

## Feminist Zines: (Pre)Occupations of Gender, Politics, and D.I.Y. in a Digital Age

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### Abstract

This article examines the potential of recent feminist zines as frameworks of grassroots D.I.Y. and direct democracy in physical and digital communities. While the height of zine creations as works on paper may be traced to the 1990s, this form of feminist counterculture has evolved and persisted in cyberspace, predating, accompanying, and arguably outlasting the physical reality of protests, revolutions, and political expressions such as the Occupy Movement(s). Contemporary zines contain not only email addresses alongside 'snail mail' addresses, but also links to digital sites accompanying real-world resources. Zinesters today utilize the handmade craftsmanship and hand drawn and written techniques of zines in combination with the grassroots connectivity enabled by digital networks relating to zines. These physical and digital communities form interesting protest spaces. This paper explores the persistence and potential of zines as various expressions of personal and political feminist identities via maker culture and of explorations of the dimensionality of the screen and the page. The educational contexts considered in this paper include university zine collections, zine-making in K-12 teaching, as well as zine communities outside of schools and academia.

## Introduction: Occupying Zines and Zine Preoccupations

Zine historian Bleyer (2004) defines zines as “the intersection of art, protest, confession, and theory” (p. 49). In his survey of zines, Duncombe (1997) categorizes them as “noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves” (p. 6). Zines are often characterized by hand bound pages, scrawled and personalized handwriting, and generally intimate qualities of handmade books, along with personal and political content. Zinesters (who make zines) in this subcultural genre create an array of materials including but not limited to personal chapbooks, diaries, commentaries, editorials, rants, news, and recipe collections. Referencing the greater political scenes of gender, sexuality, and reproductive rights, zines also document the journal/diary-like realms of personal testimonials and individual experiences through collage and drawings. The zine framework occupies the space between objects that are manufactured and things that are handcrafted and one-of-a-kind (often abbreviated online as: Ooak). Zines may be compellingly rugged, jagged, and sticky, yet they can also be very digital and machinized in their font, formatting, and Xeroxed qualities. Zines often model and question a balance of handmade and handcrafted with mass-produced and digitized. Zines are produced by a diverse array of individual makers, whether students creating zines inside or out of school settings, hobbyists working on zines recreationally, or artists approaching self-publishing and book arts such as zines as the focus of their profession.

In this article I investigate relationships between zines in print and in digital formats, both embodying artistic, literary, and pedagogical practices of feminist inquiry, political protest, and personal expression. Art education researcher Klein (2010) observes that for art educators, the zine framework of images and text cultivates “storytelling, self-expression, teacher identity construction, and collaboration” (p. 42). Tavin (2002) advocates collaborative and countercultural explorations via student-produced zines. Through an analysis of the persistence of zines in university collections, K-12 classrooms, and D.I.Y/maker communities online and in the physical world, I will examine craft/craftivist cultures of feminist zines and their creators, particularly pertaining to issues of gender, the Occupy Wall Street Movement, and related, recent politics. In contextualizing zines and their communities, I will also address related examples from my own teaching and activist experiences.

## Zine Histories: Foremothers of Zine Traditions

Although zines can be seen as a relatively new and youthful framework for countercultural art, their histories may also be usefully linked with long-standing traditions of self-publishing among artists and artistic communities. Friedman (1997) observed, “it was artists and writers who took up the call of self-publishing in the early part of the twentieth century” (p. 4). She also points out the importance of (zine-like) Dadaist manifestos, surrealist journals, anarchic broadsheets, and miniature magazines. In addition, researchers like Congdon and Blandy (2003) have linked zines with political pamphlets dating back to the self-published materials about the Vietnam War or even Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* (1776). Zines may be seen as an extension of genres like artist sketchbooks, chapbooks, surrealist games, and manifestos of art history, highlighting young women’s contributions in particular (e.g. Women’s Studio Workshop (<http://wsworkshop.org/>), the National Museum of Women in the Arts (<http://www.nmwa.org/>), the Dinner Party Curriculum Project (<http://judychicago.arted.psu.edu/archived/dpcp/minx.php>), *femmage*

([http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist\\_art\\_base/gallery/miriam\\_schapiro.php](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/miriam_schapiro.php)), riot grrrl manifesto ([http://onewarart.org/riot\\_grrrl\\_manifesto.htm](http://onewarart.org/riot_grrrl_manifesto.htm))).

Part of the richness of zines that is of interest in teaching is located not only in their historical links to other artists' books, but also in histories and traditions of feminism, activism, and open publishing. As an example, I have invited students in a course on women and the imagery of Western civilization to consider historic female figures through various forms of documentation, comparing and contrasting voices, histories, and artistic formats. Countering the 'Great Women' approach to Women's Studies (Chernock, 2013), zines often give voice to particular lesser known female activists and artists such as Queen Latifah, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Sandra Orgel (<http://www.niu.edu/wstudies/news/files/zine3001.pdf>), and those addressed in later sections of this article. With reference to women artists and their contributions to self-publishing, we might also consider how writer Anais Nin's printing press and diaries could be viewed within a continuum of handmade, self-published works, alongside zines. Or we might ask students to examine activist zine writings in dialogue with Valerie Solanas' SCUM manifesto (<http://www.womynkind.org/scum.htm>). Zines about sexuality and PSAs (Public Service Announcements) can also be productively compared with Margaret Sanger's health pamphlets (<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=31790>) and/or Hildegard von Bingen's little-known writings about the female orgasm (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/med/hildegarde.asp>). Zines, like other forms of marginalized or non-mainstream writing, can introduce students to neglected issues or unexplored aspects of mainstream topics. Teachers may also note and share the etymological kinship of the word 'zinester' with other feminized (and sometimes feminist) terms for individualistic women like the term 'spinster.' Instead of being used as a derogatory term or insult, this spinster/zinester role can be reclaimed as productive and hopeful in conceptualizing zines and their makers' places in art and history. As Henke (2003) evocatively observes,

The spinster is there, always, as society's well-kept secret resource—a woman whose life is devoted to the spinning of cloth or the spinning of tales . . . often alone and sometimes defenseless, she continues to spin wheels and words, webs and visions, fantasies and frustrations—all collected in the marginal spaces (p. 23).

I have observed similarly productive solitary space afforded by zines, in which makers are located as observers, storytellers, reporters, artists, and individuals who perhaps operate on the margins, but are sorely needed in those margins. The importance of zine writing as an historically-relevant artistic form lends it credibility in the classroom.

### **Creating Zines Identities on the Page, Sharing Selves on Screens**

Moving forward in zine history, major shifts of the digital age impacted artistic production by generating many additional platforms for publication/exhibition and personal expression, including digital zine communities at <http://wemakezines.ning.com>, online zine reference sources from <http://zinewiki.com>, and online zine stores of [http://www.etsy.com/search/handmade/books\\_and\\_zines](http://www.etsy.com/search/handmade/books_and_zines). As a researcher of zines, I have been particularly struck by zinesters who continue to work on paper and by hand to create, then use digital networks to share, distribute, and archive images of their hand-made zines. Zine researcher Piepmeier (2009) has observed that despite similarities between zines and blogs, zine creators focus on physical materials and "identify zines as a paper medium"

(p. 63). Many zinesters share their work both digitally and by hand, depending upon the audience. For example, within the Occupy Movement, paper zines were particularly instrumental in quickly and locally disseminating information beyond and before web content and traditional news. During visits to Zuccotti Park with other artists and educators in the Fall of 2011, I often noticed hand-made booklets of protest songs, announcements, and resources passed out to those on site. PSAs can often function with a certain immediacy to inspire and inform when created on paper and passed directly to readers.

Meanwhile in more personal writing, the diary component of zines combined with the public sharing enabled by digital media makes for a unique and ambivalent format exploring the boundaries between personal/private and digital/public. Emily Ashley, the author of *Emily's Heart #56* (2004), captures the tensions and transitions from personal writing to public sharing:

For years, my diaries were my best friends. They knew all my secrets, and they never let me down—could not have survived without them. Still, there was a big part of me that wanted to share myself with other people. I was sick of being silent. But I was afraid of rejection, and I was afraid of criticism. As I grew older, my fears began to subside. I opened up more. And in doing so, I made some great friends . . . with this zine, I have my same old fears and instincts: rejection, criticism, and the urge to run-and-hide. But I am going to face them, and hope for the best. Besides I have always been more bold in print. (n.p.)

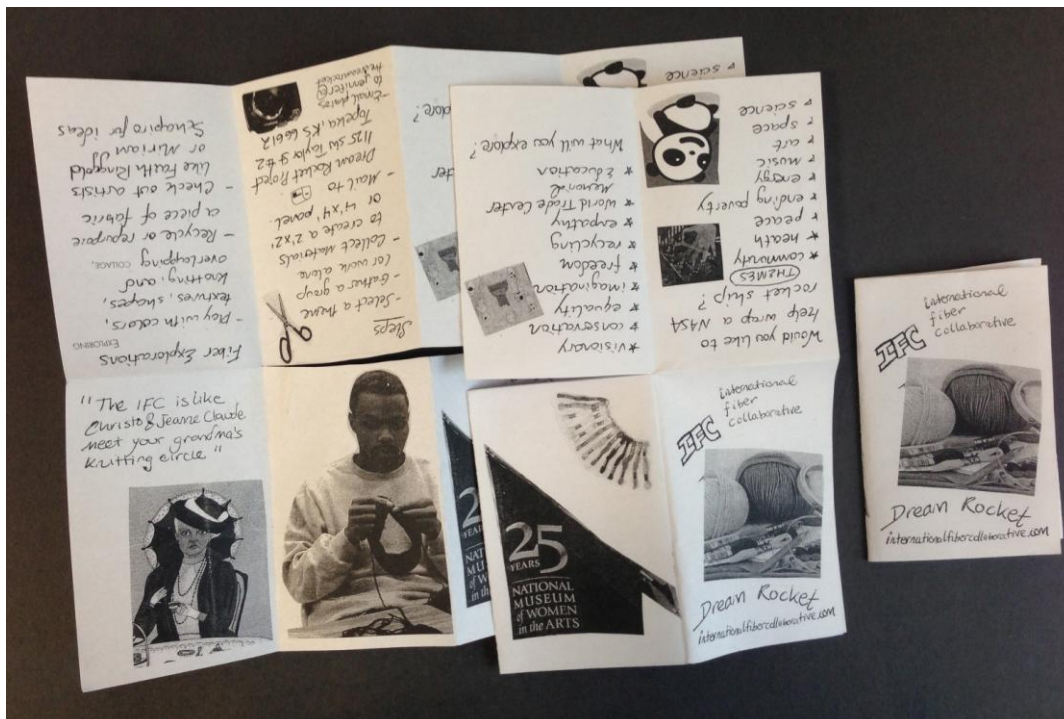


Figure 1. Collaborative zine exercise. Pages from graduate art education course taught by the author.

Zinester and zine collector Friedman (1997) has classified this boldness in zines as “unlike anything else in the mainstream: more opinionated than newspaper editorials, more

personal than magazine articles, more topical than books" (p. 1). Book artist Drucker (2011) adds that publicly shared personal writing is a special kind of genre: "women who make books out of the materials of their lives and imaginations establish a balance that gives voice to their own issues on their own terms" (p. 14). In creating zine collections with my own students, I particularly wanted to impart that a key element of the zine genre lies in striking a structural and philosophical balance between the personal and political. Locating authentic subjects that are both dear to the creator and useful to the audience is an important part of the creative process with zines that is transferrable to making other public, guerrilla, and activist art (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). In the classroom, it can be productive to interrogate artistic identities in practice through zines and similarly anonymous public art, just as the Guerrilla Girls (<http://www.guerrillagirls.com/>), keri smith (<http://www.kerismith.com/popular-posts/how-to-be-a-guerrilla-artist-2/>), or Banksy (<http://www.banksy.co.uk/>) have done in public artworks. Models such as the Guerrilla Girls' publications (e.g. *Bitches, Bimbos, and Ballbreakers: The Guerrilla Girls Guide to Illustrated Stereotypes*, 2003) serve as anonymous art and writing with hand-drawn and personalized annotations to art history, satirical comics about artists, and an array of critical collages. One might even view the Guerrilla Girls as zinesters.

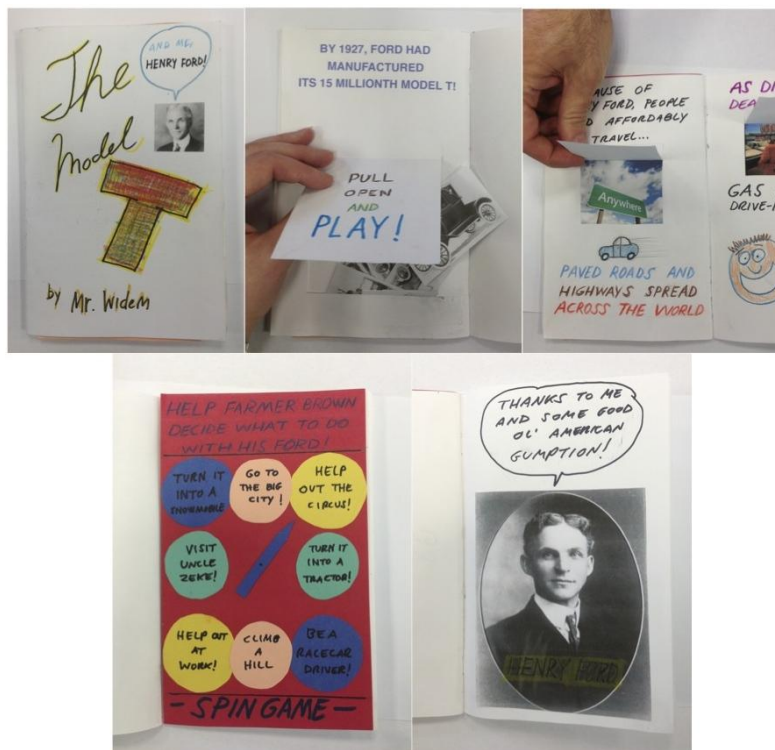


Figure 2. Zine example for K-12 students by art educator Curtis Widem.

Meanwhile, the zine itself can take on a separateness from the zinester that is particularly interesting and productive. While zines focus upon materiality and political messages openly, they may often retreat from declarations of authorship and identity disclosure in various ways, much like the feminist theorist bell hooks, whose pseudonym honors female relatives by incorporating parts of their names and uses lowercase letters to de-emphasize individual naming itself (<http://www.berea.edu/appalachian-center/appalachian-center-home-2/faculty-and-staff/bell-hooks/>). We may note that zines are often associated with

authorial contact information including only pseudonyms, defunct websites, or fleeting college email addresses. Some zines only list a physical address at a college as contact information, suggesting an authorial and artistic choice to focus upon a particular and often transitional moment in time, instead of the identity of the artist, one's presence in cyberspace, or any lasting artistic mark on the world. I believe zines distinctly speak to tensions and dualities surrounding female authorship and artistic presence. Perhaps redefining Virginia Woolf's (1929) famed assertion that "Anon . . . was often a woman" (p. 51), these zinesters are working within a framework of their own anonymity to highlight the voices, names, and visions of other women from contemporary life and art history. These considerations are particularly relevant aspects of zines as art forms that complexly document gender within specific moments and lives. I've even invited art education students to take on pseudonyms and alter ego personalities for art and authorship in this way, allowing them to act as guerrilla artists through zines and other guerrilla art. My sense is that writing and making anonymously can become a strong declaration of oneself and one's work purely as an artist and a feminist (rather than a named student, teacher, daughter, wife, or mother).

### Zine Spaces: Asserting Adolescent Angst

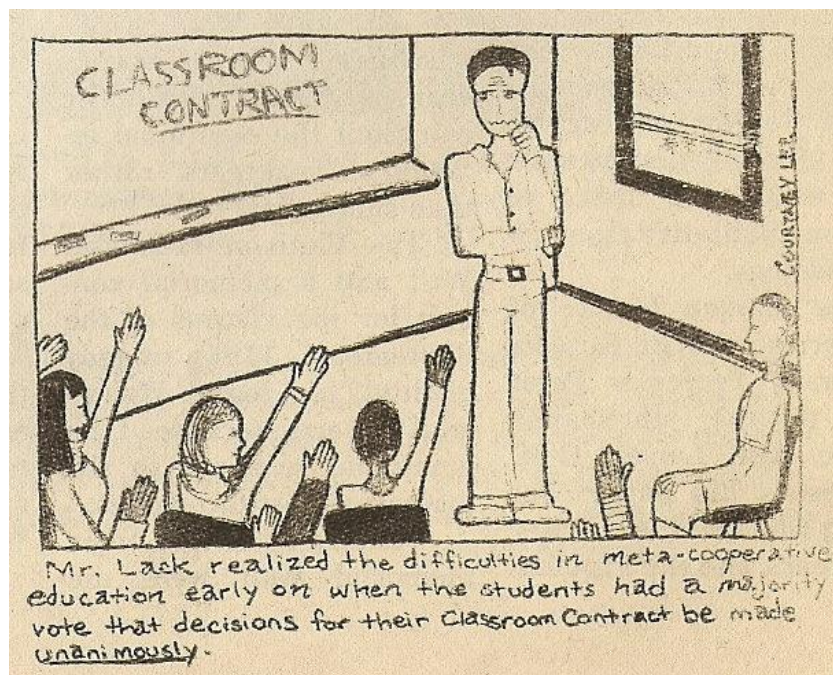


Figure 3. Comic strip from art teacher zine by the author.

Producing anonymous zines can engender valuable personal and political creative space. As a teenager, I created zines because I wanted to generate something between a newspaper and a personal journal. My passion for art and teaching was ignited during high school by the dismissal of an art teacher who seemed to be one of the few adults that understood the predicaments of adolescence and addressed them through art projects and discussions. I began a series of anonymous pamphlets and comic books celebrating his unique, brave, compassionate teaching and lamenting public school personnel practices (see Figure 3) inviting other students to join me in protest via letters and petitions to save his position. Working with my friends (and at times my sisters), I was also using zines to respond to and

revise restrictive images and ideas about teenage life from *Seventeen* magazine and other media readily available to teens. Writing about adolescence and socially-defined gender expectations, Douglas (2010) has similarly observed that American teens,

are expected to be restless, rebellious, defiant of adult society . . . [but also] to conform to pre-existing (mostly male) standards of beauty and behavior, to comply, to obey . . . How is that for an impossible place to stand? (p. 53)

Zines can be a self-made space of inquiry, allowing alternatives to narrow concepts of female consumption, teenage angst, and commercially condoned parodies of creativity and resistance for young women. Angela Francis (2002) writes of the usefulness of the zine community in *her side of the sidewalk #1*: "if we start telling these stories, maybe this space can be filled with something else. It has been my experience that the more we talk and the more honest we can be, the less threatening we become to each other" (n.p.). Locating oneself and representing oneself are essential human impulses, but it is particularly crucial to connect and to be heard during the struggles of transitory teenage life.

As another example of alternative models of young adulthood posed by zines that are increasingly relevant in revealing sexism in society, *girl swirl fanzine #3* (2000) includes empowering calls to the reader: "Protect Yourself! Do not be another victim. Fuck shit up" (n.p.). *Girl swirl fanzine #3* also counters the restrictive 'conventional wisdom' of avoiding unwanted sexual advances by shunning provocative clothing. Instead, it gives young women fashion tips: to wear sunglasses to avoid eye contact with a predator, to choose shoes that

allow for running or slipping off easily, and to forego the feminine modesty of covering oneself because it might slow one down in a fight. Rather than encouraging young women to be ashamed of their bodies, this zine offers alternative suggestions to arm and empower readers.

Though zines are historically the products and (pre)occupations of adolescents (Duncombe, 1997), there are many zines in circulation that are written by and about former teen zinesters who matured into adults, still working to carve out alternative spaces and advice. Many zinesters continue to interrogate gendered experiences as they grow up. For instance, *Leeking Ink* (Breier, 1995) is a Baltimore zine that evokes and addresses topics ranging from adult pregnancy, bisexuality, menstruation, work, travel, and many other aspects of post-teen life (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Cover of *Leeking Ink* zine.

## Zine Space: Adult Archivists

Part of the contributions of adult zinesters to the zine scene is the organization of networks and archives of zines. Like myself, several adult zinesters and former zinesters aim to contribute to the circulation and study of zines as part of their careers, hobbies, or side projects. In addition to zine historians and zine researchers, zinesters themselves (often including librarians and others affiliated with universities and communities) have created directories and libraries of zines. One of the major zine libraries is Barnard College's growing zine collection, part of the Columbia University library system.

Perhaps the most prominent current resource addressing the vast range of feminist zines is digital: *The Global Grrrl Zine Network*, a web directory of zines (much like a *distro*, or zine distribution service). Importantly, this digital resource owes a great deal to print media. In fact, the directory echoes both *Riot Girl Newsletter* and *Action Girl Newsletter* of the 1990s, and the website features self-made and published zines spanning categories of grrl, lady, queer, trans, and folk zine cultures. *The Global Grrrl Zine Network* also subtly reconfigures language and status online to suit its purposes, with references to *webmistresses* of online zines and distros (instead of the conventional webmasters). In digital craft communities, the assertion of female identity remains central, and manifests within declarations of digital space and punk affiliation such as "riot grrrl" ([http://onewarart.org/riot\\_grrrl\\_manifesto.htm](http://onewarart.org/riot_grrrl_manifesto.htm)), "craftgrrrl" (<http://craftgrrrl.livejournal.com/>), or "grrrl zine" (<http://www.grrrlzines.net/>).

In the classroom, such distinctions of identification in zines underscore the potential of digital space to dually address gender and artistic identities. I have often invited college students within online classes to question representation and identification in terms of virtual and physical realities, where marginality is reconfigured. For example, a choice as simple as disclosing one's gender, age, or culture is highlighted as optional in the digital realms of discussion. Zines are similarly unique because university professors can write as artists or activists, students might act as educators, and the choice to disclose identity and affiliation remains elective. For women zinesters who choose to disclose age, gender, or race, each identification can be an activist assertion of feminism. Johnson (2003) examines such feminist assertions of self and space in writing provocatively, suggesting "women have to figure out how to take up the space around us, to take it up like a craft" (p. 103). Sarah Jean Kennedy (199x?) reprinted a similar philosophy or manifesto in her *Ms. America zine # 2* from a zine entitled *Slingshot*:

### WHY WE NEED A WOMAN'S ONLY SPACE

Because in this boring boy's club of a world you would never let us speak.

Because we refuse to ask permission to speak.

Because on the few occasions when you do listen, our rage is usually met with patronizing condescension.

Because we are fed up with having our ideas dismissed, and women understand the value of other women's ideas.



Because in this manmade prison, if we do speak up we are labeled as freaks and man haters.

Because you, with all your inherited ignorance push us to the edge. And when we strike, wild eyed with centuries of anger, you call us 'hysterical', 'typical emotional women'.

If you were a woman, knowing this, wouldn't you desire a woman's only space to speak your mind? (n.p.)

*Slingshot* zinesters (see Figure 5) have also created a California-based maker/D.I.Y. spot to actualize this sort of creative space (<http://slingshot.tao.ca/issue.html?0096030>). Other zine creators have often created and collaborated within craft-inspired formats for makers. Jen Cooney's describes her *Zine Circle #1* zine as a sort of 'quilting circle' (n.p.) in that its contributors passed around the pages to add on to its content. So too, Occupy Wall Street demonstrations and community organizing were collaborative and operated through community call and response. The Occupy movements have spurred diverse, if somewhat short-lived political zines such as *Occupy The Zine* on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/occupythezine>), and it is notable that many zines were included in the 2011 Occupy Wall Street makeshift library. This library was a public, community-based, collaborative collection of self-published works and donated books that evolved into additional Occupy library branches I observed at the 2012 New York Maker Faire in Queens.

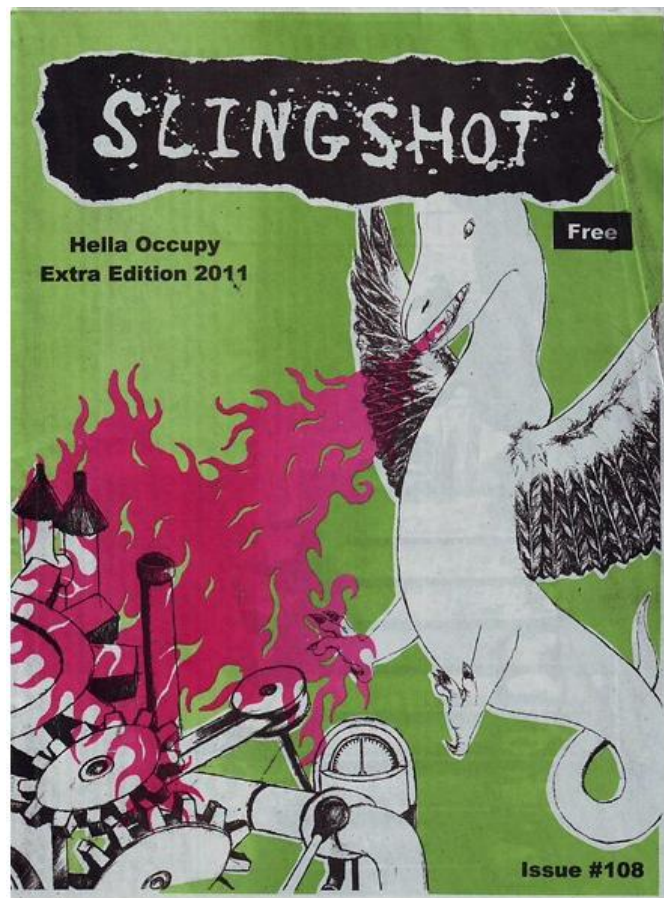


Figure 5. From *Slingshot* zine.

Recent zines pertaining to the Occupy movement similarly emphasize gender and safe space in protest sites. For example, *Workin' on it! We activate! We agitate! Womyn of color, Occupy Wall Street & beyond! #1* (2012) addresses women of color and issues of sexual harassment and even assault within the Occupy protests. As a positive reaction in response to these serious difficulties, the zine also offers suggestions promoting self-care for women and helping teach others about racial and gender oppression.

### **Contextualizing Zine Readers: Collectors, Makers, and Craftivists**

Aside from protests, popular events in physical space centered on zines range from festivals to symposia and conferences that build community around creative activity, bartering of crafts and zines, and community action (e.g., <http://brooklynzinefest.com/>; <http://www.portlandzinesymposium.org/>). Bleyer (2004) has observed that the very ways in which we subscribe to, exchange, and/or collect zines are inherently artistic, noting that the zines she has acquired over time are effectively “artifacts in my own personal museum” (p. 49). As an educator and artist who has worked in both schools and museums I am especially intrigued by the physical elements of creation and collection within my recent readings and interpretations of zines. Paper zines document an assemblage of personal handwriting, traces of the tape the author used in cutting and pasting, and other visible connections of language and visual art between the zine’s creator and the reader. Extending this creative connection, the Occupy Wall Street library and art galleries were makeshift spaces meant for visitors to view, read, swap, and contribute artifacts as an engaged community. Craft researcher Metcalf (2007) has observed this “crucial opposition stance [in that] the hand-made object is widely understood as the antithesis of mass-produced anonymity” (p. 21). In this way, zines are distinctly personal artifacts that stand out among a range of manufactured objects that occupy the physical space of our lives.

Notably, zines on the whole are not as carefully nor prescriptively created and collected as many handmade artists’ books, and this is an important aesthetic distinction that relates to their immediacy and a certain quality of freshness. As the Radical Art Girls stated in the 2001, Issue 1 zine of the same title, “art is not based in a system of competition and comparison. Some of the most stunning artwork, layout and writing I have experienced has been in zines that were copied on cheap photocopy machines and haphazardly stapled together” (n. p.). Zines take on a certain accidental and spontaneous quality, where making is direct, and by virtue of their accessibility as an artform, also rather democratic. Sabrina Margarita Sandata (1995) writes about communal bookmaking in her zine, *Bamboo Girl #1*, “as a hands-on medium with which [everyone] can chronicle their personal narrative, realities, and dreamworlds . . . We're not as concerned with the topic of the book but rather the idea of people making things” (n. p.). I have observed that one of the exciting aspects of creating a zine in the classroom can be located in the personal construction of the zine format. Each student must make individual artistic choices about the inclusion of comics, poetry, rants, collages, and other parts of the zine.

More importantly, making a zine does not require training, initiation, or education as a prerequisite—a zinester is simply a person who creates a zine. A valuing of democracy and artistic accessibility may be liberating as well as problematic in terms of issues of artistic expression and quality. For example, artists and teachers are limited by fonts, formats, and copyright restrictions if we post art on Facebook and other sites. The physical practice of zine-making by hand allows creators to approach authorship, creation, and the page itself as considerations to be revised and reconsidered. Some zines are more well known than others among readers, but the notions of quality at play are an interesting and shifting

combination of subject matter, technical skill, passion, and personality. Genres like zines offer a playful space for experimentation and improvisation around artistic considerations of typography, found art, collage, and visual culture. Zines may be employed complexly as informal sketchbooks, polished hand-made artist books, substitute artist trading cards and exhibition cards, and hybrid formats to serve an array of artistic purposes.

### **(Re)Mixing: Revising Politics of Crafts and Collage Through Zines**

Zines have educational roles as a part of histories and emerging forms of publishing, documenting, and making. They simultaneously look backward and forward into writing and collaging practices. Many zines include renegade re-prints of essays, manifestos, poems, and other works by various authors (with and without permission from the original creators). Notably, j. t. bunnell and irit reinheimer<sup>1</sup> (2003), make the following acknowledgements in the first Issue of their coloring book-style zine on gender: “We would like to thank all the artists who created work that we gracefully appropriated, changed, and used as inspiration for this project. May we all appreciate, make, and share anti-copyright work” (n.p.). In this way, some zines could be seen as an exemplary Creative Commons-friendly<sup>2</sup>-media format, for they seek to appropriate corporate content in collages, but often acknowledge and more creatively borrow works from independent artists. The ways in which we borrow, reference, create, and re-create are important questions art educators can explore through zines. Educators might make classroom connections as obvious as using ‘cut and paste’ that could be reclaimed, experienced, learned, and revised in various ways:

Which images and texts are we allowed to appropriate as men, as women, as people from particular cultures and within various communities?

What constitutes borrowing, and what may be considered theft?

When (if ever) is it acceptable or necessary to break copyright law as a form of art or as activism?

As the above questions suggest, simple choices of crafting a zine become highly personal and political. Collage can be much more than haphazard exercises with scissors and adhesives. *Collagista* (<http://collagista.wordpress.com/>) is an online zine that centrally promotes complexity in collage. There is a certain subversion in flouting the often sleek and clean format of web design by reverting to imperfect arts and crafts sensibilities. Meanwhile, zine websites like [www.smilandactnice.com](http://www.smilandactnice.com) feature web design that appears rather like hand-collaged images, showing the nostalgic aesthetic influence of the handmade upon webpage design. For educators, zines can provide particularly interesting and in-depth provocations around overlapping issues of individual style and expression that can sometimes be overlooked in digital spaces.

A classification of zines not only as collage, but as *found* art and *altered* art is also applicable, for zinesters are creating and/or reconfiguring and revising photographic, material, and/or text-based artifacts of their lives. Notably, protesters from Occupy Wall Street have recently modified their movement to document and address the destruction and homelessness in

<sup>1</sup> These two authors utilize lowercase spelling for their names as bell hooks does.

<sup>2</sup> Creative Commons is a non-profit organization that enables artists to share their creative work, but retain copyright and designate attribution procedures.

Brooklyn post-Superstorm Sandy (<http://occupywallst.org/article/occupy-sandy/>). Zines and Facebook sites around this revised movement invite volunteers and designers alike to repurpose their own belongings and to create works of art around related issues of ecology, recycling, and consumerism (<http://actipedia.org/project/occupy-sandy-relief-effort-puts-occupy-wall-street-activists-spotlight-again-year-after>). Within these collectives, a sense of personalization emerges in the practice of re-defining, anthologizing, and documenting political action that comprise a unique sort of categorization, classification, and collection of art and politics.

### Zine Communities: Collaborating Craftivists

In addition to the roles of collagista and critic, we should also view the zinester as a collaborative collector and cataloguer/archivist, for as author Sheena Allen of *Mister Fujiyama Loves You #2* (1999) notes, “we are all collectors of humorous and completely true stories” (n.p.). Zine readers interact with zines as consumers or collectors, simultaneously participating as collaborative creators of upcoming zines. Royce Carlson (2002), of *Black and Blue* zine, routinely invites readers to take and submit pictures of activist activities in their towns for upcoming issues. In Issue 3, Carlson urges: “IF YOU DOCUMENT SOME SURREAL ACTIVITIES IN YOUR TOWN SEND ME SOME PHOTOS AND I WILL PRINT THEM IN FUTURE ISSUES OF BLACK & BLUE” (n.p.). Such participatory emphasis is particularly evident within the Occupy Movements, where media from protestors served as rich counterpoints to major news outlets. As Breitbart and Noguiera (2004) have argued,

open publishing works best when many people are posting their versions of the same event . . . users can build their own understanding of an event or issue. . . flatten[ing] the hierarchy that exists whenever specialized news producers are separated from their passive audience. (p. 35)

This sort of participatory and documentary content among zines generates community-based artistic practice. Creative participation in zines also can function like communal journalism. Bleyer (2004) notes how many zinesters generate conversation and activism through their zines: “integral to reading zines was the implicit challenge to turn around and write them. Zines made clear that they were not another product to be consumed but were unique contributions to a vast conversation” (p. 48). Sites like the *We Make Zines* ning (<http://wemakezines.ning.com/>) are careful to address the community of readers and writers of zines as an overlapping demographic.

These interactive communities can be utilized as valuable extensions of the classroom for young people. Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004) examined numerous collaborative teen zines and issues of development and education. They found that zinesters’ strengthening of their personal relationships with collaborators was a social and intrinsic motivator in the creative process of zines. Further, the zinesters were able to broaden “personal worlds by exchanging ideas and ‘meeting’ (through cyberspace or snail mail) new people” (p. 431). Within all these interactions, I do not mean to suggest that all zines envision community as an uncomplicated ideal. One zine, *her side of the sidewalk* (2002) carefully articulates anxiety and ambivalence around models of feminist sisterhood and communal making in contrast with her lived life:

women are generally not encouraged to be supportive of one another. In order to understand the implications of this, I feel like we need to go back and look at how we, as well as other groups, have been set up to be pitted against each other historically. . . . How do we undo this training? . . . I struggle with the contradictions in my own relationships with women. They unravel in an astoundingly similar pattern before my eyes. What makes these close friendships so much more fragile than I had thought? We go to these meetings, sit in a circle and talk about our bonds with each other as we cut and sew the patterns of homemade menstrual pads—then we all leave and go home to our boyfriends . . . How do I balance the dynamic of being mostly intimate with boys while wanting to work on and acknowledge my clashes and closeness with girls? (n.p.)

Within this excerpt, there is an acknowledgement of the disconnect between homemade objects, activism, feminism, and everyday life that the author of the zine identifies and discusses. In this way, zines can explore tensions around gender and sexuality (including heteronormative imperatives), feminism, and coalitional dynamics as demonstrated by authentic personal examples.

Furthermore, while zines examine politics, they keep writing and making in mind as connected and connective practices. Zinesters also often follow a traditional convention from old novels, to address the reader directly or dedicate the zine to him or her. For example, *girl swirl fanzine #3* (2000), begins with the following declarations on neon green paper:

this is an information zine for women and girls.

it is a source of knowledge and part of the revolution.

it is for you. it is for your best friend and it is for your little sister (n.p.)

Both a handwritten text and addressing one's readership are traditional conventions, yet these practices are reconceived in zines and zinester cyberculture as friendly, informal, and/or subversive artistic gestures. This convention also highlights the practice of communication and reciprocal exchange inherent in zines between the author and reader, who is addressed in calls for community participation and even gifted with handcrafted items like "cootie catchers," felted objects, and other inclusions within the zine itself. Just as zines reflect the community, they also push forward into the politics of revisions and revolutions.

### **Concluding Reflections: Future Feminisms, Digital Discourse, and Zines**

Some of the tensions and possibilities surrounding zines prove productive avenues of inquiry for feminist teaching about personal and political experiences. These include sometimes opposing and sometimes collaborating forces, such as academic discourse versus discourse outside of academia or anti-academia, adult cultures versus youth cultures, digitized and mass-produced zines versus those that are OOAK, timeless versus timely zines, and personal versus political issues in zines.

In an increasingly digitized era of art education (Hurwitz & Day, 2011), we may well take up zines as physical artifacts and grassroots practices of activism. I believe we must do so within a framework that honors their histories, meanings, and potentialities. Turkle (1995), Director of MIT's Initiative on Community and the Self, has observed that traditionally some people "identified being a woman with all that a computer is not, and computers with all that a woman is not" (p. 56). Craft researcher Katz-Frieberg (2010) has also noted ways in which

strategies that in previous decades were identified with women artists attempting to liberate themselves of the male hegemony have been integrated into contemporary artmaking as . . . a celebration of manual production in a world that has wildly over-computerized itself. (p. 696)

Crafting zines by hand and/or holding them in our hands and reading them can both identify makers with a continuum of creative women in the past, and also function as a subversion of mass production through contemporary manual artistic processes. Sterk and Knoppers (2009) also suggest that we may come to explore questions of gender and feminism "somewhere in between hardware and software, those two reductive senses of how humans live out gender, in a space that honors both individual humans and communal living" (p. xiv). My sense of zines is that they are often immensely personal and yet communally relatable in compelling, gendered ways.

Today's D.I.Y. scene might be viewed as a renaissance of craft itself through maker culture, a celebration of ideals about community, feminism, and social justice, often expressed and catalogued online. Further, many zines offer art educators rare political context, personal expression, and views into local adolescent culture, transcribing oral information into self-published print. One zinester observes in *CROQ #12* (2010), "folk is the new punk" (n. p.). As Bravo notes in his 2005 book on the popularity of D.I.Y. cultures "people are dissatisfied with what our contemporary situation has to offer and [are]. . . searching for practical, vital, and sustainable alternatives . . . yearning for some sort of blueprint for a better world" (p. 1). Along the same lines, Brent (1997) has observed how self-publishing serves as a sort of antidote to the disaffection of zinesters. Zines and zinesters communities provide a living framework for future visions of art education and feminist activism.

I believe that many feminist artists and educators will locate many of their activist cues by reading zines, and they will create new paradigms by generating new zines and zine-inspired manifestos. Perhaps the Radical Art Girls (2001) express this best in the first issue of their zine: "Collective action, education, art and decision making can and will transform society" (n.p.). Zines have changed the way I read, write, and make art with my own students (inspiring, for example, the creation of a zine and altered book library with pre-service teachers at my institution). As Burkhart (2006) has suggested, various handmade books defy definition, but provocatively intersect areas of art, documentation, and literature. In addition, zine-making can bridge gaps between disciplines of art and other areas through little known or uniquely considered connections to history, literature, gender studies, and philosophy. Zinesters are actively participating in and reporting on local politics, analyzing historical and contemporary discourse in reference to their own experiences, and arranging their illustrative drawings and collages by hand. The zine genre demonstrates powerful and accessible means by which art education projects and provocations can sustain and enliven active learning through self-publishing, activism, and D.I.Y. ethics. Further, women's documenting, sharing, exhibiting, and selling their artwork

both online and offline through zines can be viewed as an occupation of the hegemony of gender divisions in art and technology, forming feminist spaces for a counter-culture of women creating, trading, collecting, and purchasing zines.

## Digital Resources

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupy\\_movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupy_movement)

Occupy Movement Wiki

<http://www.occupytogether.org/>

International Occupy Movement

<http://occupywallst.org/>

Unofficial *de facto* resource of Occupy Wall Street

<http://brooklyncollegezines.commons.gc.cuny.edu/2011/10/09/the-occupy-wall-street-library/>

Brooklyn College Zine Site for Occupy Wall Street Library

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zine>

Zine Wiki

<http://www.grrrlzines.net/about.htm>

Global Grrl Zine Network

<http://wemakezines.ning.com/group/feministzinesters>

Zine Group for Makers and Readers that Identify as “Feminist”



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