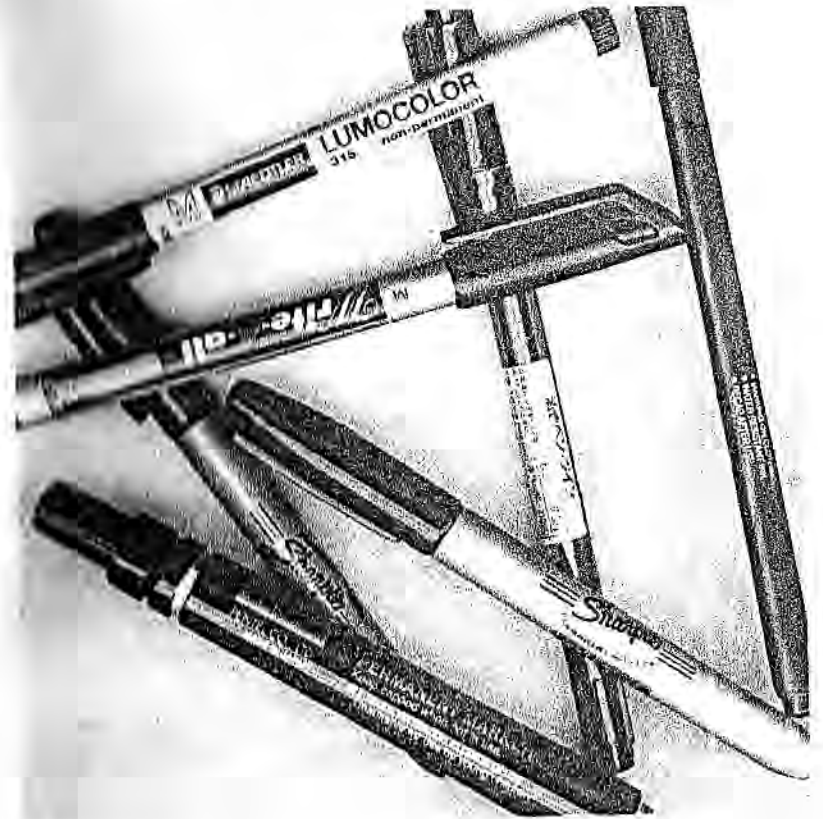


# REASSESS YOUR WEAPONS



Issue #4

PERIODICALS  
L579 12.05

INLAND REVENUE, NI CONTRIBUTIONS OFFICE  
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, NE98 1ZZ



*"She writes it down quickly before it fades away. The ink is black permanent Sharpie. She chose her pen well."*

> Nikki McClure in: *My Super Secret* fanzine.

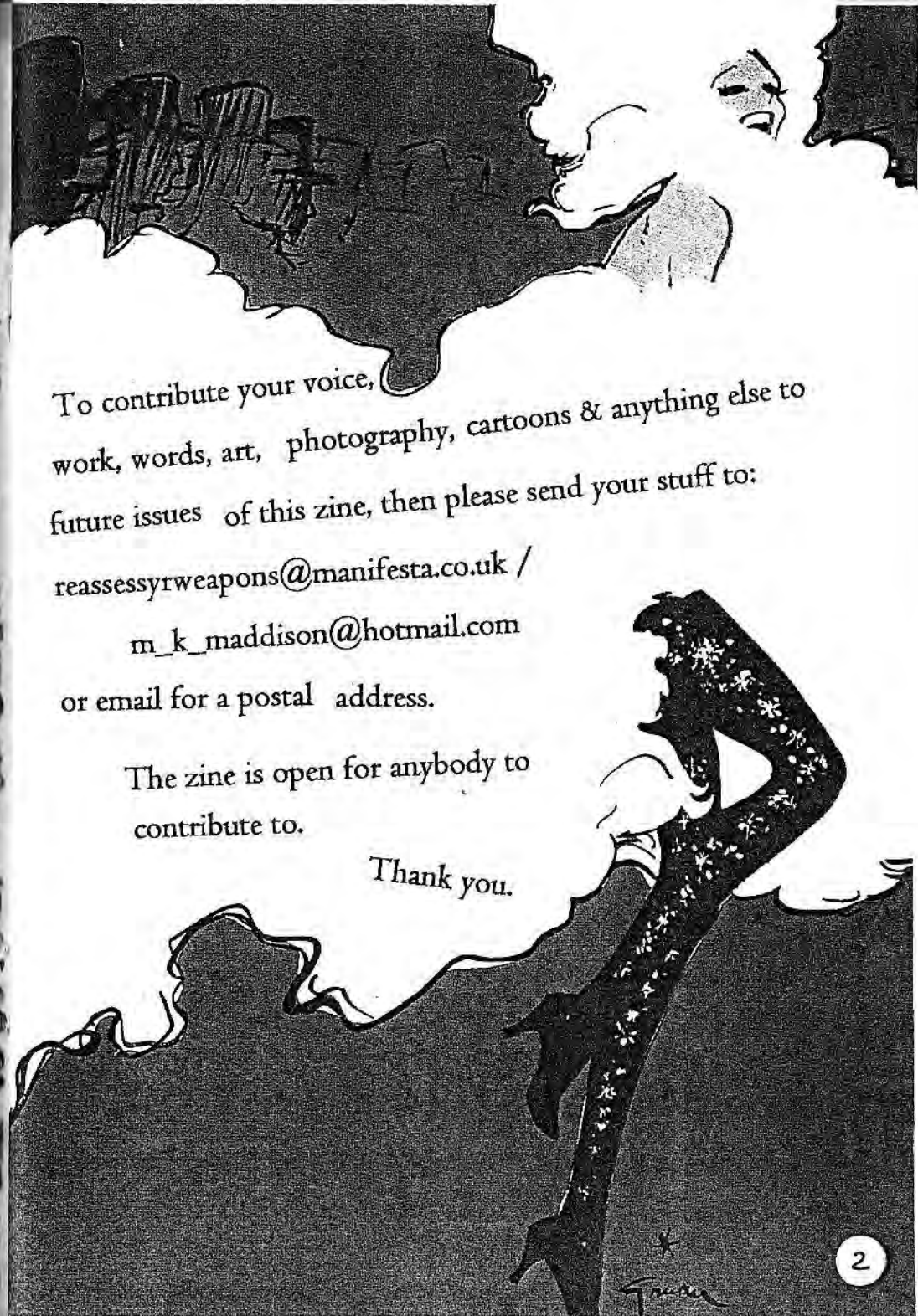
Welcome to issue 4 of *Reassess Your Weapons*, Manifesta's collective zine. Thanks as always to all contributors for all their hard work, creativity and inspirational pieces. These are our voices, written in permanent pen.

There is a definite theme of friendship and community in this issue. From us looking out for each other & supporting each other through burnout, to making links with feminist cultural producers & activists from other countries who support and compliment our actions in the UK, to continuations of collaborative work, to the reliance of friends, - it is clear that our communities, feminist comrades, and our friends are so important. The contributors to this zine are not all Leeds based, we are part of a wider community of individuals who make up life, and who understand the importance of creativity and cultural production. This zine is a document of individuals who make up our communities, all gathered together as an important example of collective and collaborative action.

March 2006

[www.manifesta.co.uk](http://www.manifesta.co.uk)

*Manifesta is a Leeds based DIY, not-for-profit feminist collective of totally amazing and inspiring individuals who blow my mind!*



To contribute your voice, work, words, art, photography, cartoons & anything else to future issues of this zine, then please send your stuff to:

[reassessyrweapons@manifesta.co.uk](mailto:reassessyrweapons@manifesta.co.uk) /

[m\\_k\\_maddison@hotmail.com](mailto:m_k_maddison@hotmail.com)

or email for a postal address.

The zine is open for anybody to contribute to.

Thank you.



# SCRATCH

written with the wondrous Hopie Windle, Julie Novak and Joseph Hath

## for Orpheus

Marsha walked into the drugstore and sat down. Well, rather, she slumped down, at the soda fountain counter. She was quite tired. It had been a long day. All she wanted was a nice root beer float. "Give me a large root beer float with lots of ice, Charlie," she said in her sing-song, melancholy voice.

The familiar waiter crafted a perfect float for Marsha and slid it down the counter. "Mmm, this is so good. I needed that after the day I've had," she said after her first long drink. Truth be told, most of Marsha's days were not much different from today. Her job at the factory was a hum-drum affair, cutting sheets of steel to be made into hog and cattle feeders. Every action in her life had begun to feel like it was out of a pre-determined pattern, a Butterick for boredom. Wake up, brush teeth, be careful not to think too much. And so on. But the design never did get fulfilled. Forever it seemed she was assembling some garment that was her life's work and the pieces of fabric never fit together the way they showed in the instructions.

But one day, as quickly as the drive on a new Singer, everything changed. The first thing to happen was the lottery. Each evening on her walk home after work, Marsha began to stop at the convenient mart to buy a Scratch Off and a pack of Post-its and a poochie treat and a bag of Whoppers and a can of Off! and a tub of Cool Whip and an *Us Magazine* and some Merit cigarettes and some Shout. She needed all these things every evening to win her day, to have her day won in a special way. So she bought treats and Post-its and attached the former to her arms and legs and then pulled them off methodically, one by one. She would feel her skin gently lifted and then *thwack* she'd pull each one off. She'd do it again and again until the entire contents of the pack of Post-its would all be fluttering to the ground.

Post-its were her new beloved. All else were old hat obsessions. Post-its on the lamps, on the bedposts, in the fridge, on the curling iron. Each one served as a little reminder to her that she was *good* and deserved the Universe's abundance. On her boots was a reminder to "walk tall and proud so you are recognized as the leader you are." A Post-it next to the peacock feathers in her bathroom let her know to "spread your wonderment around in each new place you go today." So by the time she walked out the front door and twisted the doorknob that read, "open the door to more grand and glorious opportunities," damn, was she feeling good. These new Post-its were really turning her life around.

Melanie: I

I was wondering if you (and the other collaborators) would object to me reproducing the article Scratch in the zine, which I hopefully intend to follow with polaroids of post-its attached to everyday objects with further positive messages that the readers of the zine could relate to? It sounds suspiciously like I'm merely wanting to reproduce your creativity for my own means, but I read this amazing thing this week about *honkadori* which is a 'cumulative' Japanese literary device in which a writer lifts the first lines of a haiku from another writer, and then adds two original lines of his own - the artist, Aya Takano, who was discussing *honkadori* said 'when I see something cool in a great artist's work I want to incorporate that into my own'. I really like the notion of this cumulative, incorporate art & literature exercise being used as an example of feminist collaborative, collective work and inspiration; Me building on your work for a new audience (who I can then also direct toward the original source material, your zine), and letting the ideas snowball. See what you think. I'll send you a copy when it's done!

Jacinta:

And your idea with our short story sound fabulous—especially since it was a collaborative work to begin with. We each wrote a few sentences and passed it on to the next person with only a line showing. We had to build a story upon that one line. After it was all finished, I went back and cleaned up the transitions so it flowed smoothly. But continuing the collaboration sound magical and perfect! So much of what I do is build upon other artists, as I'm sure you have gathered, so I welcome your expansion of our ideas! I know the other writers would be honored to have their story so well-loved.





### Damn you luscious smokes



The cheeky one behind the shed, out of the window, in the bathroom....I know why I'm still smoking, cause to not do would bring up too many things that I would have to do instead. Like tidy my room, clean out the cat litter tray, iron my shirt and fix my trousers up for work. It's so much quicker to roll up a cig then get off my arse and do something productive.

There is another reason too-cause last time I stopped I felt so sad, I couldn't stop crying. My mate suggested that's cause I'd been stifling my feelings with cigs all these years-this kinda makes sense cause when ever a challenging thought enters my mind, one that seems to require my full attention, I reach for the skins. So it's really a wise choice cause who would chose the sadness or the pleasure, albeit a chemically induced one.

Also I'm not sure I wanna be a 'good girl'. It's an unimaginative rebellion but an easy one. I know that every good citizen feels that smoking is wrong I feel it from their disapproving eyes. So these are my reasons, excuses whatever you wanna call them.

But I do want to stop completely 'cause last week I'd managed three weeks clean without cigarettes. I felt better already, my breathing was definitely starting to get easier and I was getting my appetite for food back again. Nether did I have to dowse myself in perfume to rid the pungent smell of tobacco, every seemed cleaner, crisper. But then I lapsed, I decided that there was no reason for me to not have what I wanted, (the brat in me) so I rolled one up, just cause I was pissed you understand. Smoking only when pissed turned to only smoking with a drink, which turned into a drink and a cig to relax which resulted in me, I admit it, having a fag when I felt like it. So here I am locked in a battle with my conscience again. gggrrrrrr!!



>Anon





 **You know when you see something so different from what you are used to that your reflection of**

**'We meet in underground passages, a handshake will pass my message to you. Then we will move on, separately, as if nothing has happened. But my story has become part of you now. It is a story about how we will create our own meaning'.**

This week something remarkable happened. Maybe it shouldn't be remarkable. Maybe it was only remarkable because it was so spontaneous and unexpected. I was at a gig, the women who had travelled internationally to play this gig were being given shit by the sound man, and were being told how he thought they should sound. They stood their ground, but ultimately, when they were on stage he changed the sound on his whims. So much more crap went on at this gig, crap that led to frustrations and anger, and disappointment. From the heckling of the 'compare' who began speaking for the women, interrupting them, infantilising them; to the atrocious sexist environment and support bands; to the distinct lack of support, encouragement or 'community'. And so much more that was 'felt' in the atmosphere of that hateful, backwards, misogynistic venue. I was so proud of those women for persevering through what was ultimately the worst gig of their careers. At the end of the night I ended up talking to them, telling them my observations of all this, a hug passing on the message of how sorry I was that they had experienced such bullshit in my home town, a town that should have, could have given them so much more of a better experience, I felt so responsible and uncomfortable by what they had experienced. And angry. Really fucking angry. I wanted them to know that I understood. I ended up taking the bands back to my best friends' house. I didn't want them to have to stay with those horrible, weird, hateful people. We had shared something that night, me and those women - we only had each other as witnesses, as the only people who would ever understand the severity, the peculiarity, the horrors of that show. We saw the worst of the worst. We had shared an understanding of something important, to know that I and they understood 'it', and that we all shared an understanding of just exactly what was so utterly wrong about the situation that they had been put in that night; it was a relief for us all to find like-minds in such a fucked up situation. That night, back at my friends, drinking tea, sharing stories, I was so damn comfortable with these amazingly talented women who allowed me and my best friend to speak of our lives, who wanted to know us, who seemed genuinely interested to know about our lives, our projects, and how we were so connected, and importantly, as a counter to everything that they hadn't experienced that night. To share queer, feminist space, for our voices to be heard by each other was tremendous, and so damn important, particularly in contrast to the environment of that gig. I spent hours talking to them the next morning, making reams of toast and endless cups of tea. We spoke of their hopes and dreams, of their projects and communities, we learned how alike we were, and what we shared, and how important it was that we had met and got to share with each other all about our projects. It made me realise just how

**yourself changes? I felt like they carved a hole in my head to let in more light and air.**

>Nan Turner

widespread and international the work of women as cultural producers, as cultural activists is. It made me glow inside with possibility and positivism. I felt connected. I felt respected. I felt like it was all worthwhile. I got to understand alternate perspectives, and got excited about projects happening in another country that I was so eager and proud to hear about from these women who I had chanced upon meeting. I was so glad, beyond belief, that I'd spoken to them at the gig, and offered them this place to stay, if I hadn't I would never have learned what I did, I would have simply left that gig with all my anger and disillusionment intact. Their work complimented my work and the work of my friends. I glowed inside with the reality of what we do and why we do it, and how remarkable it is that these women, living thousands of miles away were doing things that so complimented things that are so crucial to my life, and that they wanted to know and hear and share that link, my knowledges, my experiences, just as much as I did theirs. We sat there on a cold Thursday February morning, talking of revolution and counter-cultural exploitation, police response to French demonstration, cultural feminism and community, and my head exploded with the fact that these women who I had randomly befriended were, unknowingly, teaching me an important lesson of why I cannot sit back in my pit of depression when there's so much possibility and there's so much to do, and to challenge. It was life-affirming. Hugging those women goodbye as they set off on their trip to their next venue on the tour, promising to keep in touch, we passed on something important: we're not alone, there will always be an extended community of women out there who need us to keep going so that we can support each others' ventures, and so that there's a worldwide continuation of activist, feminist, queer projects and actions going on that are part of a much bigger picture of support and vision of our shared meanings. Their stories, their enthusiasms, their un-dented dedication was passed to me, my knowledges and projects and understandings were passed to them. And we all went on our way. But something has been left behind in me, and I can't fully explain it, and I don't fully understand it, but suddenly everything became clearer, more important, more necessary, I'm buzzing. And it took just one brief, remarkable encounter to teach me things I needed to learn about myself, and about 'it': this unspoken thing, these unspoken shared understandings and meanings that we share with people who we've never met, or may never meet if we're it not for choice encounters. There's more people out there who 'get it', who support 'it'. And when things get tough I'll now always remember that, and those three women who flipped the light-switch for me.

An executive at Nirvana's record label, upon hearing the album, *Nevermind*, for the first time retrospectively claimed, 'it was just like a shot of life; and I think that's what everybody responded to'. It was just such a shot that I received and responded to this week. And I feel exponentially energized by it.

By: diy\_feminist\_activism\_zine@hotmail.com Thanks to Michael, Helena, Valerie, Heather & Melanie.

## givebody

Five minutes in the shower.  
Lather, rinse, smooth  
conditioner midway to ends,  
leaving the roots to give body.  
Giving your body up to the water  
as you let the conditioner sit  
for a minute. Scrub, shave,  
rinse thoroughly, out, dry,  
deodorant.



Five minutes to slip on knickers,  
roll tights up from the toe,  
arms round, adjust, click for bra.  
A shirt, a skirt, jacket and jewellery  
into place. A soft routine, never hard,  
never military or mean, but balletic,  
beautiful and efficient.



Flecks of flaked mascara,  
glittery lilac dust straying  
onto the pouches of skin under your eyes,  
away onto your cheek.  
Sometimes I brush them away with my thumb,  
if you're a little distracted.

You had five minutes to put your face  
together, paint your eyebrows back on,  
shadow your eyes so the watery blue  
fades less. I focus on the lines  
around them instead, where you smile,  
and the grey at the corners  
where the liner ran.

## Penny Broadhurst



## Who's Charity?



>Anonymous

My friend had said that she had heard that people often do charity work because they feel guilty. My friend felt this was true and I stayed silent, I secretly thought to myself how true this was. Both my friend and I are what could probably be called 'overachievers'. The idea that some people just can't stop volunteering to do things, that everything they do has to be of worth, that it must have a successful outcome. I can't speak for my friend but I will admit that without the charity work I fear that I would lose a part of my identity, I am stricken with the fear that I am not a 'good person', that I am selfish, that I am never doing *enough*. That is not to say that I do not enjoy the work because I do, but it does require commitment. Being a volunteer at a charity requires anything from a few hours to a few days a week, even a few hours require that you shape your social life around it, so you cannot really go away for the day or go out and get pissed the night before if it's an early start.

I'm not sure I really believe in altruism, indeed it's been argued that animals only show affection to their 'owners' to achieve their target, such as food. Whilst I doubt this as I've experienced great loving affection from animals, I'm a little more sceptical of humans. I feel that we are all interdependent and as such our social interactions are all about our own gain, of course we generally want the other person to benefit too, but at the expense of ourselves? When I volunteer to work for a charity, my main motivation is how I can improve my c.v, my next motivation is that I'd like to experience working at that project and also that I could help, hopefully empower people to improve their own lives. When I go charity shopping, my first motivation is to find a great new item of clothing for next to nothing as an additional bonus I am helping some really cool charities.

Don't get me wrong its not that I'm only out to pleasure myself (sorry☹), because I commit to regular support of charities through donations and practical help whenever possible, but I guess I'm arguing that charity is certainly a two way street. Indeed good charities work with this, they offer training that can be also be applied outside to the volunteers life. A nice looking certificate to put on your desk may accompany this. They may also provide social opportunities to meet new people and often use gift vouchers and prize draws as incentives. Charity work has increasingly gained job status in the careers field and people are growingly aware of this. Indeed when you can't get that job because you just haven't got the right experience, and you can't get the experience without the job then the charity route is perfect.

However the new wise charity is selective and competitive, it can compete with the corporate boys now, placements at your chosen charity may be hard to come by, besides the long waiting list, you may go through a lot of training only to find you still have not passed the selection process. However if you choose the right charity the rewards are ten-fold, meeting people on the same wave length as you, experiencing things you may never have thought of trying before, finding out that you are much more capable than you think, getting support and on top of all this often being inspired and touched by the resilience, the strength and the sheer warmth of the human spirit.







#### ADVENTURES IN TRACTING

I was always fascinated by the morbidly religious; those people who are called by their god to go forth and preach the gospel, no matter how ridiculous it makes them look to the uninitiated. I blame my parents, which I suppose is the fashionable thing to do anyway. They both left Northern Ireland, the British Bible Belt, to avoid the kind of hassles that can only come from the "mixed marriage" of Papist to Prod. Despite their early experience of Christian love and forgiveness, Belfast style, I was brought up very carefully, so as not to prejudice my young and impressionable mind against any kind of god. Well, some kind of Christian god, anyway. It didn't work. Somewhere along the line their careful lack of indoctrination failed to take; I cannot remember ever having been other than a confirmed atheist.

Nevertheless, the subject of this invisible man living in the sky, and the lengths his adherents would go to please him, exerted a powerful pull. A quick glance through my grandmother's bookshelf as a teenager helped; books with titles like "Satan is alive and well on planet earth!" (by Hal Lindsey, a classic) really made me want to know more. Where were these people hiding, besides Northern Ireland?

It was the common enough, but utterly bizarre, practice of Tracting that really spurred me on. I'm sure everyone, even those who know only the meekly private approach to religion that characterises the UK, has seen or been handed a tract at some point in their lives. Tracting as a religious duty has its roots in the same social developments that created the tabloid newspaper, and the salacious pornographic crime or horror novel. Cheap paper and cheaper printing techniques enabled multiple sheets of information to be reproduced. The Victorian "penny dreadfuls" are the populist example; the Victorian religious tract could perhaps be described as their moral counterpoint. Victorian tracts were the ultimate triumph of message over style. The message of god's love was thought to be so vital, and so undeniable, that its proponents never stopped to think about its presentation. Victorian tracts were generally in the tiniest possible print, so tightly packed onto the page that they were next to unreadable. Adding the more generalised fact of high illiteracy rates amongst the poor (those generally thought to be most in need of the message) meant that instead of being a marvellous idea for the propagation of god's word, they were little more than wasted paper (assuming they didn't find their way into someone's outdoor privy). The same desire to cram as much dry holy writ into the available space, regardless of how unreadable that makes it, can still be observed in tracting today.

Perhaps the most numerous tracts in the world are those printed by the Fellowship Tract League, out of Lebanon, Ohio. These are the small rectangular ones you may have seen around British towns. They are handed out mainly by British Baptist (or other fundamentalist protestant) groups, and comprise a cover, followed by two and a half pages of text and a space to write in your churches' contact details. The League's website ([www.fellowshiptractleague.org](http://www.fellowshiptractleague.org)) claims (no doubt truthfully) that over 2.8 billion have been distributed in two hundred countries since 1978, and they currently print in 70 languages. FTL tracts are very simple, usually printed in two or three simple colours, and sometimes utilizing clipart as part of the cover. They used to be printed in a church basement, but due to their popularity have expanded over the years into a large scale publishing operation.

However, it was not until I spent my first year living in the spiritual homeland of the crazed Christian, The United States of America, that I discovered the holy grail of free religious pamphlety- the work of Jack T Chick. Chick tracts are to the work of the FTL what a stone axe is to an assault rifle. Behind a single coloured cover, they are small rectangular comic books, about two inches by half an inch, with

astonishingly vibrant black and white artwork. The more cartoonish are drawn by Chick himself, the most popular dating from the seventies, while the more realist ones are drawn by a long time associate who shuns the public eye. Chick revolutionized the art of the tract, starting from his personal assessment of the popularity of the comic book and applying what he saw to the spread of god's word. Since his first tentative steps, Chick has managed to become the most published comic artist in the United States. I have only ever found one in the British Isles, but have been assured by proselytizers it is merely their prohibitive cost that makes them so uncommon. Luckily for the fan, they are all available for perusal on JTCs website (www.chick.com). No time spent looking at Chick tracts is wasted- their worldview is bizarre in the extreme. Amongst other breathtaking gems, Chick is of the opinion that dinosaurs lived alongside mankind in the 6000 years since biblical creation, usually pretending to be dragons or sea monsters; the Vatican is a satanic conspiracy to deceive would-be Christians, and is responsible for every atrocity ever committed in the name of Jesus; and that England's empire was destroyed because of a failure to honour agreements made with god's chosen people, the Jews. Nothing too special if you are at all familiar with real fundie prods, but a real eye opener for those who think of the Church of England as a protestant church.

It had long been a desire of mine to produce my own tracts, ever since I found my first copy of "The Burning Hell!" (FTL) on a damp Leeds pavement. If these loons can write out their version of the universe and hand it out to anyone who walks past, then so the hell could I. It was, however, like most of my ideas, just a little too much of a distraction from intoxicants and the pursuit of nookie, and remained on the backburner for many years. However, in 2003 I found myself back in the bosom of Bush juniors' America, Ohio no less, and was starting to think that now might be a good time to start spreading the word. Having a copy of "After Death, What?" (FTL) dropped next to my coffee whilst minding my own business was the last straw. It was also my first shamelessly ripped off title. I decided that, in honour of those Ohioans who had first opened my eyes to tracting, the only worthy name was The Atheist Tract League, and the only worthy format was a single fold, cover plus two and a half pages of screed- conveniently, something that could be easily produced with a photocopier and some black and white paper.

The ATLs first run was of three tracts: "After Death, What? Rot!" (about the glorious afterlife of slowly becoming worm food); "The Burning Hell!" (about why only assholes would claim you deserved to be eternally tortured for disagreeing with them); "Tract This! Or 'this is Satan's tract'" (about why tracting was a lame way to fulfil gods requirement to "go forth and preach the gospel"); to be joined by the limited run, slightly wonkily printed "The Carrot and the Stick" (about how the Christian worldview of heaven and hell was the kind of complex nonsense a four year old would come up with). I followed the advice of the FTLs website and left them in the post office, in local stores, tucked into magazines and dropped in the coffee shop. Helpfully, there was an underground and independent publishing conference held annually at Bowling Green State University, which enabled me to drop some to the kind of scruffy zine punks who frequent such gatherings. I think this is how some managed to find their way into the Denver Zine Library (which I like to imagine as a huge nuclear bomb proof bunker deep in the Rockies, filled to bursting with the angry rantings of disillusioned hippies.)

The point behind the tracting was twofold; I wanted to annoy fundamentalists as much as they annoyed me (difficult, when their mind exists in a world of complete certainty) and I wanted to give people like me, who were sick of being handed judgemental tracts when they were drinking coffee a good giggle. However, I had fallen into the classic tractors trap. I had allowed the message to eclipse the style. I was working on the assumption that if someone handed an atheist tract to me, I would read it and have a laugh. However, most people don't read tracts,

and "In God We Trust!" (containing the revelation of the testament of the worship of Moo the Fish God),

but quickly bin them (they even have real toilet paper in 21st century America). Worse, my tracts had been designed to a great extent as parodies of those produced by the FTL; as such, they looked exactly like real religious tracts. I had wondered why a lot of the alternative types at the publishing conference had been giving me such odd looks, before it occurred to me that they had probably assumed I was a religious nut, and that I wasn't even giving them my own work but something I had mail ordered from an operation based in some churches basement. Something told me this was not the way to impress attractive indie boys and girls.

The next logical step was to produce a tract that couldn't possibly be mistaken for something actually Christian. "Jesus Hates You!", my personal favourite (about Christianity's sordid legacy of misogyny) and "Bow Down To Whitey!" (which shamelessly thieved some Jack Chick artwork) were the answer. However, this led to a whole new set of problems. Generally speaking, people wouldn't take something from you that said "Jesus Hates You!" on the front. I discovered this during John Kerrys stump-speech visit to BG, OH. It was like some kind of weird street festival, with two blocks closed off, Democrats lining up to see the long-faced wonder explain why he should be president, college republicans with insulting banners, anarchists protesting the war, and uncle Tom Cobbley and all milling about in the sun. Because Kerry was nominally a Catholic, and yet was nominally pro-choice, the abortion is murder squad turned out. The same group had brought a float to campus with huge full colour posters of mashed fetuses and Jews being herded into gas chambers. Not wanting to disappoint their public, they stood in the street, as close as the Secret Service would allow them to the stage (I'd estimate about two hundred yards, and behind a big banner) with their aborted foetus porn shining like a beacon. I couldn't resist, and tried to slip them a few tracts. I managed to get rid of a couple of "Jesus Hates You's" by hiding them inside the far more religious looking "Tract This!", but when those ran out I was reduced to "Jesus..." on their own. One girl, holding a placard of a foetal hand clutching a twenty five cent piece, looked down at what I was holding, then stared into my face and said

"Why?"  
I was, I have to admit, completely stumped.

Back in England, I tried to spread the word, but it didn't seem to catch on. I got in the habit of leaving a tract on my bus into work, where I could watch its progress from further back. Not once in a dozen journeys did anyone pick one up. One guy stared at it for a while, as if it were illegally occupying his seat, then plonked his arse down right on top and spent the rest of the journey staring out the window. I handed one in person to someone in a bar, and was handed it right back 45 seconds later and told "Er Dads a priest and she don't agree wi that!" Then management came over to inform me that they don't allow anyone to hand out religious material in their pub. That's when it dawned on me; They would have said that to someone with real religious tracts as well, and there would have been no squealing about the first amendment and how the agents of satan were thwarting god's word. Here, I was the asshole for bringing up religion. It's the British way to avoid controversy of any kind, and despite Holier-Than-Thou Tony Blair's best efforts, religion is still considered a private matter. I think my favourite response (after "Why?") was when a lefty read "Jesus Hates You!" and sighed "Don't you just hate it how feminists have no sense of humour?" I felt pretty chuffed that my writing had been mistaken for that of a woman, even that of the fabled dried out old feminazi.

If the preposterous "incitement to religious hatred" bill ever passes, it might even become illegal to hand out something that criticises Jesus or any of his followers. Perhaps that would be the best time to start again, and this time come up with something really eye catching, like "Fuck You, You Fucking Fuck, I Know Where You Fucking Live! Read This Or Die A Thousand Deaths!" And maybe stick in a few more knob gags.





\*i would tell you the truth but i'm not that bold\*

how do you describe independence?  
being utterly alone - no,  
not being alone, but depending on no-one  
for anything?

where does that put you  
when you depend on your friends  
for everything?

when someone leaves and the bottom falls out of  
your world, when you can't get on without them,  
when an hour on a train is too long and you can't  
face the journey without crying, she told me,  
can't be alone  
can't deal with inside of head  
can't cope without distraction of friends.

when we'd climbed the hill and walked over the  
moors to the next valley, we sat and ate our food,  
watching the view  
smoke curled from a chimney downhill.  
late summer. i would not be here  
without her. nor she  
without me.

who would you be if no-one saw?

i am afraid to be myself sometimes.  
i am afraid to be myself alone sometimes.  
i think she is too.

I, fight for solitude, false independence,  
then numb it.

She, makes sure she is never alone.

\*sometimes i close my eyes\*



### What are my fears?

- *I'm afraid that Joan will die when I still need her*-where will that leave me? Will I be able to cope on my own? I would miss her so much, would I survive the pain? I'm feeling afraid that I may not have spent enough time with her.
- *I'm afraid to lose Rolo*- Will I be able to cope on my own? I would miss her so much, would I survive the pain? I'm worried I didn't love her well enough.
- *I'm afraid that my mother will never find peace*, I'm afraid that she is not happy and free. I'm worried that she will die without experiencing joy and happiness because she deserves it so much. I'm afraid because I'm not sure I need her anymore and what this means. I'm worried that I am not the daughter she wants.
- *I'm afraid that my brother will never learn from his mistakes, accept things and never find peace*. I'm worried that I will have to look after him his whole life. I am worried that he will destroy a girl or a child and himself. I am worried he will kill me in some way.
- *I'm afraid that I will never resolve my feelings with my father*, that it will always overshadow my life. I am afraid that he will never find peace.
- *I'm afraid that I don't need my parents anymore*. What does this mean? Does that mean that I'm selfish? I still love them but I left them as they left me. But I want them to be happy. I want them to love me without demands.
- *I'm afraid of how I will feel when my first love marries and settles down*-where does that leave us? Why should it matter? I know what we had but I need to talk to him one day, I'm afraid that what I fear is right, that he could not love me, that it was all his using me. I've afraid that I will fall back into his bed again and get hurt again, will it ever be separated. I'm worried that he was my chance, that there will be no more.
- *I'm afraid that I will lose my best friends*. I'm aware that situations change and so do people. I worry for the loss I would feel, the emptiness, the pointlessness. I wonder what I would do.
- *I'm afraid to lose all the stability from my life*.
- *I am afraid of feeling isolated*.
- *I'm afraid that I will make the wrong decisions, am I making one now?* I'm nervous cause I'm impulsive and don't think things through enough beforehand. Am I heading in the right direction? I'm afraid that I cannot cope with the changes needed. I fear my feelings, my limits.
- *I am afraid that I've took the wrong paths*. I'm afraid it made the wrong choices-what if it wasted my life, evaded my happiness
- *I'm afraid that I will never experience the loving relationship I want*
- *I'm afraid of getting hurt again*. I'm terrified that I would not survive it.
- *I'm afraid to leave my job*. I am afraid to lose this stability in my life, the loss of so many emotional relationships, the loss. How will I replace it financially?
- *I'm afraid of facing my debt*. What if I can never overcome it, what if it becomes out of control like my fathers did. What if I lose control/face.
- *I am afraid of becoming pregnant*. How would I cope?, how would it feel? What would it mean to my sexuality? I'm afraid of being trapped, controlled. That I cannot escape.
- *I am afraid to lose control*-what if something bad happens to me? Could I survive it? What if I could not regain control again of my life?
- *I am afraid of dying before iv had chance to tidy up*. It's important to me that the people I love know that I love them. I want my life to be a success. I'm afraid to fail. I would let people down? I could not prove that im loveable.
- *I am afraid of my freedom*-what if I am free, would everyone else leave me? Could I handle success? What if I lost it all again. Do I deserve to be happy?
- *I am afraid I am never gonna be the person I wish to be*. I'm afraid that I will never be brave enough to follow my heart, do missionary work in poor countries, foster, ride a motorbike, write a novel, and be enough. Be important to someone? Be needed. Be loved? Not feel lonely-trust myself-not be afraid to be alone. Find answers.
- *I am afraid that I am falling behind the social clock*. What if my life is not a success?

>Anonymous

# ...notice board...

manifesto distro

www.manifesta.co.uk/zines

Dear friends,

We are giving Zia (our niece) the gift of a website for Xmas/Solstice. This is no ordinary website. This website involves you, as her beloved fans, whether you know her or not. The site features her, along with guest musicians Julie Novak, Jacinta Bunnell, Dean Jones, and Michael Wilcock in a band that was in existence but for one brief hour. Granted that one hour was in No Parking Recording Studios and captures never-heard-before vocals and music by this Super Group who we hope to hear more from.

Here's where you come in... If you chose you may go to the website, listen, post comments, become fans, request shows, etc. This will let Zia (and the rest of the band for that matter) know that they are shining stars in all our eyes. Feel free to spread the gospel of The Pink Monkeys far and wide.

[www.purevolume.com/thepinkmonkeys](http://www.purevolume.com/thepinkmonkeys)

We would love for Zia to get the chance to go to Rock & Roll Camp for Girls this summer or next. If you would like to help make that happen, you may send donations to: Jacinta Bunnell (Rock & Roll Camp for Zia), PO Box 325, Rosendale, NY 12472, USA.

With love and thanks and just pure rock, Jacinta and Michael.

## Further thoughts on Confidence...

Confidence is yourself at age six

That thing that you know

You gotta stick to by hook, crook or coke

'else you gonna get Fucked

And what grrl loves fucking?

I can't deal with anyone's ID but my own. Love and Regards, Nonto

A section of RAYW#5 will be dedicated to HARASSMENT in all its various forms, and in all its guises & disguises, subtleties & unsubtleties. We welcome your thoughts, experiences, & advice on how to face harassment. Please submit your ideas, in any form, by June 1st 2006, to: [reassessyrweapons@manifesta.co.uk](mailto:reassessyrweapons@manifesta.co.uk)

Manifesta... is a diffuse network of women, ladies, grrrls, boys, gentlemen, and queers who like to organise inspirational gigs, club nights, benefits, workshops, distros amongst other things.



We meet every first Sunday 6pm at the brudenell social club, queens road in Leeds and everybody is welcome



Email us at [letsgetwhipped@hotmail.com](mailto:letsgetwhipped@hotmail.com) and visit us at [www.manifesta.co.uk](http://www.manifesta.co.uk)

# burnout Special





last night? again?) No...  
ah!

As a result of inspiring and crucial conversations with incredibly active and awe-inspiring friends, the rest of this zine is dedicated to Burn-Out. Burnout, stress and pressure within DIY communities, and beyond, especially when it occurs as a result of balancing our work/DIY/social/creative/volunteer commitments with our own personal wellbeing and everyday lives, is a hugely common occurrence. *Reassess Your Weapons* feel that it is important to think about burn-out so that we don't all collapse under the weight of it. Hopefully dedicating this space to this important issue will help us to view our stresses and pressures from a degree of distance so that we can more clearly detect and appreciate our pressures for what they are, and perhaps learn to cope with them more effectively, or learn how to eliminate or reduce them; And also so that we are aware & thus more able to support each other through & help share the load, if possible. Hopefully by opening up the discussion, and validating burn-out as an important issue & a dangerous problem, we can all begin to feel less like we're letting people down, or missing out by stepping back every once in a while in order to curb our own personal stresses. RAYW welcomed contributions addressing experiences and/or thoughts & advice on how to avoid/overcome burn-out. The following pages feature the responses received...

(last night? again?) Do you wanna (yeah!) Do you remember feeling I must've been sleeping when letting well at all. I've got this g around called please pretend kay? Do you wanna stay in bed re coffee, put on some eye- that things are fine & they're Hey look I'm really sorry I in party. I know it looks a to-do list behind my nds I'm still a feminist. But r benefit. I give up. I give day. > Le Tigre: Much Finer  
nd (what?) I was up ht? again?) Do you wanna lo you remember feeling ve been sleeping when ill at all. I've got this d called please pretend you wanna stay in bed - put on some eye- s are fine & they're I'm really sorry I - I know it looks i list behind my till a feminist. But - I give up. I give day > Le Tigre: Much Finer

wicksand (w last night? again?) ah!) Do you I must've been ting well at around ca ay? Do you re coffee, p that things d Hey look I ur party. t a to-do ier - I'm st 19 enefit. today > Le Tigre: Much Finer

Noam Chomsky in an interview for Punk Planet (2000):

I think it's important to try and make the connections you speak of not just in your mind but also in your actions. But the problem becomes how you decide where to focus your energy. It all can be really quite draining.

Noam> There's no answer to that. There is just way more than any human being can possibly do, so you have to choose your priorities. How you make such decisions depends on all sorts of things, from your personality to your background.

A lot of people burn out. In fact, I had friends who committed suicide which is the ultimate in burnout. [...] It [burnout & struggle] led to all sorts of reactions, all the way up to suicide, not to mention constructive adjustments. But they're not easy to make. What happens to your life?

Being a committed activist changes your life enormously. A lot of things that would be fun to do, like having dinner with friends or going to a movie, are out because you're just too busy doing other things. I can't say I've suffered - that would be ridiculous - but it certainly changes your life a lot. It's a much harder, more intense and difficult life than it would be if you took a different path.

wicksand (what?) I was up ht? again?) Do you wanna feeling when at this pretend y in bed eye- they're rry I ooks my st. But I want be coming to your benefit. I give up. I give up. I'll be at home today > Le Tigre: Much Finer

# \*Burnout\*

Notes on burn out.

I'm a processing freak. So when I started thinking about burnout, I had to start analysing why I ever feel burnt out at all. What stops me feeling burnt out, and why is it burn out only ever seems to happen after doing something exceedingly diy?

And it all seems to come back to fire. How can something burn out if there was never a flame to start with? The main things that I feel fired up about, that I can wax lyrical and be idealistically passionate over, all live in the diy world. The things that motivate me and the people that inspire me all have at least some connection to diy. I can't think of anything more exciting than people carving out and creating space; forming networks across all kinds of borders and constantly learning and generating ideas...someone once told me that he thought that there was no authentic experience left in society, that people don't engage in their lives, aren't present in their existence, some huge postmodern dilemma of nothingness. And I could see his perspective up to a point. And that point is where diy intersects with society and injects something that is ultimately present, exciting, connected and passionate; at a time when we are all supposed to be cynical, depressed and isolated. And that's the root of the fire. Diy just feels so very alive.

And then the flip side of this...passion knows no limits on its demands...what we can view as the ideal, that isn't harnessed by a cynical realism, often propels you into an organisational and soul possessing whirlwind that you have to see through to the end for the simple reason that you believe in it. Diy could burn you alive. And once it's consumed you, what happens to the flames? No passion to feed on and it's gone. Rebuilding motivation from the ashes is hard to do. It is repeatedly done, but it is hard to do.

So I've been trying to unpick (as a processing freak is wont to do) why sometimes I would feel so burnt out and other times I wouldn't. And it's taken me fucking ages to figure it out, but I think that maybe I have it. And it all seems to come back to fire. Sudden large bursts of flame followed by ashes followed by sudden large bursts of flame, like a circuit of self combustion...except for the fact that it's not about the self and it doesn't have to be about the self. One of the best things about being involved with diy grass roots organising is the connection to so many other people who are involved with the same thing. The people who come along to events and lend support and enthusiasm about what they see growing around them.

I suppose that we choose whether we want to kill ourselves for the cause, and we choose our involvement and levels of responsibility; well, to a certain extent! As willing as this proffering is, I think there is a need to hear, and thereby know that it was worth it. Because it's this appreciation and encouragement that helps keep diy fires going. We owe it to each other to keep each other's fires burning, because these are the things that sustain us. The value of being able to experience and live actual alternatives to an increasingly depressing mainstream world has immeasurable value to me. We need this. The risk of burning out and not being able to reignite is a terrifying one. But the beautiful potential of never having to burn out at all is an amazing one. And that's totally idealistic, but since when was diy pragmatic? And maybe that's the point. Because it all seems to come back to fire.

\*Burnout\*

\*Burnout\*

>humey@riseup.net

# \*Burnout\*

This is a runaround couple of weeks + I'm wary because of what's happened before, just taking everything on + feeling responsible for too much + ploughing onwards until you lose yourself + have to drop it all. Been talking to friends about burnout, ones we've had before + ones that might be coming. I know I'm at capacity now + I can't take on any more fun or work or I'll crash. + I can see a couple of people heading for it too, maybe, but I don't see how to warn them, how to help them rein it in, I mean until you drop it all there's no way to just let one thing, or one person, go.

\*dirty feet what have you done?  
We can do the rest in the morning ...  
dirty face rest your eyes now  
the shape you're in ...  
lets move to the back\*

I think maybe I'm learning a bit better nowadays, I know the symptoms to watch for: lying on my bed staring into space, pissing about on the internet, smoking manically, eating too much, all signs that despite acting glazed, somewhere inside I'm panicking + I need to stop. I've got a bit better about spacing things out, leaving time to focus on one job at a time. I've started to practice saying no to things I don't have time for, no matter how tempting. Realise limitations, you can't be a part of everything. I've started these conversations about burnout partly to prepare my friends for when I say 'sorry I can't make it, I've got too much on'. You're no use to anyone if you're not fully present because you're mind's capsizing with all the other things you've got to do.

I mean it's amazing how little we can do really, any one of us. You think of the possible hours in the day + you think of the potential uses of each one. But you do have to sit + do nothing, often. Read, not improving texts, but something to switch your mind off for a bit. Talk to someone on the phone about nothing in particular. Try + get out of town for a day. I know watching TV doesn't make me happy, but sitting round it with my housemates does. You've gotta go out + get a little drunk or whatever, you've got to have balance, that's all. You've got to sit + write something out of your head, got to sit + listen to Julie Doiron + do nothing special, you know?

>amy

# \*Burnout\*

# Things to do today

Day Sat 15th Jun

Date

# \*Burnout\*

## Priorities

I'm not burnt out, but I am rather scorched at the edges with the awareness that if I carry on like this, I could be consumed whole, reduced to something flimsy, charred, and barely recognisable. **leted**

This has happened before. I should have seen it coming. How did I let it get to this? Exhaustion. Feeling abnormally repelled and depressed at the thought of doing anything. Work-related stress. Feeling lazy and useless. And so I'm having to unpick my life and find out how I've got to the state I am in now.

I work 35 hours a week. I'm involved in a collective which organises queer cafes, gigs and events. I'm learning to drive. I play in a samba band. I'm in a performance group. I'm involved with someone who lives far away. I'm trying to maintain relationships with friends, both locally and not so locally. I aim to see my parents every six weeks. And I'm trying to do usual day-to-day stuff. Eating well. Staying reasonably healthy and fit. Contributing towards the running of the household. Socialising. Relaxing.

I don't know whether what I do looks like too much to you, but it is more than I can take. I no longer feel satisfied with the contribution I'm making to any of the things I am part of. The things which I chose to do because I enjoy them have now become more chore-like than chores. And I'm feeling guilty about the things which I've let fall behind. **S @ ABBERS**

Why did I let it get to this? I actually have very few compulsory commitments. It's not like I'm a carer for a relative or responsible for children. I do lots of things because I like to be busy. I need stimulating activity for my general well being. It's hard getting the balance right. In the past, I've stopped doing so much that it's made me miserable. Often, activities can't be assigned mutually exclusive categories. A lot of what I do is somewhere between socialising, recreation and activism. This is an advantage but it can be a disadvantage when you're trying to measure the impact of withdrawing from activity.

It is hard saying no. You may find you can't say no from the outset, because only when you've got involved can you decide whether it's worth carrying on with. You may regret not getting involved later. It's hard deciding what to give up. There are some things I don't like, but I feel like I shouldn't give up. There are some things which other people are working hard to maintain who need support, so I'd feel bad about giving them up. So this is my advice to myself:

1. You are not indispensable, things will carry on without you.
2. It's better to contribute well to a few things rather than spread yourself too thin.
3. If people care about you, they will accept your decision to say no to things.
4. You don't have to give things up forever. You may just need a break.
5. If you burn yourself out, you won't be fit to do anything at all.

125/11

>Heena

✓ I am not indispensable - 110' - " CLSIR ✓

\*Burnout\*

\*Burnout\*

\*Burnout\*

\*Burnout\*

\*Burnout\*



## \*Burnout\*

burnout is like a bi-annual addiction for me

I was reading for my work and I came across this sociology paper by Erika Summers-Effler which put things into context for me at a pretty crucial time of burning out. She talks about the role of emotions in feminist social movements. It's a pretty hard paper for me to read cuz I didn't know a lot of the models she's talking about but I think I picked up an explanation for burnout and how to combat it that I can relate to so maybe you can too?

Okay so she uses this concept called 'emotional energy' which means to be the, 'long term levels of enthusiasm, personal strength, sense of social connectedness, and willingness to initiate interaction'. This is the part of us we need to protect from becoming burnt out. There are things that can make us stronger she calls these 'solidarity experiences' which I guess amounts to a positive meeting, party, gig, song, band. But there are also things she calls 'energy sinks' things, moments, people, housemates (sic), situations, tour promoters that drain this emotional energy from you. She talks about feminist movements and how in wider society women are trained to repress their emotions to survive. Through a gendered experience women are taught to believe that their needs/actions/beliefs are less worthy. But to protest against huge things like patriarchy, capitalism, racism, fat oppression, classism, homophobia in a society or social group which takes these things for granted is to put women, men, and trans individuals in a situation where they are thought to be expressing 'deviant emotions'. To go against the grain, expose the hilarity of the status quo, to speak out against and defy oppression...

To me this is like what I was trying to do in my band black bats. I was trying to talk about and raise awareness of feminism, sexism, homophobia and general crudeness in a scene which I saw as invested in a lot of the same hegemonic shit so-called 'mainstream society' does. But I kept on getting tired. It's like talking to a brick wall. In all my years I only really found one person who actually thought about these issues. I was accused of creating the problem, told that there is no sexism in the punk scene anymore, essentially told to shut up. This kind of experience is what Erika talks about as being 'repressive sanctions' which leads women to lose emotional energy and eventually give up. Sometimes it's not smart to complain about injustice when you're trying to survive like trying to get yr band gigs, make a record, and get out there. I came to understand that the hardcore punk aesthetic is invested in a history of masculine heterosexist affirmation which is really really hard to expose and challenge. I got exhausted, I saw nothing revolutionary happening there, comments like 'women in bands are overrated' and 'my ex-girlfriend is such a cunt' were bandied around like it was no big deal. Then they'd turn around and ask me why there weren't more girls involved in the hardcore scene. Duh! They'd agree with me sometimes but never do anything to consciously question their own behaviour or actions. I was the problem not them. I had a biased opinion. I was sexist because I liked bands that had predominantly female/feminist/queer involvement. You can't simply add feminist content or women into hardcore punk culture, you have to subvert the whole damn

system and it's too invested in stubborn masculine ego right now and I can't fight the battle all by myself. I lost my emotional energy to fight. You can call it giving up. You can call it what you like. No wonder bikini kill aren't around anymore. I don't want any more bruises.

So what can protect you from burnout, how can we work to protect our own and everyone else's 'emotional energy'? I think one way which protects me and keeps me going is the culture we've created for ourselves in manifesta. To be part of a collective of people who are thinking about the same set of problems. To have people around you that care about you, to rant with, to share opinions, dialogue and debate. I know I don't do this enough with people face to face, which is why this zine is so incredibly important to me in knowing that there are people out there struggling with similar issues to me. Manifesta meetings and gigs can be like a recharge for me to pick myself up and get back out there and kick ass. Other things are songs, books, zines and bands that affect me emotionally - make me stronger, share in discussing counter-cultural thoughts and open up my field of opportunity. Music brings us together to dance at clubs and gigs or connects us through bedroom dancing. I'm not the most physically active person in the world and using my body every now and then makes me feel heaps better. Being in a band and creating music is also an incredible way of conserving my emotional energy especially in bands with other feminists and working musically in radical ways. It inspires me. It makes me smile. Another thing that bell hooks talks about in her book 'Yearning: race gender and cultural politics' is how important it is to create your own resistant space in your home, to allow a space for you to revive yourself from the shit you get outside yr front door. I love domestic things like cooking, baking, even housework sometimes and I love rearranging my furniture. This has become incredibly important for me in recent times, as my house situation turned to shit and I felt a lot of hostility at home. The act of personalising your own space, occupying space with your music, books, posters, photos, pictures, quotes, candles etc can save yr ass sometimes. So don't let yourself burn out, you're not alone, and make moves however small to create an everyday somewhere where you can totally be yourself - musically, domestically, physically, spiritually, politically and culturally.

Oh this is the paper...

Summers-Effler, Erika (2002) The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Consciousness, and Social Movement Formation *Sociological Theory*, 20(1): 41-60

\*Burnout\*

>Julia

'My problem is that I can't do less than what I do. If it's for Green Day or some other giant band, or IBM, god forbid, or for somebody who has a bicycle repair shop in the neighbourhood, I do the same work because I can't not do what I do to its fullest extent. I throw myself into whatever I'm doing, which can be exhausting when you use up all your energy on little things and don't have anything left for anything else'  
>Winston Smith, (artist) in: *We Owe You Nothing*.

# Things to do today

Day ..... Flicking through my notebook this morning I found the below entry, which I wrote last year. It was going to be the epilogue to my perzine, but in the end I changed my mind:

Priori

I realise as I stick this zine together how limited it is in scope. When this year began I felt like I was in hell, as the year progressed, everything got worse and worse and worse. Physically and mentally I completely fell apart. I don't know what a breakdown is. People might say I'd know about it if I had one, but I think I just never gave myself time. I've got a week staying with my parents over christmas, maybe I can have one then. All I know is that two weeks ago I was coughing up my own innards and this year I have spent a lot of time screaming and crying and grovelling and fucking people over and being fucked over. Begging on the phone, writing an email in desperate, fractured sentences, scared that I'm gonna have a psychotic episode, that this really is it for me. Coming back from a gig, sitting quietly in my living room, calmly believing that I'm going to die. The decision to bite the bullet and be honest with the people I care about, write difficult letters, difficult emails, have difficult phone conversations, because there's a part of me that's worked out that in the long run, all this is better than the grating, exhausting tension of repression. To cancel gigs because I was too exhausted. To stop doing the d.i.y. night I practically lived for. To buy some earplugs. To consciously let people down in the interests of saving my own arse. If I'd written about all of these things maybe this zine would be of far more value, because everyone has nightmares and everyone has bad days, and most people have good days too. The hardest thing is to look at your life and the ways in which you are tormenting yourself and to say enough, because then what's left? But it might just save you.

Maybe it's not what most people had in mind when they think of burn out, but personally I think I'd be able to cope with everything d.i.y./activist/socially based, were I to worry less and sleep properly instead of dreaming in vivid, exhausting nightmares all the time which leave me more tired when I wake up than when I fell asleep. I guess all I am saying is engage, don't just absorb. And the world won't fall apart if you go easy on yourself now and then.

sleepinpublic@excite.com

\*Burnout\*

\*Burnout\*

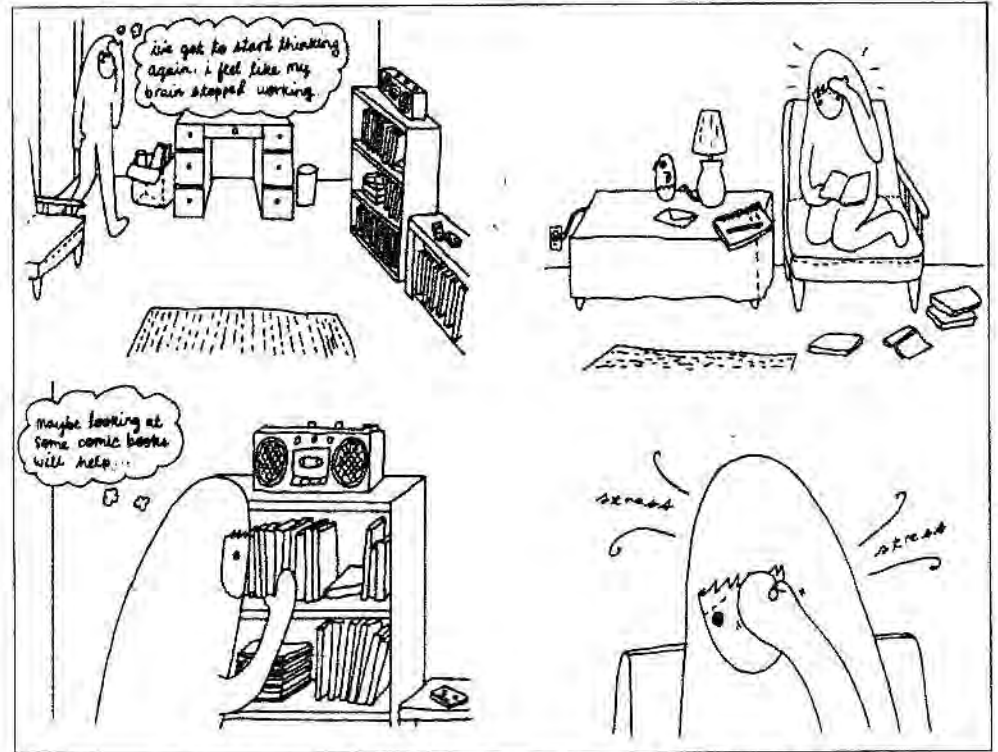
\*The gatherings and mobilizations demanded a tremendous amount of energy yet failed to generate the momentum or create the infrastructure to keep projects alive without burning us out\* > Cleo Woelfle-Erskine & Andrea Maybelline Danger in: *That's Revolting!*

\*Fortunately I don't want to duplicate the conveniences that allow a person to be pressed, a dry flat shape, into oblivion. I'm trying to be comfortable with hypocrisy and self-indulgence. I'm trying to avoid guilt and obligation. I rely on the darkness\* > Jean Smith in: *The Ghost of Understanding.*

\*Commenting on success, I read you once state that 'the trick is to make yourself a commodity. Make everyone want YOU'. In making yourself accessible to all as a commodity, are you ever in fear of Burnout? How do you curb burnout? Saying no sometimes. No is probably the most powerful word you can say\*

> Tara McPherson interviewed in: *Colouring Outside The Lines.*

\*When I lived in the city, traffic roared up on all sides. I lay in bed on a life raft in a terrible episode of survival, the survivor doomed to ride the waves without rescue. Ever-elastic vehicle, salted up, floating on my back, holding in salty tears, buoyant. Calm hostage begging: "When will my life begin?" I was weighed down, dragging an anchor of never-ending work, organizing a series of events that simulated life. I fell in stride with other people's lives, but I couldn't feel my own—built on deadlines, plane tickets, and reasons not to do anything new. I didn't want to be an eternal searcher. Where was my relief agent? > Jean Smith in: *The Ghost Of Understanding.*



\*Burnout\*

From: *Stress Mess* by Alison Cole



# Things to do today \*Burnout\*

Day A few years ago I was finishing up my degree, working practically full time and volunteering at Oxfam. When I finished Uni I moved cities, transferred my job to Leeds and got another full time job alongside it. I quit one of my jobs when I started my full-time MA degree which I commuted three times a week to York for, reading theory and text books at bus stops, catching every second of the day I could. The rest of the week I worked full time in the stressful retail job in a position of authority. Sometimes I made after-work trips to York to use the library and search for resources. On top of this I was beginning to make new friends in a city where I barely knew anyone anymore. I got involved. I attended gigs like they were going out of fashion. I worked on essays till the early morning. I had to read umpteen texts a week and prepare for seminars. I was stretching my brain every which way. I remember once visiting a friend in Rotherham for her birthday and when everyone went to sleep when we got in I secretly stayed up all night doing some of that weeks crucial reading, taking notes that I hoped were going in, feeling guilty for having taken some time off for such frivolity and fun that night. I got the train home early the next morning so that I could get to Leeds in time to open up the shop and do the takings before the staff arrived at 9am. That winter the assistant manager of the shop I worked at walked out, walked out at the busiest time of the year for us: Christmas. I had to take up the slack. I was exhausted. On top of this, especially due to my highly feminist course, I began being more activist in my everyday life. I was also suffering from long-term mental health problems.

Priority

\*Burnout\*



\*Burnout\*

and supported my decision to leave work.

I began to prioritise.

That Christmas I collapsed under the pressure and I went under. I swore to myself that I'd never do the same again; but I've been close to burnout so many times since.

# Things to do today \*Burnout\*

Day <sup>Whe</sup> Subsequently, the word 'no' has kinda become an important one in my vocabulary, over the past year in particular, so that I can relieve the pressure. Sure, it's meant that I've missed shit loads of fun (and will continue to miss shit loads of fun), but I came to realise that I shouldn't have to do and go to everything, but also that I don't NEED to go to everything and participate in everything. And yes, I feel so bad all the time about how much I miss out on and how much of a poor member of our 'community' I am; about how much I consume rather than create; about the fact that I'm only involved from the periphery. But, I am completely unable to be a totally active in-the-thick-of-things member because I'd go even crazier under the pressure.

Priority

\*Burnout\*

Yes, there's something to be said for selflessness in order for energy to be directed towards change and action. But equally, revolution and change is neither gonna happen or be beneficial and worthwhile if we're all gonna be on our knees because of it.

\*Burnout\*

For a long time (and still to a certain extent) I didn't get that I had to look after myself - didn't get that we can't do and support *everything* because that's both physically and mentally impossible. Everybody needs time and space for themselves. I didn't get that - didn't see the correlation between well-being, fulfilment, involvement and burnout. Because that's a really, really thin line.

\*Burnout\*

Responsibility, whether it be due to or through self-imposed expectations regarding success & involvement, or the feeling of being duty-bound to your community and being committed to its success and importance, treads a very fine line with crumbling under the pressure.

\*Burnout\*

Personally though, it was the feeling of responsibility and expectation and commitment and perfectionism, at the same time as also experiencing, yet denying and fighting the burnout that was the most dangerous thing for me; because I wouldn't, couldn't give myself a break. There was seemingly too much to do, too much to accomplish, too many people I could let down to just 'give in'.

\*Burnout\*

But it's not 'weak', it's not 'giving in' to want to, no, NEED to step back every once in a while and take a well-earned, deserved and important breather. And doing so shouldn't be stigmatised within our community - because we've got to look out for ourselves and for others in order for any of our projects and commitments and collective actions to be worth anything at all.

\*Burnout\*

None of us can single handedly hold the sky up. *The Working Sun*

diy\_feminist\_activism\_zine@hotmail.com



\*Burnout\*

I've actually written a lot about burn-out in the last 11 months, because it has been one of the defining experiences of that time period for me.

I used to be a very politically active person. This time last year I was studying for a Women's Studies BA, I was in a local anti-G8 group, an anti-war group, a feminist group... during my degree I was also in a Green Action group, a supporters group of unfairly accused student protesters, I wrote for the student newspaper, I wrote zines, I put on gigs and did DJing, I worked as a note-taker for disabled students... there wasn't much I didn't do or didn't want to do and I don't know how I fit it all in. I was propelled by rage, by a passion and need and desire to change the world or at least - as Melanie put it in one of her zines - to act as though I could change it and as though my actions had meaning in the world. Later I would look on my uni years as a selfish time, but there wasn't much I wasn't doing for other people, or the environment, as well as myself. Everything was propelled by the strictest social conscience. In some ways I think now I must have been quite annoying - a bit holier than thou. I couldn't stand to just look at one issue or one angle of why the world was shit... I had to look at every issue from every angle at once. I had unrealistic expectations of other people and of myself. I expected them to have fully rounded political visions of the world which did not overlook any possible facet of oppression - everything had to be covered. You couldn't be a feminist, without being anti-racist, pro-queer, anti-disablist, anticapitalist and numerous other things as well, I thought. This is true to an extent. But I thought this meant being actively anti-racist, pro-queer etc in the sense of being part of a political group, or writing something about it, or... just not ever favouring one issue over any other basically. Doing everything - and that's impossible.

I wrote in my diary in June 2005, 'I feel under pressure to be this selfless heroic activist and maybe it's just not me. I'm certainly not doing well at it at the moment... I get so confused between when being selfish is affirming social norms in an individualist, consumerist society - part of the problem - and when it's asserting my needs which have historically been denied or taken second place because I'm a woman.'

Yes, I was very concerned with being right-on. My needs didn't matter in themselves, I thought. Only if they were part of some big political plan. I still struggle with that.

Eventually though my needs - the ones that didn't fit in with the plan - surfaced one day in April last year when I literally woke up one morning and felt I couldn't go on. I felt utterly despondent and apathetic, for the first time perhaps ever. I thought 'What is the point? We are not going to change the world. The Conservatives might even win the election on an anti-immigration ticket. What hope is there of a global anarchist revolution? It is hopeless. All our actions are meaningless and if that is the case there is no point in writing my dissertation and there is no point in me getting dressed this morning.' So I didn't, and this became a pattern for the next few months.

It was a scary feeling for me because it was completely new. I have a history of depression and anxiety - neither of which had bothered me much since entering my super-politically-active student universe - but which had always taken the form of extreme anxiety and anger, turned inwards or out. Strong feelings, which sometimes even propelled me to do more about the state of the world. Even at its worst, it was definitely a feeling of somethingness, of being filled, to overflowing... Never before had I experienced such a feeling of paralysing emptiness. Something that just wiped me out, physically as well as emotionally.

I had always thought that I experienced so much emotional pain because I cared so much about people, things, society that sometimes it was overwhelming. Never before had I felt I didn't care, and it was scary. With care you can aim to channel that - eventually - into something positive. But with apathy you can't do anything. It was as if I'd worn myself out with caring so much that I'd numbed myself to it. And while in the past I'd chastised myself for being weak when I cried or was afraid, now I despised myself for being empty.

I think that it was in trying to care too much - to fulfil some kind of fantasy of a selfless tireless activist for social justice - that I lost sight of my own needs. I found myself nodding in painful recognition when I read in *Footsteps in the Dark* zine: I am a human being and not a goddamn revolution machine.

These are some of my thoughts from this time:

Lately as I've been taking stock of my life, I've started to distinguish between individual and political (collective?) goals and desires, and I wonder if I would be doing the same if I lived life in a purely individualist way. I guess I was thinking the same last summer. I became less zealous. I started wondering what my own needs were and if there was a way of combining them with political struggle. I concluded in despair that there wasn't and that therefore I wasn't and am not strong enough for this world. But I have always had a feeling of not being worthy. It comes from my Christian background, which I think somehow finds its way into all our (Western left) politics.

But at the same time I think political change has to involve some self-sacrifice for those of us who are over-fed. A better world for everyone - not just a few - will mean some sacrifice now for those of us who have more than our fair share of power or resources. But feeling guilty - or pious - was never part of the plan. They are two sides of the same coin.

I feel there is so much pressure. Who says that tying yourself to the barricades of Gleneagles is a more important or effective form of resistance than making art? If you enjoy what you do then people are more likely to want to join you. But I feel there's this implicit message that if you're not in whatever group or doing whatever thing, you're not doing anything. It makes me want to scream, defensively, guiltily: 'I'm doing this, this and this.' It

\*Burnout\*

\*Burnout\*

\*Burnout\*

\*Burnout\*

makes me feel better about myself, but there's nothing anyone hates more than a pious, unrelenting activist. You avoid her in the street. And we all do it at one time or another - guilt trip our comrades and friends. And in the end we just feel unworthy and/or undervalued and burn out and give up. That's why I need to create a new life for myself now, that works better for both myself and the world around me in a symbiotic relationship.

Sometimes looking after myself means retreating and that's OK if it makes me stronger. I need to be around people I love, to make my own choices, however unconventional or unsensible, no matter what anyone else thinks, to eat well and look after my own health, to get enough sleep, sing, explore and be unashamed of my sexuality, be with people who share my ideas and who challenge them, be free to voice my opinions, be where I can be myself and feel good about it. Not fight with myself. Appreciate my own qualities. Accept myself for who I am - this is the difficult part. I've always believed people can change and I've always wanted to.

Lately I've had this obsession with the idea that I'm not strong enough to change, and that it's therefore all my fault that I don't. But I am strong, I realise when I look at all the things I've done. And no I'm not strong enough yet to take on the whole system - but who is? It isn't just me. A character in one of my favourite books, *Stone Butch Blues*, says: 'Nobody is strong enough. You just live through it the best you can.' This is so true, I realise now. I've been saying to myself the same thing I was saying to myself when I was 15: it's not my fault that the world is tough, but if I can't fight it and conquer it, it's my fault for being weak. This is just internalisation of all the blame-the-victim shit society throws at us. It's bollocks. No-one is strong enough. Sometimes you just gotta survive. Activist guilt trips and ratings are just more societal judgements, a different version of the shame that mainstream society tries to instill in many of us just for existing, being. But because I respect left-wing activists, their judgements hurt me a lot more than anyone else's.

Maybe it's OK not to be an activist all the time. Imagine all the other ways we could be if we didn't have to fight. Is it selfish to want a life of my own? A life that doesn't involve picket lines and blockades and police cells? Of course not. We fight because we want a world free from all that - where we won't have to do that. But sometimes I think people forget that. We have to make activism fun so that we'll want to keep doing it, so we create this mystique around it that sometimes becomes more important than the struggle itself. We turn getting arrested into a glamorous event, to neutralise the horror and humiliation. But then we get so carried away with it, it becomes this heroic act that precludes any discussion of what the effects of it might be, in terms of what we are setting out to do. 'Identity politics', Kristos scoffed at me, when we were discussing the protests at the G8. 'We are cool and the police are not', he mimicked. Most people don't have time to play such games. They would have too much to lose by doing it. I totally don't blame them.

When I was 15 I hated myself for not being strong enough. I hated myself for the cutting and puking and poetry and silence that I inflicted on myself. But those were all my ways of surviving. Today when I'm not strong enough to fight, when I just want to stay at home and read or write or cry, I hate myself. I feel ashamed. But this is just the way I've been taught to feel. It's a familiar routine in unfamiliar clothes. Sometimes I feel my desire to be an activist for change conflicts with my desire and need to be happy in this world.

Because I can never do enough. I have always felt this way - even before anarchism, before feminism even. I have always felt that there are people better and stronger than me. I read the diary of Anne Frank when I was 13 and cried because I knew I could never be as brave as her. I knew I would never stand up to evil in the way she had done. I also hated myself because I hadn't sold my clothes and given my money to the poor, like I was told Jesus had done. This feeling that no matter how good I am, how strong I am, it'll never be enough... I can't help relating it to my Christian upbringing. All that I learned in my first years on earth was meant to make us feel unworthy and sinful. No wonder I feel guilty.

For a while I thought I was 'doing something' to change things but it had nothing to do with the way I felt and the world I knew. In the words of Morrissey, 'It said nothing to me about my life.' I feel so alienated from much of my past activism now. I feel like it was another person doing those things. I wasn't being true to myself. I was doing what I thought I should do instead of what I felt.

I so want to change things, more than anything in the world, but I feel so powerless. I know I shouldn't care about failure but I do. The struggle isn't glorious. That was a lie. Achieving your aims is glorious. Struggle means giving up all the other good things in life for a far-flung dream of a better future. I'm just not that selfless.

I want to write and be myself and laugh and enjoy the good things in life. I don't want to struggle all the time. I'm tired of it. I feel like turning away, putting my fingers in my ears and singing 'la la la', like a kid in a fight. Maybe I can only deal with what I can deal with. I can't change the whole world at once but I can change my part of it, just a little bit at a time. Some of my radical friends would say that was reformist, but as *Morgenmuffel* zine writer Isy put it bravely: 'I don't think it's reformist at all to fight to improve your life.' I love my radical friends, but sometimes I wonder if some of them grasp fully what life means for most people, even in this rich country. Life is struggle. Life is pain. Life is often necessarily picking up crumbs when you can get them, but that's not reformist, it's just survival. There is no satisfactory way to measure what different groups of people are up against and how they are surviving and fighting it. I really think we have to respect different ways of fighting, if we are to get anywhere. I also wonder if 'fighting' is always the right terminology.

\*Burnout\*