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“FIGHT WAR, NOT WARS.
DESTROY POWER, NOT PEOPLE”
—CRASS

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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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P22-23 – Emil Lombardo

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Covers – Randall Harrington
P5 – Black Lodge Press
P7 – Martin O'Neil
P9 – Matthew Frame
P11 – Rebecca Hendin
P12&13 – Rayan Haïdar
P15 – ERRE
P17 – Andrea Zuñiga Delgado

CONTENTS

	4	Supersonic Kez Whelan
	6	All Managers Are Bastards Dan Evams
	8	Reserve Army of Addiction Waithera Sebatindira
	10	Abolish Eton Robert Poole
	12 13	Rayan Haïdar
Liberation	14	Working Class Queers Yvette Taylor
Work	16	Hand Made Shoes Flying Trunk
Prison	18	Unseen Jasmine York
	20	Classifieds
Vendors	23	Vendor Michael – West London

Supersonic

By **Kez Whelan**



This year marks the 20th anniversary of Capsule’s Supersonic Festival, celebrating two decades of championing adventurous, experimental music and art in Digbeth, the industrial heart of Birmingham. It hasn’t been an easy ride, being a female-founded festival in a male-dominated industry, offering up niche, underground line-ups amidst a backdrop of gentrification and underfunded art programmes, but the festival has become one of the most important dates on the UK’s artistic calendar, celebrating diversity both on and off stage, making avant-garde music accessible to all and bringing vitality to some of Birmingham’s most grey, oppressive areas.

After forming Capsule in 1999 to bring some of their favourite artists to the city, Lisa Meyer and Jenny Moore decided to take the leap from gig promotion to festival organisation in 2003. Inspired by both hardcore punk all-dayers at Bradford’s 1 in 12 Club and Barcelona’s electronic festival Sónar, the pair sought to combine their eclectic musical tastes under one roof, with a festival that could house everything from extreme metal to industrial hip-hop, avant-folk to harsh noise, and electronica to psychedelic rock.

Boasting a storied history of ground-breaking metal acts like Black Sabbath, Napalm Death and Godflesh, Birmingham seems like the perfect place for such a pioneering festival – although Lisa says this wasn’t their original reason for choosing the location, the city’s status as the ‘Home of Metal’ must have been in their minds subconsciously. Having worked in Birmingham alongside icons like Justin Broadrick and Nic Bullen since the early 2000s, it wasn’t until American artists like experimental hip-hop godfathers Dälek and Hydra Head main man Aaron Turner played the festival and were visibly thrilled to walk the same streets that their musical heroes did, that the global impact of the city’s experimental scene really hit home.

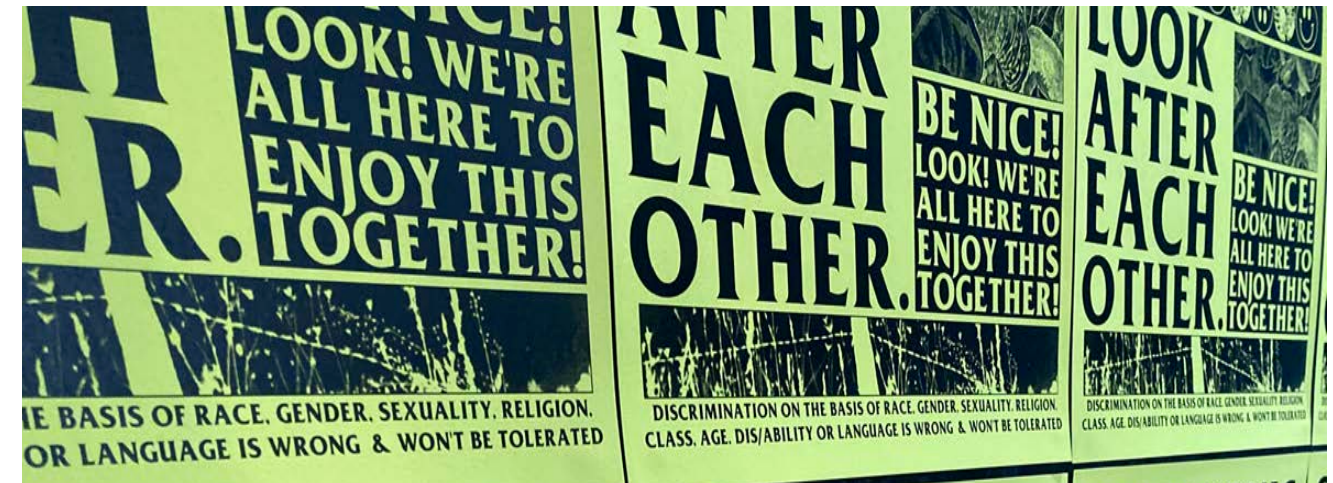
Now, Capsule are a driving force in getting the city to really recognise and cherish its musical heritage, not just with Supersonic but also their Home of Metal project. Whilst cities like Manchester and Liverpool proudly celebrate the impact of their musical exports, Birmingham seems reluctant to embrace its birthing of a genre that shook the world and is loved by millions to this day. Capsule’s continued efforts to erect shrines to metal in the form of exhibitions in Birmingham serve as a gauntlet to the city council, who are still yet to recognise and support Supersonic in the same way that many European music festivals are embraced by their respective cities as vital fountains of culture and joy.

It would be a profound disservice to classify Supersonic as just a metal festival however, as their lovingly curated and wildly eclectic line-ups will attest – more so than any other UK festival, Supersonic really feels like flicking through your best mate’s record collection, bonding over shared

favourites and having your mind blown by fresh new discoveries. While a lot of the music Supersonic covers is often deemed “challenging”, the festival’s refreshingly un-elitist ethos is that experimental music is much more accessible and affirming than it’s given credit for, so long as people actually have access to it, and it’s not hidden away like a bizarre curio or dirty secret. Nowhere is this more apparent than the Supersonic Kid’s Gigs, an ongoing addition to the festival that invites parents to bring their children along for an introduction to experimental music. Witnessing a room full of children gleefully jumping around to the mind-mangling sounds of a band like hyperactive noise legends Melt-Banana is proof that avant-garde music isn’t just the domain of specialised record collectors – it’s for everyone.

The festival’s approach to diversity and inclusiveness runs right through to its core, with both the bands invited and the team behind the stage welcoming people from all walks of life. Although Lisa and Jenny somehow managed to pull off the first edition by themselves (with a strong line-up including dance-punk heroes LCD Soundsystem, industrial legends Coil and a collaboration between The Bug and Warrior Queen), it wasn’t long until they realised they’d need some extra help to grow the festival. Lisa mentions Coil’s set as a turning point – as the duo took the stage above the pond in the Custard Factory, an audience member leapt into the water before getting dangerously close to the host of wires, pedals and other electronic equipment the band had on stage, revealing a hitherto unconsidered health and safety risk. After again doing everything themselves in 2004 (right down to making the food and sewing tote bags), later editions would be backed by a diverse team of volunteers (not to mention a drained pond).

It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to call this network of volunteers that’s sprung up alongside the festival a family, creating a sense of community and fostering numerous friendships in the process. This inclusive ethos is something the festival still admirably adheres to, even in the face of rising costs across the board in the live music industry. This year, for example, the festival is offering a solidarity ticket, an initiative where more well-off customers can pay extra for a ticket, effectively subsidising a free ticket for less advantaged festival-goers, in addition to teaming up with London’s non-profit DIY punk festival Decolonise Fest to give away tickets to punks of colour from low income backgrounds.



Alongside the problems faced by inflation, an increasingly gentrified Digbeth has also posed challenges for the festival in recent years. With a number of themed bars taking over venues in the area, and the Custard Factory eventually closing its doors to the festival in favour of focussing solely on the food and drink industry, Capsule have been forced to reconfigure the location of Supersonic almost every year it has taken place. Whilst the lack of a dedicated, reliable site would be unimaginable for many festivals, it’s just another challenge that Capsule have taken in their stride – in fact, it actually adds to the festival’s unpredictable atmosphere, with each edition having a slightly different feel and flavour.

You can really feel the amount of thought and effort that goes into designing the festival space each year, whether it’s enhancing and highlighting the area’s existing aesthetic or bringing a sense of magic, ritual and whimsy to otherwise barren and run-down locales. This mixture of harsh, industrial reality and magical, surreal otherness sits at the heart of the festival’s sonic identity, so it makes sense to reflect this in its visual identity too.

This combination of inclusive politics, diverse representation, experimental art and unpredictable atmosphere is what has kept Supersonic so fresh and resilient for the last twenty years, and given it a very unique personality amidst other, more generic, UK festivals. This year is no exception, with a line-up boasting old favourites like Godflesh, Deerhoof and Oxbow alongside a host of exciting new acts from across the world, such as Zambian-Canadian rapper Backxwash, Irish avant-folk collective Lankum, Moroccan feminist punk band Taqbir and anti-colonial drone-doom duo Divide And Dissolve. Set against an increasingly fragmented Britain in which the costs of living are soaring and accessible forms of art and culture are consistently pushed out of city centres, the ongoing existence of Supersonic Festival starts to look less like your average music festival and more like a revolutionary act.



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All Managers Are Bastards

By **Dan Evans**

When I used to work for a homelessness charity, all the senior managers and the CEO were very progressive. They were always on twitter schmoozing politicians, championing their love of causes like LGBTQ+ and BLM and how hard they worked to make our workplace #inclusive and #diverse at all times, all while helping the needy.

Fab!

In a society and public sphere where class is no longer talked about, or simply seen as one identity among many, it is now perfectly possible to be a manager and a radical.

The fact that our managers used public funds to pay themselves six figures for tweeting while the frontline and agency workers in the shelters got paid minimum wage to be threatened, deal with overdoses and clean up blood and shit every day; the fact they laid people off at will while sending cheery video updates to us about our ‘bold new direction’; the fact they didn’t allow trade unions to organise their desperate workforce and threatened anyone who mentioned unions – that didn’t matter. They genuinely did think they were the good guys, walking round in a constant haze from huffing their own farts.

Managers are breeding like rats. In the 30s when we still had an industrial society, managers and professionals were in the minority – about 5% of the working population – and were dwarfed by a huge manual working class. Today, following neoliberalism and the transition to services, the opposite is the case: managers and professionals are now the biggest group in the workforce (managers are 13% while professionals are about 20%), while the old working class has shrunk.

This shift was predicted in the 1970s by Barbara and John Ehrenreich, who coined the term the *professional managerial* class (or ‘PMC’) to describe this new technical elite and their ideology, which had come to dominate politics and wider society.

The growth of the PMC undermines the hopelessly simplistic narrative about the class structure that has been adopted by the global left since the 2008 crash: below the global billionaire elite we are essentially all the same, all part of the 99%.

As the last vestiges of this new left – Corbyn, Sanders, Podemos, Syriza – disappear, and as the working class and lower middle classes across the world consistently see what’s on offer and throw their lot in with the far right, maybe it’s finally time we reflected a bit about the class structure and our own place in it.

The problem for those of us who still can’t give up on the idea of building a socialist movement is that the PMC and their ideology have become inextricably linked with ‘the left’ both in terms of the left’s policies and values and how the left acts and behaves. People outside the left understand this very well – indeed it is glaringly obvious – but the left itself has no idea.

If you mention the PMC online, the British left turn into crying wojak. It’s a real mystery why graduates with double barreled surnames get so defensive about the concept.

More serious critics of the PMC thesis point out that there’s a world of difference between directing or managing a company and being a professional like a teacher – *I’m not a manager!* They point to the teachers and academics, social workers and probation officers – the caring, public-sector professions that also make up the bulk of local constituency Labour Party. These professions are degraded, they’re losing money. They’re on strike all the time.

So, aren’t they part of a *new* working class?

The problem is that much of the anger from these white-collar professionals is precisely that they are now moving closer to the working class in terms of pay and conditions. This occasionally surfaces on Twitter – why am I being paid as much as a barista? Ugh! There is always an implicit acceptance of the logic of hierarchy. I shouldn’t be being paid this little, but *they should*. For all the performative radicalism, this is not a group that genuinely wants to tear up class society. This is about securing their old position.

The next issue with the idea that downwardly mobile professionals are part of the working class is that it ignores *function*: these professions largely came into being to manage the working class and to this day their role is still to pacify or train the surplus population on behalf of the state.

Out of this function grows the PMC’s view of the working class, which is a mixture of paternalism and terror. On the one hand they feel compelled to help the poor, but on the other they believe this is because the poor can’t help themselves. They *need* us to sort

their lives out for them because ultimately, they are deficient in certain qualities. This paternalism is the heart of the Fabianism that courses through the Labour Party and the wider ‘radical’ left alike.

But it is a huge problem when you are clearly disgusted by the people you claim to want to help and represent. For all the right on language, this fear of the working-class surfaces time and time again, whether it be over Brexit, immigration, or people breaking COVID regulations. The working class are racist, nativist, authoritarian, intolerant, scary.

To the professional-managerial left everyone must come neatly packaged with ready-made perfect politics, just like we have. Anything else is unacceptable and you are to be dismissed as a deplorable. For those of us who are ‘unpolished’, leftist politics involves being repeatedly scolded like you’re back in school: don’t have a laugh, watch your language, don’t say that, comrade.

As Barbara Ehrenreich put it, it is hard to bring together people who work telling people what to do, and people who do work that other people tell them to do. The people doing the scolding and patronising don’t even know they’re doing it. This is a huge cultural and social dividing line that blocks people from engaging with left activism.

But it’s not just about habitus clash (although for what it’s worth you won’t be able to build a movement while these puritans are in charge). The deeper problem now is that while the left fetishizes the welfare state, most people are sick of being pushed around by the state bureaucracy and its experts. As Colin Ward and Stuart Hall argued, the reason Thatcher’s criticism of the welfare state caught on was because for many people being ‘helped’ consisted of being poked, prodded, and shamed by patronising people who knew better.

Early socialism in the UK was libertarian. The working class built its own institutions and organised itself. Through Labourism, however, ‘socialism’ inexorably became associated with the state bureaucracy and professional-managerial elitism. As Ward put it, “the political left in this country invested all its fund of social inventiveness in the idea of the state, so that its own traditions of self-help and mutual aid were stifled for lack of ideological oxygen.”

The left’s identification with this edifice – and therefore with the PMC – represents a huge issue that cannot be easily overcome. The only way forward is to break with Labourism and wrestle back socialism from the managers.

Dan Evans is the author of *A Nation of Shopkeepers: The Unstoppable Rise of the Petty Bourgeoisie* (Repeater, 2023)



Reserve Army of Addiction

By **Waithera Sebatindira**

Addiction is not an illness that is always readily incorporated into discourses on disability justice. While increasing lip service is paid to its classification as an illness – and therefore as a state of being deserving of a degree of care and compassion – it’s largely viewed as separate from other kinds of chronic illness or disability. Whether this is a lasting remnant of stigma – under which addiction is seen as a lifestyle choice or form of moral degradation – isn’t something that interests me. In fact, the question of whether addiction is a disability is itself not the most interesting one that can be asked about the relationship between addiction and disability.

For starters, disability is a nebulous concept, one that’s been notoriously hard to define. Broadly speaking, there are two models through which most people think about disability. The first is the medical model, which locates disability entirely in impaired bodyminds and seeks to eradicate bodymind differences identified as undesirable. The at best condescending and at worst eugenic consequences of this worldview led to the creation of another model: the social model. This model identifies the problem of disability in social norms and structures that aim to segregate, erase, or even kill disabled people. Other models that draw from the social model have also emerged as theorists and organisers have sought out a definition that offers disabled people the greatest access to dignity and the best strategies for transforming ableist societies.

Yet even if there was one agreed definition of disability that everyone could rally behind, I wouldn’t necessarily argue for addiction’s inclusion within it. But I think the benefit of asking this question is that it allows us to consider what work is done when addiction is explicitly denied the designation of disability.

One place where this happens is the Equality Act 2010. The Act brought together over 100 separate pieces of equality legislation, including the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which made it illegal for the first time for employers to discriminate against disabled people. While this isn’t the only or even the most visible context in which addiction is denied the designation of disability, it raises interesting questions not only about the nature of disability but also the nature of work and society’s beliefs about who is deserving of fundamental rights.

Section 6 of the Act defines disability as a ‘physical or mental impairment’ that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ (lasting 12 months or more) negative effect on

one’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The word ‘impairment’ isn’t given a strict definition. Instead, guidance on the Act states that the word should be given ‘its ordinary meaning’ and examples are provided, including mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression.

Under the Act, certain forms of active addiction clearly fall under the definition of disability. In moderate to severe cases, it is a long-term mental health condition that has a substantial adverse effect on many people’s ability to carry out day-to-day tasks. For this reason, it was explicitly excluded from the definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010 (Disability) Regulations 2010, which states that addiction is to be treated as ‘not amounting to an impairment’. The only exception to this is where the addiction ‘was originally the result of the administration of medically prescribed drugs or other medical treatment’. In this way, people struggling with their substance use are automatically removed from the protection of the Equality Act.

To understand what work is being done here, we have to return to the task of defining disability. The Act adopts a medical model that identifies a bodymind impairment that must be accommodated within the workforce. Under its logic, we can understand that addiction, while having all the signs of a disability, is perhaps not the sort of illness that we want to be accommodated in the workplace. Maybe because of the assumption that people with chaotic drug usage can’t be trusted or won’t make good workers. And again, we see the stigma of addiction as choice in the exclusion that allows people to be protected under the law if their addiction was caused by medical treatment. The clear implication here is that no one would choose to be prescribed addictive medication. It also allows for people in a methadone programme to be protected – probably because it signals another choice, this time one to move away from addiction on the terms of the state.

But in line with the work of organisers to develop a definition of disability that serves to improve the lives of disabled people, rather than justify their exclusion or oppressive treatment, I’d prefer to look at another model. This time that of Marxist writer and civil rights activist Marta Russell, who analysed how disability "is used to classify persons deemed less exploitable or not exploitable by the owning class who control the means of production in a capitalist economy". For example, we tend to be more expensive to hire due to the need for reasonable adjustments and might not be able to work as efficiently as other workers. She explains how the creation of the disabled body, defined in this way by reference to its non-exploitability, facilitates the perpetuation of capitalist oppression.

Under her model, disabled people deemed insufficiently exploitable get relegated to what Marxists have termed the ‘reserve army of unemployed labour’. This is a section of the working class whose labour power is deemed unnecessary for capitalist production for whatever reason and are therefore rendered deliberately unemployed in spite of their need and ability to work. This reserve army contains a range of workers, but disabled people make up a disproportionate part of it. It is necessary to capitalist exploitation because it provides a constant supply of readily available labour that exceeds demand, which weakens the bargaining power of employed workers and enables the owners of capital to employ and dispose of labour according to what’s most profitable for them.

By depriving people struggling with their substance use of employment rights, we become the natural conscripts of this reserve army. Regardless of our ability to work, the moment an employer discovers our addiction, our status as employed workers becomes precarious. Not only do we end up more beholden to their whims, when unemployed we create pressure on employed workers as part of a body of people ready and willing to replace them should they demand too much. This is the product of the fact that under capitalism, and in the absence of a welfare state that offers a life of dignity to its beneficiaries, without work we struggle to eat, house ourselves, or access anything else necessary for basic human flourishing. We along with the rest of the reserve army become pitted against other workers rather than being able to turn our attention to capitalist bosses.

For those people dealing with addiction who cannot work at all, there are prisons and rehabs where we can either be worked for a pittance or profited from. The final alternative is simply social abandonment.

So, it’s clear then in this context how a seemingly common-sense decision to exclude addiction from disability exposes capitalist structures that render workers precarious and pit us against each other in order to distract from the real issues at hand. The response to this shouldn’t be to argue for addiction’s inclusion in a legal definition that forms part of a structure that immiserates us all. Instead, we should use this knowledge to remake society into one in which a person’s ability to live a life of dignity isn’t tied to the exploitability of their labour.

Waithera Sebatindira is the author of *Through an Addict’s Looking Glass* (Harjar Press, 2023)



Abolish Eton

By Robert Poole

When I was young, I firmly believed that the world, or at least the little corner which I lived in, was a meritocracy. The harder I worked the better my outcomes would be. This of course leads to the assumption that anyone who is in poverty is there because of some fault in their character. As I got older, a series of events made me realise that this was not at all the case. Being sneered at by an Oxford Don at a careers fair made me realise that the “top” universities were not for people like me. The constant question of “what school did you go to?” by privately educated people at selection centres made me conclude that certain careers were also barred to people from working class backgrounds.

The next shift in my thinking came when I became a teacher myself. There is an assumption that all teachers are left wing; this is obviously not true but what is true is that being a teacher is a radicalising experience. It is impossible to see the suffering of pupils every day without becoming disenchanted with the concept of the free market and it is hard to accept the concept of meritocracy when you are faced with the effects of poverty on a daily basis. My early career saw me working in some of the most deprived wards in the country, often in buildings that leaked and lacked adequate facilities despite the best efforts of a dedicated workforce.

It was when I had my own children and started to look for schools for them that the inequality in our education system became even clearer. I was told that parental choice meant that I was free to pick a school for my children using exam data and Ofsted results. When I actually started the process, it became clear that this wasn't actually the case. The options in my local area were between a half a dozen faith schools and one non-selective state school, or the local private school. Going off the Ofsted reports and exam results, the state school was the “worst” option, leaving me with a choice: cynically attending the church of a religion I didn't follow or pay.

The argument, therefore, that schooling is a freedom of “choice” was suddenly exposed as being false. This choice is only given to those with the means of paying for a private education for their children. In the words of Billy Bragg, "Freedom is merely privilege extended unless enjoyed by one and all."

As it turns out, we chose the state school, and it was excellent. Maybe not “outstanding” by the flawed methods of reporting used by Ofsted, but my son is excelling there. They have animals on the school grounds, the teachers are nurturing and supportive and academically rigorous. So, I have saved myself thousands of pounds and not had to compromise my morals either.

Private schools often attract the most affluent families, and as a result, their student population is generally more privileged to start with. This, in turn, leads to higher test scores and other measures of academic achievement, which can give the impression that private schools are providing a superior education. The biggest predictor of Ofsted results is parental income, after all.

In reality, however, this is not necessarily the case. When we compare students with similar socioeconomic backgrounds, we often find that there is no significant difference in academic performance between those who attend private schools and those who attend state schools. In fact, some studies have found that state school pupils outperform private school alumni at undergraduate level when both have the same A-levels.

Despite not actually providing a superior education, private schools do seem to confer other opportunities in the form of access to the top jobs. The Sutton Trust found in 2019 that Britain's most powerful people are five times more likely than the general public to have gone to private school. The privately educated infest every corner of public life. Nearly two thirds of Rishi Sunak's Cabinet went to private schools, as did 65% of senior judges, 59% of civil service permanent secretaries and 57% of the House of Lords.

It is not just politics where this 7% of society are vastly overrepresented. The media, sports and business all suffer from the same affliction. Although most of these did not go to Eton, the £45,000 a year boys-only school acted as an effective foil in the campaign to finally integrate private schools. The Abolish Eton campaign came at a time where the UK had seen a succession of Old Etonian prime ministers.

I like to think that our campaign, colloquially known as “Abolish Eton,” played a big part in shifting popular opinion on private schools. As always, the debate

on what is to be done about private schools is split between the camps of reform or revolution. The idea of removing charitable status from these institutions is now pretty mainstream and likely to feature in the next Labour manifesto. This is a positive step in the right direction but unfortunately it will not be enough on its own. This policy will probably see the number of pupils in private schools fall and the number in state schools rise, but it will not deal with their entrenched position in society.

What we need is full integration. King Henry VI founded Eton College for the education of poor boys; now it is the playground of the super-rich, where they are groomed for high office. What we argue for is that what was once public property is returned to this use. The investments and properties held by private schools should be placed into a national educational endowment. These new resources would then be democratically and fairly distributed across the country's educational institutions.

For this reason, we continue our campaign to integrate private schools into the state sector. We hope that we can influence the discourse both within the Labour Party and beyond. We do not want to tear down these grand institutions, rather we want to open them up. Why not open up their doors to everyone? Unless we break up the old boys' network that hoards power and privilege, educational inequality will continue.

Robert Poole is campaign coordinator for Integrate Private Schools (Abolish Eton)

@AbolishEton





Working Class Queers

By Yvette Taylor

I imagine my future at all points as someone who is not fitting in... sometimes structurally that means that the world is not for you.

(Alisha, 39, South Asian, lesbian).

In Working-Class Queers, I explore not-fitting in as a long-term structural condition persisting through cycles of crisis, austerity, and recession. The current cost of living crisis is not new or unfamiliar for those living through the repeated sense that the world – even a supposedly post-equalities, ‘Rainbow Europe’ one – is not for them.

And yet, like Alisha, as a queer-lesbian-working-class-woman-of-colour, hyphenated terms used and substituted throughout our conversation, the people I’ve interviewed over the last 20 years have themselves persisted and pushed back. They’ve mis-fitted and persisted through homelessness, poor housing, unemployment, educational exclusion, workplace discrimination, benefits cuts, pending asylum claims, inadequate health services, and sexism, homophobia and transphobia. But in contrast to misrepresentations of working-class people as failed, hopeless, heroic or homogenous – a romanticised portrayal resting upon post-industrial masculinised straight whiteness – I try to come up with a queerer depiction, and as part of a revitalisation of a feminist queer left politics.

Over the last 20 years, I’ve interviewed more than 250 people. I’ve felt angry, anxious, and exhausted but I’ve also felt energised by the varied voices I’ve heard – including younger-older queers, queers of colour, disabled queers, religious queers and queer parents. Unsurprisingly, interviewees have different experiences of intersectional inequalities, particularly across race and gender, and varied views on what fitting-in might look like, and whether this would ever be possible or even desirable.

To say something about mis-fitting is to invoke my own story. As a young, queer, working-class person, I optimistically hoped for a future, which over the past two decades has been increasingly at odds with and disconnected from mainstream political shifts and, often, from queer or left politics. I’m the beneficiary of a full maintenance grant, enabling entry into and completion of an undergraduate

degree. As a council estate kid, my experience did not ‘fit’ with most of my peers, and I felt the class divide in the classrooms and corridors I moved through. I’ve cycled through different institutions and accrued degrees and capital, and been urged to identify or become ‘middle-class’, a destination that my education and employment seemingly takes me to, but not smoothly or satisfactorily. ‘Where I’m from’ may be somewhere between an infamous Glasgow council estate and the University, but expressions of class complexities often cannot be heard – with accusations of class reductionism frequently appearing. Queer people know that ‘it’s not just about class’, and know that declaration to often be obscuring and disconnecting, rather than a gesture of allyship and solidarity. My investment in working-class queers is an ongoing investment in the data, readings, objects, stories, carried across time and place as I’ve moved across disciplines, institutions, and UK cities.

To be allied and intimate across class and sexuality can be dis-locating: my partner and I are both Scottish; I’m white and she is South Asian. We’ve departed and returned, and Glasgow maps us whether we like it or not. I’m often recognised as being from Glasgow (and from a particular part of Glasgow), while often she is not. She’s told she grew up in the posh ‘West End,’ which wasn’t the posh West End when she was growing up, but a space of white-flight, as white working-class people left in an attempt to retain value by moving away from their South Asian neighbours. Such misfits become the ‘common ground’ that interviewees have shared across time and place. But often common ground becomes weighted as evidence of potential lag and lack.

Interviewed in 2002, in the then thriving ‘gay scene space’ of Manchester, Asifa (29, South Asian, lesbian) stated “I always felt at the bottom of the hierarchy, or that I felt I was being put at the bottom.” Speaking across schooling, family and community settings, as a second generation citizen, Asifa became estranged from her parents and

from middle-class feminist groups who patronised her, assuming that she and her family were backwards, uneducated and inevitably homophobic. Our classed connection to place is complicated, always becoming intersectional questions invoking sexuality, race, gender as sometimes subtle textures, as well as outright exclusion and immobility, including at the border.

I interview Jaslene (37, South East Asian, lesbian) at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Responding to my advertisement, she wondered if she would fit my research expectations or criteria: “Yes, I’m working-class, I’m queer but then I’m not too sure about the British point, because I haven’t been here for quite long enough.” This says something about the category of working-class as typically attached to Britishness and whiteness, and the possibilities of re-imagining it through the lens of a precarious key-worker, such as Jaslene, who’s mobility and survival is predicated on her being useful and of service to the UK population, even as her salary is deliberately depressed and subject to visa restrictions. Physically distant from her family in the Philippines, while still financially responsible for them, Jaslene sought a ‘family of choice’ in a local queer walking group. Like Asifa – and many others – she experienced everyday racism in local LGBTQ+ spaces with group members asking her if she really knew who and what the group was for. Queers of colour are made to not-fit White scene spaces and the Nation itself works similarly, imaging whiteness as part of a homo-nationalist progressive ‘world leading’ LGBT policy agenda, even evident in Scotland’s new ‘civic nationalism’ claims.

To feel on and off policy agendas, stretching from the Conservative’s implementation of Section 28 (1988), which banned the ‘promotion of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship,’ through to their rather cynical the LGBT Action Plan (2018), is often to divest of State-centric reform, and invest in more do-it-yourself initiatives. Interviewed during the height of the pandemic, Lewis (29, white, pansexual, gender queer) stated “my optimism lies in more

peer-to-peer care of looking out for each other... I’m hopeful that some of that can remain.” DIY as stand-in or substitute for welfare is a familiar and necessary strategy for working-class people, long engaged in ‘mutual aid’ before its recognition as a queer practice. Yet often there is a refusal to see working-class communities as agentic or creative, and to rest instead on lazy stereotypes (“They think people in working-class council estates are Brexit crazy unionists, racist, homophobic, there’s no place for us there, there’s no LGBTQ there. Which is just a lie, which is just not true.” – Dan, 36, white, gay, cis man).

For over two decades, I’ve been actively invested in exposing such lies. Queer as a category can speak to material inequalities, and to political hopes, failures and repeated efforts, when it includes and expands understandings of working-class, as already and always intersectional. In doing so, it has the potential to revitalise feminist queer left agendas, against right-wing backlashes, allowing our misfits to be disruptive and collective. If the world is not for you, we can attempt to make another one, shared in our queer-class stories.



Yvette Taylor is an academic and author of Working-Class Queers (Pluto, 2023).

Hand Made Shoes

By Flying Trunk (飛梗)

Once worked at the world's largest shoe manufacturing factory, where it is said that one out of every six pairs of shoes worldwide come from. Whether you're wearing Nike, Adidas, Puma, New Balance, or any branded shoes, there's a possibility that they were produced in this factory.

Sometimes, you may come across certain high-end brands claiming that their products are 'handcrafted.' Ironically, every pair of sneakers or casual shoes from developing countries is indeed handmade. Every stitching, high-frequency heat pressing, sole assembling, and even lacing is done manually. Thus, each pair of shoes is unique and not simply produced by placing materials on a conveyor belt like in cartoons.

Although there are many automated processes in factory production today, including computerised stitching, TPU no-sew, and knitted uppers, designed to reduce labour costs, we are still far from fully automating shoe manufacturing. Why do factories invest so many resources in production automation? Because human involvement introduces various uncertainties. There can be labour shortages, work-related injuries, inconsistent quality, and of course, the issue of worker strikes.

In factories, there can be various reasons that lead local workers to initiate strikes. Labour disputes such as salary adjustments, suspension of overtime (no extra income from overtime), political issues, and even football matches can be grounds for a strike. It's worth mentioning that while hooliganism occurs in British football when the team loses, in Vietnam the excitement of winning a football match can lead to riots or strikes.

In 2018, I encountered my first factory strike at a shoe manufacturing plant. The strike was triggered by political issues related to nationalism. At that time, the Vietnamese government introduced the 'Economic Zone Law' policy, planning to establish three economic zones and provide foreign investors with lease terms of up to 99 years as incentives. Protesters were discontent with the government's extension of lease terms for foreign investors.

They believed that granting foreign investors prolonged land use rights in the economic zones would infringe upon national sovereignty and negatively impact immigration management.

As a result, they gathered in the streets to protest.

What is the relationship between political issues and foreign businesses? Due to the authoritarian nature of government in the region, people are afraid to directly oppose the government. However, they still want to express their patriotism. Therefore, they turn to foreign-owned factories in Vietnam to go on strike, indirectly exerting pressure on the government. This frequently triggers anti-Chinese sentiments, and whether the factories are Taiwanese or Chinese often doesn't matter. The factory I worked at was the largest foreign-owned factory in Ho Chi Minh City. They have several factories distributed around Ho Chi Minh City with a total of 60,000 employees. The main development centre was located in Binh Tan District, designed with a self-sustaining town at its core. The factory had its own hospital, fire brigade, and even trained its own security. Additionally, due to the high electricity consumption, the company had its own water treatment plant and produced its own branded bottled water. Some factories even had their own power plants. The factory is like a small enclave built by foreign investment.

On June 8, 2018, the strike was officially initiated. Early in the morning, several individuals dressed in black distributed pamphlets at the entrances of the factory, calling for everyone to go on strike that day. Inside the factory, approximately half of the employees wore red hats or clothes representing the country, and some wore outfits adorned with stars and national flags. Despite the early morning, work proceeded somewhat normally at first. As protests and demonstrations started in the city, social media began to fill with photos of the protests. My Vietnamese colleagues eagerly showed me a video of protesters setting fire to a rural police station. Meanwhile, our factory continued its production. In contrast, other factories funded by Taiwanese and Chinese companies had already ceased operations. The Chinese and Taiwanese flags at the entrances of those factories were replaced. Compared to the risk of disrupting the production line, the direct loss incurred by a complete shutdown was much smaller.

Our factory is quite large, with multiple sections. In the afternoon, I received a message from another Taiwanese supervisor that the workers in zone A had already started their strike. I enjoyed

teasing the Taiwanese supervisors, claiming that their workers were particularly rebellious. They always seemed to be the first ones to initiate strikes. I even suspected they had a leftist book club.

At the beginning of the strike, their employees started leaving the production lines. It felt strange, as there was no violence involved. It was more like leaving work early. The female workers on the assembly lines began collecting their belongings and stepping away, but they couldn't clock out because they wouldn't receive their wages. As a result, groups of workers started wandering around the factory premises.

Soon after, the factory organised a strike parade. From a distance, we could see the long procession. The first person, dressed in patriotic attire, held a large national flag and led the way. They moved from one factory section to another. Some male employees waved sticks they had found somewhere, breaking fences, pushing open iron gates, and forcefully entering various factory areas. The atmosphere turned violent.

Once they breached a factory section, they randomly struck objects with their sticks, shouting loudly for everyone to stop working and leave the assembly lines to join the strike. Many female workers were frightened by this aggression and stopped their work, but they didn't know what to do. The team leaders of the production lines had no choice but to cut off the power, indicating their compliance with the strike.

In the vast stitching room, female workers wearing their work caps started eating peanuts and snacks from their drawers and began chatting. As time passed, minute by minute, they finally heard the sound of the end-of-shift bell. Only then did the workers begin to clock out. The colour of the twilight sun shone on them, mingling with the rumbling sound of engines from exhaust pipes. One by one, motorcycles lined up and left the parking lot, joining the air pollution and traffic congestion during the rush hour in Ho Chi Minh City.

Flying Trunk (飛梗) is the pseudonym of a garment worker in Vietnam



Unseen

By Jasmine York

It is interesting that you can be monitored 24/7 and still feel unseen.” I wrote this in my diary on my eighth day in prison. Looking back, my reflections on this statement are vast. Unseen in that I was no longer a human being. Instead, I was reduced to a criminal and nothing else, treated as though the universe had made a mistake in ever creating me. Unseen in that the rest of the world had forgotten me and everyone else trapped within these mile high walls and wire. Unseen because my rights and my needs no longer existed. Unseen because any shred of individuality was stripped. I am no longer a person, I’m an outcast. A hindrance to the social order. Poor me, right? Yes, and poor you because if it is true that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link then as a society we are fucked. You think inmates leave prison with a new lease on life ready to give back to the community that abandoned them in the first place? You’re having a laugh.

After spending 10 weeks inside Eastwood Park, I genuinely cannot give an example of any form of rehabilitation that was in place. It’s such a complex thing though, isn’t it? When I imagine rehabilitation, I imagine a rigorous care plan that involves analysing the depths of one’s psyche, fishing out the traumas and finding hope and purpose in your own identity. Another image that comes to mind is one of those sequences from every superhero movie ever: the underdog realises he’s been downtrodden and underestimated his whole life and finally takes matters into his own hands. One of the two, anyway. Both scenarios involve someone being ignored and neglected before everyone suddenly wants to control them.

Many of the people I met inside were failed by the state. I believe governments know this and they use prisons as a discreet way of mopping up their failings while still managing to convince the rest of the world that it’s an individual problem, that the world just has criminals. Why can’t the structures prison alleges to have in place to support criminals exist in society? Ah wait, it’s because the Tory government insists on defunding mental health and social care services. Suddenly defunding the police doesn’t seem like such a radical idea.

I must give HMP some credit as they do have some procedures in place that tackle mental health issues within prisoners. For instance, if you appear to be suicidal or if you’re feeling particularly murderous (both understandable states to be in on the day of your sentencing) then the prison begin a care planning

process known as an ACCT (Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork). This is supposed to involve case management, where the prison dedicates time and effort into ensuring your safety while tackling the root cause of your mental ill health.

Firstly, it’s adorable to assume any prison officer is at all capable of dealing with the complexities of the many mental illnesses that plague prisoners, considering they undergo a measly 10-week training programme after getting the job. Secondly, it’s incredibly naive to assume any prison officer can extend an ounce of empathy to an inmate. It just doesn’t happen. I witnessed seven male officers beat the shit out of a 19-year-old inmate for having a meltdown. They then reprimanded her and used her as an example for the rest of the inmates to fall in line. Officers would routinely ignore calls for help from inmates and would leave elderly prisoners sitting in their own blood and shit as they lose the will to live. People went without food, without sanitary towels, without soap, without being released from their cell – I’m talking 24/7 lock up. That’s torture as far as the European Declaration of Human Rights is concerned, but HMP acts with impunity. Don’t worry though, HMP are always fully stocked on razors and show no concern at how they are used within cells. “Don’t make a mess,” is a quote that echoes in my mind. There have been five deaths at Eastwood Park in the last year. I’ll give you my canteen money if you can guess how they died.

My point is: prisons don’t work. They might create some illusion of safety in society but it’s not long term, is it? It’s slapping a plaster on an earthquake. It’s government ignorance masquerading as justice. Putting a bloke in prison doesn’t confront why men kill women. Putting drug dealers behind bars doesn’t confront unemployment. Remanding youngsters for carrying knives doesn’t confront why kids feel unsafe. Individualising crimes does not confront the systemic issues within our society, nor does it confront the prejudice that lies at the heart of our justice system, because the criminal justice system is not motivated by creating safer, thriving communities – it’s motivated by racism, sexism and classism.

The longer we talk about reform the stronger the foundation for the existence of prison because we’re saying the system is not flawed, as if there is a way for prisons to be fair and humane. This cannot be true when prisons exist solely as a tool for racist, sexist and classist agendas. So, when we focus on the exploits that happen within the prison

system, we are distracted from seeing the system itself as the issue. As much as I prayed for better conditions while incarcerated, the failings of prisons aren’t what need to be addressed and reformed: it is the *existence* of prison that needs to be addressed. I believe there aren’t manageable symptoms of failing prisons; I believe prisons are a symptom of a failing society.

Jasmine York has been an activist for over a decade, with the majority of her efforts going into animal rights and women’s welfare. Last year she was incarcerated for her involvement in the notorious Kill The Bill protests, which took place in Bristol in 2021, where she was brutally attacked by multiple police officers. Since the protests Jasmine has been focusing on supporting vulnerable individuals exploited by the criminal justice system, and since her release from HMP Eastwood Park she has been raising awareness about prison conditions. As an abolitionist, Jasmine is passionate about prisoner rights and restorative justice.



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VENDORS

Name: Michael

Location: West London and Leicester Square



Photos: Emil Lombardo

How did you get involved in selling DOPE Magazine?

Well, I was going to Whitechapel Mission, which is the place where I have breakfast, because I don't have proper cooking facilities where I am. I was a bit pissed off with the inflated price of the Big Issue, so when I saw people selling a new mag, I thought, yeah, I'll give it a go. So I came to Freedom, got a whole bundle, and I was able to sell it – I thought it was pretty good.

What did you like about DOPE magazine?

I did like the art. I did like the fact that it wasn't overly formal. Um, I kind of like the casualness of it, and I do like the captivating covers, the slogans, and all the sort of graphics. I look at it from an art point of view rather than just a lucrative one. So, I appreciate the effort that's gone into the graphics, which are very captivating. It makes customers really interested in the paper, rather than having people buying it because they feel sorry for the vendor. Now with DOPE magazine, people are actually quite interested in taking it and reading it.

How has selling DOPE been useful to you?

You see, people often believe that we sell the magazine because we're inundated by our drugs and alcohol, vices or something like this. No. Right, what I like about it is that I'm a businessman, and I'm learning to be self-employed. And the thing I enjoy about the Big Issue, and about DOPE, is that it allows me to see what it is like to have a marketing sense of a product and being self-employed and not being restrained by all the conventional things that people have to go through in a job. I like the hours. I like the freedom. So my way is selling papers and then trying and doing a bit of art here and there.

Can you tell me more about your paintings?

We used to go to parties in big country places through friends of friends that had houses. And, at one of these parties, I found a little book by Patrick Moore on constellations and it got me into astronomy. So, I bought another book on constellations and started painting from the book. Uh, but now I want to actually go on-site to see the stars I have studied in these books. And I'm going to go "okay, that's that month, that's that part of the world, that's the constellation." I want to take a photo or a film of it, paint the photograph or actually blow the photograph up and then just do a print of the constellations. So, that's the next stage. Well, dreams, I mean, I've always had dreams to do this and the next time I do that and whatever. It just makes my life a bit more interesting.



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