, subsidence and poisonous gases from the fire were causing serious health and safety problems in the borough.

The Domboski incident of 1981 marked the beginning of the end for Centralia. In 1983 residents voted in favor of a $42 million government buy-out program, ushering in a period of relocation and further demolition of vacated properties. In 1992 the state claimed eminent domain over all remaining properties in the borough, thus effectively condemning them, and in 2002 the U.S. Post Office revoked Centralia's zip code. In 2009 the few remaining residents—squatters in homes they no longer owned—faced formal eviction notices from the state. Down to five homes and ten residents, Centralia now consists of little else but

Smoldering Centralia, Pennsylvania. The Town That Was. *(Courtesy of Dog Player Films.)*

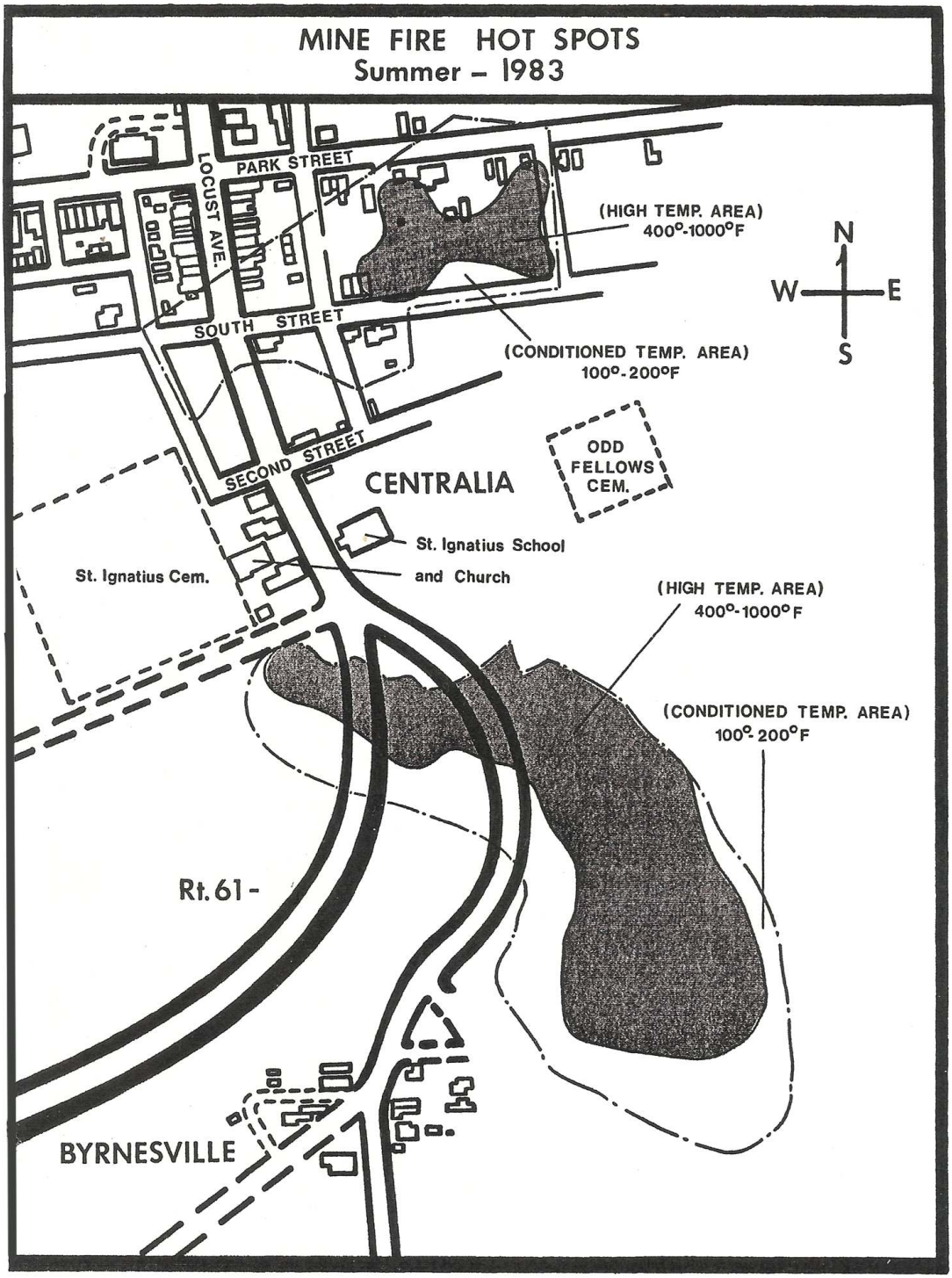
open land and a grid of paved streets to remind us of what once was a thriving place.

Best estimates suggest that there is sufficient coal under Centralia to keep the slowly westward-moving fire alight for anything between 250 and 1000 years. Thousands of coal seam fires burn internationally, but the Centralia story represents a particularly poignant and chronic human tragedy, one intimated by the title of Kroll-Smith and Couch's book: *The Real Disaster Is above Ground*. Citizens long rooted in a sense of place have fought state and federal authorities and among themselves. Caught for decades in a tangled web of governmental bureaucracy, residents have perceived their individual and communal rights to have been denied by the officially sanctioned view of a greater good for all.

The First Documentaries

My broader purpose here, however, is not to revisit the full history of the fire, which has been adequately covered elsewhere, but to seek another angle on the story by offering a history of its representation in various mass media, from film to television to internet video.

Centralia Fire was produced locally in 1982 by Tony Mussari, Stan Leven, and Bob Achs. It aired nationally on September 13, 1983 as an installment of the PBS *Matters of Life and Death* series. "Baptism by Fire," directed by Chet Lishawa, was produced by Marcia Henning for The Press and the Public Project as an installment of the PBS *Inside Story* series. It aired on May 26, 1983. Both films address relationships between



Centralia's hot spots in 1983. (Courtesy of David DeKok.)

industry, community, and memory, but their respective expectations and formal strategies reveal different contexts of production, exhibition, and reception.

Centralia Fire consists of original footage, while "Baptism by Fire," befitting its function as an *Inside Story* program focused on television news response to the Domboski incident, relies heavily on compilation footage from various television news and current affairs sources. This footage reveals a series of fairly immediate responses to a breaking news story, so its characteristic modes of reportage appear influenced to a far greater extent than *Centralia Fire* by dominant news values, competitive pressures, and constraints of time and place.

Already in the process of being made in 1981, *Centralia Fire* deals only briefly with the Domboski incident and the subsequent media frenzy. The narrator, actor Martin Sheen, states that "this event catapulted Centralia into national prominence" and led to the evacuation of twenty-seven families near the cave-in. In directing our attention instead toward inaction or impotence at various official levels, the film works primarily as a social action document for the use and benefit of citizens in their dealings with government.

The filmmakers gave no third party any opportunities to profit from the film. It includes no music and avoids using captions of citizens' names in interviews, so as to accentuate the communal voice. Furthermore, it makes only one concession to national celebrity, choosing Sheen as its narrator following the actor's presence in the region at the time for the filming of Jason Miller's 1972 Pulitzer Prize-winning, Scranton-based play *That Championship Season,* also released in 1982.

Like a number of films on similar themes produced since the 1970s (e.g., by the Appalshop collective in Kentucky), *Centralia Fire* remains politically acute by reminding us not only that the coal industry has occupied and then deserted vast areas of the coal mining states, but also that the environmental, social, and economic consequences of that history are critical to the lives and welfare of those left behind.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of *Centralia Fire*, one attributable largely to the film's local origin, is the extent to which it stresses the continuity of communal life brought about by a history of social, industrial, and religious unity. Centralia thus appears as a fairly typical American small town despite its ordeal. A citizen sets the tone with almost the first voiceover of the film: "I didn't know that the community was being slowly destroyed." Over a series of establishing shots, the

Protest sign on a house in Centralia, Pennsylvania. Centralia Fire. *(Courtesy of Mussari-Loftus Associates, Ltd.)*

narrator contrasts the formerly positive image of the town and its values with the "environmental nightmare which burns relentlessly sixty-five feet below the surface." Where once was unity and security is now division and fear.

Perhaps the most poignant statement of the meaning of home and of being forced to leave it comes from the Buckleys, one of the first families to be evacuated. After sixteen years in a home about to be bulldozed, the family has moved just twenty miles north, hardly any move in most people's minds, but one of major proportions for persons so deeply attached to their own community. As Mrs. Buckley points out, "it's just a house here; it was a home in Centralia." It remains in tune with the sympathetic stance of the filmmakers that they chose to end the film with a spirited assertion of hope. In the words of Mr. Buckley: "I shall return. I will be back in Centralia someday, living."

A very different take on the same issue appears in "Baptism by Fire." The film forms the main segment of its *Inside Story* installment, sharing program space with a shorter "Back Page" segment on a Massachusetts housing project. According with the reflexive nature of the series, the film, which focuses on press attention to and media expectations of the Centralia story, is seamlessly integrated into the overall structure of the program. "Baptism by Fire" opens with interviews of two prominent residents, Catherine Jurgill and Father Samuel Garula, who state their objections to the coverage. This is followed by a montage of five news reports, from ABC, CBS, NBC, and two regional television stations, broadcast from February through July 1981, followed by a neat segue to Hodding Carter as studio anchor and main narrator.

As the segment's title rolls, Carter offers the film's thesis: "sometimes the press can be too much

A vent pipe for noxious gases with St. Ignatius' Church to the rear, Centralia, Pennsylvania. (Courtesy of Jack Carling.)

of a good thing. . . . As much as the coal burning below, the press invasions have given these people a baptism by fire in the ways of American journalism and they have something to say about it." Later, in his summary, Carter refers to Centralia as "a chronic disaster area" on par with New York's notorious Love Canal, adding that the residents "distrust the government, which they feel is dragging [its] feet ... and they've come to distrust the press, which they find is more interested in stories than solutions."

The film's critique of journalistic practice embraces national, regional, and local television and press. For instance, it examines ABC's *Nightline* story from October 1981, in which three residents interviewed in a no-go area understandably felt sick afterwards. The presenter, Ted Koppel, chose to wrap the scene with an alarming exhortation: "Get away from that gas, will you?"

Jurgill, one of the interviewees, expressed her displeasure with the *Nightline* episode, but executive producer William Lord defended the interview set-up as appropriate and the wrap line as proper. As he put it, "one of the magic things of television as well as one of the unfortunate things" is that the telephoto effect of the camera lens in relation to foreground and background foreshortens the distance. So, contrary to the image—and also to Koppel's line—the interviewees were standing twelve feet away from the escaping fumes. Nonetheless, the scene shows the interviewees manipulated by the television crew and production team's technical and content decisions.

Jurgill, who also appears in *Centralia Fire*, became a media favorite due to her supposedly risky pregnancy. This culminated in a normal birth, however, much to the disappointment of reporters from organs as disparate as the *National Enquirer* and the *Washington Post* on the lookout for "deformed baby" stories, an obsession that understandably left Jurgill "perplexed" and "dismayed."

Exploiting the competitive element inherent in a free market of news providers and invoking the shibboleth of serious investigative journalism, "Baptism of Fire" attempts here—with a perspective offered by passing time and by a relatively leisurely programming slot—to venture beyond its competitors in the depth of its coverage. Its critique exposes a tendency by news organizations in both word and image to maximize sensational or popular elements in the story and to minimize the sense of community and the lasting effects of the fire upon that community.

Yet "Baptism by Fire," like any mainstream investigative documentary, gets caught in a vicious circle. No matter how much it tries to adopt a detached and critical stance regarding the practices of the mass media, it remains subject to the expedient principles governing news and current affairs departments. Despite the film's sensitivity to the need for openness and fairness in news reporting, PBS must try to match its competitors for an audience expecting an appealing and seamless viewing experience.

"Baptism by Fire" is an intelligent analysis, but it remains embedded within an "infotainment" vision that typifies so much contemporary programming, even more so today than when it was made thirty years ago. National news teams left Centralia as quickly as they had come, while even local stations and papers were limited in the extent to which they felt they could reasonably cover the story. As Father Garula astutely observed at the end of "Baptism by Fire," the problem does not go away, but we lack the social and cultural structures to respond adequately to a long-term crisis of this kind.

Fiction Films

The Centralia story has nonetheless entered the collective imaginary, including the world of fiction film. *Made in USA*, directed by Ken Friedman, introduces two young unemployed men—played by Adrian Pasdor and the late Chris Penn—eager to leave the grim reality of their deserted and boarded-up home town for the possibilities of a cross-country adventure. The film's first im-

John Lokitis, Jr., maintaining a town bench. The Town That Was. *(Courtesy of Dog Player Films.)*

age, Centralia's faded town sign, is soon followed by the two men passing one of the signs indicating a closed-off highway—in reality, a section of Pennsylvania 61—cracked by heat from the fire. These quasi-documentary shots form part of an extended opening sequence shot in Centralia and other old regional coal towns. Thereafter, in the critical consensus, the film becomes a nondescript road movie, its attempted social and ecological messages of post-industrial trauma soon lost amid high jinks with hot cars and even hotter girls.

A horror comedy, *Nothing but Trouble*, written and directed by Dan Aykroyd, was released to uniformly poor reviews and box-office failure despite the presence with Aykroyd of Chevy Chase, John Candy, and Demi Moore. Also a road movie, it follows four friends who, on a trip from Manhattan to Atlantic City, detour from the New Jersey Turnpike only to get stuck in Valkenvania, a burnt-out city directly inspired by Centralia and composed of dilapidated houses, vent pipes for bore holes, and a population of roving hillbillies.

A brief section on Centralia in a chapter of Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods*, his bestselling memoir of experiences hiking the Appalachian Trail, published in 1997, renewed public interest in the story. Times had changed to the degree that Bryson's piece spawned a wave of quirky commentaries on the internet and the growing presence in Centralia of rather too many ghoulish tourists for the liking of the town's few remaining residents.[4]

At the same time, the increasing popularity of video games led to the creation of *Silent Hill*, a Japanese horror survival series ongoing since 1999 and set in an American small town, abandoned and fog-shrouded in one of its several multiversal dimensions. In 2006, the game, which has garnered a cult following, inspired the film *Silent Hill*, directed by Christophe Gans.

The movie begins with Rose Da Silva, played by Radha Mitchell, taking her adopted daughter Sharon, played by Jodelle Ferland, to the town of Silent Hill, the name of which Sharon has been crying out while sleepwalking. Having taken a closed-off highway, their car crashes and, on coming to, Rose discovers that Sharon is missing. Continuing on foot, Rose passes a decaying town sign and is sprinkled with falling ash.

By adding the highway and falling ash to the video game's clouds of fog, the movie's writer, Roger Avary, acknowledged the influence of Centralia, saying that his father, a mining engineer, used to tell him stories about the town. Avary had thus been fascinated since childhood by the idea

of a town desolated by an uncontrollable underground fire, so he decided to use Centralia as the basis for Silent Hill.

Mixed reviews called the movie visually striking but hampered by a rambling and confusing story. Reviewer Don Lewis called it the "best-looking bad film" he had ever seen. Whatever the merits of the film—or its 2012 sequel, *Silent Hill: Revelation 3D*—it remains the best example of how the Centralia story has been appropriated fragmentarily by cinematic fiction.[5]

Recent Documentaries and the Internet

The Town That Was, which took Chris Perkel and Georgie Roland five years to make on a $35,000 budget, recalls the spirit of *Centralia Fire*. Emphasizing a sense of continuity and solidarity on the one hand, and one of loss and futility on the other, it casts as a narrator one of the town's surviving residents, 33-year-old John Lokitis, Jr., who lives in his grandfather's two-story row house. He explains that the county allowed him to deed the property albeit in an unofficial document, since the federal government legally owns his home.

An unexpectedly youthful self-appointed custodian of the town and its proud tradition, Lokitis commutes two hours daily to a job in the state capital, Harrisburg. He seems determined to keep the town alive by painting the public bench, mowing grass, keeping the flag flying, and putting up Christmas lights in the streets. In many ways he is the main subject of the film. Roland says that meeting Lokitis was the decisive factor in making the film: "we couldn't help but wonder why someone so young, someone with so many options, would choose to live in the remnants of a dying town with no one his age. . . . We went into the film to tell a story about a human being, to tell his story against the backdrop of the fire."

By presenting Lokitis as "not simply an eccentric who refuses to accept the death of his hometown, but rather a case study in the pathology of an entire region mired in decline," the filmmakers view him sympathetically yet ambiguously as caught between his belief in the survival of Centralia and his memories of the past. This leads him, among other things, to keep his grandparents' house almost as it was during their lifetime, as well as to ignore the danger to himself and his home posed by the presence of the fire about one hundred feet from his back yard.

The elegiac tone of the film—enhanced by Paul Henning's original score, by limpid lighting, and by moody shot compositions—offers a wistful counterpoint to Lokitis's characteristic passion and energy, though the filmmakers smartly allow their camera to dwell at times on a sadness already etched in the young man's face. As a footnote to *The Town That Was*, Lokitis was ordered to vacate in 2009, and his home was demolished before the year was out. Now in his forties, he lives a few miles away from the town.

The possibilities afforded by online exhibition and sales distinguish some newer documentaries from earlier ones, like *Centralia Fire,* which was broadcast nationally on PBS but otherwise existed only in limited 16mm and VHS copies. For instance, "Centralia, PA—Death of a Small Town," a segment of one installment of the *Life after People* series, aired in 2009-10 on the History Channel, is readily available on DVD, while a two-minute sample may be found on YouTube.[6]

This series, the most popular program ever on the History Channel, presents a set of international case studies that speculate on the fate of an earth left without mankind. The Centralia segment is subtitled "25 Years after People" thus presuming, conveniently but incorrectly, the total depopulation of the town to have coincided with a mass exodus during the demolition and relocation programs of the mid-1980s.

Online sites, many with external embedding options, have made video material of this kind widely and freely accessible. With global rights including the Internet, Cinevolve Studios, which distributes *The Town That Was,* placed it on Hulu

(slogan: "Watch your favorites. Anytime. For free."), while the educational film *Centralia to Remember* was made available in three parts on YouTube in 2010.

Despite its relatively low production values—it was shot on DV and edited on Adobe Premiere Pro for $500—*Centralia to Remember* compares well with *Centralia Fire* or *The Town That Was*—documentaries made with television channels, film festivals, and DVDs in mind—in presenting the story in a detailed, varied, and articulate manner. Describing the "past and present situation" of Centralia, the thirty-two-minute film was made by geology professor Yuri Gorokhovich for the benefit of students in his environmental geology class.

By blending live action, archival stills, graphics, music, and a set of talking heads, *Centralia to Remember* shares with its above-mentioned documentary stablemates a standard mix of visual materials, interpretive strategies, and performative elements in its quest to engage with complex questions of truth, historical representation, and ideological positioning. The whole film is edited with flair for the dramatic potential of the subject and is accompanied by an inventive soundtrack including "Paradise Lost" by Australian vocalist-composer Lisa Gerrard and Irish composer Patrick Cassidy, as well as several classical piano compositions performed by Svetlana Gorokhovich, the filmmaker's wife.

Gorokhovich opens *Centralia to Remember* on a high cultural note by quoting, from Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, one of Astrov's speeches bemoaning environmental ruin through man's careless and greedy exploitation of natural resources. "This story," Gorokhovich continues, referring to Centralia, "is yet another page in the book of human aspirations ruined by human negligence and incompetence."

A 1906 postcard view of Centralia, Pennsylvania.
(Courtesy of the Columbia County Historical and Genealogical Society.)

Befitting its primarily didactic purpose, the film combines a historical overview with a degree of technical information required by its student audience. The expert witnesses, however, keep most of this information at the level of the general viewer's understanding. One of them, Steve Jones, chief of the Mine Hazards Division of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, makes the telling point that to isolate and extinguish the fire now would cost between one-half and three-quarters of a billion dollars, a prohibitive proposition given the limits of the $25 million annual allocation to the state's entire abandoned mine reclamation program.

The film's dialectical edge comes from interviews with residents who recapitulate old divisions within the community. John Comarnisky, a teacher still living in the town, suggests that most citizens willingly relocated less out of fear for their health and safety than out of an expectedly healthy profit from their compulsory home sales. And when Comarnisky alludes to the lucrative prospect of some three million tons of coal remaining in a twenty-five foot vein beneath a watercourse and thus safe from the fire, we are reminded of the long-held suspicion of official motives for having cleared the town. Jones, however, refutes this assertion, insisting that the government acquired surface properties alone and holds no mineral rights.

Comarnisky, like Lokitis in *The Town That Was*, firmly believes that Centralia could revive, if people were allowed to buy back the land, an intriguing but unlikely scenario in the present circumstances. Asked if a lesson is to be learned from the tragedy, the answer of 88-year old Lamar Mervine, the last mayor of Centralia, is succinct: "if there's a mine fire today, put it out tomorrow."

The post-industrial ghost town exemplified by Centralia, replacing in the American imagination the frontier version represented in countless westerns, offers up images of a spectacular death by fire, destruction, and depopulation—a narrative that in turn generates broader ones of anxiety over physical safety and losses of community and work. A glance at the YouTube site reveals a laundry list of personal videos to add to a welter of blogs and off-beat web sites that the Centralia story has spawned.

Steve Jones of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection monitors the fire. Centralia to Remember. *(Courtesy of Professor Yuri Gorokhovich.)*

Even established media companies occasionally pick up the story again; in 2012, for instance, the BBC produced a four-minute report by Matthew Danzico that includes interviews with David DeKok and with some of Centralia's few remaining residents.[7] And it has become easy for everyone with a video camera to film and exhibit their personal take on the story. All of these video texts—amateur or professional in varying degrees, sensitive or lurid—reveal a persistent interest in a story now known by a greater number of people than at any time since the Domboski incident thrust Centralia into national headlines in 1981.

Centralia's Legacies

Unlike the now sparse U.S. anthracite industry, bituminous coal mining remains widespread, but has also experienced its share of disasters that, like Centralia in 1981, draw national and international attention. Many of us will recall national news coverage of the dramatic rescue of miners

trapped by a flood at Quecreek, Pennsylvania, in 2002, as well as of the mine explosions at Sago, West Virginia, and at Upper Big Branch, West Virginia, in 2006 and 2010 respectively. Much bituminous activity now centers on strip mining, still a controversial method, especially in the form known as mountaintop removal.

Before we dare to think that a Centralia story could never happen again, consider a headline in the *New York Times* in 2011: "As the Mountaintops Fall, a Coal Town Vanishes". The article reports the virtual disappearance of the small community of Lindytown, West Virginia, as a massive stripping operation steadily removes the hills above and almost obliterates the town below. Coal mining communities still vanish for one reason or another, be it mine disasters or operational expansion by mining companies, and so often with drastic human consequences.[8]

I visited Centralia recently. There were no warning signs, no rising smoke or steam readily visible, only a handmade anti-eviction sign erected by the locals and displaying politicians' contact numbers. The sun shone warmly, the leaves were green, and the atmosphere was peaceful. The Centralia story may have entered and stayed in the public consciousness, but it struck me forcibly that the few who remain there wish only to be left alone by the eager observers of their forsaken town and to be allowed to live the remainder of their lives in the place they call home.

Born and raised in England, Philip Mosley received an M.A. in European literature and a Ph.D. in comparative literature from the University of East Anglia. Since 1988 he has been a professor of English and comparative literature at Penn State University, Worthington-Scranton, where he also teaches film studies. A Fulbright professor and scholar, he is the author of three books on cinema, the translator of four books from French, and the editor of Anthracite! An Anthology of [six] Pennsylvania Coal Region Plays (University of Scranton Press, 2006). His interest in coal mining history began while a professor at Glasgow Caledonian University, includes the cultural legacy of the northeastern Pennsylvania anthracite region, and is currently engaged researching Belgian coal mining films.

Notes:

1. David DeKok, *Unseen Danger: A Tragedy of People, Government, and the Centralia Mine Fire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986 [reprinted: Lincoln, NE: toExcel, 2000]); Renée Jacobs, *Slow Burn: A Photodocument of Centralia, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986 [reprinted in 2010]); Stephen J. Kroll-Smith and Stephen Robert Couch, *The Real Disaster Is above Ground: A Mine Fire and Social Conflict* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1990). (Twenty-three years after his original book David DeKok wrote: *Fire Underground: The Ongoing Tragedy of the Centralia Mine Fire* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2009).)
2. *Centralia Fire*, directed by Tony Mussari, Stan Leven, and Bob Achs (Wilkes-Barre, PA: MLA Productions/King's College, 1982); "Baptism by Fire," for *Inside Story* (PBS-TV), directed by Chet Lishawa (New York: The Press and the Public Project, 1983); *Centralia to Remember*, directed by Yuri Gorokhovich (2004; uploaded (in three parts) to YouTube, 17 Sep. 2010); *The Town That Was*, directed by Chris Perkel and Georgie Roland (New York: Dog Player Films, 2007); *Made in USA*, directed by Ken Friedman (Hollywood: De Laurentiis Entertainment/ Hemdale Film, 1987); *Nothing but Trouble*, directed by Dan Aykroyd (Hollywood: Applied Action/Warner Bros., 1991); *Silent Hill*, directed by Christophe Gans (Hollywood: Silent Hill DCP/Davis-Films/ Konami Corp., 2006).
3. DeKok, *Unseen Danger*, 25.
4. Bill Bryson, *A Walk in the Woods* (London: Black Swan, 1998), 230-9.
5. Don R. Lewis, review of *Silent Hill*, directed by Christophe Gans, *Film Threat* (online), 24 Apr. 2006.
6. "Centralia, PA—Death of a Small Town," a segment of "Bound and Buried," for *Life after People* (History Channel), directed by Frank Kosa, aired 26 May 2009 (added to YouTube 5 Jan. 2010).
7. "Altered States", BBC *Homepage*, 8 Aug. 2012.
8. Dan Barry, "As the Mountaintops Fall, a Coal Town Vanishes," *New York Times*, 13 Apr. 2011.