



# The Complaining Body

## Manual Labours

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Total: 25,100

EXPENDITURE

Artist fees and  
Contributor fees; 15,000

The Complaining  
Body Production Costs; 9,800

Total: 25,100

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- What does it feel like to complain? *Body diagram.*
- Complaint Quiche - what ingredients do you need to make a complaint?
- Hamish MacPherson *BreastBeating* - a card game simulating an after work session in the pub where the only thing you have to do is complain!
- You Matter - Check out Ivor Southwood's *Uncomplaining Body Research Report.*

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Research extracts:

1. McGill Pain Questionnaire, 1971

Self-report questionnaire developed by Drs. Melzack and Jurgenson at McGill University, Montreal. Sensory, affective and evaluative word descriptors are used by patients, in addition to an intensity scale, in an at-tempt to specify properties of subjective pain experience.

2. Latrinalia, 2014

Detail of graffiti in women's toilet, third level education institution, Dublin.

- Collective Complaint Letter - *fill in and create a complaint letter to someone you can't complain to about the thing you are unable to complain about...*

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\* Each Chapter starts with a title page featuring *The Wearable Desk* produced in collaboration with the artist Ciara Phillips in December 2015.

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## Introduction

*'How better to secure consent to unpaid or poorly paid labour than to describe such consent as the origin of good feeling?' (Ahmed, 2010, p.50)*

*'The UK coalition government's proposals for the job crisis is work experience programmes, where [they] are creating jobs for people, just like normal jobs, the only difference being you don't get paid, you don't get any wages but it's to boost your self esteem.'* (Bridges, 2013)

*'You think twice about complaining as you are scared about what might happen. It is individualised. I'm encouraged not to rock the boat.'* Commuter, Worcester.

*'Is it worth me saying anything?'* Call Centre Worker, London.

*The Complaining Body* suggests both an individual and collective experience. It could be one woman complaining of the pressure she is under supporting four children, and a group of bodies sitting on a train refusing to leave until it completes its timetabled journey. In both of these examples the body not only articulates a complaint verbally but expresses its struggle physically, whether through acute headaches experienced by the single parent or through the stiffening of muscles during the train sit-in.

Under the project *Manual Labours* we have developed an exploration of *The Complaining Body* and the world of workplace complaints. This publication: *Manual Labours Manual #3*, illustrates, reflects on and expands the material we have gathered throughout 2015 investigating the physical and emotional affects of complaining, receiving complaints and not being able to complain in the context of work and beyond. Our focus on the physical repercussions of the complaint hopes to highlight the structures – often invisible – that propel or prohibit *The Complaining Body*.

This research has been developed with the artist Sarah Browne, the choreographer Hamish MacPherson and the writer Ivor Southwood and has involved a series of workshops with call centre workers in a London Borough Council, commuters on a train station platform in Worcester and staff dealing with student complaints in a UK University. The emotional labour involved in listening to and managing complaints; the social and cultural conditions of complaining and the affect of not complaining all have repercussions on the body as a site of resistance, absorption and expulsion. The research explores the normative discourses of the good, healthy, productive body which are disrupted by the complaining body.

Thus, the *uncomplaining body* is often in fact a sick body, having to perform a healthy body and happy self by internalising and stifling our complaints. Following our research the publication is organised into four chapters: ***Complaining***, ***Receiving Complaints***, ***The Inability to Complain*** and ***Collective Complaining***. Each chapter includes a contribution from Ivor, Hamish and Sarah that relates to their new commission responding to the theme of *The Complaining Body*. These new works will be showcased in *Manual Labours: The Complaining Body* exhibitions at the Peltz Gallery, Birkbeck University of the Arts, London, The Showroom Gallery, London and Movement, Worcester in 2016.

The material gathered and reworked here all stems from workshops and interactions over the year which we describe as practice-based research. For example, in April 2015 Jenny, Sophie and Ivor spent time talking to commuters on a train station platform in Worcester. On day one we asked people what it feels like to complain, on day two we asked what it feels like to receive complaints and on day three we asked what it feels like not to be able to complain. To do this we wore sandwich boards fashioned out of oversized office flip chart paper and (not without embarrassment) wandered up and down the platforms talking to strangers who were waiting for their train, recording their responses on the flip charts. We analysed this material by making charts out of the responses, based on spectrums of how informal or formal the complaints were, and how individual or collective they were. Through this process we focused on the physical and emotional states of the people complaining, receiving complaints or not complaining rather than the content of the complaint itself, although the contexts in which (un)complaining occurs were also significant. We found overall that the majority of responses referred to individual experiences of a formal or informal complaint process, with very few people expressing experiences of collective complaining. Questions formed around why collective complaining was so difficult and what procedures and processes were in place to inhibit collective challenges. Other responses exposed issues of gender embedded within articulating a complaint. Whilst not wanting to generalise findings, these conversations however revealed that many workers, employed in other roles outside of complaint centres or Human Relations were not unaccustomed to receiving complaints. Yet, these complaints were framed as informal, domestic grumblings rather than structured protests, often directed at a loved one or friend rather than the motivator of the daily grief.

From April – June 2015, Sophie, Hamish and Jenny then worked with staff in a contact centre of a London Borough Council. To start with, Hamish and Sophie hung out in their canteen, talking to staff about their experiences of working there, specifically the work of receiving difficult, abusive calls and the physical and mental reactions they have in these moments, such as hand gestures, body stretches and leg shaking.

Through these conversations with workers at the contact centre we became interested in the invisible procedures that go unspoken and unnoticed in the work place. Some people refer to the walls, doors and barriers that go up. These are learnt behaviours to distance themselves from angry callers, used as a form of protection and self-preservation. In contrast there were many references to the need for compassion, patience and empathy to do the job. When to display compassion and when to shut the door?

There was also talk of the knock on effect of the UK coalition government cuts to public services, as this job involves communicating the cut backs and being on the receiving end to those affected by welfare erosion. Callers might relay practical issues of broken doors, leaking pipes and old boilers that need fixing.

The same voice might portray feelings of anxiety, depression and stress. The concrete, structurally broken bits of our lives intersect with our emotional states. How do we acknowledge these aren't isolated cases, going into the ears of individual workers, but shared experiences connected to systemic problems?

Jenny, Sophie and Hamish then carried out a set of two hour workshops with groups of about ten members of staff to delve deeper into the world of the complaining body. Just as we had felt within our conversations in Worcester, the cultural image of the UK 'complaining society' often referred to, was eroded and undermined by feelings of hesitation and pointlessness to constructing formal complaints. The call centre workers discussed the affects of training a sympathetic ear whilst repeating inconclusive responses which would often not solve their caller's problem. Through workshop activities such as collective complaint letter writing and bodily responses to receiving complaints we asked what wider implications do these processes invoke? How do the structures of work engender invasive feelings of disempowerment and the disbelief that change is possible?

Alongside these activities we held a series of public reading groups throughout the year to underpin our practice-based research with texts by Kiran Mirchandani, Arlie Hochschild, Sarah Ahmed and Lynne Friedli. These readings led by lecturer in social policy – Sweta Rajan-Rankin and researcher Lynne Friedli helped us to collectively think through and analyse some of the conversations, feelings and experiences from different workers, drawing connections and comparisons in our research.

We have also been inviting others into reflect on these questions through a series of film screenings. Artist Rehana Zaman encouraged the possibilities of collective complaints in her screening of *Live Nude Girls, Unite!* Directed by Vicky Funari and Julia Query (2000) in December 2014. Later in April Sarah Browne presented *The Revolting Body* in Worcester, a selection of moving image material produced over the last thirty to forty years that examined what happens when we can't complain? Where do those complaints go or how are they manifested? Hows does the body revolt?

Through this process we discovered that *The Complaining Body* embodies experience of complaining, receiving complaints and not being able to complain: it is all of these figures. We are all the complainer who sometimes returns a dish at a restaurant for being too salty, the receiver of complaints when we share a commute from work to home with a colleague, the individual unable to complain that they have too much work on as there is no boss to complain to. It is the complex combination of these figures that we hope can be explored through this Manual and lead us, like in the structure of this publication to ways we might think of collectivising our complaints for some meaningful responsive action.

We hope this Manual, along with *Manual Labours'* exhibitions and events, draw attention to the experiences of the complaining and uncomplaining body in current society. Just as Ivor Southwood proposes, the research into *The Complaining Body* has led us to realise that it is the *Uncomplaining Body* in fact which we must focus on. To hear those complaints not being heard, and understand the structures in which the body is silenced. For the unspoken complaint never fully disappears but is suppressed by the speech organs to then erupt in various, other, unarticulated leaky ways. Our research, so far, has lead us to think about ways of reclaiming the complaint as groups of collective killjoys who are whistle-blowing, seeping, excreting all over the place to refuse the performance of the contained, productive, healthy body who appears to have no need to complain at all.

If you would like to find out more or contribute to this project please email us: [manual.labours@gmail.com](mailto:manual.labours@gmail.com) or visit [www.manuallabours.co.uk](http://www.manuallabours.co.uk).

# Complaining



What does it feel like to complain?

I have to be a voice for people who don't have a voice.

I complain about the stress I'm under in life in general. As a single parent a complaint is a release.

I complain more as I get older, I get better at it, more articulate.

I once put dead pigeons on all the doors in school, attaching them with gaffer tape. It was just for a laugh, or a complaint of sorts, but I was too relaxed, I should have been more worried about being told off. But today at school you can't say anything back.

I complain about others, not with others otherwise nothing gets done.

I don't need to complain, I just throw money at the problem.

I complain to try to give myself back power.

One person's complaint doesn't work, you need to be a collective.

It's important to complain as otherwise things never change.

I complain to my daughter to stop lying to me.



Complaining with others is easier as a group - more supportive.

If you are going to complain about something you need to feel like you have the power to change things.

Complaining face to face is more effective.

If something isn't right I usually pipe up about it, however if you feel it's not going to get dealt with, you don't complain.

I'm getting to an age when I am not worried about the repercussions.

I work for the police and in work I'm encouraged to complain, particularly about sexism and racism. But it is reverse psychology - a tick box exercise. A complaint in sexism or racism is difficult as you need evidence and it is very hard to articulate your evidence around these things.

I think people don't formally complain but over complain in other areas so the personal space becomes the site of complaints.

My boyfriend's sister does the complaining for everyone.

I'm not bothered about complaining, I'm always happy.



**What does it feel like to complain?**

*You doubt yourself, maybe they were right & it was me.*

*↓ Squashed ↓*

*I didn't even frown.*

**FACE:**  
Worried and upset.  
Pursed lips. Angry looking.  
Direct eye contact.

*Relief.  
Accomplishment.*

**SHOULDERS / CHEST:**  
Shoulders and chest were all flexed, like the hulk.  
Slouched.  
Hands tight to the chest.

**HANDS:**  
Clenched fist.  
Finger pointing gesture.  
*I do a lot of hand movements, hands on hip.*

*potential humiliation*

*My body gets agitated & nervous. Whatever I want to say doesn't sound right.*

*waiting.*

*Aching.*

*Gender affects who you are complaining to & how that proceeds.*



*Groundhog day.*

*Sore.*

**LEGS:**  
*I stand up. You can project more than when you're sitting down. It gives you more power.  
I'm getting the energy out of my body. If I stand up it's over. The head set comes off. This is before I blow.  
I was standing up. My legs always moving, quite frustrated, agitated, rigid, on the phone, moving about, pacing up and down.  
One foot forward. Hand on hip. Leaning backwards. Are you serious? Lean forward.  
Hand out, up turned.  
Legs apart. Knee tapping.*

*waiting.*

*Being a woman, your complaint doesn't get taken seriously. How you present yourself physically is important.*

## What do you need in order to complain? (an ingredients card/ recipe for making a complaint)

Make Complaint Quiche to perfection every time with this easy recipe for a crisp pastry base and rich smoked frustration, anger, patience and time filling.

1kg of motivation

500g of being listened to.

3 pinches of articulation to get your point across

1tsp of determination (If you are going to give up half way there is no point)

3kg of finely chopped frustration and anger

100ml of patience

3 large sprigs of time

3 tbsp of trust

275 kg of confidence

### Method

Melt the complaint in a large non-stick frying pan, add the diced frustration and anger and cook for 20 mins, until they are soft and golden brown. Season. Stir in the motivation and one sprig of time, then transfer to a plate to cool. Heat oven to 200c. Roll out the pastry on a lightly floured surface until large enough to line a 25cm loose-bottomed tart tin, with a little overhang of pastry all the way round the top. This will stop the pastry shrinking in the oven later. If there is more overhang than you need, trim off the excess with scissors. Gently press the pastry into the sides of the tin and prick the base with a fork. Chill for 15 mins. Meanwhile, put the facts and evidence in the pan you cooked the frustration and anger in (there's no need to wash it first or add any oil). Carefully remove the base of the pastry case, then sit in the facts and evidence and another sprig of time. Spoon the caramelised complaint evenly over the base of the pastry case. Pour in the facts and evidence and determination, then stir in the facts and evidence and another sprig of time. Remove the pastry case from the oven and reduce heat to 170c. Bake for 25-30 mins until golden and the filling is just set with a slight wobble in the centre. Trim the excess pastry and leave to settle for 10 mins, then remove from the tin and slice.

Complaint Quiche  
Serves 10-12  
Prepare: 1 hour - 1 year  
Cook: 1 hour - 5 years



# COMPLAINING IN THE PUB

by Hamish MacPherson  
TURN-BASED  
A card game where the only thing you have to do is complain.

## SUMMARY

This game, for two or more people, simulates a group of colleagues complaining in the pub after work. Players go round in turn laying down cards that direct how to complain and what to complain about.

The game ends when all cards have been drawn and the first player to lay down all their cards. *In the basic game version the winner is the player who has laid down the most cards.*

*No who - but in advanced version (options)*

## SETTING UP

Deal four cards face down to each player. Players can look at their own cards (their hand). Place the blue backed 'weather' card face up in the middle of the play area and the rest of the cards face down in a pile next to it. The 'weather' card is the beginning of the topic pile which indicates what the complaints must relate to. The face down pile is the main deck from which further cards are drawn. Finally give each player three SUPPORT CARDS (with blue backs).

## PLAYING

The player to the left of the dealer begins by laying down one of the cards from their hand. There are three types of cards.

1. Blue topic cards are placed on the topic pile to change what the complaints must relate to.
2. Black METHOD CARDS are laid down in front of the player to create a discard pile. As soon as the card is laid down, the player must follow the

method to complain in response to the current topic.

Red WILD CARDS are also placed on the discard pile. These make things harder for other players by either forcing them to complain for longer or changing how many cards players hold in the or hand. While the topic and method cards can only be laid down when it is a player's turn, wild cards can be laid down out of turn.

After laying down a card, players should draw one card from the main deck.

## METHOD CARDS

Complain in any way

Body (4)  
How does it effect your body?

Build (4)  
Build on the previous complaint made

Calm (1)  
Complain in any way as long as it is calm

Change (4)  
Say how something should be changed

Empathise (4)  
Empathise with the previous complaint

Explanation (4)  
Give an explanation for a problem (doesn't have to be true)

Feel (4)  
Say how it makes you feel

Justify (4)  
Justify something problematic so it doesn't seem so bad

Loud (1)

Complain in any way as long as it is loud

Metaphor (4)

Complain using a metaphor

Observation (4)

An observation without seeking a change

Passionate (1)

Complain in any way as long as it is ~~passionate~~ *passionate*

Quiet (1)

Complain in any way as long as it is quiet

Sarcastic (1)

Complain in any way as long as it is sarcastic

Serious (1)

Complain in any way as long as it is serious

Slow (1)

Complain in any way as long as it is slow

Swear (1)

Complain in any way but make sure you swear

We (4)

Complain collectively on behalf of all the players

Without words (4)

Complain without using words

## OPTIONAL: WILD CARDS

Make things harder for each other. There are two types of wild cards.

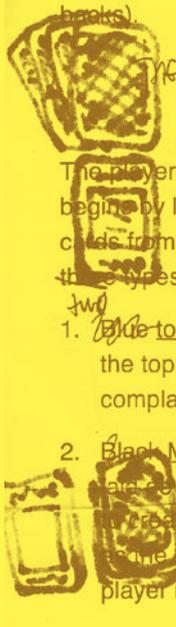
1. 2 minutes cards can be laid down as soon as another player lays down a method card and just as they are about to start complaining. The card means that the player must now complain for two minutes. *If players have a method card in their hand they can lay it down at any time.*

2. Move cards can be laid down at any time. The player laying it can move now on two cards (as indicated on the card) from any players hand (including

*Handwritten notes in the margin:*  
- "method to complain in response to the current topic."  
- "Red WILD CARDS are also placed on the discard pile. These make things harder for other players by either forcing them to complain for longer or changing how many cards players hold in the or hand."  
- "While the topic and method cards can only be laid down when it is a player's turn, wild cards can be laid down out of turn."  
- "After laying down a card, players should draw one card from the main deck."  
- "Complain in any way"  
- "Body (4) How does it effect your body?"  
- "Build (4) Build on the previous complaint made"  
- "Calm (1) Complain in any way as long as it is calm"  
- "Change (4) Say how something should be changed"  
- "Empathise (4) Empathise with the previous complaint"  
- "Explanation (4) Give an explanation for a problem (doesn't have to be true)"  
- "Feel (4) Say how it makes you feel"  
- "Justify (4) Justify something problematic so it doesn't seem so bad"

*Vertical handwritten notes on the right side:*  
- "Loud (1) Complain in any way as long as it is loud"  
- "Metaphor (4) Complain using a metaphor"  
- "Observation (4) An observation without seeking a change"  
- "Passionate (1) Complain in any way as long as it is passionate"  
- "Quiet (1) Complain in any way as long as it is quiet"  
- "Sarcastic (1) Complain in any way as long as it is sarcastic"  
- "Serious (1) Complain in any way as long as it is serious"  
- "Slow (1) Complain in any way as long as it is slow"  
- "Swear (1) Complain in any way but make sure you swear"  
- "We (4) Complain collectively on behalf of all the players"  
- "Without words (4) Complain without using words"

*Vertical handwritten notes on the far right side:*  
- "OPTIONAL: WILD CARDS Make things harder for each other. There are two types of wild cards."  
- "1. 2 minutes cards can be laid down as soon as another player lays down a method card and just as they are about to start complaining. The card means that the player must now complain for two minutes. If players have a method card in their hand they can lay it down at any time."  
- "2. Move cards can be laid down at any time. The player laying it can move now on two cards (as indicated on the card) from any players hand (including"





MOVEMENT

MANUAL  
COMPLAINERS  
LABOURS

# UNCOMPLAINING BODY!

**YOU  
MATTER**

THANK YOU TO:

For making me smile/making my day/making my day  
easier by:

PAYING ME LESS THAN THE LIVING WAGE  
AND THEN CUTTING MY HOURS BECAUSE  
I'M NOT "HAPPY"

LETS DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY

**MANUAL LABOURS RESEARCH REPORT  
'THE UNCOMPLAINING BODY' BY IVOR SOUTHWOOD  
AVAILABLE NOW IN PRINT & ONLINE**

FROM [WWW.MANUALLABOURS.CO.UK](http://WWW.MANUALLABOURS.CO.UK)

Not happy  
Teacher  
On line  
Feedback from myth space  
\* SA first action  
\* 50 hours of work  
\* 10 hours of sleep  
On line - just  
- push  
Stronger  
Anxiety  
Crisis

968  
010  
010

# Receiving Complaints



What does it feel like to receive  
complaints?

Call Centre Workers:

'I know how you feel'.

We pay your wages

You all sound the same

Idiot

It's hard to handle the grief/anger.

When people are irate on the phone you know you have to **bite your tongue**. You need to be polite.

'Someone will call you back'.

You don't need a degree

Jobs-worth

When you get calls you have to be compassionate. That can be trying at times

I'm a pair of ears.

'I've got a screamer.'

Are you in India?

It's not like it's your money

Sometimes it is difficult to separate yourself or detach emotionally from a complaint especially if you're the one getting an **ear bashing**, even if they keep saying 'it's not you, it's not you'.

I'm not a verbal punch bag.

People humiliate you.

It never becomes personal...

It's hard not to take it home. If you don't, you're heartless.

If they keep ranting I won't say anything until they pour out all their anger.

I can't not be compassionate.

We're not invincible, we can take it personal(ly)...it depends on what they say... imagine if you've got a racist person on the phone and then they said to me 'black bitch'...



University staff

I put them on hold for 30secs/min I can reset the conversation. I call it my nice voice.

I stay calm, let them vent, I won't butt in, if you butt in it become more like tennis.

We've got that **barrier** - it might be my uniform - if nothing else. On a personal basis it's different, because I don't have that barrier.

The complaints tend to be **irrational and not valid**, nothing I can do anything about - I sympathise with them, but then that makes me feel defensive.

Put yourself in their shoes. But then you may want to come out and hit the wall or something because you're really angry.

We try and reflect a **positive and calm feeling on the other person**. If we're calm and collected you reflect that onto the person getting angry and upset so then they are more likely to mirror what you're doing. If you start to get worked up or start showing your emotions, then that's when it becomes really hard to handle.

Everything's an emergency to the customer.

[With] 40% of the calls by the 'hello' you can tell how it's going to go.

Mindfulness. Knowing how to react when I get an angry call. Breath. Leave a period of silence to calm the situation down. Sometimes I forget [to do this], I get it wrong.

There isn't any emotion - I almost feel quite bad, but in terms of the complaints I get, we're an intermedia third party, it's about students not getting their student finance. We're trying to assist them and help them get their money to come through, but there's not a huge amount we can do to help them so yes, it's about listening and having a listening ear but I don't feel anything anymore, really. It doesn't matter how much they shout and scream at me, because I do it on the phone as well as face to face.

I don't necessarily think about how I'm feeling at that time [when receiving a complaint], I may afterwards then think, 'I'm really annoyed about that', and my body language will totally change. But in that situation, I want to be understanding from their point of view... I have to understand where they're coming from, their point of view, maybe how I would feel about that, and kind of sympathise with them, even if you don't agree with it.

We have to start arguing with the tenant at times. They shout and swear. We give them 3 warnings. You can't swear at them. After that you have the right to terminate the call.

A call can make you physically drained.

We as staff have to be positive.

You become dehumanised in stressful calls.



## What does it feel like to receive complaints?

### HEAD/FACE:

Headache.

Withdrawn. Taken a back. Nervous. Holds head.

Nodding with sympathy. [face-to-face] Nodding - the cue that I am listening or, I am going to pretend as if I'm listening...

If I speak my own language my voice changes, goes lower, I feel more comfortable.

I used to sit at my desk and pull faces, role my eyes and swear at them.

Face to face, I'm quite calm and I'm confident to deal with it...

By the tone of the voice you can tell what the body language is like.

You've got to put yourself in a positive mindset.

### SITTING:

Leans forwards.

Above the desk - calm: below the desk - not so much.

Tapping my foot under the desk when I've heard the complaint before. Letting is wash over me.

Upright, focused, delivering message. Chest out. Face out. Project authority. Gives me confidence.

Pain in back, tension from sitting for so long. Accumulating tensions.

All my previous jobs were physical. This is the first job I've done sitting on my arse. I found it very draining, tiring, a new kind of tired more tiring - you can go rest and sleep but you still feel kind of tired from it.

### HANDS/ARMS:

Hand signals to lower the noise.

Gesture - 'stop the train' - palms up, stand up.

Sign language. Put someone on hold. Pointing to someone.

Click fingers.

I do a lot of hand movements, hand on hip.

I try not to cross my arms and end up fiddling around in front of me, doing different kinds of dance.

I'm aware of trying to be as open with my body language as possible, but then I feel uncomfortable - where can I put my arms?

### LEGS/FEET:

Hypertension in thighs, they hit the desk.

On your feet when a caller has phoned a number of times.

I stand up. You can project more than when sitting down.

Got more power. I'm getting the energy out of my body.

Long call - get up and stretch. Hold side. Doesn't help. Time to end call.

Feel quite relaxed [but] stood can appear quite defensive to people. I like to sit like this as well (arms crossed).

Receiving a complaint makes you feel ashamed you've done something wrong even if you haven't.

When I get complained to it doesn't affect me - I laugh lots and remind myself you could get hit by a bus tomorrow.

The complaints team operates more as a counselling service.

It can also be frightening when someone is physically standing over you, invading my own space, not had any training and wish I had. I had to learn to be quite laid back.

- Demoralising
- Ashamed
- Dishheartened
- Embarrassing
- Upset
- Deeply personal
- Agitated
- Nervous
- Fetal position
- Headaches
- Scared
- Distressed
- Empathetic

I think it's conditioning really... there's always someone that tugs at your heart strings, awful situations, and you think, why didn't you come and talk to us earlier about this, there's so much we could do to help. It's more that that bothers me now, and since I've had children I can't turn the waterworks off either, so I get a bit embarrassed about trying to like 'let's keep breathing, I'm not going to cry with them', but before then it wasn't really an issue at all.

I am a divorce lawyer so I am paid to listen to complain. In order to deal with this I have to have regular back and neck massages for stress. I know when I need a holiday. I used to book a holiday when I started getting stress headaches but now I know I need to book the holiday in advance so I don't get to that point. The point before the headaches start. I also need exercise to deal with stress. The commute - my commute is about 4 hours. I find the hardest thing is to manage expectations, I feel the need to comfort my clients but I know I can't promise them what they want.

Feels awful, I was upset, annoyed, angry. But I can understand it as working in the public sector you are there to be complained about. It means that I love and hate my work. It creates a bit of a depressing office which just has people in it with awful jobs.

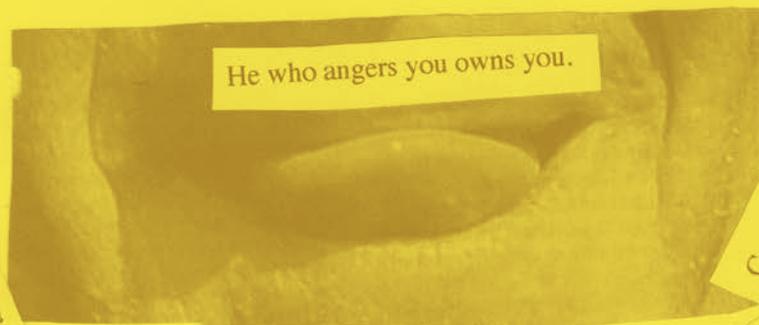
He who angers you owns you.

Complaints teams are deliberately not empowered and paid the minimum wage - there needs to be a change in culture in call centres.

There are very few compliments.

It's absolute shit.

I feel like slapping him.



Dear Department for Work and Pensions,

We'd like to make a complaint. Well, actually we *need* to make a complaint. We wouldn't like to, we'd rather not, but it has become unavoidable. We understand that there is no-one we can speak to in person or on the phone, and none of your official forms is suitable. Is our complaint about a current claim? Well, yes and no. If we don't specify one or the other then you can't progress our complaint any further? Well, this conveniently illustrates our complaint. You see, we need to complain, and yet we find it impossible to complain. Or rather, we can and do complain about the DWP, all the time, but if we direct these complaints directly to your organisation directly they evaporate into the virtual ether or bounce back off the blank faces of your advisors - sorry, 'coaches'. No, we are not making personal allegations about your staff. You see this is getting nearer to the true nature of our complaint. Our complaint is not personal. It is quite the opposite. You will have noticed that we are using the collective pronoun to describe ourselves. We, as a body of people – past, present and future claimants, un-under- and over-employed, sick, disabled, healthy, young, old, middle-aged, all of us anxious, angry and tired - are complaining to you, the DWP, an organisation which is supposed to deliver social security but in fact delivers insecurity and poverty. Your so-called 'coaches' are not the object of our complaint; although renaming benefits advisors as 'work coaches' does warrant a complaint, not least we would imagine from the staff themselves, just as the re-naming of claimants as 'customers' is preposterous. What kind of customers are we? What product are we buying? Is welfare now a lifestyle choice, a holiday destination, as your ministers and their media friends are fond of suggesting? And is the administration of welfare now a matter of customer service? Should we therefore frame this complaint as dissatisfied customers, as if we had purchased a faulty appliance from a shop or been poorly served in a restaurant? Is this how you see welfare - a restaurant patrolled by G4S guards where everyone is forced to sit and eat what is given to them and the waiters are instructed to issue fines to those who do not clear their plates? The Jobcentre offers just such a stomach-churning customer experience (and with the coming convergence of Jobcentres and foodbanks, the stomach is not just a metaphor). No, we do not blame the Jobcentre staff. Some of them seem more enthusiastic than others, keener to push the unpaid work placements and play the motivational guru, but it is an act, a performance, we know this. Like us, they have to pay the rent (or for the senior grades, the mortgage) and they are kept on message by performance targets and training courses.

Our meta-complaint, so to speak, is that complaints to you can only be articulated in your bogus language of customer service, and are therefore already emptied of all impact by the time they leave our mouths. This, we realise, is not a bureaucratic accident, but a deliberate institutional strategy. We have also noticed that these non-complaints can only be articulated individually and not collectively. You even object to individuals being accompanied to Jobcentre appointments. What other reason can there be for this than that your organisation is threatened by a complaint which transcends the terms of the individual? We understand the reason for this. Under the current political regime unemployment can only be defined individually, as a personal fault curable through coaching and positive thinking, and not as what it obviously is: a structural economic problem. This is a deception we are expected to play along with by speaking the language of employability and flexibility, by airbrushing our CVs and hopping along to the next unpaid or zero-hours 'opportunity' like good aspirational bunnies. Just as you cannot acknowledge the real causes of unemployment, you won't acknowledge the real reasons for your policies, for fear of the complaints that would be levelled against you if those reasons were stated openly. You insist that sanctions are not a way of bullying people off benefits but a form of support, a way of helping people to find work – you even invented quotes from imaginary claimants

to try to justify this! And you say that unpaid work placements are gifts of experience, rather than exploitative and stigmatising exercises. You endorse the corporate lies of your workfare partners about wanting to help people by using them as unpaid labour, as if it wasn't really about them helping themselves.

We can complain about this of course - it's a free country, I mean this is what we are doing now. But we know that whereas taking direct action against workfare providers often brings results, attempting to complain to your organisation about forced unpaid labour is utterly futile. DWP policy-makers loftily dismiss such complaints as attempts to evade good honest hard work, and those who complain on behalf of workfare conscripts are branded 'job snobs' - only in DWP-land would an expectation of wages for work be called snobbery. A claimant who points out this prejudice risks being subjected to yet more intensive 'support', verging on medical intervention, much as the patient in the asylum who does not adapt to the madness of the institution is prescribed ever harsher treatment. So our complaints go unheard, or even worse, are used against us. We would do better to complain silently to ourselves, or onto a sheet of paper you will never read.

We wish to complain about the way claimants are imprisoned in the offices of private contractors to search for non-existent jobs for 30 hours a week on computers which are inferior to those claimants have at home. We wish to complain about the 'My Work Plan' booklet in which we are ordered to record our 'jobseeking' activities like a child's homework exercise. This booklet is clearly designed to humiliate and infantilise (and again hyper-individualise) the claimant and transform the advisor from a mere administrator into a authoritarian cane-wielding teacher (the cane is the threat of sanctions, six of the best for not doing the right thing, it's for your own good, if you don't agree we'll beat/starve it into you). We wish to complain about the fact that this 'My Work Plan' booklet is presented as if it was mandatory when it is not, and the same monotonous narrative can more easily be copied and pasted from one week to the next on an A4 printout. We wish to complain about your intrusive requests for 'evidence' of our 'jobseeking' activities, such as applications, websites visited and emails written, as if we are on trial; and we wish to complain about the powers of the Decision Makers who preside in judgement over us, as if by being unemployed we are criminals, or would-be criminals, guilty until we prove ourselves innocent. Yes, we know that these are the rules that must be followed. Our complaint is not one of procedural irregularity. Our complaint is with the inhumanity of the procedures themselves. Do you have a form for that? A box to tick? Is there a box to tick for when a sanctioned claimant dies after the correct procedures have been followed, as with David Clapson, who died of diabetic ketoacidosis three weeks after his benefits were stopped, whose body was discovered at his home, his stomach empty, next to a pile of CVs? Is there a box to tick for when a 60-year old man suffering from severe depression kills himself six months after being deemed 'fit for work' by an ATOS assessor, with the coroner finding that the 'intense anxiety' caused by this decision 'triggered his suicide'? Is dying the only complaint the DWP will take notice of, or is even this something that can be shrugged off, recorded as another successful 'off-flow' from the claimant figures? Oh, you find this language objectionable? You find our tone aggressive? Abusive language will not be tolerated. Except the language of institutional abuse, of institutional violence. We find your language objectionable and your tone aggressive. Just because you don't raise your voice it doesn't mean you are gentle or civil.

Let us be clear: we do not go the Jobcentre for help getting a job. If there are jobs we find them, or they find us, as badly paid, precarious and life-sapping as they invariably are. We go to the Jobcentre to get the money we need to live on while we are unemployed. But what do we find there, once we've answered the random pre-appointment phone call and got past the private security guards? A system carefully designed to prevent us from getting this money, full of 'little trip wires' and trap doors, deliberately useless schemes, constant surveillance, humiliation dressed up in self-help jargon. All this is not really intended to 'help' anyone, but to make the experience of claiming benefits as difficult and unpleasant as possible, and thereby to artificially reduce the official unemployment rate. This is how the effectiveness of your organisation is measured, and by this measure you are indeed effective. On these terms the Work Capability Assessment is effective, sanctions are necessary, the Work Programme is a triumph. Given this overwhelming efficiency, what is our complaint? Our complaint is with you, DWP, with what your organisation has become. The end of the DWP in its current form can't come soon enough. Close the Jobcentres, abolish sanctions and pull the plug on the welfare-to-work industry. Give us a basic income and put all the 'work coaches' and their managers on the dole. Don't take it personally. No, we won't give you our names or our national insurance numbers. If we all speak together you'll have to listen. If we all act together you won't stand a chance.

# Lessons From The Front Line

Make a conscious effort to make that wall

Try to understand how the other person feels

Get experience

Remain calm and cool

Get training

Build up a wall between you and them to prevent the emotional implication

Be nice without being patronising

It's not about you. You're just a scapegoat. A punch-bag

Create defenses in order to remind yourself that it isn't personal

Breathe in and out

Acknowledge and listen to what they're saying...  
Empower the complainer

so you can deal with the situation in the appropriate manner

Laugh lots!

Don't let it get to you

Get the facts of what they're actually complaining about...

what is it that they've got a problem with?

Be calm and remain calculated

And then respond to them or go and find the information you can...

Don't let it get to you, don't show your emotions

Get regular massages

Go Running

Put yourself outside and view the situation

Try and find it funny

Exercise

Control your own ship

Share info during breaks on how you deal with calls/complaints

Split yourself up

Minimally move the earphones away

Find something to make you happy

Just take a breather

Pretend to be a manager

Go outside for a break.

Walk

Get away from the desk

On your break don't talk about work

Be compassionate

Put a jacket on with 'manager' on the lapel...

See the complainer as a person rather than a problem

Manipulate the caller so they are more receptive

They feel the crisis has been handled in some way

Blank it out

Think about how you present yourself and have an open body language

People change the way they speak to you...

Talk things over with colleagues - it helps share the burden.

Be patient, understanding and listen

When The

Wall Is Built It Is Also

Built Around Your Friends

# The Inability to Complain



What does it feel like not to be able to  
complain?

Internalising the Complaint Internalising the Complaint Internalising the Complaint



There's certain things and people you can't complain about and you just have to keep it in.

I'm just too lazy or stressed

Blaming of Self

I'm lucky to have a job

Don't complain as you can deal with it yourself

I don't complain as there are things in life you can't control

I would be misunderstood

You're bloody useless

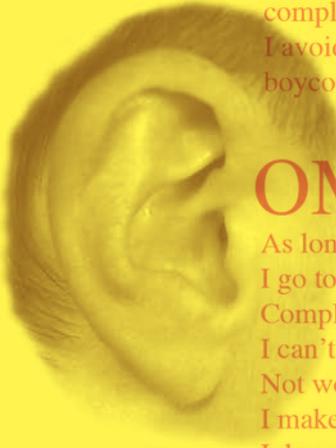
Internalising the Complaint Internalising the Complaint Internalising the Complaint





## COMPLAINING

I sometimes write the problem down, say it out loud. To read it out is a relief.  
I remind myself it isn't just me, there are other people dealing with this too.  
I get insomnia and because of that I work a little longer so I can have a better night's sleep. I don't know if work stress is creating the insomnia though.  
I'm starting to look for another job.  
I walk off from a situation rather than having a confrontation.  
I go for a run - there is no point beating yourself up internally, because you're doing yourself more harm than good, if needs be, get a punch bag.  
I close myself off. Then I can plan a tactical defense to sort out the problem. Calm and tactical.  
I have a friend who cheers me up, who says 'don't worry, it will be alright'.  
I have a good life, I dread coming to work though.  
Social media means you can sign petitions online and share on facebook. But social media dulls complaining and stops real action, the more advanced technology becomes the more difficult it is to complain. The myth that the internet makes it easier to complain, it doesn't go anywhere.  
I avoid or boycott as complaining isn't an efficient vehicle. I tell forums and friends to spread the boycott of different services and companies.



## COMPLIANCE

As long as I'm aware I don't mind.  
I go to work to help people, but I know you can't fix everything.  
Complaining doesn't get you anywhere.  
I can't complain as I have nothing to complain about, if I felt strongly enough I would say something...  
Not worth the fuss or hassle.  
I make up reasons not to complain.  
I do work more hours than I'm paid for. I want to make sure my work is done.  
There is no point articulating any complaint if I know it's not going to go anywhere, it is disheartening that there is no one there.  
I agree to all the policy and procedure changes because even if there are times management gets you ticked off you don't say stuff as you don't want to lose your job or for it to effect applying for future roles. It's better just to be smart and pull back and find a different way for you to believe in your job. Here it's either you agree to it or you are out.  
I would feel guilty about complaining and the unknown trouble I might have caused.  
It's ground hog day when complaining.  
I'm the reticent British sort of person. We are taught to conform not complain.



## CARRYING ON...

When I started full time working - it was in retail, the music they were playing at work was really annoying, especially at Christmas time, the same songs over and over. Eventually, I don't know how, I had to block it out. From then on, I learnt how to do that with other stuff.  
We have the wall boards which are great if they give you the right information. Recently these showed the longest call waiting but it didn't show the right information, it added up all the longest waiting calls and made people feel really down. And now, rather than fixing the information they have just wiped it, so people have to trust their own performance from their managers, which I know if I was working wouldn't motivate me as you have no knowledge of how well you are doing. If I don't know how well I'm doing, I don't really care.  
I don't feel like I have a voice to complain as I am the person who is meant to receive complaints.  
I think I am quite self-sacrificing, where I don't put myself first.  
I'm a single parent and I don't have anyone to complain to. I get stressed a lot - headaches, tension headaches more than once a week and when I visited the doctors he just told me to calm down which is hard with four kids. Sometimes I just have a good cry about it.

My mind is going through all the things that if I complain what I would do. It makes me anxious, I just have to sit there & take it.

Bitter taste in mouth.

**SHOULDERS / CHEST:**

Heaviness in chest, agitated, anxious, tight, heavy. Wound up

I carry the tension in this region along my shoulders and the sides of my neck. It lasts until it is dispersed, however I do that.

My heart would beat faster. I would be hot/flushed.

My chest hurts because I then go and smoke a lot.

The heart - it is like someone stabbing me.

**FACE/NECK**

Tense throat

Any stress goes into your neck.

Ache in the neck, very painful.

In your head, too much thinking.

Withdrawn. Confused expression.

Frustrated.

Often I get a headache.

The head, overanalysing things, thinking too much.

Covers face. Can't talk. Tension headaches.

Eyes looking down.

Left neck tension. Stiffness.

I bite my lip so I physically feel something of the tension I am feeling emotionally.

**STOMACH:**

In your stomach, you feel quite sick.

My hands feel uncomfortable, like I need to wash them.

There's certain things & people you can't complain about & you just have to keep it in.

**ARMS / HANDS:**

Hand tapping on the desk.

Lots of hand gestures.. unable to speak - using hands to find other ways of communicating.

Wringing of hands.

Fingers move.

I feel the beating of my pulse.

Arms folded. Closed position. Focused.

**LEG:**

I'm a tapper - my foot's always moving when I'm frustrated.

Fidgety. Leg shaking, Lot of movement because you can't express it in words.

**What does it feel like not to be able to complain?**



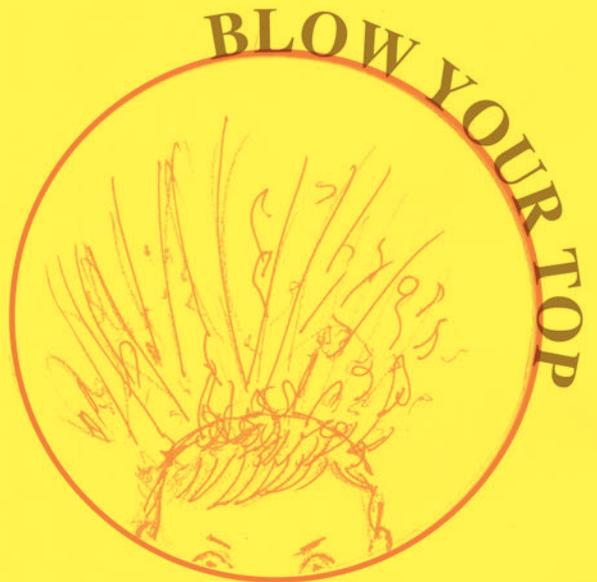
One of the first symptoms of a traumatic experience is diarrhoea as it just goes to your gut.



In your stomach you feel quite sick.



It feels like the veins are going to pop out of my legs sometimes.



It effects your head as the more you want to complain the more nothing happens and it's in your head and you just want to blow your top!



Sometimes I just have a good cry.



SUPPRESSION OF COMPLAINTS LEADS TO PHYSICAL OUTBURSTS!  
BODY EXPULSIONS.

# McGILL PAIN QUESTIONNAIRE

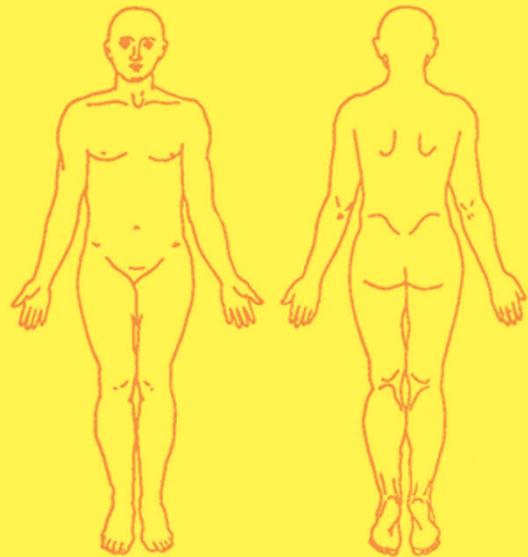
RONALD MELZACK

Patient's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm

PRI: S \_\_\_\_\_ A \_\_\_\_\_ E \_\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_\_ PRI(T) \_\_\_\_\_ PPI \_\_\_\_\_  
 (1-10) (11-15) (16) (17-20) (1-20)

<p>1 FLICKERING QUIVERING PULSING THROBBING BEATING POUNDING</p>	<p>11 TIRING EXHAUSTING</p>
<p>2 JUMPING FLASHING SHOOTING</p>	<p>12 SICKENING SUFFOCATING</p>
<p>3 PRICKING BORING DRILLING STABBING LANCINATING</p>	<p>13 FEARFUL FRIGHTFUL TERRIFYING</p>
<p>4 SHARP CUTTING LACERATING</p>	<p>14 PUNISHING GRUELLING CRUEL VICIOUS KILLING</p>
<p>5 PINCHING PRESSING GNAWING CRAMPING CRUSHING</p>	<p>15 WRETCHED BLINDING</p>
<p>6 TUGGING PULLING WRENCHING</p>	<p>16 ANNOYING TROUBLESOME MISERABLE INTENSE UNBEARABLE</p>
<p>7 HOT BURNING SCALDING SEARING</p>	<p>17 SPREADING RADIATING PENETRATING PIERCING</p>
<p>8 TINGLING ITCHY SMARTING STINGING</p>	<p>18 TIGHT NUMB DRAWING SQUEEZING TEARING</p>
<p>9 DULL SORE HURTING ACHING HEAVY</p>	<p>19 COOL COLD FREEZING</p>
<p>10 TENDER TAUT RASPING SPLITTING</p>	<p>20 NAGGING NAUSEATING AGONIZING DREADFUL TORTURING</p>
	PPI
	<p>0 NO PAIN 1 MILD 2 DISCOMFORTING 3 DISTRESSING 4 HORRIBLE 5 EXCRUCIATING</p>

BRIEF _____	RHYTHMIC _____	CONTINUOUS _____
MOMENTARY _____	PERIODIC _____	STEADY _____
TRANSIENT _____	INTERMITTENT _____	CONSTANT _____



E = EXTERNAL  
I = INTERNAL

COMMENTS:

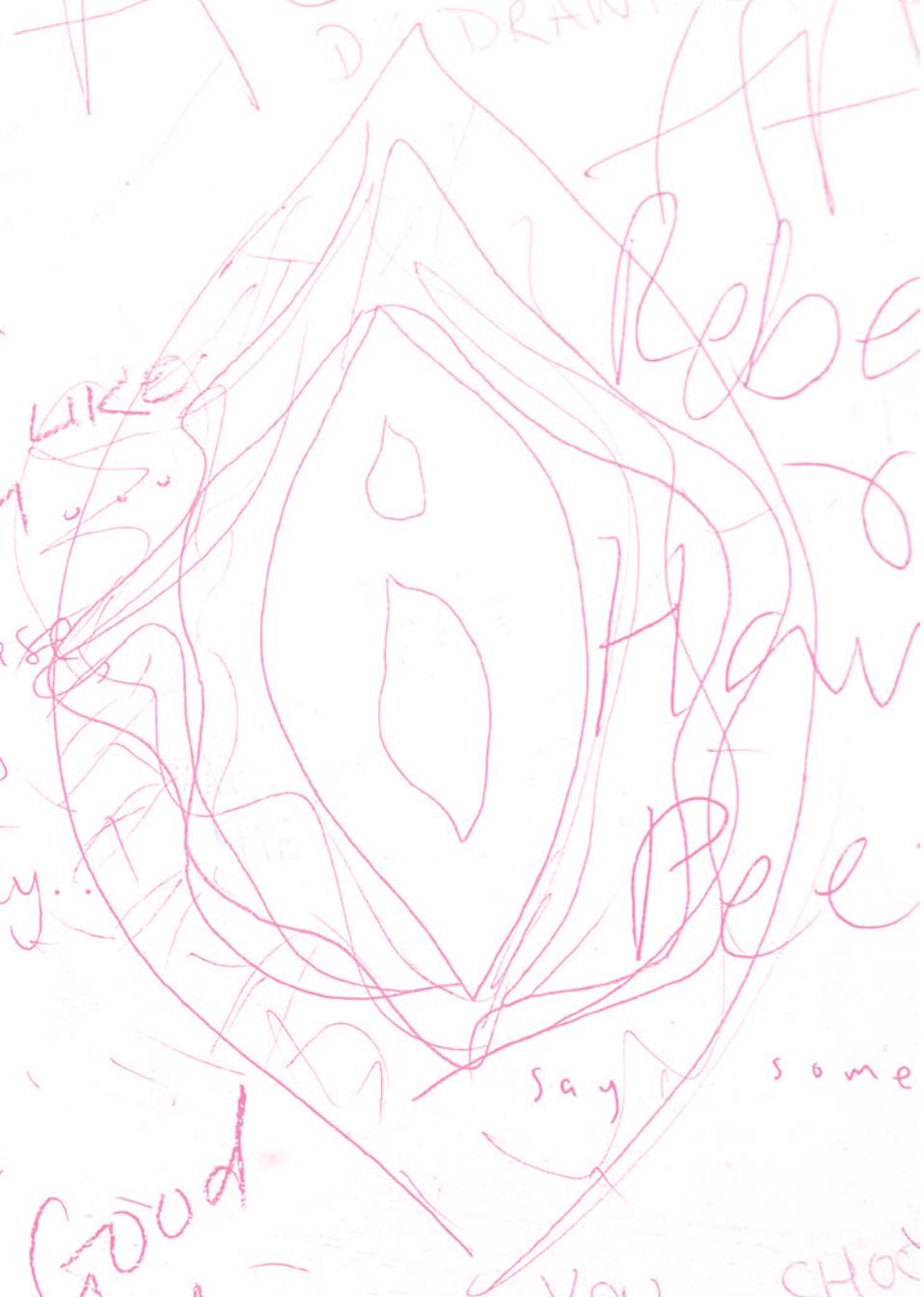


DRAWING

SUCH CREAM  
I DON'T LIKE  
CREAM

Help me please

I'm giving up  
rather quickly.



Say some

WANT  
or APPROVAL

(RAPE)

set is cool

GOOD  
JOB

you

CHOICE



REALITY

IS IN YOUR

FOLLOW

AND

A

PLAT'S

## Collective Complaint Letter

\*Write a letter to someone you cannot complain to about the thing you are unable to complain about...\*

-----Fold-----

Who are you complaining to?

-----Fold-----

What is your complaint?

-----Fold-----

How does it make you feel?

-----Fold-----

What do you want to change?

-----Fold-----

What happens if nothing does change?

\* With 2 or more people write a collective complaint letter. Answer the first question on the list, then fold and pass to the person on your left. Continue until all sections have been filled in. Open the letter and read aloud to the group.

# Collective Complaining



How can we collectively complain?

A group of commuters on a train heard an announcement that their train was now not going to make its final destination. The commuters refused to get off at the revised, earlier destination with the whole carriage staging a 'sit in'. They refused to get off the train until the train took them to their final station. The train company conceded, and there were triumphant cheers in the carriage as the train pulled off.

Fourteen cleaning staff employed by the co clean the offices of the Foreign Office signed four testimonies, to Foreign Secretary Philip meeting to discuss the living wage. They

*"Cleaners at the FCO are currently paid wage, at £7.05 an hour, which will rise so-called "national living wage" of £7.2 next April.*

*The cleaners were asking to discuss the wage as calculated by the Living Wage living in the capital, which*

*The cleaners were then sent a letter from Interserve, accusing them of bringing threatening them with*

*- Rowena Mason, 19 Oct*

Case Study 1: Sit-in

Case Study 2: Collective letter

Company Interserve to  
a joint letter, including  
Hammond suggesting a  
were concerned that:

and just over the minimum  
rise to the government's  
£10 an hour for over-25s from

the London weighting of the living  
wage Foundation, based on the cost of  
living which is £9.15 an hour."

in return from their employer,  
changing the contract into disrepute and  
a disciplinary meeting.

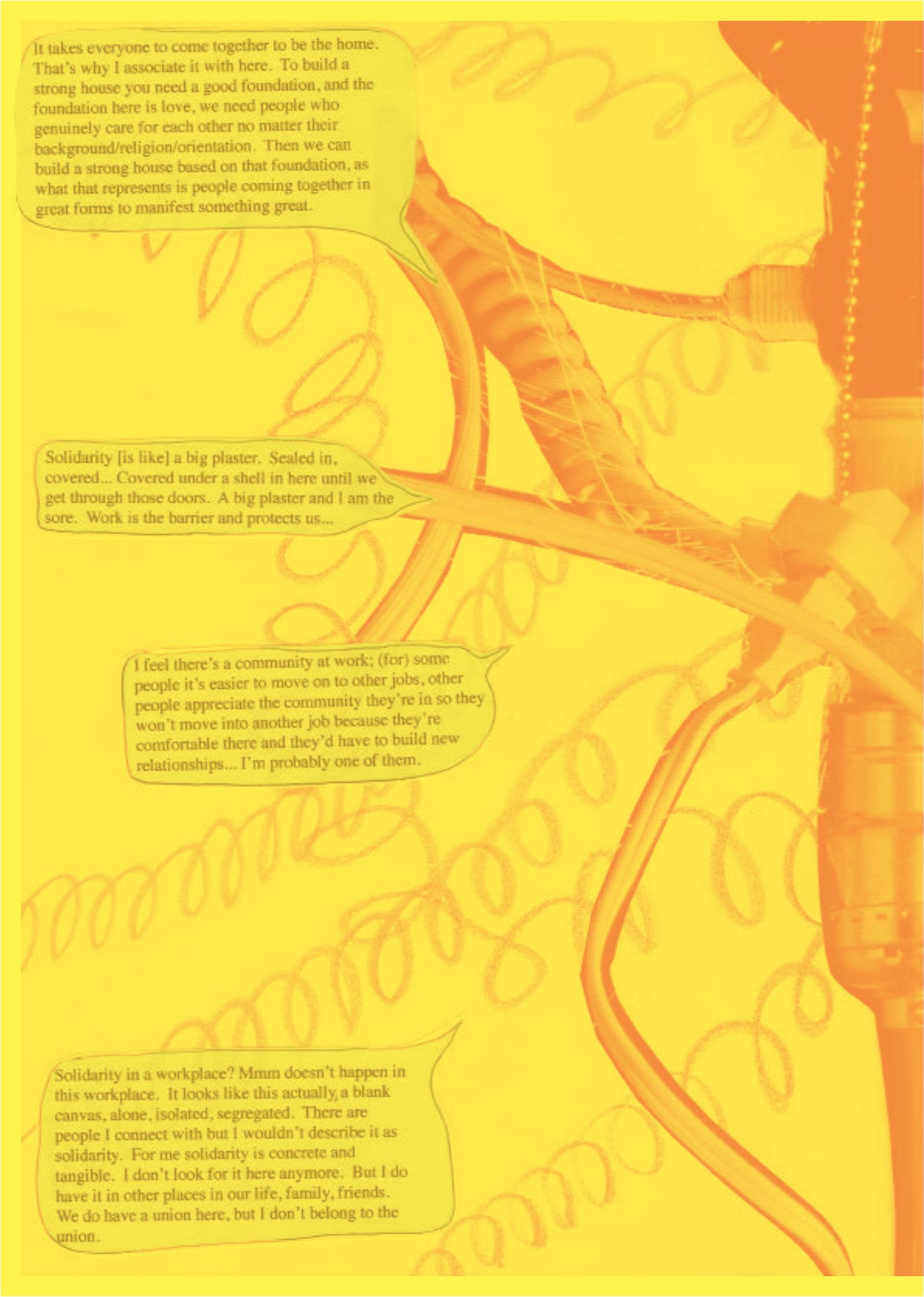
October 2015, The Guardian

The not for profit community project, open artist platform and film  
laboratory *no.w.here* are campaigning with Tower Hamlets solidarity and  
pressure group *Stop the Blocks* to prevent the eviction of grassroots  
community spaces, homes and hospitals facing eviction in London.

Run by cultural workers who place value on education, resistance, collabora-  
tion and free expression, *no.w.here's* future is under threat from a tidal  
wave of property developers. Vital in its community, *no.w.here* does not  
view displacement by billionaires or the destruction of communities as a  
natural evolution.

Following an online petition *no.w.here* found out in December that Tower  
Hamlets Council upheld *no.w.here* as an Asset of Community Value, giving  
*no.w.here* the opportunity to buy the building should the landlord proceed  
with their plans to sell. The landlord cannot sell the building without letting  
Tower Hamlets know that they intend to do so, or grant a lease of more than  
25 years. They also have to wait until the end of a six month 'full morato-  
rium' period if Tower Hamlets does receive a request from *no.w.here* to be  
treated as a potential bidder. However, it seems unlikely that the landlords  
will give up on their attempts to sell the building, and that they will continue  
to try to force *no.w.here* to vacate the premises.

- Change.org Protect Community Spaces -  
Stop the Eviction of no.w.here  
[www.no-w-here.org.uk](http://www.no-w-here.org.uk)



It takes everyone to come together to be the home. That's why I associate it with here. To build a strong house you need a good foundation, and the foundation here is love, we need people who genuinely care for each other no matter their background/religion/orientation. Then we can build a strong house based on that foundation, as what that represents is people coming together in great forms to manifest something great.

Solidarity [is like] a big plaster. Sealed in, covered... Covered under a shell in here until we get through those doors. A big plaster and I am the sore. Work is the barrier and protects us...

I feel there's a community at work; (for) some people it's easier to move on to other jobs, other people appreciate the community they're in so they won't move into another job because they're comfortable there and they'd have to build new relationships... I'm probably one of them.

Solidarity in a workplace? Mmm doesn't happen in this workplace. It looks like this actually, a blank canvas, alone, isolated, segregated. There are people I connect with but I wouldn't describe it as solidarity. For me solidarity is concrete and tangible. I don't look for it here anymore. But I do have it in other places in our life, family, friends. We do have a union here, but I don't belong to the union.

I don't feel any solidarity in here. I feel lonely. Solidarity is a combined thing, you are joined together. Solidarity is to do with friendship rather than work.

We are at work and here to work and some people have hidden agendas in terms of their careers so they can get you out the way, capitalise on your mistakes, give you misinformation.

We are all different but we all work together. And we all should be working towards the same thing. But often I feel like we aren't working together and there are breakages when people go off in the wrong direction.

Solidarity for me would be all depending on each other. How I would like it, is an unbroken chain where we are together and everyone is fine with no one left behind. We are all leaning on each other.

We have solidarity as we all ~~are~~ experiencing the same thing. All under the same stress. All under that pressure inside. We can all relate to each other.

When I was younger, I didn't play with other kids. As I got older, I learnt to interact more - I think that also has an effect on how I manage things now. I learnt to listen, learnt to appreciate and respect other people's views, helps me to see when someone else needs help. I can be focused 100% on what I'm doing and I can tell when some else needs help down the other side of the room... if there's something wrong I can pick it up...

What does it feel like to collectively complain?

PLATE 4.



\*Mark your response on the body diagram\*

# Office Politics

*It is Monday morning. Three characters all meet at work, a call centre for a local borough council and chat about their daily grumbings....*

*Dolcis - Shoe*  
*Dracaena - Office plant*  
*Dell - Computer mouse*



*Dolcis: Oh, come on, will you, this waiting is killing me! Ouch, what was that?*

*Stop kicking me, don't you realise I was only polished yesterday. You dare scuff me! This tapping is infuriating. Ah, great, the train's coming, let's get to the front, we know where the doors are, we've done this hundreds of times. And... we're in. Not long now.*

*Dracaena: Here she comes, look at that strut, how you doing there? Good trip into work?*

*Don't, just don't, I don't want to talk about it, bane of my life. You're so lucky you don't have to do that trip day in, day out - you just sit there, same spot. But don't you get bored?*

*Me, no, I love it up here, got a great view of everyone, every so often the sun comes my way and bathes me in light. I get to see the workers come and go. There's always something to see, someone to keep a watch over. Can't complain, me.*

*Dell: Can you two stop your chattering? Can't you see I've got work to do here, it's a very busy day. She's already swung me into action without even getting a coffee first, she must be late, and you know how I hate it when she's late.*

*Oh come on Dell, can't you give us a break?*

*Listen, my job is extremely important, without me, this whole operation would come crashing down. You two are superfluous decoration. You don't get it do you?*

*Decoration? I'll have you know my presence in this environment is essential to the well-being of the people here. I may not look like it but I'm helping people through the stresses and strains of the job, which, as far as I can tell, is not that good for their health - sitting down all day, having to listen to people moan and complain. My very being here gives them a little bit of life and colour. It gives them hope*

*Hope for what exactly?*

*It reminds them that there's life beyond work, that nature is a slow, organic process that is more important than all this work stuff. I calm them down. Apparently I can even make them more creative and productive.*

*And sorry Dell, but what exactly do you get done - as far as I can tell you just direct people's complaints around in a circle, you aren't allowed to get to the bottom of a problem and as for well being in this place, are you joking? Admittedly I'm getting an odd view from down here - but when I do get the chance to get out from under this desk I see some pretty sad scenes - I can feel the tension in the feet that wear me, the scrunching of the toes, the jiggling of the legs - all usually happening when they're on a stressful call. Their faces when the boss comes round might show a smile but I can feel in their feet another story.*



All the more reason for me to provide some distraction and a sense of relaxation around here.

*That's just it, it's a sense of relaxation, it's not actually relaxing!*

I've been in this job way longer than you two and let me tell you, I don't hear much complaining at all. They're all too good at their jobs. I help them when I can to carry out the tasks efficiently and effectively.

*(mumbling) Yeah because if you're going to complain about something you need to feel like you have the power to change things...*

*(teasingly) Yeah or throw money at the problem and buy a new pair of shoes...*

What was that you two?

*Oh nothing...I was just asking how old are you now, Dell?*

Oh, that would be telling. Let's just say I've been around for at least 5 restructures, 3 computer upgrades and an office move.

You must have seen some changes!

Oh yes, I'm often nearly chucked out and replaced by one of these cordless ergonomic things, but I've managed to stick around. It's my experience, you see. I'm trusted to get the job done. Yes, my ball gets stuck every so often, and that can frustrate the worker, but I soon get going again. Like you, Dolcis, I have regular skin contact with my worker - it's a privilege, it really is.

I am there to serve and I'm proud to say I rarely let her down.

*But don't you get frustrated and annoyed that you're just slaving away for someone else? Obediently following instructions? Sometimes I just want to take over and decide where to go and what to do rather than always follow her around.*

Dolcis, you will learn, like I did that, 'he who angers you owns you' and as soon as you are aware of that you can get over that sense of powerlessness. It is our duty, Dolcis, we are all obliged to follow orders, just as they are following orders from above. We all have our part to play in delivering this service the best we can. The sooner you realise that and 'toe the line', the better for everyone.

I agree with Dell, I just want people to be happy in what they're doing. There's no point rocking the boat. I'm here to make people satisfied in what they are doing so they keep doing it without complaining too much! Why don't you go out for a walk or hang out by the bins for a minute, you'll feel refreshed and ready to get back under that desk girl.

*Complaining? Let me tell you about complaining - admittedly I'm new to this job, but can't you see all the suppressed complaints around here? This place operates more as a counselling service appeasing customers, I sometimes think the place is going to explode! There are all these tactics people use to try and keep calm - watering the plant, going for a cigarette, a trip to the loo, standing up on a difficult call - these are all tactics they encourage, you to do, so you don't complain. I hear this body often saying yes to work because she finds it impossible to say no. She's worried that will mean she can't cope with her workload, and she'll get complaints and feel a failure.*



But surely, Dolcis, that's a sign of a clever worker. She or he is managing their own emotions, it's the only professional thing to do.

*I get that, but it's so sad that the complaint is silenced, swallowed. The complaints in this office are palpable but invisible. They emerge as physical eruptions in the body, I feel it in the foot. Don't you feel it in the hands that touch you, Dell, don't you ever wonder what's behind that fleeting irritation?*



Well, I do get the odd vigorous tap or slap, but I just take that as a sign to work harder and help them to get the job done. I've been here a long time, that's just how things roll, you just get on with it. Come to think of it, it is strange that when I have heard the odd complaint they are pretty much the same, year in year out, but they are never shared between the workers, normally just under their breath so I catch it.

I don't hear those complaints, I'm just watching for when she waters me, I think I can see a glimmer of something special in the corner of her eye - I'm sure it's a sign of reduced stress. It makes my day!

*But you know what, when out of this workplace I hear a lot of complaints. When I'm picked up from the tube station this body is practically screaming about her day to her partner, she vents it all out before she gets home to the kids. In privacy there is a lot of complaining, and then her family and friends are there to cheer her up - seems like quite a lot of work for them too!*

Maybe they need both of us you and I, Dracaena. We keep the balance around here. Even if they feel like they can't complain no-one's going to do it on their behalf, so don't get any ideas Dolcis, you're just out to make trouble - you're what I'd call a killjoy. And for goodness sake don't start acting above your station. You're just a shoe amongst a room full of footwear that have a lot more experience and understanding than you. They know to keep their feet firmly under the desk where they belong. Let us get on with the day to day workings of this place.

*Well, you don't know what we've got going on under here. There are a few other shoes I've been talking to under the desks and we've been sharing stories about this place. You think you're so great placed up there at hand level, and you at eye-height Dracaena, but both of you are replaceable. Us shoes are essential for the worker to get to and from work - without us, there is no work. And even if she feels like she has to buy a shoe like me, with high heels and pointy toes, just to be taken seriously, I bring her to work day in, day out.*

**Don't tell me you're plotting a mass walk out!**

*I'm not saying anything, just that don't be so sure you know where the power lies. All that not complaining might one day rise up and explode not in a little keyboard slap but give you the shock of your life!*



**Calendar of Manual Labours events and activities**  
(not including all the administration inbetween)

12-14 December: Planning weekend in Margate with Sophie Hope, Jenny Richards, Sarah Browne, Ivor Southwood and Hamish MacPherson.

12 December: Officeless Christmas Party and film screening, The Showroom, London.

24 February: Reading Group #1 with Sweta Rajan-Rankin at The Showroom, London.

28 February: Sophie contributes to Ruth Ewan's event, 10 Ventôse CCXXIII, celebrating the French Republican Calendar's Sanculottides at Camden Arts Centre.

21 February: Jenny hosts Labour of Love Conference, Edinburgh.

20-26 April: Ivor Southwood, Sophie Hope and Jenny Richards spend one week in Worcester with Movement and commuters at Worcester Foregate Street Station.

24 April: Screening of The Revolting Body, a selection of moving image material by Sarah Browne, at Movement, Worcester.

28 April: Reading Group #2 as part of the WE (Not I) programme of events, held at Cubitt Gallery, London.

30 June: Reading Group #3 with Lynne Friedli, London.

April - June: Hamish MacPherson, Sophie Hope and Jenny Richards work with staff at a Call Centre, London.

28 July: Workshop in Preston with In Certain Places.

4 June: Sophie Hope facilitates a workshop as part of Birkbeck's pop-up university in Enfield.

10 July: Sophie and Jenny do follow-up session with the call centre.

3 November: Manual Labours, In Certain Places and iROWE (Institute into Research for Organisations, Work and Employment) host a special event discussing the processes of complaining, with Steph Fletcher, Hamish Mac Pherson, Gemma Wibberley and Sweta Rajan-Rankin.

4 September: Manual Labours stall at Wellcome Collection Hubbub Late Spectacular event.

11-14 December: Sophie Hope and Jenny Richards spend the weekend making the Manual Labours Manual #3. This includes collaborating with artist Ciara Phillips to produce 'The Wearable Desk' featured in the image used as the title page in this publication.

**Exhibition dates of Manual Labours: The Complaining Body**

6 February – 3 March 2016  
Peltz Gallery, Birkbeck, School of Arts, 43 Gordon Square, London, WC1H 0PD

4-12 April 2016  
The Showroom Gallery, Penfold Street, London, NW8 8PQ

22 June – 22 July 2016  
Movement, Platform 2, Worcester Foregate Street Railway Station, Worcester, WR1 1DB

JAN | DEC | 2016

SEP | AUG | JUL | JUNE

MAY | APR | MAR | FEB | JAN | DEC | 2014

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Manual Labours Manual #3

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