

Anaconda: A Short Story

Edward B. Reynolds (edited and with an
afterword by Matthew Basso)

Editor's Note: Edward Reynolds wrote the short story "Anaconda" for *Men at Work*, a 1941 Federal Writers Project (FWP) anthology that, because of World War II, was never published. Harold Rosenberg, the editor of *Men at Work* and later in his life one of the nation's best-known art critics, asked FWP authors from around the country to submit stories about people doing their jobs. In the hope that this collective project might provide a unique window into American work ways and the lives of workers themselves, the FWP stipulated that the authors either had to have witnessed the labor they were writing about or had to have done it themselves. Reynolds, who had worked at the Anaconda Reduction Works several times, was an ideal candidate for the assignment. In the "Sketch Biography" that he submitted with his short story, Reynolds, who was born and raised in Anaconda, wrote that he first worked in the smelter on weekends as a high school student. The wages he earned at the plant helped him complete a journalism degree at Montana State University, but he always considered "the copper college" an equally important educational experience. He told Rosenberg that "it would take a book to tell of the Micks and Slavs and Swedes and Russians; the Cousin Jacks, the Polacks, the Italians, the Germans . . . of the varied occupations, as many in number

as the works is huge." Reynolds described the story below as depicting in detail only "a small part" of what went on at the plant, "with but a cursory glance at the remainder." Even with those caveats in mind, I believe "Anaconda" is one of the best—and most interesting—literary portraits of the built environment of a once mighty industrial site.¹

He shoved the white card into the timekeeper's window and growled a greeting. While he waited for the clerk to go through the familiar routine of making out a time card, he continued grumbling to himself. He had been grumbling on the street car all the way up the Hill to the works. Grumbling ever since the clerk in the employment office downtown had given him a work card for the Stack.

The Stack! Rappin' treaters or dumping flue dust. That was a job for sodbusters and greenhorns. Not for a guy that had been born and raised right here on the ground, here in Anaconda, whose residents do not look at the morning sky to see how the weather is, but whose first glance is at the Big Stack to see how the smoke's coming out. They don't ask one another's health, they ask, "What shift you on?" "How's she going?" is hello; "Tap her light" is good-by. Why, his parents had been there when Old Marcus himself, the Copper King, had bellied up to the bar he'd had built as an exact reproduction of the Hoffman House in New York. The Stack! Jeez, you'd think there was



Coming to work at the Stack off the trolley, Anaconda, Montana, 1945. Photograph by R. I. Nesmith. Courtesy Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives, Helena (Lot 19 A210).

enough Okies and Arkies laying around to take those jobs. You wouldn't think they'd put a guy in a hell hole who'd worked every place from the high line, dumping ore, to the hot metal. If times hadn't been so tough with him, he'd have told that employment clerk where he could stick his card. But...Well...Hell!

The card hustler handed him the pink pasteboard and said, "Give this to McClelly at the Stack. You'll have to walk. You're the only rustler and there's no sense in sending a bus for just one man. Besides, you should worry; you're getting paid from now on. If walking's the hardest work you have to do, you'll be lucky."

"Okay, okay. Let's have her."

He took the card and started up the road to the Stack. It was a hot July day and the exertion of climbing soon made him remove his jacket. A couple of flies buzzed around his head with soothing sounds. They reminded him of fishing—of luxuriously stretching his legs on the bank of a stream and baking in the sunlight. Far up, on top of the mountain, the Big Stack reared upward to the height of 585 feet. A silvery-grey mass drifted from its top and lazily blended into the deep blue of the sky. Its soft cloud-like formations looked deceptively gentle against the background made hard by the glaring sun. He almost forgot his grumbling.

As he kept mounting upward the Big Stack

began to grow and became formidable. It lost its beauty, and its size became overpowering. He began to think again of his job. He was certain he wouldn't get one of the better jobs. A rustler was always put to either rappin' treaters or dumping flue dust.

When you rapped treaters you took a bamboo pole and rapped the dust from plates inside chambers that are built right into the stack. These plates are sheets of corrugated roofing steel, twenty-one feet wide and twenty-four feet high. They are hung vertically, twelve inches apart, in box-like chambers that form the treaters. Between them are rows of small chains, suspended at five-inch intervals. The chains carry a static charge of electricity at a tension of 62,000 volts. When the smoke and gases rise between the plates, the electricity charges the fine particles of dust and repels them from the chains to the plates. The plates are grounded so that the dust particles lose their electrical charge and cling to the plates until they collect in masses large enough to fall through the rising gas to hoppers in the bottom of the chamber. . . . Dumping flue dust is when you get into the tunnel underneath the treaters and pull the lever that opens these hoppers so the dust runs into ore cars to be hauled away to the arsenic plant.

It all sounds fine when you explain it that way, but the new man wasn't thinking of technical processes. He wasn't concerned with the fact that

arsenic recovered as a by-product from the smoke and gases that formerly passed off into the air as waste matter now form the basis of a huge industry in itself. He wasn't concerned with farmers who dusted their fields and fought insect plagues with that same arsenic. He was thinking of the 62,000 volts in the chains and the burning and poisonous qualities of arsenic.

It was true that precautions had been taken to eliminate the danger of electrocution and that men were rarely killed. But he remembered cases when something had gone wrong. He remembered stories of the smell of burning flesh, of the blue hole where the juice had passed through a man's feet on out of his body, of rigid forms toppling from the cat walk. He realized that these stories were told by men whose constant companionship with death causes them to exaggerate tragedy in order to relish it the more. He realized all this, but the stories were there in his mind. And, somehow, death by electrocution seemed tawdry after the violent, threatening spectacle of the hot metal.

It was the same with dumping flue dust. That didn't bring violent death, but there was always the chance of getting burned. Here, too, you took precautions, to keep the dust away from your skin. When you sweat and the dust touches your skin it turns to arsenious acid that eats into the body and



Joe Messer, lifter, at the new converter, Washoe Smelter, Anaconda, 1943. Photograph by R. I. Nesmith. Courtesy Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives, Helena (Lot 19 A371).



Lowering new machinery, Flotation, Washoe Smelter, Anaconda, 1942. Photograph by R. I. Nesmith. Courtesy Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives, Helena (Lot 19 A102).

leaves nasty sores. There is something unpleasant and humiliating about these sores—under the arms, between the legs, around the waist. You look at them and treat them in the privacy of your room. You're ashamed of them. No, it's not like the hot metal, where the leaping, roaring flames and the fiery glow of molten metal places danger on a high level.

As he reached the high line where they dump the great cars of copper ore from the Butte mines, he stopped on a landing of the stairway to “take five” and look back. Below him stretched the reduction works—immense and spreading, like the reptile the plant was named for. The great buildings seemed to flow down the mountainside, wrapping themselves around rocky ledges with snakelike purpose. They were built that way to take advantage of gravity. Raw ore was dumped in at the top and wandered down through the buildings, everywhere undergoing different processes, to the smelters at the bottom of the hill. Here the treated ore was fused and turned into molten copper.

Because he had worked in almost every department on the Hill, his eye, as it roved from building to building, visualized what was happening in each. He watched an automatic dumper grasp in its iron claws a big ore car, fresh from the mines of Butte. He saw it pick it up and turn it upside down, spilling the rock into a huge bin.

He imagined the scene inside the great building



The Washoe Stack, Anaconda, 1943.

Photograph by R. I. Nesmith. Courtesy

Montana Historical Society Research Center

Photograph Archives, Helena (Lot 19 A396).



Workers in locker room, Washoe Smelter, Anaconda, 1942. Photograph by R. I. Nesmith. Courtesy Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives, Helena (Lot 19 A142a).

built right onto the bin. He could see the doors open and the ore come tumbling down onto the iron bars called grizzlies. He could hear the crashing of rocks, too big to pass through the bars. He could see and hear them moving toward the crushers—in whose jaws they were crunched and chewed until they were at last spewed out, small enough to drop between the bars to conveyor belts below.

In another building farther down the Hill he could sense the ore being crushed still further until it was sand. He could hear the chattering and throbbing of the Hardinge mills with their iron balls pounding the sand. He could see the Anaconda and the Dorr classifiers letting the finely ground ore through and rejecting the coarser stuff. He could hear the bubbling and murmuring of muddy water rushing through little flumes called launders as it washed the finely ground ore toward the flotation machines.

The flotation machines in another building mixed the ore with pine oil and chemicals and blew air into it, until the mixture became a slimy foam. In this process the copper sticks to the oily bubbles and rises to the top; the waste material at the bottom is washed away. The slime goes to great Dorr thickening tanks where it is brought to the consistency of pancake batter. Then it is passed over Oliver filters, shaped like barrels and the water is drawn out. He could see these giant mud pies, rich in copper, zinc, lead, gold, silver,

and other metals, being scraped off and loaded in cars for a trip to the roasters.

As his eye moved toward the roaster building, he saw one of the little trains of cars dart out and puff its way up the track. Alongside the big railroad cars these trains looked like toys, but they were big enough if you had to work on them. Little sputtering engines, charged with compressed air, rushed the cars along like a crotchety old spinster herding a crowd of children. The train mounted to the top of the roasters and dumped its load of concentrates.

Inside the roasters the furnaces were built with several floors, and on each floor revolving arms shaped like wide garden rakes pushed and stirred the concentrated ore which dropped from one floor to another. The ore glows a deep orange-red as the sulphur commences to burn. Finally it comes out at the bottom red hot and is dumped into trains of iron cars that carry the smoking material called calcine to the smelting departments at the bottom of the mountain.

His eyes dwelt on the smelters with a mixture of respect and hatred. The blackened buildings with their giant stacks looked like the charred remains of a forest fire. Down there was the hot metal; with its menace that fascinated him. He could see the calcine being dumped into the reverberatory furnaces along with charges of dust and unroasted concentrates. He could

hear the roar of the gas used for fuel. From the door of each furnace came a wild red glow like the blood-shot eye of a Cyclops.

He could see the converter furnaces, huge truncated cones, that spouted flames, changing from yellow through orange and red to blue. Then there were the fiery rivers of molten copper when they tapped the furnaces, and the darker slag or waste material that was discarded. There were anodes, 630-pound slabs of copper—the finished product as far as the smelters were concerned. These would be further refined and made into wire and cables, but that was some one else's concern.

The rustler on the stairway finished his mental tour as his eyes lit upon the main flue. Sixty feet wide and extending twenty feet above and seventeen feet below the ground, it ran from the smelters on up the Hill towards the Big Stack. Nearly a mile of smaller flues from the various furnaces were connected with it. As it neared the Stack it widened out to one hundred and twenty feet. This is the flue that carries the smoke and gases, rich in metals, that must be recovered by the treaters. The rustler swung his jacket over his shoulder and started climbing upward once again, his grumbling mood returning as he toiled up the steps.

When he reached the top the Stack no longer had form. It was too big—a huge mass of bricks that went up and up and up, overpoweringly. He found the

office and gave his time card to the boss.

“Go over to that white stack. You'll find a man there who will tell you what to do.”

He entered the door of the shack, a tiny one-room affair, and found a fellow stretched on a bench, reading a copy of *Western Story*. It was Mickey O'Brien, an old friend. He laughed.

“So they finally got you, too.”

“Yeah. I guess it's better than nothin!”

“Yeah, that's right. Is that all you got to do?”

“This is plenty,” Mickey tossed the magazine to one side. “You know as well as I do, any time you get a chance to read there's a catch in it.”

“That's a fact.”

“Remember that guy we saw down town that looked as if the side of his face was eaten off by cancer?”

“Yeah?”

“He had this job before I did. He got some arsenic in his tear duct.”

Mickey went to a cupboard from where he took a big roll of cheesecloth, clothes and other gear. “We're dumping flue dust,” he said. “I'll show you how to wrap up.”

He tore off a large hunk of cheesecloth and wrapped it around the rustler's head, tying two ends behind so that it fitted like a cap, with part hanging down over his neck and shoulders like the riggings

Arabs and members of the Foreign Legion wear on the desert. He took another piece of cloth and wrapped it around the rustler's face like a bandit's mask. Another cloth went around the neck and a smaller piece was placed over the bridge of the nose, connecting the mask and cap so that only the eyes peered out.

The rustler now pulled on a pair of rubber boots that reached his knees. Then he got into a pair of woolen coveralls that hung to his ankles, and buttoned them up around his neck and wrists. Fur trimmed goggles went over the cheesecloth on his face, fitting tightly around his eyes. A large dust mask covered his nose and mouth so that the air he breathed would be filtered. Over everything went a woolen hood with an opening for the eyes, nose and mouth.

Lastly, he drew on a pair of gauntlet gloves and over them a pair of canvas sleeves that reached from his wrists to a point above his elbows. When he had finished dressing no part of him was exposed. Mickey, while dressing likewise, told the rustler to follow him and to copy his actions.

The two men made their way to the tunnel under the treaters. As they walked



Arsenic worker, Washoe Smelter, Anaconda, ca. 1942. Photograph by R. I. Nesmith. Courtesy Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives, Helena (Lot 19 A34).

the hot July sun beating down on the rustler's heavy woolen clothes started him sweating. He remembered what would happen if the arsenic dust reached his skin with all that sweat, and he tried hard to stop, but the thought caused him to sweat even more. At the tunnel they found a couple of huge ore cars spotted on the tracks.

Mickey gathered some gunny sacks and started cutting them into small strips with a knife. With these they began to chink the cracks in the bottom of the cars, which could be opened like hoppers in order to dump their contents. It seemed to the rustler as if they'd never get those holes and cracks filled up. Every time he thought he was through he'd take a look and see daylight. At last Mickey tapped him on the shoulder and started toward the door.

When they got out into the sunlight again, Mickey led him to an air hose and started to blow the dust from his clothes. Carefully, he went over every section of cloth; satisfied at last, he removed his hood and muzzle.

"You want to be real careful to blow off good," Mickey told him. "Then wash good in cold water. If you don't you might get some dust on you and get burned. I've been here two weeks now, and I haven't gotten burned yet. Some guys'll get burned the first day."

They went inside and stripped down. It was

11:30 so they started to eat their lunches. After lunch Mickey returned to his western stories, while the rustler found himself an old newspaper. About one o'clock they dressed again to get ready for the actual dumping of the dust.

"When you pull the lever," Mickey said, "pull it slow. This flue dust is finer than water. It'll shoot down into the car if it's going too fast and boil up and splash all over the place. Take it easy."

The rustler nodded.

"I ain't given you no baloney," Mickey added. "I seen cars standing half full of water when it's been rainin'. And I seen that flue dust shoot right through that water and run out cracks that weren't big enough to let that water out. That's why we got to chink it careful."

They went back into the tunnel and Mickey showed him how to pull the lever. In no time at all a thick dust fog had settled like a pall over the place. Mickey became a ghostly shape flitting around cars that seemed like things from another world. The silence interspersed with the soft phut-phut of the dropping dust was frightening. He wished it would hurry. He wondered if his clothes and that dust mask could really keep the arsenic out. His thoughts caused him to sweat and his glasses began to steam. Unconsciously he reached up to wipe them off. When he touched them he remembered the man with his

eye eaten out by arsenic. He became panicky and opened the lever a little wider to hurry it. There came a soft sound like the rustling of silk and a flood of dust slapped him in the face and trickled down over his clothes. The car was boiling over. He was almost ready to run when he felt Mickey's hand gently but firmly pushing the lever closed. When the dust once more resumed flowing in a slow steady stream, Mickey passed on, giving him a slap on the back. It seemed like ages before he saw Mickey signaling him from the top of the car that it was full and he could close the hopper tight.

When they got out in the sunlight again it was like coming into a new world. Blowing the dust off his clothes, he was even more careful than Mickey had been in the morning. At last they were finished, and removed their work togs. In the shower room, he blew off his town clothes, too, with an air hose.

Context, Subjectivity, and the Built Environment at the Anaconda Reduction Works: An Afterword

Matthew Basso

This afterword uses Edward Reynolds's wonderful 1941 short story "Anaconda" and some of my own research on three Montana copper towns—Butte, Anaconda, and Black Eagle—during the World War II era to consider aspects of the relationship between the built environment and the formation of individuals' sense of themselves and others' sense of them.² Reynolds's story tracks a local Anaconda man who seeks work at the Anaconda Reduction Works late in the Great Depression. The protagonist shares his observations about being hired and then traveling through the plant to his eventual work site at the Stack. Reynolds's rich portrait of the Reduction Works offers many ways to consider the place of landscape and the built environment in people's lives. I argue that it reveals a geography of masculine status, visible only to workers, that overlays the built environment of the plant.

It's fitting that Reynolds, in his effort to detail the workings of the Anaconda Reduction Works—more commonly called the Anaconda smelter—chose to have his protagonist moving toward and eventually working in the Stack. Whether you're a native of Anaconda or have only passed it driving down I-90, the Stack likely

looms large in your memory of the town. Yet, while folks with widely divergent associations to Anaconda share this tie, what the Stack represents to them can vary dramatically, as Laurie Mercier noted in a 1988 article on the subject.³

For some, the 585-foot landmark, which is the single remaining piece of the once massive Anaconda Reduction Works, is the last vestige of an industrial past that saw thousands of locals employed in good jobs. The continuing presence of the Stack in Anaconda, after the rest of the Reduction Works was torn down following the plant's closure in the early 1980s, prompts, for this group, memories of better times, of America's industrial might, and of the vibrant immigrant culture that once characterized the town. For others, the Stack symbolizes the pollution that came from the Reduction Works, sudden job loss, and corporations' abandonment of small-town America.⁴ A third cohort, made up of the men and the few women that worked at the Anaconda Reduction Works, experienced the Stack in a way that only they, and perhaps those with whom they shared that insider knowledge, understood.

In this article, I uncover those insider resonances in a historically attuned way. This can be challenging because the extant evidence does not always speak directly to such questions, but I believe such an approach can reveal another layer of how the built environment shapes our lives.⁵ Although Anaconda

and Butte are now “postindustrial” places, the general precepts the story “Anaconda” offers about how worker subjectivity interacts with the built environment may also apply to other cases.

As Reynolds’s protagonist illustrates, for folks employed at the smelter, the Stack provided a key landmark by which to map the other work areas at the Reduction Works. For workers, thinking about the Stack also led inevitably to thinking about the jobs housed within and around the structure. Witness the narrator’s characterization of the difficult and dangerous work involved in “[r]appin’ treaters or dumping flue dust.” Rather than positions that were sought after by all workers because they showed one’s manliness, they were “job[s] for sodbusters and greenhorns”—that is, men who had never worked at the plant before and farmers who, during hard times and lulls in agricultural work, often sought jobs at the Reduction Works. In another story about life at the smelter, Reynolds characterized these “sodbusters and greenhorns” as comprising mainly the “Okies and Arkies,” who, like John Steinbeck’s Joad family, famously left the lower Midwest during the Dust Bowl to seek work in the West.⁶ “Anaconda” shows that jobs in the smelter—as well as the men who occupied them, whether they were “sodbusters” or experienced locals—and the structures that housed them, such as the Stack, had discrete reputations about which outsiders, misled

by stereotypes about how status is formed among the working class, often had no clue. In short, the reputation of a job, especially in regard to masculine status, emerged from more than a job’s inherent difficulty and danger.

Research by sociologists and historians who concentrate on workplace dynamics indicates that the perception of a job and the workers who occupy it is established early in the life of a work site by the actions of the employer and the initial cohort of employees. Although these scholars tend to focus on gender and race segregation, and not on the relationship between the built environment and subjectivity per se, their studies of meat packing, electrical goods, textile manufacturing, cigar making, and other industries clearly show that workers saw the distinctions among various jobs geographically. Once set, the reputation of a job was very difficult to change.⁷ Nonetheless, a comparison of the reputation of certain site-specific jobs within the Anaconda Reduction Works in the pre-World War II period to how workers perceived those jobs and sites *during* World War II indicates that the narratives workers created about jobs were mutable to a certain extent. The importance of paying attention to context—meaning place, time, and the specific identities of the people engaging with the structures and spaces in question—as we assess the meanings insiders ascribe to built environments emerges

immediately in Reynolds's story.

The protagonist begins his journey into the built environment of the Reduction Works in the same place as most other workers did: the Company's downtown employment office. In this brief scene, context operates in multiple ways. First, this is one of a handful of times that "Anaconda" takes the reader outside of the smelter, illuminating the difference between the worlds within and outside the plant gates. The other notable instance of this is when the protagonist's imagination takes us to his favorite fishing spot, where he imagines "luxuriously stretching his legs on the bank of a stream and baking in the sunlight." Occurring as it does when the protagonist is laboring to reach his prescribed work site, the Stack, this mention of leisure space joins the idea of leisure to the "natural" landscape/nonbuilt environment around the town. Thus, natural spaces of leisure are contrasted with the plant's built environment and the physical nature of smeltermen's work.⁸

The contrast between the built environment of the downtown employment office and that of the smelter is perhaps not as obvious as that between the worlds of labor and leisure. Yet, in regard to the human geography of the smelter both before and during World War II, the white-collar labor that characterized the employment office provided an important foil for the smelter's blue-collar employees as they sought to claim the financial and psychological wages that combined to help form

workers' masculine status.⁹ This is a second overlay of context in relation to the employment office. The desire to claim status over bosses emerged in part, as Reynolds's short story shows, as a response to the reality that the white-collar men who worked in the employment office and other supervisory sites had power to influence the material realities of smeltermen's daily lives. Recall the protagonist's anger at being assigned to work at the Stack: He had been "[g]rumbling ever since the clerk in the employment office downtown had given him a work card for the Stack. The Stack! Rappin' treaters or dumping flue dust. That was a job for sodbusters and greenhorns. Not for a guy that had been born and raised right here on the ground, here in Anaconda." The worker's displeasure reminds us that Anaconda's smeltermen—like their counterparts in Butte and Black Eagle and, indeed, throughout the U.S. labor movement in the last half of the 1800s and the first half of the 1900s—cherished a sense of themselves as "independent" working men who strove to maintain "equality" with their bosses.¹⁰

Historians and gender studies scholars have shown that, when working-class men perceived the exercise of power by white-collar men as unfair, they reacted not just by complaining but also by making an effort to seize back control and by their own superiority in the realm of masculinity. Steve Meyer's study of the auto factories, for example, shows that this effort could

occasionally include fights and other physical violence. In Butte and Anaconda before and during the war, contests with specific foremen and other managers more often led to wildcat strikes by the workers of a particular area of the plant or mine. More subtle forms of assertion often found workers championing their “productive” masculinity with its physicality over the intellectual labor and uncertain productivity of their bosses. In Montana’s copper facilities, foremen, clerks, and other lower-level managers consistently heard workers refer to them not as “company men” but as “company boys.”¹¹ Sometimes workers used this term jokingly, to kid men who had left labor’s ranks, but at other times it became a way to emasculate clerks and managers, particularly those who seemed either overly beholden to the company’s upper echelon or unwilling to deal with workers fairly. A similar trace of derision accompanied other examples of local vernacular for white-collar workers, including “book miners” or “fifth floor guys”—mining technicians who worked on the fifth floor of the ACM headquarters in Butte—and “pencil pushers” or “ink slingers”—timekeepers who kept track of the workers’ hours. On the other hand, local terms such as “Brains” for a smelter’s assaying and chemical department appeared laudatory. “Big Boy,” a name for the smelter manager, was more ambiguous.¹²

At least one of the nicknames used for managers had a clear spatial undertone, but even when the terms

used to draw distinctions between employee and employer masculinity did not specifically reference the geography of the plant, insiders still saw the built environment of the plant as compartmentalized along these lines. For although a company “owned” the grounds, equipment, and structures that a plant comprised, workers and supervisors each were tied to certain spaces and places within and, as the references to Anaconda’s bars (a worker space) and the employment office (a bosses’ space) show, even outside the facility. Many of the battles between employees and employers were sparked by arguments about who controlled the space in which workers and bosses most often interacted. Labor historians use a geographic metaphor in describing these as fights over control of the “shopfloor.” In a plant the size of the Anaconda Reduction Works, there were far more areas where employee and employer met than just the formal “shopfloors” where production occurred. Each of these places witnessed interactions that helped define the meaning of the surrounding built environment for insiders.

Among the places that witnessed a contest between employee and employer was the area between the plant gate and the timekeeper’s window. Even though Reynolds’s short story does not mention it, any smelter worker of the time would have encountered a management representative, the watchman, either at

the gate or on the way to the timekeeper's window. The watchman was also the last person associated with the Company that workers encountered on their way out of the Reductions Works. The practice of employing watchmen to surveil workers as they entered and exited the plant marked this particular space as one that the Company owned and controlled, while also, like the gate itself, serving as a reminder that the entire facility was owned by the ACM and, thus, theoretically was controlled by management. However, as the above photograph illustrates, workers often responded to this projection of power by studiously ignoring the watchmen and thus, arguably, the ACM's claim of control.

When Reynolds submitted "Anaconda" to the editor of *Men at Work* in the middle of 1941, the timekeeper at his window and the watchman at the gate symbolized administrative oversight and a form of white-collar masculinity that drew status through its connection to the Company's power. That symbolism continued during World War II, but workers who had tended to either poke fun at or ignore the watchmen and timekeepers began to see these men as representing the inequities in the U.S. government and the ACM's policies regarding wartime labor. As early as the summer of 1942, production workers at all three of the ACM's major Montana copper facilities exhibited frustration with what they saw as the Company's effort

to protect white-collar workers like timekeepers and watchmen from more difficult production jobs or from military service.

Although workers were never keen about the lack of trust implied by the use of watchmen, prior to World War II, management had traditionally appointed "old employees of the plant" to these security positions as a reward for their service on production jobs. In the first year of the war, however, with government demands for greater security against both outside attacks and possible sabotage from within, the watchmen force grew and came to be constituted of a mix of younger and older workers.¹⁴ Initially, it seemed possible that the watchman's position, buttressed by semi-military authority, accoutrements, and guns, might be akin to soldiering and thus hold a fairly high status among smeltermen. But, like most Americans, Montana's copper men perceived a difference between actual soldiers and homefront guards.¹⁵ In addition, the presence of older men amid the watchmen diminished the apparent abilities and masculine status of these security forces. Furthermore, once early fears of a Japanese invasion subsided, the contribution of those forces to the war effort appeared questionable. Most importantly, the able-bodied men on the watch force were perceived as being protected from difficult production jobs and military service by the ACM and, therefore, as placing a burden on other men in the

plant either to take more difficult production jobs or to join the military.¹⁶ Thus, during World War II, the area between the timekeeper's window and the gate that was peopled by watchmen came to represent white-collar masculinity and Company power in heightened ways.

As the narrator moves away from the watchman at the gate and the timekeeper's window and enters the more densely industrial areas of the Reduction Works, in no way does he leave behind the contest over control of the built environment. In the section of "Anaconda" that sees the narrator arrive at the Stack, Reynolds alludes to the presence of bosses in these areas and to their power to direct workers. Scholars have written extensively about the shopfloor battles that take place between foremen and workers in these productive parts of plants. These engagements comprise the more classic examples of the struggle between management and labor; they produce their own insider's geography of the plant that links the built environment to perceptions of subjectivity in ways both similar and different to the watchmen example.¹⁷ However, as my purpose is to allude to the multiple ways within the plant that the built environment intersects with subjectivity, I want to shift away from the employee-employer dynamic and toward two other facets of this issue that I mentioned at the beginning of this essay: workers' perceptions about tasks associated with certain machinery; and the tie between workers and certain jobs.

Industrial-era commentators—including workers themselves—frequently argued that the machine age dehumanized the workplace. In the mid- to late nineteenth century, the rhetoric around this development typically referenced the death of the "artisan" and the birth of the factory worker. The Great Depression, with its turn toward working-class culture, saw an upsurge of concern about the machine age and what it would mean for laborers. Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* is perhaps the best known meditation on the issue from the 1930s, but journalism and proletarian fiction of the era also focused on the question.¹⁸

Reynolds's "Anaconda" very much fits within the New Deal tradition of contemplating the industrial process, as indicated by the protagonist's meditations from "the highline," his next stop on his journey to the Stack. The protagonist "imagined the scene inside the great building built right onto the bin. He could see the doors open and the ore come tumbling down onto the iron bars called grizzlies. He could hear the crashing of rocks, too big to pass through the bars. He could see and hear them moving toward the crushers—in whose jaws they were crunched and chewed until they were at last spewed out, small enough to drop between the bars to conveyor belts below." The story "Anaconda," like *Modern Times*, sometimes seems to suggest that the machines dominate the man. However, like much of the proletarian fiction of the era, "Anaconda" also continues

to center the human's role within the larger industrial structure.

Moreover, whereas *Modern Times* and many other texts from the era seem to treat all machines as similar, "Anaconda" depicts the varying emotional response workers can have to machinery in the plant. When, for example, the smeltermen gazes upon the built environment of the actual smelter area within the plant, especially the hot metal section, readers glimpse an especially intense inner response. Reynolds writes:

His eyes dwelt on the smelters with a mixture of respect and hatred. The blackened buildings with their giant stacks looked like the charred remains of a forest fire. Down there was the hot metal; with its menace that fascinated him. He could see the calcine being dumped into the reverberatory furnaces along with charges of dust and unroasted concentrates. He could hear the roar of the gas used for fuel. From the door of each furnace came a wild red glow like the blood-shot eye of a Cyclops.

For the author, the "mixture of respect and hatred" elicited by the hot metal's "menace" imbues the place with the ability to provide status that is seemingly not

shared by any other location within the plant, as his other writings on the subject underscore.¹⁹

The two jobs the protagonist expects to be assigned upon reaching the Stack, rappin' treaters and dumping flue dust, reinforce the site-specific response of workers and also reinforce the lack of predictability regarding the jobs that smeltermen consider as deserving respect. Rappin' treaters and dumping flue dust share the traits of danger and dirt, as the last third of the story shows, with working the hot metal. For the protagonist, a lifelong Anacondan and veteran of several stints in the smelter, the treaters recall "stories of the smell of burning flesh, of the blue hole where the juice had passed through a man's feet on out of his body, of rigid forms toppling from the cat walk." Yet, the treaters did not have the same reputation as the hot metal section. As the narrator notes: "Somehow, death by electrocution seemed tawdry after the violent, threatening spectacle of the hot metal."

If the treaters come up wanting in comparison to the hot metal, the danger inherent in dumping flue dust was seemingly even less worthy of masculine status. It "didn't bring violent death, but there was always the chance of getting burned." Apparently worse than burns were the "nasty sores" which men who worked the flue dust could develop. In a language that clearly ties masculine status to the particulars of this job, the narrator remarks: "There is something unpleasant

and humiliating about these sores—under the arms, between the legs, around the waist. You look at them and treat them in the privacy of your room. You're ashamed of them." These wounds he compares to "the hot metal, where the leaping, roaring flames and the fiery glow of molten metal places danger on a high level." Notably, even after he goes through the process of dumping flue dust, and feels the panic associated with the possibility that "the side of his face" would look like it "was eaten off by cancer," there is no sign the job has been elevated in the estimation of the protagonist.

The "tawdry" danger associated with the built environment of the treaters and the "humiliating" sores and potential facial disfigurement associated with the flue dust could well have been the reason that working the Stack became "a job for sodbusters and greenhorns." However, as I implied earlier, the profile of the workers first associated with the Stack could have also been the source of the place's low status. Since the ACM first began employing large numbers of workers at the end of the nineteenth century, Anglo and Irish workers in Butte and Anaconda had fought to distance themselves from other immigrant groups that were considered, by the pseudo-scientific race theories of the day, as not fully white. Thus, in Butte, Serbs, Slavs, Mexicans, Filipinos, and others considered lower than the Irish and Anglos were sent to work in mines that had the

reputation for having wetter, hotter, and generally more difficult working conditions.

In Anaconda, a similar process occurred. The most obvious example involved the small number of black workers at the smelter. African Americans, the group that found themselves placed on the lowest spot in the American racial hierarchy, were entirely barred from working in the Butte mines through the time when Reynolds wrote "Anaconda." At the smelter, they were allowed to work only in segregated crews and only at two jobs: the acid section and, when the acid section broke their bodies, on the janitorial crew. Some white smeltermen claimed the acid section was not the most difficult place to work in the smelter, but in so doing they reinforced how areas of the smelter gained the reputation, often through their ties with a particular group, for providing a specific status.

Surprisingly, the racial heritage of Edward Reynolds and his family provides one of the best windows onto the arbitrary operation of race in Anaconda. Both of Reynolds's parents held prominent places in the community. Born in Kentucky, his father Claude lived in the smelter city for thirty years and served for a period as the President of the Anaconda Smeltermen's Union. Reynolds's mother, according to the *Anaconda Standard*, was born in New Orleans and "came to Anaconda as a young woman and during her 24 years' residence here gained by her noble character

and charming personality the friendship of all with whom she came in contact.” Marie Reynolds’s maiden name was Roxborough, and although her Montana Certificate of Death listed her as “White,” her family appeared in the Ohio and Louisiana census as black. Her sister Cornelia was a prominent member of the “Sisters of the Mysterious Ten . . . A Negro Order” based in Kentucky. Under the “one drop rule” that became codified into law in numerous states across the U.S. during the first decades of the twentieth century, this made Edward and his siblings either black or “mulatto.” That classification would typically have barred them from the privileges, like better working conditions and higher pay, that came with whiteness. And, in fact, the 1910 Montana census listed not only both women, but also all the Reynolds children and Claude himself as “mulatto.” A former Anaconda resident confirms locals knew about the family’s racial background, yet by 1920, after having been effectively treated as white for over a decade, the family saw themselves legally shifted to that category in that year’s census.²⁰ Why Anacondans received the Reynolds so warmly while they marginalized other families of color remains a mystery, but there is no question that, due to their unique place in the community, they influenced the spatial dimensions of identity formation in complex and even contradictory ways.

The Reynolds family story obviously underscores

the power of local context, but to buttress my argument here let me note one other development at the smelter during World War II that profoundly affected how particular jobs were perceived. In early 1944, after fighting against their employment, Anaconda’s smeltermen witnessed women joining their ranks in production jobs.²¹ It takes little effort to imagine how the particular jobs women were allowed to take on the shopfloor had their reputations change dramatically. In this case, and in that of ethnic workers and black workers, context again helps us see how the built environment and subjectivity intersect.

I want to conclude by raising the question of the other, perhaps overlooked, ways that space, place, and time influence the meaning of built environments for particular audiences.²² Using only Reynolds’s short story as a prompt, we can sense, for instance, an awareness by Anacondans not just of their immediate surroundings and current context but also of an expansive geography and deeper history. The protagonist alludes to both aspects of this broader perspective when he notes that he was “born and raised right here on the ground, here in Anaconda” to parents who “had been there when Old Marcus himself, the Copper King, had bellied up to the bar he’d had built as an exact reproduction of the Hoffman House in New York.” The historical consciousness reflected in this passage will not surprise those who know at least a little about Montana’s

industrial working class. That historical consciousness ran also to narratives about workers' organizations like the Western Federation of Miners and immigrant associations like the Clan Na Gael, as the historians who have told the story of these immigrant workers have noted.²³

We should be equally unsurprised about the geographic side of the cosmopolitan nature, to paraphrase Mark Twain's evaluation, of these workers.²⁴ If we judge by the protagonist, smeltermen obviously felt connected to the Anaconda Copper Mining Company's empire, which had its headquarters in the aforementioned New York and owned plants in every region of the United States as well as overseas in places like Chile. The wide-ranging locals of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers also connected Anaconda's smeltermen to their "brothers" around the United States, providing another geographic

network influencing how Anacondans thought about their place in the world. Perhaps most importantly, the residents of these three towns felt a keen historical and spatial connection to their immigrant homeland as well as to those of their friends—whether it was Ireland, England, Wales, Scotland, Italy, Serbia, Croatia, Finland, Mexico, Lebanon, or any of the other nations that sent workers to Montana's copper towns.

There are no doubt many other approaches we could take to the nexus of issues raised by reading "Anaconda" with landscape and the built environment in mind. But, coupled with an effort to understand the complex topography of meaning that overlays the built environment of any work site, I believe that weighing the influence of historical and spatial affiliations like those noted above provides a productive framework for any evaluation of how people experience the landscape and built environment in which they live.

²³ Harold Rosenberg, ed., *Men at Work: Stories of People at Their Jobs in America*, unpublished manuscript, "Writers' Program, Work Projects Administration," 1941, box A-852, folder 1 and 2, Records of U.S. Work Projects Administration,

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Reynolds submitted the story with the title "A Day's Work." That story is available in the Library of Congress holdings. It, along with his "sketch biography," other Montana stories associated with the Men

at Work project, and instructions to potential contributors, are also held in MC 77, box 9, folder 7, Work Projects' Administration Records, Montana Historical Society Archives (MHSA), Helena. Montana State University Special

Collections also holds “Men at Work” materials in Collection 2336, “WPA Records, 1935–1942,” box 89.

On instructions to authors and the purpose of Men at Work, see also Harold Rosenberg, “Preface,” in the *Men at Work* manuscript at the Library of Congress. For an overview of the Federal Writers Project see Jerry G. Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers’ Project 1935–1943* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972); and Jerrold Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers’ Project* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

² An early version of my research on Butte, Anaconda, and Black Eagle during World War II appeared as “Metal of Honor: Montana’s World War II Homefront, Movies, and the Social Politics of White Male Anxiety” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2001). The final version of this work is under contract with the University of Chicago Press.

³ Laurie Mercier, “The Stack

Dominated Our Lives,” *Montana The Magazine of Western History* (Spring 1988): 40–57. The Stack is famous enough to have its own Wikipedia entry, which notes that it remains “the tallest and possibly largest free standing masonry structure in the world,” so large, in fact, that the Washington Monument “would easily fit inside.” Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anaconda_Smelter_Stack (accessed October 4, 2008).

⁴ Mercier, “The Stack”; Laurie Mercier, *Anaconda: Labor, Community, and Culture in Montana’s Smelter City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Donald MacMillan, *Smoke Wars: Anaconda Copper, Montana Air Pollution, and the Courts, 1890–1920* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2001); Patrick Morris, *Anaconda Montana: Copper Smelting Boomtown on the Western Frontier* (Bethesda: Swann, 1997).

⁵ There were, and are, different levels of outsidersness, of course.

While the smelter was still in operation, townspeople who did not work there, especially those with relatives laboring in the smelter, had a knowledge base akin, but not identical, to smelter workers. We can surmise that working-class people, even if they did not live in Anaconda, also had a different sense of the place, whereas white-collar tourists who saw the plant from a distance likely had little clue about this insider’s world.

⁶ Sodbusters, greenhorns, Okies, and Arkies recur often in oral histories of Anaconda and Butte. See, for example, OH 484, Perle Watters, interviewed by Laurie Mercier, March 25, 1983, MHSA. John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Penguin, 2002).

⁷ Patricia Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker: Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories, 1900–1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana:

- University of Illinois Press, 1987); Mary Blewett, "Manhood and the Market: The Politics of Gender and Class among the Textile Workers of Fall River, Massachusetts, 1870–1880," in *Labor Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, ed. Ava Baron, 92–113 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904–54* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997). My interest in and understanding of space and place and its relationship to subjectivity, though substantially different in focus, are also influenced by such cultural geographers as Doreen Massey and Linda McDowell. See Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); and Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
- ⁸ On outdoor leisure for workers, see Lisa Fine, *The Story of Reo Joe: Work, Kin, and Community in Autotown, U.S.A.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004). On leisure more broadly in Montana's copper communities, see Mary Murphy, *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914–1941* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).
- ⁹ On the material and psychological privileges of masculinity, see Simone de Beauvoir, *Second Sex* (New York: Bantam, 1961); and R. W. Connell, *Masculinities: Knowledge, Power, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
- ¹⁰ David Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Ava Baron, ed., *Labor Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Peter Way, *Common Labor: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals, 1780–1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); and, especially, Steve Meyer, "Rough Manhood: The Aggressive and Confrontational Shop Culture of U.S. Auto Workers during World War II," *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 125–47.
- ¹¹ Meyer, "Rough Manhood." One example of such a confrontation occurred on May 16, 1944, when thirty-five to forty miners at the St. Lawrence Mine walked out, unwilling to work any longer for a shift boss they despised. On this event, see: Munzenrider, "Long Distance Call to J.J. Carrigan [and E.S. McGlone]," May 17, 1944; S. M. Goettlich to Oscar Baarson, May 20, 1944; War Production Board Agreement between the Anaconda Copper Mining Company and Butte Miners Union No. 1, May 20, 1944; all in "War Production Board Records," Anaconda Copper Mining Company Collection, 239, 8/7, MHSA. See also "Company Action Causes Shutdown at Saint Lawrence," *Miner's Voice*, May 19, 1944, 1; "Miners Walk Out at St. Lawrence: Action

Is without Notice to Company,” *Montana Standard*, May 19, 1944. For an example of the use of the term *company boys*, see OH 904 William Tonkovich, interviewed by Laurie Mercier, February 27, 1986, Black Eagle, MT, MHSA. Clark Davis, *Company Men: White-collar Life and Corporate Cultures in Los Angeles, 1892–1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

¹² “Mining Jargon,” in Box 18/12, MC 77, Works Progress Administration Records, MHSA. “Mill and Smelter Jargon,” U.S. Work Projects Administration, Montana Writers Project Records for 1939–41 (originals at the Colorado Historical Society), MF 250, reel 5, MHSA.

¹³ The story of the tensions over Black Eagle’s watchmen has survived in far more detail than that of Anaconda or Butte. Therefore, I use records from that smelter community to flesh out the changing perceptions of managerially related workers. As for the background on the wartime watch force, like the rest of the

copper production facilities in the area, the Black Eagle smelter was encouraged by regional military command, early in the war, to closely examine its security. Initial military plans issued in January 1942 called for 150 soldiers to guard the Black Eagle plant, but with every soldier theoretically earmarked for frontline duty, this proved impractical.

Instead, the plant hired more guards and watchmen, whom the military deputized as part of its Civilian Auxiliary Military Police force. Later in the war, the status of the special watchmen became even further eroded, perhaps partly because the Company often guided returning older men to those positions. In March 1944, the ACM decided to substantially trim the watch force “in view of the present acute labor shortage,” indicating that their work was now clearly less valued than that of the men on the production lines.

Just a few months later, in June, the Ninth Security District commander decided that the

remaining special watch force was no longer needed and discharged the last special watchmen from the Civilian Military Auxiliary Police. Certain measures had been taken in an attempt to ensure that younger men thus dismissed could return to their earlier positions with their masculine pride intact. All of the watchmen had maintained their seniority in the departments from which they transferred and, upon their dismissal from the watch force, each of the men received a letter of commendation. But it is difficult to tell whether these factors mitigated the doubts directed at younger watchmen with regard to their masculine wartime duty, particularly as they were forced to give up such trappings of masculinity as “riot guns,” military designations, and “the wearing of arm bands denoting that they are members of the Auxiliary Military Police.” Memorandum from R. B. Caples re: plant defense, January 19, 1942; Floyd S. Weimer, monthly luncheon

- agenda, April 21, 1942; Memo re: watchmen as Civilian Auxiliary Military Police force, October 16 1942; COL C. K. Wing to Caples, correspondence re: Ninth Service Command surveillance program, October 26, 1942; R. B. Caples to H. C. Riddle, correspondence re: watchmen, May 6, 1940; Notes on Potential Watchmen, December 17–19, 1941; H. N. Doran, Memo re: Men added to watching department, December 16, 1941; all in 169/176/5, MHSA—see other documents in this folder as well; Floyd Weimer to R. B. Caples, correspondence re: watchmen drawdown, March 17, 1944; R. B. Caples Memorandum re: Disbanding Special Watching, June 22, 1944; both in 169/176/6, MHSA.
- ¹⁴ Of the fifteen men appointed in mid-December 1941 to the special watch force, five were under forty, with the youngest being thirty years old. Six others were fifty-five or older, with the oldest man being sixty-seven. H. N. Doran, Memo re: Men added to watching department, December 16, 1941, in 169/176/5, MHSA.
- ¹⁵ On the question of home front versus frontline soldiering, see chapter 7 of my forthcoming study (under contract with University of Chicago Press) of Montana’s copper communities during World War II.
- ¹⁶ Besides earlier citations regarding this issue, see also *Meeting Transcripts*, October 15, 1942, 14–18, Victory Committee Records, Anaconda Copper Mining Company Collection, MHSA.
- ¹⁷ Montgomery, *Workers’ Control*; Meyer, “Rough Manhood.”
- ¹⁸ *Modern Times*, Charles Chaplin Productions, 1936. Leo Wolman, “Machinery and Unemployment” *Nation*, February 22, 1933, 202. On 1930s proletariat fiction, see Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left* (New York: Avon, 1961); and Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1997).
- ¹⁹ Edward Reynolds, “Blood and Bread,” in MC 77, box 9, folder 7, Work Projects Administration Records, MHSA.
- ²⁰ “Mrs. Marie R. Reynolds,” Certificate of Death, State of Montana Bureau of Vital Statistics, June 29, 1929; “Anaconda Woman Passes in Butte,” *Montana Standard*, June 28, 1929; “Claude Reynolds Called by Death,” *Montana Standard*, August 13, 1933; *Ninth, Twelfth, Thirteenth, and Fourteenth Census of the United States, Jefferson County, Kentucky, Orleans County, Louisiana, and Deer Lodge County, Montana; History of the United Brothers of Friendship and Sisters of the Mysterious Ten* (Louisville, KY: Bradley and Gilbert Company, 1897).
- ²¹ On hierarchies among immigrants in Butte and Anaconda, see David Emmons, *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town, 1875–1925* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); ch. 1 and ch. 5 of my book in progress; Pat Kearney, *Butte Voices:*

Mining, Neighborhoods, People (Butte: Skyhigh Communications and Artcraft Printers, 1998); and Mercier, *Anaconda*. See also Basso, ch. 9; Robert Vine, *The Women of the Washoe* (Butte: Butte Historical Society, 1989), on women in the Anaconda smelter.

²² There are, of course, other ways this story highlights the built environment and landscape. For instance, the protagonist's journey from the timekeeper's window to the Stack reminds us of how intimately landscape shapes built environment and workers' relationship to that environment. Reynolds indicates that the walk between the timekeeper's window

and the stack is long enough that a worker would normally take a bus. The protagonist's experience of the site shifts as he climbs up the road: "The Big Stack began to grow and became formidable. It lost its beauty, and its size became overpowering." When he gets to the "highline," he stops to appraise the plant below him: "The great buildings seemed to flow down the mountainside, wrapping themselves around rocky ledges with snakelike purpose. They were built that way to take advantage of gravity." This description suggests that something as mundane as the pitch of the ground shapes the plant's defining features and its reptilian

representation in the eyes of its workers.

²³ Emmons, *Butte Irish*; Murphy, *Mining Cultures*; Mercier, *Anaconda*; and Michael Malone, *Battle for Butte: Mining and Politics on the Northern Frontier* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981).

²⁴ George Everett (with a grateful nod to Rufus A. Coleman), "Mark Twain's Trip to Butte," available at <http://www.butteamerica.com/twain.htm> (accessed October 12, 2008).