The Centrality of Disablement Subjectivation to the Reproduction of Capitalist Social Relations

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The wider project

Empirically-informed (interviews and diary entries of precarious workers in the UK - 'disabled' and/OR 'neurodivergent', 'chronically ill', 'experiencing mental distress', 'having impairments')

- new theoretical framework on disablement and work which is absent from Critical Political Economy;
- here, I propose the idea of 'disability composition' & offer a non-identitarian term for the technical composition of disability; disablement = structural feature of capitalism.

Contributions aimed at CPE, activist spaces, Disability Studies. Literatures - Autonomist, Feminist Marxism & post '68 Marxisms + social model lit.

PolEcon & PolSci have considered disability & disabled people through an individualising & depoliticised lens, if/when mentioned at all. In Disability Studies, Marxism has been largely abandoned.
I build on the *impaired - disabled dialectic* proposed by UPIAS*.

I argue that capitalism (not simply ‘society’) is disabling & influences understandings of identity, oppression, exploitation.

People with impairments, who are chronically ill, neurodivergent, D/deaf, neurodivergent are subjected to disablement.

*Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation*
'Models' of (approaches to) disability

- Medical, cultural, liberal, postmodern, social, bio-psycho-social, posthuman, charity, tragedy (27 - Withers 2012)

BUT - main distinction (via Mike Oliver 1990):

- Individual model (regards 'problems' within individuals' bodyminds deemed necessary to 'fix')

- Social model (emerged from UPIAS - the 'problem' lies in how society is organised); society disables people with impairments; 'disabled' = political, social identity.

The social model's language has been appropriated over time (inc. by the state & liberal academics)

- I am following & retheorising the UPIAS-inspired social model.
Disability- & bodymind-related identities (1/6)

- 'disabled',
- 'neurodivergent',
- 'chronically ill',
- 'D/deaf',
- 'experiencing mental distress'
- 'having impairments'
- & the impaired - disabled dialectic
Disagreements in society & literatures (1/5)

Rejection vs denial vs reservations

- Different interpretations of 'disability' & 'impairment' (via models);
- Social modelists: 'disability' vs 'impairment' - BUT some activists: mental distress is not an impairment;

- In the UK, only 1/4 of those who are 'disabled' according to the law identify as such;
- Some people's claims to disability are being denied by the state, employers, 'professionals.
The language and concepts used are all over the place.

Even now, identity questions on disability mailing lists can lead to dozens of heated responses.
Implications for activism (3/5)

Siloed self-organising can result in unnecessary divisions;

A divided language inhibits coalitional politics;

Language matters for groups' constitutions and coalitional work.
Research participants' views (4/5)

- 'Disabled' was used interchangeably with neurodivergence, chronic illness, mental distress; exclusively; or not at all;
- Some participants did not use the term 'disabled' due to not wishing to 'claim' the term away from others;

However, all participants presented evidence of disablement-related oppression and exploitation – common material conditions of everyday life.
Reasoning behind the search for a new concept: subjects of disablement (5/5)

- lack of consensus (everywhere);
- avoid long lists of different groups of people;
- avoid ‘imposing’ the term ‘disabled’;
- acknowledge the ‘mental distress is not an impairment’ argument;
- not everyone who has an impairment is aware of it;
- ‘identity’ = historically contingent concept – from mid-20thC, personal & social (Moran 2015);
- build on the (UPIAS-inspired) social model & combine it with recent Marxist work -> how disablement is produced & historically located.
"Class consciousness" & "Class composition" theories (1/4)

Working class people (exploited under capitalism)

Working class people (conscious of their class position)

Technical composition

Working class people (exploited under capitalism)

Political composition

How working class people organise themselves politically

attention on how to 'raise consciousness' - too psychologising & hierarchical

Mohandesi (2013)

Class-in-itself

Class-for-itself
'Disability consciousness' in the UPIAS-inspired social model (2/4)

Disability-in-itself

People with impairments

Disability-for-itself

Disabled people

conscious of the fact that they are disabled

CPERN Workshop 2023
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My 'disability composition' proposal (3/4)

**Technical composition**
(how people are materially constituted)

**Subjects of disablement**
neurodivergent, impaired, chronically ill, D/deaf, with experiences of mental distress, & **other future identities/bodymind characteristics**

**Disabled people**

**Political composition**
(how people organise themselves politically)

* and/or 'Mad', 'Crip' activism & other similar political groups

- how can political coalitions be built?
- what’s the political difference between them?
Key points (4/4)

Subjects of disablement
- non-identitarian analytical concept – the 'technical composition' of disability;
- highlights structural subjectivation of different groups through disabling capitalism;
- open to / welcoming of future identities/groups (e.g. Long Covid; 'neurodivergence' = recent term)
- helps further the idea that disability (as a social formation) is a modality through which class is lived (cf. Hall et al. 1978).

Disablement [oppression & exploitation] is central to the reproduction of disabling capitalism.