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Performing the Hidden Injuries of Class in Coal-Mining Heritage

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ABSTRACT

Industrial heritage deals directly with working-class experience in a very public forum, but has not really been analysed in relation to class issues. This article discusses the case of ex-workers re-employed as heritage guides to tell the story of their own lives at a living history coalmining-museum, exploring the nature of the performances/representations of class that are produced. Heritage performance is caught up in a double bind that is familiar to other kinds of working-class representation: a continual equivocation between foregrounding dignity and autonomy on the one hand, and acknowledging subjugation and defeat on the other. This tension is played out, though differently, both in the guides' past occupations and their present ones. The article examines the public narratives they produce for visitors in the here and now as well as locating these in an understanding of their current positions as tour guide employees and their living through of their memories and identities as mineworkers.

KEY WORDS

autonomy / collective / heritage / history / individuality / working class

Introduction: Heritage as Working-Class Performance

From the late 1970s, the West began to witness a proliferation of 'vernacular' heritage sites, many dedicated to the display of its own industrial, working-class cultures. Such sites nowadays rarely showcase only puffing machines; instead, they present the human stories that allow the voices of the workers to come through – following today's guiding principles of 'interpretation' and 'interactivity' in public display (Dicks, 2004). This approach favours

techniques of personalization, i.e. presenting history through the stories of individual characters. Hence, although industrial heritage sites frequently depict the history of whole communities and industries, such as ‘miners of South Wales’, or ‘steel-workers of Sheffield’, they do not primarily present the visitor with an image of a ‘mass’ or a collective. Whilst always present as a backdrop, the collective is usually subordinated to the stories of individuals’ lives in ‘their’ community (Dicks, 1997). So history tends to be presented through the eyes and voice of individual workers, frequently in audio-visual films – or, as in the case study here, physically present ex-worker guides. These characters are rarely, if ever, the boss or the manager; they are usually clearly signified as working class, through costume, accent, mannerism, mode of speech, and so forth. The article explores this phenomenon of the individual working-class performer through a case study of an industrial heritage site, and tries to tease out the class issues at stake – a topic that has received relatively little attention in the literature on heritage.

Although class is rarely directly nominated at these sites, at one level this is what they are clearly about. The occupations they deal with, that is, those that have been restructured into virtual oblivion in the UK, are unambiguously manual, working-class ones. And the communities on display are ones that are etched into popular consciousness – through countless media images – as emblematically working-class. This is Fred Dibnah’s Britain, a world in which the working class were visibly and multiply at work – where they were defined by work, made meaningful by work (and not by wayward consumption – as in current hostile media representations of chavs, yobs and scallies – see skeggs, 2005). In contrast to today’s images of ‘crime-ridden estates’, these are depictions of working-class localities that have a particular kind of symbolic value. Derived from the dominance of industrial monopolies based on mass Fordist employment, this is manual labour geared to tangible, material outputs: fuel-extraction, heavy engineering, building, transportation, and so forth. The closure of these industries, the decline of the localities that supported them, and the loss in collective strength and confidence of their inhabitants are themes that were well-aired in popular British film of the 1990s. In films like *Naked*, *Nil by Mouth*, *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off*, working-class identities are depicted as directionless and abject in the aftermath of industrial closure and joblessness. With their settings of socio-economic dereliction these films and others, such as those of Stephen Frears and Ken Loach, demonstrate ‘an increasing difficulty in representing the working class in terms other than decline’ (Hill, 1999: 166). Whereas the earlier British New Wave of the 1960s saw working-class identity as facing the challenges of affluence and social mobility, the more recent films show it facing increasing economic irrelevance and disappearing into an ‘under-class’ (though as Haylett, (2000), discusses, still occasionally getting complex and sympathetic treatments, as in the films of Ken Loach and Mattieu Kassovitz).

Such films focus on the pressures of domestic and family life lived in run-down estates and forgotten industrial wastelands. Industrial heritage sites offer an antidote to this by presenting the lives and occupations of working-class characters ‘before the fall’. Here the working class can be pictured as industrious

worker rather than 'defective consumer' (Bauman, 1998) – even possessing, in Munt's term, a kind of 'heroic potency' (2000: 10). The coal-miner in particular has long been stereotyped, both positively *and* negatively, as the 'archetypal proletarian' (Harrison, 1978), and this mythification continues in the wake of near-total industry closure (Strangleman et al., 1999). I do not suggest that popular pre-closure images of miners represented a fixed, static contrast to today's portrayals of the working class (they were more fluid than that and always contested); rather I am interested in how today's heritage narratives engage with received ideas about working-class identities in the context of closure; how do they negotiate a symbolic terrain now dominated by images of defeat and subjection yet still redolent with motifs of heroic potency? At the coal-mining heritage site discussed here and others (such as Big Pit Mining Museum, also in South Wales, Snibston Discovery Park in Leicestershire, and the National Coalmining Museum of England in Wakefield) living, breathing ex-miners show visitors around and offer them what I call 'autobiographical working-class performance' – that is, *unscripted* embodied first-person accounts of their own working lives. Such guides have considerable control over visitors' attention and movements: they lead them round, show them sites, tell them stories, provide them with information, and are responsible for their safety and protection. They present to visitors as individuals possessing both autonomy and authoritative-ness, and as 'characters' with extraordinary and vibrant stories to tell.

Yet the theme of 'heroic potency' is an unstable and vulnerable one in such sites, for, as the analysis below suggests, quite complex classed subjectivities come into play. For a start, each individual embodies two worker-identities: the ex-miner and the current tour guide. As guides they exercise autonomy over tour groups and tell their own stories, yet as ex-miners they cannot help but remind visitors of (even if reticent about publicly accounting for) the economic and political events that have left them redundant (colliery closure). Further, it is only the individual miner who is present (as an 'ex' at that); the wider community is absent (how is a visitor to know what it is like today?). Hence, the spectre of decline is conjured up at the same time as the vibrancy of the culture is asserted. What rendition of working-class identity is produced in the process? It seems to me that the historical framing contradicts the performance of autonomy: workers cannot perform themselves as 'here and now' when heritage frames them as archaic. Just as *Brassed Off* poses the question: 'how can you have a colliery band without a colliery?' (Dave, 1997: 125); so heritage performance poses the question: how can we keep the worker alive without the industry, the miner without the mining community? This question can usefully be approached by picking up the theme of dignity analysed by Sennett and Cobb in their discussion of the 'hidden injuries of class' in the US a generation ago (1972). Heritage seems to attempt a resolution to their question (one that is still relevant today, and revisited in the 'new' class analyses emerging in recent sociological work, as below): how can a working-class person *feel* him/herself to be a self-respecting, autonomous individual in the face of subjective injuries and degradations inflicted by a class-based society? The autonomous ex-miner-guide,

I suggest, encapsulates this contradiction. There is a kind of celebration of working-class lives going on in industrial living history and heritage, but it is one that privileges a particular kind of individual/collective relationship in which the politics of class remain repressed. These sites are, I suggest, worth exploring for this reason – to see what light they might shed on contemporary problematics of class-representation.

Research Design

The arguments presented here draw on ethnographic research conducted by the author at a selected coalmining museum in South Wales during two fieldwork periods: the first (1995–7) undertaken for my doctorate and the second (1997–9) for an ESRC-funded project on multimedia.¹ The doctoral research sought to understand the conditions of social, cultural and political-economic change within which this Victorian colliery was transformed into a heritage museum in the 1990s, and the implications for our understanding of the making of history, heritage and ‘community’ (Dicks, 2000). The multimedia follow-up study focused more explicitly on the relationship between the museum’s Guides and its visitors. The data analysed include archived public records, museum documents and reports, plus 60 qualitative interviews and/or focus groups with its funders, planners, designers, visitors, local inhabitants and staff (findings of the whole study have been published in a monograph (Dicks et al., 2005) and an experimental hypermedia CD-Rom is also available). Here, while also drawing on the earlier data analysis, I focus on the Guides who show visitors around in tour groups. These data consist of videotaped in-depth interviews with pairs or small groups of Guides plus three days of filmed observations of three Guides at work in the museum – comprising footage of front-stage tours with visitors and backstage interactions with each other and managerial staff. The data were analysed primarily through a social discourse-analytic approach (see Fairclough, 1992), supplemented with some experimentation in hypertextual techniques (discussed elsewhere – Dicks et al., 2005).

My approach conceives discourse quite broadly, not attempting to study the minutiae of utterances but rather to see how the Guides’ talk and actions as they engage in various tasks and activities at the museum bring particular cultural distinctions, formulations, categorizations, silences and so forth into play. This means paying attention to the resonances of broader cultural discourses within individuals’ socially situated speech and action, and the positions that speakers take up in relation to them. However, in an extension of Fairclough’s approach (and inspired by psycho-social approaches to class analysis – see below) I also examine how the Guides’ talk, performances and interactions – with each other, with visitors and, indeed, with me – show up traces of the individual’s subjective experience – and particularly their sense of who they are and how they feel about their lives (as [ex]-miners; as performers; as tourist workers). Given that autobiographical heritage tours of this nature offer the performer’s ‘own’ subjective

self as a cipher for the wider, collective, public 'self' of an industry, an era and a locality, the objective of analysis, in striving to understand what are classed experiences, is to see how affective and subjective dimensions (often submerged rather than directly articulated) are embedded within the performative and narrative conventions Guides use in their tours.

Working-Class Identity as Everywhere and Nowhere

It is this subjective dimension of class, or what Reay (2005: 913) has called its 'psychic economy', that has provided the impetus for a renaissance of class analysis in recent times, epitomized in the collection of articles brought together in this journal (*Sociology*, 2005; also Sayer, 2005a). Sayer (2005b) observes how the language of class in the UK is composed of largely moral judgements that elicit highly emotional responses amongst social actors. The emotional reverberations of class are present in heritage, too, as in other cultural representations, yet, since public display tends to seek to resolve contradictions rather than highlighting them, they are rarely overt. Skeggs (2004: 117) notes the 'understated ubiquity of class' in which class is rarely directly referenced or acknowledged in representations but instead assumes a multiplicity of forms, illustrating the extent to which the symbolic is 'absolutely central' to any understanding of class. This reticence about naming class has been widely noted: Savage (2005) observes the 'everywhere and nowhere' quality of class discourse. Jameson (1981) theorized this as the 'political unconscious' of cultural texts, in which they frequently act as strategies of containment for the contradictions of class; contradictions that remain repressed as they can never be directly confronted (see Dave, 1997). Hence, class becomes an 'absent presence' (Bromley, 2000: 67).

Class, argues Savage (2005: 940), 'raises issues about individual authenticity' in a world 'premised around the centrality of the primordial individual, who is not a social cipher, and is expected to differ [only] because of their nature'. He therefore rejects the idea that working-class identity is necessarily about collective consciousness, and focuses instead on how its workings depend upon the ideology of individual freedom. Class-effects are frequently denied by people reluctant to question a person's individuality, yet remain an unavoidable point of reference in accounting for their own and others' lifestyles. It is the social derivation of people's taste, values and lifestyles that is denied and yet also inescapably acknowledged in everyday talk. This analysis can usefully be applied to heritage, which similarly both effaces and summons up class and presents the autonomous individual as stand-in for the collective. It can also be brought into dialogue with Sennett and Cobb's study of the damage to dignity experienced by working-class individuals, as above (1972). In a society that values individualism, dignity means having choices and 'the carving out of social space in which one can be alone' or where one can be 'more personally in control' and 'act more independently' (1972: 58). Working-class children whose potential is neglected by teachers, or adults subjected to disciplinary supervision

in demeaning occupations, are forced to accept the legitimacy of the people who judge them, even if they find their abilities or character to be repugnant or a sham. The 'badges of ability seem unfairly awarded, yet hard to repudiate', say Sennett and Cobb (1972: 118), for wider society continues to insist that people can only be judged by their own worth, as individuals. Hence, it is how class makes individuals *feel* about their individuality, about their capacity to be self-sufficient agents that underpins its power to divide people from each other through effacing itself in the process. Sennett and Cobb's observations, by pointing to the ambivalent emotional dimensions of classed lives, resonate with more recent work on the emotional, moral and affective dimensions of classed identities (Skeggs, 2004; Walkerdine et al., 2001) and also with the 'everywhere-nowhere' quality of class discourse discussed by Savage (2005). Heritage, too, the analysis below suggests, is the product of an interplay between the fantasy of dignified worker (awarded display-space by a society signalling its pride, somewhat belatedly, in its working class) and the acknowledgement of its impossibility.

In fact, the theme of coalminers' heroic potency is challenged by another diametrically opposed one: miners not as heroic, but regressive and backward (Strangleman et al., 1999; Warwick and Littlejohn, 1992). This theme can be seen played out in decades of workplace disputes, where workers under 'modernizing' management regimes are expected to 'change with the times', their allegiance to 'old' traditions decried as obstacles to progress (see Strangleman's 1999 study of the UK rail industry). There is, as Strangleman suggests, a kind of ontological insecurity created when discourses of modernization cast traditional practices as outmoded, since workers are taught that their own lived experiences are arcane. The 'historic' working class brought to visitors via live autobiographical performance in heritage also sets in motion this ambivalence between nostalgia and 'nostophobia' (Strangleman, 1999, citing Davis, 1979). While the ex-miner Guides perform a sense of dignity, autonomy and pride in their tours that derives from their own personal experience, that experience was gained in an industry itself characterized by incessant modernizing drives in later years, both technological and in terms of human resource 'management' (see Waddington et al., 1991). Hence, miners' ability to see their own pasts as 'heroic' or prideful is open to question; indeed, the analysis below exposes its faultlines. Whilst mining communities have always been seen as exhibiting strong collective solidarities and class-consciousness; it is important, as Crow (2002) notes, not to forget the complexity and precariousness of the solidarities they fostered. Strong solidarities were most noticeable during periods of strikes and disputes; in conditions of closure and decline, there is likely to be an increase in social fragmentation and mobility as work patterns and social networks shift (Harris and Brown, 1987; O'Byrne, 1997). In this context, heritage's staging of the individual worker as 'standing for' the collective may seem obviously outmoded; the analysis below suggests that ex-miner tour guides feel subjectively adrift in this situation rather than anchored or secure. Some of this is no doubt grounded in the destabilization of both minework and community life in the years leading up to redundancy; some of it relates to their sense of a loss of dignity in their current work-identities, as I now discuss.

The Voice of the Tour guide

These classed tensions of dis/autonomy in which industrial heritage is entangled cannot be understood without briefly examining the 'backstage' of heritage: the conditions of work in which the Guides currently find themselves. All the Guides I studied had previously been working in mines in the South Wales valleys; all took redundancy when their respective pits closed between 1982 and 1995 (though some had already transferred a number of times from closed pit to still-open pit). All had had periods of unemployment and poorly paid work since, commonly as security guards, taxi-drivers and bus-drivers. A few had tried to lift themselves out of dead-end jobs via retraining for more service-sector occupations. Most, however, were facing long-term unemployment. They had ended up at the museum largely through answering advertisements at the then Coal Board Jobshop – in the process making the transition from ex-coal-miner to coal-miner-performer for the tourist market. Although tourist-trade occupations are notoriously badly paid, they demand considerable resources and skills from the worker. As Crang (1997: 153) observes, much touristic work is about 'expressive performance' – creating the right kind of experience for visitors through interpersonal interactions – in conditions that are essentially unpredictable. Having lost jobs in which their labour was measured directly in material output under highly disciplined conditions, the Guides find themselves in the totally novel situation of working in a colliery turned over to the service sector and governed by the demands of expressive performance. The colliery as a workplace has changed as completely and suddenly as if it had been knocked down one day and entirely rebuilt.

The Guides' position, however, is very different from other heritage-industry workers, such as first-person re-enactors (as in medieval performers), or even less spectacular kinds of routine touristic performer, such as holiday reps or conventional tour guides. Crang (1997: 153) suggests that whilst performance per se may feel alienating to tourist workers, it also 'may be experienced more positively' by workers since they 'may be able to isolate their paid performances within the realms of the false, distancing themselves from their roles, and playing with them as well as at them'. Nothing in what the Guides I studied say about their work suggests they see it as anything to do with such role-playing. On the contrary, they vigorously insist that their performances are 'honest' and 'truthful', explicitly rejecting any latent accusation that they might merely be acting. As Gavin says, 'you've got ex-miners coming here and they'd tear you apart, they'd soon know if you were telling them a story or if it is from genuine experience'. Dai says the material is all there, in their heads, because 'growing up in a community that was full of humour, full of bloody compassion, going down the pit that was full of all kinds of scenarios, you have a huge reservoir of things to work from'. In this we can see the particular contradictions of autobiographical heritage performance. Guides are the performers of their own stories; their own history. This means they feel that they do more than just perform, but also less – for it is not a performance in their own eyes.

They are performing themselves. And this, they say, is something that no one else can do. Hence the value of their expressive performance lies not simply in their labour but in their own selves, the fact that they are who they are.

In this sense, the Guides see their job almost as a vocation. They recognize that 'we are in the information or entertainment business' and that there are arts of performance – keeping the tone light, engaging groups of different ages, nationalities and tastes. But they say this 'comes naturally'. Hence there is quite a complex doubling of identity in play: both being oneself and trying to think about projecting oneself for an audience. This returns us to the issue of autonomy and dignity. Since the Guides recognize the value for autobiographical performance of their own unique experiences, they feel that they should be the authors of these narratives. In fact, the Guides have successfully fought for control over the content of their tours during the years of the museum's development. 'Now', says Gavin, 'we are given a free hand because the boys have developed this themselves.' They began to enjoy this level of autonomy only when the museum opened its 'underground experience', in which Guides take their tour groups underground – now the keynote feature of the museum. Initially, the consultants who designed it wanted Guides to follow a set script, delivered as first-person re-enactment (i.e. pretending to be employed in the 1950s' still-working coalmine). Dai described the meeting in which this script was presented to the Guides. He commented: 'We all looked at each other and then got on with it exactly the way we wanted to do it.' And, he adds, 'it's been accepted now that's the way it is.'

In insisting on an autobiographical style with which they feel comfortable, Guides have been able to capitalize on the symbolic value of their own authenticity. It has allowed them to develop a tour model in which they are free to 'be themselves' – to have dignity in Sennett and Cobb's phrase – rather than pretend to be other selves trapped in a time warp. But this performative autonomy is constrained within the management–labour relations of a tourist attraction, in which overt supervision and casualized work is the norm. Hence they are still doing daily battle with the Duty Manager (not an ex-miner). He can tell them what to do – including picking up litter, sweeping the yard and other menial tasks. Gavin, miner for 37 years, talked of the terrible disillusionment towards the end of the 1980s as pit after pit closed down, miners had to keep on transferring, and eventually everyone ended up taking redundancy. He said: 'They thought "Enough. I've had enough." But when we came to this place then we thought, right, it's a chance to keep the story going.' There is a sense in which employment as a Guide allows them to continue their identity as miners. But it is not, of course, the same. The work is badly-paid, and, for some of the Guides, is far from secure. As the museum is run at 'arms' length' from the local Council that funds it, the Guides do not qualify as Council employees. Some are paid on casual rates by the hour; only a few have proper full-time contracts. Ewan comments that he is now paid a third of the wages he was getting in 1989 at the pit. Tomas points out that they take classes of schoolchildren around all day, but are paid only a third of what the teacher is getting. 'Where does that put us?' he asks.

The Declasse 'Double Voice' of Heritage

The autonomy achieved by the Guides in tour-content – the ability to narrate their own lives unscribed – differs in an important respect from the type of autonomy frequently depicted in working-class films (where a character manages to escape the 'confines' of class usually by displaying individual qualities; see Lawler, 2000). In heritage, by contrast, autonomy does not derive from the distinctiveness of an individual's responses to his/her condition, since there is no contradiction depicted between being an individual and being part of the collective unity. It is a world where individuals project a clear and unambiguous work identity and gender identity, where they can tell the story of their lives as a meaningful narrative: you left school, you went to work, you worked hard, you played hard, you lived in a community in which everyone else was doing the same. Here, for example, is Dai, standing at the real pit-head cage, describing his own first day at the colliery in company with 600 men:

Dai: The first time I went down the pit here, you had a new helmet, a new pair of boots, and a new belt was provided by the National Coal Board. Then, in the early 1950s, the miner was still wearing the cloth cap. We queued up, about 600 men over there, that side of the pit, everybody talking, all used to doing it of course, men talking about where they'd been for a pint the night before, er, what film they'd seen, what conquests they'd made

Audience: [laughter]

Dai: [laughs] invariably they were liars of course, and then my turn came, because these men – 25 at a time – were going into these cages and going down the pit, vanishing before your eyes as it were. And I can remember, irrespective of always, always the conversation at home was always mining, but nevertheless my heart started to beat a bit fast, because everything was done so violently. Steam, noises of cages like this coming to the surface, hitting the gates up in the air and shuddering to a stop and men getting in and disappearing, until our turn came. And you could feel the draw of the air as you got nearer to the top of the shaft. The way they ventilate a coalmine is to draw the air up one shaft, causes a vacuum, so the cold air went down the Bertie and when I say cold air, that cold air was supplying 18 miles of roadways underground, so there's quite a draw you know? And then, our turn came. Get in, in the cage, [noise of Dai slamming cage door]

Dai: Ding, ding, ding, and away she started to go, and when I say go, I mean *plummeting*

In narrating his own first day at the pit, Dai aligns his experience always with the wider collective: both with the other miners ('we queued up ... everybody talking' till 'our turn came') and his family ('always the conversation at home was always mining'). In this instance, of which there were very many in the tours I observed, the Guides speak about the self and the vernacular collective as one. They perform a 'collective self': it is still a very personal and vivid account, but presented as the cipher for others' similar experiences. An altogether different voice takes over when imparting present-tense technical information ('The way

they ventilate a coal-mine is ...'), before the subjective past-tense narrative returns again ('And then our turn came'). The balance varies: some Guides rely more heavily on personal narrative; others on impersonal explanation, but there is always some degree of interweaving – a defining feature of autobiographical performance. Hence, the Guides are both performing their own collective self but also History with a capital H. In other words, the guide is an objective educator as well as a teller of personal stories. Interestingly, History and heritage are often distinguished. All heritage, it is claimed, is someone's heritage, whereas history belongs to the disinterested realm of public knowledge (Lowenthal, 1998; Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996). Heritage centres as opposed to traditional museums are often castigated for majoring on the 'personal' side, but in fact they interweave both into a subjective–objective narrative (Dicks, 2000).

Sometimes, the imparting of historical facts is woven directly into the personal narrative. Ewan, for example, is here explaining the non-stop winding of the coal:

But that gate there would be lifted up, see, the men would go in, they would drop the gate down, and from 6 till 7 in the morning, they would get the men underground. Every two minutes, there would be about 25 men dropping down the mine. Then 7 o'clock, a big steam hooter would blow, and that meant, if you was hanging about by here and you wasn't in that cage, you would be sent home. Because once 7 o'clock came, that same container was fetching the coal up. And it never stopped winding coal at all then throughout the rest of the day. The only time it would stop winding coal is if someone was seriously injured on a stretcher. If you was immobilized and being carried out the mine, they would make arrangements to stop all these trucks and you were fetched straight up the pit. Now if you had a migraine or a toothache and you wanted to go home, they wouldn't let you go home [...] because this would only stop if someone was immobilized really.

Ewan begins talking about the miners as 'they' but quickly switches to 'you' so that 'they' becomes the mine management. In this way, Ewan's narrative uses both an impersonal voice ('The only time it would stop winding coal is if someone was seriously injured ...') and a personal one ('if you was ... carried out the mine, they would make arrangements to stop all these trucks'). So, the historical facts are enclosed in a narrative told by Ewan speaking for the collective self.

At other times, the narrative is told from the audience's point of view, asking them to imagine being the 'you' of the miner. Gavin, for example, is here telling a group of school children about the Banksman's power to prevent cigarettes and matches getting underground:

So this man could search everybody. No matter who it was. It could be a little boy starting on his first day; it could be the colliery manager; even the Inspector of Mines. He could search everyone. If he wanted he could even call different men from a group... If there was 20 or 30 miners like yourselves going into that cage, he'd say 'you!', 'and you!' 'come with me!' [points to children] and he'd take you into a cabin by there [points at cabin] and he could [pause] he could, he could have to strip-search you, and if you refused you'd be sent off the premises and you couldn't go down the mine. It was as strict as that.

This technique is used by the Guides particularly with children, to try and draw them into the story and to imagine themselves as miners. Here, too, the two-fold narrative purpose is clear: Gavin wants to tell the children how it felt ('he'd take you into a cabin by there') as well as inform them about the general role of the Banksman ('So this man could search everybody').

I propose that this inter-weaving of the two voices, one subjective, the other objective, short-circuits the possibility for the self-as-collective to assume overt class connotations. Specifically, it suggests an organic unity between the speaker and the mine: colliery regulations and procedures are presented as the rational way of doing things, furnishing the merely factual context for the personal lives lived out within it. In using this objective-rational voice as well as the subjective voice, the ex-miner is showing the audience that the subjective experience of mine-work reinforces the colliery's productive imperatives. There is no conflict between worker and the productive process that organizes and rationalizes his labour. Further, we hear not only about the faceworker but the supervisors – the Overman, the Banksman, the pit deputy, the safety officer. Hence, the Guide is telling the life of the pit, not only the life of himself-as-worker, and in the process he aligns the various grades of worker into a common universe. In this sense, the speaker positions himself as the direct inheritor or spokesperson of the entire industry (rather than of the workers or a class). And, since he speaks also for the absent collective (family, co-workers, neighbours), they too become absorbed into this common universe. It is a performance of autonomy-in-unity, which is not dissimilar to the historical imaginary of working-class male culture (especially in coal-mining) analysed by Savage (2000: 128). This celebrated workers' freedom from supervision – a freedom that could be tolerated because these workers were 'in themselves' disciplined and tightly-knit.² Similarly, in the case study here, history *appears* to be one unity, comprising the workers, the community and the industry.

The Classed 'Third Voice' of Heritage

But this ideal of individual autonomy-in-unity was always a myth, not a reality, in working-class occupations. In fact, the mines were places of strict hierarchies and divisions of labour, and, of course, of industrial conflict and struggle within and amongst groups of workers. Indeed, the reality of mine-work conveyed by the Guides in the wider ethnographic work I undertook at the site made much more of this, and the focus was frequently on the *frailty* of solidarities. Outside the public tours, what the Guides reminisce about are first, the humour, and second, the conflicts over authority that characterized the mines. During interview, Arwyn, a former miner at the same colliery, noticed a visitor he knew: the erstwhile Overman. He was nicknamed by the miners both 'Thousand and One' as well as 'Screaming Skull' – the first because he always had 1001 jobs to give them, and the second because he would be shouting directly in their faces while doing so. In interview, the miners spoke of the deterioration in manager-worker relations that

characterized the years leading up to and (even more intensely) in the aftermath of the 1984–5 Miners' Strike. For example, Lewis talks of the time just after he finished in 1989 when the Banksman was caught overstepping the limit of 12 men in each deck of the cage; on this occasion there had been only 13 men in total, so he had let them travel on one deck together. He was sacked on the spot. Lewis said 'they were looking for excuses very often to get rid of people'.

The arbitrary and authoritarian nature of pit-management that thrived particularly in the aftermath of the 1984–5 strike – emboldened by the workers' historic defeat – comes through clearly in the Guides' interviews. They talk of their experiences as involving the progressive weakening of an always precarious autonomy (seemingly strengthened in the victorious strike of 1972, only to be lost again thereafter), and their anger at being caught in the then Coal Board's frequently vindictive industrial relations strategies in the post-strike era (Waddington et al., 1991). Throughout interview, the highly emotional legacy of the 1984–5 strike is plainly visible, with the Guides' conversation constantly turning over the same questions again and again – how could things have turned out differently? Hence, the data show the miners' experiences as characterized by considerable emotional suffering; solidarities were fiercely contested and always fraught. After the strike, there was the family and community fallout, increasing subjugation at work as the closure programme accelerated, the ever-present stress of redundancy decisions and the iniquitous redundancy payment system (where miners were blackmailed into voting for the closure of their own collieries – Waddington et al., 2001). There are also intimations of divisions (in class allegiances, solidarity, politics, generational identity) amongst the Guides themselves, visible both in their memories of mine-work and in their current attitudes to guide-work. All of this suggests that images of the individual borne aloft by collective unity are somewhat wide of the mark.

In the tours, such cracks and fissures remain buried from public view. Yet, closer analysis of the 'we' versus 'they' or 'he' dynamics of the Guides' talk in the extracts above reveals the Guides making particular choices in the kind of subjective experiences they draw attention to. When Ewan emphasizes the unstoppable rhythms of the cage-winding system, he is contrasting the imperatives of production ('it never stopped winding coal at all') with the human needs of the workers ('if you had a migraine or a toothache ... they wouldn't let you go home'). When he talks of the strict enforcement of time-keeping (from 6 till 7 in the morning, they would get the men underground) he points to the fate of the worker who has turned up late ('if you ... wasn't in that cage, you would be sent home'). Similarly, when Gavin tells us about the Banksman's stop and search powers, he does so from the perspective of the men being singled out for humiliation (he'd say 'you!', 'and you!' 'come with me!' and he'd take you into a cabin by there and he could [pause] he could, he could have to strip-search you'). He says this last phrase with quite a bit of emotion. And then he says: 'But it very rarely came to that. In reality, no-one would be stupid enough to take matches underground.' In other words, even though they were rarely needed, what he chooses to tell us about are the Banksman's considerable disciplinary powers.

I am not suggesting here that either Ewan or Gavin are mounting a subdued critique of the mine's codes of discipline and conduct, for they are discussing regulations that they were fully endorsed by the miners. But what the men select for anecdote and the perspective they relate them from all summon up the impression of their being *subject* – to the productive logic of the mine. In other words, the personal experiences they convey are not ones of autonomy or dignity, but of conformity to procedures. Stories of the miners' self-discipline are told in the context of being subject to the threat of dismissal, humiliation, fear or castigation (or, as elsewhere in the data, unwelcome technological innovations such as coal-cutters). Hence, in contrast to the museum's pre-scripted audio-visual shows which paint a seamless picture of miners' resilience, autonomy, solidarity and dignity, in Guides' unscripted live tours, the other side of this mythology occasionally breaks through – precisely because here the subjective self is centre stage. Hence there is a doubling, in which the voice of the self does register the hidden injuries of class whilst moments later realigning itself with the logic and the rationality of the mine. As objective educators, Guides have to do public duty to the latter. In that sense, the narrative is not fully about them as individuals; they cannot altogether control it or speak entirely 'from the self'. To different degrees, a lack of autonomy characterizes their previous working lives, their current tours, and is mirrored again in the present-day conditions of their employment. Add to this the fact that the guided tours are solitary (no mining community is present at the museum other than in photographed faces or disembodied voices), together with heritage's inevitable signalling of the redundancy of their own working lives (see introduction), and the myth of 'heroic potency' begins to founder.³

So, when the Guides relate what mine-work was like, they often give glimpses of feelings of powerlessness – like Dai standing aghast at the plummeting cage. This also gives us a clue as to their use of banter and 'taking the piss' during the tours. The Guides continually tell amusing anecdotes to visitors and each other in front of the visitor, which may be about other visitors, or about other Guides, or be stories from their lives as miners. These are not only about providing entertainment, for 'the piss-take' was a central aspect of the miner's famed camaraderie and sociability. Hence, in reproducing it, they are adding to the authenticity-value of the performance. But there is another level to it: performing not taking life too seriously in turn suggests that they were (and are) not ground down by their work. Showing that you take it lightly can function as testimony of a capacity for individual autonomy. As Skeggs (2004) shows, drawing on Willis (2002), taking the piss is not only about making a hard job bearable, but also about a kind of doubling, in that it pokes fun at what is real as though it were not real, at what is serious as though it were not serious. Hence it allows workers to maintain a focus on the constructedness of their reality and their ability to distance themselves from it, as well as on an understanding of their own exploitation.

Banter also of course serves as a powerful marker of non-pretentiousness (Skeggs, 2004). Indeed, the Guides' discourse is in effect worked out in a space

that they have carved between narratives of their own collective selves, the Industrial History of the colliery they are obliged to provide, and an anti-pretentious rejection of middle-class values. Here is Ewan teasing his audience about their impending descent into the cage:

25 men went in that container, and down the pit we dropped, quarter of a mile, took about two minutes, that's all. But don't look so worried, we're not going to put you in this one today. We've got a specially made one for you, it's got fitted carpets. We're really spoiling you today.

This teases the audience about their attachment to the comforts of middle-class life, suggesting its distance from the realities of productive labour in the mine. It also gently satirizes the heritage experience itself. Later on Ewan adds: 'But anyway I'll tell you a little bit more about why we still use this lamp here now, the Davy lamp – the Japanese think they're antiques and they want to buy 'em off us, but we still use 'em in the mines today.' Here the Japanese tourist (like the American stereotypically depicted as materially privileged yet culturally ignorant), misrecognizes the lamp as a commodity, allowing Ewan to take a side swipe at the commodification of heritage itself. This shows us how banter allows the Guides access to a self-mocking discourse that makes it clear they are fully aware of the contradictions of their position as heritage performers. In the frequent humorous references to other visitors' misrecognitions and mistakes in negotiating the space of the mine, the Guides can show up their awareness of the artificiality of their own position. This is crucial for them, I think, because it allows them to use the tour publicly to distance themselves from (though not directly to critique) the actual conditions of being an autobiographical performer.

Conclusion

It is clear that the transition from miner to tour guide is no straightforward journey of decline from an exalted position to a demeaned one (nor indeed, the other way round). Different struggles for autonomy now arise under altered conditions, but they are still struggles. In fact, the current tour guide finds himself sandwiched between two realities, one past, one present, neither of which were or are conducive to the achievement of personal autonomy or dignity (in spite of the myths of the miner as 'archetypal proletariat'). Though in very different ways and under different conditions, both the mine-worker and the tour guide have to negotiate the hidden injuries of class, and in the person of the ex-miner tour guide they come together. My analysis has shown how the resulting ambivalence is registered in the live performances actually produced. This makes this kind of heritage far from being the kind of cosy or romantic ploy which is often asserted in the literature (e.g. Bommers and Wright, 1982; Hewison, 1987; Walsh, 1992; Wright, 1985).

In the decades since the publication of Sennett and Cobb's book, talk about class, both popular and academic, has until recently neglected the subjective, individual dimension of classed lives (Savage et al., 2001). The 'old' collective

working class of the industrial age having seemingly disappeared, we have come to see individualism as concomitant with the superceding of class. Popular film entrenches this theme of the individual pitted against the collective. Autobiographical heritage stages the working class as individual characters trailing a silent community like a shadow. I have argued that a) the individual is granted a performative autonomy unachievable in the real conditions of working-class employment; b) reflecting this impossibility, live tour-talk oscillates between objective authority and subjective subjugation. The reality of historical defeat throws a constant shadow over heritage's dignified worker. Ultimately, the individual performer is alone on stage: able to evoke only echoes of collective power (the working-class community; the mining industry). In being the public representative of both, the narrative keeps at bay the idea of class as a political relation involving struggles between interests. Although class-experience pervades Guides' backstage talk, it is an 'absent presence' in the public tours. In this sense, heritage invokes a tragic structure of feeling; it summons up the image of class-based strength only simultaneously to dissipate it. It does so not only through its narrative content, but through the physical transformation of the colliery and its literal embodiment of the reconstituted labour market and the subjugated role of the worker. Class structures industrial heritage as an objective-subjective presence, but is audible only as an echo.

Notes

- 1 'Use of Multimedia Techniques in the Analysis and Dissemination of Qualitative Data: A Study of a Heritage Museum', ESRC R000237126.
- 2 Savage's wider argument here is that the persistent equation of working-class identity with anti-individual, collectivist identities is erroneous.
- 3 In post-tour visitor-group interviews carried out at the site, not reported here due to space constraints, visitors were frequently perplexed by the sheer sense of loss in it all: why did the colliery shut down and how can the community now survive? self-citation.

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