

Sparkling Revolutions in Minds and Hearts

In Conversation with Grrrl Zine Editors from around the World

by Elke Zobl

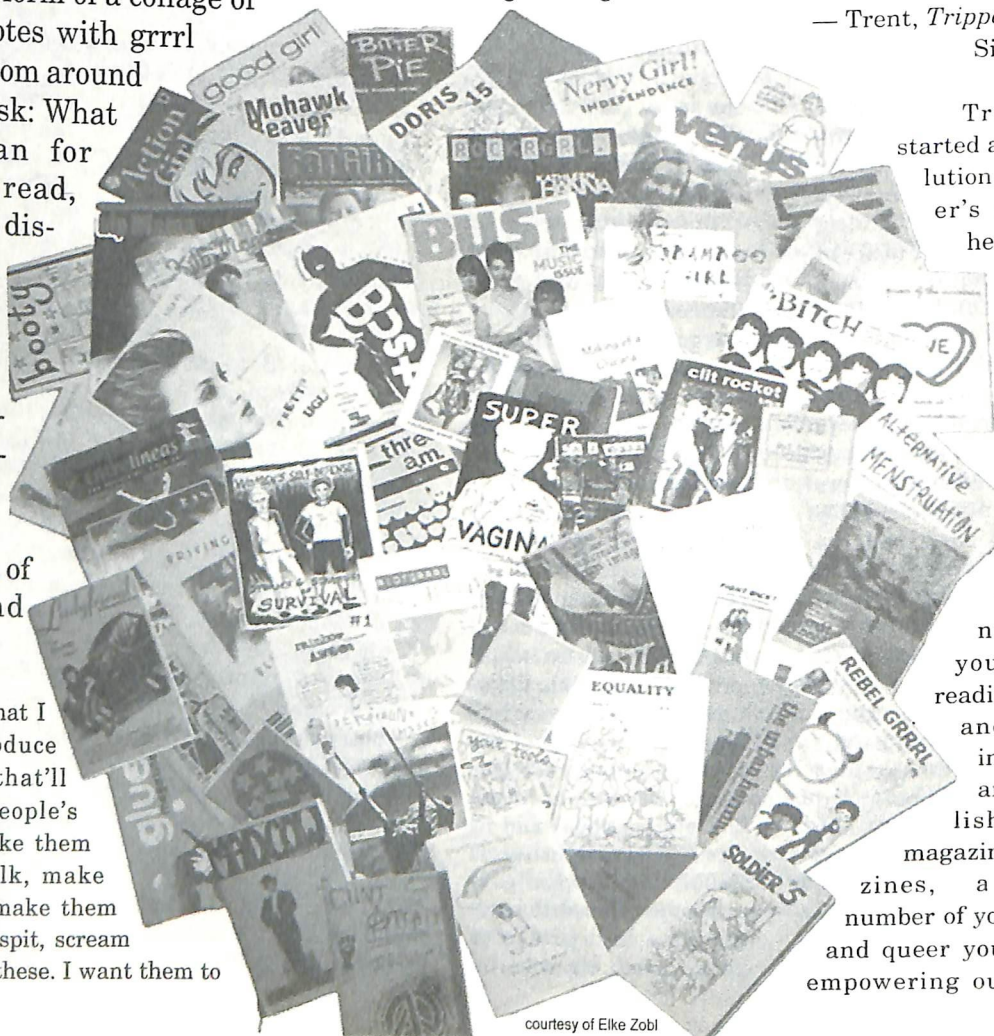
As a creative form of resistance, zines reflect the unfiltered personal voices of young women and queer youth fighting against the societal and patriarchal corset. In zines, they challenge the conventional meanings and expectations of femininity. In the form of a collage of interview quotes with grrrl zine editors from around the world, I ask: What does it mean for zinesters to read, produce and distribute zines, and how do we build a creative resistant feminist community through the creation and exchange of zines around the globe?

I've decided that I want to produce something that'll change people's mindsets, make them think and talk, make them angry, make them stand up and spit, scream and stomp on these. I want them to

fucking feel for something. People are getting more and more jaded and bored as the days go by and they cannot seem to emote anything in their senseless and aimlessness. I want to stop that. I know I can't single-handedly start a revolution and overthrow the government or anything like that. All I wanted was to start a tiny little revolution in all my reader's minds and hearts that I hope'll lead to bigger changes.

— Trent, *Trippers Zine*, Singapore

Trent indeed started a small revolution in her reader's minds and hearts. In fact, this even became global! With her lesbian punk rock zine *Trippers*, Trent joined the worldwide network of young women reading, creating and exchanging self-made and self-published little magazines. In these zines, a growing number of young women and queer youth find an empowering outlet to ex-



courtesy of Elke Zobl

press their experiences, thoughts, and anger that accompany the process of growing up in a patriarchal and homophobic society. In addressing issues such as rape, racism, and eating disorders, zine editors point at the very failures of society and create a rebellious alternative. In this spirit, Argentinian *Pink Punks* editor Lil calls for a grrrl revolution: "Girls, support our Riotgrrrls Revolution! Believe in yourself and always do what you feel. Let's fight against sexism! racism! and anything that stops our Revolution!"

I became actively involved into the zine network during my own zine publishing activity of *female sequences: frauenlesbenkulturHEFTig* (1999), an alternative magazine focusing on art, music and literature by and for Austrian women/lesbians, and through creating the online archive *Grrrl Zine Network* (since 2001). Since no central resource platform for grrrl zines existed, I decided to provide a comprehensive (but never complete!) listing of worldwide, multi-lingual, feminist-oriented zines, distros, and DIY (do-it-yourself) projects at *Grrrl Zine Network* (<http://grrrlzines.net>). It now documents around 600 online and print zines and eighty zine distros in 12 languages from 33

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countries. In contrast to the general impression that zines are almost exclusively produced in Anglo-America, this archive proves that the network has grown globally. The goal of this site is to facilitate the dialog, creation and growth of an international grrrl zine network, and to encourage others to actively participate in shaping their own media environment.

This article is a bricolage of quotes from interviews I conducted with almost forty grrrl zine editors from Argentina, Austria, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Germany, Holland, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden and the USA featured at *Grrrl Zine Network*.¹ Among others, I asked the following questions:

- What does zine making and distributing mean to you?
- How does the grrrl zine community in your country look like?
- Do you think zines can effect meaningful social and political change?

Grrrl Zines and Distros

Believe it or not, I was inspired to pick up [a] guitar and form my own punk band after reading a riot grrrl zine. My parents told me girls should not play rock music, they told me to get piano lesson instead and I was like "What the fuck?"

— Carol, *Grrrl: Rebel*, Malaysia

With their focus on girls' and women's experiences and unapologetically feminist viewpoint, they are often referred to as "grrrl zines." In zines such as *Bendita: Latin women's initiative against violence towards women* (Brazil), *Catch That Beat!* (Japan), *Clit Rocket* (Italy), *Equality* (Brazil), *FIGHT BACK! A Guide to Feminist Self Defense!* (Sweden), *Framing Historical Theft* (Singapore), *Grrrl: Rebel* (Malaysia), *Hot Pantz: Do It Yourself Gynecology* (Canada), *Pretty*

RIOTGRRRL
ISSUE #1 **EUROPE**

Catch that Beat!

Volume 10
2000

Amy Linton
Bangs
Dennis Driscoll
Ginger Patch Holiday
The Lucksm. This
Mr. Lady Recordings
The Ninjas
Slumberland Records

Girls Rule
Columns
Music and Time

The Zine
That Would Be
Queen

big boots

50¢

words
and
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from
the
front
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EQUALITY

Ano 1

4

VENUS

LE TIGRE

DIS: AMY BAK, ESO, THE NEED, SOLEN
MYSTIC, JENNY TOOMER, KELLY WOGAN
PLUS: SUPER DEPTH COVERAGE OF LADYPUT

DRIVING

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ARE WE
NOT PUNK
ENOUGH?

Who's being
exploited?

sofukuYa
Hello CUca
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GIZPOUDAU
& MORE...

grrrl: #3

POUCH
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FRAMING HISTORICAL THEFT
NUMBER TWO

courtesy of Riot Grrrl Europe, Catch That Beat!, Equality, Adjective Stories, big boots, Venus Zine, Driving Blind, Grrrl:Reba and Framing Historical Theft.

Ugly (Australia), *Race Riot* (USA), *Silent Screams* (South Africa), and *There are not enough hours in the world for all the bitching I have to do* (Singapore), grrrls around the world are discussing issues such as sexuality, violence against women, politics, culture, music, feminism, parenting, ethnicity and the media. Grrrl zines lay open and document the first-hand experiences, thoughts and concerns of young women and queer youth today. Sadly, these concerns remain the “old” concerns: fear and experiences of sexism, rape, incest, violence, homophobia, racism, machismo, human rights abuses, and religious pressure. For Carol, co-editor of the Malaysian *Grrrl: Rebel*, one of the central topics in their zine is feminism. The editors use their zine to disseminate information among women: “[W]e take a great deal in focusing on pressing issues that women have to deal with; for examples rape, incest, sexism, sexual harassment and the list goes on. I think these issues are too big to be ignored. Also, we try as much as possible to include the necessary precautions that women or anyone ought to learn in order to deal with the problems.”

Distribution providers—in short distros—such as *Pander Zine Distro* (US), *Moon Rocket Distribution* (New Zealand), *Smitten Kitten* (Australia), *(her) riot distro* (Sweden) and *Livinghood Distro* (Hong Kong) play an important role in the spread of zines. These grrrls put an enormous amount of time, money and effort into running their not-for-profit distros. But why do they go through all the effort of creating and distributing zines? Says Italian *Clit Rocket* editor Veruska: “I want my voice across the wires and be heard. And I definitely want [to] put a [brake to] the racist-patriarchal-homophobic rules which regulate our cultures and lives cuz that suffocates me!”

Trent cannot imagine her future without zines: “Making zines started out as a hobby and then it turned into an essential. It’s like an outlet for me to vent my frustrations, it’s like writing a diary but this time, people are allowed to look what’s inside. It’s very progressive and a very transitional and transcendent experience.” Zine editors deeply enjoy the process of zine making and find like-minded people around the world. Argentinian Lil thinks: “It’s a pleasure, it’s getting to know people from all over the world and

Opposite page: Grrrl Zines from all over the world: *Riot Grrrl Europe* (Europe/Holland), *Catch That Beat!* (Japan), *Equality* (Brazil), *Adjective Stories* (Australia), *big boots* (Canada), *Venus Zine* (US), *Driving Blind* (US), *Grrrl:Rebel* (Malaysia) and *Framing Historical Theft* (Singapore).

from my own country, it’s to share ideas and opinions, it’s to learn and teach, it’s to open my mind and help others to open their minds.”

Above all, zines are a means of communication and expression. *Grrrl: Rebel* Elise (Malaysia) finds zines “the perfect medium for me to express my thoughts, feelings and ideas, and I’d really want people to listen and know what I have to say and suffice to say, zines make it possible.” Zines indeed play a central role in the empowerment of girls, young women and grrrl-identified folks today:

Zine making to me means creating our own channel to express just about everything we wanna say and were never given a chance [to]. It’s so empowering. Especially coz in a lot of occasions it gives a voice to marginalized groups whose voices (and lives) have never been considered by mainstream society in general. Zine making is a way to exist, really.

— Isabella, *Bendita*, Brazil

A Global and Feminist Network

Although most zines are produced in the U.S., the online archive *Grrrl Zine Network* illustrates that many young women around the world are culturally productive and actively participate in the feminist and transliberation movement. In the spirit of DIY, many grrrl zinesters consciously do, live, and integrate feminism in their daily lives and explore this in their zines:

When I started the first incarnation of *Pretty Ugly* (*Kill the Real Grrls*) I hoped to refocus people’s attention to feminism as a valid and essential movement, the zine was also a great medium to explore feminist issues and concerns on a personal level. As the zine transformed into the *Pretty Ugly* project, a major goal of ours became to inspire young people, especially women, to write and perhaps make their own zine.

— Kelly, *Pretty Ugly*, Australia

But what does feminism mean to young, culturally productive women today? “It means that I too, as a woman, have the right to choose whatever I want to do with my life, whatever I want to wear, say, see, hear. I have the right to choose whatever I want to be without the restrictions based on gender, race and background,” says Trent. Of course not all young women creating zines identify with feminism, but many zinesters such as Michelle see themselves as part of third-wave feminism:

Feminism to me is part of a broader outlook that might be called humanism. Perhaps the idea of the feminist movement progressing in 'waves' is most appropriate when we think about the new battles being fought by feminists to counteract inequity globally. By dint of my age and my political ideals I identify as a third-wave feminist. What this means to me is that I recognise the new challenges ahead for feminism and for activists in general, and I am excited about using my life joyously in order to help us get where we all need to be.

— Michelle, *A Show of Hands*, Australia

Take Back the Media and Start a Revolution!

Zine making means people who take their own space to spread self-expression and build new bonds of communication. Reading zines means: get inspired, educated, motivated... I love the sensation across my stomach when I sit to write a zine and I love to feel impatient making it and to know there are people from different parts of the world waiting to read my zine. I love to get in touch with new people, share information, stories, stuff, ideas and interview bands and artists I admire so much! The most radical aspect is the great underground artistic, political, literature, musical revolution we are building.

— Veruska, *Clit Rocket*, Italy

Zines provide an alternative to the capitalist mainstream media. Zines are, as *Pink Punkie Lil* said, a "good and fun way to get information without all the bullshit that TV or radio give." As creative cultural producers, grrrl zinesters take an active role in shaping their media environment and start the revolution. Zines are true vehicles for social change:

Alternative and independent media is VITAL to any social change and movement. Grrrl zines are especially important because we live in a world where male voices reign supreme and strong, independent, feminist women's voices are few and far between. They are out there, but we don't often get to hear them...unless you pick up a zine to read!

— Kelly, *Pretty Ugly*, Australia

So, grab pen and paper and Do It Yourself! Olivia Pepper, editrix of *Persephone is Pissed*, United States reminds us that "[e]very girl out there should take some photos or write some poems or rants or essays or short stories and start her own true, passionate, heartfelt zine." ↷

¹ The interviews can be accessed at: <<http://grrrlzines.net/interviews/interviews.htm>>. All the quotes in this article are taken from this source.

For grrrl zine listings links and interviews, visit Elke Zobl's *Grrrl Zine Network: A resource site for grrrl, lady, queer and transfolk zines, distros and DIY projects from around the world* at <<http://grrrlzines.net>>, or e-mail her at <elke@grrrlzines.net>.

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courtesy of Elke Zobl



In this community of politically progressive and activist DIY grrrl zine editors of complex and plural identities and backgrounds, many aim at building a supportive proactive space for young women. "In general it's about creating space for women and making our different perspectives visible," says *Emancypunx* editor Yen from Warsaw, Poland. Yayoi, creator of the music zine *Catch That Beat!* (Japan), hopes to "create a space where we talk [about] our beliefs, desires, and emotions [since we] don't have a scene for girls who love indie pop/rock/punk in Japan." Carol of *Grrrl: Rebel* finds that "[i]n Malaysia generally, underground fanzines are our main ways of networking. We make friends via writing to each other, reading and supporting each other's zine." Zines indeed provide a platform for feminist dialog, community building and networking.