

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.....

Precariousness at work

Insecure, contingent, flexible

Illegal, casualised, temporary

Precarious, unstable, insecure

Non-traditional forms of politicisation

Requiring new subjectivities

Non-central place in economy

Identity is rendered fluid

Coal Mining

secure, predictable, repetitious

regulated, permanent

routinised, stable and endowed

Available access to political system

Masculinist

Central and strategic role in energy

Identity is fixed and bounded

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.



	<u>Body</u>	<u>Mind</u>	<u>Soul</u>
<u>Body</u>	factory	clerical white collar	affective labour
<u>Mind</u>	call centre	the creative office	Google
<u>Soul</u>	flight attendants	signature architects	Macmillan nurses

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 Atlanticly

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

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

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
for Management

Soul

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?