



Subjects of Disablement

Disability Politics 101 + the analytical usefulness of 'subjects of disablement' via class composition theory

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About the project

Interviews (f2f & online), diaries (analogue & online) & post-diary interviews (online) with:

- gig economy workers in various industries & contracts;
- self-identification: disabled, chronically ill; experiencing mental distress, being neurodivergent, and/or having impairments.

RQs related to (1) identity, (2) empirical findings re. navigating waged & unwaged work, (3) the benefits of synthesising different theories.

Contributions mostly aimed at Critical Political Economy, Disabled People's Organisations & anticapitalist activist spaces (+Disability Studies & other related fields).

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Diaries & participant packs





Identity: *its changing meaning*

Marie Moran's 'cultural materialism' (using the work of Raymond Williams)

'Identity' = historically contingent concept; it has undergone a 'significant change of meaning' since the 1950s (Moran 2015:22) within the 'changing social reality' of Western societies (27).

- in 16th Century – marker of sameness and indivisibility of a person – i.e. despite changes in one's life, one continues to remain oneself;
- two centuries later – the 'legal' use of identity (which still persists) with the invention of identity cards; 'identity theft' started to be a practice;
- from mid-20thC – a historically novel and dual understanding of identity – personal identity and social identity (2015; 2018; 2020).

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'Models' of (approaches to) disability

e.g. the medical, liberal, postmodern, social, bio-psycho-social, posthuman, charity, tragedy etc models of disability

BUT – the main distinction:

- individual model (sees 'problems' within individuals' bodyminds)
- social model (emerged from a -broadly socialist-activist group in the 1970s - UPIAS*; the 'problem' lies in how society is organised); society **disables people with impairments**. However, the social model's language has been appropriated over time (inc. by the DWP & liberal academics); 'disabled' is a political, social identity.

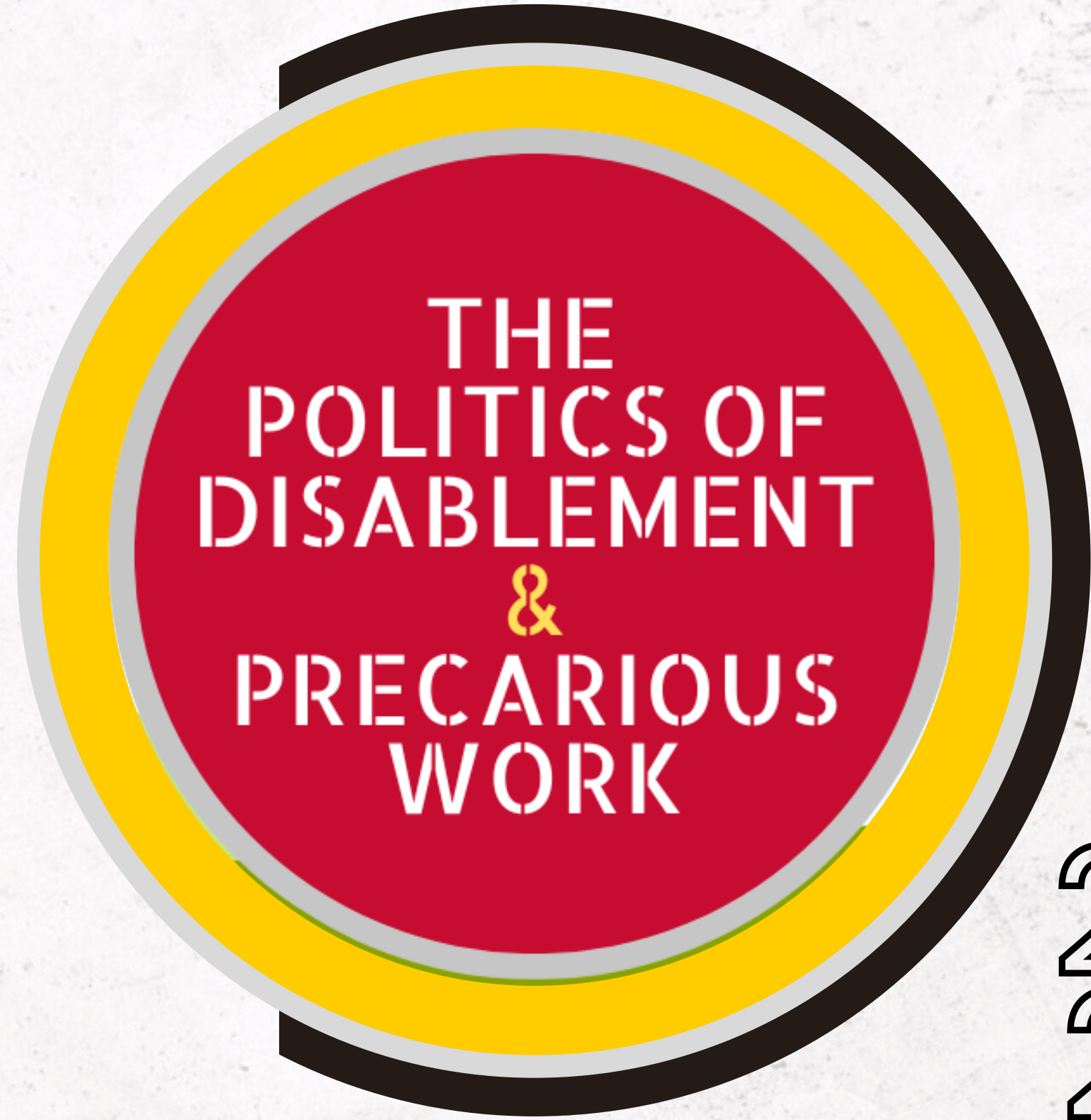
Vic Finkelstein:
the 'social model' has become a 'potpourri'
(losing its critical edge)





Disability- & bodymind-related identities

'disabled', 'neurodivergent',
'chronically ill', 'd/Deaf',
'experiencing mental distress',
'having impairments'



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some also use the term 'people with disabilities'

General Disagreements in society & literatures

Different interpretations of 'disability' (models)

Social modelists: 'disability' vs 'impairment'

(self-described) 'Mad' activists: mental distress is not an impairment; distress is problematically pathologised.

Chronically ill & neurodivergent people's claims to disability are being denied by the state, employers, 'professionals'.



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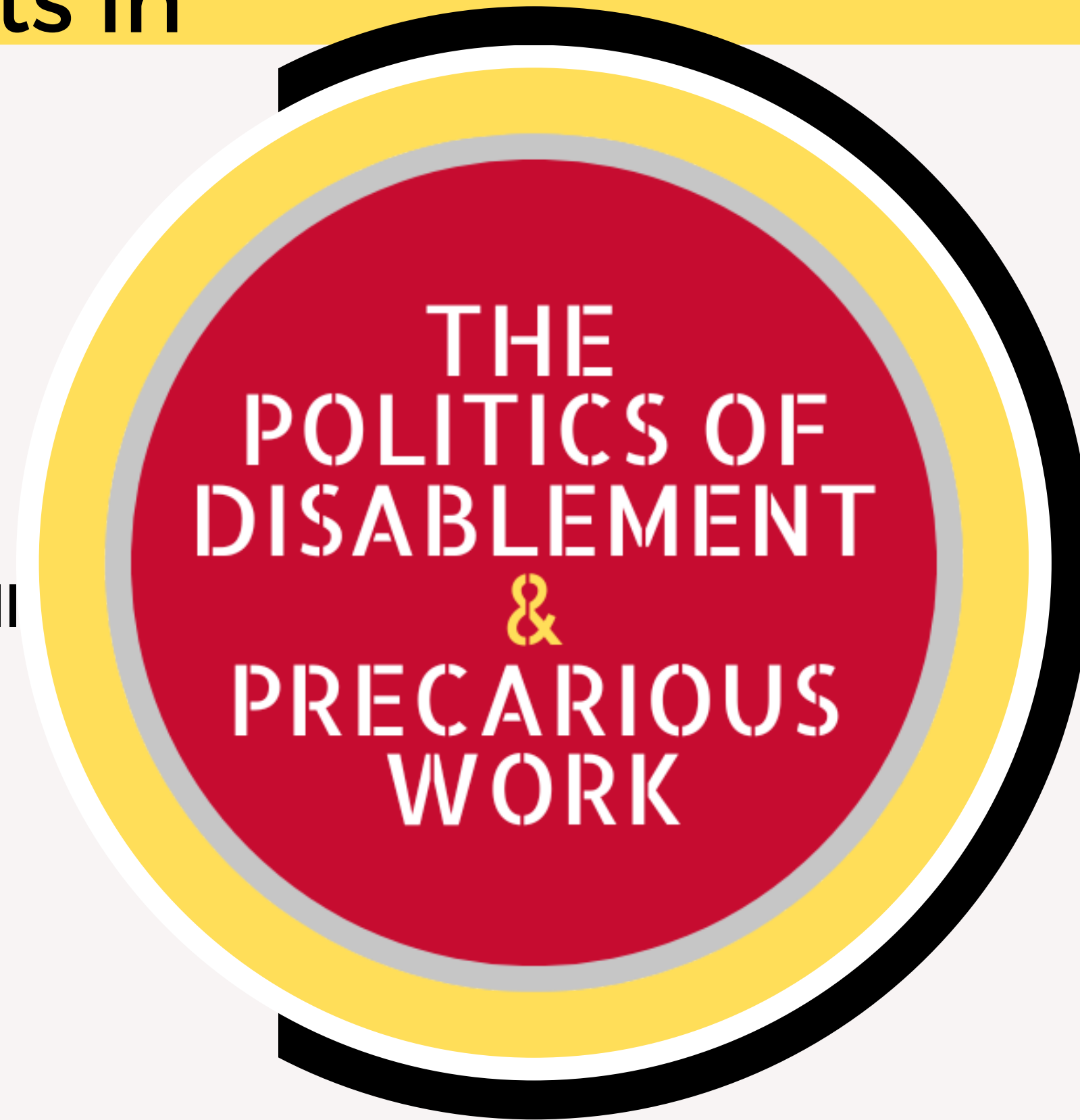
In some academic literature & other spaces, neurodivergence is treated as an 'advantage' for productivity (instead of opposing 'productivity'-based hierarchies).

In the UK, not many of those who're 'disabled' according to the law identify as such (only 1/4).

Some argue that chronic illness = 'energy impairment' & neurodivergence = 'social impairment'

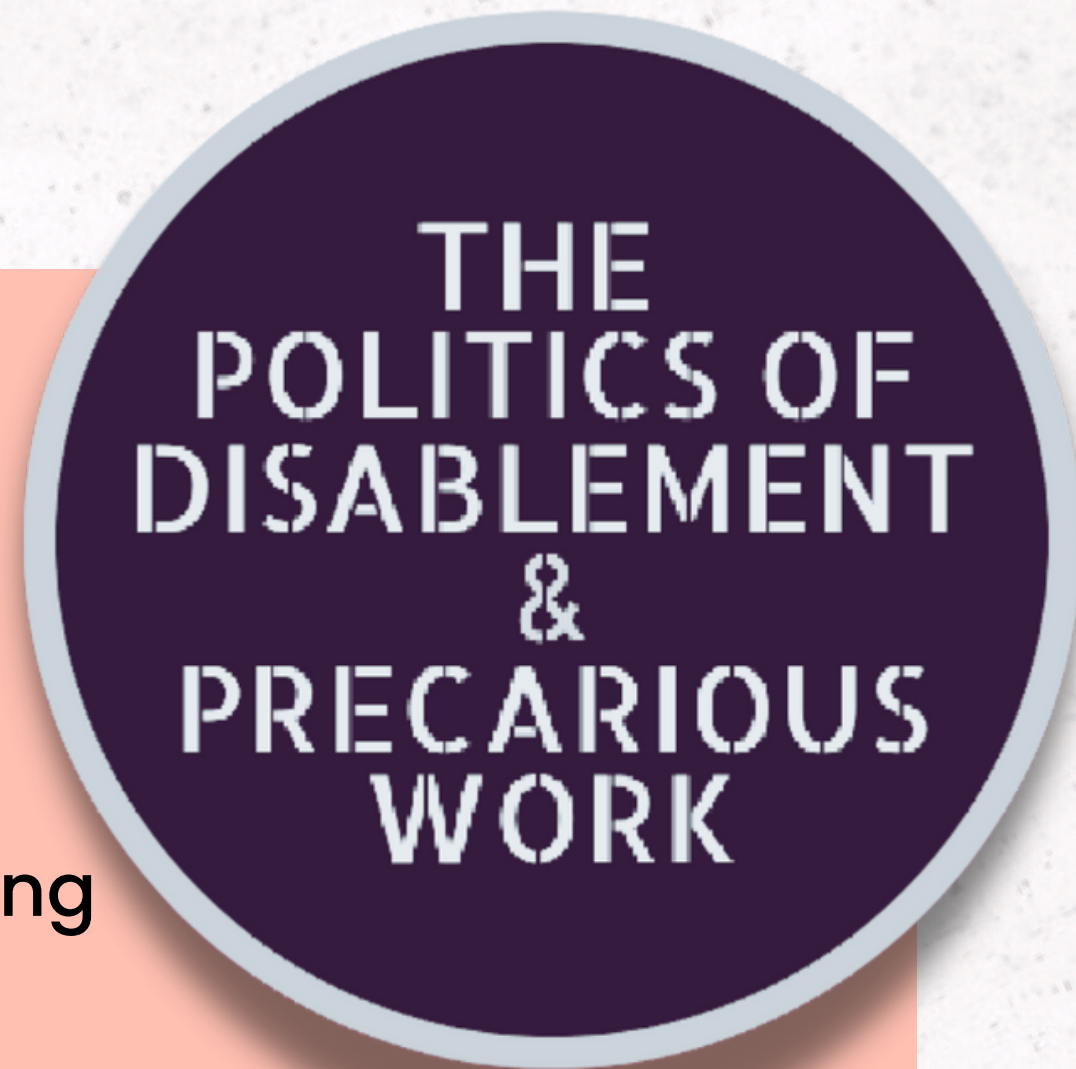
General Disagreements in academia

the language and concepts used are all over the place



even now, questions re. identity on disability-related academic mailing list can lead to dozens of heated responses within hours

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Research participants' views

- No clear consensus among participants re. identification along disability and/or bodymind lines;
- 'Disabled' was used interchangeably with the other terms, exclusively, or not at all.
- Some participants did not use the term 'disabled' due to not wishing to 'claim' the term away from others;
- **However: all participants presented evidence of disability-related oppression and exploitation.**

My reasoning behind the search for a new concept

Triggered by/ wishing to:

- lack of consensus in society, among participants, in academic literatures, and activity circles;
- avoid listing different groups of people every time I talked about participants;
- avoid 'imposing' the term 'disabled' on participants who don't use the term;
- acknowledge that 'mental distress' is not (necessarily) an impairment;
- build on the (UPIAS-inspired) social model.

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'Class consciousness' & 'Class composition' theories

Class-in-itself

The attention is on how to 'raise consciousness' (too psychologising)

Class-for-itself

Working class people (exploited under capitalism)

Working class people (conscious of their class position)

'Class consciousness' & 'Class composition' theories

Technical composition

Political composition

Working class people
(exploited under capitalism)

How working class people
organise themselves
politically

'Disability consciousness' & the UPIAS-inspired social model

I argue that the UPIAS-inspired social model adopts the following approach

Disability-in-itself

Attention is on how to
'raise consciousness' (too
psychologising &
potentially hierarchical)

Disability-for-itself

People with
impairments

Disabled
people

but 'impairments' is
too restrictive

My proposal based on 'class [disability] composition' theory



Subjects of
disablement

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

neurodivergent,
impaired, chronically ill,
with experiences of
mental distress, & any
other future
identities/terms



Disabled
people

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

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

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We turn our attention to how the subjects of disablement are organising / composing themselves into a political identity / section of class

Ultimate aim?

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The abolition of disabling
capitalism & its institution
of work (the wage system)




Building on the UPIAS-inspired social model

'Disabled people' as a political, social identity

- important (BUT note the lack of societal awareness + 'disabled' has other connotations through the state);

Distinction between impairment and disability = important;

But 'consciousness-based' approaches to self-identification are problematic.



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Building on the UPIAS-inspired social model

'Subjects of disablement'

= non-identitarian analytical concept that anti-capitalists (UPIAS-inspired social modelists) can use

= highlights structural subjectivation of people (neurodivergent, chronically ill, etc) through disabling capitalism

= a result of tweaking the 'class composition theory'



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