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Résumé de l'article

Les « zines » sont des textes qui existent comme lieux ouverts et conscients de résistance active aux catégories et aux identités normatives. Publications maison et photocopiées existant en marge de la littérature et de l'art canoniques et commerciaux, les « zines » sont un moyen d'expression qui, par leur forme et leur contenu, défient, en texte, les représentations familières de soi-même. Les « zines » fournissent de la documentation sur la résistance des femmes en examinant et en réinscrivant simultanément les frontières du sexe, de l'identité, du féminisme et de la textualité. J'aborde les « zines », en tant que texte, à travers des entrevues réalisées avec deux femmes de Winnipeg qui publient actuellement des « zines », Stefanie Moore et Tamara Biebrich. En intégrant la parole des femmes, ces revues s'avèrent être des incarnations de leur vie quotidienne et de leur travail, un espace où les femmes peuvent se représenter en dehors des exigences de la culture dominante sur la publication et sa forme. Les « zines » remettent en question l'autorité des textes courants. Ils appartiennent à la contre-culture et à la culture populaire et se déplacent entre les deux tout en traversant les frontières et en compliquant nos notions de divisions entre les différentes formes de discours.

Zines, Women, and Culture
Autobiography Through Self-Publication

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In examining Canadian cultures from a feminist perspective, I have undertaken a process of deconstructing and recreating for myself the complex locations of culture. Sexuality, race, gender, and self are neither single nor limited locations; rather, they overlap and intersect. Using a feminist perspective, I have centered on identities and modes of resistance. The mapping of a culture seems impossible and unwieldy until one employs partial perspectives to look at the ways in which we make and enact culture and create ourselves both within a culture and in resistance to it. Within the complexity of what we call mainstream or dominant culture, I have chosen to focus on spaces of resistance.

Zines are texts that exist as overt and self-conscious sites of active resistance against culturally prescribed categories and identities. Zines are homemade, xeroxed publications, or an "independent magazine; designed, written and edited by you" in the words of the *Zine Club* at the University of Winnipeg (1996). Zines are distributed through mailing networks, friends, and community spaces or events. Deployed on the margins of canonical and commercial literature and art, zines offer a means of expression which, both in form and content, challenge familiar representations of self in text. In the realm of my research, zines document women's resistance, while simultaneously questioning *and* reinscribing the borders of gender, identity, feminism, and textuality.

The zine is autobiography — textualized self. It houses the author's thoughts, stories, and problems without the limits of the written narrative form of traditional autobiography. The editing, censorship, and accessibility problems created by the publishing industry are absent or considerably lessened when one is self-published. In the fragmented postmodern world which struggles for representations of self and body, the zine offers an ideal location. It provides space for the individual, connection and access to community, subversion of language and structure, and an attack on categories of autobiography, literature, and art.

I engage these homemade texts through interviews with two Winnipeg women who are currently publishing zines, Stefanie Moore and Tamara Rae Biebrich. I use their voices from our interviews as well as material from their zines, working them into the text with my own voice. Borrowing from feminist and anthropological writing that emphasizes the need to rethink the appropriation of "informants'" words and lives for academic production, I seek to relinquish control in order to extend some agency to the women I have interviewed.

> Stefanie: It made me feel weird when you said you were doing a paper on zines and I thought, "well that's great that you can bring this thing that you are interested in and bring it in to school," because I think schools are the most repressive environment created in this society. It's kind of nice you can bring just a little bit of your life to it, because academics aren't really known for being — having any connection to reality. But it's also strange from the other side of it, [of] the people who are bringing things to you and having it sort of mainstreamed....Whether you like it or not, this is me. It's such a very personal part of me. And when it becomes more of a mainstream commodity, suddenly it's just this novelty.

> Tamara: You want to keep the zine culture... so it's something you have on your own and something that isn't invaded by mainstream media, so it can be something where you can keep that freedom. It's also good that people have an understanding of what it is....I think in some ways, dealing with it through the academic thing, someone who wouldn't necessarily have access to the zine may understand a little bit more of what it is.

In the world of zines, the issues of counter-culture versus mainstream culture and media are made explicit. There is much discussion of the personal and political work necessary to resistance accompanying analysis of these issues. Given the bridging of the gap between the academic form and underground texts that I am undertaking in this paper, I have to consider the politics and problems of using the frame of the academic article. The problems entailed in academic forays into the underground are discussed by Bruce La Bruce in his look at resistant queercore culture through the medium of fanzines:

> And I'm not going to write about punk, because whenever anybody tries to, they come off sounding really stupid. Punk isn't supposed to be written about, just like "queercore" fanzines aren't supposed to be catalogued and historicized and analyzed to death, for Christsake. They're supposed to be disposable. That's the whole point. Throw your fanzines away right now (1995: 193).

In contrast, Dana A. Heller's approach to women's comics, specifically *Hothead Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist*, posits them as preservers of women's/lesbian folklore and identities. Heller contends that zines need to be looked at as documents of a resistant culture. For her, they are coded modes of representing knowledge and experience that are too dangerous to document elsewhere. The ideas and actions that are documented in zines could not appear in more culturally revered locations such as the academic article or the widely distributed journal or magazine without posing a threat to that culture and its hierarchy (1993: 27-44). What is interesting to me is the possibility that the zine's subversive potential provides to women who employ the zine medium to produce an expressive form which can give voice to their subversive selves. I focus here on the texts and selves these two women, Tamara and Stefanie, create through their zines.

I have focused upon women writers/artists in the Winnipeg community, using feminist discussion and analysis. Choosing to focus research on women

I FIGHT LIKE A GIRL.
I FIGHT LIKE A GIRL WHO REFUSES TO BE A VICTIM.
I FIGHT LIKE A GIRL WHO'S TIRED OF BEING
IGNORED + HUMOURED + BEATEN + RAPED.
I FIGHT LIKE A GIRL WHO'S SICK OF NOT BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY.
I FIGHT LIKE A GIRL WHO'S BEEN PUSHED TOO FAR.
I FIGHT LIKE A GIRL WHO OFFERS + DEMANDS RESPECT.
I FIGHT LIKE A GIRL WHO HAS A LIFETIME OF
ANGER + STRENGTH + PRIDE PENT UP IN HER GIRLY BODY.
I FIGHT LIKE A GIRL WHO DOESN'T BELIEVE IN FEAR + SUBMISSION.
I FIGHT LIKE A GIRL WHO KNOWS THAT
THIS BODY + THIS MIND ARE MINE.
I FIGHT LIKE A GIRL WHO KNOWS THAT
YOU HAVE ONLY AS MUCH POWER AS I GRANT YOU.
I FIGHT LIKE A GIRL WHO WILL NEVER
ALLOW YOU TO TAKE MORE THAN I OFFER.
I FIGHT LIKE A GIRL WHO FIGHTS BACK.
SO, NEXT TIME YOU THINK YOU CAN DISTRACT YOURSELF
FROM YOUR INSECURITIES BY VICTIMIZING A GIRL
THINK AGAIN. SHE MAY BE ME, AND
I FIGHT LIKE A GIRL
WORLD WITHOUT LARD ZINES/BOX 26051/116 SHERBROOK /WPG, MB/R3C 4K9.

Fig. 1 - Poster by Stefanie Moore (date not available).

only does not necessarily mean a feminist work will result, nor does research on both women and men, or on men alone, preclude a feminist approach. Perhaps we have reached a point in women's studies and anthropology (among other disciplines) where we no longer have to defend work that is women-focused, given the large gaps in academic literature about and by women and the relatively short span of time women's studies and feminism have had in the academy to build a theoretical base of knowledge. My work operates in accordance with this view, while I am concurrently engaging the prickly issue of gender as a construction *and* a lived reality, very much wrapped up in identity and therefore in autobiography. To examine zines as sites to express difference, individuality, and identity, I must deal with how individuals see and portray gender, how they live through it and (re)create/(de)construct it for themselves.

To write as a woman is to be dismissed and ignored by a variety of communities and individuals in many different ways. It also entails dealing with the presumptions according to which a female writer's work is read, presumptions constructed both by the "mainstream" and by genres of feminist thought which have forged the link between gender and narrative. While there is inherent value in analyzing writing from a gendered space, this mode of examination too often pursues the lines of "woman" at the expense of the multilayered categories of race and class, and the way in which these categories, too, are constructed and maintained.

I first encountered Stefanie's work two years ago when I came across her poster entitled "I Fight Like a Girl" (Fig. 1). It was placed in an area that I frequently walked through but which I also considered unsafe. "I Fight Like a Girl" marked that women in my community were thinking and reacting. Stefanie is committed to projects such as "Fight Like a Girl," to her publications, and to her audience. Her writing is much like a journal, containing poetry, accounts of different events, trips, and people in her life, and the day to day of being her. There is commentary on everything from coffee to bulimia. Issues of her zines contain clip art, comic strips, and quotes. These forms allow changes in layout and design from issue to issue, rather than inscribing a static or standard mode.

Her zines employ writing through segmented anecdotes, separated and continuing installments which change as she changes and therefore represent and create a fluctuating and mutable self:

> Stefanie: The first zine I put out I knew was going to be really, painfully awful. But I also knew that once I put out one, I could put out another one that was better, so that it never really mattered how bad each zine was cause I could always say "well the next issue will be better!" So I guess I'm still working towards a decent zine....But I think it was really good for me because I figure I shouldn't be doing anything that I'm ashamed of, or that I'm not willing to let people know about. And if I'm doing things that I'm proud of and that I'm comfortable with, then I shouldn't have any problem with people knowing that I'm doing them. Which sounds all well and good until you walk into somebody's living room and your life's on their coffee table.

Fig. 2 - Tamara Rae Biebrich, nEuROTIC Girl, no. 2, 1996.

Tamara is someone I have known for a few years. I first heard about her zine/comic when she completed the first issue and was passing it around to friends. Reading *Neurotic Girl* made me laugh, and for me her zine was another signpost that women were living and creating, not lying down or shutting up (Fig. 2). I liked the zine because it was bold and in your face. In fact, it was a lot like Tamara herself. Her zine is comic art, anecdotes, and observations transformed into storyboards with written text. Recently Tamara has created and collaborated on a new zine entitled *Fight Like A Girl*, a title gleaned from Stefanie's poster.

> Tamara: I haven't really been that involved in making zines until my comic. That was like full force and I decided to jump right in!...I've been reading lots of really good women's comics. It's actually just been in the last year and a half or so that I've been into women's comics. And they're a lot different than mainstream comics. A lot of people when you say comics they're thinking you're immature and you're into Superman or Spiderman or something. But there's a lot of good ones out there that are autobiographical and deal with relationships. The original comic I wanted to do was either one called Neurotic Girl or one called Raunchy Girl. She was going to be this sexpot, she had all these muscles and she totally kicked ass and she was going to use men and throw them, just toss them aside, because she was just this babe. And then I decided that Neurotic Girl was more encompassing.

The process both women undertake in the creation of their zines is one in which they must consider not only art and expression but also the practical concerns of how to distribute their work, how to be heard. Printing is the biggest cost involved in doing a zine, which usually means that creating a zine is not a profit-making endeavour. Stefanie remarked that she has lost hundreds of dollars in her ten years of zine writing, given not only photocopying but mailing costs as well. During her work on *Neurotic Girl*, Tamara was able to break even after her second issue, with any surplus money going right back into the publication of her next zine. Networks of friends, mailing lists, independent distributors, and publishing houses are allies both women have accessed in order to get their zines out.

> Stefanie: I've really gone through a lot of cycles when it comes to distributing. When I started, I would just print up twenty copies and leave it on buses and on tables in restaurants and stuff, and be completely anonymous, borrow friends addresses so I could change the address for every zine and do each one under a different name. A lot of distribution is just through the mail with people I'll probably never meet. Actually a lot of my really closest friends are people I know through mailing zines back and forth. Navel Gazing's the first zine I've done that's been in Winnipeg and I've given it to people who I actually deal with face to face and who I'm going to talk to the next day after they've read it (Fig. 3).

> Tamara: In Neurotic Girl, the story where she's thinking he's a jerk, I took that right out of my journal. It was a night that happened a couple of years ago. I was reading

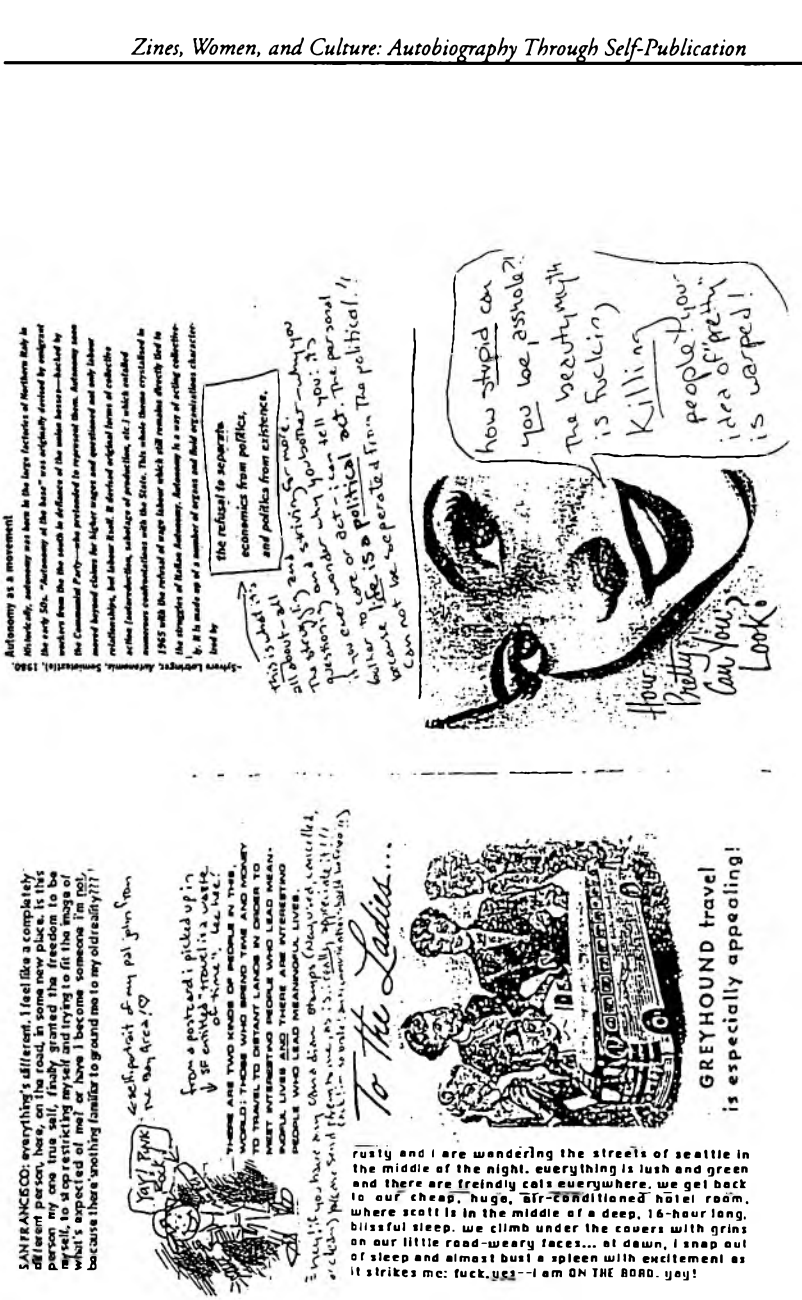

Fig. 3- Stefanie Moore, Navel Gazing, no. 4, January 1995.

> it and was "wow, this is actually pretty stupid of me. I'm going to make it into a comic!" (Fig. 4). And the Raunchy Girl goes to Fargo is basically a road trip story; I mean, it's almost exactly what happened. I changed things around a tiny bit just to make them a little more humorous, like we didn't really get strip searched, but it basically happened that way.

The "confessional" is a form of writing often cited as a tool of the feminist or woman writer, a tool that specifically and explicitly uses experience as a base, and attempts to be as truthful as possible. Feminist critic Leigh Gilmore, in her work on women's autobiographies, refutes critics who see confessional writing as "naive," and exhibiting a "lack" of "self-consciousness" and hence an ignorance of theory (1994: 225). For Gilmore, the confessional form allows women agency and power to define for themselves their stories and their lives. The difficulty in interpreting women's writing and stories arises when we begin to determine the standard for women's forms of expression. We need an approach that confronts gender directly with all of its contradictions and multiple personas. This constant search to find unity in women's experiences and work distracts from the rich diversity of their lives and can be a limiting lens through which to view women and their creative products (Fig. 5).

In *The Disobedient Writer*, Nancy Walker describes the textualized female self as one that is characterized by others *through* which she tells her stories, others who can be relations or friends or "a defining cultural narrative" (1995: 122). This stance contrasts with the type of confessional used by both women zine authors. For Stefanie, *Navel Gazing* is an account centered very much on herself and her actions. She is the determining force in her stories/autobiographies. Tamara's writing relies equally on the self-identified actor, though her narratives are told through many characters, multiple selves. For both women, much of their work remarks on how each sees and portrays gender. How they live through and deconstruct feminine myths and images in their textualizations emphasizes the expression of difference in identity and illustrates the discrepancies between reality and text.

> Tamara: With my comic I find because I have Neurotic Girl, I have Rebel Girl and Superfly Girl, they're all parts of me....Some of the things that they do is some things I'd want to do. There are some things that are blatantly made up, but most of the stories are things that happen in real life. Maybe it's not my deepest darkest side of me, it's more of my fun side. I think I'm fairly straight forward in it especially in my intro, that it's me trying to be clear but still laid back.

> Stefanie: My zines are an attempt to be as much me as I can, to find the real me and confront the real me and be as honest with myself as possible and be as honestly me as I can by forcing myself to expose everything I am to other people and see it through their eyes. But of course, there's more to me than even ten years worth of writing. I try not to think about it. I just sit down. It's usually just pure emotion, you know. Whatever is on my mind just comes out through my pen and I try not to look at it again until I have it printed up and I can't really turn back....I get submissions

Fig. 4 - Tamara Rae Biebrich, nEuROTIC Girl, no. 2, 1996.

> sometimes, but I think most people know it's just sort of my therapy, my diary, that I print up. I put in more than I should. I used to do this zine called "Honey and Ribbons" and it was all about sexuality. Nobody, including myself, can believe I did that zine. Everybody thought I was asexual and I thought I was asexual too, but I still wrote the deepest darkest parts of my sex life...and then mass-produced them and sent them to people — strangers — in the mail!

The more women create means of expression to articulate their place, their identity, and their *self*, the more we begin to see the fallacies of constructed unities and separations, and the more I can see ways of reworking the lines and boundaries. As a bisexual woman, I am switching fields constantly, appropriating that which I consider male as well as what is allotted to me as female. I do not crave the unity early feminists aspired to, but I do want a shared space that allows discussion of difference, communication, argumentation. Helene Cixous, in "The Laugh of the Medusa," discusses women "returning" to write and "rethink womankind" (1976: 882), and with that, I suggest a rethinking of the venue of writing. Economy and industry must be explicit considerations in the *where* of women's writing, the location of writing for anyone who is denied a voice in mainstream publications.

As postmodern art/text, zines depict the plurality and multiplicity of self-representation. The authors are not simply writing about the body as feminine, they are also confronting the very existence of "feminine" and speaking of "the body, how it looks in public and how it feels" (Lavin 1994: 80). Confronting the body means confronting desire, and sex and sexuality are openly dealt with in both *Neurotic Girl* and *Navel Gazing* in varied forms and contexts. In Maud Lavin's discussion of the group of artists labeled "Bad Girls," she states that the self is specifically engaged in this new "bad girl" artwork and that "these younger women [artists] are exploring areas of feminism and defining femininity in ways sometimes ignored by earlier feminists, seeking out darker corners of women's desire and the complexities of their eroticism" (1994: 82).

Both Stefanie's and Tamara's zines map out this new territory in ways that reflect a refusal to ignore or be ashamed of their bodies. Their methods of exploring the body textually cut across literary and artistic categories. They do not limit themselves to the written word alone, but instead use images they've created, or borrowed and altered, accompanied with text. This act of writing/drawing/storytelling enables them to question the ideals and boundaries of gender.

Critical analysis of women's autobiographies and self-representational texts has often been concerned with the translation of identity from daily life to page, with how the lived body/experience is transcribed in writing and other modes of expression. In *Autobiographics,* Gilmore argues that this form of critique has mistakenly used a cause and effect analysis: what women live is what they write. She demonstrates that the connections between women and their autobiographies are more complex than most critics will allow (1994:

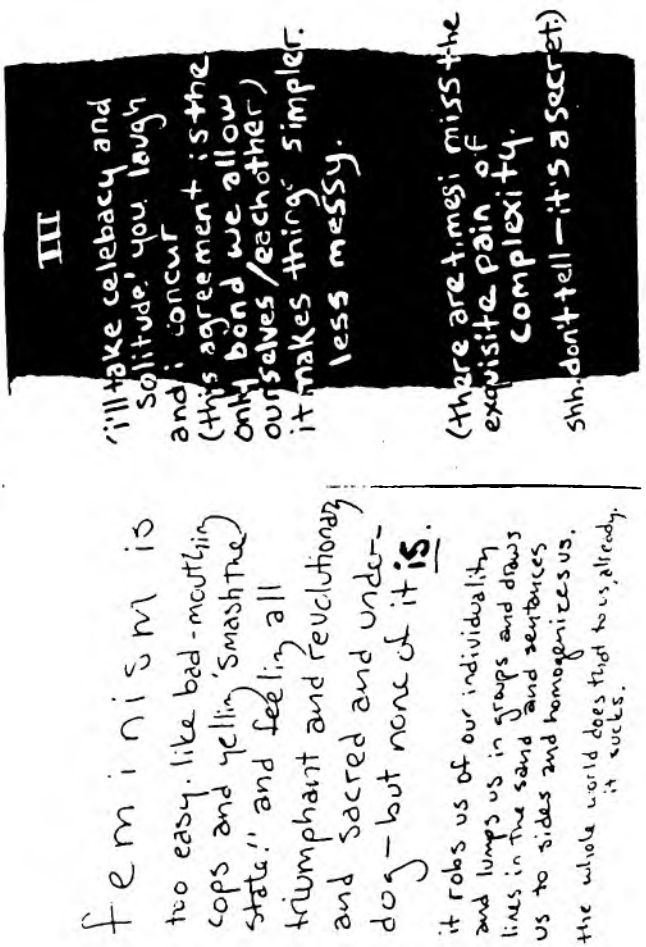

Fig. 5 - Stephanie Moore (date not available)

225). Since Tamara and Stephanie describe both the process and the practicalities of producing a zine, the day-to-day is both the cause and effect of their zine writing. One aspect — the lived experience of place and culture — could not be said to birth the other — the zine, the story. Rather, they are caught up in a constant making and remaking of one another.

The challenge for us is to understand, without appropriation, women's lives and the place of sub-cultural, counter-cultural texts and works. The conscious creation of zines outside of the mainstream defines the borders of, and the problems with, dominant culture. While making more clear the boundaries that create zines, their authors and their publications occasionally inhabit space on the other side of these boundaries separating the mainstream from the underground. The popularity of, and market for, zine material is becoming increasingly evident, as is the academic attention given to the subject. Given the mainstream's increasing efforts to control twenty-somethings as a target market, using a constant penetration of subcultures in order to appropriate what is newer, weirder and better, zines have been in the spotlight a lot lately, on television, in video clips, and in book form, as the example of Pagan Kennedy's Zine reveals. In light of these trends towards commodification, it is necessary to understand appropriation and commodification while redefining how we relate to dominant culture. Stefanie's and Tamara's work shows us there is precedent and possibility for alternative politics and æsthetics.

The closer we look at women who create a means of articulating their place, their identity, and their *self*, the clearer modes for reworking lines and boundaries become. Zines cannot construct the unified or egalitarian community early feminists aspired to, but they do create a space that allows communication and discussions of difference. The constant search to find unity in women's experiences and work distracts from the rich diversity of their lives and is a limiting lens through which to view women and their creative products. Stefanie's and Tamara's publications create a space for documenting women's resistance through comics, art, humor, and informal writings. As radical textualized identities, they alter canonical forms of writing and reading, subverting the categories and interpretations of academic and popular culture alike.

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