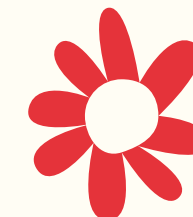


# AFFIRMATION

moving beyond pain to an ethics of joy

Lou Mycroft

@loumycroft



AN AFFIRMATIVE PRACTICE



**The working class is the home of those  
who constantly commit acts of  
solidarity within their class and against  
the systems that seek to divide us**

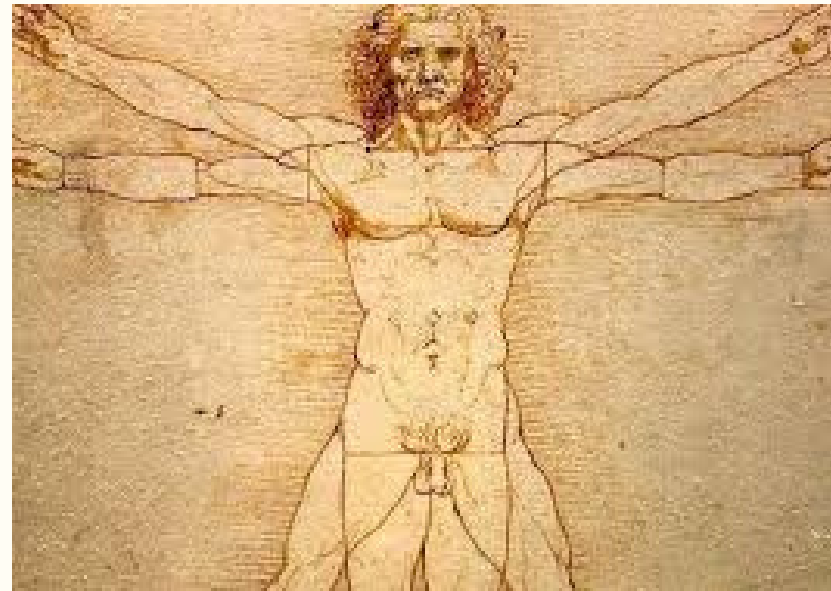


D.Hunter



@loumycroft

# UN-VITRUVIAN



## **a lived experience**

of being disowned by society in some way

## **the impact of a lived experience**

on how you view your place in society

@loumycroft

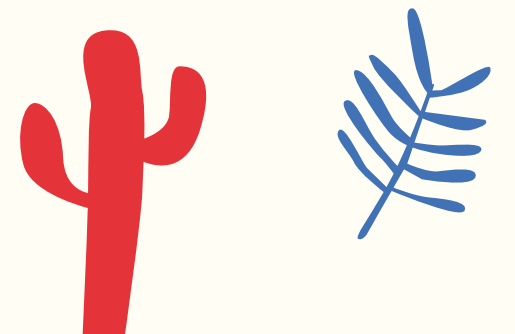
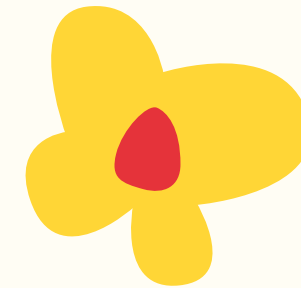


# INTERSECTIONALITY

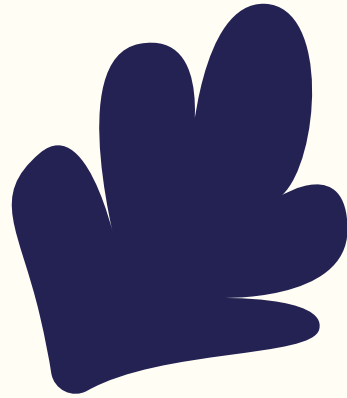
**Suriya Nayak and Rachel Roberts**

Intersectionality reveals the motivation and necessity for the divide and rule strategy

@loumycroft







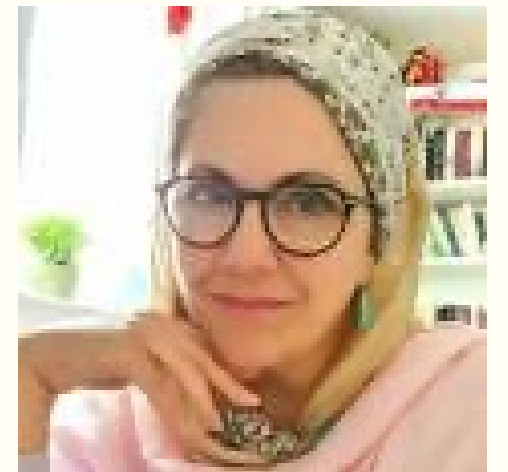
# FURTHER EDUCATION

**Rania Hafez**

Further education is a working class service. Why don't we talk about that?



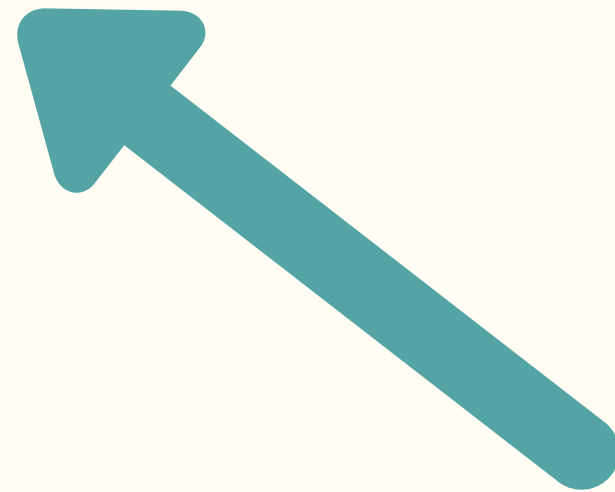
@loumycroft



# JOYFUL MILITANCY

carla bergman

Colonialism does not spark joy



read this book

@loumycroft







@loumycroft

# NOMADIC LIFE

**Fred Moten and Stefano Harney**

She wants to be in the world, in the world  
with others and making the world anew.

# ALL ABOUT LOVE

**bell hooks**

Love is an act of will, both an intention and an action

@loumycroft







# #JOYFE

**Ivan Illich**

Friendship is the soil from which a  
new politics will emerge



# BELONGING

**Arundhati Roy**

There is no such thing as the voiceless, only  
the deliberately silenced, or the preferably  
unheard

@loumycroft



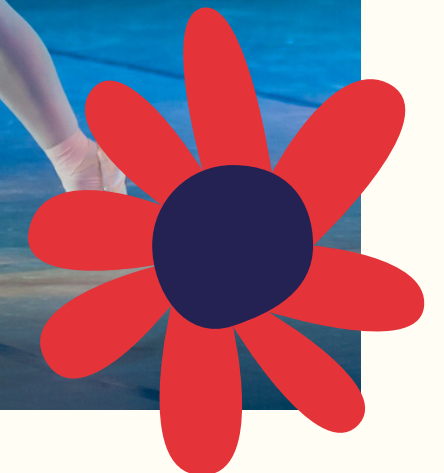


# JOY AS A PRACTICE

**a way of being in the world**

- cultivate friendships
- reject binaries and divisions
- amplify unheard voices
- create spaces to think and belong
- diversify your reading
- teach hope

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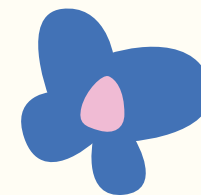




# THINKING SPACES



#JoyFE



#IdeasRoom



#SolidaritySpace

@loumycroft

# Affirmation

## getting beyond places of pain to an ethics of joy

Working Class Academics Conference 14th and 15th July 2020

Lou Mycroft

Since this conference was announced six months ago, I've been on a journey inside myself and back out again. So I want to start off with a big thanks for even the idea of the next two days. Also, you've probably noticed already that my slides and me are not aligned. This is deliberate - I find it freeing! So the slides will rotate and I'll talk and you, hopefully, will let your thoughts go wherever they need.

Like many people here, I didn't know that I was working-class until I went into an environment where people treated me as though I was less important than them, on the basis of where I came from. On the contrary, I'd been accustomed to seeing myself as fairly privileged because, although my dad - a plumber, a real grafter - was permanently out of legitimate work by the time I went to uni, we didn't live in the kind of abject poverty I often saw around me in early 80s South Yorkshire.

I failed my honours degree and that crushed my aspirations for the next ten years. It wasn't until I had my son Fraser - who is speaking in the first session tomorrow! - that I started to believe I could have some influence on the world.

This presentation isn't about me, and at the same time it's inevitably about the way my life has coloured the work I do.

I work in further education and further education is a working class service, as my friend Rania Hafez says. We don't talk about that. We don't talk about the fact that black, brown and white working class people make up the bulk of our students, many of our teachers and hardly any of our leaders. And we treat them - staff and students - like battery hens. Which, when you think about it, is a fine preparation for a life working like a battery hen in places like the Amazon warehouse because, after all, as the education

secretary Gavin Williamson said only last week, the main purpose of education is to get you a job.

I've educated myself out of having a job. Like my dad in the early 80s, I've found that the only way I can be myself is by working for myself, though I have to say that I do - eventually - pay my taxes. I both jumped and was pushed from my 20 year career in an FE college - jumped because I liberated myself through European philosophy - more of that in a moment - and was pushed because, eventually, I was just too much myself by which I mean that I wasn't content just to be working class, letting middle-class colleagues leapfrog over me with my own ideas, I had started to talk about it too.

Have you found this in public service, in academia? It's OK to be working class as long as you don't talk about it? Cos it's cool to be around

I want to talk with you today about how doing a PhD has liberated me to think differently about what FE can be. I'm studying with Huddersfield, where it's OK to be working class though I do have to say it's a bit more awkward to be a working-class person who rejects Marxism in the course of learning how to think. My frame is posthumanism, and even as I tell you that the genealogy of posthumanism comes from the Enlightenment Dutch philosopher Spinoza via Deleuze and Guattari and Paris 1968 I feel a complete dick. You can take the girl out of Mexborough! But posthumanism allows me to lift up the huge crinoline of social construct we labour under and take a glimpse of what's really there - humans and the non-human world that's all around us.

Don't worry, I'm not going all, 'All Lives Matter' because it's very clear some lives matter more than others. At the core of posthuman thinking is Vitruvian Man, elevated in Enlightenment times to become the 'perfect' human, the David Beckham of his day. This is the biggest crinoline of all, that concept of 'human', internalised as it is in us all. Vitruvian Man formed the theoretical base for colonialism, for the othering of any one of us who isn't as white, as male, as 'whole' (I put apostrophes round that), as privileged as he is. 250 years later, the philosopher Simone Bignall wrote that the further away we are from Vitruvian man, the nearer we are to death in this global Anthropocene, this time when humans have done so much damage that the Earth will never recover.

We like to think that education can transform lives and there's enough truth in that to make the exception seem the rule. Where I used to work there was a culture of gratitude which obscured how many people actually slipped through the net and much of FE is the same. But education can't make you more white, more male, more straight - and nor should it of course. So, in the world we live in, it can't make enough of us more equal, for it to make a difference.



What the Enlightenment set up - what Descartes set up - was a *monument* that holds us all in thrall and that's the monument of the *binary*. FFS, it's even how computers work. Our challenge is not just to end the struggles of inequality - but the structures that cause those struggles and our wholesale acceptance of binaries is one of those structures, if not the fundamental one.

Ourselves vs 'other'

Mind vs body

Man vs woman

Black vs white

Straight vs queer

Middle class vs working class

When I take up my posthuman lens I've got half a chance of seeing past those binaries - that monument and the documents that support it, documents like:

What I choose to wear

What I choose to eat

What I choose to drink

What I choose to do with my free time

I want to be very clear that I am not less working-class because I enjoy an avocado salad with my glass of red wine. I am working class because that has been the experience of my life, an experience which still shapes how I think and act.

The documents which exclude me, despite my privilege as a white person:

My accent

Where I grew up

Where I went to school

What middle-class people think working class people are like

Where I live now etc etc etc

I am working class because, as D.Hunter says, I "constantly commit acts of solidarity with my class and against the systems that seek to divide us". And that's the heart of it for me:

I am working-class by experience and as a practice.

That's why the people who give me grief on Twitter for how 'unhelpful' it is to mention class, even if our grandparents, our parents or even ourselves shared a working-class experience growing up, can't shift me from my path. They choose not to practice working-class solidarity any more. I choose to build my career around it.

Since 2017 I have been a nomad, which is a pure Deleuzian concept (again, I'm sounding like a dick). As a nomad, I work for myself on various projects, never completely alone and always with a constellation of others - constellations which are time-bound, coming together as we do around shared ideas and energy for the life of the project. Not a team By not being employed, I'm not 'owned' and I can walk away - and have walked away - if the work diverges from my values. I make my decisions based on a personal, affirmative ethics which is very live in me and which I revisit at least daily. Sometimes I get paid, sometimes I don't, it's cool, there is enough. I swerve any attempts to territorialise me and I won't be infantilised, no line management for me. These lines of flight are freeing up the best work I've ever done.

And I came to all of this through doing my PhD, because before that, as a working class person (even a bolshie one), I'd been conditioned not to think, or at least not to think for myself. By the left, as well as the controlling hegemony of the right.

The value that most drives me is joy - Spinoza's notion of joy which is relational, all about the connections between people, the energy that comes from that. Joy as a practice. Working class solidarity as a practice. What a combination! Absolutely what we need in the world.

Anyway, as this joyful nomad anarchist I get to talk to loads of people across the whole of FE and I have come to realise that the work I am doing - with others - is to open up spaces where ideas can flourish - where people can flourish. Spaces which always begin with the humanising, "how are you?" not the siloed crinoline of "who are you?" As my friend Stef Wilkinson says, I am asking, "What matters to YOU?"

Lockdown has accelerated the work and we have a real moment now to change the culture of FE so that the nonsense of othering, of disowning, of infantilising, of patronising, is transformed. We've got a moment because we have learned how to do this and we've got a moment because there's going to be the money to do it - if we can make the case powerfully enough for an affirmatively joyful way of working, that money might create some space, rather than continuing the "misery of academia" as Moten and Harney call it.

Three examples of what is changing FE:

1. Ideas Rooms, facilitated in a #ThinkingEnvironment, a practice of equality, where role, rank and ego are left at the door and individuals are empowered to think for themselves whilst remaining fully present as themselves, in all their identities so it's genuinely intersectional work. If your mind has drifted to unicorns and rainbows - STOP. This is a disciplined practice, which is why the power people resent it. The ideas generated here are already shifting stubborn cultures across FE.
2. #JoyFE □ a constellation of educators who have come together since lockdown to re-make a joyful education; a broadcast, a magazine, a podcast series, a manifesto, a message, a movement. A new leadership. Funnily enough, we are all women...I'll just leave that there.
3. Solidarity Thinking Spaces (#SolidaritySpace), a lifeline. A bi-weekly space, facilitated in a #ThinkingEnvironment which is determined to create a new narrative, and which is also just a place for working class people to be.

This last adventure challenged my posthuman thinking, as do middle-class people on my timeline just about every day. If I'm all about changing culture through affirmative politics, turning anger into joy, why is it helpful to stay in those places of pain? I felt driven to open up the first Solidarity Thinking Space because someone I loved was in pain; I was driven by feelings and intuition ("How are you?" "What matters to you?") rather than philosophy on this occasion but the thinking has followed. Every one of these sessions ends up in a more affirmative, a more activist space than it began so knock yourself out, haters. As long as working class people - in any community, across any intersection - are hurting because of how they are treated by The Man (the monument), we'll keep opening up these spaces to find one another. We'll keep practising working class solidarity. We'll keep practising joy. We'll channel that anger into joyful militancy and we'll change the working class service of FE and so much more besides.



