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One Girly-Man's NZ Zine History

ABSTRACT

I have witnessed significant growth in New Zealand fanzine activity over the last 15 years. In the early 00s, multiple NZ zine distributors represented local product alongside international post punk / post Riot Grrrl titles. By 2010, distributors had been replaced by the greater communality of localised zine festivals. Current fora include five annual "zinefests" across major urban centres, significant collections at several libraries, and a scattershot of retailers, public workshops, exhibitions, and educative projects (school and tertiary). The significant increase in NZ zine activity appears contradictory to the parallel rise of the Internet. This contradictory condition is excused by the increasing craftiness of NZ fanzines that already boast a traceable Craftivist / Riot Grrrl legacy. But as craft meets ubiquity, there is a danger that NZ fanzines are on the brink of becoming dominated by titles that are apolitical and decorative; at odds with the forces that spawned them.

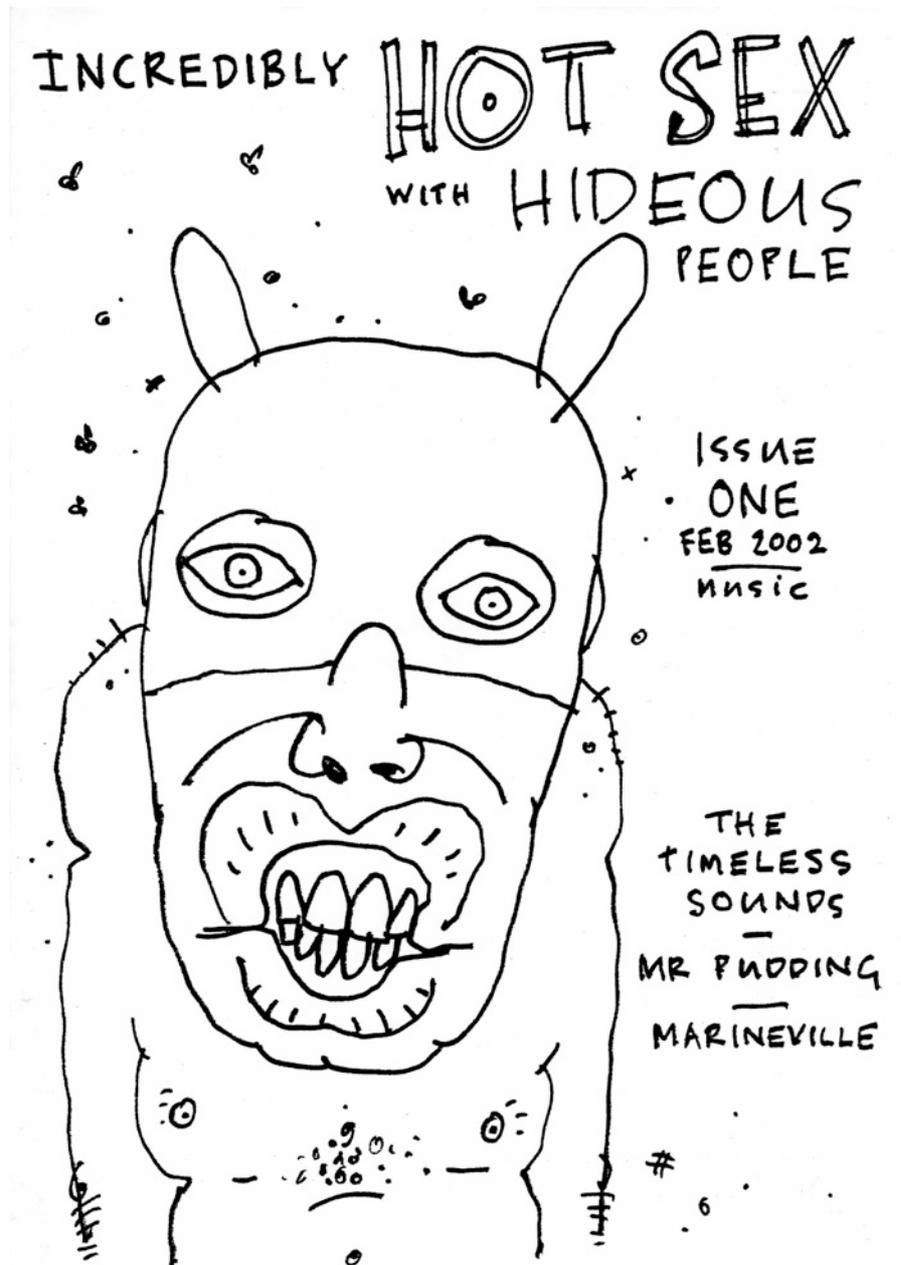
KEYWORDS

Zine History
Post-Punk
Do-It-Yourself
Paper Craft
New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

In 1980s Zealand, zine-making bubbled up to support independent music of the Flying Nun ilk and the kind of anarcho-punk politics espoused by UK imports like the band Crass. A decade later, Riot Grrrl would conflate punk rock with third wave feminism to give female fans something to sink their teeth into. The music of Riot Grrrl found shelf space in independent record stores, but fans would have to work harder to import individual zine titles that were also part of the movement. Some of these fans would graduate to facilitating New Zealand distribution by the start of the new millennium.

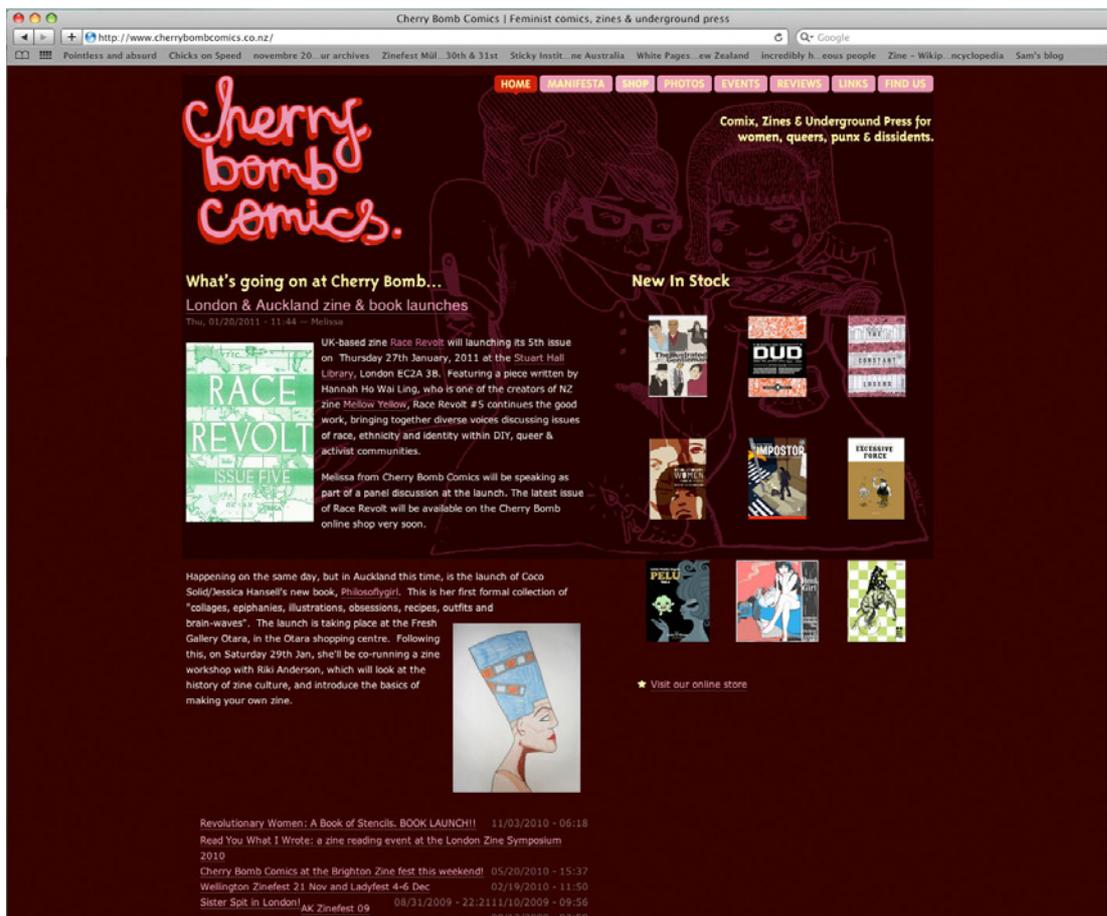
I made my first zine during the period of emergence of these distros, though my efforts were informed more by the antagonistic pranksterism of early punk than any awareness of Riot Grrrl's updating of the zine medium. With the new millennium now in its teens, I am able to reflect upon significant changes in New Zealand zine activity over the 2000-2015 period. Mine is a reflection based on experience rather than any remote academic observation. Let it be said, it is also an experience coloured by the biases of an aging punk who has taken refuge in the university.



Galloway, Bryce (2002). 'Incredibly Hot Sex With Hideous People #1'
Zine cover.

DISTRO GRRRLS

New Zealand's millennial zine forum was the 'distro' (an abbreviation of distributor). Distros represented a broad collection of titles from different creators and geographical locations. Moira Clunie ran her online Moon Rocket distro from 2000 to 2007. Kerry Ann Lee ran her Red Letter Zine Distro from 2001 to 2005, working offline to produce ziney little A6 catalogues full of title listings, descriptions, and prices. And Cherry Bomb Comics opened a physical retail space in Auckland from 2004 to 2007, taking the shop online for another five years after that.



Cherry Bomb Comics (c. 2012) Screen grab from www.cherrybombcomics.co.nz

These distros made international titles available, reaping the belated zine activity of Riot Grrrl feminism and North American post punk. It was within this context that a minority of local titles could be found. All three distros were run by women with varying degrees of allegiance to Riot Grrrl feminism. In the case of Moon Rocket, this allegiance was born out

by the distros catalogue rather than any overt branding. But Cherry Bomb Comics made the bias explicit when they adopted the tagline, 'Comix, Zines & Underground Press for women, queers, punx & dissidents'.

Riot Grrrl is an early 90s conflation of punk rock and emergent third wave feminism, started in the northern United States of America. Riot Grrrl attempted to create a space for female punks amidst the machismo of a male dominated punk scene exemplified by the violence of the 'mosh pit' - the aggressive male-dominated slam-dancing zone at front of stage (Anderson 2013). Beyond the music, the zine became Riot Grrrl's media-of-choice, for its diaristic personal/political qualities. Riot Grrrl zines involved a willful reclamation of the pejoratively "girly" art of scrapbooking, the margins of zines being decorated with love-hearts, ponies and other cutesy iconography, a visual aesthetic knowingly at odds with the angry personal political venting of text that described first hand incidents of sexism, poor body image, bulimia, sexual abuse and other feminist issues.

These scrapbooked manifestos embraced the immediacy of what was achievable using rudimentary stationary tools and the local copy shop (or, better still, covert use of the employers copy machine). The physical exchange of amateur zines echoed the intimacy of their content. The intimacy and control riot grrrls exerted over their media of choice was highlighted by the 1992 media blackout called for by key proponents of the movement, in the wake of features in *Newsweek* and other mainstream publications. Riot grrrls exercised little faith that the mainstream media would A) represent their pluralistic voice, B) treat Riot Grrrl as anything more than novelty, and C) promote the work of the many rather than the few (Spencer 2005: 50).

The craftiness and intimacy of the zine became the perfect vehicle for the politics of Riot Grrrl at the same time as the Internet was hitting the domestic market. For Riot Grrrl, this provided an argument for the legitimacy of the analogue fanzine, at odds with the sea change toward online publishing. No such argument may have existed for men who followed amateur music journalism and/or their own political concerns onto the worldwide soapbox.

Such craftiness is exemplified by the scrapbook aesthetic of Riot Grrrl zines and the more overt gendering aligned to activities/media like knitting and sewing. One can appreciate the paper craft of Riot Grrrl as informing later craftivist definitions. Both appreciate the community and conversation engendered by shared gendered activities (Riot Grrrl gigs, zine-making, sewing circles, Stitch 'n' Bitch sessions), and both "eschew mass production in favour of non-corporate, small-scale production" (Petney 2008). With the possible exception

of Auckland's Cherry Bomb, New Zealand did not experience the communal fever of Riot Grrrl culture, but its artifacts (records and zines) would reach the bedrooms of eager individuals.

ZINEFESTS

When the distro was the dominant forum, zine-making in New Zealand was afforded a certain covertness. In more recent years, the zine festival (or 'zinefest') has become the dominant forum for the sharing of zines. Very *unlike* the act of selling one's lone bedroom creations through a distro's postal network, the zinefest is an embodied forum wherein zinemakers meet each other and their public in a celebratory and information-sharing event-based context.

Though the first years of the 21st century could be described as the distro era of New Zealand zine activity, it was not without its zinefests. In 2003 and 2005, Moon Rocket's Moira Clunie and friends facilitated the *small print* zine festivals. These events centered around a zine market at the Grey Lynn Library Hall, but included workshops on self-publishing and other DIY initiatives. *small print* 2005 extended activities to also incorporate a zine exhibition at Canary Gallery and an after party at Eden Bar, Auckland. *small print* was attended by the young women who would go on to run Wellington and Auckland zinefests.

As each of New Zealand's three distros folded (2005, 2007, and 2012) an obverse increase in zinefests took place. There was no rhetoric to suggest that these zinefests were an attempt to fill the void, rather, each localized zinefest inspired the birth of the next: Wellington Zinefest arrived in 2007, then appeared annually; Auckland Zinefest arrived in 2009, also appearing annually, Dunedin Zinefest, annually since 2011; Christchurch Zinefest 2011, with a year off in 2012 due to the post-quake exodus of young creatives, but annually since 2013; and finally Hamilton Zinefest 2014/15. Three New Zealand zine distros buoyed by the occasional Auckland event, have been replaced by five annual zinefests of varying stature, with no distro support whatsoever.

Sharing zines is no longer remote, covert *or* private. Today's zinesters might even be on the zinefest circuit, travelling between the five main centres with their wares. Some of the more committed zinesters make it to zinefests in Melbourne, Brisbane or Sydney. Zinesters sit across narrow trestle tables from their public. They introduce their work to fans and novices. They collect coins and bills in repurposed plastic containers, shoeboxes and coat

pockets, handing over their work with a conversational smile. Today's zinesters arrive early to swap their wares with others. They leave late for similar reasons. They drink together at post-event parties, and farewell each other until the next such event in a few weeks, months, or next year. This is a far cry from the lonesome distro-facilitated zine activity that existed in the first years of the new Millennium.

The shift from distro to zinefest has also emphatically localized the content on offer. Stallholders at New Zealand zinefests are invariably representing their own work, or the work of friends. At the first New Zealand zinefests, Moon Rocket and Cherry Bomb could be found representing international catalogue titles, but the disappearance of these distros has left localized zinefests with a local bias. To the online world, this 'shrinking' might seem backward, but far from being *unfortunately* localized, this geographical intimacy only echoes the intimacy of zine voice & content. The zinefest's sense of occasion is akin to that of a community fair or party, not one that trades on the star turn, as might be said of many cultural events including comic cons like Armageddon Expo.

INSTITUTIONS

Beyond the generous networking that takes place in and around the zinefest market, zinesters may also be running or attending workshops, panel discussions, or public lectures. Herein, the informational and guiding motives of zine-making are made overt. Within these forums, zinesters not only talk to the particularity of their art, but to the idea that self-publishing is empowering, egalitarian, easy, grass roots, and an alternative to normative commercial and institutional economies and hierarchies. An alternative in that nobody takes the power to veto participation. An alternative in that commercial "chump change" is unlikely to be a participant's prime motivator.

Zine-making workshops are guided by the principal of easy participation. No prior knowledge of zine-making is required of attendees. Workshop facilitators never grandstand the kind of the virtuosity that sometimes acts as a deterrent rather than an encouragement. The modest cost and/or production standards of many zines acts as it's own invitation to participate, but beyond this, workshop facilitators are actively inviting participation by helping attendees create content, paginate, copy and bind that very first zine. These things are likely to have contributed to the rapid growth of zine-making in New Zealand over the last decade.



Venn, G (2014) Talks and workshops poster for Hamilton Zinefest 2014
(photograph: Bryce Galloway)

Zines are now being welcomed into institutional contexts. For the art gallery or museum, there's the sense that zines bring with them both a valuable extension of audience, and just enough of that untrained energy that makes the outsider/savant such a valuable injection. Conversely, there's the sense that today's zines are not *too* dangerous. That's been the contextual sensibility embracing my own co-curatorial efforts: The 2012 New Zealand zine survey *Zines Aus Neuseeland*, Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt (with Heather Galbraith); and the Australasian zine survey *small press*, Ramp Gallery, Hamilton (with Kim Paton). The medium is given additional legitimacy on the coattails of celebrated New Zealand artists and designers such as Andrew McLeod, Kerry Ann Lee, John Lake and Luke Wood, who have created zines inside and out of reputable gallery sites.

Public talks and workshops now spill beyond the one-off zinefest event to pepper other dates in the calendar year. These are sponsored by museums, galleries, libraries, and community studios. On-loan and research collections now exist at Auckland Libraries, Wellington City Libraries, Hamilton Public Library and The Hocken Library.

I detail the growth of institutional zine forums with a certain ambivalence, yet it's a growth I have encouraged. Not only have I been actively involved in all of these forums, but

in the running of zine-making electives in a tertiary education context. This is not an easy ambivalence to sort out. The title page of my own Massey University zine-making elective reads 'Zines have no place in a university; the idea that a student could fail this paper for making a bad zine is perverse. Nevertheless, let us continue...' Zine-making courses also exist, or have existed, at numerous other tertiary education institutions - at WelTec, Wintec, Canterbury University, AUT, and Otago Polytechnic, usually within Design programmes that *may* privilege form over attitude.

THE UBIQUITOUS OBJECT

The growing ubiquity of zines and zine-making is having a noticeable effect on the character of available titles, an effect that I'm not altogether encouraged by. With the online migration of largely informational texts, zines have been left with a particular objecthood, or thingness, that is their undisputed territory. Science fiction, punk rock and Riot Grrrl legacies have not been enough to foster the construction of sympathetic content through extended narrative means, be that textual, pictorial, or a mix of the two (as with comics). This objecthood, this thingness, is rightly exploited for its paper quality, its stapled, stitched or folded construction, its print technologies, its ability to indulge bespoke scale and shape, without the economically restrictive concerns raised by extended mechanical print runs. Objecthood and institutional currency see the zine collide with, what are now, canonical modern art staples like the manifesto (Dada, Surrealist, Fluxus) and the artist's book.

The amplified objecthood of this analogue media is meeting a surfeit of facilitatory forums to result in some - from one angle - fairly decorative and self-indulgent fare; this in a zine domain once characterized by the anger and urgency of its marginalized voices. Many contemporary examples are particularly slight of narrative content, sometimes bordering on a new zine formalism, almost solely defined by the interplay of those material concerns, previously listed. An example of this is the current zine trend for block-colour Risograph printing on coloured paper stock. Sometimes this technique is employed to great effect, at the service of the zine's content. At other times it feels like a formal and technical novelty that fails to mask any deeper thematic or conceptual investment.

Illustrative content has surprised historical contexts with its undeniably cutesy portrayal of (random example alert) bears at a tea party, or pussycats in space. These examples may sound akin to the "love-hearts and ponies" previously mentioned as detailing the borders of classic Riot Grrrl fare. But for Riot Grrrls, such "cutesy iconography" was

used in knowing contrast to visceral and political writing, not as a stand alone, not as the only content.

In 2014, my report on Auckland Zinefest for the Sticky Institute (NZW) website referred to this growing genre as '*Frankie-hell*' (Galloway 2014), a nod to the Australian lifestyle magazine that describes itself as follows:

[...] aimed at women (and men) looking for a magazine that's as smart, funny, sarcastic, friendly, cute, rude, arty, curious and caring as they are. We cover design, art, photography, fashion, travel, music, craft, interiors and real-life stories - we aim to surprise and delight readers with every turn of our beautifully matte pages, and have a good old laugh while doing so.

Frankie's mission statement might describe an array of contemporary zines, highlighting personal misgivings as to the shift in character of available titles. Why would a medium, whose former idiosyncrasies were licensed by its definition as being of less than 1000 copies (MSU Libraries 2015) - though more likely, just 50 - be crossing into the territory of a magazine approaching a circulation of 400 000?

CROSS PURPOSES OR CROSS POLLINATION

What to do? Probably nothing. Yet I (and others) have been guilty of raising the specter of greater criticality as a potential antidote. newzealandzinereview.org is a website devoted to weekly criticism of a New Zealand zine title. Reviews are usually favourable. Perceived shortcomings are delivered almost apologetically, alongside a generous portion of commentary on the better qualities of the title in question.

The women running New Zealand Zine Review are the same two who instigated Wellington and Auckland zinefests - Kylie Buck and Tessa Stubbing. Buck and Stubbing are acutely aware of the paradoxical place of New Zealand Zine Review within such an all-comers medium. This explains the ambivalence with which they wrestle with the idea of zine criticism, resulting in such soft or positive reviews.

Proponents of the neighbouring Australian zine scene (e.g. facilitators of the Sticky Institute, Melbourne and Brisbane ZICS) offer surprise that Buck and Stubbing would even broach zine criticism, also surprised that New Zealand zinefests are likely to feature Best-of-Fest awards that qualify individual titles for special mention. The criticality of tertiary zine

classes (be that formal or conceptual) may also be anathema to the Australian scene, judging by the derisive title added to a New Zealand zine roundup I wrote for Melbourne's Sticky Institute four years ago. Having acknowledged the rise of tertiary zine-making in New Zealand art and design schools, the title banner *The Punks Get Degrees* was added to my roundup. Some on Sticky's editorial panel were resentful of the idea that such qualifying mechanisms might be applied to the post punk all-comers medium of zines.

Are our Australian neighbours right? Are such qualifying mechanisms in danger of turning zine-making in New Zealand into a boutique activity, protected from the apolitical fancies of a horde of crafty individuals? God forbid.

The New Zealand zine scene is at a crossroads wherein growing support and ubiquity might result in further dilution of the mediums former post punk politics. The alternative might be an insular criticality that protects the medium's former qualities from further dilution, but through institutional mechanisms such as awards and criticism rather than any discriminatory marginalization from the mainstream. Forced to consider such options, I should er on the side of wanting the New Zealand zine scene to remain open to all new zine formalists and *Frankie* magazine lovers, even whilst their apoliticality and cutsey iconography irks the punk within. To do otherwise would be a stifling contradiction to the "pay no dues" ethos espoused by 70s punks and 90s Riot Grrrls.

After all, the significant participation at zinefest of formalist and pictorial genres is not at the expense of stalls featuring sci fi comics, feminist manifestos, anarchist journalism, literary zines, poetry zines, surf zines, pre-election zines, fan art zines, queer zines, trans zines, satirical zines, absurdist zines, music zines, photo essays, diaries, comics and cartoons.

I shall insist on having my cake and eating it too; let me bemoan shifts in the character of New Zealand zine-making whilst throwing the doors ever wider to the growing eclecticism that is the certain upside of this condition. It will be interesting to see how far into middle New Zealand zine-making will journey. It will also be interesting to see what remains after the inevitable crash - post 'peak zine'.

In the meantime there is something to celebrate in the unlikely bedfellows of anarchist journalists alongside suburban craft 'ladies', of queer diarists alongside design school formalists. Contemporary New Zealand zines are less often informed by a politicised punk rock energy, yet there is energy. The form and medium are morphing rapidly to the *various* needs of a growing participation.



Oiseau, S. (2015) Poster for Auckland Zinefest 2015

POSTSCRIPT

Kylie Buck and Kim Gruschow organized the first Wellington Zinefest eight years ago, with support from Wellington City Libraries. Buck and Gruschow's determination to create a zinefest required calling on self-publishers, who, until that time, had existed within discrete

orbits around comics, feminism, anarchism, satire, contemporary art, and popular culture. Wellington Zinefest 2007 contrived a much larger community, inviting these disparate cliques to identify under a common banner as self-publishers. The luxury of defining narrower interests (as afforded those international zine distros) was lost. Necessitated by the need for an actual geographical location (church hall, pub, concert hall), zinefest spawned a local community of self-publishers, across genres, across cliques.



Gruschow, K. & Buck, D. (2007)
Poster for Wellington Zinefest 2007 -
(photo: Kylie Buck)

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Bryce Galloway is a champion of analogue self-publishing. Galloway boasts authorship of New Zealand's longest running fanzine (*Incredibly Hot Sex With Hideous People* (2002 -)). Galloway co-organised Wellington Zinefest 2009-2011, instigated Hamilton Zinefest, co-curated the NZ zine surveys *Zines Aus Neuseeland* (Frankfurt) and *small press* (Hamilton), also running university zine electives and delivering a raft of public zine-making workshops and lectures. Previously, Galloway was known as one-half of avant-pop group Wendyhouse; satirists noted for their use of toy musical instruments and anarchic comedy. Galloway also makes self-effacing comedic video, such as the well-travelled *Hair Transposal Video* (2011).

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