

## **Industrial Nostalgia and Working-Class Identity**

### **Introduction**

A common phenomenon in post-industrial societies, particularly in towns and cities that have undergone major periods of deindustrialisation, is a rise in nostalgic celebration of the industries of the past. But what impact do these types of nostalgic celebrations of the industry of the past have on present-day working-class identities?

A number of theorists have *criticised* nostalgic celebrations of abandoned industrial sites as forms of ‘smokestack nostalgia’ (Cowie and Heathcott 2003) or ‘ruin porn’ (Clemens 2012). This work, generally produced by middle- and upper-class artists, can be viewed as inflicting a further harm on working-class people (High and Lewis 2007), beyond the initial harm caused by the closure of industry and of losing a way of life. When these sites of working-class loss are transformed into objects of aesthetic nostalgic appreciation in ways that pay no attention to those who worked there, a further violence is perpetuated against working-class people: the past is closed off from the present in ways that deny the relevance of that past for present day identities (Lasch 1991).

However, other theorists are more *positive* about industrial nostalgia, arguing that it can provide a way to assert working-class pride in a hostile environment and serve as a basis for present-day solidarity. For example, Tim Strangleman (2013) has argued that industrial nostalgia can support an important process of collective and individual mourning of working-class life. Similarly, researchers engaged in close engagement with working-class practices of nostalgia draw argue that nostalgic practices can play an important role in resisting class-based oppression by working-class actors themselves. For instance, Labour Historian Ewan Gibbs’ (2021) oral history project examined how members of former mining communities draw on a critical form of nostalgia to mourn the loss of collective bonds and economic resources in a way that allows them to come to terms with the losses and gains resulting from deindustrialisation.

This chapter draws on these important contributions from geographers, historians, sociologists and media theorists to give an overview of these discussions about the negative and positive ways in which industrial nostalgia can reshape present-day working-class lives. Our aim here is to make a distinctive contribution to this discussion that draws on our expertise as social philosophers. We do so by bringing this existing literature on deindustrialisation together with work in social philosophy on the nature of oppression and resistance.<sup>1</sup> Our aim in doing so is to analyse the ways in which industrial nostalgia can function both as a tool of oppression but also as a form of resistance against oppression.

We begin by providing a brief overview of the phenomenon of industrial nostalgia and explaining how we will use the term (Section 1). We then examine the criticisms that have been raised against this form of nostalgia and distinguish between five different ways in which this nostalgia may function as a form of oppression, drawing on Iris Young’s (1990) five faces of oppression to highlight these different ways in which industrial nostalgia can be oppressive and so demonstrate that the oppressive use of these nostalgic practices is multifaceted. We then explore the ways in which working-class nostalgia may instead have a positive impact on working-class identity and function as a form of resistance (Section 3),

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<sup>1</sup> For extensive overviews of the historiography of deindustrialisation see High 2013 and Lawson 2020.

before, finally, drawing some general conclusions about the positive and negative ways in which industrial nostalgia shapes present-day working-class identities.

## Industrial Decline and Nostalgia

In 1982 Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison's *The Deindustrialization of America* (1982) brought attention to the major process of deindustrialisation taking place in the United States: "a widespread systematic disinvestment in the nation's basic productive capacity" (Bluestone and Harrison 1982: 6). The number of Americans working in manufacturing, for example, reached a peak of 19.5 million in 1979 but this number fell by over 40% to just under 11.5 million by 2010 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2021). The impact was particularly severe in the area stretching from New York to the Midwest that had previously been known as 'The Manufacturing Belt' due to the central role that large-scale manufacturing played in the economic life of the region. As deindustrialisation began to take its hold on the region, and factories and manufacturing plants began to close, the region experienced a period of stark economic decline. As a result, the region became known as 'The Rust Belt', in reference to the rusting abandoned factories that became common features of the landscape.

This period of deindustrialisation was accompanied by the development of a form of industrial working-class *nostalgia*. We understand nostalgia to be an emotion that is typically directed towards the past and that views the past as possessing a value that is (often) irretrievably lost.<sup>2</sup> As philosopher Scott Howard describes: "Any adequate view of nostalgia will acknowledge that it involves a felt difference between the past and the present: the very irretrievability of the past is salient in the experience" (2012: 641)<sup>3</sup>. We understand industrial nostalgia, then, as an emotion that involves viewing the industrial past as possessing a value that is irretrievably lost.

As the sociologist Tim Strangelman (2013: 6) notes, this nostalgia could be clearly seen in the growth of coffee table photography books focused on former industries. Strangelman identifies three different forms that these books took. The first are books that document the industrial past. These include books from large publishing houses such as Byron Olsen and Joseph Cabadas' *The American Auto Factory* (2009) and Ford R. Bryan's *Rouge: Pictured in its Prime* (2003), and books from small heritage organisations such as Michael Davis' *Chrysler Heritage: A Photographic History* (2001). The second type Strangelman identifies are books charting the process of deindustrialisation itself, such as Thomas Dublin and Walter Light's *The Face of Decline* (2005), Bill Bamberger and Cathy N. Davidson's *Closing: The Life and Death of an American Factory* (1998), and Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson's *Journey to Nowhere* (1985). The final kind of book are those focused on post-industrial ruins from the industrial past, such as James Jeffery Higgins' *Images of the Rust Belt* (1999) and Manfred Hamm and Rolf Steinberg's *Dead Tech: A Guide to the Archaeology of Tomorrow* (2000).

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<sup>2</sup> Though as Boym (2001), Bonnett (2016) and Sweeny (2020) note, it is possible to be nostalgic for a past that never existed, such as a childhood one never had.

<sup>3</sup> Although note that there are exceptions to the view that nostalgia must involve an unfavourable comparison with the past: Howard (2012), for example, proposes that nostalgia need not always involve a negative perspective on the present.

In addition to these coffee table photography books, industrial nostalgia also found an outlet in the rise of *industrial heritage*. Industrial heritage is often seen as a way of reviving the economic lives of communities suffering the consequences of deindustrialisation (Lawson 2020: 5). For example, the anthropologist Cathy Stanton (2006) has explored the ways in which the Lowell National Historical Park sought to revitalise the economy of the former mill town of Lowell, Massachusetts. The aim here was to revitalise the city by making it a tourist destination for those interested in industrial history. This would be achieved by presenting the industrial past in a way that celebrated the value of that past whilst also implicitly making clear that Lowell's industry was firmly a thing of the past and not part of Lowell's present or future. This, then, can be seen as an attempt to use industrial nostalgia as an explicit tool for economic development, not only one of remembrance.

This practice of nostalgia, whether for economic and commemorative means, is in no way limited to the United States. Scottish historians Andy Clark and Ewan Gibbs have, for example, explored the ways in which "a simplified, nostalgic image of the industrial past" can be found in Scottish commemorations that memorialise the country's past industries such as shipbuilding, coalmining and steel production (2017: 48). Gibbs and others have also explored the role of nostalgia in British labour festivals and events held in former industrial towns, in particular The Annual Durham Miners' Gala (Bennett 2016; Gibbs 2021; Pantazatos & Silverman 2019; Raeside-Elliot 2020; Tomaney 2020). Similarly, the historian Jackie Clarke (2011; 2015) has explored how industrial decline in France, particularly after the closure of the domestic appliance company Moulinex, was accompanied by a rise in nostalgic cultural attention to French industrial workers which included films, heritage sites, photography books, novels and songs (Clarke 2011).

In this section, we have examined the ways in which deindustrialisation may be accompanied by a rise in industrial nostalgia. We have given a brief overview of the work of historians and other researchers who have identified this process in deindustrialised areas of the USA, the United Kingdom and France. The connection between deindustrialisation and industrial nostalgia, then, appears to be one that is not confined to one geographical or political context. This does not mean, of course, that deindustrialisation will always be accompanied by such nostalgia. While further research is needed to investigate just how widespread this phenomenon is, our interest in this chapter is not in settling this issue but rather in engaging in an ethical and political evaluation of this nostalgia. It is to this task that we will now turn.

## Industrial Nostalgia and Oppression

How, then, should we evaluate industrial nostalgia? This question could be answered in several different ways. One approach would be to examine industrial nostalgia as an aesthetic phenomenon (e.g., Edensor 2005; High and Lewis 2007; Trigg 2006). We focus, though, on evaluating this nostalgia from an ethical and political point of view.<sup>4</sup> In this section we examine a number of critiques that historians, anthropologists and others have made of industrial nostalgia and analyse these critiques through the multifaceted lens of oppression.

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<sup>4</sup> Though it is worth noting that there may be important connections between the aestheticization of ruins and the resistance to dominant nostalgia narratives, which future work could explore further. We are grateful to Dylan Trigg for raising this possibility.

The philosopher, Iris Marion Young, describes *marginalisation* as involving casting a group of people out from “useful participation in social life” (1990/2011: 53). Young takes this to be a particularly dangerous form of oppression. Those who are deemed to have no useful role in the social or productive life of society, for example, are put in a position of economic deprivation, as they are unlikely to find employment. While this deprivation can be mitigated by welfare payments, these payments make the recipient dependent on the state for survival and leaves them open to the demeaning and arbitrary treatment of the welfare providers. Moreover, they are denied the chance to exercise their skills in socially recognised ways, leading to feelings of “uselessness, boredom, and lack of self-respect” (Young 1990/2011: 55). By rendering present day industrial workers invisible, industrial nostalgia can contribute to this oppression of marginalisation for present-day working-class actors.

One common form of criticism levelled against industrial nostalgia is that it contributes to the ‘invisibility’ of present-day industrial workers (Clarke 2011). This may seem like an odd claim to make, given that industrial nostalgia involves paying renewed attention to industry and, at least in some cases, to industrial workers. However, as Clarke (2011, 446), argues nostalgic narratives, “operate in such a way as to relegate these people and places to a time and space outside the contemporary social world.” Notice that in the case of industrial heritage in Lowell, there is a practice of effectively erasing the existence of present-day working-class persons from the locations in which they live(d) and work(ed): tourists are invited to visit a long-gone past, not to interact with a present-day community. Stanton argues that a key function of industrial history museums is “to praise *and* to bury – to extol the workers whose labor created these places and frame that labor as something essentially finished” (2006, vii). This leaves no conceptual space for the visibility of present-day industry.

This practice of present-day industrial erasure is present not only in industrial heritage activities, but in more straightforwardly commemorative artistic works which focus on deindustrialisation, ruins and remembrance of the industrial past at the expense of present-day reality. Clark and Gibbs, for example, argue that creation and existence of industrial monuments in Scotland form an important part of a dominant historical narrative in Scotland that involves “consigning industrial activities to the past” (2020: 47), in the presence of a still-active shipbuilding industry. And, as Stangleman points out, in the case of memorialising the past in print, people are often literally erased from the picture – a noteworthy feature of the coffee table books he examined was the absence of *people*. In Higgins’ book, for example, there are “nearly fifty color plates completely devoid of people, even in cases where part of or the entire site being photographed was still active” (Stangleman 2013: 26). The historian Steven High describes this focus on industrial ruins and “nostalgia for vanishing landmarks,” as part of a distinct aesthetic: “the deindustrial sublime” (High and Lewis 2007: 9). Photography books of empty industrial landscapes or rusting factories which are devoid of people invite us to remember those who used to populate such spaces but ignore those who live and work their now (Linkon 2018: 99).

These criticisms therefore hold that industrial nostalgia can contribute to the marginalisation of present-day industrial workers through invisibility. As Clarke clarifies her own position: “I am using the term invisibility to signal not total disappearance, but various forms of marginalisation, occlusion and disqualification from the mainstream political and media discourses which play an important role in shaping public understanding of the social world” (2011: 446). Industrial nostalgia, then, does not get rid of industrial workers altogether but rather places them at the *margins* of the social world. It does so by propagating the idea that these workers belong in the past but not the present (Archer Forthcoming). As John Kirk et al. explain “heritage spectacles and exercises in nostalgia” often present the industrial world

as “extinct or as increasingly obsolete” (2012: 9). A renewed attention to the industrial past can be a way of rendering the industrial present invisible in ways that marginalise working-class persons.

A second, related in this instance, way in which industrial nostalgia may be oppressive is through contributing to *exploitation*. Exploitation has traditionally been understood in narrowly economic terms to refer to the transfer of the fruits of labour from the labourer to those that own the means of production. Young, though, argues that we should expand the concept to refer to other ways in which the energies, resources and talents of one group are used “according to the purposes and for the benefit of other people” (1990/2011: 49). In this way, we can see how the marginalisation of working-class persons as actors and voices in the present, serves to exclude them from acts of nostalgic heritage and remembrance, which explicitly draw on their resources and past in exploitative ways.

Sherry Lee Linkon’s (2018: ch.4) study of ‘rust belt chic’ examines how many cities in the Rust Belt became the centre for artistic projects such as creative writing anthologies, essays and photography. In these projects, working-class history and cultural resources are being used for the benefit of middle-class actors: rust belt chic collections and publications rarely feature working-class artists (Linkon 2018: 154). Linkon notes that these artistic projects – mainly produced by young, educated, white middle-class artists (Linkon 2018; Rhodes 2019) – are therefore often exploitative, often produced by people with no connection to the city who “treat the city as an exotic backdrop” (2018: 144), and making use of working-class resources without engaging working-class artists and actors in their creation or profit.<sup>5</sup> As Linkon puts the point: “by embracing the memory of earlier working-class experiences and ignoring the lives of workers in the present, Rust Belt chic at once appropriates and erases working-class culture” (2018: 154).

Further, Linkon’s criticism of Rust Belt chic points to a third way in which industrial nostalgia can be a form of oppression: as a form of cultural ‘othering’ of the working-class, which Young calls “cultural imperialism”. Young explains how (1990/2011: 58-61) a dominant group in a society can universalise their own experiences and identity whilst making other identities and experiences appear to be abnormal and inferior, resulting in the ‘othering’ and exclusion of members of the non-dominant group. The consistent message that industrial work belongs in the past marks out both present-day industrial workers and those who recently lost their job as abnormal and inferior. As Kathryn Dudley puts it: “dislocated workers face an external culture that no longer seems to value, or grant social legitimacy to, the kind of work they do” (1994: 134). Industrial nostalgia celebrates worker identities as having been a normal and valuable part of the *past*, while simultaneously marking these identities out as *belonging* to that past and so being abnormal in the contemporary world. As many critics of industrial nostalgia note, this can have profoundly disorientating effects on working-class members of the communities targeted with this form of nostalgia (Clark and Gibbs 2020; Perchard 2013).

Identifying that industrial nostalgia can produce these first three forms of oppression, helps us to recognise the severity of the injustice committed in uncritical nostalgic attention. Marginalisation, exploitation of resources, traditions and history, and cultural imperialism all serve to produce present-

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<sup>5</sup> Owen Hatherley (2017 Ch.5 especially pp.198-199) notes a similar phenomenon (though not involving *industrial* nostalgia) in the celebration of modernist council housing in the UK in the 2010s. The renewed appreciation for these buildings paid little attention to the working-class people who lived there. This renewed appreciation also contributed to the gentrification of these communities.

day effects which may not be immediately obvious when looking only at nostalgic acts themselves in isolation. The lens of oppression helps to demonstrate why these acts can be harmful in the present, not only misrepresentative of the past.

In addition, however, when combined, these forms of oppression can connect to entrench a fourth, pervasive, form of oppression for present-day working-class persons: that of *powerlessness* (Young 1990/2011). A group which is rendered invisible, and viewed as deviant, and with its resources depleted or distorted through the cultural imperialism of others in nostalgic attention which excludes their voices and decisions, lacks power in an obvious sense: in terms of domination and political visibility and support. But this inequality can also affect the ability of working-class actors themselves to recognise their own identity and strengths, or to come together in active positive solidarity. Artefacts of nostalgia which misrepresent and dominate the story of working-class identities reflect the oppressor's world view. This can create distortions both in understanding oneself, and in conceiving of what resistance to oppression might look like, amongst present-day working-class persons. As Paulo Freire expresses it, in considering what liberation might appear to be from the perspective of those who are long-oppressed: "The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped" (Freire 1970: 45). If only cultural domination appears to be a route to power, for example, and the oppressed do not see themselves amongst the dominators, or the tellers of history, then powerlessness is internalised as a powerful mental obstacle. Worse, powerlessness can take the form of a lack of recognition of the injustice being perpetrated: oppression may not even be recognised as such by those whose perspectives are being influenced by prevalent, consistent, dominant narratives around what the working-class past and present is. In this way, the impact of pervasive nostalgia which marginalises, exploits and 'others' present-day working-class persons is more than the sum of its (already significant) oppressive parts: it renders such persons powerless through the internalisation of oppressive narratives.

Finally, before turning to the ways in which nostalgia might take more positive forms, it is worth adding something around the potential for industrial nostalgia to be oppressive through enacting Young's fifth form of oppression, that of *violence* against working-class people. On the face of it, again, this does not appear immediately relevant to considering the role of industrial nostalgia on working-class lives: industrial nostalgia is not a form of physical violence. However, in addition to the systematic threat of murder, assault and sexual violence that members of oppressed groups might face, violence can also take the form of "less severe incidents of harassment, intimidation, or ridicule simply for the purpose of degrading, humiliating, or stigmatizing group members" (Young 1990/2011: 61).

Several researchers have identified a form of symbolic violence that can reasonably be understood as a form of ridicule and degrading or humiliating treatment, with respect to industrial nostalgia. In *Detroit City is the Place to be*, the author Mark Binelli provides several illustrative instances of this form of ridicule. For example, Binelli describes running into a group of German college students at an abandoned factory, exploring the urban. When he asked them why they were there one of them answered with glee, "I came to see the end of the world!" (Binelli 2012, p.281). He then describes a conversation with a fellow Detroit resident, Marsha Cusic, about 'urban explorers' in which she explains how unpleasant she finds the practice as a citizen of the area: "People don't understand how offensive that is to us. Just the arrogance of it [...] Detroit isn't some kind of abstract art project. It's real for people. These are real memories. Every one of those houses has a story" (Binelli 2012, p.285).

Stangleman understands the practice of exploring these ruins of industry for entertainment as a form of desecration, writing that:

There is something unseemly or objectionable in middle-class urban explorers gaining pleasure from sites of working-class loss. Spelunking [urban exploring] can be read as akin to dancing on a grave, an unthinking act in what could be seen as a deeply meaningful, almost sacred space (Stangleman 2013: 30).

While certainly not as extreme as some of the forms of systematic violence Young refers to, this can, we suggest, be seen as a genuine form of symbolic violence meted out on working-class people. However, whether understood as symbolic violence, or merely a form of hostility, such attitudes serve to further disrespect working-class persons, and their lives.

Industrial nostalgia can therefore act in a multitude of ways which serve to oppress working-class persons and communities, and which maintain the conditions for injustice now and in the future.

Having offered an analysis of the ways in which accounts of industrial nostalgia can be understood as identifying its role in oppression, we now want to consider the potential upside to industrial nostalgia. While many have criticised industrial nostalgia on moral and political grounds, and we have offered a social philosophical perspective of the injustice of oppression which working-class nostalgic attention can contribute to, this is not the only potential impact of industrial nostalgia. Others (indeed sometimes the same people) have pointed to the ways in which industrial nostalgia can also be valuable for working class people.

## Industrial Nostalgia: Mourning and Resistance

We should be wary of accepting blanket criticisms *or* celebrations of nostalgia. Not all forms of nostalgia will serve the same political purposes. A common point of emphasis amongst those who seek to emphasise the value of industrial nostalgia is the need to accept a more nuanced picture of the nature of nostalgia. Different forms of nostalgia can involve different evaluations, serve different purposes and have different political impacts. While nostalgia can involve an uncritical celebration of the past that functions mainly to separate the past from the present, it can also serve as a resource for critical engagement with both the past and the present that can serve as a basis for solidarity and resistance (Gibbs 2020; Linkon 2018; Strangleman 2013). While some forms of industrial nostalgia may be used as tools of oppression, other forms may play an important role in resisting this same oppression.

Both Gibbs (2021) and Linkon (2018) use the term *critical nostalgia* to refer to nostalgia that engages with the past critically and uses the past both as a tool for critiquing the present and as a way of encouraging political projects that may address present-day problems (cf. Svetlana Boym's (2001) distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia). This is often nostalgia enacted by working-class actors themselves. Gibbs's oral history research investigated how residents of former mining communities in Scotland made sense of deindustrialization and the way it had transformed their communities and their lives. Gibbs, found that many of those he interviewed engaged in a form of nostalgia. However, this nostalgia was one that served as a tool of critical analysis of the present. As Gibbs argues, "[a] latent critique of present circumstances is implicated within nostalgia," as it involves a

contrast, “between a past defined by community and a present whose main feature is its erosion” (2020: 100). Similarly, despite her criticisms of Rust Belt Chic, Linkon’s analysis of US working-class writers attempting to make sense of deindustrialisation also led her to conclude that industrial nostalgia can play a positive role for working-class people, as it can serve as a means, “thorough which people make sense of new conditions, and a source of critique and tension, a means of resisting change” (2018: 166).

In the remainder of this section then, we consider industrial nostalgia’s potential for *resistance* against many of the same oppressive forces we considered in section two. We first introduces what the Peace and Development political theorist, Mona Lilja, calls ‘constructive resistance’ (Lilja 2021; 2022a), before investigating three related ways in which discussions on industrial nostalgia have identified value of this kind: as a form of individual and collective mourning; as a way to reclaim pride in one’s identity and sense of community; and as a form of active counter-narrative against symbolic violence and feelings of powerlessness induced by the wrongs of the past against working-class communities.

In moving away from what she identifies as a false dichotomy between everyday, small-scale and hidden resistance vs collective, large-scale and visible resistance, Lilja proposes that we instead consider resistant acts in terms of three broader goals for resistance: avoidance, breaking and constructive (Lilja 2022a). *Avoidance* resistance, includes what Scott calls “everyday forms of resistance”, such as “foot-dragging, dissimulations, false compliance, feigned ignorance, desertion, pilfering, smuggling, poaching, arson, slander, sabotage, surreptitious assault and murder, anonymous threats, and so on” (Scott 1989: 34). These avoidance tactics are the hidden acts of resistance which “avoid power repression through disguise” (Lilja 2022a: 209). On Lilja’s account, this form of resistance can encompass a wide range of ‘hidden’ acts which seek to undermine, or work against, those in power from within the existing power structure. *Breaking* resistance, on Lilja’s account, also fights against dominative power, but it is direct and public in its content, whether performed individually or collectively (Lilja 2022a: 210). It includes activities such as, “protests, strikes, civil disobedience, road blockades, occupations, consumer boycotts or other (similar) actions” (Lilja 2022a: 210), which are designed to disrupt power and its structures or practices.

In contrast to these forms of ‘oppositional resistance’ against power, *constructive* resistance is not defined in terms of what it is against but, rather, what positive alternative it is trying to bring about or assert (Lilja 2021; 2022a). It involves the construction of counter narratives, through a wide range of means, to oppressive dominant ones. The methods of deploying this form of resistance may “still contain elements of more conventional forms of protests, boycotts and civil disobedience”, but it will deploy these in order to offer alternative interpretations of reality, or additional perspectives that might overturn dominant ones (Lilja 2022a: 211; 2022b). Constructive resistance therefore “requires a creative or imaginative practice that furnishes other modes of being known, seen and conducted” (Malmvig 2016: 263). These ‘other modes’ of seeing the world are offered in place of those practices imposed by dominant, oppressive narratives and structures.

Industrial nostalgia, as a very publicly visible activity which offers an interpretation of the past and its connection to the present, can be well-suited to supporting the goals of constructive resistance as much as it can to the goals of dominant power structures. As urban and environmental sociologist, Alice Mah, identifies: “Popular imaginations of old industrial places are often based on prejudices and stereotypes which have little to do with present lived experiences and social realities. These negative imaginaries

can stigmatize places of industrial decline” (Mah 2012: 176). However, in acts of constructive resistance, working-class communities might instead take part in publicly visible industrial nostalgia in ways which resist those imaginaries, by replacing them with alternative ones. Discussions of industrial nostalgia refer to values which, we suggest, demonstrate the potential for industrial nostalgia to demonstrate collective constructive resistance in this way. We can view the various suggestions made in favour of industrial nostalgia as forms of constructive resistance against a narrative which marginalises, exploits, and ‘others’ working-class knowledge and resources.

Such resistance can serve to reduce feelings of powerlessness and, rather than constituting symbolic violence or erasure, allow working-class people to engage in constructing narratives allow working-class people to pay due respect to what has been lost. For example, industrial nostalgia can support an important process of collective and individual mourning of working-class life. Strangelman, while critical of much industrial nostalgia, claims that we can also see some forms of industrial nostalgia as “part of a mourning process, the lamentation for a previous culture or set of identities based around industrial work” (2013: 28). The glossy photography books depicting the past or the decline of industry can be viewed as a form of memorial to an old way of life, and treated as such, not only as a form of erasure of the present. Similarly, Gibbs argues that nostalgia in former industrial areas can be a mourning process which involves a form of “grieving for lost social connections, cultural activities and occupational identities” (2021: 100). One clear example of this is Lolita Hernandez’s (2004) collection of short stories of workers in a Cadillac plant in Detroit. Hernandez had worked in the factory for 21 years and describes the writing of the book as “a grieving process” that allowed her to articulate both the hard, physical nature of the work but also what was lost in the closing of the factory (Linkton 2018: 36-38).

Here we see how a nostalgic focus on the industrial past can play a valuable role in helping workers to mourn what has been lost in deindustrialisation. In doing so, memorials, art and literature, we suggest, can act as constructive resistance, in enabling grievors to positively assert the value of what is lost (Stangleman 2013), to pay respect to what has been lost, and to carry the past with them into the present (Westlund 2017).

In a second example of the value of industrial nostalgia, this practice can perform a more celebratory role for working-class communities. When oppression involves risks of marginalisation and cultural imperialism, as patterns of industrial nostalgia which neglect present-day working-class persons may do, collective acts by working-class people that make both past and present working-class lives unavoidably and *proudly* visible can enact counter narratives in which the working class are the rightful owners of their past and its complexity. One example of this is the Durham Miners’ Gala that takes place each year in the north-east of England. This event began in 1871 as a day of recreation and bonding for members of the Durham Miners’ Association (Pantazatos and Silverman 2019). The event continued even after the death of coal mining and in 2022 more than 200,000 people were in attendance (Durham Miners’ Association 2022). As several researchers have noted, the gala serves as a way for former mining communities to assert pride in their community and culture to renew their feelings of identity and belonging (Pantazatos and Silverman 2019; Stephenson and Wray 2005; Wray 2011). As Andreas Pantazatos and Helaine Silverman describe, “Participation generates intense feelings of community solidarity, village identity, personal identification with one’s family history and collective memory of the pit village past” (2019: 124).

These events can therefore play an important role in enabling people to reclaim visibility and a sense of pride in their identity as part of a rich industrial lineage. Even the fact that the community needs to join together to repair and parade their banner is a way of bringing the community closer together, through working on a joint project which celebrates their past, demonstrating precisely the non-dominating communal power which narratives of industrial decline might otherwise undermine (Pantazatos and Silverman 2019: 113). The sociologist Vik Loveday (2014) in her study of working-class men working in higher education in England found that several of those she studied used this kind of nostalgic sense of working-class identity as a way of hanging onto to their sense of themselves as working-class in an overwhelmingly middle-class setting. Industrial nostalgia can play a useful role in allowing people to retain a sense of working-class identity despite the impacts of deindustrialisation.

However, remembering the working-class struggles of the past can also further provide ideas for how to respond to the present, and models that people may be inspired to emulate. One way in which Rust Belt chic does so, for example, is by emphasising the value of collective belonging. While the picture this literature paints may sometimes be overly romantic, the emphasis on belonging can provide a useful counterweight to the individualistic values that dominate North American culture (Linkon 2018: 160). This may not provide concrete guidance for how to respond to the challenges of today, but it may provide inspiration and motivation that encourages people toward “solidarity and resistance” (Linkon 2018: 161).

This further suggests that constructive resistance in the form of “public, collective interaction” (McAdam *et al.* 2001: 4) of the kind demonstrated at galas and remembrance events, and through public celebration of industry’s past, can perform a third role: working to undermine pervasive internal narratives which would otherwise instil feelings of powerlessness amongst working-class communities, and provide opportunities for self-respect and political action in the face of the risks of symbolic violence by the State. As Pantazatos and Silverman argue, the way that the Miners’ Gala functions as a very public expression of pride in working-class identity is not only celebratory. It is a way of contesting the “horrific denigration and demonisation” that British miners had been subjected to, particularly during the miners’ strike of the 1980s (2019: 122). In continuing to come together to publicly celebrate their identity, and to tell richer stories about that identity and its past, communities resist dominant societal narratives that downplay the relevance of socio-economic class for understanding contemporary politics. As the then President of the association, David Guy, claimed in 2010, events such as the Durham gala send a clear message that the British establishment, “could not destroy that pride, community spirit and solidarity, which has been forged over centuries of adversity” (Cited in Pantazatos and Silverman 2019: 122).

In generating a sense of pride in working-class identity, industrial nostalgia has therefore been claimed to be a potential form of constructive resistance against oppression and marginalisation of a more active, forward-looking political kind than mere remembrance might suggest. Industrial nostalgia offers the possibility that symbolic violence, in the form of policies and social attitudes, can be resisted and overcome through industrial nostalgic activity led by those communities who have been most affected by changes in industry, and the actions of the State, despite countervailing forces of oppression embedded within it.

## Conclusion

In summary, we have surveyed the ways in which industrial nostalgia can be used both as a tool of oppression and as a form of resistance. We have examined the existing interdisciplinary literature on the ways in which industrial nostalgia can oppress working-class people but also be used by working-class people to resist this oppression. While this interdisciplinary literature contains contributions from a wide range of academic disciplines including history, sociology and cultural studies, so far philosophers have been largely absent from this discussion. In this chapter, we have sought to make an initial attempt to bring philosophy into this conversation by showing how the existing contributions to this discussion can be understood in terms of Young's theory of oppression and Lilja's theory of constructive resistance.

There is, however, a great deal more that philosophers could contribute to this literature. In recent years there has been an impressive growth in philosophical work that looks at issues of justice, oppression and resistance that go beyond the question of the distribution of economic goods, including work on epistemic injustice and oppression (McConkey 2004; Fricker 2007; Dotson 2011; Medina 2011), on affective injustice (Archer and Mills 2019; Srinivasan 2018; Whitney 2018), and on the structures that create and sustain these and other forms of oppression (Haslanger 2012; Anderson 2012; McKeown 2021). We hope that this chapter can help to prompt other philosophers to engage in this discussion on industrial nostalgia and on the topic of deindustrialisation more broadly.

One important issue to consider in engaging in this research, is how to make sure that the voices of working-class people are playing a central role in this discussion. While our chapter has developed a philosophical analysis that draws on existing oral history work and literary analyses of working-class fiction from a range of class backgrounds, a more extensive philosophical investigation into these issues should seek to find ways to include and expand working-class voices within the philosophical analysis as well (for transparency: one of the authors of this chapter is from a English working-class background, the other is from a middle-class background).

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