

THE POWER OF PEN PUBLISHING: INTERNATIONAL GRRRL ZINES AND DISTROS

by Elke Zobl

According to Lil, one of the creators of the Argentine riot grrrl e-zine *PinkPunkies* (<http://pinkpunkies.8m.com>), zine making is “a pleasure, it’s getting to know people from all over the world and 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. It’s a very good and fun way to get information without all the bullshit that TV or radio give.” Lil’s comments, as well as her zine, indicate the very active presence of feminist zinesters worldwide, not just in the vibrant North American zine network. Even though the phenomenon may not be as widespread in other countries, and such publications may not even be called “zines” in other places, the medium has nevertheless evolved in various parts of the world.

This article introduces a number of international feminist print and online zines and “distros” (distribution service providers) outside North America. Please keep in mind that these represent only a small selection from the worldwide wealth of contemporary grrrl zines!

LATIN AMERICA

La Línea (nos. 1–2, 2003–2004)
[in Spanish]

La Línea presents the interdisciplinary, collaborative literary and artistic work of a diverse group of young women, most of whom live and work in the city of Tijuana, Mexico (two live in San Diego, California). Abril Castro, a poet and the member of the group responsible for visual coordination, says that “the name and the idea were given by the place we inhabit: The border (literally ‘The Line’). The border between the first and third world.” Coming

from philosophy, literature, and visual arts, the five members of *La Línea* try to span a bridge by performing in both cities of the border. The project started when the group realized the lack of opportunities for young women in Tijuana in specific and in Mexico overall: “We began this project after seeing the necessity, urgent in our city and in our country, of creating a space in which to promote the work of young women that are somehow involved, in a preliminary and professional level, with art and literature” (Abril). The zine comprises different literary forms as well as photographic works and other visual art forms. Contributions, all written in Spanish, come not only from members of the group but also from all over Mexico. Each of the issues published so far has had a special topic: The first (2003) was dedicated to “Heroínas” (“Heroines”), the second (2004) to issues of identity.

Email: publicacionlalinea@gmail.com. Price per issue: USD \$1.00.

Bendita: Minha boca muda grita em tua orelha surda (nos. 1–4, 2001–2004) [in Portuguese]

Bendita, a Latin American women’s initiative against violence towards women, is based in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Edited by the feminist group Coletivo Artemisia, which formed in October 1999, the zine contains stories by women who have suffered from sexual violence. It was founded to end the silence that prevails around sexual violence, and to make women’s voices heard: “We want to tell our stories so that raped girls/boys can identify with it and also because we wanna break the invisible walls that surround this subject. It’s our big FUCK YOU to a patriarchal society that tells us to shut up when it comes to rape” (Isabella



Gargiulo, former co-publisher). The stories, currently forty-one texts by anonymous authors, are available in Portuguese in printed form as well as online. For Isabella, who also played bass in Dominatrix, Brazil's first all-female, feminist band, zine making has played a significant role: For her it means "creating our own channel to express just about everything we wanna say and were never given a chance. 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." Indeed.

Geisa França (*Bendita Zine*), Caixa Postal 448, São Paulo/SP, Brazil, 01059-970. Email:

bendita@benditazine.com.br, website: **http://**

www.benditazine.com.br. USD \$2.50 for each issue, postage paid.

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Pretty Ugly (nos. 1–4, 2002–2004)

This zine is published by a collective of writers, artists, and zinesters from all over Australia who are "keen to see more Aussie gals turn on to the power of pen pushing!" *Pretty Ugly* provides a forum for young Australian writers, especially women, to share their words and meet other creative souls. The editor of this "100% feminist" print and online zine, self-described "web designer, radio presenter, zinester + sociology geek" Kelly Elizabeth, says about her motivation to establish this zine, "When I started the first incarnation of *Pretty Ugly* [then titled *Kill the Real Grrrls*] I hoped to refocus people's attention to feminism as a valid and essential movement, [and] 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." In this spirit, Issue 3 explores various forms of writing, such as pen pal correspondence, songwriting, and journal and zine writing.

Most issues of *Pretty Ugly* are available online. The excellently designed and updated website provides plenty of links to resources on the topics of art, music, sexuality, spirituality, activism, and feminism, and furthermore offers "community," "zine," "shop," and "write" sections to inspire visitors.

Pretty Ugly, PO Box 469, Croydon, Victoria 3136, Australia. Email: **kelly@pretty-ugly.com**; website: **http://**

www.pretty-ugly.com. USD \$2.60, postage paid (PayPal accepted).

Personality Liberation Front (no. 4, 2003)

Here's another Australian feminist zine dedicated to challenging mainstream society's ideals and gender stereotypes as well as to putting the so-called "liberated" DIY (do-it-yourself) hardcore punk scene under the microscope. *Personality Liberation Front* is produced by Kylie, who explains her motivation: "[B]y zinemaking/creating i want to express myself, explore my beliefs and connect/collaborate with other people. I write a lot about feminism, body image politics, gender and queer issues in the context of how I experience them and how I encounter them in my daily life, which is through conversations, interactions, attitudes."

Kylie has also been involved with other zines: She produced the one-off (only one issue published) *Letter to Kathleen Hanna*, which discusses how riot grrrl and third-wave feminism have been misrepresented by mainstream media and been co-opted into commercialized "girl power" and "girls rock!" t-shirt slogans. With her zine project *ladies liberation handbook*, Kylie wants to communicate directly with



women at events like “Reclaim the Night” and International Women’s Day. When Kylie is not busy traveling the world and publishing all her zines, she runs a mail-order distro and gets involved in many DIY-feminist-punk community projects in Australia and abroad. Phew!

Personality Liberation Front, PO Box 3023, South Brisbane, BC, Queensland 4101, Australia. Email: unigeek@yahoo.com. Issue 4 with compilation CD, AUD \$6.00.

Smitten Kitten Distro (1999–2005)

Smitten Kitten is a DIY feminist mail-order distribution service with a great selection of small press zines and comics. Operating since 1999, Kristy has brought the publications of many zine and comic creators to a wider audience and thus has helped the zine scene in Australia grow. She started this distro because of a “serious lack of fanzine distributors in Australia. I love zines so much as a means of artistic expression, and it makes me so happy to provide this service as a means of getting these amazing creations out there.”

Currently the distro carries about forty zines, mainly from Australia and the United States, but also a few from Canada and Europe. Very reliable! Kristy has also published seven issues of a zine with the name *Smitten Kitten*, as well as a one-off called *Muppet in Training*.

Smitten Kitten Zine Distro, c/o Kristy, PO Box 1219, Camberwell, VIC 3124, Australia. Email: kristy@smittenkitten.net; website: <http://www.smittenkitten.net>. Print catalog: AUD \$2.00, postage paid.

Moon Rocket Distribution (2000–2005)

Moira Clunie has run this distro out of her house in Auckland, New Zealand, since 2000. She also publishes several zines of her own: *Child That Mind* (a personal zine), *Woven* (collaborative, poetry), *Small Print* (collaborative), and *Mittenfist*, “about clothes and what they mean to different people.”

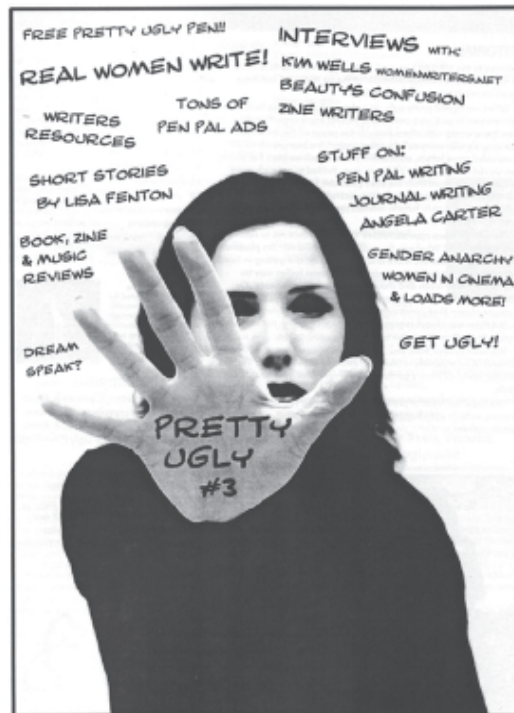
Moon Rocket is a distribution catalogue for self-published zines, comics, small press literature, music, art, and other things made by individuals or small groups of people. Moira created the distro “to support New Zealand-based and international small press & independent DIY artmaking, to encourage people to make their own media, to share some resources that make publishing and disseminating that

media easier, to make small scale, self-made art/media more accessible to people (especially in New Zealand) and more visible, and especially to encourage and be part of a supportive network for projects that I feel enthusiastic and excited about” (quotation from website). Her breathtaking catalog lists more than 100 personal zines, around 60 general zines, more than 40 literary and art zines, more than 100 comics, 7 metazines, and a few books from Australia, Asia, Europe, New Zealand, and the United States, as well as music, buttons, stickers, and patches. Extremely reliable with orders and equipped with an up-to-date website offering extensive worldwide resources, this distro is truly a zinester’s paradise!

Moon Rocket Distribution, P.O. Box 7754, Wellesley Street, Auckland, New Zealand. Email:

moira@moonrocket.co.nz; web-

site: <http://www.moonrocket.co.nz>. *Child That Mind* #3: NZD \$2.00.



ASIA AND THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Jawbreaker (no. 1, 2002) [in English]

Claire and Paolo in Manila, the Philippines, created this zine “when they realized that all other Filipino girl-centered youth glossies...fell short of engaging post-EDSA [the period after the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship when democracy was restored by the People Power movement in 1986] Filipinas in a smart, witty, and most of all fun way” (quotation from website). Appropriating and enriching a teen girl magazine aesthetic with feminist viewpoints, *Jawbreaker* is “both a print and digital space *by* and *for* kick-ass Pinays — and token boy-allies — who have a love/hate relationship with

pop culture, both local and international.” As a website and print zine, *Jawbreaker* envisions an “independent, queer-positive, and proudly feminist” forum. Claire and Paolo also created the distro Dumpling Press in 1999 to make zines more accessible. Currently, the catalog stocks nine zines, mostly from the Manila area and including Claire and Paolo’s own works, such as *Halo-Halo* and *Chopsuey: Stuff from ZineCon ’02 & Beyond*. Claire has been involved in the grrrl zine scene in the Philippines, a subject of many of her writings, for a long time. She is also in charge of a website called **Own!** (<http://www.wfsphil.com/own/>), which aims to encourage intergenerational exchanges between feminists. Let the dialogue begin!

Claire and Paolo, P.O. Box 1126, Makati Central Post Office, 1251 Makati City, Philippines. Email: dumplingpress@hotmail.com; website: <http://www.jawbreaker.ph>. *Jawbreaker*, USD \$3.00, postage paid.

Grrrl:Rebel (nos. 1–4, 1998–2003) [in English]

This riot grrrl/feminist punk zine from Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia, is produced by Carol, Elise, Michelle, and Rizal, a group of friends whose main mission is “to promote underground female acts from all over the world [and] to raise awareness among the girls in the punk/HC [hardcore] scene.” Their zine covers women’s and riot grrrl issues, punk, DIY tips, interviews with all-female bands, zine and concert reviews, and more. Amazingly, I got to know *Grrrl:Rebel* when I was living in California and Carol was writing about the Malaysian underground grrrl scene in the German grrrl zine *It’s Not Just Boy’s Fun!* (www.notjustboysfun.de/). That’s the global grrrl zine network at its best!

Grrrl:Rebel, c/o Rizal, 23 Jalan Bakti, Off Jalan Kamaruddin, 20400 Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia. Email: grrrlrebelzine@excite.com. USD \$4.00 or trade.

MIDDLE EAST

Thaili Distro and *Maya* (zine) (2004–2005) [in English]

Rahel, the first grrrl zinester I have met from the Middle East, operates her distro and her zine out of Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The distro’s mission is to “promote an underground press where there is none; literacy and awareness in a cultural wasteland. We believe...that feminism is not a dirty word and that the personal is political. We support passion over passiveness and other good stuff.” The team behind Thaili hopes “to eventually cater to the whole Middle eastern region, where a zine culture is almost unheard of; through this distro we aim to help establish one,

bringing independent literature in from around the world, while also getting local voices heard” (quotations from website). Rahel’s distro will carry zines from the Gulf and Greater Arab regions, such as *My Very Own Guide to Life* and *Ultra-Reflective Cat Organ*, as well as international zines. Let’s support this amazing endeavor!

Rahel, PO Box 1989, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Email: distro@thaili.port5.com; website: <http://thaili.port5.com>. *Maya*, USD \$2.00, postage paid.

EUROPE

FingerBang Distro and *Varla’s Passed Out* (zine) (2001–2005) [in English]

Inspired by riot grrrl politics and the desire to create and educate, Red Chidgey created the UK-based FingerBang, a small independent distributor of “ladymade” and feminist goods, as well as the zine *Varla’s Passed Out*. The distro wishes to “support underground, d.i.y. and alternative cultures and publications, [to] promote the art, music, crafts and organisational projects of emancipatory social groups and rebel grrrls/guys, [to] organise events, panels, workshops, film screenings [and to] promote zine and comic communities through establishing the UK Zine Network [<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/ukzinenetwork>] as a forum for discussion and skill-sharing.” As if that’s not enough, Red also started the Ladyfest Film Archive (<http://www.geocities.com/fingerbangdistro/listings.html>) to provide a non-profit lending resource for UK Ladyfests and other activist and feminist events. She has also been involved in the amazing collaborative *Riot Grrrl London* zine (http://www.geocities.com/rg_london). “It’s been totally empowering as I’ve learnt how easy it is to take charge and create something sustainable,” Red told me. “I learn a lot from zines and have become more confident since writing my own. Feminism, riot grrrl and Ladyfest constantly inspire me to take action and spread revolution like fire burns and kisses.”

Red Chidgey, 29 Wellesley Road, Clacton-on-Sea, Essex, Co15 3PW, United Kingdom. Email: red_chidgey@yahoo.com; website: <http://www.geocities.com/fingerbangdistro>. *Varla’s Passed Out*, USD \$4.00, postage paid.

Bloody Mary (nos. 8 & 9, 2003–2004) [in Czech]

In 2000, four grrrls in Prague started a zine revolution in the Czech Republic with the first issue of *Bloody Mary*. This team wants “to inform people — give them another

point of view. We want to show that women have also something to say and that they can do it. We want to spread feminist/riot grrrl ideas. And, we want to have fun and amuse other people as well" (Emca Revoluce). Each issue focuses on a certain topic, such as female warriors, pregnancy, menstruation, subcultures, or patriarchy, and combines serious articles on feminism and women's rights with fun, ironic, and absurd contributions. Besides doing their zine, the collective is organizing concerts and feminist parties to raise money and promote grrrl bands, and is making t-shirts, badges, and patches with feminist themes as well. Emca notes that there are many alternative magazines in the Czech Republic, but most don't call themselves "zines," a situation I have noticed in many other countries. It's not that there are no zines, it's mainly a matter of labeling and of speaking the language. So for starters, let's dive into the Czech language!

CSAF [Czechoslovak Anarchist Federation], *Bloody Mary*, P.O. Box 223, Praha 1111 21, Czech Republic.
Email:
bloodymary@bust.com.
USD/EUR \$1.00.

Clit Rocket (no. 2-3, 2002-2004) [in English and Italian]

Veruska Outlaw has been publishing this anarchist feminist zine out of Rome, Italy, since 1999. Written in a mix of English and Italian, *Clit Rocket* focuses mainly on queer and lesbian issues and feminism. For Veruska, the main motivation to do the zine lies in making her voice of resistance heard: "I want my voice [to be transmitted] across the wires and be heard. And I want definitely [to] put a break [to] the racist-patriarchal-homophobic rules which regulate our cultures and lives cuz that suffocates me!" Veruska also runs an anarchist feminist radioshow, "Queen Bee," on the local pi-

rate radio station Radio Onda Rossa, giving visibility to feminist and queer history and expression. Apart from publishing *Clit Rocket* and another lesbian zine, she has recorded the spoken word demo tape "Die Bitch" to document the ways misogyny and sexual abuse affect women's lives and their relationships with their own bodies and each other. If you order her zine, Veruska will truly amaze your postmaster with a beautiful cut-and-paste envelope...and be prepared for some quite radical feminist and queer imagery!

Email: veruskaoutlaw@yahoo.it;
website: <http://clitrocket.altervista.org/blog>. *Clit Rocket* nos. 2-3, EUR \$4.00. No. 4 to be published in April 2005.

At the end of our grrrl zine planet tour, let's keep Kelly's (*Pretty Ugly*) striking words in mind and turn them into action: "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!"

Note: Interviews with these zine editors can be accessed at <http://www.grrrlzines.net/interviews/interviews.htm>.



Veruska's Passed Out
again (4)

[Elke Zobl is the creator of Grrrl Zine Network, a website that lists international feminist zines, distros, and DIY projects (<http://grrrlzines.net>). She also facilitates a mailing list and zine exhibits, as well as zine workshops with the San Diego-based group Grrrl Zines A-Go-Go (<http://www.grrrlzines.net/agogo.htm>). Having finished her doctorate in Vienna, Austria, she is now having fun working on an anthology of international grrrl zines. Elke is greatly indebted to all the zine grrrls, as well as the Austrian Science Fund. She can be reached at elke@grrrlzines.net.]