

ZINES FOR (A) LIVING

by Claire Villacorta

I've been doing zines since 1998. Zines (pronounced "zeens") are self-made publications that happen to be topically flexible – they can be about virtually anything! Initially, I had dreams of putting out a magazine, but when it came to shopping for ad space, there were practically no takers. Not willing to let the material go stale, I went ahead and ran a thousand offset-printed copies of Halo-Halo, a Pinoy pop culture zine that reflected the hybrid of below-critical-radar Filipino personalities engaging in globalized media forms. I figured that if bigger, glossy zines like Giant Robot had its humble beginnings in monochrome, there would still be hope for HH to turn into "something more." However, the follow-up issue would not see print until a year later. With the print run reduced by half, the copies were risographed to cut costs. But HH's contents matured to accommodate critical perspectives on the topic of sex, the issue's theme, yet still keeping its tongue-in-cheekness intact. This gradual shift in rhetoric had a lot to do with my exposure to smaller, xeroxed zines of the "personal as political" variety. I was particularly drawn to female zinesters of color who were influential in articulating the intersections of race, gender/sexuality, class and identity within their relative (sub)cultural contexts. It was also through zines where I learned more about feminism. I acquired zines either by trade or mail order, and this somehow led to a forum for communicating ideas with like-minded zinesters. This exchange, through email, letters, and contributing articles to other people's zines, informed my d.i.y. (do-it-yourself) sensibilities in ways that renewed my passion for writing and sharing ideas as an unbridled vehicle for self-expression. Suddenly, that "something more" in terms of sustaining a regular magazine that entailed forced prolific, shelling out the insurmountable funds for it and turning up a profit no longer appealed to me. Zines are a labor of love, and they've enabled me to constantly challenge myself as a writer coming from the Filipino cultural backdrop of a marginalized youth culture. The money aspect of zine-publishing likewise, became inconsequential.

GIRL ZINESTERS A GO GO: There are a few other Pinay girl zinesters who have been doing this longer than I have. Some of them remain active and dedicated to their craft. Zine-making affords us the opportunity to validate our experiences, something that mainstream "accountability" won't assure because the spaces for participation are rather selective and not all of us have the privilege to get published. We come in all ages and from diverse backgrounds, and while most of the zinesters I know are writers in their own right, not all of them take to the pen for a living. Athena, who writes the perlitical Framing Historical Theft, has been publishing zines since she was 11. She's put out 20+ zines in the past 5 years or so and has had time to reinvent herself on her own terms. Now at 16, she's toughing it out as a senior in high school and will be off to the U.S. for college in the fall. She used to write for the school paper. The same goes with Wendi, who has released 10 issues of her personal zine w.r.i.n.g. throughout her college years, during her short stint with law school, and on the job printing shirts. She is a "raving mad, married and pregnant Pokemon." It took Loi 3 years to come out with the 2nd issue of Dissent. Self-employed, her energies are generated toward all-vegetable handcrafted soaps. Karen, a Psychology major at a Laguna-based state university, utilizes whatever free time she has to publish Sapling Thoughts, a feminist zine that touches on women's reproductive health. Lunar Landing is an art zine done by Lena, who scores gallery shows while majoring in Fine Arts. And the list doesn't end here!

MARKET SIZE: Zines are for everybody! They're not heavily reliant upon a "target market" but rather mostly networks of people who course through these d.i.y. publishing circuits. I've managed to turn non-zinesters and college professors on to zines. For the most part, though, it's a whole lot easier to expect people to see things through mainstream lenses and dismissively pass on them or view the cut-and-paste revolution with "less cred."

SEARCH AND DISTRO! You'd be lucky if you can even find our zines in your nearest comic book store! The harsh reality is that many places are unsupportive of zines, much less carrying them for distribution. Comic Quest did little to hide the favoritism they reserved for their comic-publishing friends. My zines sold pretty well there, even if they never bothered to put up my poster at my urging. Then there was Tower Records, which took an active interest in promoting local zines. So I tried it out as a vendor for distributing an ample range of zines, since I had a SEC-registered small press to boot. All of them were bought, a few stolen. But when I made a trip to their head office in San Pedro to claim my check and was asked to return 3 times due to procedural problems, I closed the door to this little venture. A few zines can be found at Odd Manila in UP Diliman. You can also get a wide range of punk zines via mail order through Make Your Own, an independent distro based in Quezon province. I, on the other hand, run an in-person distro. I used to sell zines at shows and poetry readings, but lately, I've been supplying zine readers directly. My zine is currently being distroed by MYO and a few Stateside distros. If you wanna know more about HH or any of zines I've mentioned here, you can email me at dumplingpress@hotmail.com

GET ON THE INTERNET! Websites can be extensions of zines. You can find w.r.i.n.g. zine online at <http://wringisyourfanzine.ph/>. Athena is pretty web-intensive as well and has hers up at atheory.effronte.org. Her site includes info about herself, her online journal, writings published in the school paper and zines, a reading list, and her record collection, among other stuff. I have an online journal, too, but am partial to email. The internet has been a valuable tool for looking up zines and networking with zinesters from all over the world. You'll chance upon zines that are "close to home" but can't be had here. In this light, Fil-Am zinesters Sabrina Sandata (Bamboo Girl), Charisma (Brewster) and Therese (BananaQ) reflect, but are not entirely representative of, the diasporic experience.

REVOLUTION GIRL STYLE NOW? We're here for as long as we wanna be. It would be rad to see more girls producing their own stuff without having to resort to the mainstream as the default in informing their sensibilities. But while this particular wave of cultural production may not happen overnight, I do see small sparks of interest, and I take that as a sign of encouragement. But there's one thing I'll be emphatic about: THIS IS NOT A TREND, NOR WILL IT EVER RELY ON ONE IN ORDER TO SURVIVE.

Claire has no shortage of ideas. But she does get overwhelmed by them. In spite of taking on more than she can handle, her new zine project is well on its way.

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