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ARE BEAUTIFUL

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First published in London 2019 by Dog Section Press
Registered Workers' Cooperative No. 12472460
Printed by Sharman & Company
ISSN 2515-9011

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“Intellectual property is a legally fabricated monopoly, confining culture and science, and violently depriving the poorest and most marginalised from access to critical resources. The fictions of copyright and patent are despotic attempts to monopolise the mind; outrageous constraints on intelligence and creativity; and a destructive protectionist scheme for the profit of power.”



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Anarchy is Love

By **Carne Ross**

I used to think that anarchism was “just” a political philosophy. I was wrong. It is much, much more than that.

By political philosophy, I mean a way of thinking about politics, institutions and decision-making. How people arbitrate their business with one another, theories of government – or self-government – or the abolition of all hierarchy. I liked to boil down anarchism into a few pithy phrases like, “anarchism is about no one having power over anyone else.”

I was not wrong. Anarchism is indeed about all of these things. It is indeed a political philosophy. It is indeed about how people take decisions together and manage their affairs collectively. But I thought this was its philosophy in toto, that there was nothing more to it. It was a way of thinking that was separate from our interior realities. It is an external philosophy, above all about how we behave towards one another.

These ideas take you far in analysing the current political and economic situation and working out how to reform it and replace it. In place of a top-down system of government, we need a system where decisions are made by the mass, including everyone with a stake. In place of an economic system controlled by the few with massive wealth, we need one where shares are equal, both in terms of wealth but also in terms of agency; where everyone gets a say over the economic affairs that affect them, whether in the workplace or society at large. The individual and society are at the heart of this idea. Individuals must be free to act as they please, but always taking into account the needs of others – a fair and equal negotiation (this isn't the most purely libertarian form of anarchism, of course, more socialist libertarianism).

But who is that individual and how do they think? Anarchists are sceptical of formal religion, seeing it as another form of social control where agency is denied the individual in favour of a rigid orthodoxy enforced hierarchically – most often by men. The claim that god exists is seen as a veil, used to conceal many human wrongs and injustices, excused as a universal salve and explanation. Anarchism rejects religion: no gods, no masters.

Thus, I had been sceptical of those who sometimes called themselves spiritual anarchists. What is spiritualism but another kind of religion that confuses and misleads us from our earthly realities? I saw what can loosely be called spiritualism as narcissistic and selfish, with its focus on the individual soul and its needs and expression. Some of those I saw talking of spiritualism retreated from the battleground of society into drugs and other forms of refuge, both physical and mental. The battle is in our cities and streets, here and now, I argued crossly.

But those same ‘spiritualists’ claimed to me that there could not be revolution of the whole of society without revolutionising the way that individuals think within it. You couldn't expect that society would adopt practices of equality, respect and inclusion unless we ourselves were transformed from the rationalism and analytic thinking that sees everything as structure or transaction. The interior needed to be reformed too. You couldn't have revolution in one without revolution in the other.

I have come to think that they might be right.

At the heart of all anarchism is how we treat other people. Anarchism demands that this treatment is always respectful and egalitarian: no one can coerce another, whether by overt means or subtle. My kind of anarchism demands that we treat others as they wish, not as we wish (which is, by the way, an explicit rejection of the so-called ‘golden rule’, under which we treat others as we would wish to be treated. Instead we must attend to what they say they want, not what we think they want). We must give up all notions of domination, of influence and getting others to do what we want. We must give up all power.

I once worked in government. I was agog with power, convinced that I worked among an elite few who understood the needs of society – in my case, in foreign policy and diplomacy – better than society understood itself. This fed my ego and structured my life around career and status. It has been a hard road to abandon these pillars of my sense of worth and self. If I don't have power, what am I? If I cannot tell others what to do, what value do my ideas and wishes have? If it's just me, what am I?

I have found that I need to believe in something. I'm not sure what I would call it. But I suspect my spiritualist friends would call it just that: spiritual need. It's a belief that there are values and meanings outside ourselves but which animate and inspire our interior realities. Religions might name this thing god, expressed through litany. But my litany is anarchism, and I'm not willing to call that guiding spirit god. It is more earthly, it is more human.

I identify it by observing the core of anarchist practice: the interaction with others. How we treat other people. In anarchism, that interaction must be guided by consideration and caring, the putting of the needs of others on an equal footing to our own. At least: in its most extreme iteration, it is the erasure of self. Lao Tzu talks about this in the Dao te Ching. It is having power by giving up all power. He reached this conclusion thousands of years ago. It is a harmony between how we see and treat others and how we treat ourselves. There is a word for this practice: it is love.

Without this ‘spiritual’ core, anarchism struggles to make sense. If it is judged in the terms of current capitalist culture, it is not necessarily a more efficient or productive practice: it does not necessarily produce more goods or make more money. What it accomplishes is in fact of infinite worth: the beauty of humans living with one another in love and respect and equality. These are abstract, ineffable things that cannot be measured in euros, pounds or dollars. Indeed, this stuff is beyond all terms themselves – and this is why it's hard to put it into words too. It is on a plane above all that. And if you want to call this a ‘spiritual’ plane, I am happy with that. What goes on in the spirit or the soul matters, for it matters to the exterior reality too.

What we believe in ourselves is intrinsic to how we engage with the world. One doesn't work without the other.



Carne Ross is a former British diplomat, author of *The Leaderless Revolution: How ordinary people will take power and change politics in the 21st century*, and the subject of the film *Accidental Anarchist*.

accidentalanarchist.net



Sound System Resistance

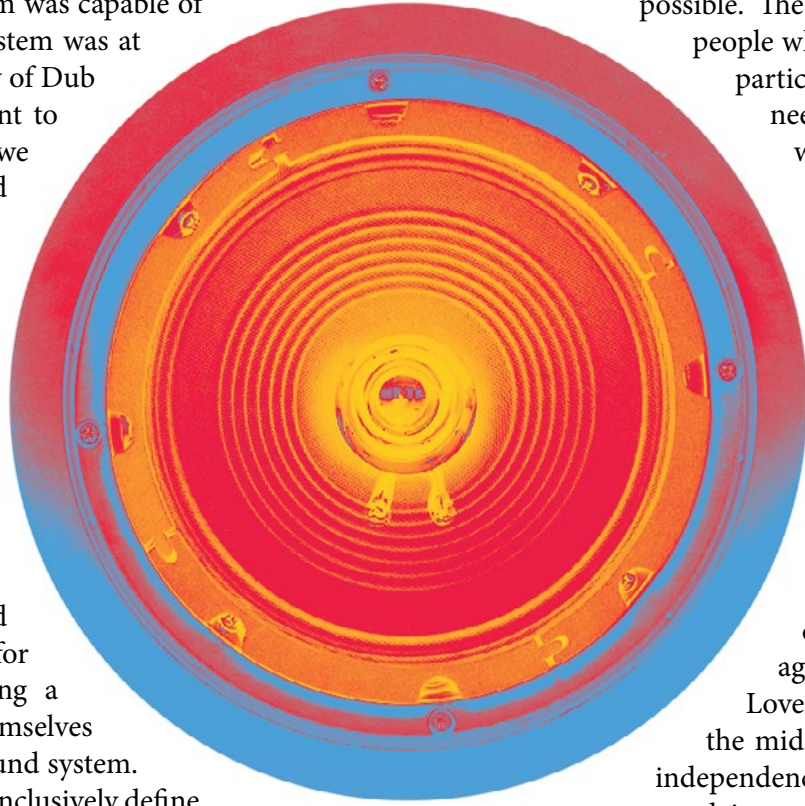
By Adam ‘Hylu’ Ainley and Vincent Møystad

Unit 137 is a sound system, a collective of artists who have organised ourselves according to Jamaican & UK sound system culture. We were inspired by going to dances and experiencing what the sound system was capable of doing — my first memory of sound system was at Brixton Recreation Centre (a University of Dub session). However, it was when we went to Outlook Festival in Croatia in 2011 that we first performed on a proper sound and experienced Mungo's Hi Fi. From this point we decided to create Unit 137 sound system with the intention of our music being heard properly and aligning this with the output of our record label. We work to make our events open, free, and supportive of our communities.

We are interested in the political aspects of sound system culture, and all the different ways it has generated capacities for people to stand up for themselves. This text is about opening a space: allowing people to express themselves freely is both the ends and means of sound system. It therefore makes no sense to try and conclusively define the political dimension of sound system culture, or to make statements about what it should do. Instead, we reflect on what the culture means to us and how it textures our lives and resistance. Every sound system is an experiment in sound and togetherness, and we are sharing thoughts about ours in the hope of hearing about others.

Sound system culture began in Jamaica in the 1950's, when the culture of black working-class Jamaicans was almost completely invisible in the Jamaican media. Engineers and mechanics crafted sound systems, and collectives formed around them, organising a steady supply of music, inventing new performance styles, and fine-tuning the sound. Sound systems became a major influence on global music, pioneering the remix, live mixing, low frequencies, and deejaying. Sound systems travelled with the Jamaican diaspora, forming centres for independent cultural growth, often in hostile environments, giving people a place to gather and enjoy each other's company.

Sound systems in this tradition are not just about the amplification of sound. They developed in response to the human need for togetherness and solidarity, and the centre of the sound system is not the speakers, but the people involved.



Every sound system is a **collective**, a group of people who have organised to carry boxes and leads, select music, etc. Then there's family and friends, who make this commitment to the sound possible. The sound system audience is another collective: people who come out to hear music and dance are active participants in building the sound. Sound systems need music, and so the session will be in dialogue with global networks of musicians, producers, engineers, and impresarios who are present at the dance through their tunes. Sound systems work through all these technical, physical, and cultural circuits, which means that sound system culture is as diverse as the multitude of connections they reflect.

Being involved in sound system culture means constantly testing what the sound system is capable of. When sound systems were introduced to the Notting Hill Carnival, the event transformed from a rich but modest cultural event to a flashpoint for uprisings against police brutality. Sound systems also played Lovers' Rock, cultivating care and romantic love in the midst of oppression and resistance. With Jamaican independence, Ska was the first music to unite the country around its own language and dance. In parts of the world today, sound systems using regional languages have helped organise cultural revivals by adapting the Jamaican strategy. A heavy roots sound will create a sanctified atmosphere as profound as a forest or a roadside shrine. A dancehall sound can build a warm interplay of joy, raunchiness, and aggression. Sound systems turned phonography into a performance in its own right, and have built up an archive of thoughts, feelings, and experiences pressed on wax.

For us, being in a **sound** is about committing to this process of social and sonic experimentation: being attentive to all the influences, skills, and ideas present in our collective, as well as the social/sonic needs and passions in our communities, and seeing what we can do with them. We are committed to musical experimentation, playing a mix of Reggae, Dub, Hip-Hop, Dancehall, Jungle and much more. We also work with jazz musicians and experiment with live performances (our latest being Electric Brixton, alongside Joe Armon-Jones). Sound system culture is about the mix, weaving tunes and people together to build the vibe, mixing the new and familiar, or experiencing the familiar in a new way. Living in Lewisham, we are surrounded by so many musical histories, and it's important for us that the sound reflects this.



This means we also take every opportunity to build a reflective conversation about musical history and evolution in our community, both teaching and learning about sound system culture in the process. We've worked with scholars in the Sound System Outernational network and with young performers in the Alchemy project, and are present at community events like Lewisham People's Day and Woolwich Carnival.

We love a free all-day in a park, with families, food, a wide line-up of singers, deejays, musicians, selectors, and bands from the area and beyond. There are few spaces where people can be drawn together in this way, by the sound system, jerk chicken and maize on the barrel grill. We want dances where teenagers can perform, people can dance freely, and grandparents can bring their grandchildren. For that to work we can't organise events where people will be put off by a £15 cover charge, invasive security or police presence, or racism, sexism, or homophobia in the crowd.

It takes a lot of work to run a sound, and we want the sound to financially support the community that runs it. This means thinking carefully about our independence and what kind of moves we can make without compromising our commitments to community and artistic experimentation. We try out different approaches to sponsorship, partnerships, and grant applications to make our work possible, but it's a complicated process. This is a major concern for all sound systems, especially as the kind of infrastructure (youth clubs, independent music venues, decent housing benefit, and community centres) that sound systems need disappear from our neighbourhoods at an alarming rate.

For us then, sound system culture is about creating a proliferation of ways to bring people together through sound. Sound systems have brought people together to look after each other, to learn about their histories, cultures, and languages, to fall in love, and to fight back. In London today, sound systems continue to hold an important space, by insisting on our inalienable collective right to joy, even as the city becomes ever more hostile to our communities. Sound system culture cannot fight back against this on its own, but the beauty of a sound system session can create real experiences of togetherness and remind us of what we are struggling for. As the culture continues growing and developing, even in difficult circumstances, we look forward to seeing and hearing all the manifold and unique ways sound systems will continue to do this.

Adam 'Hylu' Ainley is part of Unit 137 Sound System and Vincent Møystad is part of Sound System Outernational.

unit137.com
soundsystemouternational.wordpress.com

To the Front!

By Lucy Katz

“WOMEN AND NON-BINARY PEOPLE COME TO THE FRONT”



Wherever we are playing in the world, Dream Nails shows always start with the same rallying battle cry. From my seat behind the drums, I witness a sea of newly empowered gig-goers emerge victorious at the front of the stage, taking up the space that they are usually afraid to. They have found us and found each other: now the show can really begin. This isn't just an amusing, irreverent turn for the sake of effect: it is at the core of our philosophy as a band and as musicians, and something that (unfortunately, but unsurprisingly) doesn't always go down very well with a certain kind of audience member.

But what exactly do we mean by “women and non-binary people to the front?” And why do we down tools (literally laying our sticks and guitars on the ground) if our simple request is met with resistance from even one person?

All public – and most private – spaces are dominated by men. Women and non-binary people taking back space they have been denied is a radical act of liberation. We don't write songs for our fans to listen to while they stare at the sorry sight of men's backs. It never ceases to amaze us how men will stand right at the front of feminist punk shows and assume the space is theirs. But lol dudes, no way. Our songs are about our pain and joy and rage, about our experiences and the injustices we witness every day; they are not always serious, but they are always deeply personal and we want our audiences to take them to heart and get as much joy from them as we do. Our energy, as our guitarist Anya once infamously put it, is “more infectious than norovirus, but way more fun,” and we focus as much on playfulness and silliness as radical attitudes for women to exhibit on stage.

While asking for women and non-binary people to the front, we are not only referencing our riot grrrl foremothers (to whom we owe a lot, but acknowledge went nowhere near far enough in espousing the intersectional feminist ideology we know is everything), we are asking our male fans to actively move to the back, to give up the space they have – even unconsciously – taken up.

It is always a funny and touching moment when men approach us after the set and inform us (with surprise!) that they have never felt ‘excluded’ from any space before, how ‘strange’ it feels, but how much they enjoyed the show and the energy from the back of the room. This is a radical act of allyship that we expect, but is nonetheless gratefully received.

After every show, women and non-binary people thank us for giving them the chance to take up the space they are usually denied. Even older women tell us they have never had that experience in a whole life of gig-going. In our personal experience, each of us have grown up going to shows without being able to see a damn thing. At best our eyeline is blocked and we are shoved around a bit, but at worst we have been frightened, groped, assaulted and violently pushed. At certain types of shows, drunk idiots and macho culture will continue to prevail for the foreseeable future, but where we are able to, we are determined to break this cycle, to change the culture around gig-going for fans and artists alike.

Dream Nails shows are about creating liberating, joyful places where we can dance and rage together, but these kinds of spaces are not the default. Just because we are playing at a night dominated by female and non-binary, or even feminist bands, the spaces will not automatically be safe. As we so stringently enforce the WNBTTTF policy at our shows, we have a reputation for really safe, accessible and fun shows that women and non-binary people feel comfortable to come to alone and make friends. In our efforts to change the culture around gig-going, we regularly promote and programme our own shows at venues that are willing to work with us to make the nights as accessible as possible. We always make the toilets gender neutral, we never play with bands who are known to contain or have associations with perpetrators, and we arrange our own shows in accessible venues. A few months back, a fan who uses a wheelchair told us after the show that it was the best night she's had in three years, because she knew she could enjoy herself and not worry about access. We've learnt in the past from our fans that a big concern of theirs is travelling home alone, so we try to link up fans on the Facebook event of shows we are promoting so that people can buddy up to get home safely.

When we are promoting shows, we make sure that the venues we use undertake Good Night Out training, so that all staff – from the bar to the door – get on board with GNO's mission to end sexual harassment and assault in venues and bars. It feels like a personal mission to change venue and gig-culture from the other side, to change the culture by changing the way gigs are run from the ground up, and it's encouraging that there is so much enthusiasm for it.

Although we all somehow hang on to gruelling full-time day jobs, we are most certainly full-time punks, and adopting oft-crusty punk venues across the UK and Europe as our temporary ‘workplaces’ has been an interesting journey. More interesting still is noting how these venues and some of the staff that work in them are hell-bent on maintaining a boys-club culture designed to exclude everyone except the never-ending zombie army of mediocre man-bands that continues to be the plague of our time. Sound techs (some of whom are talented and delightful) seem more often than not bred to be deeply condescending. Gems that we have been treated to include: “do you know where to plug your bass in?”, “do you know what a soundcheck is?”, “remember the sound is different because you're wearing earplugs,” and my personal favourite: “be careful: the drums are loud you know, you might hurt your ears.” We have also been stopped from entering our own venues (despite carrying instruments), and told to “join that queue, this one is artists only.” It goes without saying that experiences are habitually much worse for peers of ours on the scene who are women of colour. A lifetime of being socialised to de-escalate and placate has set us in good stead to deal with these frustrating situations, but improving venue-culture more widely for women, non-binary people and people of colour is something we are committed to working on.

We don't want to have to say WNBTTTF to crowds, we want fans to implicitly understand what it means to see a feminist punk band in action and check their male entitlement at the door. We don't want to have to work so hard to ensure that we and our fans are safe at shows, but until this day arrives, we will continue to fight, and to fill these spaces with rage, joy, inclusion, love, and absolutely banging feminist punk music.



Lucy Katz is the drummer of London feminist punk band Dream Nails.
dreamnailsband.com

More info on Good Night Out can be found here:
goodnightoutcampaign.org

OK, Boomer?

By Keir Milburn

As the shock of the 2019 general election fades the argument over its wider meaning has begun. While Brexit was the issue that most determined the result, it seems likely that it will lose salience now the UK is certain to leave the EU. It makes sense then to step back from the specifics of the campaign and think about the wider political and demographic trends that the election fits into. There are two prime candidates.

The first is the dramatic geographical shift in political support. That discussion is dominated by the collapse of Labour's support in the so-called 'Red Wall' areas. While we should treat the phrase 'Red Wall' with scepticism (it was more or less invented at this election in order to be knocked down), it does link to long term demographic changes. Those Northern towns once dominated by a single employer, perhaps in mining or manufacturing, and so conducive to labour organising and, therefore, Labour voting, have, over the last thirty years, been hollowed out and changed beyond recognition. But the long-term decline of the Labour vote in these areas doesn't indicate the loss of the working class, it is rather a geographical effect of a much larger, long-term recomposition of class. The so-called 'Red Wall' is part of a wider geographical trend in politics in which Labour has come to dominate the vote in cities and larger towns while the Conservative vote has been concentrated into smaller towns and villages. This is true both in the devastated small towns of the North and the wealthier villages of the Home Counties. How can we explain this?

The key lies with the second stark political division of the election: the huge political generation gap. In the election, the young massively favoured Labour, who led the Conservatives by 33 percentage points among the under 30s, while the old flocked to the Conservatives, who beat Labour by 44 points among the over 60s. This was a near repeat of the age divide seen in the 2017 election where the generation gap between the youngest and oldest reached a huge 97 percentage points. This was new and historically unprecedented: in the 2010 election that generation gap had been just 15 points. Interestingly, this pattern is not restricted to the UK. It's followed most obviously in the US but is also detectable in many other developed countries.

These two political shifts, geographic and age, might point to a complicated picture but, in fact, the former is primarily explained by the latter.

Over the last thirty years there has been an exodus of young people away from villages and small towns into larger towns and cities. Why? Quite simply, because that's where the jobs and opportunities are. In turn, the smaller towns have aged dramatically, with huge populations of retired people relocating there. It's a self-reinforcing dynamic, as age segregation makes small towns less attractive to the young. The conclusion is obvious: the key to understanding the 2019 election lays, beyond all other things, in understanding the political generation gap.

Even though this age divide appeared just three years ago, its roots go back to the 1980s, a period of defeat for the Left. In fact, the 'Baby Boomers', those born between 1946 and 1965, are best understood as a defeated generation. Their movement to the Right is an effect of that defeat. They failed to get the world they wanted when they were young and now no longer believe positive change is possible. Not coincidentally the 'Red Wall' towns were the arena for a key moment in that defeat, when the once powerful Miners Union were smashed during the strike of 1984-5. This was a key moment in the wider defeat of the unions and we are still living with the consequences. Wages have (adjusted for inflation) stagnated ever since. But after the application of the stick, with the near military defeat of the miners, came the carrot of increased individual wealth. This wasn't achieved through raised wages, which would have required organised labour, but through rising house prices. The sell-off of council housing, at an average discount of between 30-50% of market value, represents a huge transfer of public wealth into private hands. The public resources built up by one generation were ransacked to buy off the next generation, the defeated boomers, but that was always a one-time trick. The trouble with neoliberalism is that it eventually runs out of public goods to loot.

The incredible rise in house prices became supercharged through the 90s and early 2000s by the deregulation of the finance market and the financialisation of pensions. It was this economic set-up that hit the rocks with the financial crisis of 2008. The material interests of the over 60s have gradually become aligned with the performance of the financial and real estate sectors. This helps explain the unanimity across the country of the shift to the Right among the home-owning elderly.

Even a house in a depressed area like Grimsby has increased in value an average of 200% since 1995. No wonder they are voting for more of the same. The young, on the other hand, were gradually priced out of this bonanza and since 2008 the door has been slammed shut. Home ownership rates among the under 40s have fallen through the floor. The material interests of the young are pinned to the level of wages and social spending going up, but every government policy since 2008 has pointed the other way. The financial and real estate sectors have been propped up by quantitative easing and low interest rates while austerity has proven catastrophic for the young.

It is this division of material interests, along with a division in what seems socially and politically possible, that lies behind our great political generational divide. The Left has become hegemonic among the urban young (and, indeed, Labour won the election among the working age population), but the propertied pensioners, in alliance with financial oligarchs, defeated them. To rebuild, the Left must start from where they are strong and deepen their hegemony over Generation Left and the cities – but we must then move out from there to break the Right's hold on small towns. The wealthier propertied pensioners will be the hardest to reach and some 'Red Wall' towns, deserts of the old, aren't the best place to start. Many areas, however, are more mixed, and a program of deep organising there has every chance of winning them back to the Left. Polling shows that the political views of the young in the villages and small towns are closer to the young in the cities than the older people surrounding them. It is they who can provide the initial base for such organising alongside those, usually older women, who are already running social solidarity and food bank type projects. The movement built up around Corbyn now needs to shift its focus away from parliament towards helping workers get organised in the service sector jobs that dominate small towns, towards aiding the formation of community and renters' unions, and towards growing projects of social solidarity. This is the way we can re-establish the idea that politics can change things for the better. It is the only way to end the domination of the country by the long defeat of the 'Boomers'.

Keir Milburn is author of the book Generation Left (Polity, 2019).



IF YOU'RE A PROPER FUCKING THIEF THEN YOU
CAN'T BE FUCKING FUCKED GOING FUCKING
BURGLING FUCKING PROPERTIES IN THE FUCKING
MIDDLE OF THE FUCKING NIGHT BECAUSE YOU
FUCKING GOT TO FUCKING GET UP IN THE FUCKING
MORNING TO FUCKING RUN THE FUCKING COUNTRY

TRUTH. NOUN. THE QUALITY OR STATE OF BEING TRUE. A FACT OR BELIEF THAT IS ACCEPTED AS TRUE. THAT WHICH IS TRUE OR IN ACCORDANCE WITH FACT OR REALITY.

We Are a Chorus

By Lola Olufemi

The struggle is long and requires much from those who wish for more liveable worlds. Feminist thinking offers us a challenge; it pushes us to think beyond the limits of the given – all we have been told is impossible. Feminism is a tool, a frame, an analytic that we can use to destroy the restraints that structure this world. It argues that we deserve to live well and that we might be able to craft a world where everyone is free from harm, where exploitation and extraction do not underpin our relations or determine our interpersonal interactions. It provides an answer to the problem of capitalism, the problem of racism, the problem of gendered violence, disablism and homophobia.

The feminist project has always been heavily tied up with imagining – feminist thinkers have needed an escape from the miserable conditions they have been subjected to and a way to contend with the failures of the promises made by the valorisation of certain male thinkers. Feminist thinking rejects the cult of the individual in favour of an understanding that our liberation will always be plural. It will always contain many routes, a multitude of conflicting ideas that clear a path for understanding how we have been forced to live and how we can work to transform these conditions.



It is Saidiya Hartman’s idea of ‘the chorus’ – an amorphous multitude that ebbs and flows. Understanding the rhythms of political movements and demands is what feminism looks like in action. We are a chorus. We reject a die-hard allegiance to individual thinkers, in favour of the collective. Often we have been maligned by certain parts of the left, accused of being identitarians, accused of dividing movements when really we have sought to expose how any refusal to acknowledge the multipronged consequences of exploitation will always ensure that our political projects are doomed for failure.

Feminists have insisted that our burdens are multiple. We cannot talk about work and the chain of wage labour without acknowledging how those chains have tied some of us to the home, the nuclear family, the private sphere and domestic servitude. Some of us are workers and mothers, some of us are black workers, some of us are trapped because we cannot work at all.

A poster from the See Red Women’s Workshop from 1983 famously reads “Capitalism Depends on Domestic Labour” as women stand around a conveyer belt. Feminism might be seen as the answer to the problem of metanarratives. By understanding gender as one of the many rubrics we use to analyse the world, we accept the premise that liberation is not a one-time event and it cannot and will not be ushered in uniformly.

It is going to be chaotic and messy and it is going to require us to rethink our comrades, those people that we call brother and sister and lover, it is going to require us to come up with new names and build communities of care where we come together to support and love one another and, most importantly, to strategise.

There is something that obscures this horizon. Liberals have described ‘neoliberalism’ as just another meaningless phrase. But for those interested in radical thinking and radical politics, it helps us name the condition of the societies we live in. Broadly speaking, it refers to the imposition of cultural and economic policies and practices by NGOs and governments in the last three to four decades that have resulted in the extraction and redistribution of public resources from the working class upwards, deregulated capital markets, and decimated infrastructures of social care through austerity measures.



It has privatised the welfare state and individualised and securitised the ways we relate to one another. Neoliberalism has had many effects on our politics, our minds and our psyches. It is what has caused the hollow feeling of emptiness that is commonplace in an increasingly atomised society. It is what dictates the social convention that we relate to our friends like soulless robots, constantly checking that we are not overstepping each other’s personal boundaries, put in place to survive. Neoliberalism has infected our feminist politics. It comes in the form of the girl boss, the women-only private members club, the feminism on sale in the tote bag, t-shirt and the badge; the focus on the individual, micro-interactions, patterns of behaviour, stereotypes. It is the imaginary figure of the woman CEO who dominates the boardroom, ‘has it all’ and does it twice as well as any man could. The hope for a woman leader no matter her political ethos, the reliance on the state and the police to provide answers to the problem of sexual and gendered violence. What is most dangerous about neoliberalism is way it shape-shifts. It can mimic the language of liberation so well, pushing ‘women’s’ concerns to the centre, making us forget that biology is a trap.

Critical feminism is invested in creating a more just world: ending austerity, ending climate catastrophe, ending prisons, ending borders, ending the state as we know it, ending fascism. It is a project with many ends. Remembering the radical feminist histories we belong to means refusing to capitulate: becoming problems by exposing problems in the neoliberal project. We have to start with women on the underside of capital, asking – why is it that some women’s exploitation is a natural part of other women’s achievements? We have to refuse the allure of the biological essentialism that has a viper grip on mainstream feminist politics. When white middle class cultural gatekeepers insist that the issue of our time is the supposed erasure of ‘sex-based’ rights, we have to respond by reminding them we have no cult-like allegiance to womanhood or to the violence it facilitates. We understand ‘woman’ as a category under which we gather to make political demands for our freedom and the freedom of others. It is only the possibility of freedom that matters to us. We must call this attachment to the body and chromosomal make up what it is: scientific racism in disguise. We must connect it to the encroaching fascism that seeks to swallow us all up.

We have to keep reminding ourselves and others: the police are not saviours and the state will not deliver us salvation. We have to be brave enough to proclaim that no feminism worth practicing believes in borders. When we reorientate our concerns and use feminism to uncover the way that this world is sick and makes all of us sick, it might not feel like feminist work. But it matters for those rebuilding their lives after a decade of austerity, for those sex workers that face certain death under state policies of criminalisation, those women who die because they have no routes to escape domestic violence, those women in prison, those trans women who are struggling to survive as mainstream discourses render their lives impossible, those women and children who drown between nations and those who so easily become the casualties of illegal wars and drone strikes. It matters for every person that mainstream feminism makes invisible in order to tell a neat story of linear progress and women’s achievement.

What good is a parliament full of ‘female’ politicians if they step over our dead bodies to get there?

The struggle is long and requires much from those who wish for more liveable worlds. Feminist thinking offers us a challenge: we must rise to it.

Lola Olufemi is a black feminist writer and organiser from London. She facilitates workshops on feminism and histories of political organising in schools, universities and local communities. She is the co-author of A FLY Girl’s Guide to University: Being a Woman of Colour at Cambridge and Other Institutions of Power and Elitism (Verve Poetry Press, 2019). Her most recent book is Feminism, Interrupted (Pluto Books, 2020).

We Clean (We Are Not Dirt)

By *Marlene Jimenez*



This is based on my experience as a cleaner in London; I assume there is not much difference than in the rest of the world.

It is a very important and indispensable form of work in every aspect but, unfortunately, its value is not recognised – either in monetary, human or social terms. It is invisible work: nobody sees it, nobody appreciates it. As a cleaner, I felt marginalized, discriminated against and exploited.

I have been in the English trade union environment since 2008 and, little by little, I have acquired knowledge of the various types of exploitation that exist in London.

I have cleaned in the City of London, in floors full of employees; the people who worked there passed over me and did not see me, nor did they attempt to clean or pick up their own rubbish. When I was cleaning the men's bathrooms, I put the sign on the door that said "cleaning in progress": they ignored the sign and went to pee while I was there. They had no respect at all, they ignored me completely. I was terrified, as it is impossible that they did not actually see me, but they never asked permission.

The difference between cleaning in the public toilets in one of the busiest train stations in London, which I've also experienced, is that the people were more respectful, greeting me and asking permission to enter if I was cleaning – and the bathrooms were much cleaner than the bathrooms of City workers (bankers). It is amazing to see people like this, with good jobs and obviously a lot of money, but way too ignorant and arrogant.

When executives, bankers or others, go to work, everything is impeccable and clean. Hospitals must be in the best standard of cleanliness, for hygiene and industrial safety: well disinfected in all areas, so as not to endanger the health of patients and workers, including doctors and nurses. This means cleaning shit, blood and other bodily fluids, thoroughly cleaning when someone dies, etc. Nobody cares who does it or how they do it, they just demand and demand, more and more.

They don't care if people are sick or if they are putting their life or health at risk, either by using dangerous cleaning products that directly affect their health, or by doing jobs without training. This might mean cleaning high windows without the right equipment, so workers end up climbing on stairs, tables, chairs, etc., or lifting heavy things. If the workers refuse to do so, they simply sack them; for fear of losing their job, workers rarely refuse to do so.

The companies every time demand more work for less money. The cleaners are not treated like people, more like machines of production or yield. They give the job to the one who gives more physically; if they do not manage to do the work demanded, or do not run as the company wants or if they get sick from the excess of work, they simply change the part – and it becomes a vicious circle.

There are many, many cleaners who get sick in their back, arms, hands or who acquire diseases from the use of chemicals, or stress at work, etc. And there really is no law to protect them. In order to have a legal case, evidence is needed, and in these cases it can be very difficult to gather evidence or to demonstrate that certain diseases have been acquired due to overwork or stress, or the accidents that have occurred have been due to the negligence of the company.

We can also find a lot of discrimination with pregnant women. Legally, the pregnant woman is covered by discrimination law from their first day of work, as long as there is evidence of notifying her supervisor or manager that she is pregnant. But companies do not have a bit of humanity, nothing – everything revolves around performance and profits. So they're put to work cleaning bathrooms and using liquids that affect both the mother and the baby, or doing heavy work, pressing them to perform more, threatening them with being fired if they do not. Many times this causes the loss of the baby.

In the case where companies pay the London Living Wage (currently £10.75 per hour) the salary is an illusion since everything is based on profit.

Companies cut staff and put the cleaner to work doing the job of 2 or 3 people, meaning that the cleaner often ends up working for less than the minimum wage. This is another cause of people getting very stressed and sick.

It is true that we clean shit: it is one of the most disgusting jobs. That does not mean that those who work in cleaning are rubbish. It is an honest job, which unfortunately we do as immigrants because of the language barrier, for lack of opportunities or because we have a family to support in our country of origin and it is very hard to study, work and support a family.

By this I do not mean that we are victims. We simply want to be paid for the value of our work and be treated with respect. We have the same rights: we are not machines, but human beings just like everyone else. We feel, we think, and we also get sick.

My recommendation as a female trade unionist is that workers organise themselves to demand better wage conditions and be treated as human beings, and not as production machines. If they touch one, they touch us all – it is the only way to claim our rights with dignity.



Marlene Jimenez is an organiser with the Cleaners & Allied Independent Workers Union (CAIWU).

CAIWU is a registered trade union representing over a thousand workers employed mainly in London's cleaning industry. They believe that every human being is entitled to dignity and respect in the workplace, and it is their mission to help their members fight for this basic right, along with others like fair pay, terms and working conditions.

caiwu.org.uk

Hidden Histories and Haunting

By *Anastazia Schmid*

Fear is a base emotional response to trauma, pain, and uncertainty. As one experiences fear or terror in a paranormal presence, they share the emotional energetic pain that trauma invoked. Epistemic injustice occurs through silencing trauma and human atrocities. That silence allows human rights violations to continue unabated. Ghosts (both those who live with the damning label and those from beyond the grave) raise questions as to whose bodies and lives are used as fodder for other’s social, political, and intellectual gain. I propose the recovery of lost, secret histories via paranormal experiences and a collection of oral histories encountered and taken at the Madison State Hospital and Correctional Facility.

The Southeastern Hospital for the Insane, also known as “Cragmont” and now the Madison State Hospital and Correctional Facility, opened in 1910. It was designed to be Indiana’s largest hospital for the insane, and in the first ten years of operation, the population rose to 1,200 patients, with the number of women patients nearly always exceeding that of men. Hospital records consistently noted the race of patients; 233 of the insane patients were listed as immigrants, and 185 patients were purported to have “mixed” blood. Eugenic field workers and doctors proliferated the staff. Their reports and statistical charts permeate the early hospital reports. In 1907 the state issued a compulsory sterilisation law targeting institutionalised people; I question how many of these people became the targets for medical experimentation or marked for death.

The hospital was known for its medical research and experimentation on patients. Shock and insulin treatment, “hydrotherapy” (various forms of water torture), chemical and physical restraint, and the unspoken dark room isolation cells, complete with chain restraints, in the bowels of the institution were all forms of purported “treatments” inflicted upon the inhabitants.

Death permeates the institution. By 1919 Cragmont’s annual report noted that nearly 1,000 people died in less than 10 years. At least 17 violent deaths were reported during that time, mainly listed as suicides by hanging. Early newspaper accounts reported on a few of these suicides, including Daisy Phillips who hanged herself at Cragmont in 1924.

Phillips previously attempted to shoot herself after her husband’s suicide the year before and was committed to the asylum. Perhaps violent deaths like these contributed to the Madison State Hospital and Correctional Facility’s notoriously haunted reputation. Madison is listed as one of the most haunted sites in Indiana, yet very little information documenting its paranormal activities or darker histories exists.

In 2007, part of the Madison State Hospital transitioned into a women’s prison. Upon transfer to MSU, I planned to expand my autoethnographic research into the history of the Madison State Hospital. When I arrived at Madison, I immediately recognised the facility from multiple dreams I’d had for five years prior to arriving. The history and ghosts of Madison appeared to be calling to me long before I knew anything of the institution. Originally, my research was solely focused on the institution itself and the patients who were there. As I began conducting interviews, stories of the facility’s extreme paranormal activity began emerging. Most staff members would only speak to me if I promised not to divulge their identities.

The superintendents and wardens of the facility have a longstanding reputation of habitually denying outsiders entrance for filming, photography, or research on the facility and its inhabitants. I experienced my own encounters and collected numerous stories while inside the facility.

Blank South Lower is currently the in-house drug rehab at the facility. I was repeatedly told that the presence of a large man was felt physically and could be seen or heard in the corner room at the far end of the hallway. One woman who lived in the room told me she woke from sleep after feeling the weight of this man holding her down in her bunk, his face twisted in a grotesque distortion right in front of her, screaming, “you’re not safe here!” A counselor employed by the facility for a few decades told me that when that portion of the facility was used as a men’s prison in the 1980s, a man hanged himself in the same section of the building where many women experienced this paranormal presence.

The open population dorm, McCart South Lower, also harbors recurring paranormal experiences. Room one on hallway one was reported by staff and residents alike to constantly be excessively cold with a feeling of a strange, sometimes dark presence. The inhabitants of that room repeatedly spoke of being touched in their sleep to the point of being awoken. Shadows were seen hovering over the lower bunk by staff members. An incarcerated woman who had been chronically sick died in that room in 2010; her death went undiscovered for three days. The room was left uninhabited and was used as storage for several years after the incident, but as the prison population began to swell, the room was once again inhabited by residents.

Officer Mrs. D has worked at the facility for over thirty years. She told me about the old dentist office in the basement of one of the now-condemned buildings on the grounds. Patients purported to have been violent with a propensity to bite were forcibly restrained in that office to extract all of their teeth, and she claimed to have been a part of this practice.



When I questioned her about the legality of permanently maiming patients, she stated, “I think it was the right thing to do. What are you supposed to do with monsters who won’t stop biting? No one wants their germs or their filthy mouths on them.”

I went into the basements of every building I had access to, roughly five different buildings out of 40 on grounds. They all harbor isolation cells, many still bearing markings on the walls and floors where chains and restraints once were. The interior cells are extremely small and completely dark, with dirt floors. Once inside an adult cannot fully stand upright, forcing a person to remain cramped in the tight space on the ground. The pipes to the furnaces and water heaters run along the ceilings in several of the cells. Many times during the day and night, loud banging on those pipes is heard through the floors. At times the banging would become so loud and intense that it woke people from their sleep and rattled the bed frames from the vibrations through the floor coming from the banging.

Regardless of whether these stories are folklore or actual experiences, they are a contestation of silencing, trauma, and the disappearance of people’s hidden lived experiences. Substantial profit has been made off the bodies of institutionalised people across time and this continues today in institutions like prisons. There is a vested interest by interconnected power structures to keep these voices silenced and the histories of lives captured within hidden. We must recognise the commonality in pain and suffering before we can delve deeper into the lives of disappeared people and their histories. I acknowledge those demands from beyond the grave as a form of resistance to human degradation in all forms and the continued perpetration of trauma to all institutionalised people.

Anastazia Schmid is an activist artist and graduate independent scholar in the higher education program at the Indiana Women’s Prison. She received the 2016 Gloria Anzaldua Award for her work in gender and sexuality by the American Studies Association, and received the Outstanding History Project Award presented by the Indiana Historical Society. Her work and interviews span multimedia sources including NPR and Slate magazine. She is the co-author of the play *The Duchess of Stringtown* currently under production both inside prison and out.

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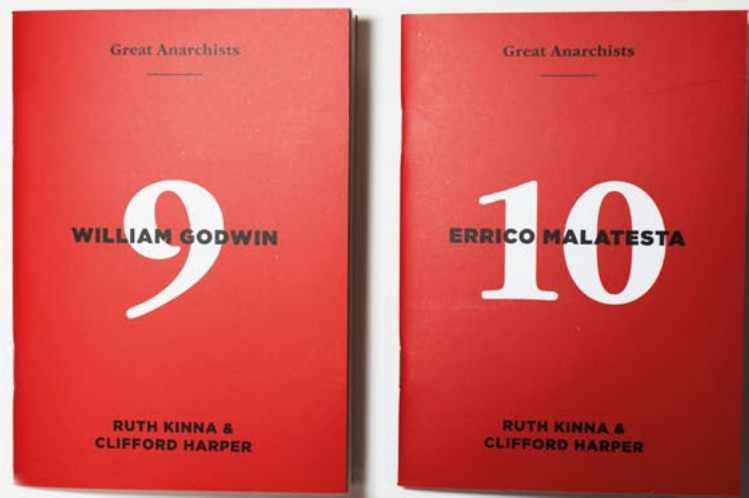
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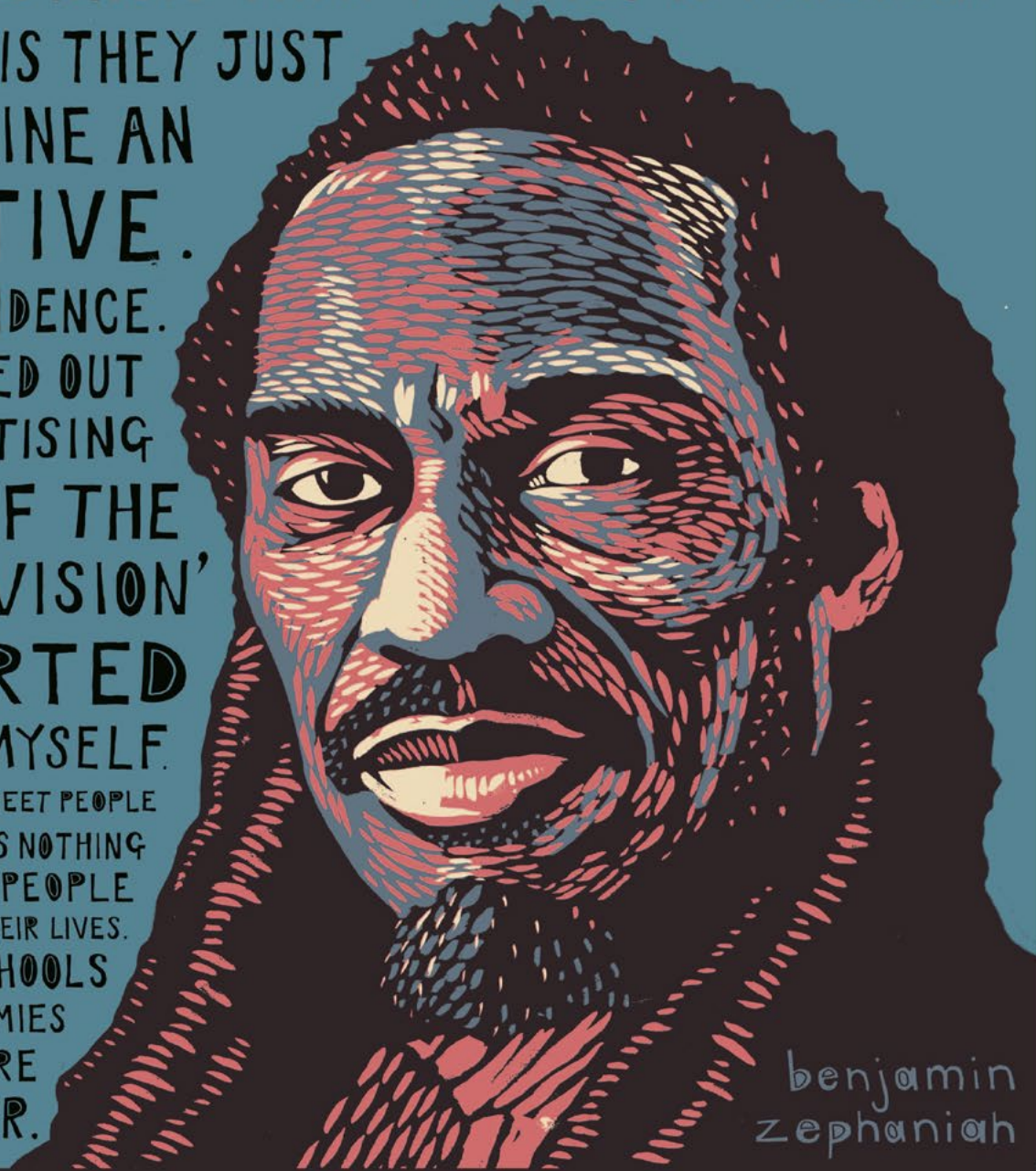


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