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Reassess



Your Weapons

Welcome to the second issue of Manifesta's collective zine, *Re-Assess Your Weapons*.

This one goes out to Andy; one of the most supportive, helpful and friendly people I have had the pleasure of speaking with in this community of 'ours'.

I didn't know Andy terribly well, but communicating with him excited me. He was one of those people who inspire you to believe that anything you want to achieve can be possible; as shown through his steadfast dedication to so many projects in the DIY community and his enthusiastic encouragement of others, like me.

This belief that 'we' can stand up, and do what is important is mirrored in many of the articles herein.

Thanks to all the RAYW contributors, their ideas & ambition, for reaffirming this belief by submitting these articles.

This zine is open to anyone. To contribute to future issues of *Re-Assess Your Weapons*, send your articles, pictures, photos & anything else along to: m_k_maddison@hotmail.com, or email for a postal address.

July 2005

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Manifesta is a Leeds-based not-for-profit DIY feminist collective.

✧For Andy✧

Wednesday, July 13th, 2005

3:44 pm

i have been writing all day
and deleting everything
it is one of those days.
i am having a difficult time
maintaining a healthy perspective.
feel like i'm getting a cold
would like to shake certain people
and tell them to stop running from themselves
because to see their potential and
to see how they ignore it
just rips me up.

note to creative types:
do it do it do it.
we need you.
if you are saying no to yourself, why?
is it because you are scared?
we're all scared all the time- so what.
you can still do it even though you're scared.
i told you about laurence olivier throwing up before every
performance, didn't i?

it's about standing up and doing something.
not sitting down in your own excusecake cesspool.

we all do it.
i think i've been really negative lately
and sitting on some things i need to work on.
but the time is now.
once more into the breach.
i am henry the 5th
with longer hair.

>>> Reproduced, with permission from Nan Turner.
View online at: <http://www.livejournal.com/users/tuffyvera/>



I'm finding it very hard to concentrate on anything but the hypocrisy displayed by the British government since the attacks on London on the 7th July. Last week I picked up the paper and staring me in the face was an estimate of the civilian death toll in Iraq. According to the Iraq Body Count (IBC) -an alliance of academics and peace campaigners- 24,865 people were killed there between 2003-2005. I'd heard it was a lot higher, around 120,000. A lot of people say that that's just anti-war propaganda. Maybe they're right. A man in the paper today said that the actual number of Iraqi civilians killed 'accidentally' by allied forces was 'only 10,000'. Shit. Accidentally killed 10,000 people. That's quite a big mistake to make especially when the pretext they were accidentally killed for was proven to be wrong. Makes shooting an innocent man in the head five times seem like a smaller mistake though doesn't it? Perhaps the people in the west in a position to best know the exact number of deaths are the forces who invaded Iraq, but Britain and the US refuse to make any attempt to record the number of killings. Whatever the figure, it's too much for me to genuinely take in. Because I don't live in a country where that is happening it is something I can't mentally imagine. But this is no excuse to pretend it didn't happen. I remember when the war was on the telly and it became like some TV series rather than an actual war where people were actually dying in time to the explosions and gunshots going off. After all, explosions and gunshots go off on telly all the time, as long as there's no direct damage to 'us' then it's easy to make it feel like fiction.

When 56 people are killed in London it is 'the ideology of evil', when thousands upon thousands of Iraqis are killed it's 'collateral damage'. I woke up on the 8th July to Tony Blair and a speech calculated to play on peoples' emotions and lure them into this 'you're either with us or against us' bullshit. How can he condemn the killing of innocent people when he is jointly responsible for just the same thing on such an enormous scale? That this whole fucking 'War On Terror' is painted as the battle of good against evil by the government is beyond contempt. Evil is, as the song goes, a four letter word that means nothing at all. It's so convenient, yet so incredibly warped and ignorant to say that the terrorist attacks on the US/UK happened because of 'evil'. I'm not trying to justify what they did, but I can't seriously believe that anyone buys the 'evil' explanation given that 'we've' invaded Iraq and killed thousands upon thousands of people over there. I certainly can't fathom that Tony Blair believes the London bombings are not linked to the war on Iraq, but apparently this is exactly what he thinks and he has rejected claims to the contrary. This is clearly just so as he doesn't have to take any flack for his genocidal foreign policy. Just say they are evil. Quite simple, nothing more, nothing less, and this evil must be destroyed at it's source, which is in whatever state

a large population of Muslims reside and is strategically convenient. Tony Blair may have said following the bombings, 'don't take this out on the Muslim community', but internationally the US/UK 'took it out' on Afghanistan, on Iraq.

Now we are to have new measures against terrorism introduced. As I recall the last anti-terrorist bill passed was a huge affront to civil liberties in itself and made fuck all difference. The new measures will of course have to be even more oppressive. The government has rejected any criticism of its ID card scheme and is now going to try and bring them in faster amid the post 7/7 hysteria. These will allow every move we make to be monitored, our fingerprints and personal information to be kept on a database not just by the British government but shared with the US too. Or else no passport.

I try not to read the paper too often or turn on the news right now because I know how the media are blowing stuff out of proportion. I don't want to stare at the same pictures again and again until terrorism is all I ever think about. Sure, it should be reported, I am not saying pretend it didn't happen or that there is no risk, but there is no perspective in the press. Even the liberal broadsheets like the Guardian and the Independent re-hash the same details. Yes, it was a tragedy and yes there's a threat of further attacks but the media and the government salivate with excitement over the prospect of a common enemy, an 'outsider' menace because it diverts attention away from all the other shit that is going on in this country, either because it doesn't sell papers or because it would land them in shit. Nevermind the fact that the atmosphere created by the media's warped picture is one of suspicion and distrust in which racism and intolerance flourishes. Of course the papers don't mention that the risk of being killed by a bomb is so very tiny when compared to that of traffic accidents, heart disease, cancer, etc.

And already an innocent man's been shot dead by the police. Maybe if anything at all good can come of the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes, it might highlight just how futile and dangerous this atmosphere of paranoia is, and make more people less inclined to buy into it. But it didn't make the police think, their response, 'it's tragic, but these things *just happen*', as if that makes it all alright and will make it OK if it *just happens* again.

Maybe by writing about the events of the past few weeks I'm helping to sensationalise them myself, but I've seen so much shit written and broadcast and propagated even by supposedly 'impartial' newspapers I find myself inclined to respond. And no, this article is not impartial, but at least I'll admit to that.

Debbie and Anna are learning mentors in secondary schools in Leeds and Manchester, respectively. They invited me to interview them for Reassess Your Weapons on the subject of homophobia in schools.

Amy: Can you tell me what you both do, and why you wanted to do a piece for RAYW on this subject?

Debbie: As a learning mentor I work with young people who're not achieving their full potential, working with them one-to-one and in small groups.

Anna: We've had lots of discussions together about homophobia in the schools and kids saying 'gay' all the time.

D: Everything's gay – that door's gay, that pencil's gay. Being gay and working in a school, I was wanting to talk about how it feels to work in such a homophobic environment.

So do you take it personally, do you find the homophobia affects you personally?

D: I do feel threatened, it's not a safe place to be gay.

A: Didn't you have some kids calling you gay?

D: Yeah, I had an incident walking home one day, these three lads started shouting lesbian, queer, things like this at me – as I had challenged them earlier on my own about their use of homophobic language. I reported it and was pleasantly surprised that it was acted on, they were put in isolation for 3 days – it was 'verbal abuse of staff'. We have an Incident Form – racism is on the form but sexism isn't, verbal abuse is on it, but homophobia isn't.

Do you think this form reflects a wider culture among staff in terms of recognising racism but not sexism or homophobia?

D: Homosexuality is hidden in school – its only visibility is when it's ridiculing someone, or slang. I spoke to a teacher recently who felt the school pandered to racism, he opposed racism too but we agreed that there's a big problem of homophobia in the school, like a secret, we all know it's wrong but no one will challenge it in public, homophobia's too close to a nerve for a lot of people.

A: Yes, it's embarrassing for kids, it's harder to stand up and say "I'm being bullied because I'm gay, or because everyone thinks I'm gay and I'm not". People would immediately be very angry about racism but with homophobia – you might get a bit of a titter.

D: Yeah, it's treated with humour, it's not seen as something that can scar your development

A: But having worked with queer young people I can see the bullying has fucked them up
D: My experience of homophobia in school [as a pupil], I hadn't come out but even just the mention of being a lesbian was met with horror by the teacher, just total disgust, it was the worst thing you could possibly be. This experience adds to my feeling of vulnerability at work.

A: Do you worry now that everyone will find out?

D: Yeah, I feel very vulnerable

A: I'd like to be open about it, but I don't talk about my private life to my colleagues, I'd rather keep some distance, I don't trust people not to keep quiet about my private life

D: Do you mean about your sexuality?

A: Yeah

D: Something always holds me back—I never get into a discussion because if they asked "are you seeing anyone?" I wouldn't want to answer.

I've been quite shocked to hear you talk about this – not by the children's attitudes, but the teachers' – I thought they would be trained in equal opportunities nowadays.

A: If there was training, the teachers are cynical, they would just say it's political correctness gone mad

D: I considered coming out, as a role model – I'm popular as a learning mentor and it would be a positive example, but it would be seen as my whole identity. I think most staff would be ok to my face but I fear that a backlash from the kids would happen.

A: If you don't mind people talking behind your back like 'there goes a lesbian'

D: It would become like harassment

A lot of people would argue that kids using the word gay to mean 'a bit rubbish' is just another slang word, it isn't homophobic, and that it's not going to have any long term effect on their attitude towards gay people.

A: Yes, the use of the word is so common, it's not consciously homophobic – but it has to be challenged – it's a really loaded word, it's got lots of meanings, it means crap, sad, stupid, no other word is being used like that.

D: I was shocked to hear a teacher use it when a lad refused to put his shoes on as they were 'gay' she replied 'I know they're gay but put them on' – I was shocked, I found it horrible – I wanted to challenge it but it wasn't safe as a gay person – I felt so exposed, vulnerable. White people challenge racism all the time, but if someone challenges homophobia people always assume they're gay.

A: I do have some straight colleagues who challenge it. One of them says 'some of my friends are gay and I find that offensive'

D: This sound teacher I know, he gets it off kids - they assume he's gay. He never denies it, he turns it around like 'So what if I am?' Because they're accusing him – they see it as 'accuse' of being gay – a lot of the kids are questioning it in themselves.

But it's safer to say 'So what if I am?' if you're actually straight.

D: There's no outing to fear. The other teachers will know he's married.

A: But at least with kids using the term it gets it out in the open so we can challenge it – because they never hear that it's alright to be gay from anywhere else

D: Some of my straight friends thought it's just that I'm on the defensive cos I'm gay – one who's a lecturer hadn't challenged it among her students, she thinks kids just don't know what they're saying. So I investigated this by asking kids what they meant after they called someone a faggot. One young one didn't know and an older one said 'It's two fellas sleeping together, it's disgusting' and it's only a matter of time before younger one knows too. And there's no one to challenge it.

How do kids react to you challenging them?

D: One time one of my mentees was using homophobic language and I asked him about it in a mentoring session. He said he and his friends beat up a guy because they thought he was gay – he thought it was quite funny. I told him it wasn't funny and tried to explain why. But I think it has brought it out in the open – I have been backed up by other kids sometimes which is wonderful. I think word's got round, cos some lads I haven't

challenged ask me and I say I'm against all forms of discrimination-- I think by saying that to kids they can understand it. Some kids have a really sound attitude to racism, so they can understand it a bit better that way.

A: I say 'can we not use words like gay' and they're fine usually but one lad, I said it was offensive and we got into an argument. He said all the normal stuff like 'I don't have a problem with it but I don't want it around me'. He was saying that when he was on holiday there were two lads kissing and someone punched them cos it was in front of children -- he said he thought this was right like 'you don't want that in front of kids'. I found this really frustrating -- I knew he wouldn't change his mind, we had to agree to disagree.

D: Sometimes I say 'So what? That's cool'

A: Yeah or 'Good for him!'

D: I try and explain: I don't mind you using that word as long as it's not in a horrible way -- because there's nothing wrong with being gay -- and they often say you're there. The teacher I spoke to said that challenging it doesn't change their opinions it just drives them underground.

A: But at least they're hearing someone saying that's it ok to be gay.

D: It's society, it's got to have these distinct gender roles: masculinity and femininity are designed to be as far away as possible from being gay, for example the distrust of women who play 'masculine' sports such as football, rugby, the fear they will turn into lesbians. This is based on two assumptions, firstly that being gay is bad, and also that engaging in the sport associated with the opposite sex makes you gay! I do think that in these ways schools do foster homophobia, they're very set in their ways. We need a radical overhaul of the education system which I don't think we'll ever see.

A: It's discriminatory in so many ways.

D: A lot of kids go unsupported at my school. But recently there was a change to the child protection law to say that homophobia is damaging and should not be tolerated in schools. But homophobia is way down on the priority list of the senior staff of things to change.

Have you encountered any homophobia among the staff? Or in the teaching methods?

D: The librarian was talking about some books which featured homosexuality. This girl was doing a project on gay marriage and this was a girl who I suspect to be gay. The librarian said 'I don't agree with that I think it's wrong'. I found it extremely frustrating, I felt uncomfortable myself and I didn't want her to experience homophobia there. I think he could've got away with it among most other members of staff -- they turn a blind eye to it.

A: I think staff in schools can be homophobic. In PE it's like 'What are you doing you big girl?' It's verging on homophobia and is very sexist. I have one colleague who's homophobic and I know he's a better arguer than me so it's pointless to argue, he has done stuff in front of kids -- but nothing that you can write down and make a formal complaint about, it's always subtle.

D: Another learning mentor -- he does impressions of limp wrists etc. I had a really upsetting time when he referred to homosexuality as abnormal. I challenged him, I said 'Are you saying that homosexuality is not right?' he said, 'No I said it was abnormal' -- I didn't see his point, it really upset me, especially when we are both supposed to be challenging barriers to learning.

A: Because when you're at work you can't go on a big crusade to change people's views. You've got to get on with people, that's what becomes the most important thing, not changing their attitudes.

D: I definitely hide my sexuality at work. I'm out to the people I work closely with but it's something that I'm aware of -- other staff being gay -- it's like you're all hiding. I feel threatened when I see other gay members of staff, scared of being exposed. I know there's another lesbian member of staff. I could come out to her--

A: -But she might not be sensitive about telling other people. My friend was doing teaching practice and at one school was outed to his class by a colleague and at another was called batty boy the whole time and got no support from his mentor teacher. It undermines you and makes you feel really horrible about going to work.

D: Being gay is just one part of ourselves, why should it be made into such a big issue? It ends up defining us because of the homophobia.

A: I think you're right, there needs to be people who stand up and are the gay ones

D: I wish I was that brave person who could do it, but I'm too afraid of the consequences.

A: You don't want to make your job more difficult

Is homophobia dealt with in the policies and procedures of the school? -- equal opportunities, anti-bullying? Did you receive any training or professional guidance on how to approach homophobia among the young people that you mentor?

A: No it isn't mentioned anywhere

D: It's supposed to be in the new child protection law, but homosexuality remains invisible apart from as ridicule, as an insult.

A: If you came from the outside you'd think it didn't exist. Like bullying was until recently -- certain schools didn't want to publicly deal with it cuz that would be admitting they had a problem.

D: There's heterosexual banter everywhere, all the time. It pisses me off, because we're in the minority -- you have to just sit there, you have to take it. Homosexuality is so degraded and heterosexuality is promoted.

A: Having this conversation has made me think I need really specific training to challenge young people on their homophobia in a positive way so they start to think about their attitude. They know that I don't find it ok but it doesn't change what they think. Teachers need training too.

D: They don't know how to challenge it.

A: There needs to be training in every school.

D: I had a leaflet about a project for queer young people and anti-homophobia training, but even carrying it down the corridor made me feel vulnerable.

A: Yeah why don't they talk about it in PSHE? It's not taught very well in general. Teachers don't feel confident to talk about it and don't realise it has an effect.

D: They got a Muslim member of staff in to talk to a R.E class about what it's like to be a Muslim. I really wanted to volunteer to talk about what it's like to be gay but didn't feel brave enough. I felt vulnerable on so many levels. Because homophobia is about fear, and talking about stuff breaks down our fear.

Have you had any contact with queer kids in the schools? What do they say about their experiences of homophobia?

A: One lad told me he was bi so I referred him to an LGBT youth group. No one knew, then he came out. Loads of people wouldn't speak to him, but some friends stuck by him. I thought god that was brave coming out to everybody. He's the sort of kid who could do really well but I don't think he will, he'll go on the dole. And I think his experiences of school, of being bullied for 5 years, have really affected his life chances and that he will

suffer social exclusion and deprivation as a result. It sounds really defeatist, really prescriptive but...

D: I suppose university is more of a better atmosphere for coming out, or for being gay

A: I know some people who've had terrible experiences with their housemates at university, but people aren't going to beat you up as much

D: I see kids who I think are queer kids, but you can see that they're hiding – it's not a safe space for me to be gay, never mind for kids. One girl used to joke about being a lesbian but then when it got serious she went into hiding again. I just try to create a safe space for them to tell me things. One lad came out to me about a same-sex experience and I signposted him to a youth group and things. When a kid confides in you it makes the job worthwhile. A kid needs someone to respond positively, someone who doesn't make them feel not right, not normal and a freak.

A: Yeah and that's really important that we continue to be approachable for the queer kids. One person cannot create a completely homophobia-free school but we're making little changes.

D: Yes, it's the little changes that make the big changes

A: We won't see the results of what we do – it'll be when that kid's 19 and goes to college and succeeds because of something little that you said

D: Yeah I'm looking forward to bumping into some of them in Queens Court five years down the line!

Has the repeal of Section 28 made practical changes to how sex education is taught? Has it had any other effects?

A: I don't know what it was like before it was repealed but to be honest most teachers don't know that it has been repealed. Most teachers thought that it meant they couldn't talk about homosexuality at all, which was not the case. It meant that loads of kids didn't get the support they needed. I bet that if that kid had come out to anyone else in the school he'd never have found out about that youth group – teachers should know about stuff like that and what to do about it.

Is there a difference in the attitudes to male and female homosexuality in the culture of the school?

D: A lot of boys say 'oh I don't mind lesbians me, but lads shagging that's wrong, that's disgusting'.

A: Quite a lot of girls snog each other at parties and I think that's great!

D: Yeah, but it's just used to gain male attention, like women on the cover of *Loaded*

A: That's true, but it does help to open their minds a little bit

D: One girl says she's bisexual. Bisexuality is more socially accepted among straight people and it's safer in schools, straight people feel you can still have a conversation with someone who's bisexual, but if they're gay they're completely different to them.

Do kids talk about transsexuality? How is this issue treated?

D: I was in the library and there were some kids flicking through a magazine with Nadia from *Big Brother* in it. The kids were saying 'she's a man, she's a tranny' – I argued it was about being born into the wrong sex body and having a really strong feeling that you are not who you are inside. But they seemed defiant that Nadia was a man.

A: It's frustrating when you've spent so long trying to change someone's point of view and it doesn't seem to make any difference. But I think *Big Brother* is good because kids talk about it all the time and it exposes them to trans issues and they see queer people on tv

D: Some people say it exploits gay people but it just exploits stereotypes, and the kids' favourites are often gay so that's positive.

A: And the fact that girls snog on *Neighbours* and stuff I think that's great. We never saw anything like that when we were growing up apart from on *Brookside*, and that was so exciting!

D: Some kids like *Sugar Rush*, and we talk about it all the time, that's great!

A: But be careful you don't get too excited about it!

D: Yeah there is a constant fear of outing yourself. I was talking about a picture of Angelina Jolie that a kid had, I said it was nice and he asked me if I was bisexual and I was so taken aback ... We need more gay role models, in the media, there aren't many.

A: Yeah like in sports – that's who kids rate – footballers and R&B stars

D: We need people kids like and respect to be gay

A: We need 50 Cent to be gay!

D: Brian Dowling.. there were little innuendos there – a children's presenter who's gay – isn't that progress? But he's not on now, is that because someone's decided it's not suitable viewing? Graham Norton, the kids like him – camp is more socially acceptable, media-wise

A: We need an alternative to camp in the media, not that there's anything wrong with it but we need to show there's more than one way to be queer you can be 6'4" and massive and a rugby player and be gay

D: And there's no gay women. Alex Parks.. where's she gone?

A: I think having loads of friends now who are gay, I've completely forgotten what it was like to be really lonely, not able to talk to anyone

D: The damage that was done by growing up with homophobia, internalising that homophobia, I still struggle with it. I have trouble with being isolated, gay people are isolated, the last thing you want to do is say hey I'm gay, to be openly gay is on the one hand extremely liberating, on the other it's very isolating.

A: it's very hard to be openly gay in a school as we've said. But we can continue to challenge homophobia and make a stand.

D: This interview has made me realise how important it is what we're doing and also that we're facing this extra hidden discrimination which many learning mentors don't get.

A: I think that's a strength though because we can help kids with it

D: Yeah, I think it's so important to keep on doing what we're doing, and I've experienced so much support from my friends when I've come home after a bad day, you wouldn't be able to do it without them. So many little experiences of homophobia we've brought out, it adds up to such a huge thing. Schools are so oppressive and I feel so frustrated a lot of the time, but at the same time I feel that I'm making some difference. It's no good staying outside, you've got to be on the inside of a system to change it, I do strongly believe that what we're doing is really positive.



Waking up hungover one more day, this time I'm not reaching for my most screamy girl music and looking forward to a day of mental energy and physical lethargy. I hate all the media-generated moral panics about women's drinking and drug use, just trying to scare us and keep us in line. But last week I read how drinking over 35 units of alcohol a week means you're effectively lobotomising yourself. To me that's a little different to your standard piece about out of control ladies on alcopops sitting with their legs apart and throwing up in town. I think of how my memory's shot, and my powers of concentration, how for a few years I've had a feeling of dazed-ness that I can never quite shake off, how I can feel my kidneys aching, and how I actually feel about the prospect of cirrhosis at the age of 30.

Mushrooms are the only drug I like, and I like them a lot, but after each time I take them my mental health seems to reset itself at a subtly lower level. I am sure I can see these effects among my friends and family too – depression, anxiety, paranoia all made gradually, almost imperceptibly worse through the drugs we use to quiet our minds in the first place.

Statistics show that drinking, drug use, smoking and suicide are all at far higher levels in the gay scene, + I see this in alternative queer communities too. Who to blame? Ourselves for being filthy degenerates? The cigarette and alcohol manufacturers who deliberately market to the mainstream gay scene? Society for turning our lives into a constant battle against homophobia that leaves us needing to escape of an evening?

Spent all of yesterday with an almost uncontrollable urge to smash my wrists. For fucks sake, I need to turn this energy outwards, stop hurting myself, go out and smash something else. I need to change the society that is making me feel this way. That's not diverting blame; I take responsibility for my own choice to use alcohol or self-harm in whatever way but the fact that I often cannot cope with the world when sober is not my fault.

I don't want to speak for my friends and acquaintances, I'm only speaking for myself, but I look around me and it's hard to see people who aren't struggling with their mental health. What I'm saying is that to me it's painfully obvious that being on the receiving end of discrimination, phobia and hate – overt or otherwise – diminishes self-esteem, removes a feeling of personal safety, leaves us burnt out and exacerbates mental health issues. I think our generation is shy to identify the big destructive patterns in our lives. I think it occurs to us individually but it's not cool to talk about it, even in our feminist, queer subcultures. I think our postmodern take on the world has let lapse the simplistic but vital connections to be made: homophobia in schools leads to higher suicide rates. Billboards of airbrushed females make ordinary women feel like shit. Don't fucking tell me this is too simple to be true, that's what they want us to believe. I know all this macro theorising is so 1970s but our lives are still under threat from the sexism, racism, transphobia, homophobia that are the building blocks of our society.

I ought to take to the streets every time I feel like damaging my body. Get a fucking sandwich board. They are killing me, they will kill me if I don't do something, and that thought is enough, finally, to make me really really angry.

I will not accept the messages screaming around me that I am not good enough. I will not internalise the discomfort felt by my family, my colleagues, some of my less close friends, because of my queerness. I will not read magazines that tell me I'm ugly; I will not read papers that tell me I'm scum. I will only go dancing in places where people don't look me up and down, and there I will dance for all I am worth. I will not shut up about the connections I see everywhere, although everyone's giving me funny looks. The mental pressure that this fighting creates – I'll try and turn it into energy to use constructively.

okay i felt all gushy and inspired, and wrote this, below. I just hate the idea of people not wanting to do stuff because of all these weird ideas i hear people supporting about what it is to be in a band...

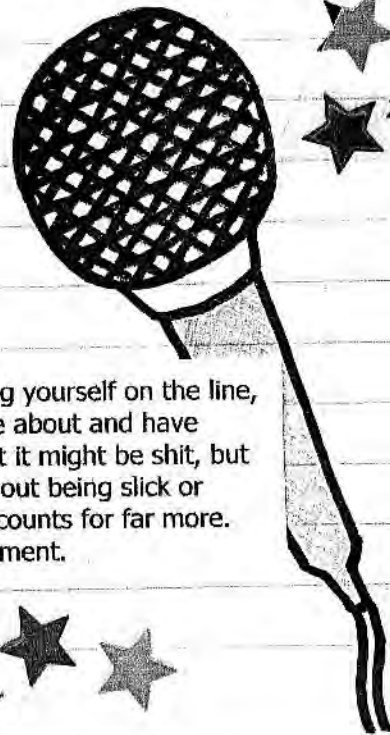
why should * i * be in a band?

* Because nothing is more empowering than just doing something: creative, subversive, small, gargantuan, written, sung, shouted, screamed, anything.

* Because you can justify doing completely insane things. Shave your head. Dedicate songs to complete strangers. Flash. Chat up someone that scares you. Dance, shake and shine.

* Because its fun

* Because the scariest thing about putting yourself on the line, publicly showing something that you care about and have invested a part of yourself into is not that it might be shit, but that it won't be. That being good isn't about being slick or perfect, that having guts and conviction counts for far more. Listen to your favourite record of the moment.



* Because once you start doing it you'll realise what a load of pompous cack there is about and how much technical musical snobbery is designed to stop you having fun. If you can't play an instrument, make a new one - takes some strings off, sample and loop, detune, retune, play keyboard demos - do what ever makes you smile.

* Because you'll be able to write songs about all your friends and overtly embarrass them, but covertly make them realise how much they mean to you.



* Because maybe you'll inspire someone else. Even if that's 'god they're awful, I could do better than that'... if there aren't people that hate what you do, you're doing something wrong.

* Because you can create an alter ego. Something to hide behind, so that every time you get onstage and play to people who don't know you, people who will judge you, people who will love you, the mask gets a little bit stronger.

* Because the only reason you shouldn't is if you don't want to. There is nothing else stopping YOU.

THE ADVENTURES OF VINCENT GALLO'S COCK

EPISODE ONE,

KINGS CROSS

(TWENTY FIFTH APRIL 2005)

WRITTEN BY VINCENT GALLO'S COCK
PRODUCED BY VINCENT GALLO'S COCK
DIRECTED BY VINCENT GALLO'S COCK
STARRING VINCENT GALLO'S COCK
SCORE BY VINCENT GALLO'S COCK
HAIR AND MAKE-UP BY VINCENT GALLO'S COCK
CINEMATOGRAPHY BY VINCENT GALLO'S COCK
EDITING BY VINCENT GALLO'S COCK
CAFFER VINCENT GALLO'S COCK
GRIP VINCENT GALLO'S COCK

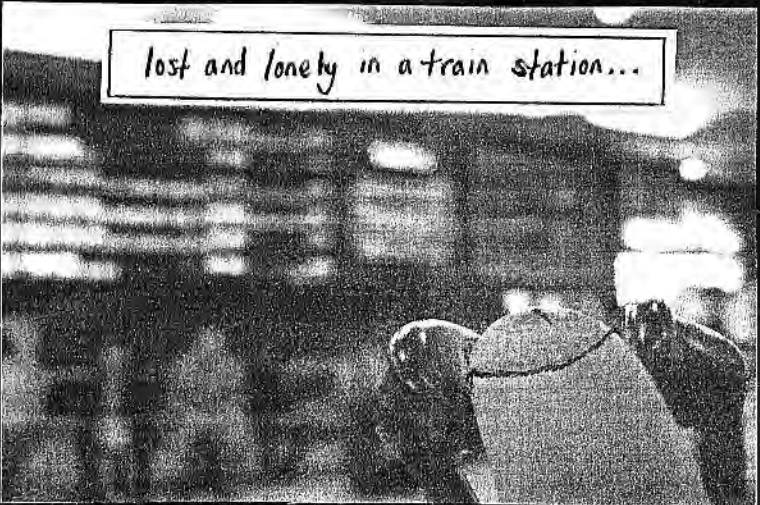
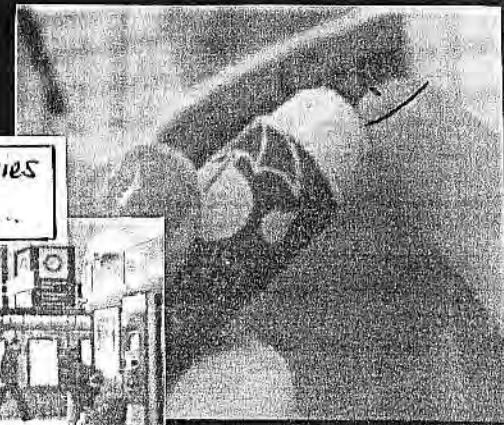
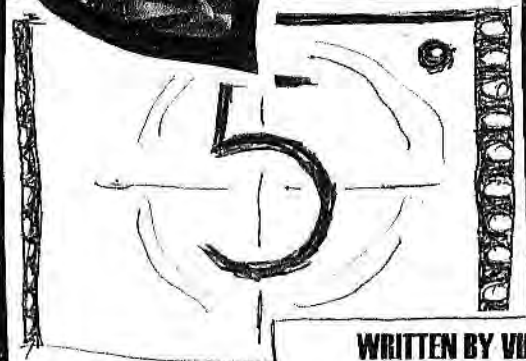
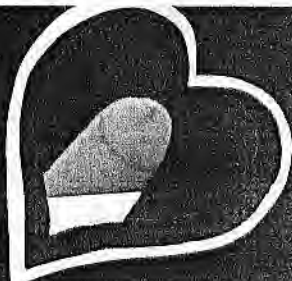
lost and lonely in a train station...

looking for meaning in fleeting encounters with strangers...

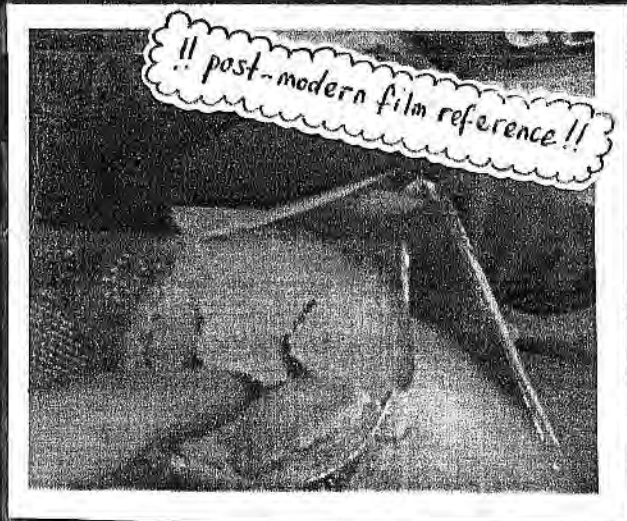
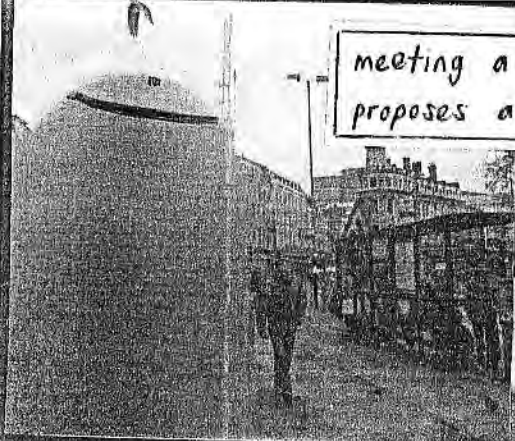
... but feeling unfulfilled

vincent's cock tries new experiences...

* disclaimer - apologies that this story makes no sense, it was written by a pretentious cock.



meeting a stranger on the street, Vincent's cock proposes a cameo role in his next film ...

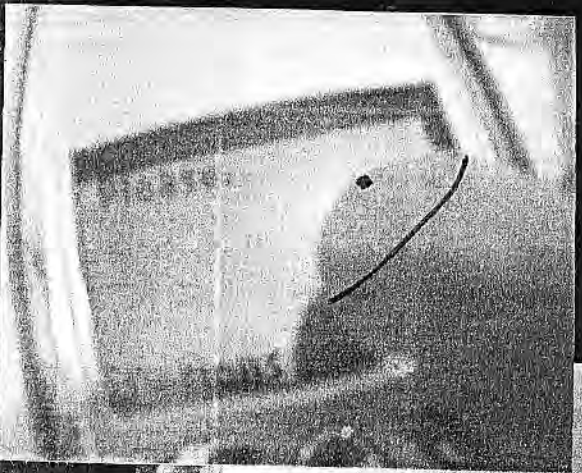


!! post-modern film reference!!

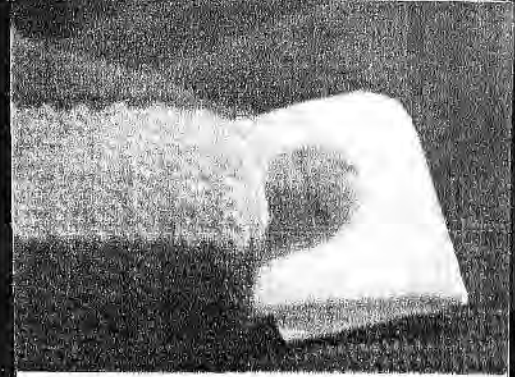
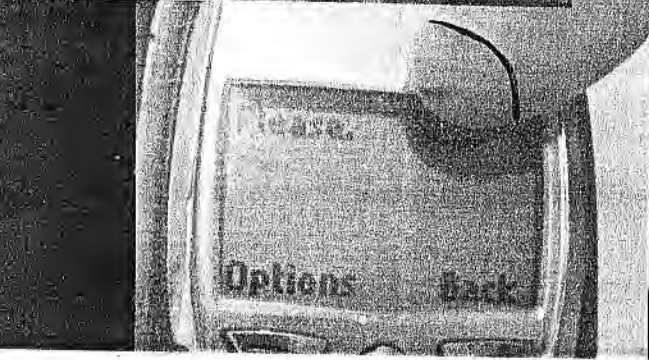
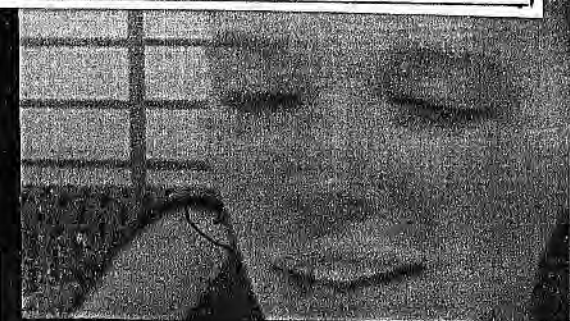
replying, the stranger agrees, with one condition...



vincent's cock, finding the stranger too stiff and wooden, gets its kicks elsewhere... ↘



but he still feels lost and lonely, and dirty to boot.

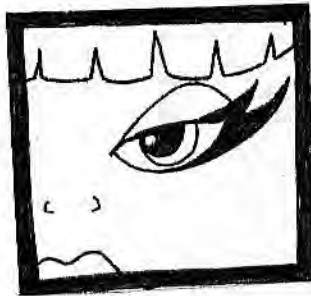


thankfully this whole sorry episode was just a dream.

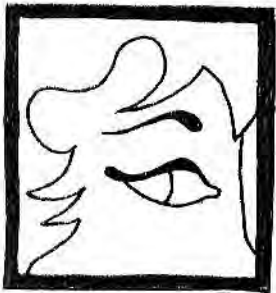
HAVE YOU ALSO COME ACROSS VINCENT'S COCK? IF SO SEND YOUR PHOTOS TO: vincent@alloscock@hotmail.co.uk

"you're depressed? of course you're depressed. that's how you know you're awake... only a moron would not be"

sometimes i don't thrill you. sometimes i think i kill you. just don't let me fuck up will you. 'cos when i need a friend it's still you. what a mess.

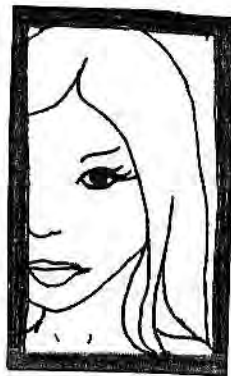


i do what people say. and lie in bed all day, absolutely horrified. i hope you're satisfied.



When the soul has forgotten what it means to be loved & you think you've hit the bottom of enough is enough. Hey, I'll be fine, I'm just losing my mind. Hey, I'll be fine.

anything that i could ~~would~~ do would never be good enough for you. is there anything that i could do that someone doesn't do for you?



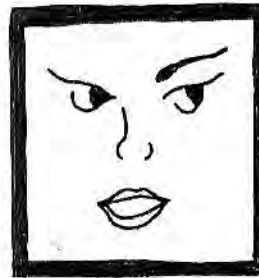
nobody knew, so nobody cared. nobody knew, so nobody cared. nobody knows.

i've got nothing to offer but the middle of the night.

the pain is somewhere very close to me.



all the perfect drugs & superheroes wouldn't be enough to bring me up to zero.



i'm not immune to the sorrow you put me through. i was a fool to be blind to the things you do. all i ever wanted was a little more respect from you.

words & sentiments from: throwing musas, eliott smith, aimee mann, bettie servante, kirby maccoll, dinosaur jr, fran lebowitz, violent femmes.

depression can affect anyone.

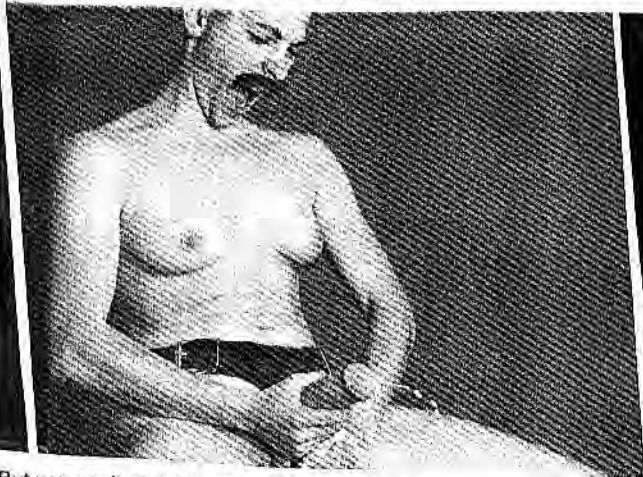


ROASTS ON

SPUNK

I am currently trying to bring the expression 'spunk your pants' into common usage as a verb. I was never much good at grammar but I think 'to spunk pants' would be the infinitive? Correct me if I'm wrong Angry from Leeds. In a sentence the expression would go, for example, 'I'm so excited about seeing Sleater-Kinney I think I'm going to spunk my pants' (future) or 'The mere sight of them made me spunk my pants ad infinitum' (past) or 'I'm spunking my pants as we speak' (present). Obviously the term can be used literally but I generally use it to refer to being extremely excited about something and it is in this innocent way which I would like it to grow. Don't get me wrong, there's nothing I dislike about the original usage, but I find that a lot of people don't like to air their dirty laundry in public so to speak. Personally I often mean both things simultaneously...

My mission did not start as a mission and I guess it still isn't, I just think it'd be nice if everyone used it from time to time because I cannot think of another expression in the English language that conveys excitement so well. I don't think I will ever get my wish, because outside of my small bubble of friends in Leeds who have learnt to at best adopt, at worst tolerate, my use of language, most people seem to wince in disgust at the phrase. I also don't think I would feel comfortable were my parents and grandparents to start using it. Guess I'm more hung up than I like to admit!

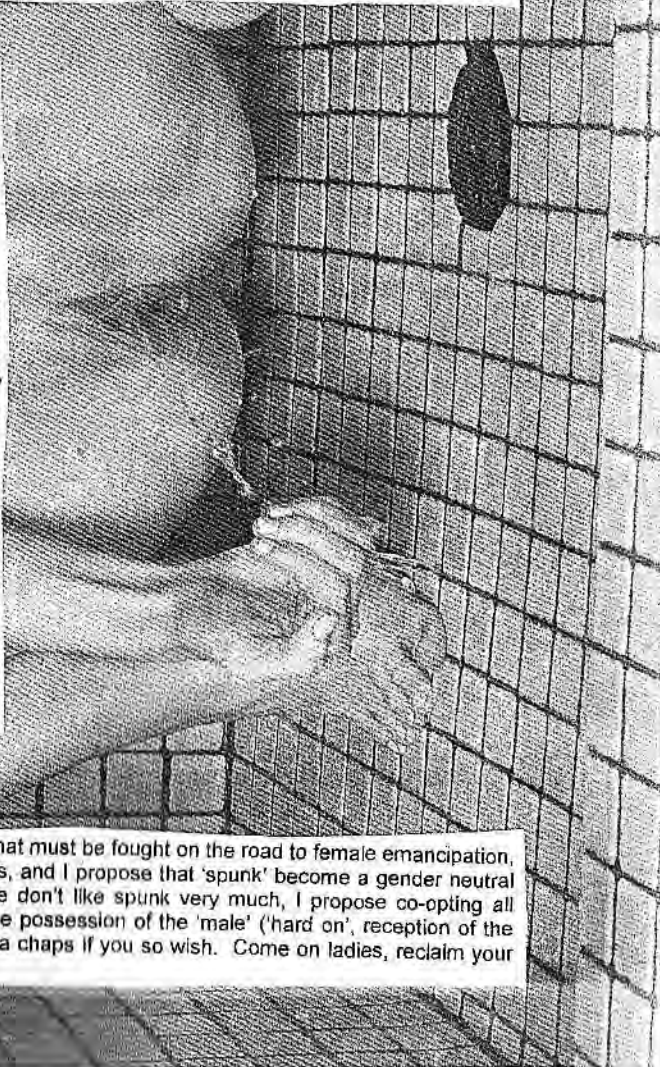


'But you can't spunk your pants, you're a girl!' some wise soul once retorted. But just because girl spunk is generally harder to 'collect' than boy spunk and may be harder to produce under laboratory conditions (thus some doctors and scientists still maintain that females can not ejaculate) does not mean, as I'm sure you are aware, that it does not exist. I would like to present those who refute the possibility of lady spunk with a pair of my spunked pants for immediate analysis, but modesty—and not arsedness—prevents me. Of course I would submit my unwashed pants in a flash were I to believe that this would seriously alter society's perception of male and female sexuality and stop people believing there is an inherent difference between the two, but I don't think it would cos you can buy ladies soiled underwear on the internet (so I've heard!) and there is yet to be a revolution...

I don't think the girl-spunk-denier in question actually did not believe in girl-spunk, rather she refused to call it by that name, attributing the term 'spunk' only to 'male' ejaculations. Which leaves women with what? 'Ejaculation' is slowly being accepted as a neutral term (and even then begrudgingly, and you usually have to qualify it by shoving the term 'female' at the start) but it's not a very pleasing phrase. Moreover, it seems to be associated with distance, which whilst obviously possible for some women, is generally more easily achieved by men. This seems strange to me. As I recall from reading *Wuthering Heights* at A-Level characters are forever ejaculating foul curses and the distance which the sound travels is never a consideration as to whether or not they are doing so.

Less pleasing is the deeply unflattering, asexual, clinical term 'vaginal secretion', which I accept as a valid phrase only at the clap clinic. Is it any coincidence in our patriarchal society that men get the infinitely funky phrase 'spunk' to refer to their 'functions' whereas women are landed with—if it's ever spoken of at all—'vaginal secretions'? It's quite simple to me, spunk = sex for fun; vaginal secretion = sex for medical purposes (baby making). Female sexuality is demonised across the world and I think it's telling that women are not given a satisfactory vocabulary with which to talk about their bodies, sexuality and desires. We are not meant to talk about them after all, we are not meant to have them. In 1935 Virginia Woolf wrote that it would be decades before women could write truthfully about their own bodies. Well, that was decades ago and whilst things have undoubtedly improved, how can we talk in any meaningful way about our own bodies if language itself is stacked against us?

I appreciate it's not the biggest battle that must be fought on the road to female emancipation, but the world is changed by little things, and I propose that 'spunk' become a gender neutral phrase. And if some of you out there don't like spunk very much, I propose co-opting all words that are supposed to be the sole possession of the 'male' ('hard on', reception of the 'hand job'/'blow job' etc) and vice versa chaps if you so wish. Come on ladies, reclaim your spunk!



"My whole life looked like a picture of a sunny day"

By Anna. beatgirl88@hotmail.com

This story is slightly embarrassing but I promised Melanie I'd write about me "interviewing" Carrie from Sleater-Kinney.

It's a story about the desperation of youth, and how sweet and amiable Sleater-Kinney were years ago.

I was 17, and when I heard Sleater-Kinney, one of my favourite bands, were playing in my home town, Liverpool, excited wasn't the word. We bought tickets and my friend Kate came home from Uni in Leeds for the occasion. We met up, and hurried to the Irish pub Guinans (now sadly gone, overtaken by the trendy/ student bars in this district of Liverpool). We wondered whether something was amiss somehow when SK were on posters but not on the bill, however went inside and got our tickets checked anyway. Eventually we asked what had happened to the band we were dying to see and it turned out one of the band was ill, and they'd cancelled their show. Gutted!

We debated about what to do for a while... get drunk in another Irish pub on Slater Street? Go home and cut our losses? Hang around the Adelphi hotel and see if we could see their tour bus leaving? Get in!

So we walked over to the Adelphi, the poshest hotel in the city, and lurked about. I think our JD and cokes had got the better of us as we decided to wander into the lobby. I can't remember who it was- me or Kate- who asked the receptionist "is Ms Brownstein or Ms Tucker staying here?" but we did and heard "Yes we can phone up to their rooms if you like?" "Give us a minute" we cried and headed to the pub opposite where we decided on questions to fire the SK girls and had another shot of dutch courage (amongst the best: "any hair dying tips").

Half an hour later we're back at the Adelphi Lobby "Can you phone up to Ms Tucker"? I nervously said "Hi we'd like to do an interview" and Corin said she was too ill, I had completely forgotten about it and when I said I hoped she'd get well soon she said "Thank you so much!!" in that overly but lovely enthusiastic way Americans do. Carrie, however said, "yeah, I'm pretty bored up here, I'll be there in 5".

So, we're sat in the bar in the Adelphi, can I just say again, the poshest drinking spot in Liverpool, chatting away to Carrie Brownstein. Quite an exciting moment. And bless her, she didn't even comment when I spilt a bit of my half pint on my dress as I got up on the bar stool. We chatted about how the tour had been going- they were "bummed" (indeed!) about not playing the show tonight, had liked the European bits as the music often overrode the words of the songs there and people were really excited- their other activities- we were surprised that Carrie was doing a postgraduate course in sociolinguistics (one of us cringingly made some comment about how it was good to have something to fall back on, haha!) and how feminism and sexuality impacted on their music.

But to be honest I can't remember too much about exactly what we said, or talked about, it was eight years ago, apart from that Carrie was great to talk to, interested in us and gracious. She put Kate on the guest list for their show the following day in London when Kate said she couldn't afford to see them. In the end we both missed our trains home and my dad had to pick us up (so we of course regaled him with tales of our Sleater-Kinney meeting).

It's weird remembering something that happened so long ago, almost as if it happened to a different person (and to be honest I am almost a different person to then, I'd never dare to do something similar now) and I wonder how gracious they'd be about strange stalk-y fans ringing up to their hotel rooms these days...?

When Kurt Cobain, Jeff Buckley, River Phoenix, Ian Curtis, Elliott Smith died, they secured their place as cult icons, who would and will never be forgotten. Don't get me wrong, I adored Elliott, and parts of Kurt and Jeff's back catalogues will always hold a special place in my heart. But not because they died.

When Mia Zapata died in 1993, her position and memory as any sort of 'icon' other than within the punk community was less secure. Because she was a woman? That didn't stop Janis Joplin being remembered... Because she didn't kill herself? Because that's a cooler thing to be remembered for...right? Or because people would simply rather brush the circumstances of her death under the carpet and because the media have 'better' things to report and remember?

Twelve years ago Mia, lead singer with awesome punk band, The Gits, was leaving a bar alone, where she'd been out with her friends. Two hours later she was found. Mia had been beaten, violently raped and strangled to death. Her body was found laid in the middle of a deserted Seattle street. The coroner stated that had Mia not been strangled she would have otherwise died of the internal injuries inflicted upon her by the attacker. It took ten long years, and the necessity for her friends to hire a private investigator, to find Mia's killer and to bring him to justice. DNA from saliva found on Mia's breasts was finally traced to her killer a decade later in 2003.

Now, why do more people not know about this? I know with agonizing detail the circumstances of Cobain's death. Yeah, he was a bigger star, a well-known 'name'. He'd sold squillions of albums and was a poster boy for a generation...this I can appreciate. Mia was front woman for a lesser-known Seattle band. Had Mia lived long enough to play with The Gits for everyone to hear, maybe more people would be forced to agree with my belief that the Gits were an amazing band, a band who did pack out venues and play to full houses all over Seattle, and who had an amazing set of songs that Mia delivered with a fevered intensity and passion. But this isn't an article about (competitive) popularity, or 'success', or status, but one that asks: when does blowing your brains out deserve more column inches than a brutal murder and violent sexual attack that took ten years to find somebody guilty of?

What does the media find more important to report? What does society take more notice of? What lessons haven't been learned?

It's around about the same time frame since both of these artists, Kurt and Mia, died (give or take). And yeah, people do commit suicide all the time. Gun ownership is so commonplace nowadays, and the flaws and stigma in the detection and medical treatment of mental illness, as Kurt experienced, mean that similar deaths to Kurt's occur with some alarming frequency. But deaths like Mia's happen with even more agonising frequency. And the injustice of the persons responsible for such murders never facing charges, or even being caught, is largely the same now as it was those twelve years ago. Why in all this time have things not changed significantly for the

Mias of the world?

This article started off in my head as a piece where I was gonna address the issue of women who aren't remembered with the same respect as male artists, and why on earth that is; (the untimely deaths of Kristen Pfaff and Stefanie Sargent strike me of two other scenarios of this). But in writing down my thoughts, I've come to realise that the issues in hand are much more than that. It's not just that women aren't remembered, **It's that our lives as we live them are rarely reported and recorded in the media with the respect they deserve. And more than that, in erasing our histories, and not elevating them to the status of male history, crimes and incidents against women can never be learned from, and acted upon, or our futures changed for the better.**

The more people who know about women like Mia and who are aware of violent crime and sexual abuse on our streets, the better. The more we learn about defending ourselves, and about networks and organisations for helping women who have been on the receiving end of such crimes, the better; the more we support these two things, also the better. The more we learn to look out for our friends, whether they be drunk and leaving bars and clubs, or merely on a more basic day-to-day level, the better. The more women take on the media and report our own lives and experiences, the better. Because for every Kurt Cobain in the press there's a hundred Mia Zapatas who very few people get to hear about, and a hundred more perpetrators of violent and sexual crime who are never found, or are never charged

• View: www.thegits.com and www.state51.co.uk/hotlips/496/homealive.html for more info on The Gits and Mia Zapata, and the memorial projects set up in her name.

• Log onto: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/05/14/48hours/main617479.shtml> for more info on the case against Mia's killer.

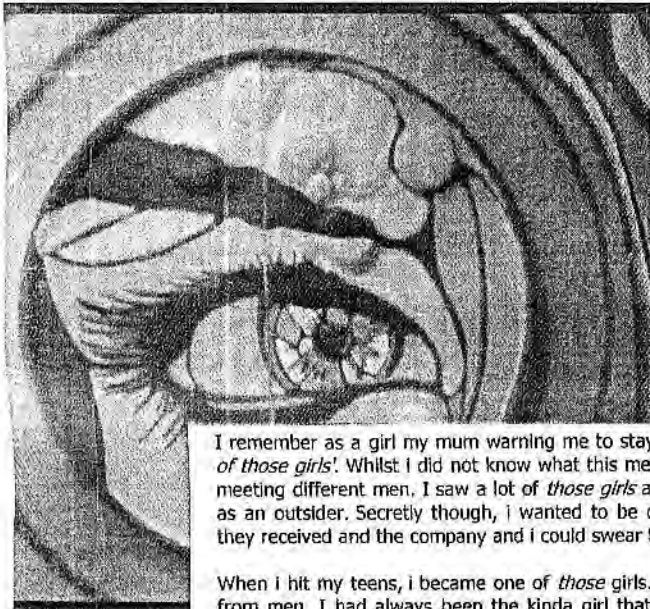
• See: the last issue of *Reassess Your Weapons* for a list of organisations in Leeds (and surrounding areas) providing help, support and activism for survivors of rape and sexual abuse.

• Read: *Go On Girl*, a practical self-defence info comic for women (available from the Morgenmuffel distro, and other distros)

• View: www.indymedia.org.uk to begin to see the realities of reporting our own lives and experiences within our own media.

• Look our for: other people in your community.

Melanie xx



Why i love trashy women

I remember as a girl my mum warning me to stay away from another girl as she was 'one of those girls'. Whilst I did not know what this meant I was aware that this girl was always meeting different men. I saw a lot of *those girls* as I grew up, watching from the side lines as an outsider. Secretly though, I wanted to be one of *those girls*, I envied the attention they received and the company and I could swear they appeared to be having fun.

When I hit my teens, I became one of *those girls*. In my adult female body I got attention from men. I had always been the kinda girl that boys asked out for a joke and the girls avoided me. I began to play around with boys, I played games. I wanted to be this vamp, this enigmatic ultrasexual figure. I created the bait and the boys took it. Although the encounters were empty, hollow experiences on the whole, I just couldn't say no. I was desired, I was wanted, if it was only for my own creation, an image, a fantasy.

I wanted to attract men then ridicule them with rejection as they had done to me. I had fun with the *bad* boys, I enjoyed the chasing, the mind-fucking, the thing I didn't really want was the sex, but to me this was the inevitability. My best friend who witnessed the head games with men declared, 'I think it's really cool the way you handle men'. I felt in control of men, the hunter. There was no way they could take control from me.

Living in a small town I was told by some friends that I was 'getting a name for myself'. A friend came round regularly and jokingly called me a 'slag' on a frequent basis. It seemed friends turned against me. My heavy drinking, smoking, shagging self was too much to accept.

The truth is I hated the men for their simplicity, their patheticness, but much more than this I hated myself. Whenever money went missing, it was my fault, I was always compared to my best friend 'she'd never do that' they'd say. But I was 'one of them girls'. I began to hate my friends, I was eaten up with envy at what I perceived as their perfection. I even attempted to seduce their lovers, when I was rejected I felt I could die from the self-disgust.

I fell in love with a boy who couldn't love me as I was one of *those girls*, it's your drinking' he'd say. 'Who are you shagging now?' he'd spit. Never mind he was screwing around. This relationship was to become both the most painful and the most transformative of my life. I was in love, I became vulnerable, this nearly killed me. Every time he rejected me, I would go out and sleep with another man, trying to reclaim some sense of worth, but I just felt shittier and shittier.

I believe that everyone must reach the bottom before they can come up again, and I did this. Looking back at how I felt then, I was unpleasant, worthless and did not deserve to be loved. Anything good in my life I had to destroy, and I was pretty damn good at that.

Inside I knew Michael could never love me, I always pictured the nice girl he would probably marry, little miss perfect, miss conventional, the opposite of me. But there was *something*. We couldn't stay away from each other for too long. Looking back, I wanted him as he looked like the loneliest person I had ever met, and I guess I reflected that back to him. We were drawn together both to destroy each other and to save each other. And as he did the former he inadvertently did the latter.

I could no longer hide behind sex or drugs. I was exposed, I was vulnerable. At my lowest point, I cried like I had never cried before, I screamed, I wailed, I never thought I'd ever stop, then I felt it.....silence...peace. I walked along the beach, the waves crashed, the sun beamed, I felt half way to madness, but then I had *the feeling...Relief*. It was all over. I knew right then that everything would be alright.

This was the most important turning point of my life. I finally left town. My journey never ended there, it had its downs, but I broke through into happiness. Over time and with *love* I became less afraid of losing control and power in friendships and I found through these relationships that I had been looking in all the wrong places for what I needed.

Through friendship I learned that I was o.k, and more that this that I was lovable and people wanted to be with me for me, not some fantasy image. So I discarded my old costume and became me. I became strong, I became strong enough to handle intimacy and my own vulnerability. I'm not completely there yet but I'm not going to hide anymore. I'm not going to destroy myself anymore.

Looking back, I pitied those boys for their weaknesses and I was particularly cruel to the nice ones. I never wanted them, I just wanted them to want me. I felt very bad about this for a long time but then I forgave myself. Now I see that I had unmet needs, as they had. Not only this but I look back and I see that I really was ok, as a drinking, smoking, sexual girl. There were powerful times during this period where sex really did empower me. I enjoyed that power over men, and oh how good to say 'no thanks' to the offer of a boys phone number afterwards! I look back with compassion and affection for my former self.

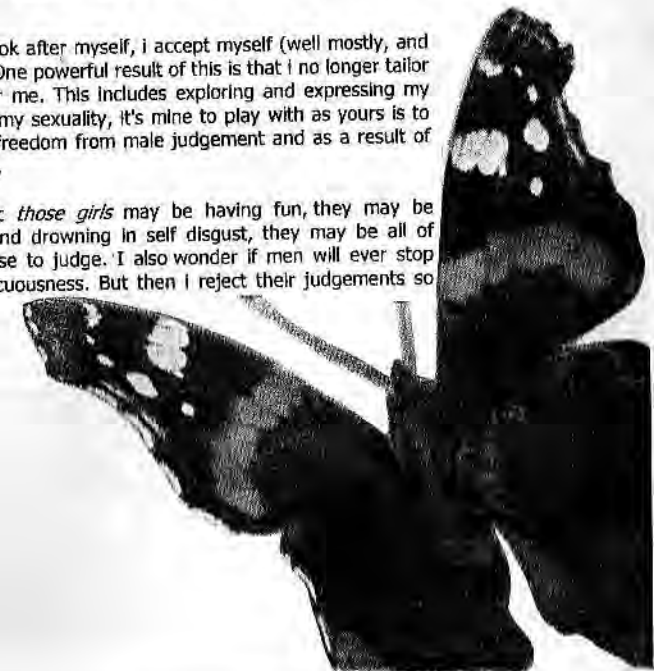
What really hurt me was the *shame* of being one of *those girls*. I was conforming to it with the aim of self destruction. But why should I have felt shame? I reject those judgements. I personally feel it's ok to sleep with different people if it's for the right reasons (and safety considered). If no one is exploited. Was I exploited in those encounters or were the boys? Does a prostitute ever exploit her clients or is she always the exploited? Would I have been less exploited if I charged money for my 'services'? Things are not always clear cut.

What I do know is that it does not work for me now and that needs can be easily misinterpreted. That sometimes to except that we have a need for another person is the *scariest* thing!

Today I'm looking in the right places. I look after myself, I accept myself (well mostly, and I'm working hard on the rest) and I love. One powerful result of this is that I no longer tailor my sexuality towards men but own it for me. This includes exploring and expressing my desire for other women. I have fun with my sexuality, it's mine to play with as yours is to you. This means I feel a great sense of freedom from male judgement and as a result of this self defining a glorious empowerment.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that *those girls* may be having fun, they may be empowered, or they may be degraded and drowning in self disgust, they may be all of these things. But it's not for any one else to judge. I also wonder if men will ever stop hiding their vulnerability through promiscuousness. But then I reject their judgements so it's ok to reject mine :)

DebbieX



The twenty second of July, two thousand and five.

Today I woke up to radio four again. It's a strange sensation because the news filters into your dreams and you dream of the apocalypse. My dream this morning involved family rifts, apocalypse, lesbian drama and dirty houses. I'm not sure how that actually connects to the news though. The news was about Nestle pumping too much of it's bottled water from springs in San Lorenzo so there's less for the local people. The water is said to have healing properties but now they feel that it tastes different. Nestle says there's no scientific proof for that so keep on pumpin'. In Pakistan you shouldn't drink the tap water as it's not safe enough, if you have enough money you buy big tanks of the stuff and have it delivered to your house. Nestle have the monopoly on tanked water there, so if you want to have safe drinking water, you have to buy Nestle. Here I opt for refusing to eat Drifters, Lion Bars and the like, oh and all the other products that they don't actually print their name on but in small print at the bottom tells you to write to mega nestle corp if you have any complaints about the product. Complaints I have a few. The other part of the news was about an Asian man who was chased through Stockwell London underground station by plain clothes police men, he jumped the ticket barriers and they jumped after him. They caught up with him eventually and shot him 5 times at close range. Apparently he had a detonator for a bomb. Got to be careful after the 7/7 terrorist attacks. It's lucky it happened on 7/7 rather than 6/7, because then we'd be stuck as to whether to go with the American way 7/6 or the British way 6/7. At least with 7/7 it works both ways. I didn't even realise that the police could do that here, I thought they opted for beating the shit out of people instead. If he did have a detonator for a bomb, I do understand that makes things different, that there's imminent danger. But the image I have in my head is of an Asian man being chased by a group of armed white men who is then shot in the head. I'm glad I'm not an Asian man living in London catching the tube, just in case. I never get any racist comments or abuse. I'm pretty lucky. Or have I subsumed my identity so much in the west there's nothing to be racist about. I always joke that I might wear the hijab one day and see if things are different, but I never do. I wonder how the right-on punk world would react to that. They'd probably think it was right-on and that would totally defeat the point. Or it would be a joke. I'd be successful in the double whammy of belittling and right-oning a culture that doesn't necessarily want to be right-on in this context. Whose culture? My culture, I feel like I'm flailing in the news. I hear Pakistan mentioned every day by people who have been there so many times more than me but don't have the connection to call it their own. Apparently there needs to be a clampdown in how many Islamic faith schools there are in this country as their existence works to further the isolation of Islamic youth from 'mainstream society'. For such a barbaric religion, they'll only teach barbaric lessons. 'open your books at page 3 class, and let us study how to build a bomb'. Cause and effect, cause and effect. It seems that there's only effect now. At my school I never learnt about the partition of India, the creation of Pakistan, British colonialism. I learnt about kings and queens, penicillin and how much of a hero Churchill was. 'open your books at page 3 class, and let us study how to be a westerner'. I think I learnt my lessons well. Trying to unlearn them is proving to be harder. There's an internal tug of war going on, and I'm just standing still, wondering what's going to happen to me on judgement day.

(honey@riseup.net)

As a rule, I don't *do* exercise. Apart from dancing my ass off at a club every so often [I always tell myself that this must surely be as effective as anything else that could keep me fit], I had always sworn that conscious exercising was a fool's game the idea of it turned me green. At school I actually *chose* to study Spanish [yes, I voluntarily chose to do this!!] as it meant that I could drop games (hooray!!), and if there's a lift, I'll be darned if I climb the stairs instead.

So my friends and family laughed out loud when I told them I had decided to enter Cancer Research UK's 10th anniversary 'Race for life', a 5km/3mile female only run held to raise as much money as possible for the charity's vital research. Not only was I terminally unfit and generally too lazy to walk anywhere, let alone run, there was also the dilemma that I owned absolutely nothing suitable to run in. People started sponsoring me out of sheer hilarity, convinced I'd have to walk the course, joking that it'd kill me or that I'd pass out half way round.

But this wasn't just about me taking a stand against my unfit and unhealthy body; it was a chance for me to do something actively to help this charity. In this day and age I'm sure very few people have not been personally touched by cancer, either as sufferers or survivors themselves, or in my position, as somebody who has had family members die from cancer, had a large proportion of female family members have breast cancer scares and have friends whose parents have been diagnosed or who have died from various forms of cancer.

So, after much borrowing of trainers and tracksuit bottoms (always a look I've craved(!)), doing training runs through fields and woodland where I live (and requiring to collapse into bed as soon as I got back from training, no joke!!) and sessions in front of the TV on an exercise bike where I began to get seriously competitive about beating previous days times of how fast I could cycle 5km in, whilst also keeping up to date with the storylines on Home and Away (I don't know which is sadder!!), it finally came to the 1st of June, Race Day.

If my reasoning for running this race was ever in doubt, turning up at Temple Newsam Park on the day to see over 6000 women with running numbers pinned to their fronts preparing to run/walk/saunter/jog or sprint the course in the name of charity was awareness enough of how important the race was to be. One of the most emotional and thought provoking moments and sights for me was at the beginning of the race being surrounded with women wearing signs pinned to their backs showing who they were running in celebration of, or in memory of. It hit me so powerfully just how widespread the effects are. One woman with a photograph of her dad pinned to her back who she was running in memory of, a single sign showing 10,15,20 different names of sufferers on it, poems for relatives, people celebrating their own recovery, it all had me choked from the start; then all these women starting the race together, running in unison amongst cheers and laughter.

I'll gladly admit that the race itself was hard work; at reaching the 3km sign post and being gutted because I was convinced it should have read 4km I felt like I really really wanted to give up, or at least walk from therein; but I knew I couldn't, (no thanks at this point goes to the man who stood cheering "support" from the sidelines, with the words 'you're half way there now'... yeah, real funny).

I finished the race in 40mins, which I was chuffed senseless with (until I heard the winner had finished in 15mins...as if!!), no seriously, I was really pleased that I ran a race, and that I did it in 40mins, and that I got a pretty pink medal to prove it. The fact that I was one in over 6000 women who felt that feeling was even better. Reading the message book that women had written their thoughts and comments in upon finishing the race summed up this poignant feeling, no complaints about cramp, blisters or joggers nipple, simply lines upon lines of supportive and celebratory thoughts and feelings.

It's two days on now and I've got seriously painful calf muscles and terrible sunburn on my shoulders from taking part in the race, and have sworn that I'm never going to exercise again, who was I kidding, I knew the pain would catch up with me in the end! Saying that though, something tells me that I'll probably enter the race again next year, and raise even more money for Cancer Research UK, and that something is the lasting memory of one woman's back sign in memory of her sister that read:

'Hope dies last'.



Nobody ever told me...

During the intermissions at screenings of one of Miranda July's video-projects (in the early 1990s), she set up a camera in a bathroom or closet and asked audience members to spend two minutes with the camera, completing the sentence, "Nobody ever told me..." At the end of the screenings, Miranda showed the audience the tape they had made. She said it was an interesting exercise in getting audience members to recognise themselves as participants. I also think it's a really neat exercise in community sharing & a way for people to learn and teach, and interact with other's histories, cultures and experiences... a positive way to prevent these things from being forgotten to be told again.

To explore this further, I emailed a bunch of people to ask: *How would you finish this sentence?*

And this is what they said...

Nobody ever told me to throw away my comfort blanket.
Neil.

Nobody ever told me that British school children can opt out of religious education whenever they want to. Eclnmonkey

Nobody ever told me that careers involving art are just as valid as those involving maths and science. >Ali

Nobody ever told me that if you don't look everyone in the eye when you chink glasses and say 'cheers!' then you'll have seven years bad sex... in Europe at least. Anonymous.

Nobody ever told me I was eligible for Disability Living Allowance despite the fact I was claiming no other benefit.

Neil

Nobody ever told me it was ok to make mistakes.
Neil

Nobody told me that I don't have to please anybody with my life choices but myself. Ali

Nobody ever told me that you don't have to go out with someone you're fucking to love them like a boyfriend and you don't have to fuck someone to love them like a boyfriend.
Anonymous.

Nobody ever told me you spell 'environment' with an 'n'. >Neil.

Nobody ever told me that there wasn't a set-in-stone definition of the 'perfect' that my family expected me to be.
Melanie

Nobody ever told me that that 'row row row your boat' song is meant to be 'life is but a dream' not 'life is butter dream' so I spent my childhood thinking life is a dream about butter. > Catherine

Nobody ever told me that when you take Testosterone you develop an Adam's Apple. Neil

Nobody ever told me that I can achieve as much as the next person, by myself. ALI

Nobody ever told me that when you get fucked up the ass you can come without anyone touching your cock (it was a pleasant - if unexpected - surprise.)
Anonymous.

Nobody ever told me that it was perfectly okay for ME to find my own route. Melanie

Nobody ever told me that I was so beautiful that I could have been a model. >Anon.

Nobody ever told me that singing 'Nine to Five' in a white van on the Staningley Bypass would be so much fun.

Ferg Nobody ever told me when it's right to phone the police. Neil.

Nobody ever told me that I'd had an operation on my willy when I was too young to remember. I realised why when I saw my first boyfriend's and it was the same as mine.
> Anonymous.

Nobody ever told me that eating too many tomatoes would turn the skin on my tummy orange. Melanie

Nobody ever told me it's all out there for the taking. Kath

Nobody ever told me I was going bald at the back of my head. Neil

Nobody ever told me that Venlafaxine makes it really hard to cum Debbie

Nobody ever told me that southerners say "auntie" and "anti" differently. Anna

Nobody ever told me that du siehst wunderbar aus. Anonymous.

Nobody ever told me that the agonising mire of teenage-hood was not in fact life's pinnacle. I wish I'd known back then that life does get better - far harder and scarier, but freer and better - as you get wiser and older. Anonymous.

Nobody ever told me that when you starve yourself you can actually begin to shit quite a lot, strangely. And that this shit would come to scare me because there's no food, digested or otherwise, in it. It's all made up of parts of myself. Nobody ever told me that my body would begin to digest itself. > Anon.

Nobody ever told me that if you straighten your hair once, you have to keep doing it. Ali

Nobody ever told me how to shave. Neil.

Nobody ever told me that you had a girlfriend that looked like a boyfriend that you had in February of last year. Ferg

Nobody ever told me teenage goth girls were so gorgeous... I had to find out for myself. Anna.

Nobody ever told me what I wanted to hear every time I wanted to hear it the most.

> Anonymous (cos it's a bit of an exaggeration but one that I don't want to polish up for realism).