

**maz
murray
and Hava
Carvajal**
*Unionise
All Skills
Influencers,
Reform
and Abolition*



In ‘The Girl Who Was Plugged In’¹, published 1974, James Tiptree Jr. imagines a future where corporations use people plugged in to cyborg bodies as secret brand ambassadors. Secret because, in this future, the government instituted an advertising ban in response to rising anti-capitalist sentiment. Our heroine is disabled, and because of this deemed disposable. After a suicide attempt she is head-hunted by a megacorporation and given the chance to become a god, which she accepts. Her body is wired up to sensors which control a non-disabled, conventionally attractive cyborg, and she works long punishing hours to secretly promote the companies’ products through television shows, press junkets, and gossip mags. All of this is designed so the product placement seems accidental, just another part of the cyborg’s aspirational lifestyle. Only when she sleeps does her mind return to its physical form. She notices that touch doesn’t feel quite so intense in her cyborg body. In short, Tiptree Jr. imagines the influencer, well before popular use of the internet. That Tiptree predicted this turn doesn’t make him² clairvoyant, it simply means he understood the logic of capital enough to understand its conclusion: embodied authentic brand sponsorship with potentially limitless reach. The main difference, as with much speculative fiction, is how small and banal our cyborgs are in comparison to the imaginations of the past. The writer’s dystopia becomes the capitalist’s utopia.

It’s this banality which helps render the boundary of social media so fuzzy. Irl-ity and url-ity are difficult to parse; like that part when Neo can zap the machines *in the real world* and Agent Smith is bopping about in that random guy’s body with that plotline which sort of goes nowhere (we do not endorse the Matrix sequels). This is what gives social media its power. It’s become the arena where much of our social communication happens: our bitching, discoursing, certain public-facing organising, call-outs. Who we follow, who follows us, who we communicate with online, what we like and share, is relevant to our social networks in the real world and has real-world repercussions. It’s an allegedly social space but it is also a workplace: the content we produce will be mined for data whether we can monetise it or not.

The Influencer Industrial Complex

The Influencer economy is a significant source of income for many famous queers/our alleged queer representatives, with corporate money effectively propping up queer ‘culture’ via the backdoor (ahem). There’s the Amazon Prime (oops, sorry Pride)³ sponsored content, the advertorial activists, the self-ful-

1) http://www.f.waseda.jp/sidoli/Tiptree_Girl_Plugged_In.pdf

2) James Tiptree Jr. was the pen-name of Alice Sheldon, it all seems quite trans so we are using ‘he’ here

3) <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/rambling-reporter/amazon-prime-video-host-virtual-pride-festival-pride-inside-1300234>

filling panel discussion circuit, the ‘having conversations industrial complex’⁴. More than that, there’s our language and our way of responding to each other, even when it’s just between me you and GCHQ. The accounts with 400 followers talking like an advert, the feeling of *is this sponsored or not?* Who’s funding this? Is this an op? Are *you* an op? Wait. Am *I* an op⁵?

There’s a cause-and-effect-bait-and-switch happening, a phenomenon analysed by Sarah Schulman in *The Gentrification of the Mind*. In order to contain AIDs era activism, acceptable gay personalities were to be ‘identified and positioned as ‘leaders’, even if they had no grassroots base...kind of like the CIA setting up a puppet government.’ The influencer economy twists already flawed ideas of meritocracy until it’s unclear whether someone had a following because of their success, were successful because they had a following, if they even really *have* a following, or whether it even matters.

On a superficial level it suits both influencer (used here as a category as broad as our definition of trans) and capitalist to pretend their relationship is just an inevitable recognition of greatness rather than a labour exchange. The influencer can sustain a less embarrassing identity (Artist, or maybe #activist), and their presumed authenticity works to the sponsor’s advantage via the aforementioned process (aestheticised #activism⁶). Beneath this, employment practises remain murky: leading to pay gaps, manipulation and exploitation. White influencers appropriate black social media users’ content, black influencers get paid less than white Influencers⁷ who make the aesthetics of blackness less subversive. Influencer economy functions as a bastardisation of service and gig economies, prizing its workers on desirability politics, authenticity and audience. It is by nature an inaccessible form of labour with unstandardised and opaque pay grades, but can seem more accessible than the worlds of art, fashion, music, film, advertising. While many of these industries have become in real terms *more* exclusive - due to public funding cuts and revenue changes, among other things - an overwhelming majority of people now have a smartphone with HD camera, Instagram account and open DMs for brands to hypothetically slide into. But brands do not reach out to ‘content creators’ in a vacuum, nor in a meritocracy. We’ve written before about how trans people are particularly vulnerable to seduction from new virulent forms of capital⁸ but we really didn’t think [redacted clothing brand] would call our bluff.

The Right Lube Sells Out!

We were ‘submitted’ to [redacted clothing brand] by another Instagram account who followed us, which reveals one of the ways this murky influencer economy finds and elevates its chosen influencers. At first we went along with the process for a laugh, doubtful that we’d be picked and thinking we could write something about it. The casting was...*odd*. Suddenly we had to change in and out of clothes in a cold, open warehouse space and explain ourselves to cis people. What is this, *the GIC*? There was a list

4) <https://twitter.com/degendering/status/1264913473571610624?s=20>

5) <https://thenewinquiry.com/enemies-of-the-people/>

6) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aestheticization_of_politics

7) https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/black-influencer-pay-gap_uk_5ef32959c5b6aa825ac96254?utm_campaign=share_twitter&ncid=engmodushpimg00000004

8) <https://www.therightlube.co.uk/gender-capitalism>

of other trans young things on the wall, all of whom had larger followings and modelling experience. We scribbled some bratty anti capitalist words on our form, filled our pockets with (fancy) snacks and went back to Basildon. That evening we got an email saying we'd been picked: £1,250 each, plus expenses. We had no idea if that was a fair wage, but it felt like a lot to us. How come the least famous ones (at the time we had about 1.5k followers) got picked? Because we're not well known we're more 'authentic' and people apparently 'listen to us' (shout out to the cis women who message us asking if they're allowed to use the term 'womxn') - the brand can gain more clout by getting some anticapitalist queers to model their clothing for them by piggybacking off the ethics we claim to hold (and therefore, for the capitalist, to literally represent) even if it's a total contradiction to do so. It may also be because they know that we, as trans people, are usually too precarious to say no or haggle our price.

It would have felt good to do the photoshoot if we believed that our existence was resistance, that representation is radical, and that big evil companies that rely on exploiting workers in the global south⁹ could be reformed by clothing some tr*nnies. We began to understand this liberal ideology as a handy way to mitigate the guilt that might form if this was a primary source of income, while also tricking yourself into believing that progress is not only *happening*, but that **you** are one of its instigators. Is this activism? I pondered, as two styling assistants put my shoes on for me. There was such a cognitive dissonance between our treatment at the shoot and everywhere else I can see how it could make you feel all... **is this TV show my friend?** They paid for a taxi there and back, the gay hairdresser listened to us and the makeup artist affirmed us, the stylists told us we were hot and the photographer was very nice. Reader, we were only misgendered twice! The only way we could've previously thought to make £1k in a day was through sex work, which is much more ideologically sound but isn't half as easy [insert weird problematic sex workers are better than billionaires meme].

We're hardly the first transes to be hired for this kind of work. The diversity lookbook is old hat now, and trans models like April Ashley and Tracey Norman¹⁰ were hugely successful in their time. What's changed since? We are out now. We are serving a different kind of realness: not just our image but our selfhood. Although some would have you believe this makes all the difference, we - among many others¹¹ - would argue that a real-term decline¹¹ in material conditions combined with heightened visibility is the reason our black trans sisters still face such violence. Trans people, along with many other marginalised groups, are purposefully pushed into visible positions with little power: ensuring compliance because of a lack of other options while soothing the cognitive dissonance of capitalist violence to liberals and signalling the other to white supremacists (who don't need to be in a fashion campaign to have power). And, in fact, is being 'out and proud' better than being seen as a glamorous woman? What exactly does one's transness have to do with that, except to let the cis feel like they know what you are, so that they are once again in control of things? Although the cis people running the shoot were perfectly nice, it was clear they saw us as oddities (wow, your skin is so soft Hava!). They were looking for oddities: not to be self-hating on main, but we were by far the least 'passing' trans people out of the options we saw at the casting. If you want clout for your trans inclusion, you need your trans to be *readable* (clocky).

9) <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/05/07/bang-m07.html>

10) <https://www.thecut.com/2015/12/tracey-africa-transgender-model-c-v-r.html>

11) <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/paris-lees-visibility-alone-isnt-enough>

The Influencer as Reformist

The role of the influencer is an inherently reformist one: their purpose is to demonstrate that *you too!* can improve your life within the confines of the system, even (sometimes especially) when radical language and aesthetics are repurposed to further the brand. Walter Benjamin (Jew, maskilim, and Marxist) wrote almost one hundred years ago that fascism seeks to aestheticize politics, to make people feel as if they can express themselves while actually just maintaining the fundamental idea of property and therefore capitalist relations. To ,give these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves...the introduction of aesthetics into political life'. The visual culture of social media, not to get too Adorno and Guy Debord about it, is a well developed system which insures, among other things, that politics doesn't occur inside of it (a categorization that is currently very murky). Our visual identities, alongside the context placed around us by [redacted clothing brand], serve not as our lived and therefore political experience, but rather aesthetics which exist to serve the brand: our clockiness, our queerness, Hava's ethnic ambiguity. If people see us in a clothing ad and then look us up, all our writing and posts become contextualised as the brand's aesthetics. The brand takes our selfhood and applies it to itself, turning us into both commodity and salespeople. We can reformulate Benjamin's concept as 'neoliberalism has introduced aesthetics, alongside the market, into every part of life'. How has this happened, so quickly and without much resistance?

Capitalism, forever pushing for greater ease of information flow to accommodate greater flow of capital and more stable risk management, innovates new fields in communication technology. The printing press created a process of not only spreading written and visual information quickly and cheaply, it also standardised language use and contributed to the loss of geographic dialects. The language of capital could be understood with far greater ease, but also people could imagine themselves as one with all of the nation that spoke, or at least understood, this standardised language. As now a unified mass, there was far less diversity in culture and therefore capital could also more easily take risks. Now, out of the utopian possibilities of the internet, capital has developed and harnessed perhaps the quickest and greatest way to let information flow - social media.

The Algorithm and the App

The arena of the algorithm was designed by capitalists with motives, and its logic is the algorithm: a shadowy, shifting code of capital that dictates which things appear on the top of the newsfeed and pop up in the search.¹² The algorithm is built to maximise profit through advertising by exponentially increasing the amount of time a user spends on the app, foreclosed only by the amount of sleep one can access¹³. Every app developed under capitalism is necessarily engaged with the replication of itself and its algorithmic logic, in which time literally equals money in the purest sense and where our actions and thoughts equate to content. To increase the amount of time is to make engaging content, a quality which is dictated by the hierarchies of Western colonial capitalism.¹⁴ Through trial and error the algorithm aims to make our brain work like the app.

12) <https://www.thenation.com/article/culture/ruha-benjamin-race-after-technology-book-review/>

13) <https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/advice-support/sleep-hub/sleep-matters/blue-light-and-sleep/>

14) <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/sep/08/artificial-intelligence-beauty-contest-doesnt-like-black-people>

A good question to ask is, can anything be done inside the algorithm which is radical or abolitionist? And if our apps are now much of how we engage with each other, online and offline, can we abolish the apps inside our head?

The algorithm, though it can feel like a revolutionary shift in the way capitalism reproduces itself, is simply another process of the neoliberalisation of capital where all our thoughts, actions, and identities can unlock their potential at the marketplace. Influencers are, knowingly or unknowingly, the sales-people who get the messaging out. Like Agents from the Matrix (last reference), strikebreakers, or CIA plants, they can be anyone who uses the app. It is theoretically possible, although **very unlikely**, that anyone with an Instagram account can be an influencer. Therefore, anyone who wants to be an influencer should already act like one so that a brand can notice that they would be a good influencer. The unpaid would-be influencer is on the lookout for ways to co-opt social movements online for reach and clout, and to beat down their opposition which is theoretically anyone else using the app.¹⁵ To make this more confusing, the most effective influencers are ones who do so without detection and with the most commitment and honesty, which can mean the lifestyle influencers of big budget holidays and nice houses but can also mean a use of language and aesthetics borrowed from radical politics. This is, ironically, why we were chosen to be put in an internal PR fashion shoot: because we had no desire to be influencers and so had the potential to be very good ones.

By its nature, capitalism works very hard to stop us from undoing it. Apps keep you turned away from reading, from education, from deep thinking, from radical possibilities, from organising something meaningful, even when it claims the opposite. What it wants is your time and passivity. The longer you spend on influencer's pages looking at posts about reading lists in their bio the less you spend reading, especially if you can hit share and feel like you've done the reading anyway¹⁶. The more your posts consist of information-sharing over aesthetic, the less reach you get. Whiteness is prioritised - Instagram has grudgingly acknowledged, in vague terms, that its Explore function has an algorithmic bias against black and dark-skinned users¹⁷; TikTok's algorithm is known to have created a form of digital segregation¹⁸. Sex workers who use Instagram to build a platform for their services and promote sex worker activism (such as calls for decriminalisation) get shadow-banned, while sex worker *aesthetics* are sanitised by influencers who flog luxury sex toys and promote club nights.

15) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panopticon>

16) <https://www.vulture.com/2020/06/anti-racist-reading-lists-what-are-they-for.html>

17) <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/instagram-black-lives-matter-racism-harassment-bias-algorithm-a9567946.html>

18) <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/tiktok-filter-bubbles>



Recently 'Stoosh'¹⁹ and 'This is Woke'²⁰, two faux youth oriented media companies adopting patois and African-American slang to push a female empowerment-lite agenda, were revealed to be part of the UK government's controversial (read: racist, islamophobic) Prevent policy²¹. Influencers hired to post for the initiative weren't told about the Home Office's involvement in the site, and speak of an unpleasant cult-like and paranoid atmosphere at work. Both sites were clunky and gained views but no real engagement (hardly any likes, not a great deal of followers). These government funded pages shatter the idea of algorithmic meritocracy where likes and follows equal currency. It would be easy to write off this straightforward op as a failure, but its power was not in becoming a successful version of the things they imitated but in inundating people with information. It achieves its goal by muddying the superfast flow of information, by sowing confusion in the ever-changing online discourse, by chipping away at radical movements using the aesthetic of radical movements, slipping in behind your thoughts until you just sort of agree with it anyway²². To quote Benjamin quoting someone else, "I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images."²³ - by the moving flow of information.

The real power of this economic framework is not in buying individual loyalty, (very inefficient!) it's in reinforcing a context of aspiration, assimilation, competition and exceptionalism (where 'Excellence' is just another word for supremacy) which will encourage a conscious or unconscious reproduction of the languages and behaviours of those who get paid. The entire creation of the nation state, and of race, shows that people tend to be more loyal to a cause that has deemed them special, than a cause which merely sends them a paycheck.²⁴ What other form could compete with this relentless machine for attention capture and wealth extraction?

The Influencer VS Media Jobs

On a material level the influencer economy has rerouted the flow of capital from traditional modes of advertising, such as print and online media, into apps²⁵, a process which has only been exacerbated

- 19) <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uk-prevent-stoosh-bame-women-instagram-influencers>
- 20) <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/revealed-woke-media-outfit-thats-actually-uk-counterterrorism-programme>
- 21) <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/sep/23/prevent-counter-terrorism-strategy-schools-demonising-muslim-children>
- 22) <https://onezero.medium.com/our-ability-to-process-information-is-reaching-a-critical-limit-3c761fee3259>
- 23) <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>
- 24) Cheryl I. Harris, *Whiteness as Property*, Harvard Law Review, Vol. 106, 1993
- 25) <https://www.digitalinformationworld.com/2018/07/how-social-media-changed-the-ad-game-infographic.html>

by COVID. So many people stuck indoors and online created an advertiser's market. As companies went into hibernation, they withdrew the advertising funding that kept most publications afloat. The impact was not unbiased - The Outline folded²⁶ and many journalists were fired²⁷, among them trans and POC writers of the broad left. Companies are less likely to throw cash at even the most moderate opposition during such a time of crisis, so only traditional, conservative and establishment right media seems safe (whatever its purported identity - looking at you 'the guardian'). Media reverts to its basest purpose: a misdirection machine acting on behalf of the ruling class.

As trust in traditional media has fallen²⁸ - not something we're going to lose any sleep over - influencers have stepped up. Influencers have collapsed a boundary between advert and editorial that it was perhaps naive to imagine ever existed. They take the filler from the advertisement wrapping and pulp it all together so effectively they had journalists playing catch up.²⁹ While researching this piece, we found dozens of articles from business websites that basically amounted to: *The Influencer Economy: It seems like a Huge, Unsustainable Bubble! Will it Burst? No, of course not!*³⁰ Something to file alongside *Print Media - is it dying? Nope!* and *Subprime mortgages are GOOD, actually!* While never admitting that influencer economies are unsustainable, really just a character of any capitalist economy anyway so who cares, these articles did forecast a return to 'micro-influencers' and that the big excesses of the influencer golden age were over: no more free holidays or expensive designer swag³¹ ([redacted clothing brand] *said* they'd send us stuff but they didn't!). Influencers would have to do more to prove their worth: guarantee a committed, loyal audience and be tied in to longer term brand relationships where their lifestyle (labour) and online presence (product) could not conflict with the values of the sponsor (employer). An unspoken truth lurks behind the frugality: big companies are getting nervous to flog their wares via idealised avatars that constantly flaunt their wealth and excess during what's forecast to be one of the biggest economic crashes since the Great Depression.³²

Just a few months later influencers were hiding their perceived wealth (inflated or not) behind black squares as their employers - sportswear and luxury brands - were looted.

Blackout Tuesday

The pandemic had, unpredicted by financiers, made social media go quiet. When people did post it wasn't so aspirational or concerned with micro-identities. Then the Black Lives Matter protests started, and our socials were flooded with images and videos of protests, discussions on the merits of looting, on abolition of the carceral state, of revolution. It became quite apparent that influencers were totally unequipped to provide the knowledge and education befitting such a radical uprising. Celebrities, who

26) <https://www.niemanlab.org/2020/04/the-outline-an-attempt-to-build-a-bolder-kind-of-news-site-appears-to-have-met-its-end/>

27) <https://twitter.com/viceunion/status/1261299357514633224?lang=en>

28) <https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/uk-news/2020/06/16/public-trust-in-media-plummets-in-uk-with-just-28-trusting-most-news-research/>

29) <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2019/oct/20/caroline-calloway-writers-journalists-social-media-influencers>

30) <https://www.sideqik.com/influencer-marketing/influencer-marketing-bubble>

31) <https://www.wired.com/story/influencer-economy-hurtles-first-recession/>

32) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52236936>

had already taken a hit at the start of the pandemic, were met with cries of ‘open your purse’ and ‘this you?’³³ Influencers with large followings, perceived skills and grifters, received similar treatment. As well as signalling a deepening frustration with platitude and performance over material demands, this was a rejection of the politics of aspiration - what’s the point of stifling one’s politics in the hopes of making it in yet another arena where only those at the top truly benefit?

Influencers are in an unstable situation: they don’t want to bite the hand that feeds them because of the instability of their labour (if we are generous) but they need to at least *appear* like less of a neoliberal sleeper agent in order to retain their status as one - as a liberal reformist container of the revolution as potentially effective as white supremacist street gangs (& probably cheaper too!)

The media blackout that was ‘Blackout tuesday’ was a perfect articulation of this tactic³⁴. It hardly matters whether the trend was ‘manufactured’ or not, it was certainly algorithmically generated which amounts to the same thing. Its origins in the music industry³⁵ allowed celebrities to jump on the bandwagon, then celeb wannabes and influencers, then brands. The lack of effort involved made it easy for (white and non black) people to join in and feel a sense of accomplishment, a comforting distancing technique. A compulsion to be involved, or to not be seen to have missed the memo or got it wrong, moved some to post for the first time in weeks. The politics of an international movement, in some places a full blown uprising, reduced to leaving empty space for black people’s ‘content’ allowed a lot of messy individualistic politics to slip back into the ‘discourse’, allowed for ‘discourse’ itself to reappear and draw people in to discussion over the merits of posting/not posting rather than the issue at hand.

every company
right now:



It’s easy for companies to *say* black lives matter, because black lives *do* matter to them: as products, property and as labourers. Capitalism isn’t an old white man who ‘hates’ black people or trans people or poor people, someone who can be brought in line with the right diversity and inclusion policies, or by reading ‘White Fragility’.

33) https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/v7gdvm/this-you-black-twitter-receipts

34) <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/blackout-tuesday-instagram-square-george-floyd-protests-a9547181.html>

35) Blackout Tuesday started as the initiative #TheShowMustBePaused created by music executives Brianna Agyemang and Jamila Thomas, Senior Director of Marketing at Atlantic Records

The flood of black squares made for a depressing sight, but people's instant calling out of this op-like tactic felt saw a real shift from a begrudging acceptance of performative, representational, reformist and 'woke-washing'³⁶ neoliberal politics, into something exciting.

The micro-influencer is an attempt to undercut this mood, to regrow a sense of trust and authenticity in the influencer that's fast evaporating as ideologies of abolition become acknowledged in a wide public discourse, ideas which exist outside of the realm of the influencer or the imagination of the algorithm. This is how, in hindsight, we see the context behind [redacted clothing brand] reaching out to us just before lockdown with an offer we couldn't refuse.

Unionise All Skills!

You can never really clock off if your life, world view and liberation is your job. The good thing is, it literally can't be. Our jobs can never be radical and, crucially, *they don't have to be*: whether it's working for a non profit or advertising tummy tea. This should not be a surprise, and it certainly isn't to anyone who has been doing the essential work of cleaning, caring and serving during this pandemic. Such workers have been similarly branded as individual 'heros' rather than workers, a meaningless platitude which neither gives them the PPE they need, the agency they deserve or enough money to live on. The continued collapse between work/life/identity has drawn focus away from actual labour politics, towards an individualistic understanding where the 'progressive' nature of one's work disguises the exploitation *innate* in capitalist labour - all the more insidious given the poor treatment of many charity sector workers³⁷. This neoliberalising of labour politics is also a very sneaky way to make people feel less inclined to do 'the work' which can often be difficult, long term, without instant gratification and rarely with financial reward. Salaries, business ventures and charities are not the same as reparations, tithing, redistribution and mutual aid. Being the diversity in a lookbook is not radical - smashing the brand's store is radical. We took their cheque, but it's not going to stop us smashing their store when the time comes. Until then we have no delusions of radicality about the labour we exchange for money, and neither should anyone else.

The opposite end of the 'me getting paid is radical' ethos is that getting paid automatically makes you an op, which is quite - dare I say it - binary. It also only suits the system to view labour this way, and to view each other with such suspicion. Whether it's far-right trolls propagating anti-semitic tropes by accusing the Minnesota Freedom Fund of stealing donations because they were unable to redistribute \$30 million within 2 weeks, or twitter users demanding a list of names of BLM 'leaders' when such leaders have been targeted, harassed and doxxed in the UK and disappeared and most likely killed by the state in the US. Companies can see these trends and use them to their advantage: twitter recently verified several black writers, among them radical abolitionists whose 'blue tick' can serve as a tool to both discredit (the blue tick gives a certain image of legitimacy and authority) and monitor.

36) <https://www.marketingdive.com/news/the-year-of-woke-washing-how-tone-deaf-activism-risks-eroding-brands/557606/>

37) <http://classonline.org.uk/blog/item/charity-workers-facing-rising-stress>

End Celeb-ification

Just like the tendency to build up and tear down celebrities, the need to deify and then be disappointed by algorithmically generated public figures must be abandoned. The system only benefits from badjacketing³⁸ without investigating the material conditions behind our actions, the conditions which make people seem op-like and op-adjacent. We could quickly fall into a politics of envy, but there's no time to entertain this if we are to work together for a society which gives us so much more than an influencing gig could ever offer. If an actor/influencer/shill shows up to the march wearing a great outfit and chatting shit, so what? Such people exist only as long as they are afforded attention, and meanwhile the cops are *right there*. We must have confidence that an alternative can be built which far surpasses their platitudes and empty promises. It's a continuation of bemoaning 'cancel culture' as if it's the same as the prison system when, again, prisons are *right there*. It would be handy if there was a clear cut way to tell who might be an op (beyond literally being a cop) just as it would be handy if there was a clear cut way to tell who might be an abuser. The abolitionist politics which many of us are now coming to presents a challenge to such black and white thinking, urges us to interrogate how the capacity for wrongdoing is something which capitalism breeds in all of us and must be consciously fought as part of a wider struggle.

Whiteness is the Original Op

White queers, particularly white middle and upper class queers, should be asking as we call for no cops at pride why the cops want to be there in the first place, why the home office wants to be there, why the banks want to be there, and which faggots invited them? We (Maz, and maybe you!) are not ignorant in our complicity - we *know* we are white. The existence of whiteness is the existence of racism³⁹. We need not just acknowledge our whiteness - this is a performance - we need to abolish whiteness⁴⁰. It's in an indictment of the whiteness of trans politics, something achieved through purposeful gentrification and homonationalism, that we face a potential criminalization of our existence and attacks from increasingly alt-right 'gender criticals' after years of hyper-focus on assimilatory rights and certificates championed by charities run by cops and cis people. The way prisons, social services, schools and the medical establishment impact trans people would be much better understood if more of us had a working understanding of the way these systems oppress black people, that these systems are built on exclusion and mistreatment and cannot be fixed *at all*, let alone by asking nicely. If we are doing it right, at a certain point the brands and the cops and the liberals and the managerial classes will not *want* to (officially) be there⁴¹, which is the point we reach by going beyond 'anti', because even big companies who do photoshoots can absorb anti-capitalist sentiment at this point. To be anti-capitalist is also to build something else, (whether anarchist or communist, we can work it out at the revolution pretty please) which is what people excluded from state protection have already been doing⁴² behind

38) <https://libcom.org/library/no-badjacketing-state-wants-kill-us-lets-not-cooperate>

39) <https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2020/june/abolish-whiteness>

40) [https://libcom.org/files/Race%20Traitor%2001%20\(1993%20Winter\).pdf](https://libcom.org/files/Race%20Traitor%2001%20(1993%20Winter).pdf)

41) "It's not going to happen on its own, it's not going to be taken up by the capitalist corporations and presented as something that is both profitable and something that is pleasurable to masses of people." – Angela Davis

42) <https://gal-dem.com/weve-been-organising-like-this-since-day-why-we-must-remember-the-black-roots-of-mutual-aid-groups/>

the scenes, the real version of what people have so cynically fetishised and aestheticised beyond meaning. It's a comfort to think someone else is doing the work, but this is not the case with influencers and those adjacent. Deny false leaders their power, look to your own community (not as it's imagined through corporate language). Noone is coming to save us.

The Revolution Will Not Be Sponsored

Respectability politics and the stifled, sealed imagination of the algorithm want us to believe that another world is not possible, that we should only ever look inwards and make the best of what we've got. It wants us to believe that abolishing prisons is 'ridiculous', as if the continued expansion of the prison industrial complex is not really the thing which beggars belief. As long as prisons exist, they will be filled. More will be built and more people will be put in them. What can be measured will be managed. Life is increasingly illegal. 'Prison is the emptying out of safety, of imagination, love, desire and everything that makes life outside bearable.'⁴³ and isn't this a similar stripping down process those of us privileged enough to be outside have witnessed over the last 10 years? As long as prisons exist, they will be the model for everything else in life, not least gender. Every moment of our life will be accounted for and managed and monetised. That is, unless we refuse a logic which pushes us to compete, to assimilate, to aspire, to snitch and scab at the expense of those further down the ladder. There are already people doing this, the unsexy work of solidarity and struggle, and there is a global movement for black lives happening which cannot be contained by capitalists and their reformist, grifter lackeys. Online discourse keeps people reactive and gives the impression things are moving quickly and becoming strange, but our needs and our demands have barely changed. The window dressing may have, but the fight is the same. It's a fight that's been happening for 400 years, let us not get distracted.

43) [Criminal Queers](#) password: loverevolution

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Making social space for trans people.**