The Role of Coal Mining Towns in Social Theory: Past, Present and Future

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21st Century Cognitive Capitalism, Immaterial Labour, Affective Capitalism and Precariousness

“That capitalism has undergone a series of transformations over the last few decades and that these transformations have been reflected—at least to some extent—in a qualitative change in the nature, form and organization of labour is increasingly undisputed. Also widely recognised is that these developments have in turn had a reconfigurative effect on the political organization of workers and their resistance”

Dowling et al in *Ephemera* 7:1 page 1 2007
Theme: The consequences for body, mind and soul of......

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Precariousness at work</th>
<th>Coal Mining</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insecure, contingent, flexible</td>
<td>secure, predictable, repetitious</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illegal, casualised, temporary</td>
<td>regulated, permanent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Precarious, unstable, insecure</td>
<td>routinised, stable and endowed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-traditional forms of politicisation</td>
<td>Available access to political system</td>
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<td>Requiring new subjectivities</td>
<td>Masculinist</td>
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<td>Non-central place in economy</td>
<td>Central and strategic role in energy</td>
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<td>Identity is rendered fluid</td>
<td>Identity is fixed and bounded</td>
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**Industrial Labour**

Focus on ‘**the body**’ of the worker

Fordist, large scale, fully integrated processes on single sites

Opportunities to unionise through scale and homogeneity of (semi-skilled) work levels

Single employment contracts with single employer for centralised managerial control

Predictability of regular repetitious work with a predictable wage at the end of it.

Resistance is through strikes, absenteeism and sabotage
Cognitive Capitalism and Immaterial Labour

First, transformations take place in the workplace itself. The factory becomes a network of disparate productions of knowledge.

Second, the principal source of value comes to rest in the knowledges produced by workers and not in capital nor their material labour on things.

Third, workers willingly exploit themselves as individuals who are possessed of separable knowledges and not as part of a collectivity.

Fourth, this form of capitalism empowers those placed in strategic positions in the economy.

This approach is typically found in theorists and activists from France and Northern Italy.

They tend to prefix discussions with ‘neuro’ (as in neuro-capitalism) indicating the focus upon the mind of the worker.
Affective Labour and Precarious Labour

Class and class struggle altered by the shift of gravity into the home

These elements of class have twilight status

Class de-alignment, class fragmentation and divisions based on poverty and unemployment versus ‘valued persons’

Post-Fordist regimes of production spread production away from the factory and highlight the individual as the unit of production and consumption. Individuals are given ‘permission to think’ and to act as entrepreneurs.

Individuals become required to demonstrate high levels of intimacy, care or emotions as labourers and consumers. The drive to make the “worker’s soul to become part of the factory” (Lazzarato 1996)

Resistance takes the form of refusal to work
Three elements: Bodies, minds and souls at work

The Cartesian splits

Biffo Baredi on’ The Soul at Work’ 2009

Humanity in the form of the body is no longer the measure of the world

Control is no longer exercised at a human level but at the level of nanotechnology and the invisible

Psychopharmacology, algorithms, mass communication govern the soul at work

Bodies, minds and souls have had their traditional places overturned – both in work and outside work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body</th>
<th>Mind</th>
<th>Soul</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>factory</td>
<td>clerical white collar</td>
<td>affective labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>call centre</td>
<td>the creative office</td>
<td>Google</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flight attendants</td>
<td>signature architects</td>
<td>Macmillan nurses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Typology of targeting work relationships**
Models of the body, mind, soul triad in employment

The centrality of work to identity

*Forms of separation*
Body dominant- the factory
Mind dominant- the creative office
Soul dominant- Macmillan nurses

The intermediate possibilities

Integration - the religious house
Rejection – the maximum security prison

Disintegration of the triad – the unemployed precariat
The unemployed precariat and a maximum security prison?

Options are very limited

Economic activity is highly constrained

Mobility is highly constrained

Many shared values which are anti-authority

The only representatives from the outside who are ever seen are the forces of the state apparatus

A sense of abandonment and isolation

An ‘isolated mass’
The concept of the ‘isolated mass’

Kerr and Siegel 1967- geographical determinism? Fishing villages

How to explain high level of ‘militancy’ amongst mining communities?

These communities rely on fixed locations above coalfields and are unattractive

This creates one -industry homogenous groups of workers fixed in space

The work is dangerous and accident rates are high. Group norms are strong

They are characterised by collectivism, strong trade unionism and shared cultures

This creates a defensive and often successful position with regard to opposing management initiatives regarding output control via strike behaviour in particular

There is an emphasis on educational achievement and ‘male’ sports as escape routes from dirt, disease and danger
The concept of the isolated mass (continued)

Educational achievement often takes the form of regional and national political activism

Coal mining is often a centre of labourist politics

Pit villages formed a ‘vanguard’ of the labour movement with galas as ceremonial rites for Labour and Socialist supporters

Some ‘modernisers’ within left wing groups however saw defensive labour militancy as a block to ‘progress’ with the ‘new working class’

The very isolation of the pit village was seen as its worst feature making it dependent upon inward looking anti-managerialist rhetoric

The ‘new working class’ was produced by the new division of labour which required international thinking in a differentiated way.
The 1970s and 80s

‘Manufacturing the Employee’

From the Right the colliery town was seen as a source of infection with the bacillus of militancy and anti-government prejudices at its very heart.

The ‘classist’ press saw social inferiors from West Virginia, Wales, Scotland and the North of England having positions of power well above their station. How dare they have tea at Number 10? The demonisation of miners leaders. The rhetoric of those who live underground- troglodytes

From the Left, the insular pit village was a drag on the necessary modernisation of labour. They were not well understood by ‘New Labour’ after its takeover by the metropolitan upper middle class and their articulation of the ‘Third Way’
Pit closures- trans Atlantically

The dependence of the pit village upon world markets

The rise of environmental groups re global warming

Cheap and dirty coal from Poland, India, China, Australia

The move to oil and then gas

The circumvention of the power of miners in a strategic industry bottleneck

Thatcher’s revenge

The dismantling of old labour
The effect on pit villages; bodies, minds and souls

The changes to subjectivity. Manufacturing a new identity

Emasculation of masculine values

‘Women’s work ‘ in light industry

Unemployment

Crime, drugs and other escape attempts

The flight of resources outwards

Socio-economic neglect

Life on the edge
Colliery Towns today- but not in the West

In India and China, pit ‘villages’ have developed and then faced economic uncertainty but are often opencast

Over 4300 small, inefficient coal-mining operations have been earmarked for closure in addition to the 7250 that have been closed in the last 5 years, slashing a further 560 Mt from Chinese production. In total, 1.3 million coal and 500 000 steel jobs will be lost as part of a broader economic restructuring.

January 2015 India: A strike was called by five unions representing some 3.7 million coal workers employed with the state-run Coal India, which has a near monopoly over production. India is opening a coal mine a month in order to double production by 2020. Its goal is to produce 1.5 billion metric tons of coal by 2020, exceeding U.S. coal production, and becoming the second largest coal producer in the world, after China.
## Indian Workforce categories

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Industrial category</th>
<th>Main Workers ('000s)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total main workers*</td>
<td>312,972</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural &amp; allied activities</td>
<td>176,979</td>
<td>56.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining &amp; quarrying</td>
<td>1,908</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>41,848</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, gas and water supply</td>
<td>1,546</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>11,583</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale, retail trade &amp; repair work, Hotel and restaurants</td>
<td>29,333</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport, storage &amp; communications</td>
<td>12,535</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial intermediation, Real estate, business activities</td>
<td>6,109</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services</td>
<td>31,131</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Industrial classification data based on sample.

Agriculture sector employs largest number of workers: out of 313 million main workers, 166 million (56.6%) are engaged in ‘Agricultural and allied activities’.
“Peak coal production in the United States occurred in 2006. In 2014, coal production was 14 percent lower than that peak. Similarly, peak coal consumption in the United States occurred in 2007 and has fallen 19 percent since then due to competition from low cost natural gas and onerous regulations from President Obama’s Environmental Protection Agency. As India is opening up new coal mines, coal mines in the United States have closed and thousands of coal miners have become unemployed in the coal producing states of West Virginia, Kentucky, Colorado, Indiana and Utah. According to data from the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), the number of operating coal mines in the United States fell to 1,701 in 2013, from 1,944 in 2010—a drop of 13 percent”
Precariousness at work  

Coal mining  

Precariousness without work  

unpredictability  
economic deprivation  
insecurity  
crises in identity  
marginalisation  
reduction in life chances
Conclusions

Coal has not disappeared from the world economy and so the same forces are at work outside the west. Moreover, Trump has claimed he will revive the US coal industry. What politico-economic role will pit villages play this century?

Mining villages in the UK, Belgium and France (inter alia) however, are places of the precariat.

The pit village has had a history of danger, dirt, destruction and dire living conditions. It still does - but elsewhere in the world’s political economy. These produce very specific conditions for an isolated mass with class motivations and access to resistance.

There are complex relations within these isolated masses with different inter-twinings of the body, mind, soul found in the population. It was certainly never homogenous.
Body            Mind            Soul
for Management

The able body          Educated to a technical standard   Methodism
for the worker

The disabled body      Food for thought through art      the CIU Club

An oppositional pattern
What can be done to reconcile village inhabitants to the collapse of their ways of life? Is it to fall back upon deeper political resistance and masculinist values? Or to embrace modernity and openness to new ways of thinking? Does education still have a key role to play? Is it difficult to be optimistic?

New Bodies?
New Minds?
New Souls?
New re-arrangements of hybridity?