

the RAG



revolutionary.

anarchafeminist.

group.



issue #1
AUTUMN 2006

Welcome to the first issue of The RAG - a magazine produced by a diverse group of anarcho-feminist women in Dublin. **We are all feminists**, united in our recognition that women's subordination exists. Our struggle needs to be fought alongside the struggle against other forms of oppression, not treated as an afterthought or as a distraction. **We are all anarchists**, united in our belief for the need to create alternatives to this capitalistic, patriarchal society wherein all are dominated and exploited.

Although anarchism is, in theory, inherently feminist, the reality is often quite different. RAG was created out of a need to bring feminist issues into mainstream anarchist sphere. We hope the magazine will contribute to a change in anarchists' organising, on all levels. We desire a fully participatory role for women in anarchism.

This first issue of the magazine has taken over a year to produce, and has been an important and fulfilling process. We have taken time to get to know one another, to become comfortable talking in groups and to discuss and develop our ideas. While some women in RAG have been long-time political organisers, others have approached the group from a range of diverse backgrounds.

We have remained committed to non-hierarchical structures within the collective, with revolving facilitators, skill sharing, group editing, mutual support and respect, and, whenever possible, consensus decision making.

As time goes by members come and go but the spirit of the collective remains constant and, we hope, welcoming, involving and empowering. Over the past year and a half we have held discussions on a variety of topics from motherhood to the sex industry, watched feminist films, organised an anarchist assembly and workshops, put up abortion information stickers, swapped and shared books and zines, built friendships and supported one another.

We hope that this magazine will provide food for thought and provoke discussion. We hope that readers will be inspired to set up their own feminist collectives, organise workshops, start and continue writing, and otherwise bring the anarcho-feminist word to the streets where they live.

Please contact us with your feedback and ideas to tell us what you think about the magazine, and what you would like to see addressed in future issues. If you are a woman living in our area interested in writing or organising for the revolution, please come get involved.

This is just the beginning!

Love and Solidarity,

RAG

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Autumn 2006

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The RAG cover: Lisa and Natalia

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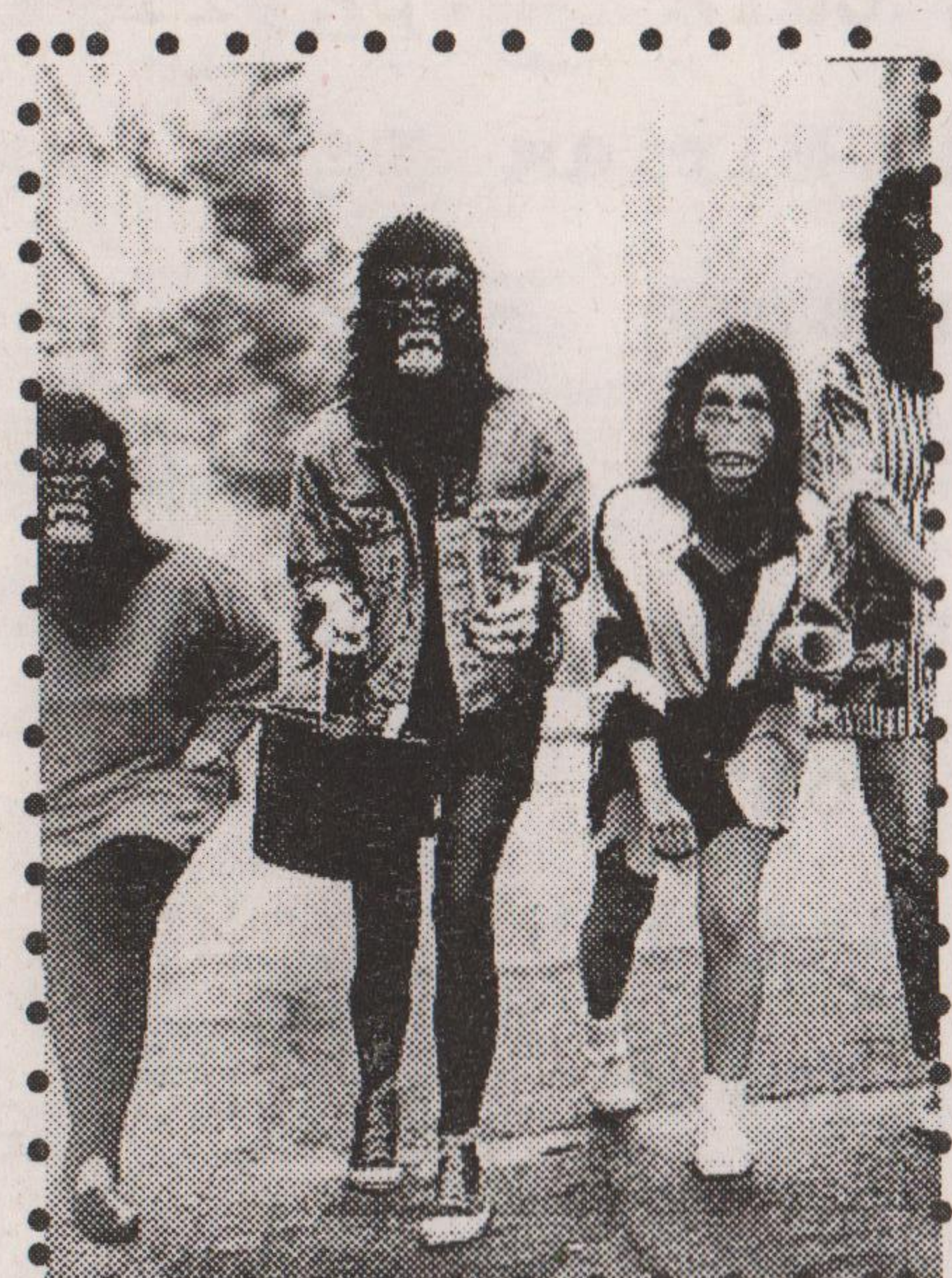


GUERRILLA GIRLS

words by cara
images courtesy of guerrilla girls

These feminist art crusaders otherwise known as the Guerrilla Girls have been using humour, radical tactics, creative campaigns and speeches to challenge the art and entertainment worlds since 1985.

This group of renegade artists assume the names of dead women artists and wear gorilla masks in public. The mystery surrounding their identities has attracted some attention and in some cases a media furor. They feel that their hidden identity is important in order to focus further on the issues at hand rather than their own personalities. The Guerrilla Girls tend to operate on the fringes of contemporary art scene, combating sexism, racism and social injustice politically and culturally. They believe that feminism is a fundamental way of looking at the world, a world in which huge inequalities unfortunately still exist.



Their main method of combat involves producing posters, books, stickers, protest actions and letter writing campaigns. They started out by wheat-pasting posters in the middle of the night and partaking in other subversive activities but can now be found lecturing all around the world in galleries, museums and universities. One of their books, *The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art* is being used as a textbook in colleges as part of women's and gender studies curriculums. They have become a model for feminist activists as well as introducing a lot of young people to the Guerrilla Girl ideals and feminism in general.

"The work of the Guerrilla Girls represents a most powerful political union between theory and practice. They set an example for feminists everywhere." - bell hooks

A typical Guerrilla Girl will wear the imperative gorilla mask and will occasionally sport a shoulder padded sports jacket, a mini-skirt, fishnets and high heels. Using humour as a tool, they say it helps to "convey information, provoke discussion and show that feminists can be funny."

Their most recent 'unhinged' campaign is an ongoing campaign to get the Hollywood big-wigs to take notice of the shortage of female directors. Just when you thought the Academy Awards couldn't get any more political; in 2006 the Guerrilla Girls decided they'd up the ante. Weeks before the 78th Awards ceremony a billboard was erected! The image: A frock-clad, lipstick wearing gorilla in chains holding an Oscar statuette. The slogan: "Unchain the women directors". The statistics, well, one in particular that stands out: 'No woman director has ever won the Oscar'.

This is not their only attempt to confront the powers that be in Hollywood however. Back in 2002 they introduced the "Anatomically Correct Oscar". This particular billboard depicted the Oscar as an overweight, bald, hairy white male. Their response: "Just like the guys who win".

If you would like more information on this witty, provocative and consciousness raising group of feminist monkeys go to: www.guerrillagirls.com



FW: fwd: ... Just a Laugh?

words by clare

In your face sexism in the workplace may be less prevalent today but perhaps it has simply found a new medium. Working in a male-dominated office environment has shown me just this.

Women working in 1950's Ireland encountered obvious, unashamed sexism on a daily basis. They had to contend with lower pay, very limited access to professional careers, little chance for promotion, thwarted recognition and forced resignation from state jobs upon marriage. Sexism was blatant, inappropriate remarks and derogatory terms were commonplace and acceptable. Now, fifty years on, most of the same challenges face working women in offices, shops and industry. However, it is fair to say that men tend to watch their p's and q's a little and attempt to master more "politically correct" language

Although it is less likely that your male colleagues will suggest that you run along and tidy the office kitchen, there is a very good chance that he will send you an email outlining the "Top Ten Reasons" why a woman's

place is in the home. On the whole, when these types of jokes are emailed (or sometimes even texted) around, the senders may not be motivated by malice. In order to break the monotony and apparently just for a laugh, jokes, cartoons etc., are emailed around between friends and workmates - messages bringing a moment of amusement to a grey desk.

Similar to other forms of sexism that have been highlighted by feminists for decades, these jokes attack a woman's self-confidence and self-worth. They are often based around degrading stereotypes such as: women are bad drivers, blonde women are stupid, all women only want to bag a man. No doubt there have been volumes written about the impact that this variety of sexism has on women. If people hear something often enough they can start to believe it. It is irritating, offensive and knocks a woman's self esteem. Most annoyingly it seems that your colleagues will view you as a killjoy if you raise any objections.

The sexist "joke" emails I receive daily highlight a strange obsession with women drivers. Women are trusted to drop the country's darling children off to school every day. Yet, according

women gardeners, women teachers or women cyclists? Perhaps some people have a problem with women controlling big machines or maybe they're just sore because we get cheaper car insurance.

.....
: Prepare your :
: daughter for :
: working life :
: pay her less :
: pocket money :
: then your son :
:

Exactly what aspects of sexism do people find funny? Recent reports in both the Irish and UK media have highlighted scary statistics with regards to women in the workplace. The next time a male colleague gives you that "Aw, will you ever lighten up a bit" look, why not point out that while you and other women work full time in an equivalent job you can expect to be paid on average 15% less than him². When considering part-time and unskilled labour the gender pay gap soars to a sickening 38%³. Information from the Irish National Council of Women has shown that women

SEE INSERT
FOR MISSING
TEXT ©



parents².

The only heartening statistic appears to be the large increase in women students in the last 30 years. However, when all these women fill the (lower, no doubt) ranks of various professions, have they been prepared for the discrimination they are likely to encounter? We are told that there is no longer a need to be so ultra-PC, the glass ceiling has been smashed. Women and men are graduating side-by-side. However, a 2005 ERSI report entitled "Gender Pay Differentials among Recent Graduates", shows that just three years after graduating women earn on average 11% per week less than men. The value of bonuses received is approximately 25% higher among men. Men are more likely to have received a promotion with their current employers and more likely to have received employer sponsored training⁴.

In many professions and workplaces, pregnancy remains informally frowned upon; it is seen as opting out of a career. With the scarcity and expense of childcare, the complete lack of paternity leave and pressure to return to work as soon as possible, for women this is no laughing matter. Considering that the future of the human race is reliant on women continuing to give birth it is bizarre that it is viewed as a women's issue.

This leads to the question of why so few people acknowledge the very real extent of gender discrimination in the workplace. Why do men (and women) feel it is both suitable and amusing to spam their colleagues with sexist "humorous" emails? Why do they appear both confused and surprised when faced with a counter argument?

This recent and less visible form of sexism may not seem critical to many but it is a symptom of a larger problem. Despite those who believe otherwise, sexism still exists and is everywhere experienced. If equality is to be achieved, a blind eye can no longer be turned on sexist "humour". Attention should be drawn to this practise, women are not second-class, we do not exist to be objectified and we are definitely not here to be ridiculed. It may be just for a laugh but any form of sexism reinforces the already oppressive atmosphere many women must work in. Sexism does not need a new guise, it needs to disappear completely.

Did you hear the one about the blonde who kept being sent sexist emails? She was pissed off and decided to do something about it...

Footnotes

- 1 Picture taken from email attachment I received on 11.11.05 "women parking lot"
- 2 "Women and Men in Ireland", Central Statistics Office Ireland, 2005.
- 3 UK Equal Opportunities Commission, December 2005, www.eoc.org.uk
- 4 "Degrees of Equality: Gender pay differentials among recent graduates", Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), Dublin, November 2005
- 5 Text in box taken from a UK Equal Opportunities Commission poster.



Unschooling: Let's get free

words by tamarack
image by julia h-v

"I never see the negation (in the term "unschooling") as negative...to me unschooling is as positive as unchaining, unbinding, unleashing, unfolding, unfurling, unlimiting...all mean freedom and growth and vast possibilities."

Suzanne Carter, poet and home-schooling mother

Unschooling means being responsible for your own education, and learning outside of the traditional school system. The term was originally coined by John Holt (founder of "Growing Without Schooling" - the first U.S. magazine for homeschoolers), and used to refer specifically to school-aged children who were learning outside of the classroom. Truly, an unschooler is anyone who takes learning out of the hands of experts and reclaims it as their personal right. Unschooling means deciding what, when, and how we want to learn; it means forging our own paths in the world of knowledge. We have been fooled into believing it was ever anyone but ourselves who did the learning. We are autodidacts one and all.

It is difficult to argue against traditional schooling with people who have had positive experiences in the classroom - those who have achieved some success within the system. We are taught to believe school is our gateway to success, and hence freedom: personal freedom through academic enlightenment, and freedom within society as we achieve higher career goals. This success has limited spaces, forcing us to compete mercilessly with each other for seats in prestigious universities and placements in powerful jobs. We should not allow the possibility of lifelong learning to be limited by the goals of an external institution whose interests lie in production: production of graduates, professionals, and skilled workers. These societal slots are filled at the expense of the individual who may never have the rewarding life experience of discovering her own potential.

Many people seem to feel that without school, especially university, they would fail to create any framework within which to learn. This is simply untrue. Schooling is primarily an indoctrination process: we are repeatedly instructed in a set of beliefs about the world and our place in it, and taught to uncritically accept this instruction. As children we are told we are "not old enough" to hold opinions worth consideration, and by adulthood we have been so long manipulated by others' authority that we often no longer

know where we stand! School as we know it is only a little over a hundred years old - the subjects taught within were not invented by their teachers. Knowledge can be found through self-initiated research in such places as libraries, museums and galleries, or with experienced craftspersons, and the multi-talented individuals that surround us in our communities.

Those of us who have been traditionally educated should examine critically our school years: what information we were given about the world; what were the effects of the teaching methods used in school; and whose interests might our indoctrination have served? Are we still forcing competitive learning models upon ourselves? Are these habits stopping us from attaining our goals? Are we sending our children down this same unfulfilling road? If we are going to learn how to be our own educators, we need to stop looking to others' judgments to determine the worth of our work. For many of us the natural love of learning has been smothered, and like grass under the concrete it will need time, patience, and care to regenerate.

Certified by University Incorporated

Doctors, engineers, and other specialised workers are brought up to defend traditional methods of schooling. We forget that medicine, houses, roads, and the passing on of all specialised skills and knowledge predates schools. Having met home-schooled kids light-years ahead of most of my adult peers is proof enough to me that schools in no way assure a more effective transmission of information. For example, in the state of Massachusetts (USA) the literacy rate was at 98% before compulsory state schooling was implemented in 1850. 140 years later, the literacy rate had never exceeded 91%.*

Learning specialised skills is far more efficient in small groups, such as apprenticeships, where each individual has greater access to resources. We should be looking at how methods of teaching in universities are degrading the quality of doctors, engineers, and others: how curriculum is all geared towards testing and the job market; how these "qualified" individuals are often experts in a narrow field, but lack well-rounded knowledge and experience.

Facing the argument that we need universities for specialists such as doctors, I can't help but think of all the horrendous experiences many friends and family

members, and certainly I, myself, have had at their hands. Doctors are often very difficult to communicate with, and the patient is often left feeling that her concerns have been ignored and her complaints unaddressed. I am not alone in having experienced humiliating comments from doctors meant to silence my questions, prescriptions that would have serious side-effects never mentioned by the doctor prescribing them, accusations of fabricating illness, and refusals for requested examinations. I realise I have to reclaim my health as my personal responsibility, and that doctors - like any source of expertise - are only a tool to be used to my benefit.

We don't need no education

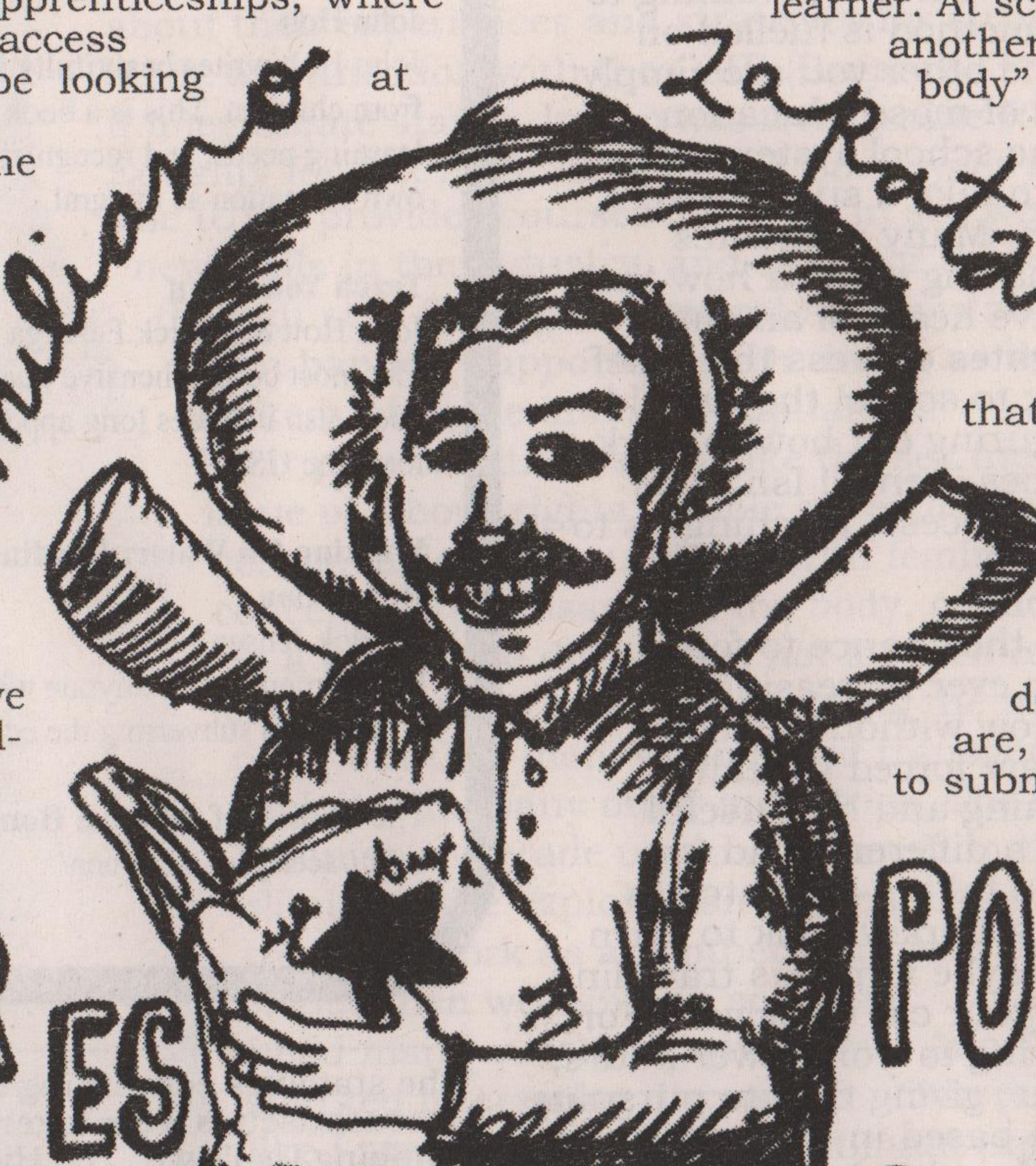
"School is a place where children learn to be stupid"

John Holt, educator, author, and unschooling advocate

The word stupid is rooted in stupere: "be amazed or stunned" (Oxford). Students in school are stupefied by an overwhelming amount of teaching. Children from the age of five are force-fed textbooks of information and never allowed to develop a natural appetite for learning. We are forced to follow meaningless routines instead of following our own interests and curiosities. Through the condescending attitudes and the "deadline mentality" of teachers and principals, we are taught that we are inherently lazy creatures who will not learn unless coerced. This is absolutely not true. There is an innate curiosity in children, and all people, that given time, space, and support, will grow in its own right. Those who have experienced alternative learning environments (such as home-schooling, Montessori, Steiner, Freinet, and others) find that children will want to learn to read and write of their own accord. There is no necessity for coercion. Forcing anyone to learn something they are not yet interested in, or see no use for, and setting their pace and their goals for them will destroy an otherwise natural appetite for learning.

Upon entering school we are stripped of our right to self-determined learning. A "one size fits all" approach to education disregards the individual learner. At school we are seen as just another appendage of the "student body" - part of a programmable mass to be sent from one essay to the next, one exam to the next. We are sent from year to year and never does school teach us how we might really own this knowledge that is being forced upon us. How can we own what we cannot choose? We are not allowed to choose what to learn, when or how to learn it, nor do we have any say in determining whether we are, in fact, learninWe are told to submit to the experts, reverse the textbook, and dismiss our own experiences.

LEER ES



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Our self-confidence suffers as we are taught to constantly defer to authority. A system of emotional rewards and penalties leads many students to associate learning with punishment. Failure is never validated as part of the learning process, but seen as a stigma. The constant threat of becoming a failure keeps many students from experimenting, questioning, or participating at all. When trying becomes equated with humiliation, is it any wonder so many adults turn their days over to television? Nearly all students, failures and successes alike, are cowed by the hierarchical nature of the classroom. Systems that reward best those who follow orders, and punish those who stand out, create students who spend most of their time and energy learning what will please the teacher. All those years at school could have been spent indulging curiosities, investigating desires, and learning about the people around you.

Might as well face it, you're addicted to school

"I've come to understand the reason school lasts thirteen years. It takes that long to sufficiently break a child's will. It is not easy to disconnect children's wills, to disconnect them from their own experiences of the world in preparation for the lives of painful employment they will have to endure. Less time wouldn't do it, and in fact, those who are especially slow go to college. For the exceedingly obstinate child there is graduate school."

Derrick Jensen, author and creative writing teacher

The comedown for those who leave school can be a difficult low period. Many of us find ourselves "lazing" about : sleeping long hours and not getting out of the house much. This seems to reinforce the belief that we are incapable of kicking our own asses into gear, and need school to provide motivation that we are unable to provide for ourselves. Before we can really say we've left school, we need to stop using their same criteria for validation: believing that only the most tangible results equal learning, and the process is a distant second in value. Compare walking to riding in a sportscar: one method is fuelled on your own efforts, and in the other you are simply a passenger. The methods of mass education create a dependency on the school system where students are encouraged to take a submissive role in their own education. Many graduates leave school disoriented, having no idea how they got to where they are. I have heard of an entire classroom of college graduates express the belief that if they only went back to school they would have a better chance of figuring out how to work in the world – but when does it end?! Isn't this supposed to be a weaning process, teaching us to "teach ourselves"?

Perhaps never having had the chance to forge our own way we've become ever increasingly doubtful of our abilities. Now without school to set our goals for us we are forced to really evaluate what we are learning and how useful it is to us. De-schooling is a different road for each of us: maybe it means taking a nightclass in bellydancing, or getting a library book to learn computer programming; maybe it means travelling in India, or learning to fix your car or bicycle. For me unschooling means trying to work fewer hours, or fewer months of the year, giving time to pursuing new ways of living that are based in the enjoyment of learning and doing. I figure that by dissembling

the mental pedestal under university education, and all knowledge for sale, I am reclaiming meaning in my life. Choosing to leave behind external judgements of our own successes shows a commitment to life and learning that no school can hold a candle to.

Quitting school is for everyone - even those of us who are all grown up and no longer have the faeries stocking our fridge and paying our bills. It is the quitting of an entire system of self-derogation, and the subsequent beginnings of a new way of living: one wherein we realize we are in fact learning all the time.

QUITTING SCHOOL?

Eat Your Heart Out Martha - The Education Issue

Candyce (<http://www.cyhom.com>)

Candyce writes about homeschooling her son Kyle and unschooling her own life. Also see Candyce's column "The Radical-Mother" in Slug & Lettuce 'zine.

Anything School Can Do, You Can Do Better: The Story of a Family Who Learned at Home

Maire Mullarney

Documented life and times of a homeschooled family in Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow. Maire explains their troubles with the Irish school system, their use of the Montessori method, and includes brief bios on all her kids.

Real Lives: Eleven Teenagers Who Don't Go To School

Grace Llewellyn

By and far the most inspiring of all reads. I was lucky enough to pick up the second edition, which includes follow-ups on the authors in their twenties.

How Children Learn

John Holt

John Holt writes beautifully about listening to and learning from children. This is a book about understanding children's learning needs, and recognising their participation in their own education as integral.

Teach Your Own

John Holt & Patrick Farenga

The most comprehensive question-answerer I've read. This book also includes long appendices of resources (mostly from the US).

Walking On Water: Reading and Writing Revolution

Derrick Jensen

Recommended for anyone with the dual interests of creative writing and subverting the education system.

The website of the **Irish Home Education Network** is <http://acer.gen.tcd.ie/hen/>

*The statistics concerning literacy rates in the state of Massachusetts were taken from John Taylor Gatto's *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* (pg 22 in "The Psychopathic School").

Unionising Sex Work

words by *tobie*

Sex work, academia and activism are not usually discussed at the same time. Yet Ana Lopez used the opportunity of doing a Ph. D. to do some activist work and start a union based in London for sex workers. Coming from an activist background and being a sex worker herself, she knew her main interest of study was sex work. She started by asking sex workers in different areas of work what they felt needed to be looked at in the industry and what information needed to be gathered.

From these interviews she got what she has referred to as a "call for action" to do something about their working conditions and felt a responsibility to make these changes happen. The workers were conscious of their exploitation and although isolated from each other, they were looking for a collective voice with which to fight. Their main concerns were both the exploitation in their work places and the media representation that showed a dichotomous view of sex work which ignored the complexities and multiplicity of the industry.

It was as a result of Ana's thesis, in 2001, that the International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW) was born. At the moment it has around 200 members, and through a web-site and message boards it allows more than 2,000 people from around the world to talk about their experiences and strategies for struggle. The IUSW has made a connection with the GMB (Britain's General Union) giving it a legitimate status. It also has a magazine RESPECT! (Rights and Equality for Sex Professionals and Employees in Connected Trades). The IUSW provides courses for those in sex work who want to learn new skills in the industry, and skills for those who want to leave the industry. They go to general marches and protests under their union banner, supporting such things as the anti-war movement, workers' struggle and anti-capitalism.

Their plan of action is to make the sex industry discussion an issue of labour rights. People get exploited in the sex industry yet the dialogue around this with feminists and others concentrates on issues of the body, gender and morality. As a result, the dialogue is not focused on eliminating the exploitation but rather eliminating the industry. The IUSW point out that men, women and transgender people get exploited in many other industries. The response of the feminist and trade union movement in these other cases is to eliminate the exploitation and not the industry itself. So if we treat sex work as any other work and their issues as labour issues then we can find solutions.

I had many questions when I met Ana - some of which sparked interesting discussion. Others I'm sure sounded like I was a person with no intimate experience of sex work, making judgments on the industry. I asked if the goal of

decriminalising prostitution and creating safe environments in which to work included the ultimate goal of eliminating street work. I was given a tired "NO". I suppose this is a point of contention. She said that most people do think that but it comes from the assumption that given the choice most people would not work on the street. Instead Ana gave examples of safe zones that are practiced in the Netherlands and Edinburgh: designated areas to work that are well lit and protected, where there are legal indoor establishments that many would choose to work in. Others who like the freedom of not having a boss and choosing their own hours can still work the streets, knowing that the chance of violence and exploitation is lowered in this protected area.

We had a discussion about sex work being like any other type of work. I mentioned that RAG had discussions on sexual violence and prostitution. Many women felt they were treated to some extent as a prostitute without ever making the decision to be one; like the only thing of value that a woman has to offer is her body and she is expected to use that body and sexuality to return favours. It may not be as overt as that, but rather there is a sense in which young women do not have a social ownership over their bodies and can feel pressured to have unwanted sexual relationships. Ana was happy to talk about this which is the root of her activism, saying "No woman is free 'til all sex workers are free." She refers to the "whore stigma" that society has attached to every woman. It is this stigma that she feels should unite women in solidarity with sex workers' rights. The idea of being a whore will no longer be a stigma when sex workers are treated with dignity like any other worker and when no sex worker is in this industry against their will. She went on to explain that this is the role of the union and any sex workers organisation.

We talked about trafficking, the illegal movement of people based on coercion and exploitation, and how, according to the media, trafficking is a huge problem among sex workers. Ana Lopez said that even if one person experienced this form of slavery and lack of freedom of movement then that is too much. It is definitely something that the union looks into alongside the wider issue of migration. She feels that the media uses moral fear tactics to depict these situations, leading people to believe that any form of migration is exploitative trafficking. She does say that many people in the sex industry migrate, partially because you make more money if you are a new face and for more general migration reasons; moving to where it's good to get work or just to live in other places. Since much of the work is illegal often people use third parties to help out with the migration process. She describes it as a lottery: some have great experiences and others have horror stories. In many ways this is not far removed from other illegal or legal migration stories e.g. the employer knows that the worker (be they

care workers or cleaners) can't complain for fear of deportation and therefore the worker is vulnerable to exploitation.

Since this interview I have read a few articles and books about sex work, one of which is by a sex worker in Eastern Europe. The author agrees with Ana on the point of seeing trafficking and prostitution as two separate issues. "Speaking about prostitution we should never mix it with trafficking with women. Forcing women to sex, taking away their passports, imprisoning them had nothing to do with prostitution as 'profession'. Women trafficking is based always on violence and exploitation and cannot be seen as nothing else than incapacitation of the human."¹ Trafficking and exploitation are issues that the union takes on in its goal of legalising the industry.

The IUSW website gives positive reasons for the prostitutes' role in our society including that they can give relief to those who can't do so themselves. People with physical and other forms of disabilities who cannot masturbate themselves and are less likely to have sexual relationships with other people can use the services of a sex worker to live a happier life. I asked Ana about the thinking, that the majority of people using the services are white business men and therefore there is an inherent power dynamic which recreates itself within and outside of the sexual transaction. Ana knows many prostitutes that get most of their money from city workers and businessmen which gives them the opportunity to work with disabled clients and give them a lower price. This extension of care work makes me uncomfortable. In a way it's about boundaries, because the reality is that we all sell ourselves for a wage and we do work that in an ideal world would be done because we want to. When I'm at work as a care worker in a housing project sometimes I need to wash people. You have to do things that they can't do themselves, be their arms so to speak. Washing and changing people is as far as I have gone and can see myself going. The difference between me cleaning the genitals of a resident and a sex worker masturbating the genitals of a client is a discussion of boundaries. When Ana was explaining her work to her mother, which I can only imagine being a very difficult task, she compared their two professions. Her mom worked as a child minder in her home and had several women hired to take care of the children. Ana described that her mom's work was like that of a brothel mother. Organising the women to use what many people see as a very sacred thing - a mother's love of a child - from unrelated women. I asked about intimate relationships and if there is any confusion or difficulty managing her work and non-work sexual relationships. She said of course it is difficult and most workers develop strategies and discuss boundaries with their clients. The type of sex they are having with their partners is very different to the type of sex they have with their clients. She went back to the example of her

mother's work, saying that when you are caring for a child you give the child lots of love and attention yet you differentiate between the kinds of love you give - child minding is not the same as mothering. When we look at our society and our experiences it's not surprising that many women on the message boards of the IUSW say they have experienced rape and violence outside of work more often than within work. The idea of the union is to create a space where there are regulations and guidelines, contracts and procedures for grievances. Some clubs have already put these in place as a result of the union. As Ana Lopez says "I think sex workers organising should be inspiring for other workers. Because we work with our bodies it is obvious that no one should control our own bodies and that we should be able to do what ever we want with our bodies. And if we manage to organise and do our work on our own terms and have control of our industry [...] then any worker can do that, and I hope this inspires other workers. [The workers]... should control their own industries. When people realise that, then we can get rid of capitalism and have global revolution!"

Since this interview, I have been in a few locations famous for their sex work industry: Dubi, a Czech Republic town bordering Germany women can be seen in the windows of little huts on the side of the road surrounded by forests; Pattaya in Thailand where the "entertainment" industry serving westerners has flourished with women and "lady-boys" flocking there for foreign middle-aged men. I could only hope that these women could work in legal, safe conditions. Unionising this type of work is a good starting

point for making sex work a safer profession. However, there will have to be more work done for men to stop seeing women in an objectifying manner. Everyday women have to deal with being talked down to and being harassed on the streets. They have to listen to sexist language and deal with seeing sexist images. This will not end automatically with the legalisation and unionisation of the oldest profession.

I don't see sex work as if it is any other type of work and I think it's impossible to separate a discussion on gender from labour rights. Although we are all "prostituting" ourselves for a wage and are working in exploitative environments, people who are not working in the sex industry experience their bodies and sexuality differently. This should not take away from supporting all women who are facing exploitation and oppression due to their gender. It is probably true that no women will be free 'til sex workers are free and I would support sex workers' rights whenever possible. I believe that feminists everywhere should stand up for sex workers' rights, realising that this is just one of the many ways that women can fight for equality. The goal of destroying sexism will not happen while women are still seen as pieces of meat for men to consume. www.iusw.org

¹Derwiz, Sylwia. Prostitutes, Prostitution, Anarchism, in "Abolishing the Borders From Below; Anarchist Journal from Eastern Europe" www.abb.hardcore.lt The English in this quote and in the magazine is not always the most grammatically correct. This is the English of people who are learning it as a second language in order to communicate their ideas to a wider audience.

BOOK REVIEW

The Triple Threat of Hormonal Imbalance

words by fernanda

My friend gave me a lend of this book and I thought it was really good because it talks about motherhood in a very honest way. The author explains her transition period of the first year of a new motherhood. It is the clash between expectation and result, theory and reality.

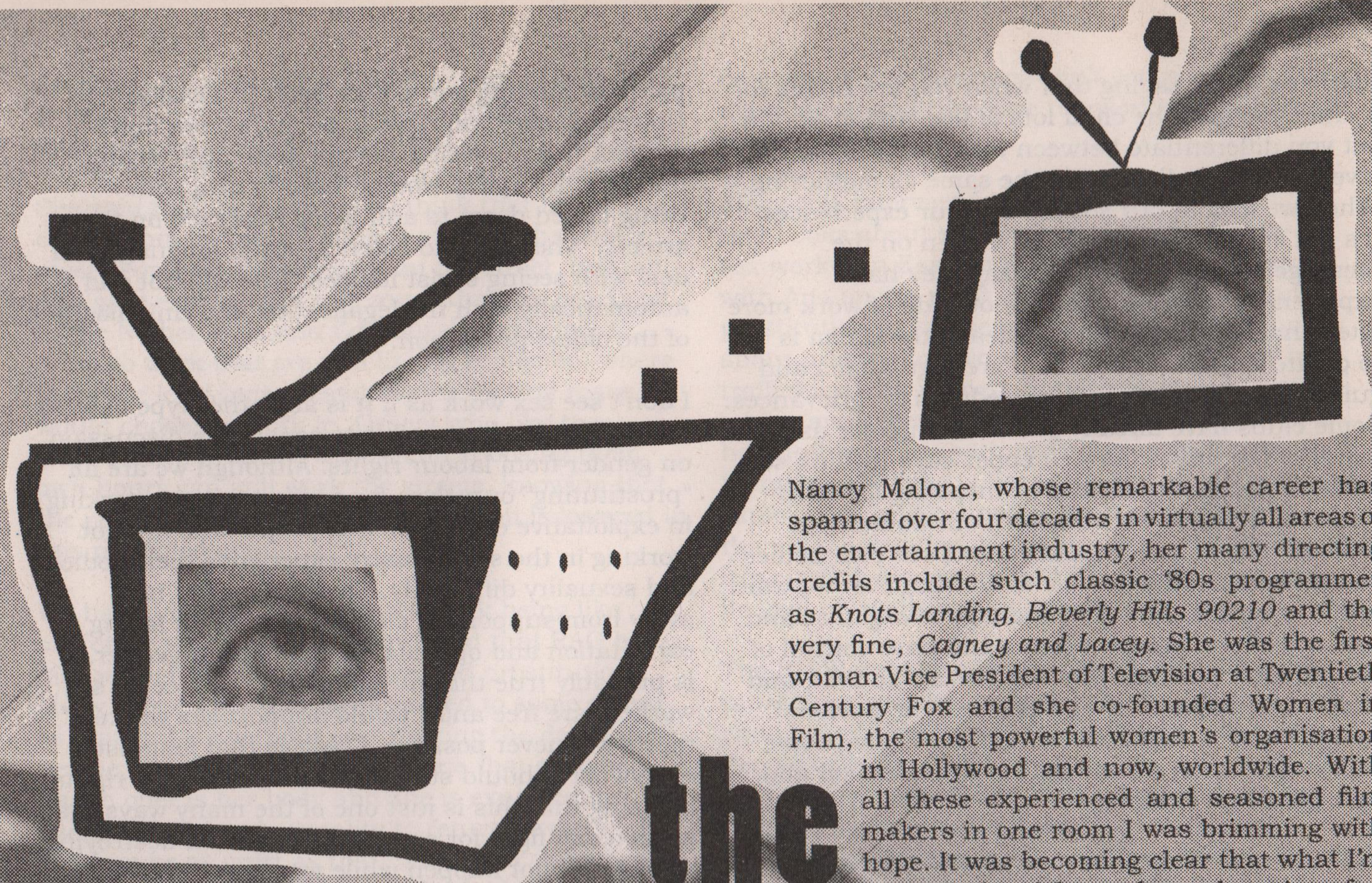
It is the twilight zone of twenty-four-hour a day living the triple-threat of hormonal imbalance, sleep deprivation and physical exhaustion. It is the stress of trying to acclimatise as quickly as possible to the immediacy of nothing, a new conception of oneself and one's role in the family and in the world, a new fearful level of responsibility. She divides the first year of a new parent in four stages: 1- initial euphoria; 2- irritation/ hostility; 3- recovery and 4- adjustment.

What she describes is exactly the way that my partner and I felt. Also many friends that had their first baby in the same period felt the same. So it gives a good perspective of the huge change and adaptation after the birth of the first child in someone's life.

ANDREA J. BUCHANAN "MOTHER SHOCK" -

TALES FROM THE FIRST YEAR AND BEYOND LOVING EVERY (OTHER) MINUTE OF IT.

www.mothershock.com | www.sealpress.com



the female eye

words by cara

The female eye has the ability to see things as they really are, but it's not always pretty.

In film making, we are all striving for "a stream of unmediated consciousness", that what we're doing is something that hasn't been done before. Sick of being directed in the editing seat and continually getting ideas for short films/documentaries, I decided to branch out and do some research on independent film making in Ireland, and the women involved.

I was of the opinion that if I had a good script or a good idea, there's absolutely no reason to think that I, (as a woman), wouldn't get funding. I recently attended the second "Women in the Picture" symposium held in Galway and with the number of established female film makers there giving me the hairy eyeball after I made that comment, I was gently led to believe that this is not the case.

Over the course of the weekend there were 15-20 women and three men in attendance and it was a steal at only €25 for three days. The symposium covered everything from Iranian films made by women, political video activists in Germany to present-day Irish film makers. Looking around me, I realised that the film industry in Ireland wasn't exactly overrun with women film makers and observed that most of these creative, inspiring and influential women were over the age of 40.

The guest speakers at the symposium included Pat Murphy; a film maker in Ireland for the past 25 years. Her films include *Maeve* (1981); widely recognised as the first Irish feminist film, *Anne Devlin* (1983) and *Nora* (1999). Other speakers included Laura Mulvey, a feminist film theorist and film maker, and

Nancy Malone, whose remarkable career has spanned over four decades in virtually all areas of the entertainment industry, her many directing credits include such classic '80s programmes as *Knots Landing*, *Beverly Hills 90210* and the very fine, *Cagney and Lacey*. She was the first woman Vice President of Television at Twentieth Century Fox and she co-founded Women in Film, the most powerful women's organisation in Hollywood and now, worldwide. With all these experienced and seasoned film makers in one room I was brimming with hope. It was becoming clear that what I'm trying to do might not be so daunting after all.

The theme of the weekend was influence and inspiration. The aim was to try and encourage younger women to pursue directing at an early stage in their professional development. In turn, this should open doors for women directors. We will gain a perspective of the world through the female eye, something which Irish cinema particularly is in great need of. The very idea that women in Irish cinema are still being portrayed as 'the mammy', the annoying girlfriend, the sister, generally quite insignificant and unremarkable characters is worrying and it needs to change.

We need to create new programme formats and make films that are not as rigid as the films funded by our national broadcaster. Linear scriptwriting shouldn't be held in such high regard, in other words, we need to break some rules. All we need to do is convince distributors and commissioning editors that it's ok to do this!

There needs to be more exposure for young women film makers in Ireland. In a country where money can be obtained from sponsorship, funding by the Arts Council, the Irish Film Board and Filmbase to name only a few, you'd think every woman and her dog would be out there with an 'oul camcorder, but they're not. So, where are all the female film makers? We all have different stories to tell and different

ways in which we want to tell them and my intention is to set up a network/collective for women film makers in Ireland in order for these stories to be told. Whether it's a documentary on the Irish dog singing championships held in Clare or a short film about bestiality, so be it. I'd personally like to see the group meet monthly or bi-monthly to discuss ideas, write treatments, hold scriptwriting groups and share skills, from operating a camera to using editing programmes etc. All industry professionals and newcomers would be welcome.

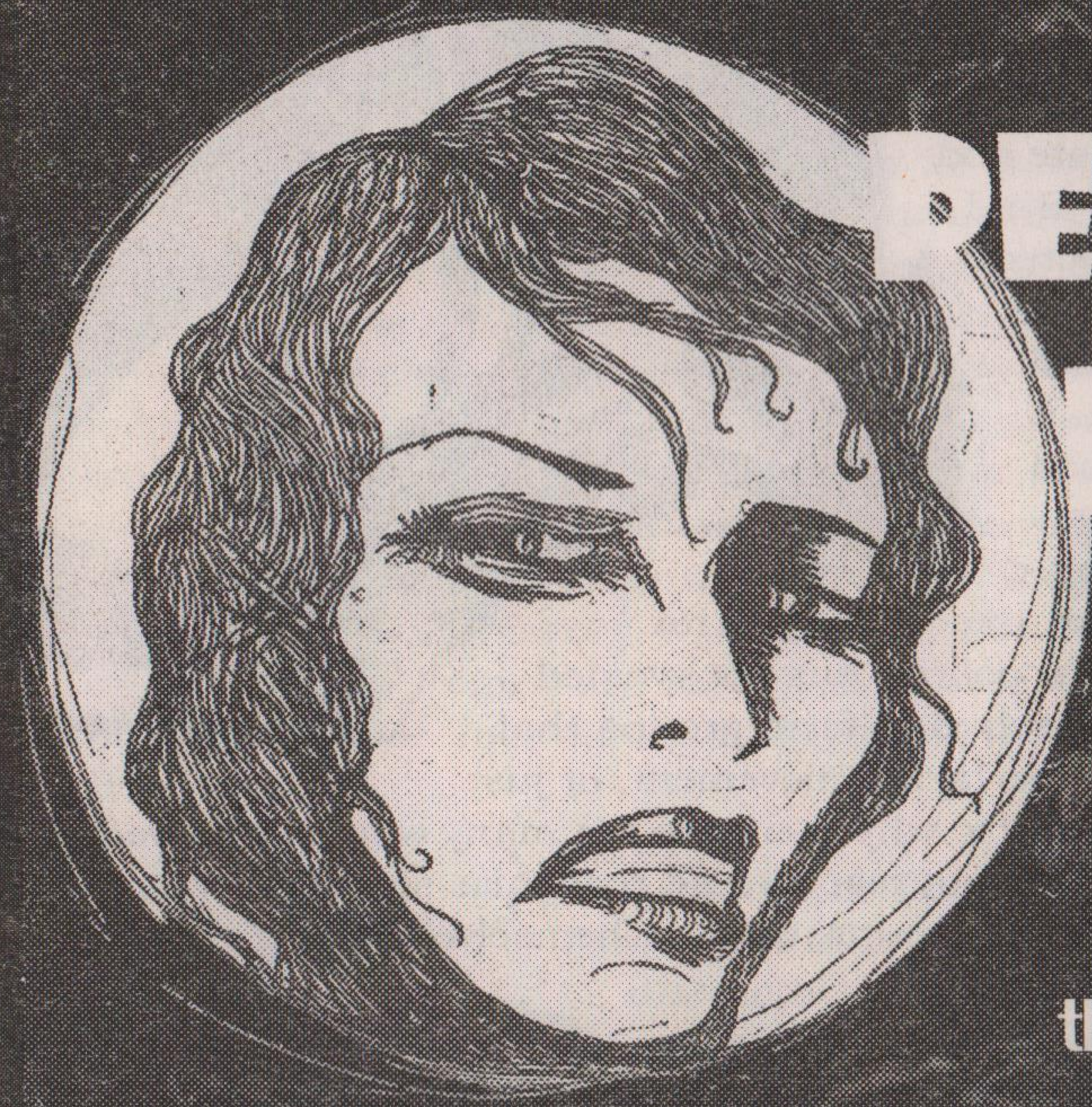
Already established is the Women in Film and Television Network (www.wftvireland.com <<http://www.wftvireland.com>>). One of their primary aims is to assist and educate women who wish to become involved in the film, television and radio industries. Instead of trying to create the world twice over we should consolidate energies and possibly ally ourselves with them. With the rise of community television channels in

Dublin, and "Northern Visions" (a community radio station) in Northern Ireland, the potential is great.



If anyone's with me, contact caraholmes@gmail.com

"my lovely anti cramps herbal tea formula"



PERIOD PAINS

- 1:1 valerian root (sedative, improves your patience to deal with the pain)
 - 1:1 mugwort (anti-spasmodic)
 - 1:1 yarrow (stomach ease)
 - 1:1 sage (mild sedative, strengthens nervous system, hormone balancer)
 - 1:1 camomille (good for your tummy, good for your spasms)
- (1:1 means 1 measurement which can be a pinch, a teaspoon etc.,)
- boil the mixture in water for 10 min and steep another 10, strain and take warm...

better along with a hot water bottle with some drops of lavender essential oil on your tummy. rest a lot, cry till you fall sleep, they will be gone when you wake up.

things you can do before your period appears:

- *don't drink coffee the week (or two) before your period is due
 - *take evening primrose oil the whole month to balance hormonal system
 - *omega 3 oils are great to balance your nervous system (flaxseed oil is the alternative to fish oils for veggies)
 - *if you have time and money you should take agnus castus to complete the balance of the hormone system for a couple of months
 - *don't forget that hormones are more controlable than we think, as they are linked with our emotions, the more relaxed, less stressed you are, the less hassle they give you!
- (meditation, breathing techniques, yoga, good food, time for yourself are good ways to be more relaxed)

recipe by miriam
images by sgraffito



WOMEN and ANARCHISM

words by marianne

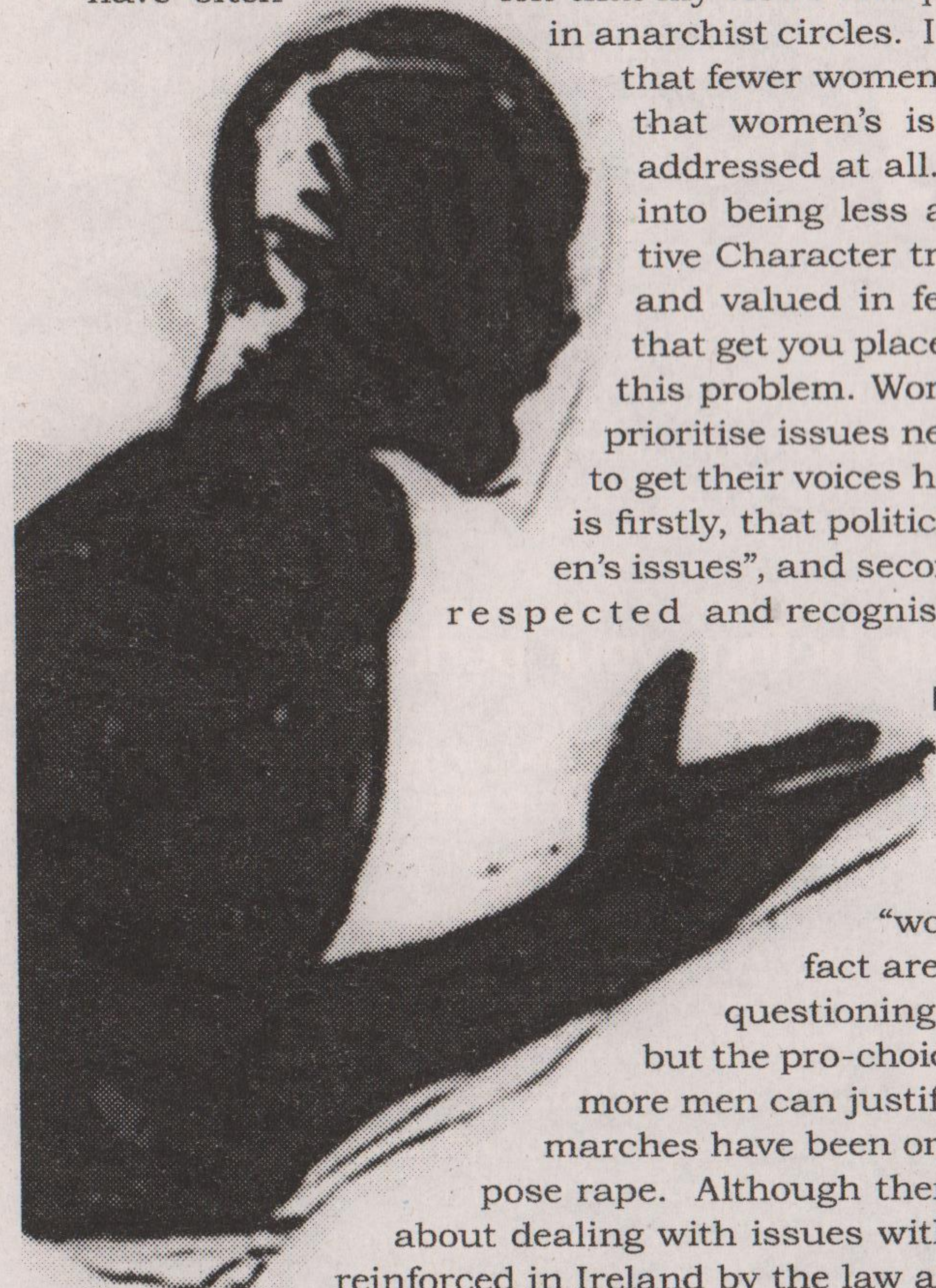
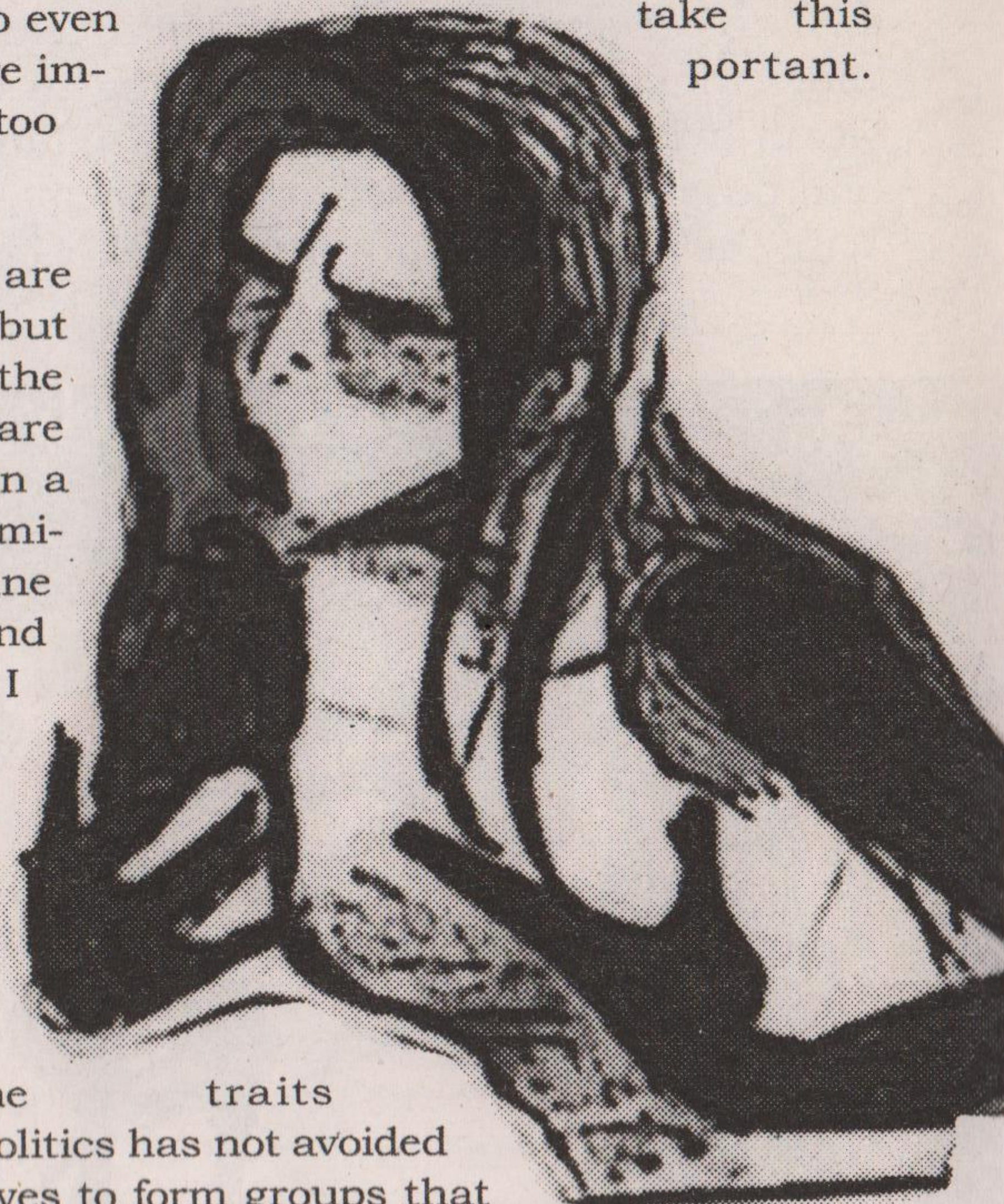
images by sgraffito

Anarchist movements are some of the most radical social movements today. These are the movements looking for a completely new society, one without capitalism, without leaders and based on direct democracy. Our movements model themselves on our ideal societies, with a non-hierarchical structure, and everyone being theoretically equal. I want to look at one of the inequalities, specifically those of women within these groups, based on my own experience in Ireland. These groups all share the same leaderless structure and consensus based decision-making process and ideologies, which are designed to be inclusive. But if women felt they were treated equally, there would be no such thing as anarchy-feminism. All anarchists should be feminists, as equality is part of anarchist ideology. But it is clear from the numbers of women in our organisations, in our community, that something is wrong. Women form their own groups as many feel they are not taken seriously and so-called "women's issues" are not seen as political. At the Dublin Grassroots Gathering in 2004 there were gender circles, workshops with separate spaces for men, women, and transgender people to talk separately about gender issues, and there have been more of these discussions since. The same questions seem to come up again and again, such as why women don't talk as much as men at meetings and why there are fewer women involved. Having these discussions is important but it is only one step towards solving the problem. Many, usually men, refuse to even take this first step; they see these discussions as side issues and don't feel they are important. I would argue that they are important, not just for women, but for men too and certainly for the anarchist movement as a whole.

As happens within mainstream political parties, questions of why there are not more women involved are raised sporadically in libertarian groups, but not really addressed. We need to avoid replicating problems that exist in the current political system if we are to hope for a real alternative. Women are almost always a minority in anarchist groups, and the feeling of being in a "male" environment can be intimidating for women. For some it is not intimidating but in this male environment there is a need to behave in a masculine way to participate fully. I have never really found it hard to participate and express myself at meetings, but maybe having two brothers helped. But I have often felt that my views and priorities are not reflected

in anarchist circles. I have grown to recognise that fewer women speak at meetings and that women's issues are secondary, if addressed at all. Women are socialised into being less aggressive and competitive. Character traits that are encouraged and valued in female children are not the traits that get you places in politics. Anarchist politics has not avoided this problem. Women take it upon themselves to form groups that prioritise issues neglected by the larger libertarian movement, or just to get their voices heard. One simple answer to why there are not many women involved is firstly, that politics, even radical politics do not respect and recognise so-called "women's issues", and secondly, that in these political groups, women themselves are not always respected and recognised.

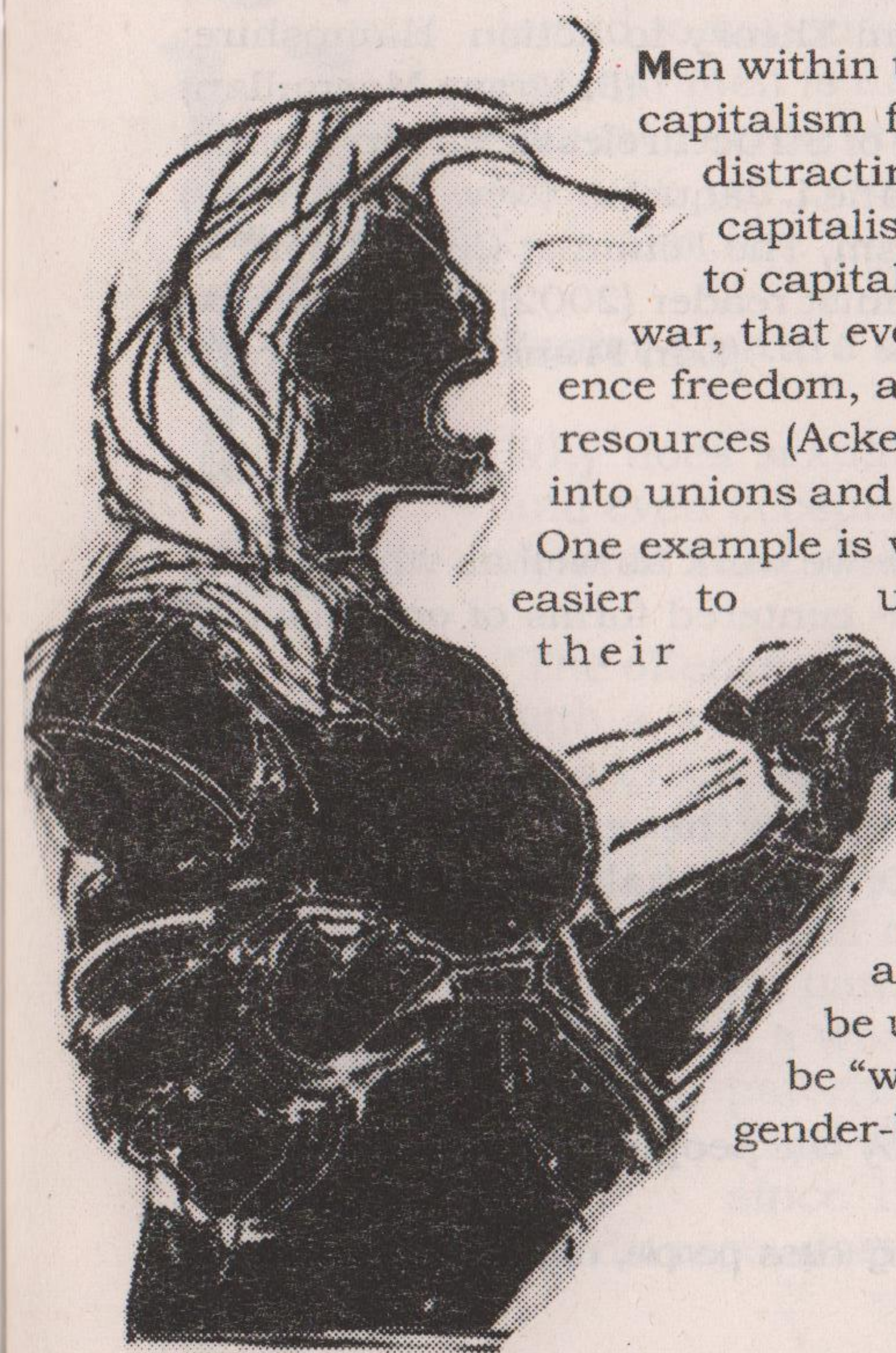
Money, time and effort are finite resources and have to be allocated to specific projects. For example, issues tackled by the libertarian community include environmental issues, worker's rights, anti racism movements, anti-war campaigns, opposition to the G8 summits among others, but rarely do large groups of libertarians mobilise for "women's issues". These decisions may be seen as gender neutral but in fact are simply supporting the priorities of a male dominated group without questioning. The pro-life groups in Dublin have large numbers of men involved but the pro-choice groups are made up almost solely of women. This would imply that more men can justify controlling women than actively fighting for their liberation. Large marches have been organised in the last few years to oppose racist attacks but none to oppose rape. Although there are many reasons for this, one is certainly the unease people feel about dealing with issues within the private sphere (the body, the home, friends, family). This is reinforced in Ireland by the law and the constitution pushing the idea of minimal interference in what goes on behind closed doors, often to the detriment of many people's lives, especially women and children. The phrase "the personal is political" (which comes from the women's movement in the 1960s) needs to be reapplied here as women take it upon themselves to form groups that prioritise issues neglected by the larger libertarian movement. It makes no sense that domestic violence and sexual violence are seen as "women's issues" when the majority of this violence is carried out by men. It takes two to get pregnant, but who pushes the abortion issue? The private sphere is not limited to women only but many women's subordination occurs within the private sphere.



The problem with this is that issues which are seen as private are not seen as political. The Grassroots Gathering principles state specifically that women should receive equal recognition in order not to reproduce "feelings of disempowerment and alienation within our own network". However, it seems to me that women are tolerated but not fully embraced within this and similar groups. There is little time given to discussion of gender and socialisation within many organisations, and there is a distinct reluctance to address the problems women experience.

Another problem is that anarchists feel we are enlightened and no longer carry racist, sexist or any other prejudice. In fact we all carry these prejudices from childhood, through social conditioning, and only by addressing them can we begin to deal with them. This is not about "feeling guilty", this is about changing. We are brought up in a racist, sexist, homophobic world, how are we so special that we are not affected by it? Did we not all watch similar cartoons, listen to similar music, live in similar families to the unenlightened masses? Anarchist groups need to take some time to address these issues, to be self reflective. The idea that we look inwards too much has come up to silence these problems, I never know how to react because it seems so insane to me. It's like a backlash against something that never happened in the first place. Anarchist groups rarely take the time for self examination, it is something that can and should be incorporated into everything we do. If women do not feel their opinions, their way of expressing themselves, their issues are valued in the same way as men's within anarchist groups there will continue to be less women involved. This is a major problem, not just for women but for anarchism. At gatherings someone will bring it up and there will be a sigh. "Why can't women just be more assertive?" Thus the blame is placed on women when these questions arise. But why can't the decision-making process, the issues, the character traits that are valued, be those belonging to women, as well as those of men?

Often there is a macho culture around anarchism that many women, including myself, feel alienated from. At marches and demos, at meetings, at almost every event, it's a matter of who can shout loudest, be most confrontational or angry, and who can be most aggressive. There is also the question of who can devote the most time to politics, and women are more likely to have family or care commitments (although this shouldn't be the case, it is). These issues bring about disempowerment not only for women, but for many men who cannot or do not want to live up to this macho stereotype. Much of the learning involved in libertarian groups involves skill sharing which I think is a great way to learn. People teach from their experience and no one is seen as "expert". This is a very equal and interactive way of learning and I think that events such as the Grassroots Gatherings, which focus mainly on these practical approaches, have a more gender-balanced attendance. Although many of the workshops, like the actions, have a male focus, there is room for women to put on our own workshops. However in actions where physical work is involved, women seem to be in the background. This is both because women cannot identify with the unnecessary machismo involved in some anarchist actions, and because they do not feel empowered to take part. Often male-dominated cliques can form within the main group. These cliques are sometimes based on knowledge (for example on who has read more political theory, who knows the secret location of the action), or on risk (who is more willing to risk arrest or danger). As women are socialised to be less competitive many have little interest in these games and feel left out of these cliques. To avoid these cliques we must address their existence and discuss ways to minimise their effect on the group.



Men within the libertarian community often connect capitalism with patriarchy; saying when capitalism falls patriarchy will follow. I have heard feminism referred to as a red herring, distracting from the "real issue" of class politics, but subordination of women predates capitalism and crosses all societies and classes worldwide, and is not intrinsically linked to capitalism. We can see for example, from reports from women during the Spanish civil war, that even in this time, (looked to by anarchists as an ideal time) women did not experience freedom, as women's problems and oppression were not completely tied to the production of resources (Ackelsberg, Free Women of Spain). Workers controlled their production and organised into unions and worked co-operatively, but the male bias here is clear once we scratch the surface. One example is when work for textile industries done from home was banned in order to make it easier to unionise these women. They moved into factories and could no longer look after their children or the house as they worked. Women's burdens were in fact increased as they took on the added work as wage earners and political activists on top of housework, which was not shared. One woman is quoted as saying "inside their own homes, [men] forgot completely about women's struggle." Women had to set up their own group, Mujeres Libres to fight separately for women, for anarchism and yet against their fellow anarchists! The idea of freedom for workers and worker's rights alone is problematic for women if work in the home continues to be undervalued as it is not seen as part of the economic system, and if it continues to be "women's work". Problems will always arise if we look at the world as though it were gender-blind and as though we are too.

I do think that there is a lot of love, care and solidarity within the libertarian community in Dublin, with people working closely together over long periods of time. However, in difficult times communities like these can split when there are problems within. I have been involved, most recently in a protest camp, in talking about "safer (or positive) spaces policies". The workshops try to highlight possible problems with safety that could arise, such as sexual assaults, violence and conflict within communities.

The aim is to show the need for policies to be in place before issues arise. I found that some men are very hostile to these and feel attacked as soon as sexual assault is mentioned. They are far less willing than women to show support for survivors of sexual assault. It is so hard to see rape myths surface in the mouths of those you believe to be willing to change the world. Many of those who feel the need to react do so with suggestions of violence. Once again people are reluctant to look at something considered "private" as being part of politics. Yet challenging how you have been socialised is one of the most political and radical things you can do. It is mainly through the formation of women's support groups that these issues are challenged within activist communities in the US and it seems it will be the same here. There are men however who believe that it is also up to men to tackle issues of men's violence and try to prevent it, so hopefully segregation along gender lines on this issue can be prevented.

In libertarian organisations each person has more power and influence than in other groups with a more hierarchical structure. People feel more empowered and able to express their views. However, saying principles that women should feel empowered to speak and contribute enough to make it actually happen. Peggy Kornegger states in her article *Anarchism: A Feminist Perspective*, that "Anarchist men have been little better than males everywhere in their subjection of women". She gives this as a reason for women to form their own groups and she calls for anarcho-feminist revolution. Kornegger and other anarcho-feminist writers of her time call on feminists to realise they are anarchists, they have the same beliefs but do not label them as anarchism. I think it is equally important to call on all anarchists to realise they should be feminists. Instead of feeling threatened by women having the same power in decision-making, men should see that this is essential for a libertarian socialist society. Paying lip service to the idea of empowering women is not enough, and unless these issues are discussed no progress will be made. Women often seek and find power through working together but this also needs to feed back into mixed groups, which takes effort from all involved. Power relations are not always drawn along gender lines and many men who do not meet the ideal of what masculinity is supposed to be are also sidelined. So we need to challenge all gender stereotypes and our own prejudices, by bringing them into the open, in order to achieve equality of power. Although a group may do everything it can to fight against outside inequalities it is also important for groups to look at their own, usually unconscious, behaviour and confront it.

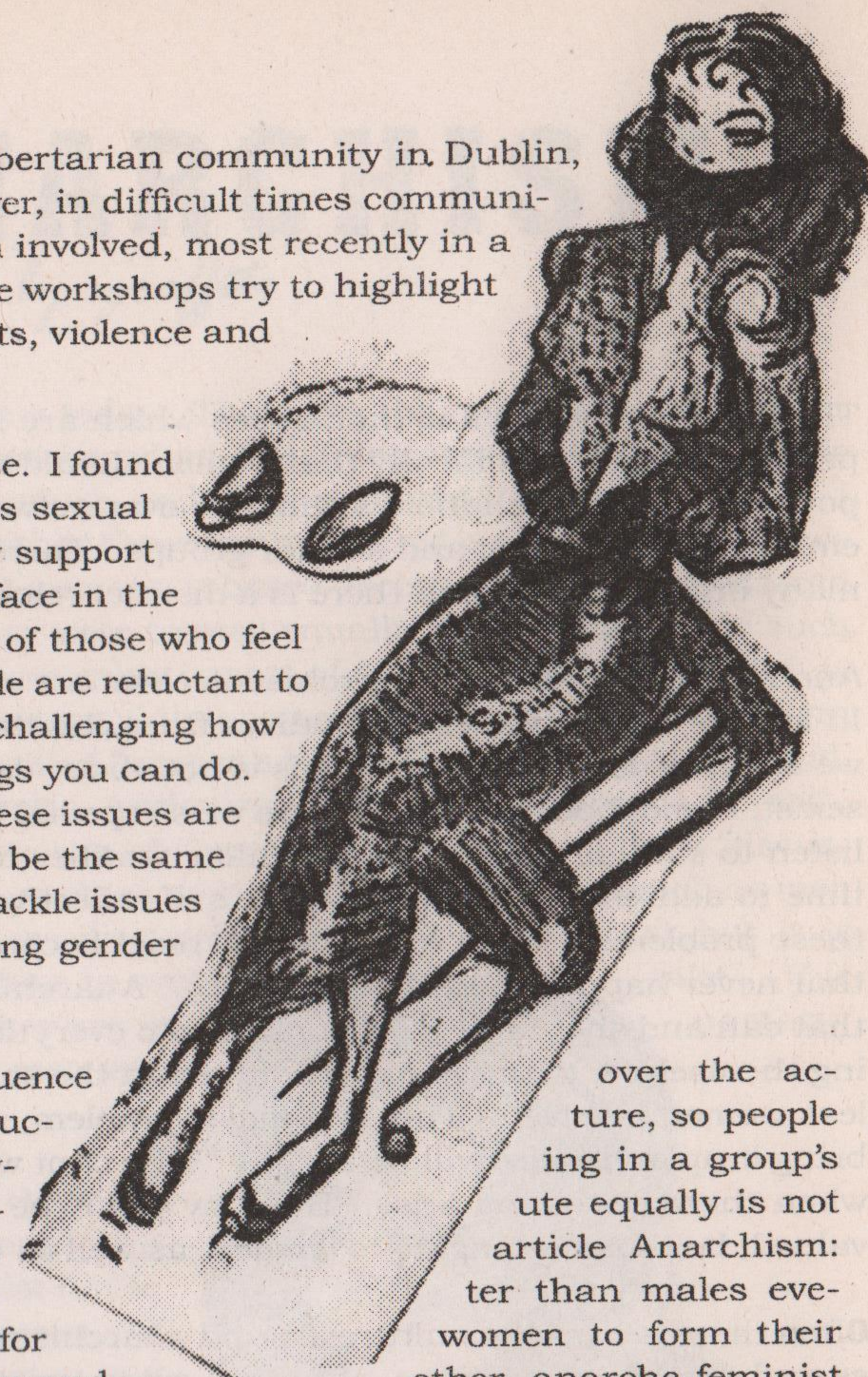
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Grassroots gathering principles:

1. People should control their own lives and work together as equals, as part of how we work as well as what we are working towards. Within the network this means rejecting top-down and state-centered forms of organisation (hierarchical, authoritarian, expert-based, Leninist etc.)
2. The network should be open, decentralised and really democratic.
3. We call for solutions that involve ordinary people controlling their own lives and having the resources to do so:
 - ≡The abolition, not reform, of global bodies like the World Bank and WTO, and a challenge to underlying structures of power and inequality
 - ≡The control of the workplace by those who work there
 - ≡The control of communities by people who live there
4. We argue for a sustainable environmental, economic and social system, agreed by the people of the planet.

We aim to work together in ways which are accessible to everyone, particularly women and working-class people, rather than reproducing feelings of disempowerment and alienation within our own network.



rape culture

Sexual violence is a huge problem in our society. Sexual assault is not something that happens to other people elsewhere but is something that has happened to a significant number of people in any community, group or setting. Yet sexual violence is rarely talked about, the extent of it is not widely known and outside the feminist movement it is seldom taken up as a political issue.

This article sprang from a case of rape in a community of activists which, in the various meetings, workshops and discussions that followed, forced people to try to deal with a problem which is usually hidden. The whole issue proved to be quite divisive. It became clear to anyone listening that sexual violence is something of which a shocking number of women have their own personal experience. The hurt and anger felt by some were compounded by the reactions of others, which were often distressingly insensitive, inappropriate, and inadequate. It seemed as though sexist myths about rape were just as common in a community of activists wanting to change the world as in mainstream society.

If something positive came from the whole process it was that for some of us this was a real learning experience and it politicised people about the issue. Many of the ideas in this article come from RAG discussions which tried to understand some of the reasons why sexual violence occurs. This article begins by looking at statistics which detail the widespread prevalence of sexual violence in our society, followed by a discussion on some of the possible causes.

Sexual violence comes from the unequal balance of power between people, and in particular between men and women. This article concentrates on sexual violence against women. It discusses the widely held sexist myths about rape which, along with our gender role socialisation, contribute to a culture which encourages sexual violence. Finally there is some (hopefully constructive) criticism of common reactions to sexual violence, in particular within the anarchist community in Dublin.

Prevalence of Sexual Violence in Our Society

The true prevalence of sexual violence is unknown and is difficult to estimate accurately due mainly to extremely high levels of under-reporting. However, there have been numerous studies done to determine what percentage of the population has experienced sexual abuse. These are often by means of anonymous surveys of people chosen at random from the population. The best estimates from most international studies indicate that 14 - 25 per cent of adult women have been raped during their lifetime. In the Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (SAVI) study, which surveyed over 3000 people, more than four in ten of women reported some form of sexual abuse or assault in their lifetime, as did over a quarter of men surveyed. For a significant proportion of men the abuse took place in childhood, whereas for women the rates of childhood and of adult abuse were the same. For adult sexual assault alone, the figures were one in five women and one in ten men.

Sexual abuse is a gendered crime. Girls and women are considerably more likely to be subjected to serious sexual assault than boys and men, although the prevalence of sexual abuse against men is nevertheless alarmingly high. The perpetrators of sexual violence however are almost exclusively male: 98 per cent of abusers of female children are male. Of male children 86 per cent of abusers are male. For adult rapes around 98 per cent are committed by males.

Sexist Culture and Rape Myths

Why does sexual violence occur? We live in a sexist culture that in many ways tolerates, and even accepts as normal, sexual violence. Historically, rape was not even seen as a crime against the person who was raped but against their male owner:

"The offence of rape was traditionally defined as non-consensual sexual intercourse by a man with a woman.... The definition of rape has its roots in earlier times, when it was regarded as a crime against property. The word derives from the Latin rapere (to seize), as the crime was seen to have the effect of forcibly seizing valuable property from the male owner, ie, the father or husband of the female victim. Historically, rape was deemed to have occurred only where there had been emission of semen within the vagina, which put the paternity of a subsequent child born to the woman into question."iv Presumably if a woman who had no male "owners" was raped, and there was thus no potential paternity and inheritance issue, then it would not have been considered a crime. Rape within marriage has only been recognised as a crime in the Irish legal system since 1991.v This is a reflection of the tolerance that still exists in our society towards rape, particularly in intimate relationships.

words by dierdre

images by helen

Common understandings of rape and sexual assault are informed by widely accepted cultural myths. The SAVI report defines rape myths as "personally held beliefs that may promote or condone sexual abuse and also hinder the disclosure and recovery process for those who have been abused." They are false beliefs about rape and sexuality that disadvantage women in particular and are at odds with the experience of people who have been raped.

One common rape myth which is particularly offensive is the widely held belief that women often make up false accusations of rape. *There is no evidence of there being more false reports of rape than of any other crime.* In fact it is the reverse that is true. Study after study has shown that, for a variety of reasons, including the stigma and shame often attached to sexual violence, most people who have been raped are silent about what has happened to them. The SAVI study reports that one of their most striking findings was that sexual violence was a completely private and hidden matter for almost half of those affected.^{vi} Yet the same report found that four in ten of study participants felt that "accusations of rape are often false". Given such general scepticism about accusations of rape it is hardly surprising that fears of not being believed often act to effectively silence victims of rape.

This prejudice can be seen on an institutional level in the Irish judicial system with the "corroboration warning". This is a warning traditionally given in a rape trial by the judge to the jury that it is dangerous to convict the accused on the victim's evidence alone. The corroboration rule, *which only applied to sexual assault trials*, specified that the judge had to give the corroboration warning in these cases. Although this warning is no longer mandatory in Ireland and is left up to the judge's discretion, it is nevertheless almost always given.^{vii} This seriously undermines the credibility of the victim.

Until recently and unlike in any other type of trial, evidence of the victim's prior sexual history was admissible without restriction in rape trials. Again the motivation was to discredit the person who was raped. Although it is now harder to introduce such evidence in court it is still common for people in general to see a woman's sexual history as somehow relevant when deciding whether she is telling the truth about a rape. The misogynistic logic behind this line of thought follows the age-old double standard that divides women into virgins and whores, and reserves a sort of respect only for the former. Women who "sleep around" can't really be raped it seems, or if they are, they were "asking for it".

Take for example the Supreme Court decision in Italy in February this year: the five Supreme Court judges ruled that the rape of a minor was a less serious offence if the child involved was no longer a virgin. The case involved the appeal of a 40 year old man who had raped a 14 year old girl. The judges decided that the girl was more "developed" sexually than one would expect of a girl that age and because of this the rape was a more moderate offence than it would otherwise have been.^{viii} The most "rapeable" group of people are prostitutes. For prostitutes who are raped it is extremely hard to get a conviction. One Australian judge when sentencing said "the likely effect on the victim of the forced oral intercourse and indecent assault is much less a factor in this case [because the victim was a prostitute] and lessens the gravity of the offences".^{ix}

Preconceptions of what constitutes "real rape" exclude many types of rape which happen more frequently than the classic "real rape".

"When people hear of a specific incident in which a woman says she was raped, they look at the incident, compare it to their idea of a 'real rape' and often decide that the woman was not 'really raped'. The classic 'real rape' for many people is rape by a stranger who uses a weapon, an assault done at night, outside (in a dark alley) with a lot of violence, resistance by the woman (it is always a woman in 'real rape') and, therefore, severe wounds and signs of struggle. In fact, in every respect except one - the time of day - every element of this scenario is missing in most rapes. More than half of all rapes are committed by someone known to the person, the vast majority do not involve a weapon or severe injury, most occur indoors in either the victim's or the offender's home. These are the assaults which are dismissed or minimised."^x

Again, although it is in fact rare for a woman to sustain physical injuries, the absence of such injuries is often used to discredit her accusation of rape.

.....
 Acquaintance (or "Date") Rape...

What is date or acquaintance rape?
 It is any unwanted sexual contact between you and a person you know. It can take place with someone you have just met, someone you have been dating, or with someone to whom you are engaged or married. Date rape is every bit as harmful as any other type of sexual assault, and it is an act of violence. Statistics conservatively estimate that 87-90% of all rapes are committed by someone known to the victim.¹ Many rapes go unreported as the gardai tend to believe, "He couldn't have raped you - his number was in your phone book." The first step in protecting yourself from potential sexual assault is to pre-define unacceptable behaviour. Once you are certain of your rights you can then start to defend them.

Statistics from a study carried out with grade school boys and girls (under 18s) in the U.S.² showed that:

- 56% of the girls and 76% of the boys believed that forced sex was acceptable under some circumstances
- in the 11-14 age bracket, 51% of boys and 41% of girls said that forced sex was acceptable if the boy spent a lot of money on the girl
- 31% of the boys and 32% of the girls said that it was acceptable for a man to rape a woman if she had past sexual experiences
- 87% of the boys and 79% of the girls believed that sexual assault was acceptable if the man and the woman were married
- 65% of the boys and 47% of the girls stated that it was acceptable for a boy to rape a girl if they had been dating for more than six months

In a survey of male college students:³
 -35% anonymously admitted that, under certain circumstances, they would commit rape if they believed they could get away with it.
 -One in 12 admitted to committing acts that met the legal definitions of rape, and 84% of men who committed rape did not label it as rape.

Living in a culture which sees rape as acceptable, even if "only under some circumstances", means we have to double-up on our own self-confidence. There is a good chance that your attacker has somehow justified to himself what he is doing, and will try to convince you the same.

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Female/Male Socialisation and Sexual Violence as a Men's Issue

One of the main reasons rape is often not recognised as such is because of the normalisation of sexual coercion in intimate relationships in our society. Forced sex through physically violent coercion can clearly be seen as rape. Sex forced through verbal or emotional coercion however can result in situations which people don't recognise as rape because some level of coercion is perceived as normal.

There is a relationship between the construction of masculinity and sexual assault. "Men have been taught to relate to the world in terms of dominance and control, and they have been taught that violence is an acceptable method of maintaining control, resolving conflicts, and expressing anger."^{xi} Women on the other hand are socialised, among other things, to try to be "nice" and to please others. Our traditional cultural value system about male and female sexuality dictates that men should be sexually aggressive and women passive; that men have uncontrollable sexual urges and that women shouldn't really want or enjoy sex too much; that it is up to women to set the boundaries of sexual intimacy (even though these limits are often not respected).

Many of us learn growing up that we can avoid unwanted male attention if we are careful enough and that if anything goes wrong, it must be our fault. "Blaming the victim releases the man who commits the violence from the responsibility for what he has done."^{xii}

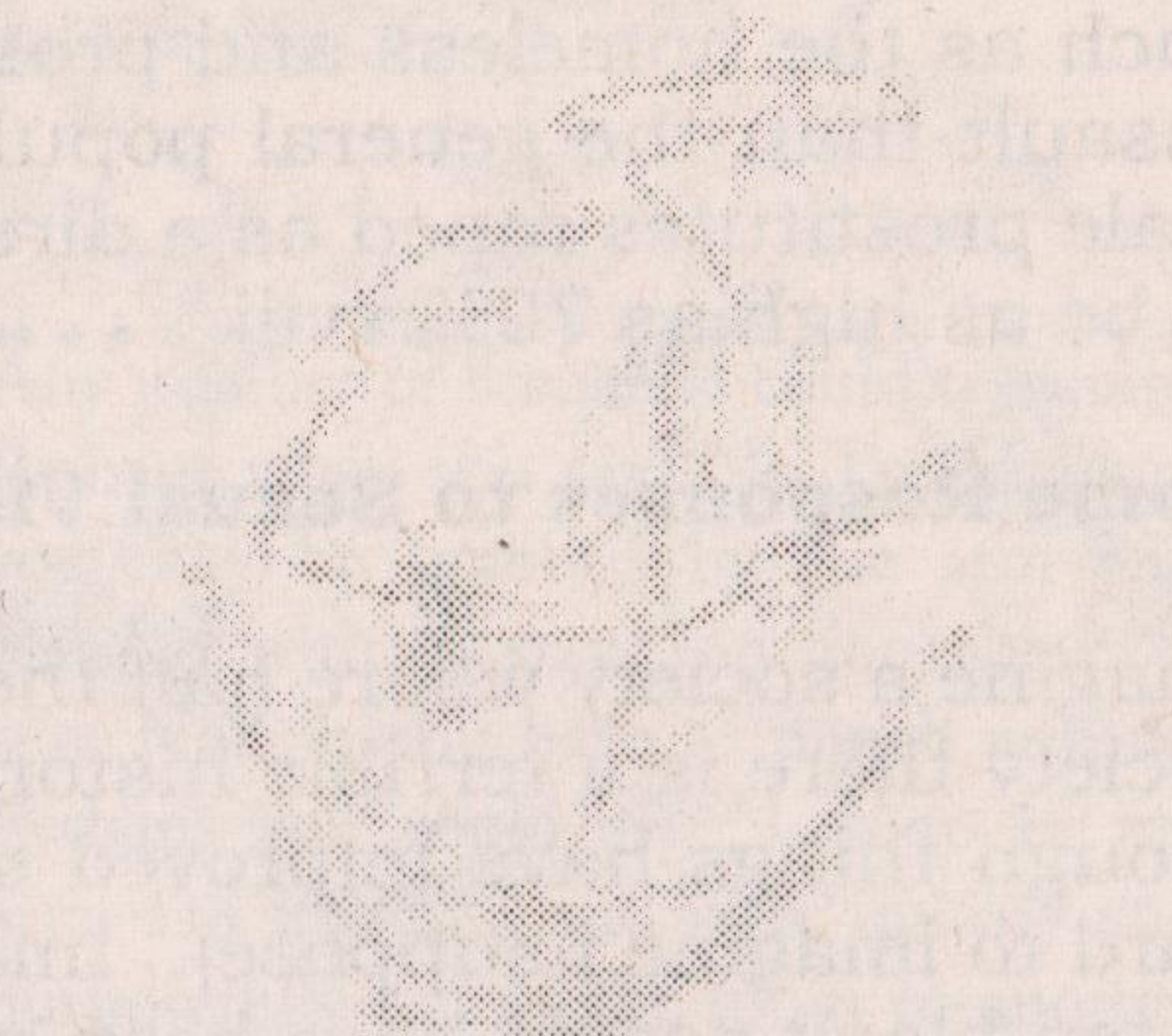
This gender socialisation combined with the power inequalities that exist between women and men lead often to unequal sexual relationships - particularly in younger people. Women are most at risk of rape between the ages of 16 and 25^{xiii}. Generally, age has been found to be the strongest predictor of risk of sexual violence. The SAVI report discusses another survey carried out in Dublin where unwanted sexual experiences before age 16 were noted by 32 per cent of female respondents and which concluded that there was "a culture of sexual aggression towards teenage girls".^{xiv}

Research indicates that a disturbingly high level of young men condone sexual violence. To take just a few examples: In one North American study 50 per cent of high school boys believed it was acceptable: "for a guy to hold a girl down and force her to have sexual intercourse in instances such as when she gets him sexually excited or changes her mind".^{xv} In a Toronto study, 31% of males and 22% of females said yes when asked, "If a girl engages in necking or petting and she lets things get out of hand, is it her own fault if her partner forces sex on her?" Another study found that 60% of Canadian college-aged males said they would commit sexual assault if they were certain they would not get caught.^{xvi}

Similarly, in a survey carried out amongst fourteen-year-old boys in Brisbane Australia more than half believed that leading a boy on justified forced sexual intercourse. There was also a common belief held by the boys that "girls often said no when they really meant yes". A majority of boys also claimed that they could "ascertain with some confidence when 'no' meant 'yes' and when it meant 'no'".^{xvii} This idea that "no means yes" is another destructive myth about women and female sexuality which reveals a lack of respect for women and is another aspect of our culture which leads to situations where sexual coercion is seen as acceptable.

If in our culture boys/men often feel they have a right to sex in certain situations, the flip side to this is that girls/women sometimes feel they do not have the right to say no. There are cultural messages learnt by young people growing up which are extremely disempowering for young women. Take for example the message to girls that it's nothing short of a mortal sin to be a so-called tease or to "lead someone on" (I mean what *exactly* is being a "tease" and why is it generally only applied to girls/women?). This sort of message can lead to situations where girls and women are left feeling they don't really have full rights of ownership of their own body or that these rights are to some extent relinquished under certain circumstances.

Sexual violence by men against women would not occur were it not for the power inequalities that exist between women and men. It is both a consequence and reinforcement of power disparities between individuals and in



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 An old chestnut says,

"Dishonest people are seldom dishonest in only one aspect of their lives."

While these traits listed below do not necessarily indicate a rapist or abuser they do indicate serious character flaws.

If you see these behaviours in a person, take care⁴:

- Ignores your personal space; does not seek your permission
- Puts you down when you try to speak up; belittles your opinions and feelings
- Thinks themselves better than almost everyone else; acts mean/cruelly towards others
- Accuses you of being uptight; calls you names
- Displays insensitivity and ignores what you have to say
- Bullies with anger, threats, or guilt trips
- Is subject to extreme mood swings, often without warning
- Throws tantrums or otherwise makes you feel unsafe
- Drinks or uses drugs excessively/not for celebration
- Vengeful; hangs on to violent anger; "blind rage"
- Egomaniac; extreme selfishness; disassociation from others' feelings

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 Another warning sign should be if someone has ever been accused of rape, with or without conviction.

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society. This hierarchy of power leads inevitably to intimidation and abuse. The disparity in power between women and men is the reason, perhaps, that levels of serious sexual crimes committed against women remain similar from childhood to adulthood whereas for men the risk decreases three-fold from childhood to adult life. Also, in childhood, the risks are lower for boys than they are for girls. There is also evidence that that marginalised groups, such as the homeless and prostitutes, have a higher risk of serious sexual assault than the general population. Some estimate the percentage of female prostitutes raped as a direct result of their involvement in prostitution to be as high as 70%.xviii

Some Responses to Sexual Violence in an Anarchist Community

Imagine a society where half the population is black, and half white. In this society there is a terrible history of oppression against black people and although things have improved somewhat it remains a racist society (not so hard to imagine I suppose). Imagine then that in this society some four out of ten black people have been physically assaulted by whites at some point in their life. What would the white lefties have to say about this? Would they ignore it completely? Would they refuse to see it as a political issue or perhaps avoid responsibility by labelling it a "black person's issue"? When such violence occurs within their own lefty community would most whites prioritise protecting the rights of the white accused over those of the black victim and treat with scepticism the accusations of the black person - after all you've got to be careful, they often tend to invent such accusations these dodgy blacks.

When it comes to the problem of sexual violence these are the sorts of reactions that are common, even in a highly politicised group of people such as anarchists. Sexual violence is rarely seen as an important political issue and tackling and fighting this problem has never been part of the struggle for revolutionary change in society. In the hierarchy of oppressions that exists in the libertarian movement in Ireland sexism tends to rank pretty low in general and the problem of sexual violence has been ignored.

When a rape did occur there were those who held tenaciously to the argument that a rapist is innocent until proven guilty and as there was no concrete evidence that the rape had occurred then essentially nothing could be done. Given that sexual violence in the vast majority of cases occurs in a private setting, with no witnesses, no physical injuries, and therefore no proof, then the effect of this sort of response is a clear protection of rapists and the denial of any sort of justice for survivors of sexual assault. Of course, it would be much easier for everyone if somehow there were proof and undeniable evidence of some sort, but the reality of sexual violence is that this will rarely ever be the case. Yet, people seem often to refuse to deal with this reality and in doing so are incapable of coming up with real solutions to very real problems. To insist on proof means always giving the benefit of the doubt to the perpetrator and essentially accuses the rape victim of lying until it can be proven otherwise. Since proving you are telling the truth is not going to be possible this sends out the unequivocal message that the anarchist community protects rapists over survivors of rape.

It should also be noted that it is extremely rare for someone to admit to rape. For example, from the records kept by the Dublin Rape Crises Centre of cases where a rape was reported to the gardai: in both 2003 and 2004 the rapist pleaded guilty in 0% of the cases - this includes those who were convicted in court and thus where all evidence undeniably pointed to rape. In the discussions that arose around the case in Dublin it was shocking and disturbing on the one hand to hear story after story from women of how they had been themselves raped and on the other hand to hear all the rape myth classics spewed forth from the mouths of anarchists who, in theory, should have known better. For example: women often make up accusations of rape - in fact it's "naïve" to think otherwise; no often means yes; there is nothing wrong with discussing a woman's sexual history when defending oneself against a rape accusation; a woman who walks in dangerous parts of the city bears some of the blame if she is subsequently raped there. On one occasion myself and another person were even treated to a rape joke in the pub. Apart from the sexism inherent in these comments as well as the appalling lack of taste, do people not realise that sexual violence is a classic case of the personal being political and that in a room full of people you can be pretty much guaranteed that a large minority of the women will have

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 If you find yourself in an uncomfortable situation with someone who is ignoring what you've said, pressuring you with coercive language, or guilt tripping you in an attempt to persuade you into sex with them then you are in a potentially dangerous date rape situation. Identifying this possibility and withdrawing from the situation immediately will help to keep you safe.

Make sure that you have communicated your wants and refusals clearly. Unfortunately you may not be listened to. Once you feel that your refusals to have sex/fool around are being ignored and disrespected, acknowledge the situation has a potential to escalate. You do not have to determine whether this person really loves you/is good/bad/etc. You are not leaving because he is or isn't anything - at this point you are leaving because you feel unsafe/uncomfortable. Likewise, you should not stay because he says so/you feel you've "led him on"/you are afraid to hurt his feelings. Respect your feelings. Reassess your relationship with this person later - when you are in a safer space.

If you are nervous or feeling unsafe, for any reason, consider whether talking loudly may gain attention or wake some one up who could come to your aid. Get yourself in the presence of other people - whether this means going into another room, leaving the house, or making a phone call for help. Avoid sending out mixed messages: do not smile and try to act friendly when saying "no". Don't focus on being polite or sensitive - this leads to ineffective communication. You should be focusing on your needs.

Aggressiveness can be counter-productive. Gently remind yourself that you are not in a debate or fighting match, and make certain that everything you say and do is geared towards getting yourself away from this potentially harmful situation and to safety. Check yourself that you are not sticking around to argue, or allowing yourself to get caught up in argument.

Being assertive means keeping your balance and trying not to get swept away in emotions or arguments. Don't worry about losing an argument or losing your cool - concern yourself only with your personal safety.

Although it's certainly not true to say it was only women who took a feminist approach, or that all women took a feminist approach, there was a definite and perceptible sexist bias from a significant number of anarchist men. There was also a lack of understanding on issues surrounding rape and a total unwillingness to learn or be self-critical. For example, for some of the discussions organised about sexual violence it seemed that those who most needed to go were the very ones least likely to attend. It was jokingly suggested that in order to attract more men to meetings about sexual violence the only way would be to trick them into going by re-labelling the meeting "Anarchists against the Occupation of Iraq".

Conclusion

Breaking the silence around the issue and talking about sexual violence is an important first step in trying to stop it. Discussion groups play an important role in consciousness-raising and help in realising that one's own personal story is similar to many others'. Women-only discussion groups can provide a space where women feel comfortable talking about sexual violence but men-only or mixed discussion groups are needed too as it is important that men take more responsibility for an issue which is as much, if not more, a men's issue as a women's issue.

If, as a community of activists, we have to deal with another case of sexual assault the priority should be support of the victim. Certainly some sort of process which enables both sides of the story to be heard should be put in place. However, in the case of conflicting versions of the truth I think people have to make a judgment on who they believe and act on that. To refuse to make a decision and act, due to lack of evidence, is not a neutral stance and sides unambiguously, and always, with the perpetrator.

As anarchists we need to take up sexual violence as a political issue and for example raise awareness of the problem and discuss issues surrounding it in our publications etc. An important part of our struggle should be the fight for a society where kids are raised so that when they are growing up they respect the rights of others and learn that it is important to care about whether the person with whom they are sexually involved consents or not. It is also essential that they know without any doubt that only they have the right to their own body.

FOOTNOTES

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 The SAVI Report, Page 12.

Cited in "Rape and 'Real Rape'". Joanne Spangaro.

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 Any number of scenarios could transpire. Perhaps when you say "No, I'm leaving," you may be grabbed by the arm and pleaded with to stay. You don't have to stay. Nor do you have to punch anyone. Perhaps you could say, "Let go of my arm, I'm leaving," and walk quickly and purposefully out of the room to another part of the house where there are people. Reacting effectively depends on you being very aware of everything going on around you. Only you can tell what the best and most appropriate action is. Act clearly and quickly. Leave and go to safety at your first opportunity. Linger to argue can be interpreted as saying, "I'm willing to stick around and be convinced". If you yell "let go of me" with wide eyes and flared nostrils, you are saying "I'm angry!". You don't need to say these things - you need to leave. Arguments and misunderstandings can be sorted out later - after your body is safe from potential harm.

No doubt we would rather not think about the possibility of sexual assault, however self-defense is a process and not a one-time event. If you intend to defend yourself then you need to pre-determine your boundaries, what constitutes an attack, and work out some possible escape tactics for different scenarios.

Above all, remember to respect and protect yourself. Trust your gut instincts, and don't be afraid to "act stupid" - your safety is your first priority.

by tamarack

- 1) statistics are taken from <http://www.nononsenseselfdefense.com>
- 2) statistics on young americans is from White, Jacqueline W. and John A. Humphrey. "Young People's Attitudes Toward Acquaintance Rape." Acquaintance Rape: The Hidden Crime." John Wiley and Sons, 1991.
- 3) statistics on college males is from Koss M.P., Dinero, T.E., Seibel, C.A. *Stranger and acquaintance rape: Are there differences in the victim's experience?* Psychology of Women Quarterly. 1988;12:1-24; and Malamuth N.M. *Rape proclivity among males*. J Soc Issues. 1981;37:138-157.
- 4) list of characteristic behaviours based on information from <http://www.nononsenseselfdefense.com>

Sexual Violence In Our Communities: A Case In Progress

*words by anonymous
images by helen*

I have a few reasons for wanting to write this, one is because I feel like people think sexual assault is a rare occurrence and can be ignored for the most part. It is not and can not. Another reason is because there was an allegation of sexual assault in recent years in our community and it was dealt with very badly, leaving people with the impression that there is no way for us to address these issues. I believe it is hugely important for communities to deal with allegations of sexual assault in a responsible manner. I believe the state does an incredibly bad job of dealing with sexual assault and there is a better way to support the survivor and hold the perpetrator responsible. Survivors often feel they cannot report their assaults to the police, because of fear and guilt or the well founded belief that nothing will be done. As a community we need to support and help them.

A few years ago I stayed on a protest site near Dublin. One night I agreed to share my bed with a guy who had come to stay. I knew him to talk to, we only had a few mattresses to go around and mine was a double (see, I'm making excuses already). He was an anarchist-activist type and seemed like a nice guy. We all sat around and talked for a while, he was pretty drunk. I went to bed before everyone else. I fell asleep and only vaguely woke up when the others went to bed. There were quite a few people staying in the room and I had no reason to feel unsafe. I woke up again when he started touching me. I was backed against the wall and just moved further away from him. As it was really cold I was wearing all my clothes, a sleeping bag and a few blankets. He managed to find a hole in my sleeping bag and kept groping me. I was still half asleep and just told him to stop and moved away. I get angry with my younger self just thinking about this. I should have shouted at him or woken other people up. It was all men there other than me and I was physically trapped between him and the wall. I'm making excuses again. Anyway, he was getting pretty forceful and I kind of burrowed down into my sleeping bag, further trapping myself. I was pretty awake and freaked out at this point. He kept trying to touch my breasts and body. For some reason I couldn't find the voice to shout or even say anything at all. Stupid as it sounds I didn't want to wake anyone up or create an unnecessary scene. He kept trying and I kept pushing him away and wrapping the covers around myself so he couldn't get in. He gave up eventually and started masturbating. I was really upset and curled in a ball at this point half-crying and just waited for it to be over. I was totally disgusted. I fell asleep once I was sure he was asleep first. When I woke up I left quickly, and didn't go back there until I heard he had mysteriously vanished. I didn't tell anyone about it, I just said that I didn't want to go back if he was there. I kind of made excuses to myself, that he was drunk and not really responsible or whatever. I couldn't believe he was the same person I had talked to before, we had got along well. Even writing this now I am aware of the language I use, I had to change sentences to remove the implication that being drunk made it any less his fault.

From the time we become sexually aware, our boundaries are pushed, lines blurred. I was sure, obviously, he shouldn't have done what he did, but I had no name for it. How different was it from drunken unwanted come-ons I'd experienced before? Well, it felt different, but these are blurry lines. This experience affected my life, my view of myself, relationships with strangers, friends and lovers, everything, in many different ways. Some of these things changed over time, some didn't.

I have seen him again a few times since, the first time he even approached me and apologised, in what I considered a really horrible way, choosing his words strangely, saying sorry for being "such a wanker" that night. I didn't say anything, just looked down, muttered "yeah, yeah" and left. I didn't know there was anything I could do and I felt intimidated and powerless.

Three years later, almost a year ago now, I heard that a woman I didn't know well had been looking for my phone number. I don't know how, but I just knew what it was about. I got a text message from her shortly after and discovered she had had a similar experience with the same guy. We met and talked about it, her experience seemed worse than mine, more intrusive; they had been friends. I felt so guilty for not telling anyone, not facing up to him about how he acted. She was assaulted after I was, maybe I could have prevented it. We decided to try to do something, to make sure no one else experienced what we had.

A few months later we came to realise that a third woman had accused him, this time of rape, also about three years previously. We still have not contacted her as she left the country and has a life elsewhere now. We do not know what happened to her, only that she said she had been raped, then decided it was not rape, and moved to England shortly after.

So we wrote him an e-mail through a mutual acquaintance after making sure he had friends to talk to who would support him. Through these friends we have established contact and are trying to communicate how we feel. With all of us living in different places it is difficult to do, but he readily admits everything that happened and that he has a problem. We are trying to ensure he gets counselling and talks to people about how he has behaved. We have not started to explore what happened with the third woman, but we have asked him to talk to one of the two mediators about this.

In writing this I have not used his name because we are dealing with the situation in a way we are comfortable with and are doing our best to ensure he can be helped. The idea is not to excommunicate him or to seek revenge; could not help him or ourselves that way. We want him to be able to be helped by our community and to learn how to deal with whatever problems he has, although neither of us wants to see him again. Sometimes I want to tell anyone, any woman he may come into contact with; I'm terrified he will assault someone else. But how to deal with these situations is another issue for another time, this is just to let people know about one of the few instances where women have felt they can do something about the assaults they experience.

**"From the time we become sexually aware,
our boundaries are pushed, lines blurred"**



Midwifery as Feminist Praxis

interview by tobie
photo by alica

After finishing a degree in Women's Studies and Sexual Diversity and a Master in Women's Studies concentrating on reproductive technology, Melissa got her science high school requirements and started studying midwifery. In recent years midwifery became professionalised, the training entered the mainstream education system and having a midwife was now covered by health care. I interviewed her in October 2005 in Toronto about this feminist course and the changing profession.

RAG: Midwifery has a history of being connected to feminist practice and women's movements. Is there still a connection with midwifery and feminism now?

Melissa: I think so. If you look at the word, midwifery means 'with women'. It's very much a women-centred practice. So it's about women's reproductive choices and grounding things in women's experience and women's bodies. It attempts to eliminate all the biomedical colonial practices that have been involved, and concentrate more on a medical and holistic model of care.

RAG: Childbirth at the moment seems to be quite medicalised. How do midwives attempt to take the medicalisation out of the practice?

M: Well, it is really an interesting subject because people have found that regulation has limited midwives' ability to practice in certain ways. I started to work on a project with a Professor to look at the past twenty years before and after regulation. What she found so far is that clients are much more concerned about giving birth in hospitals now, before regulation that wasn't a choice. That immediately medicalises the birth; regulation has made it more difficult to get

For centuries women were doctors without degrees, barred from books and lectures, learning from each other, and passing on experience from neighbor to neighbor and mother to daughter. They were called "wise women" by the people, witches or charlatans by the authorities. Medicine is part of our heritage as women, our history, our birthright...

Today, however, health care is the property of male professionals."

-Barbara Ehrenreich
& Deirdre English.



out of that medical model. At the same time there is a push towards this concept of normal birth which is what midwifery is about: looking at pregnancy not as a medical condition but a normal, regular part of women's reproductive lives. There is also a concentration on issues of informed consent. So a midwife will sit down with a client and discuss if you want an ultrasound; the reasons why it might be good idea and the reasons why it might not be a good idea. When women have the ability to choose whether they want to have these procedures it tends to lower the rate at which they happen. And also because you can have a home birth outside the medical system that helps lower the medicalisation.

RAG: In Naomi Wolfe's *Mis-conceptions* book on pregnancy she talks about how in the States they found the rates of caesarean-sections on a Friday afternoon was substantially higher than other times in the week. Do you think having a midwife involved would prevent these higher rates before weekends?

M: Midwives don't do c-sections. It's a complete transfer of care if they are necessary. Midwives don't seem to have the same structural and systemic issues that make doctors perform c-sections on a Friday afternoon for example. Physicians are paid for each procedure that they do. So it doesn't matter to a physician if a procedure takes two hours or ten hours, they get paid the same. So if you can get out earlier and get the

same amount of money than if you were there for exponentially longer, then it probably influences those discussions. Hopefully not all of them!! For midwives it doesn't really work that way, but more importantly the role of the midwife is to advocate for their clients in the hospital. If a doctor comes in and says "I think we should do a c-section", then the midwife tends to advocate on the women's behalf and says we could do this or we could do that. I think that influences things as well.

RAG: One of the criticisms of midwifery regulation is the elitism of the profession and knowledge. Do you see that as a problem?

M: Part of the reason regulation happened was an attempt to make it more accessible to a wider range of women because previously there was a very small close-knit group of women who were midwives; middle class white women, Canadian born and in certain geographical areas across the country. Their clients reflected that as well. They tended to be women who could afford it, because it wasn't covered by health care. These women were part of their social networks, they knew them and it was women who because midwifery was illegal, had less to lose if they got caught. So immigrant women who had the possibility of being deported didn't use midwives as much. Women from a certain socio-economic status could afford to pay midwives. With regulation there was an attempt to look at accessibility. Whether that has been successful has been debated by lots of people.

RAG: In your opinion has regulation been successful in creating diversity among midwives and making midwifery more accessible?

M: I think there is an attempt. There are equity committees involved in the education programme, that try to get more students of colour, aboriginal students (Canadian first nations), lesbians, and students with disabilities to join the profession and to stick with it. But there are many systemic barriers that make it difficult. For example, there are different standards for immigrants - women who come to Canada having trained somewhere else. It's really difficult for them to set up practice because there is a really rigid set of guidelines in place for a midwife to practice.

RAG: Who is using midwives at the moment in Toronto?

M: As many women as possible are trying to use it. In Toronto a lot of immigrant women are trying to use it, women coming from countries where midwifery is the norm. Then they come to Canada and there is this crazy bio-medical system in place, culturally incoherent with their own experience. They are using it. It is becoming trendy right now, I think, and that means there are a lot of white middle class heterosexual women who see it as a lifestyle option who are using it as well. Not that there is anything necessarily wrong with that. I'm sure it varies from practice to practice and small towns would be a different experience.

RAG: Has there been a reduction in care and solidarity, in the connection made with the pregnant women, since regulation was introduced?

M: Some people say yes and others say no. I'm not really in the place to know yet. I know it is leaps and bounds over the relationship you would have with your obstetrician. One of the tenets of midwifery is that of continuity

of care, so you see your midwife more frequently and for longer appointments, and postpartum as well for six weeks, so the midwife comes to your home. One of the benefits of regulation is that it is easier to live as a midwife now. Midwives used to live below the poverty line and used to have to take on other jobs. Now you can devote your working life to being a midwife, which probably makes it easier to develop relationships with women who are your clients.

RAG: How important is it in your programme that midwifery is women-centred?

M: It's incredibly important. It's one of the main reasons midwifery exists as an alternative. It's one of the reasons it is seen as an alternative to obstetrician care.

RAG: Are midwives and those using midwives critiquing a wider medical system?

M: I think so. It really depends why someone comes to a midwife in the first place. There is a core group of women who have always come to it, even before regulation. Part of their philosophy is the choice of owning your own body, trying to get the medical system off of you. Others come to it because they feel culturally it is more in tune with their own beliefs and practices. Others, because they have had horrible experiences with their obstetrician want to try something better.

RAG: Are women who are involved in midwifery involved in a wider feminist agenda?

M: I came to it hoping that would be the case. People in the course have come from such diverse experiences that I was surprised how apolitical some people are. I don't know if the course will radicalise the women. I know the professors who have lived through the regulation process are very political. I think they would all strongly identify as feminists. I think it is interesting because if you get to a situation where something becomes acceptable it then becomes the norm. We saw this happen to abortion rights in Canada. Here everyone has access to abortion so it's not an issue; as a result you don't need to be political to be pro-choice. That's becoming the case in Ontario with midwifery, it is considered legitimate now.

RAG: So you don't need to be an activist to be a midwife?

M: Right, but I think it would make you a better midwife.

RAG: Can you just talk about why you personally are involved in midwifery?

M: I think because there are so many horror stories about people's experiences, and I'm really optimistic at the moment that midwifery can help solve some of them. I also feel that it is one of the most gratifying jobs in the entire world because you are there with people during the most important and probably the happiest moment of their lives in ways that other people couldn't possibly be. Everyone remembers their midwife. You get to see the baby as they are growing up, and when they come back for their second baby.

Check out Melissa's feminist blog as she stumbles towards midwifery: awombofherown.blogspot.com

Anger: Birthed and Transformed

words by shonagh

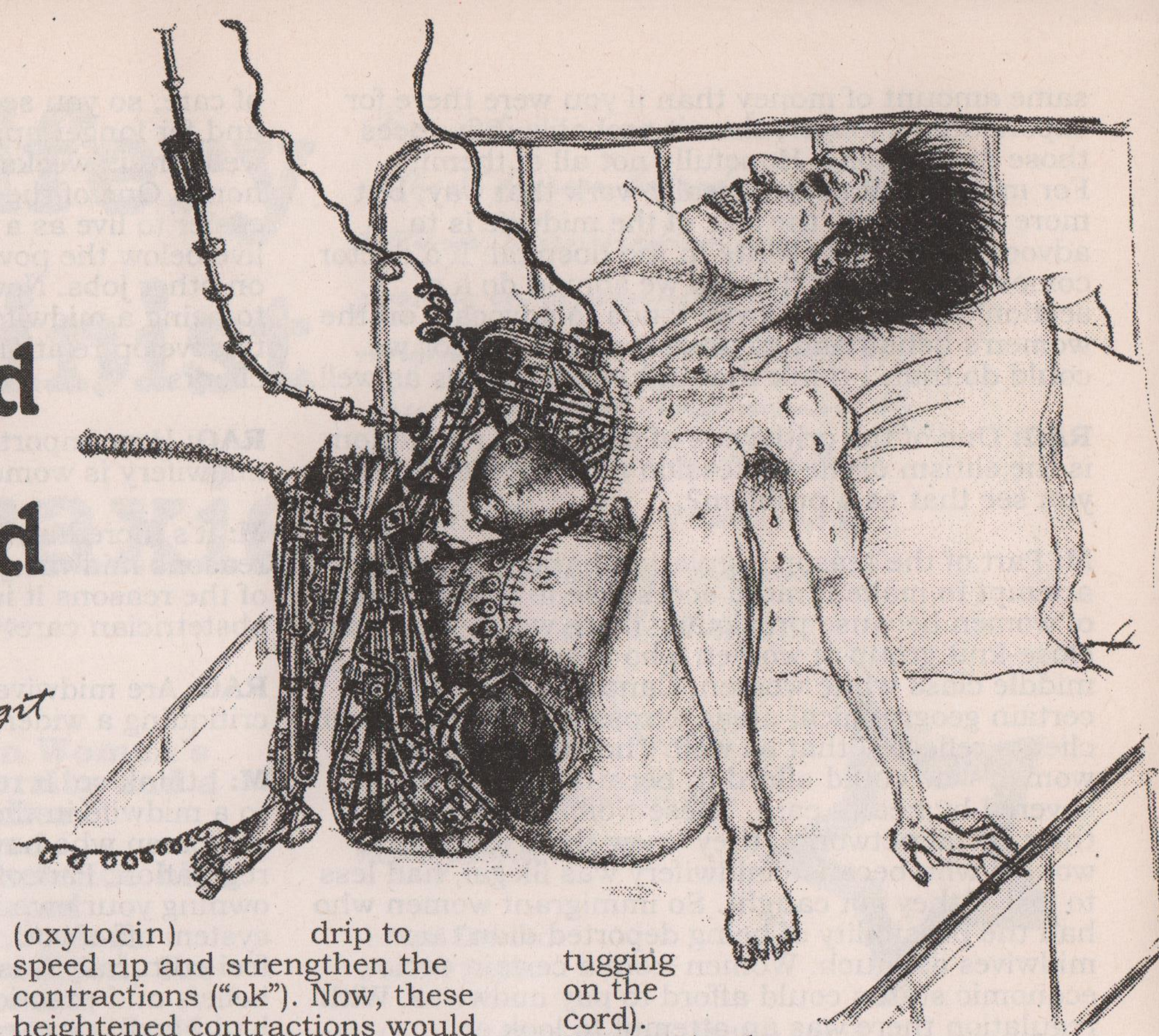
images by sarah and birgit

My experience of childbirth was not an unusually traumatic one. In medical parlance I had an NVD: a Normal Vaginal Delivery. The midwives were pleasant. I was given an epidural. I was admitted to hospital at 2pm and delivered a healthy baby boy (8lb 7oz) eleven hours later. This is the essential information, is it not? This is the only kind of information that we ever really hear about other women's experience of birth. But there is a lot more to it.

It took me a while to sort out my feelings after giving birth. The elation you feel at the presence of a new life and the physical exhaustion leave room for little else. I never really experienced the hopeless grief of the flippantly named "baby blues" in the weeks or months that followed. What I felt – when I finally sorted out the reasons for my confusion surrounding the birth – was anger.

What is anger anyway? Is it only blame and self-pity? Or is it ever illuminating? For me, anger has travelled beyond blame, beyond the individuals involved and my personal experience and shocked me into changing my whole outlook on life.

I wasn't angry during my pregnancy at the lack of options for childbirth. I never knew what else I could expect. I wasn't angry during any stage of my labour: As soon as I was admitted, I was told that I was two centimetres dilated and my waters were to be broken with something resembling a crochet hook ("ok"). After that I wandered the halls and breathed through contractions for a few hours. When I was re-examined, I hadn't "progressed" enough. I was told this was dangerous for the baby, and I needed a syntocin



(oxytocin) drip to speed up and strengthen the contractions ("ok"). Now, these heightened contractions would be very painful so would I be requiring pain-relief? ("ok"). The epidural is probably the most effective ("ok!") I gritted my teeth and I wasn't angry as the drip was repeatedly and painfully mis-inserted into my hand, or as the epidural took twenty minutes to stick into my spine. I wasn't angry that I wasn't allowed to eat anything even though I was very hungry. Or that my parents weren't allowed to see me in the delivery ward after driving for hours to be there. As I watched the clock pass midnight into Halloween, fireworks cracked and flared outside the hospital. I smiled knowing that my baby would have great birthday parties to come. And for this next hour, I shivered in freezing shock, immobilised on the delivery table, uncaring and un-angered as the drugs wore off so I could finally push. I wasn't angry because those involved were doing their jobs, it seemed so normal for them. I was moving towards having my baby, and this is what every mother went through.

The point at which I started to get a twinge of anger was when, after delivery, I couldn't get to feed my baby. It was only then that my instinct was strong enough to say, "No. This is really wrong." There is a period of about an hour after the birth where the newborn is alert and breastfeeding can be established. However, after a brief hold, he was taken away as I was given a syntometrine injection and his placenta was delivered (by

tugging on the cord). He remained away as I was stitched and examined and had to wait for a doctor to examine me. By the time I was given the all-clear (in tears at this stage asking "can I feed him now?"), I had to be moved from the delivery ward and down to the post-natal ward. It was 2am by this stage, so friends and family in the waiting room were told to go home without ever having seen me or baby. The baby's dad had been present at the birth but now was also sent home. Yet again I asked, "Please, can I try to feed my baby?" but he had to be taken away again – this time for a Vitamin K injection and for the nurse to bathe him and put his first vest and babygro on. When she brought him back he was tired and wanted to sleep. The nurse asked if I still wanted to feed, she gave a little perfunctory hold of him up to one breast and then the other and said – incredibly – "No. He's not a boob man is he?" She then put him down to sleep in the cot beside me, told me to sleep too and that I could try again when he woke up. I spent that first night wide awake, watching every twitch my new son made, desperate to hold him, horrified that I hadn't managed to take him to my breast after he was born. When he finally did wake up, I remember ringing for the nurse – looking for her permission to pick him up! This same nurse was the one who would throw back the curtains from around the beds at night if anyone dared to wish for some privacy.

Thankfully, my baby started to feed hungrily the next day. In fact, it was all he ever wanted to do. My grief for our first night together was all the more pointed as I started to realise that I wouldn't be getting any sleep for longer than two hours at a stretch for the next six months or so! The rest of my stay in hospital was a blur of zero sleep, noise, crying babies, food times, masses of visitors for two hours and then being left with no-one. On day two I remember being allowed to meet my teary mom at the end of the corridor as she passed me some supplies. Later that day I finally managed to have the baby fed and sleepy at a time when there was a lull in hospital activity. I was just dropping off – for the first time in about 70 hours – when I was woken up to bring the baby in for a BCG injection. I did so in floods of exhausted tears.

The National Maternity Hospital in Hollès St., Dublin was established in 1894 to deliver the babies of the poorer women of Dublin, who were no doubt dying in their droves during childbirth. (Ironically, the mortality rate was likely to have increased as soon as it opened, due to the prevalence of puerperal fever – an infection of the genital tract passed on to women by examining fingers.) Hollès St. and the two other maternity hospitals in Dublin (the Rotunda and the Coombe) now account for almost 40% of all the births in this country.¹ In the past hundred years, rates of midwife-assisted homebirths have declined, now they account for less than 1% of all births. What little diversity there had been within the given system is also being eroded with the closure of many smaller maternity units in recent years.²

Hollès St. has pioneered (and spread Europe-wide) a policy of "active management"³ – an obstetrician-led intervention-rich process which begins with ARM (artificial rupture of the membrane of the amniotic sac or "breaking the waters", leaving the foetus unprotected and vulnerable to pressure and infection) and continues to monitor the birthing women and administer to them when they aren't doing it right. For example, in Hollès St., the decided-upon correct rate of cervical dilation is 1cm/hour. If this is not achieved, and the mother "fails to progress", she is hooked up to an oxytocin drip which causes the onset of sudden intense contractions. In Hollès St. in 2004 (the year I gave birth) 55% of first-time mothers weren't doing it right and needed to be speeded up in this way (unsurprisingly enough, a slightly larger percentage opted for an epidural to ease the pain.)⁴

In years gone by in Ireland childbirth could be a death-sentence. This is the most oft-stated defence for today's medicalised births. The reality is that, as in present-day "developing" countries, in the past most complications during pregnancy and childbirth occurred due to poor maternal nutrition and infections which are now easily treatable or preventable with better hygiene.⁵ The high-tech interventions which are now available certainly save some lives but in many cases, especially where "active management" is practiced, these interventions are used unnecessarily. There is an often noted "cascade of intervention" where once one medical procedure has been carried out, another follows, then another leading to more invasive and traumatic interventions and often culminating in caesarean section. In Ireland, the average rate of C-section is one of the highest in Europe at 25%.⁶ The midwife-endorsed alternative to this policy of aggressive intervention is "wait and see". Strangely enough, this usually works wonderfully.

In theory, a woman has the right to refuse any of the interventions offered to her. In practice, with the high turnover of "patients", the normality of intervention and the culture of *minimisation of risk* (read minimisation of liability) women do not feel empowered to say "no". I certainly never thought about saying "no" or asking "is there an alternative?" I blame myself for this – that I was not more informed and proactive. But I am also angry at the bullying system in place. It is overwhelming and more than you are able to cope with to defy medical opinion as to what is right for you and your baby. In general, as we are taught all our lives to do, we place our lives and well-being in the hands of professionals. We become numbers, subject to routine interventions.

In Hollès St. membrane rupture is carried out routinely. It is routine for the nurses to bathe, dress and inject the newborn. A "managed" third stage of labour is routine, with hormone injections and cord tugging to deliver the placenta. This is justified by saying that it reduces the risk of postpartum haemorrhage. This is disputed by many midwives, who argue that the early cord-clamping involved is potentially injurious for the newborn and that the third stage of a normal birth should never need to be managed.⁷ Until recently, episiotomy (cutting the perineum to allow more room for the baby) was routine. It is now being shown to be usually unnecessary and at worst a mutilation.⁸ In most hospitals labour is routinely artificially induced once pregnancy reaches 42 weeks (which is now thought to be the normal term of labour in some women⁹). Up until recent years, if you had one caesarean section, you could not expect to be allowed to try for a vaginal delivery in subsequent births (this is now slowly changing). In Our Lady of Lourdes hospital in Drogheda, Dr. Michael Neary carried out unnecessary routine hysterectomies post-caesarean-section over the course of twenty-five years before it was brought to light in 1998.¹⁰ In the same hospital (and in Hollès St., the Coombe and others around the country) between the 1950's and the 1980's, hundreds of women underwent a procedure known as a symphysiotomy. Here, a woman's pelvis was literally sawn apart during childbirth, as an alternative to caesarean-section. The justification seemed to be a good catholic one – the pelvis would heal widened and the woman would be able to bear more children¹¹ – even though most were never even told what procedure had been carried out on them and many suffered life-long pain, incontinence, problems walking and arthritis.¹² This is the history of routine interventions by those who know what's best for us.

Our televisual idea of childbirth is pretty nasty – all that blood and fluid, the panting and screaming, the stretched anatomy, the emergent goey greyish-purple alien... Horrible! Remember when you first heard about sex? Remember how horrible that seemed? But sex isn't horrible, is it? What's missing – and indescribable to a virgin child – is the emotional element. Sex is a natural and beautiful process, all entangled with love and passion. So too, and a million times more, is birth. In essence, our modern patriarchal institutionalised world has a childish view of childbirth. It can't imagine that something that looks that gruesome can be anything but a horrendous experience and one that should be shortened and medicated. But childbirth is not a medical procedure any more than sex is. Now, I don't have many¹³ illusions about primitive feminine birthing rituals in mud huts (as fear and patriarchy have even greater strangleholds on women's bodies in most third-world countries). I am

not saying that every woman should have a pain-free, blissful, complication-free birth. What I am saying is that fear has no place in the process.

Fear causes adrenaline production. This initiates the "flight or fight" response where blood drains from the uterus to the limbs, slowing the process of labour until the primeval woman escapes to a safe place to give birth. Meditation and relaxation techniques during childbirth - which are often described to women as methods for coping with pain - can in fact be methods of preventing pain - by preventing fear. As with sexual intercourse, if a woman does not feel safe, relaxed and preferably loved, she will experience tension and pain during childbirth. Without ever taking a single deep breath or doing a second's meditation, what woman wouldn't feel more relaxed anywhere but on a table in a hospital delivery "suite"? Looking back on it, it seems like the most ridiculous place to try to give birth. As with sex, your body wants a darkened, intimate, safe and private place to give itself over to its natural urges and processes. Instead, while no longer strapped and slurrapped, we retain those bizarre postures, under the bright lights, the ready interference and the stares of strangers. Could you orgasm under the same conditions? Are you surprised then that our labours "fail to progress", with fear and adrenaline coursing through every vein in our bodies? Overcome it with drugs. Pull, drag and cut those children out of us. Then tell us to be thankful. If we are strong enough, maybe we can get the resources together to birth at home.^{14,15} Mothers, partners, sisters, doctors; tell us we are endangering lives. We are taking risks. Fill us, oh fill us with fear. No woman wants to endanger her child's life so almost every woman does what she's told and gets hospitalised.

Here's where it gets very difficult. I hope I don't shock you if I tell you that many women liken the experience of even a "normal" hospitalised medicalised childbirth to the experience of sexual assault.¹⁶ Aside from the obvious - the exposure of your most intimate areas to complete strangers - there is an utter lack of control over what is being done to your body. Your consent may never be sought for certain procedures, or it may be sought, but in the coercive manner of institutions that count on your fear for your cooperation. The feelings that may be experienced afterwards are those of shame and guilt that you weren't able to give birth naturally, that you didn't ask the right questions, that you gave up control and weren't strong enough to resist certain things being done. You might feel cheated if you had hoped vaguely for a natural childbirth by the reality of what took place. These feelings can be particularly strong if the mother is separated from her newborn - for example after an emergency C-section or if a baby is incubated. In some of these cases, mothers (aside from being traumatised at the time) can experience bonding problems with the infant. Even once bonding is achieved, the guilt that accompanies this can be life-long.

Why would I bring this up? Surely, many mothers experience medicalised births without mental trauma? Surely, the fact that there is a healthy infant in your arms makes up for anything you went through? Aren't you safe? Shouldn't you be grateful to the hospital for delivering your baby? (Do any women get to feel grateful to themselves, to feel the power and ability of their own bodies?) Won't revisiting the event just cause unnecessary pain and distress for women who should just forget about it and move on with their lives?

Like survivors of sexual assault, survivors of medicalised births may live years, or their whole lives, unconscious of feeling anguish or anger about their experiences. But this doesn't mean that they are unaffected by them. It is my belief that at some deep level we are robbed and moulded. We pass through our childbirth initiation into becoming disempowered, disconnected, long-suffering, patriarchal mothers. We tell our horror stories as just that, or we say nothing at all. It doesn't have to be this way. If I ever have another child, it will not be in the same way. But it doesn't stop there. I will never again blindly place my trust in authoritarian professionals and institutions. I will recognise all capitalist patriarchy for what it is and I will do my best to speak out against it.

Every day, in every way, my son is a wonderful gift. I would actually go through another ten hospitalised births in the morning just to keep him. I am sorry for his shabby entrance into this world but I am thankful to this little person for helping me to see something: the bald, blatant, oppressive, damaging, misogynistic forces at play in the most vital aspects of women's lives. Revisiting his birth has made me angry, but that has made so much else clear; how blinded we can be by the guise of protection; how crippled we can be made by fear. I wish that we talked about it, that we didn't feel that we were whinging by talking about it. That we could stop revelling in horror-stories and better place our fingers on the reason for our traumatic births - not the curse of Eve medicated to by our benevolent system - but the systematic violence that delivers our babies for fear that we might give birth to them ourselves. For in the process we might begin to understand our own strength and find words for all our angers. We might begin to disobey.

Footnotes

1. Figures calculated from those given in *The Better Birth Book* and those published by the central statistics office www.cso.ie
2. Tracey Donegan *The Better Birth Book*. Liffey Press 2006 - A great resource for anyone giving birth in Ireland
3. O'Driscoll K, Meagher D, Boylan P. *Active Management of Labour*. London: Mosby, 1993. (A hefty reference for you - no I haven't read it!)
4. Tracey Donegan *The Better Birth Book*. Liffey Press 2006
5. *State of The World's Mothers* 2006 is a report put out by the charity Save the Children and has some shocking information about how women and babies are dying unnecessarily during and soon after childbirth. Available from www.savethechildren.org.uk
7. These and other midwifery issues at www.gentlebirth.org and www.radmid.demon.co.uk
8. Hartmann et al (2005) *Outcomes of routine episiotomy: a systematic review*. Extract available at <http://jama.ama-assn.org>
9. Some info and lots of links from this page thought you have to pay to become a member of birthlove: www.birthlove.com/free/ten_month_mama.html
10. The Lourdes Enquiry makes for an interesting read and is available at www.lourdesinquiry.ie
11. Jacqueline Morrissey *Midwifery of Darker Times* - Irish Times Article 6/9/99
12. The grassroots group Survivors of Symphysiotomy can be contacted on 01 4961013
13. In fact there are many accounts of powerful, blissful, even orgasmic births! Start at www.unassistedchildbirth.com if you are willing to suspend disbelief.
14. The Homebirth Association of Ireland: www.homebirth.ie. This UK site is also very good: homebirth.org.uk
15. Johnson and Daviss (2005) *Outcomes of planned homebirths with certified professional midwives: large prospective study*. - Shows equivalent rates of mortality for homebirths and hospital births, and substantially lower rates of medical intervention, available at www.bmj.com

Feminist Health Organised

Interview With Becs From Brighton's Feminist Health Collective

words by Tobie

images by Jules and Aileen

I found out about the feminist health collective at Ladyfest Dublin and had the chance to meet Becs from the collective in May 2005 in Brighton. I ran into her again at Ladyfest Brighton in November 2005 where she was doing a workshop on feminist health.

smaller and smaller and people had different interests. We got a self-defence group that still teaches women's self defence. And people were interested in women's health issues and that's where the health collective came from. It was initiated by a woman who had done a lot of reading around feminist health and particularly around all the stuff that happened in the seventies. She started off by giving a workshop that was awe inspiring and life changing. The collective came from women who were inspired by that.

RAG: Could you introduce yourself and the collective you are part of?

RAG: What were the issues brought up at the workshop?

BECS: My name's Becs, and I'm part of a feminist health collective in Brighton. It has been going about four and a half years now.

BECS: The first workshop was

RAG: Can you tell us why and how the collective was formed?

BECS: It came out of a big group called HRAG (Hell Raising Anarchist Girls) - horrible name - forty women who decided to split into collectives, because meetings were getting

looking at how feminists have redefined the woman's body and how they reexamined the clitoris. Looking over the medical textbooks, there was nothing written about it, which is damaging because it indicates how women are treated by the medical establishment. Particularly in the US women started to look at their genitals and redefine the clitoris. In those incidences it led them to doing their own abortions; because they got to know their own bodies. She also talked about charting your own menstrual cycle; which



“At our first workshop a woman was talking about charting your own menstrual cycle; which most women in the room in the room had no idea about. We were thinking: why the fuck do we not know this, about our own bodies, and how do we find out more?”

most women in the room had no idea about. We were thinking: why the fuck do we not know this, about our own bodies, and how do we find out more?

RAG: Is there a component of ownership of sexuality?

BECS: It's integral and it's been a massive thing in the past four years for me. And it goes hand in hand with self-defence; your own boundaries, how you want to be touched and who you want to be touched by. And that's why we talk about sexual boundaries within self-defence, knowing about your body strengths.

RAG: What type of work does the collective do now?

BECS: We do open sessions once a month in the Cowley Club, which is a libertarian anarchist social centre and we meet here to do whatever workshop people have planned. We advertise these around town, and get different groups of women coming in. On top of that a core group of people meet every two weeks, because we need that time for ourselves. We were meeting once a month and not meeting in between that and it felt that too much energy was being put out and not enough being put in. In the beginning of the collective we were meeting once a week for a year. We were doing a lot of really personal exploration that's where the ideas and inspirations come from.

RAG: Are both the collective and the meetings for women only?

BECS: Women including transgender.

RAG: Do you do work specifically on transgender health?

BECS: No. It definitely came up in the conference, there was only one trans woman there and she talked a lot and many issues and ideas came up around that but we haven't incorporated them yet. There is one woman involved who does self-defence with trans women, so she has shared ideas around that.

RAG: Can you tell us about the feminist health gathering that happened in Nottingham in December [2004] and your part in it?

BECS: It came from a workshop I did, a lot of the women had not come across the ideas before. The idea of a national gathering came up. Although many women said they would help it came down to about four of us. It was two days of workshops.

RAG: Can you talk about the workshops?

BECS: They were quite basic; this was the first national feminist health gathering that had happened in the past twenty years in the UK. There was a woman there who had been involved in the feminist movement and the health movement in the UK, which gave an historical context to the gathering.

The workshops were around sexual boundaries, feminist redefinition of female bodies, abortion, autonomy and pregnancy, self-defence, black women's health, queer sexual health.

RAG: Will the gathering be happening yearly?

BECS: Hopefully. There is going to be one again in December[2005]. There is an email list people can get on to find out what is happening. A lot of what came out of the gathering was a massive race element. One of the organisers is black and race really came up. Which is good, because there are not many political anarchist gatherings where race is really ever talked about, especially with black people being there. She wants to organise a race and women gathering at the beginning of September[2005], which a lot of our energy will go towards.

RAG: Do you do any work within a wider libertarian anarchist community?

BECS: [Yes], through personal contact with the men around us. There is a strong feminist presence in my community. If we didn't push it, it wouldn't be there. There was a domestic violence issue that recently went on. I think because of the feminist consciousness-raising around domestic violence and women's oppression generally, it was an issue for both genders. People sat down and discussed together in mixed setting how this issue involving two people in the community would be reconciled.

RAG: Do you think it would be useful to do a workshop that would be open to all genders?

BECS: For International Women's Day, we did a whole day on mental health, and we got a lot of complaints from men that they wanted it to be open because they wanted to talk about those issues. That goes with everything really. There is conflict about whether we can have space for women-only things, and some people think it's really separatist. Undeniably women need their own space to talk about things. Also obviously it would be useful to take ideas from that and talk about it in a mixed space. It's crucial and we are planning a mixed workshop for the autumn.

RAG: Is your zine Viva Voce connected to the collective?

BECS: It's a zine me and a friend did. It was separate from it since my friend was not in the collective. It was very much based around feminist health and feminist ideas around sexuality.

RAG: Is there any literature the collective itself has put out?

BECS: We are in the middle of writing a zine on breasts: on breast cancer, the pharmaceutical industry, and how they are hand in hand with all the major cancer charities; on breast self-examinations and quite diverse ideas around breasts; on intimate ideas of body and the sexualisation of them.

RAG: Can you talk about abortion in the context of Ireland where it is still illegal?

BECS: The last workshop we did was on abortion two weeks ago, so I was reading loads about the underground abortion movement in America; like the Jane collective who did 10 000 abortions in five years, and why that hasn't happened in Ireland. I think one of the best things they could do is go underground and teach each other how to do abortions. There are networks that women of all classes can access. And I don't know why that hasn't happened in Ireland, other than I don't understand Catholicism and the whole religious base to that society.

Asylum seekers who can't leave the country what do they do?

RAG: There are stories of backstreet abortions with asylum seekers, there was a story in the news where this one woman who had a back street abortion went to the hospital and she got arrested. It was raised in the Dáil (Ireland's National Parliament) that asylum seekers would travel to the UK for abortion, it was said via the X case that women could travel to Britain, so that is for asylum seekers as well.

BECS: What would it cost an Irish woman to come over?

RAG: You would need about €1000 to €1200 (800 for the abortion and the rest for flight and accommodation.) Also, there is talk in Britain of reducing the number of weeks of pregnancy at which a woman can have access to an abortion - from 24 to 22 - and adding in restrictions after 12. This would have a huge impact on Irish women.

BECS: From what I read in the press that will not happen, there will be a huge uproar. It's scary when you think of Poland, women in their mid-twenties have watched abortion in their lifetimes go from legal to illegal. It can happen of course.

RAG: Do you feel the population here is pro-choice?

BECS: Yeah I do think so, there has recently been a new prayer Vigil outside of Mary Stokes, (an abortion clinic in the UK), which is the first one in years and years. And recently the bishop came out saying to vote Tory because they wanted to reduce number of weeks, and that got a lot of coverage but a lot of people came out against it.

RAG: Do you think there is a way to make more connections with what you are doing and Irish women?

BECS: If I was in Ireland I would go to America and get someone to teach me how to do a menstrual extraction. There was a network in the UK in the eighties of women doing menstrual extractions, it was sort of symbolic because abortion was legal, it was more about reproductive freedom. For example if you were to get an abortion under NHS [Britain's National Health Service], you have to get two doctors to say that you are emotionally and psychologically incompetent to keep a child. If you could avoid going through that it was better, but it trailed off in the mid eighties because there really wasn't the need. There are still menstrual extractions in the US where you can learn.

RAG: Can you talk about herbal abortions?

BECS: I have tried to do an herbal abortion and it

“I think one of the best things they could do is go underground and teach each other how to do abortions. There are networks that women of all classes can access.”

didn't work and I would never recommend it again. I have yet to meet any woman who definitely knows she is pregnant and the herbs have worked. We don't know enough, and I don't know if the herbs are as strong as they used to be, the recipes are old.

RAG: Can you tell us what happened between the seventies and now, and why all that was lost?

BECS: In the UK feminists were still doing the menstrual extraction and there was consciousness-raising in the early eighties. I think part of that demise was that the whole feminist movement got smaller and they didn't have the support they had before. I think that's partially to do with Thatcher getting into power in the eighties, most of the political social movements in the UK were destroyed by her. Fortunately we know Gale who was involved in the feminist movement, she has come to squats that we have been involved in and talked to us. No other women from the feminist movement have done that. That is how we have this connection. She has given us loads of papers and information from the seventies and we have spread that around and that is our continuity. I think the general stop has to do with wider political movements getting smaller and a lot of the women thought they had achieved what they had set out to do. There are only a few radical feminists who think there is more to be done.


RAG: How healthy do you think feminism is in Brighton and the UK now?

BECS: I think there are a lot of the women from the seventies who call themselves feminist and are involved in quite mainstream jobs. I know this from Gale and she still has a massive support network and they still have a massive support network. So there is a generation or two above me who are there and doing things. The gathering was really encouraging, everyone was really enthusiastic, 150-200 women, they went off and distributed information. When you think of it in the seventies the 3000 women crammed into this small school for the first feminist health gathering and you think that we feel encouraged having 150-200 women. It's kinda slightly depressing. Feminism is rarely talked about. It's not an issue, definitely not a massive issue in anarchist communities.

RAG: How healthy would you say the anarchist communities are?

BECS: In the last five years you can see how small every social movement has become, you can't do anything about that, it's due to wider social issues. I think within anarchist communities gender, race and homophobia are not addressed, in some communities they are but in many they are not addressed the way they should be.

Perpetual Immigrant



words and image by natalia

Most of my family moved to America in the late 1970's as political refugees, back when Carter was trying to do something decent, before the Republican reign of Reagan closed down the borders and perpetuated the Cold War. We snuck our way across Europe with other families from the Soviet Union who came throughout the late 70's. Deceitful papers got us out, lies about where we were moving and why, going through Vienna, through Italy, waiting and waiting for the time to cross the Atlantic. These families stuck together, teaching their kids Russian, cooking meals laden with beetroot and cherishing the delicacy of caviar on rye bread. Through the Cold War these groups stuck even closer as they were targeted as enemies in their new found land.

When I was 10 years old, a bouncy blonde girl went around asking everyone in my gym class locker room where they were born. "Kiev," I answered. "Where's that?" I think she expected somewhere exotic in the vein of a small town in the state of Mississippi, but when I answered "the Soviet Union" she looked alarmed. "Ohmigawd," she squealed "you're a communist!" Soon after that I stopped having kids come over from school. No more sleepovers at my house. I stuck to riding bikes around with the neighbor kids. I got worried that someone from school would meet my parents and upon hearing their thick accents turn sinister and poke fun at me and tell everyone else that I was from the wrong side of the iron curtain. I remember when the first Russian grocery store opened up in the suburbs where my parents live. There was all-round satisfaction and delight. Now when I go home there's not only several Russian grocers to choose from, there are Russian dentists, Russian jewelers, Russian car repair shops, Russian bookstores and so on.

Even from the early America days, my immediate family have been hardcore Republicans. Hail Bush and all that. My mother grew up thinking that American streets were lined with gold, literally. She grew up dirt poor with two

alcoholic parents. She remembers being seven and crying hysterically when they put Stalin in the ground, the mass sorrow that swept the country and then the shock and anger years later at finding out what sort of man they had wasted time mourning. My family thinks that in America anyone can work hard and for that work they can earn a dollar. They think that if you collect up these dollars you can use them to buy up all the pieces of the American dream. I have pretty much accepted that this is their stance and it has been cultivated because of certain experiences in their background. And that no amount of clever anecdotes illustrating the nightmares that are used to keep the American dream glued together have ever even slightly shifted their view.

Considering their Republican views, I'm used to a certain amount of racist and classist remarks when I visit my family but even I was shocked at what I heard the last time I went home. My mom, speaking in Russian, started complaining about something she'd heard on the radio. She was going on and on about illegal Mexican immigrants and how they move to the States but refuse to become part of this society (her words); how they refuse to speak English, won't integrate, keep their own cultural ways about them. All the bullshit one always hears. I tried to point out the irony in her saying this. My mom herself spoke very little English until after her and my dad split up (16 years after moving to the States.) Until then she didn't really need to. My dad was her supervisor at work and most the people in her department spoke Russian. Her friends were Russian, the people she dealt with in her community were Russian. For outside interactions she had my dad or me to help her out. But when I tried to point out to her the similarities between this and the Mexicans living in America she refused to see how this was anything like the very people she was complaining about. They are "illegal" immigrants; come from somewhere for a chance at what they hope might be a better life, but not in a government approved sort of way. We came as "legal" refugees; come with a US government 'A OK'.

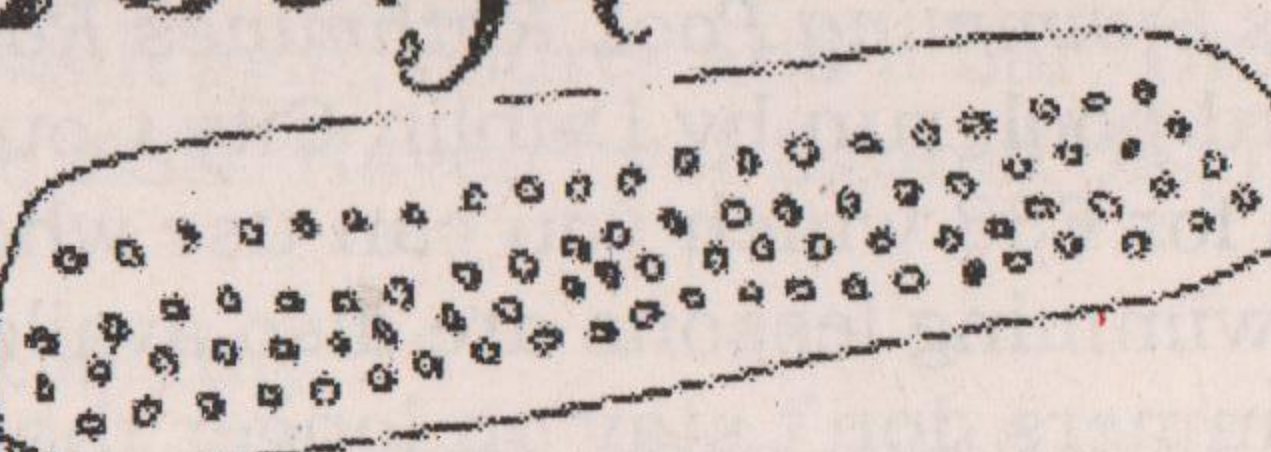
Now I find myself as a new immigrant once again having moved to Ireland from the United States several years ago. The differences this time around are astonishing. Comparatively I don't feel like an immigrant at all; well not like I did before. People in bars, upon realizing I'm from America, often treat me as though I could potentially be a long lost cousin, come back after generations away, looking for ancestors and with a little money to throw around or like they wanna give me a good ole' pat on the back. On my daily cycle to work I pass a number of bus shelters that have been graffitied with the words "foreign scum." (In hilarious protest these often get changed to things like "foreign disco" and "foreign scone") I try to reconcile this with the way I get treated in Ireland. Am I the "foreign scum" of which the bus shelter walls speak? Are the New Zealanders, Canadians, Australians, or Welsh who settle in Dublin? It's rare that you hear people say "fucking Dutch (or French or Bavarians) coming to our country, taking our jobs, marrying our men." This isn't to make the naive suggestion that I don't get any negative reactions when some people realize I've grown up in America. Often, especially, it seems, in political circles, someone will decide that I'm a stereotypical American that has crossed the Atlantic with visions of cultural and social manifest destiny; that their rejection of me is a protest against all the roots of evil and based on this will poke fun at any "American" thing I might say, or just ignore my opinion altogether. It is very strange for me to feel like an all-American girl for the first time in my life. Growing up, when people found out where I was born they would eventually make some comment to the effect of me not really being an American at all, but just another immigrant or, if you will, foreign scum.

I spend a lot of time thinking about what my life would have been like had my family never left the three room apartment in the tenement building in Kiev. Would I be a completely different person? Would I have felt "normal" in school? Would I still have been a teenage recluse? Would I finally understand the meaning of the word "home"? Now I wonder what it would be like if after growing up in the Soviet Union I had moved straight to Ireland in my 20's. I doubt people on the streets would be as friendly. I see the way they act towards other "foreigners". Would it have been as easy to find a job, get a place to live, get a residency card? Would I then, being more or less the same me, be the "foreign scum" of which the graffiti speaks? It seems, from what I can make out that yes, Ukrainians fall under the "foreign scum" category. Along with other lumped together Eastern Europeans, and for sure, people from China and from Africa. Who else? Where are the lines clearly cut? Who gets exempt? Is it people who speak "good enough" English? Is it people from economically powerful countries and the

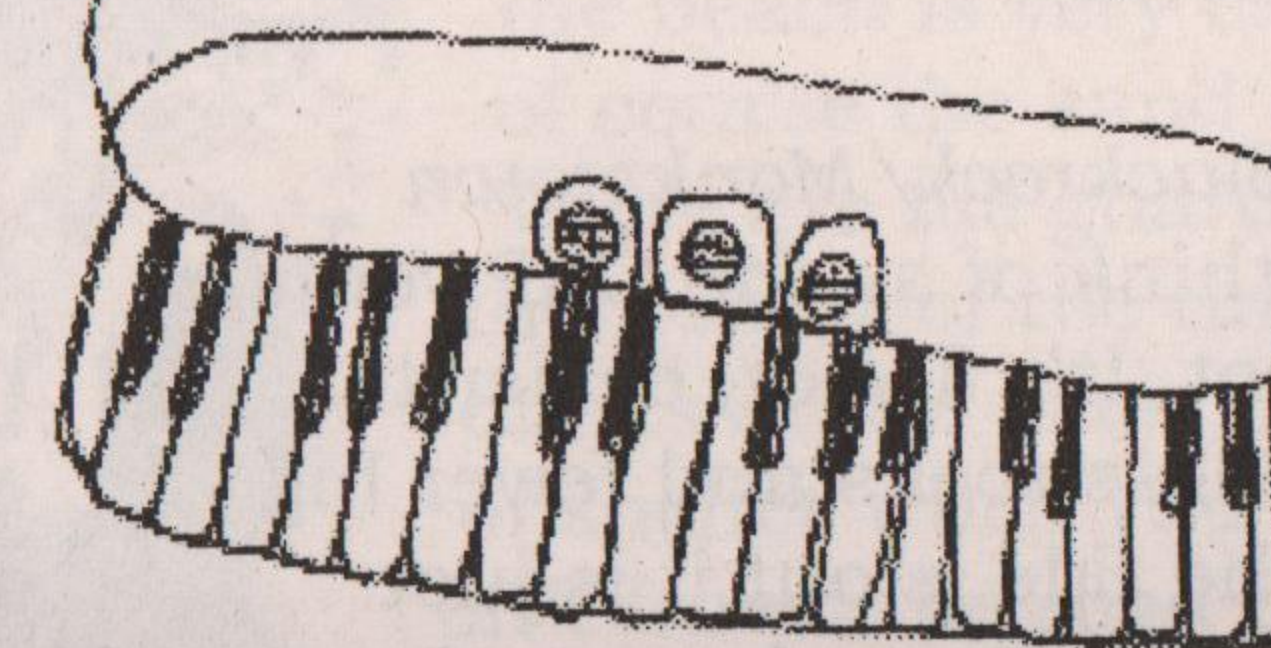
EU? Is it people from countries to which the Irish have a history of emigrating (and subsequently being treated as "foreign scum" themselves)?

My new immigrant life makes as little sense to me as my old immigrant life and how I was then treated, my parents immigrant lives and how they were treated, my mom's life and how she treats other immigrants and how Ireland, a country of former emigrants now views their own "foreign scum."

Foreign Scone



- preheat yr oven to 180c
- in a mixing bowl:
- 2 cups kamut flour*
- 1 cup spell flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 3/4 cup raw sugar
- mix and add in 1 cup chilled vegan marger - use yr hands to break up marger and blend to a crumb resembling cornmeal.
- add: 3/4 cup dried cranberries
- 3/4 cup slivered almonds
- 1/2 cup flaxseeds (linseeds)
- 1/2 cup pumpkin seeds
- mix goodly. add: 1/4 cup soy milk
- flatten dough on yr lightly floured countertop. should be approx. 1 inch thick. cut in to scones adn bake on an oiled cookie sheer until done . . . maybe half an hour or so.
- * plain flour can be substituted here. spell either



recipe by sonia thomas

doodles by tomahawk rockin

word by clare
image by jo Anne

places to swim

I've always loved swimming. Growing up we were often brought to Enniscrone beach in Co. Sligo. What seems like every other summer's day was spent in Ballyhaunis outdoor swimming pool.

Moving to Dublin, I started to explore the best swimming spots in the city. Different places stand out for different reasons. Of course I have not yet had a chance to sample it all so the search continues. The majority of these places are on the southside, which is understandable as it is where I live and work so I make no apologies. Here are a few that I have weathered or that have been recommended and are on my "to do" list:

Rathmines Swimming Pool, Rathmines Road Lower.

Fairly standard pool, run by Dublin City Council, €4.20 for a swim. There is a handy deal where you can get ten swims for €33 which you can use whenever suits you rather than trying to squish them all into one month. Swimming lessons are also available. Some people disagree with the strict controls in place to ensure swimmers don't stay on longer than they are supposed to, if any of you figure out how to dodge this system let us know! More information on (01) 496 1275

Forty Foot, Dun Laoghaire

What can I say, just a really great swimming spot. Nice chilly water, deep sea and high rocks make it perfect for diving and jumping in. Sometimes there are some old guys looking for a donation, this is of course optional and it's easy to walk past them! However it can be just too cold during the winter. There are lots of signs warning against the danger of rocks and diving, but hey that added risk adds to the thrill of jumping in. To get there it's a great cycle out from town on a nice day. The best bus routes are the 46A and the 7. The nearest DART stops are Dun Laoghaire or Sandycove/Glathule. I always get off at Dun Laoghaire because I'm less likely to get lost if I walk directly there along the sea. Oh, I just checked the map Sandycove/Glathule is much closer, and all this time....

Seapoint, Blackrock/Monkstown

This is what I think of as the OAP version of the Forty Foot. It's flatter, easier to get in and out, less rocks and fewer big waves. When the tide is out it is just too shallow for a swim, unless you're prepared to wade out a good bit. There is about the same number of people here as the Forty Foot. It's probably more child friendly because it's a bit safer and there are less steps to negotiate if you have a pram. There are places to lock your bike. The DART stop is Seapoint, otherwise I think it's the 7 and 45 bus route.

in and around dublin

Newpark School Sports Centre, Newtownpark Avenue, Blackrock.

I like this one. It has a good steady swimming vibe in the evening, not a place for splashing around. One swim is €3.50, more info on the website www.newparksportscentre.ie or on (01) 288 3720.

Markievicz, Townsend Street, Dublin 2.

Dublin City Council runs this pool and gym. It has an indoor 25 metre pool with open public swimming times, lane swimming and I've heard the beginners and advanced 10 week swimming lessons are good. Pricy enough though at €5.50, but that includes the use of a sauna. On Monday mornings from 11.00 -12.00, it's free in for unemployed people. More info ring them on (01) 672 9121.

ESB sports centre

This place looks good. Its in Ringsend and is part of a complex with gym, courts and a bar. Unfortunately, I think you have to join or be related to someone working for the ESB. Haven't yet figured out how to crack it.

Westwood gym, Clontarf,

Nice 50 metre pool, often empty but inaccessible unless you're a member. It's €50 a month for students which works out okay if you use it around three times a week, every week of the year! However, there's also a once-off joining fee of around €80 if you know a member, otherwise a hefty €200 (contact us!).

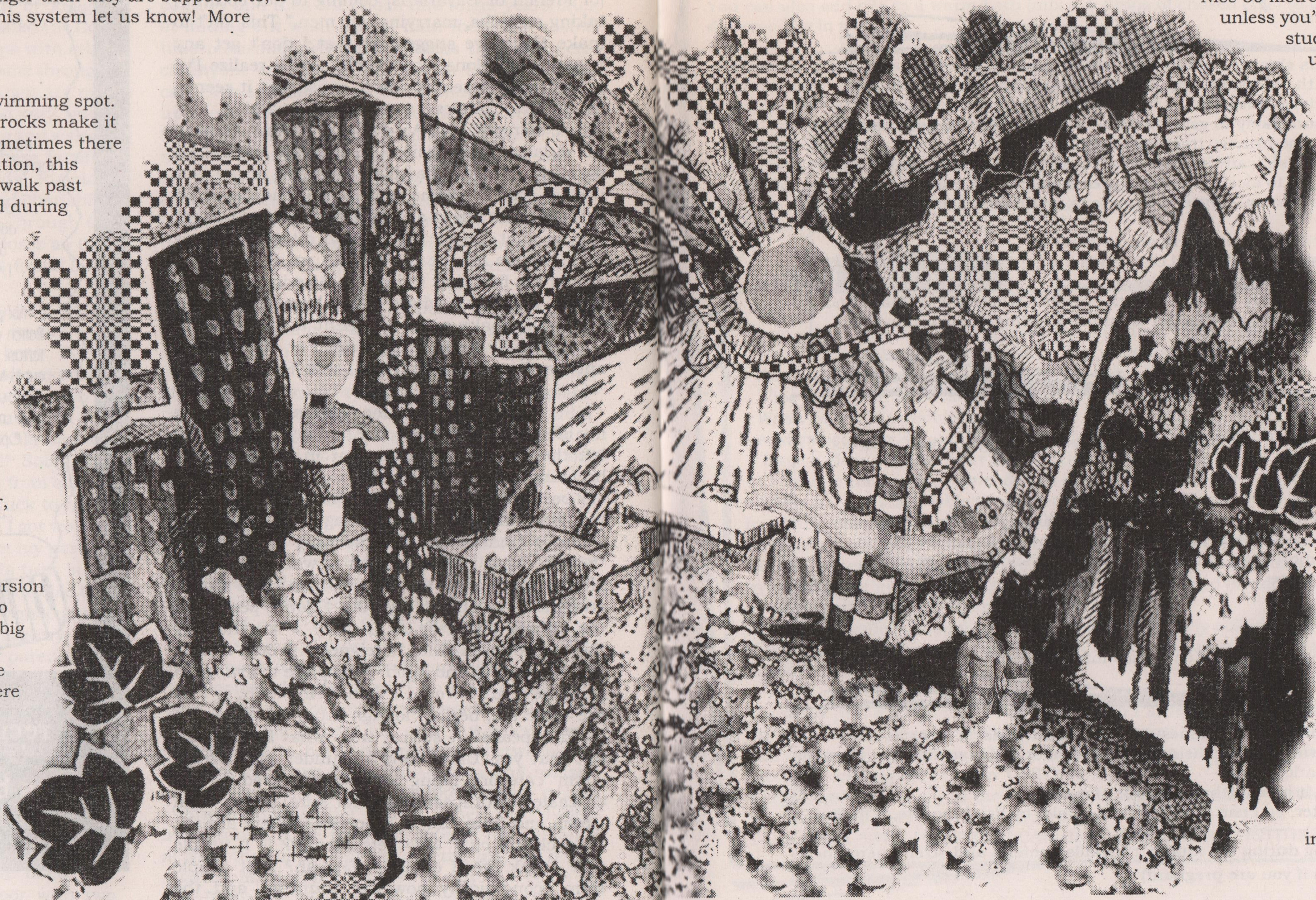
Near Avoca in Wicklow

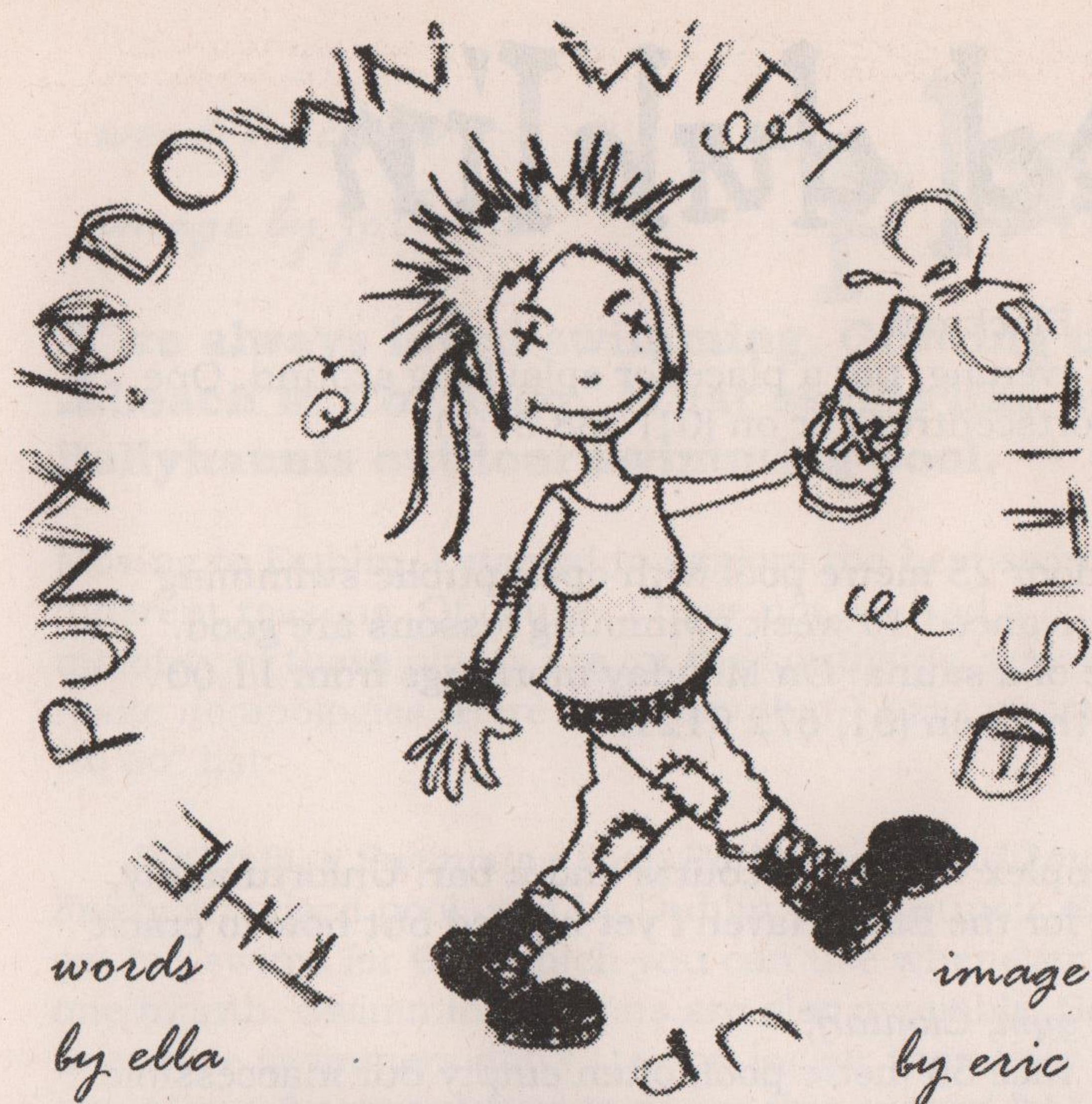
There's a place called the Meeting of the Waters, where three rivers meet and it's in the forest and very beautiful for summer's day swim. Highly recommended.

Portmarnock

The DART stops in both Portmarnock and Malahide. A friend of RAG recommended: "We swam there last year in the summer and it was lovely, it doesn't have a blue flag but the beach is very clean and of course the sand is white. There are life guards on duty there most of the time plus the dunes at the back give a good bit of shelter when you are drying off". Down the road from here is Dollymount Strand, another popular swimming spot.

Since writing this swimming list I have become addicted to basketball and more recently cycling. Suppose in the next edition I'll write something on those too. All in all, any kind of exercise is great.





I decided to write about cystitis, as I am afflicted by this bastard, evil problem and have gradually learned what to do when it rears its nasty head and stops my life.

Doctors in Ireland don't seem to offer much solution/help for cystitis unless it becomes an infection. I have been sent home and told to "drink lots of water" countless times, tearing my hair out with frustration, at the mercy of my burning gee. There's no way I'm going to spend the rest of my life on the jax, not a chance!

There are lots of things that can help, although everyone is different and responds to different things, so try out a few remedies until you find the one that works best for you. Cystitis is an inflammation of the bladder, it's not an infection, which is more serious, that's not to say it isn't hell!

Causes

- **Bacteria** - in women, the urethra is shorter than in men and is closer to the anus, making the transferral of bacteria easier, these bacteria multiply in the urinary tract and cause inflammation (cystitis) and sometimes infection.
- **The Pill** - women on the pill are more likely to get cystitis because the pill hormones alter and increase the bacterial flora in the urinary tract and vagina.
- **Allergies** - e.g. to yeast, causing thrush/candida (which is sometimes linked to problems in the bladder/urinary tract). Allergies to alcohol can also provoke a cystitis attack.
- **Stress** - this weakens the immune system. If you are prone to cystitis stressing about getting it can bring it on, pisser!
- **Pregnancy** - as the womb grows it can put pressure on the bladder.
- **Fumes** - in sensitive people, exposure to industrial chemicals e.g. certain paints will cause it.
- **Honeymoon Cystitis** - lots of sex can move bacteria into the urethra where it multiplies and causes inflammation. Also slight bruising of bladder or urethra during sex can provoke attacks.

Symptoms

- Needing to pee very often but not much comes out
 - Burning sensation when you pee (I can only describe it as like being stabbed with hot daggers)
 - Pain in tummy/bladder area
 - Lower back pain
- These are the most common symptoms but there are other things you may experience, for example, I get cold hands and feet, tired legs and pain in my upper, inner thighs. However, if symptoms last for more than two or three days you should get qualified, medical attention, also if you notice
- Pus or blood in urine
 - You have a fever
 - You are in a lot of pain.
- Sort it out; you could end up with a bladder or kidney infection, ouch!

First-aid

- Bread soda: 1 tsp in a glass of water, 1-3 times a day for about 2 days, it tastes a bit like fish but it really helps. It works by alkalising the urine, as it is the acidity that burns and therefore causes inflammation.
- N.B. don't do this too often as it is really bad for your stomach.
- Boring but, drink loads of water, you can increase fluid intake by drinking lots of herbal teas from the list below.
- Vitamin C, take up to 1,000mg during the attack, this kills bacteria and strengthens the immune system. (Don't do this if you are pregnant)

Teas

- Chamomile (anti-inflammatory, soothing)
 - Lavender (contains natural painkillers)
 - Fennel (makes you pee out all the nasties)
 - Parsley (same as fennel, also contains vitamin C) do not use if pregnant
 - Cherry stalk, add 3 pinches of stalks/pint of hot water
 - Corn silk, the silky threads from corn on the cob can be made into tea if you are lucky enough to get your hands on them!
 - Uva Ursi (bearberry) is a urinary tract antiseptic (you can also get this in tincture form which is a very effective way to take it)
 - Horsetail
 - Marshmallow root
 - Echinacea, this is really helpful as it is anti-inflammatory and it strengthens the immune system, it is better taken in tincture form though.
- Use 1 teaspoon dried or 1 tablespoon fresh herbs per cup.
When making tea, don't boil the herbs, they lose their beneficial qualities when you do this.

Try to include chervil, parsley, fennel, cucumber, alfalfa and other alkaline foods into your meals.

Oils

- Essential oils can really help, if you have them, use them in massage (2 tbsp carrier oil e.g. almond with 4-6 drops essential oil, use up to 3 different essential oils if you like) apply to tummy, back and tops of hands and feet.
- You can also add oils to a warm bath (mix 4-6 drops of chosen oil(s) to a little mild shampoo, this helps disperse oils in water).
- Use:
- Cedarwood - strong antiseptic, relieves stress
 - Chamomile - anti-inflammatory, calming, antiseptic, kills bacteria
 - Eucalyptus - antiseptic, cooling, immune-stimulant
 - Pine - strong antiseptic, kills bacteria
 - Frankincense - eases all symptoms, calming
 - Juniper - diuretic (makes you pee), urinary tract antiseptic
 - Lavender - natural painkiller, antiseptic, cooling, relaxing
 - Tea tree - antiseptic, kills bacteria, cooling, immune stimulant
 - Bergamot - antiseptic, calming

Final hints

- Rest
 - Keep warm, especially your hands, feet and tummy/back area
 - Wear breathable, cotton underwear that's not too tight
 - Don't use harsh detergents in bath/shower
 - Wipe from front to back after going to toilet, this moves bacteria away from urethral opening
 - Wash before (if possible) and after sex
 - Always pee after sex, make sure you fully empty your bladder
 - Have a glass of water after sex to help the pee along!
 - Cranberry juice is recommended as it can prevent bacteria adhering to bladder wall, some juices contain a lot of sugar which worsens symptoms and if you have an infection it feeds it, so get sugar-free stuff, blueberry is said to have the same effect as cranberry. If symptoms worsen with the cranberry then stop immediately, as one type of cystitis (interstitial cystitis) is aggravated by the stuff!
 - Barley water is said to help, I've never tried it but some friends swear by it, you can make your own by cooking barley and drinking the water. Lemon could be added to this for flavour, it also has an alkalising effect once it enters the body.
 - Avoid -tea, coffee, alcohol, sugar, refined foods, overly acidic foods.
- If you are pregnant you should research any herbs before you use them as some can induce miscarriage.

These are just a few of many remedies which I have found to help with my frequent bouts of cystitis. I am not a doctor or an herbalist, everything I know, I have learned from reading books, using remedies and talking to people. I'm still learning so if you have any additions/alterations/criticisms, please let me know and maybe I can do 'CYSTITIS 2'.

Herbal remedies or any of the other recommendations above should be used properly, with care, and not more than the recommended dosages.

TAKE CARE AND I HOPE THIS CAN HELP YOU LEAD A CYSTITIS FREE LIFE.

I met Khatarina in Turku, Finland when I was on tour with my band (Easpa Measa) in July 2005. Khatarina are five people who play fast, noisy punk rock. The fact it was five women intrigued me. I can count on the fingers of one hand the amount of bands I've seen or played with in the DIY punk scene that are all or majority women.

I liked their music and the girls were friendly, so when they asked me to help them with a tour of Ireland, I was enthusiastic.

I have come to find it normal that the DIY punk scene is a male dominated place. I have wondered how things would be different if this wasn't the way e.g. if shows were majority female or if there was only one guy in the band I'm in. Would it make a difference at all or would the same personality traits come to the fore and everything run more or less the same? I could fill many pages on these musings... but I won't. I asked Johanna if the women in Khatarina found any difference in being in an all-female band. She has never been in a band that had any guys in it, (in fact her daughter thought that playing in a punk rock band was something only women did) so couldn't comment herself. Johanna mentioned how the others find it:

"Helena says she thinks that we don't drink as much at rehearsals as the blokes do but Laura disagrees and says that she finds our drinking habits even worse than those of the boys she's played with... all in all we all feel that it's lovely to play with each other... is it partly because of the gender, we don't know... or it might just be because we get along so well."

The band started in late 2003 when Helena, the bassist, (other bands Kymäsota, Stumm, Transkaakko) put a posting up on a feminist mailing list looking for other women to start a band. Johanna (guitar) was in Haarakila and had to travel 300km to rehearse so the idea of a local band appealed to her. Helena saw Laura (ex-Viper Arms, Pohja) play drums and approached her to join. After a few months practising they decided it was time to look for a singer. In Spring 2004 Helena asked Anne, who she knew from the music scene in Turku, to sing. Anne wanted to share this role with somebody so Kerttu, an acquaintance of everyone else, came on board as a second vocalist.

I began arranging the tour in September, Khatarina arrived in Dublin in February 2006.



The other kind of rock,
The Burren Co. Galway.



words by clodagh

Day 1

Late on Tuesday they arrived at my house. They had come by car, ferry, two flights and two buses over four countries for 36 hours. Look at the map! Finland is really far away!! All were very, very tired so after pizza and tea I left them to sleep on the sitting room floor while I got a bit drunk with my housemates. Hey, I was on tour!

Day 2

Kerttu went to the pharmacy to try and get some relief for her sore throat. I cooked some Irish cuisine for breakfast: beans on toast with cups of tea. I discovered all of the women in the band spoke near perfect English.

Around midday Seán (who would drive us around Ireland) arrived with his van. We were all impressed: comfortable seats, plenty of room for musical equipment and windows all around. Next it was off to the suburbs to get Kidd Blunt (the band who would do the Irish tour with Khatarina) and their back-line (i.e. guitar, bass amps and drum kit which everyone would play through at the gigs). Kidd Blunt travelled in their own car and the rest of us piled into the van. Spirits were high: lots of laughing and singing of Finnish communist songs!

The venue (a tiled, atmosphere-less bar that plays heavy music) was relatively easy to find upon arrival in Limerick which is laid out in blocks like an American city. A poster outside declared that there would be "live punk" tonight! Two drunk guys smoked in the venue upstairs (smoking indoors in public places is forbidden in Ireland) and set up the Pils. The large room remained cold and empty for most of the night. Local band Titarse were due to play but never showed up. Khatarina and Kidd Blunt played tight sets although there were few around to see it and no amount of dry-ice could hide that fact. Oh well.

Our twelve strong touring posse and some friends of our hosts/promoters (Fiona and Mickey) headed back to their house to party and sleep.

Day 3

As is my habit, I woke early and read. The Kidds Blunt were asleep all over the house and in their car, some even shivered under towels on the bathroom floor.

Meanwhile, the Finns slept snugly in their hand-knitted socks, sleeping bags and ground mats. (How I envied their hand-knitted socks!)

Later Fiona, Luke (ex-bassist of Kidd Blunt along for the trip) and I set up a tea 'n toast conveyor belt. Kerttu went to try and get some drugs for her throat. After breakfast we left for Galway on the scenic route which brought us through the Burren (beautiful rocky landscape on the west coast). We stopped to see a dolmen, which is an ancient burial monument. This one dated from 3,000 BC. We arrived very early, set up, sound-checked, got fed and were enjoying a traditional music session and creamy pints of Guinness by about 6 o'clock.

The band diary made the first of many appearances this evening. Khatarina would produce it and write in it periodically and occasionally ask one of the Irish lot to write in it. It served as a document of merchandise sold, monies received for playing gigs and personal thoughts, observations and information. But what should I write in it? A few words about the day we had? Maybe draw a picture? I scribbled something and tried discretely to pass it on to the next person only to have it taken and promptly scrutinised by the Finnish ladies.

A grand sized crowd had formed when we returned to the venue. Local rockers Fulcrum played first. The girls were all visibly nervous before the gig. I recognised the signs because I have often felt them myself: anxious expressions, restlessness and countless trips to the bathroom. They played a stormer. There was lots of dancing and roars for more. Everything was tidied up and the two bands split up to go to where we would sleep. Back in Dan the promoter's house we drank a few mellow beers then fell asleep.

SPEED
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Day 4

After breakfast most of us relaxed in the venue, while Johanna, Laura and Kerittu shopped. Once again, Kerittu found some medicaments for her throat. A group outing to La Salsa for vegetarian burritos was next, my favourite! After the daily mental challenge of fitting all the equipment into the van in a safe, secure order we left Galway.

I had observed by now the way the band from Finland operated. The Kidd Blunt were often split up, individually doing their own thing; Khatarina operated as a group, purchasing food together, laying down the sleeping mats together to get the optimum coverage, simply doing things as a unit. I'm not saying Kidd Blunt were being individuals - it made Khatarina a pleasure to work with because they would almost always be together, also couldn't help noticing how "nice" (for want of a better word) they were to each other. A trait of women, Finns or not. Who knows? They all seemed totally at ease with each other, like family. It was pleasant to be around them: a tight working team included me in conversation (by speaking English, I really appreciated that) whenever I was in their presence.

The venue was just outside Sligo town and had a small of damp, a big hall and stage that must have been custom built for showbands. We all hovered around a fire and waited for the people to arrive.

They did! A great band of young lads, Asylum played Slayer covers and some of their own stuff, there was a brilliant punk band, Excuses, and our protagonists Kidd Blunt and Khatarina. The crowd really into the music, lots of dancing and good-natured messing about.

I slipped out on a few occasions to drink illicit caffeine in the van with some of the other women. We spoke about how the band started, the different personalities, who does what in the band. Finns I don't mean who plays which instrument but, for example, who looks after the finance (Laura), or who will stay up all night chatting and drinking beer (Johanna). I was on the legend of Laura's bag, which apparently contains everything anyone could possibly want or need on tour: e.g. papers, pens, needle, thread, gum or those strange Finnish

Day 5

At some very early hour the room full of sleeping Khatarinas and Kidd Blunts was broken to what seemed like an emergency. Sean and his van were needed. Why? The awful possibilities ran through my head and I presumed it was for a trip to the hospital. No, someone going home had driven into a ditch just outside the house. The residents thought that a tow was the only option but as it turned out a few bodies pushing got the vehicle onto the road.

The party was still going on when the alarm went off and we quickly rolled up our sleeping bags and left for Greystones. The fantastic Sligo scenery unfolded before us in the clear sunny morning. Breakfast at a service station. The van was becoming a bit messy with sweet wrappers, beer cans etc., so Laura produced a black sack from her bag. What do you have in your bag? I asked... "just in case" or words to that effect.

The early start meant we arrived in good time for the all-ages, afternoon gig. This show had been the most difficult to organise as the original venue became unavailable, then it was near impossible to find another until someone's parents involved themselves in the process. We were on a strict timetable of 4-7p.m. I for one was very excited as two of the guys in the band with me were to play with their other bands. All-ages shows are full of energy and really good fun in my experience.

Khatarina went for a walk along the beach adjacent to the venue and were hugely impressed by the beautiful wild waves that day. The venue, a community hall, was so, so cold partly due to the fact that some vandals had put stones through the windows. The local bands which played (Tunguska and another without a name)

were excellent and Khatarina rocked the house when they played last. My friends and I built a human pyramid (this is three layers of people sitting on each other's backs) which is "constructed" as a sign of respect for the band and is a lot of fun. For some reason I was on the top of this particular one. Ouch, my old cold muscles were on-tour-but-at-home feeling for Kidd Blunt and me. We all had the "on tour" feeling but were surrounded by friends, or, in Kidd Blunt's case, sleeping in their own beds. I said goodbye to my friends and partners who were all headed to a party back in Dublin. I was off to a gathering in the house of Eoin from Kidd Blunt. We gathered around the TV there to watch reports of the riots (see RAG glossary) that took place in Dublin City centre that night. It was all quite surreal. The rest of the evening was spent drinking, chatting and listening to 80's dance music (played by a chap who was born in 1989). Really fun!

Day 6

After a good yesterday had a real sense of finality, today was the last day of the tour. We drove south to Cork, once again icy cold and once again beautiful scenery. When it doesn't rain Ireland is really spectacular.

We arrived in Cork and hauled the back-line up lots of steps. The plan of action for the evening kept changing but it was finally agreed on that Khatarina should sleep a few hours in Leo the promoter's house then be dropped to the airport. Apparently, Cork airport closes at night so sleeping there was not an option. Good grub in Leo's then back to the venue for the by now familiar routine of waiting around for people to arrive and the gig to begin.

[R]evolution of a Sun played first, an excellent metal-hardcore band from Cork. Things ran a bit late and 10 minutes before curfew Khatarina still hadn't played.

Of course it annoyed the bar staff but the gig ran over time. Loading the van was awkward, as it needed to be parked on a busy road. Khatarina wished the boys of Kidd Blunt goodbye then we all bundled back to Leo's house.

It was a bit of a session there, with lots of people and cans of beer. Everyone posed for a group photo with "QT" the cat for her "myspace" page. Unfortunately Laura was really allergic to the cats in the house and chose to sleep in the van for some relief from streaming nose and eyes. There was a room that rest of us gradually slipped away to for a few hours of sleep.

Day 7

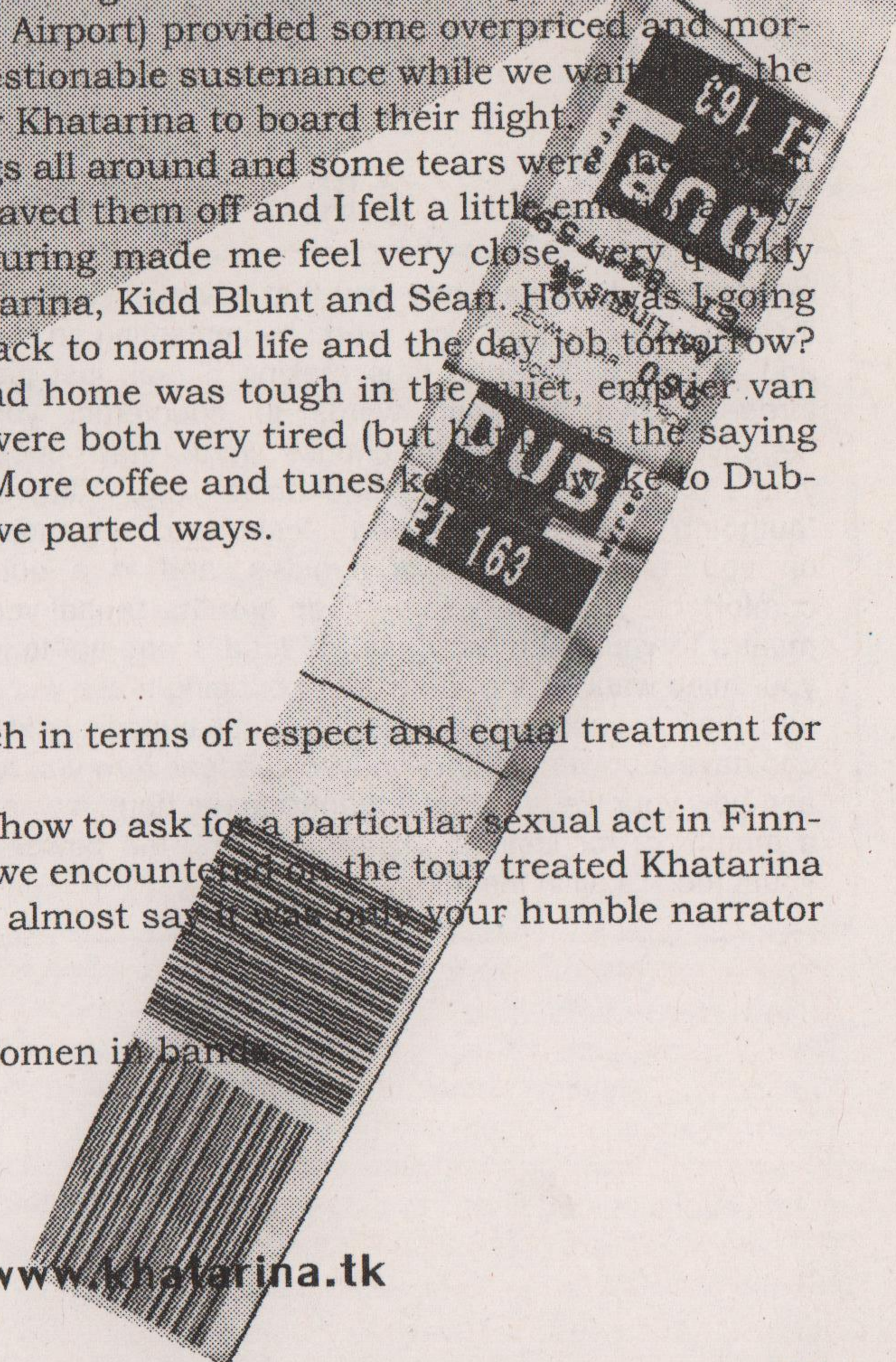
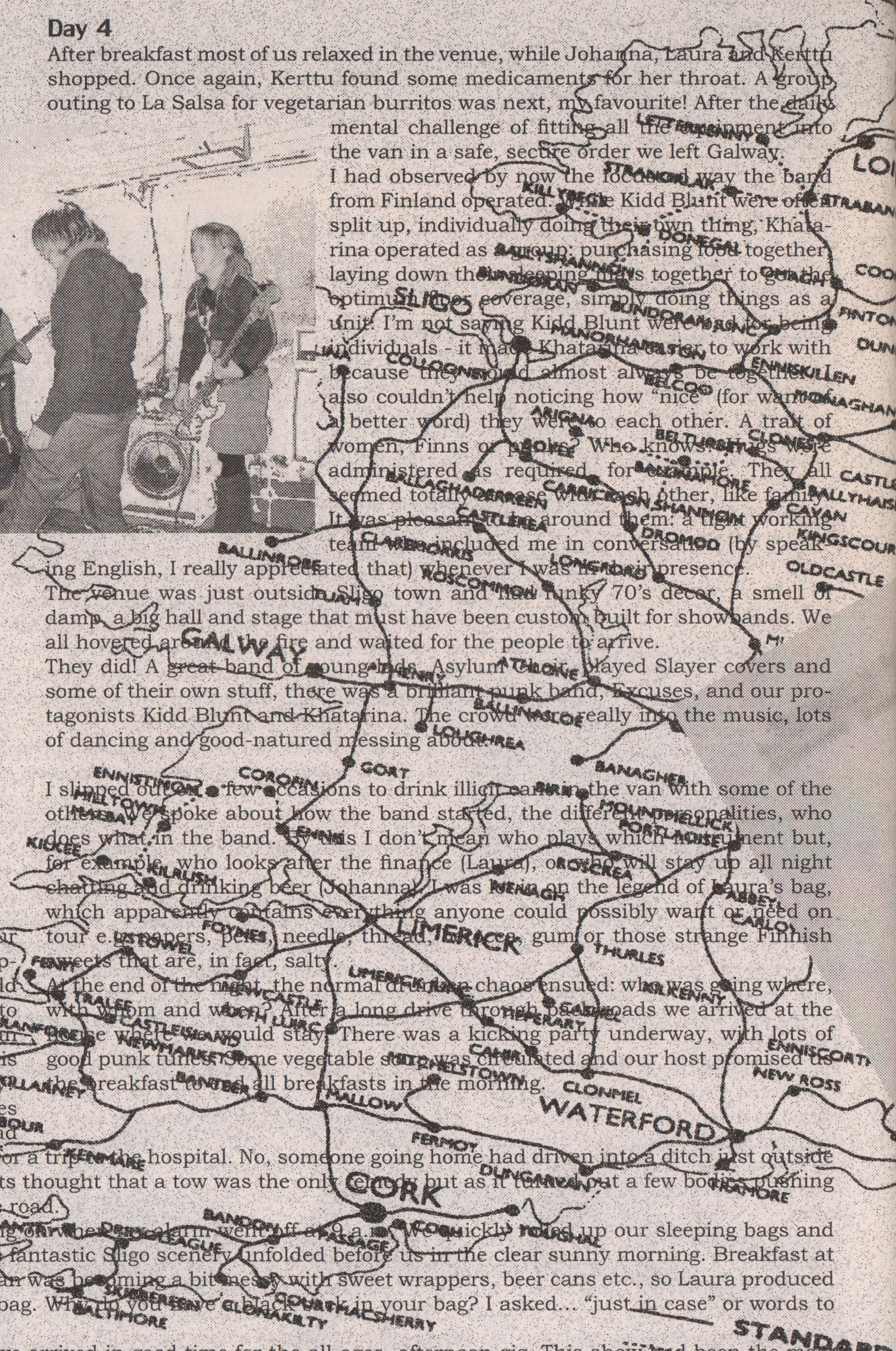
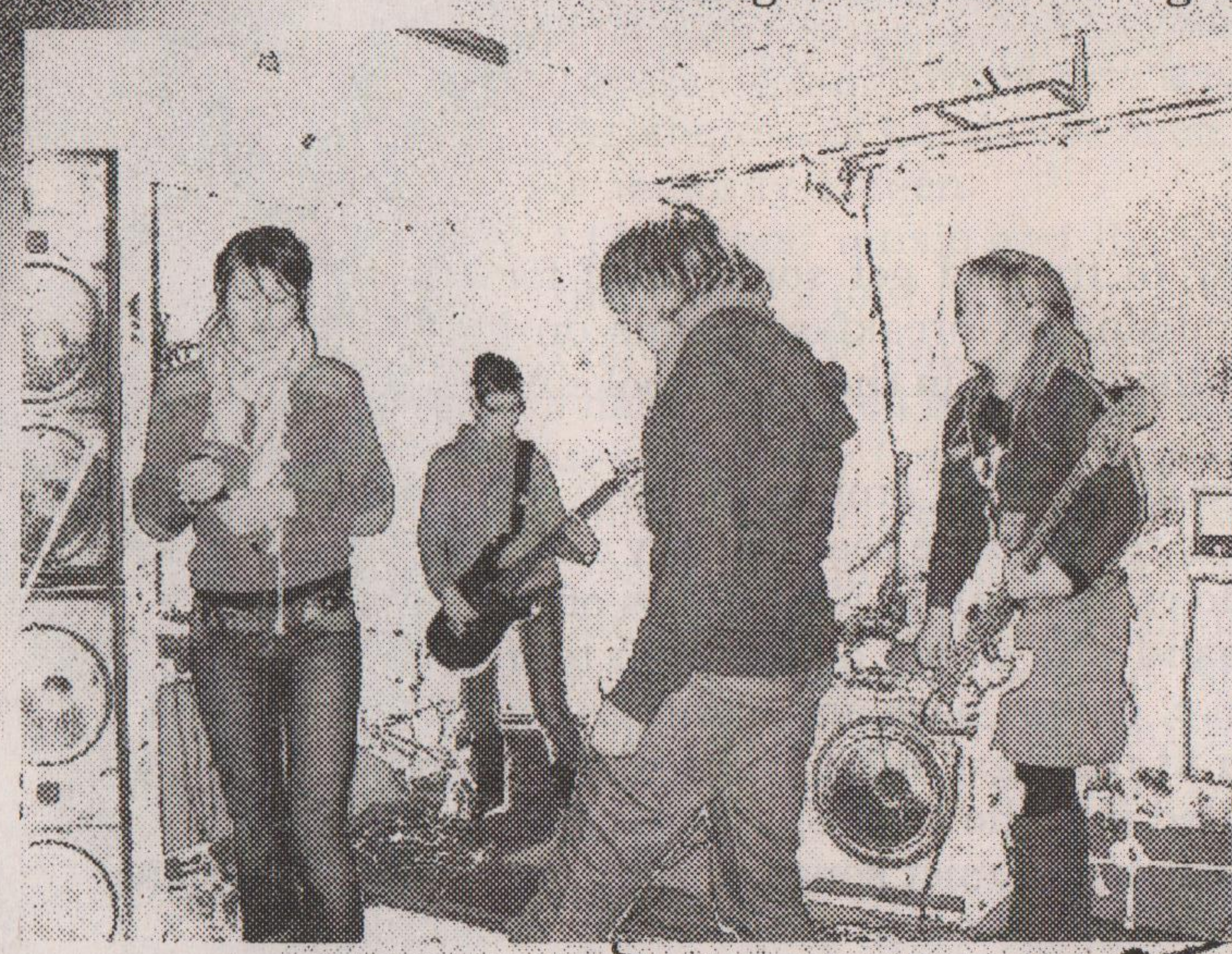
At 7 a.m., we gathered our things and headed to the airport. I had wisely slept in my boots. Sleeping bag off, coat on and I was ready to take on the cold, bright Cork morning. Starbucks Coffee ("proudly" brewed in Cork Airport) provided some overpriced and morally questionable sustenance while we waited for the time for Khatarina to board their flight. Big hugs all around and some tears were shed and I waved them off and I felt a little emotional myself. Touring made me feel very close to Khatarina, Kidd Blunt and Sean. How was I going to go back to normal life and the day job tomorrow? The road home was tough in the quiet, empty van as we were both very tired (but happy as the saying goes). More coffee and tunes kept us going to Dublin 'til we parted ways.

Afterword

To be honest, before I went on the tour I didn't expect too much in terms of respect and equal treatment for the women of Khatarina. I'm glad to say I was proved wrong. There was one drunken moron who wanted them to teach him how to ask for a particular sexual act in Finnish. Apart from that all the bands, promoters, audiences that we encountered on the tour treated Khatarina like any other punk band. And why wouldn't they? You could almost say it was only your humble narrator who got her knickers in a twist over the all-girl punk band!

Thank you Khatarina for progressing the "normalisation" of women in bands.

You can find out more about Khatarina here: www.khatarina.tk



rag

NATALIA

comic: *persepolis*: a girl's illustrated memories of growing up during the islamic revolution. brilliant.
book: *homework* by shelter magazine: beautiful photos of people who've built their own homes. **song:** stan roger's, barrett's privateers. makes you wanna gather a group of friends, a bottle of rum and whoop out a good tune together. **food:** burned garlic: get a good bit of sunflower oil super hot in the pan and throw in smallish pieces of cut up garlic. let it get good and brown. use on everything; like mixed with kai lan chinese leaves (taste like spinach and broccoli making love). **general:** learn something: just cause you're outta school doesn't mean you should stop working your brain. (see tamarack's article for how you may never have learned anything there in the first place) borrow an instrument from a friend and try it on for size. it's fumbly but once you play that first tune you feel just like you do in those dreams where you think you're flying.

SHONAGH

mantras work in the same way that advertising and all those poeey capitalist tricks work; by implanting an idea and repeating this idea thus making it real. just pick three positive sounding words to counteract your negative barriers or fears. choose words that oppose your present negative tendencies e.g. "brave", "outgoing", "energetic", "loving", "calm" etc. depending on you. take a couple of minutes, and in a quiet comfortable space with some deep breaths, repeat your mantra to yourself mentally or out loud, trying not to let your mind wander. the mere act of bringing these words and their associated feelings into your consciousness can have a powerful effect on how you feel, how you act and how your life is. adopt a mantra for an hour, a week, a month, or for life! the choice is yours, the power is yours too. it's all in the mind.

CLARE

book: *documenting irish feminisms: the second wave*, by linda connolly and lina o'toole, 2005. interesting read covering 1960s to 1990s feminism in ireland e.g. kerry babies case, ann lovet, reclaim the night, beginnings of women's aid, lesbian activism. includes photographs, pamphlets and extracts from zines. depressing to see how many of the same problems we still face both within political movements and society in general. available from anthology books, dublin. **new group:** BODY (Boid Open Decisive Youth) highlighting pro-choice issues in ireland - a difficult task and they deserve full support. contact: choice_ireland@hotmail.com tip: take a more participatory approach to life. if you get invited to something say yes - it's almost always worth it!

MARIANNE

something to do: spend more time outside. there's lots of good stuff out there to see, especially when you get out of the cities. sometimes the houses we live in can trap us and we forget they are just for shelter. one great way to be outside more is to go and visit the rossport solidarity camp <http://struggle.ws/rsc/>. it's in beautiful mayo and you can camp and the people are fantastic. go walking in the mountains, go camping. go cycling with your friends, maybe even for a few days or weeks, it's better than watching tv. **something to read:** *war in the neighbourhood*, a graphic novel by seth tobocman about squatting in new york in the 1980s. it covers battles during evictions and relationships between squatters, the police, and the changing nature of the city. the art is beautiful and the ideas inspirational.

LISA

zines: make them! tell your story or someone else's, tell the truth or go with daydreams, get your hands covered in glue, photocopy up a storm. read them! find zines at distros at gigs, by mailorder or online, or try anthology books in dublin. write back to zinesters, this isn't faceless mass media bullshit! send us yours to review! **cities:** yeah, so it's cooler to knock them but i love being in them and can't get enough of reading about them. read *the situationist city* by simon sadler, *the death and life of great american cities* by jane jacobs, *skateboarding, space and the city* by iain borden. and go exploring with your eyes open. **museums:** like visual libraries - question em; but go look. i like the way contemporary art makes my brain tingle.

RECOMMENDS...

CLODAGH

1. try to see the good side of people, hating them uses up too much time and energy. 2. if your nerves and body allow it, make cycling your main mode of transport (it's cheap and healthy). 3. read inga muscio: *cunt* and *the autobiography of a blue eyed devil*. her books are an intense reading experience, each sentence laden with meaning. she deals with a lot of the shitty things in our world: sexism, destruction of the planet, racism and imperialism but still manages to find the beauty of the world and it's inhabitants. muscio's books gave me different ways of looking at people and the world and i highly recommend them. website: www.ingalagringa.com 4. see live music, particularly in small venues put on by people who love music not money. 5. if there is a business near you that is somewhat ethical, independent or decent support it.. with cash.

TOBIE

ANARCHA is a website hosting interviews of anarchist and anti-authoritarian women and transgender folks. along with this project is the SallyDarity anarcha-feminism & gender anarchy resource page, that opens you to a world of like minded and thought provoking feminists - <http://www.anarcha.org/>. **phoolan devi kollektiv** are a group of women living in vienna that work within the hardcore punk scene, loving the music and its political roots. they make info sheets, annually put out a feminist zine and festival both called *born in flames* and are making a documentary, watch out for them - <http://www.pd-kollektiv.net/>. **my gender workbook** is the most accessible way to read anything on queer theory and gender politics since the language and the style is not based on academia. it could be used for a transgendered person working through a transition to anyone wondering how they fit in this two-tier structure. by kate barnstein.

TAMARACK

libraries: possibly the most radical institution capitalist society has to offer. if they don't have what you want, ask for it. nasty librarians? kill em with kindness. authors of goodness: alice walker, ursula leguin, derrick jensen. **science fiction and fantasy:** scoff all you want, but the truth is we all need to exercise those muscles of imagination if we are going to create anything new. some faves: *fahrenheit 451*, *v for vendetta*, *dune*, *brazil*. **kimchi:** a kind of korean pickle made primarily from napa cabbage and chillies. it makes for some damn fine eatin' as a base for a brothy soup, or straight up with sticky rice. **listen up:** janis joplin, dead prez, estel, you say party! we say die!, easpa measa, the gits, mongolia, the slits. **words of kindness:** when you find yourself covered in dirt, think yourself a garden and keep sowing those seeds of love.

GARA

gavin, my brother, is a 17 year old with down syndrome. he never ceases to inspire and taught me a long time ago to not take life so seriously. his influence has taught me to look beyond face value, to give people and situations time. many quality relationships have been the outcome. i feel very privileged to have this young man in my life. thank you gavin. **rockabilly music:** i started listening to rockabilly music about 3 years ago after a friend gave me a mix tape, a bona fide rockabilly starter kit. from then on i was smitten with the echoing, offbeat, uptempo sounds of the 1950's. **listening recommendations:** wanda jackson, janice martin and, more recently, reverend horton heat and the blue moon boys to name only a few. locally, there's a rockabilly night every sunday night in the dice bar, smithfield. **ask dr. mueller** - cookie mueller is best known as an actress in john waters' movies. this book contains material from her other books, columns for the east village eye and details, and various other unpublished works. cookie's writing is both hilarious and poignant. you'll find it really hard not to like this book!