

# > Literature From The Margins: a study on the relevance of zines

> Literatura das Margens: um estudo sobre a relevância dos zines

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## **Abstract**

The scope of this research is to study the zine, which is a handmade booklet. The purpose is to reflect on what the zine is, discussing its format, reflecting on where it is inserted in the publishing market and what its cultural relevance is. This study is a theoretical and bibliographic research with a qualitative approach. We analyze three zines – *Geração Beat*, by Renato Alessandro dos Santos, *O Ceifador de Privilégios*, by Arthus Mehanna, and *Libertemo-nos*, by Melina Bassoli – in order to understand their format, the ways of production, where they are inserted, and their themes. Afterwards, we notice characteristics that contribute to the dissemination of culture and democratic values, thus becoming an object of great cultural relevance.

**Keywords:** Zine. Marginal Literature. Publishing market.

## **Resumo**

O escopo desta pesquisa é estudar o zine, que é um livreto feito à mão. O objetivo é refletir sobre o que é o zine, discutindo seu formato, refletindo sobre onde ele está inserido no mercado editorial e qual a sua relevância cultural. Este estudo é uma pesquisa teórica e bibliográfica com abordagem qualitativa. Analisamos três zines - *Geração Beat*, de Renato Alessandro dos Santos, *O Ceifador de Privilégios*, de Arthus Mehanna, e *Libertemo-nos*, de Melina Bassoli - para entender seu formato, os modos de produção, onde estão inseridos, e seus temas. Em seguida, perceberam-se características que contribuem para a disseminação da cultura e dos valores democráticos, tornando-se objeto de grande relevância cultural.

**Palavras-chave:** Zine. Literatura Marginal. Mercado editorial.

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## 1. Introduction

Throughout the ages, there are always facts that mark history. It is marked by the cultural, social and political context, and this is not immutable because we are not; we change at all times and with that everything around us changes, always being reinvented. History is always being registered in literature: it reflects what has been portrayed concerning our cultural and social context. According to Jonathan Culler, literature is “a product of conventions”<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, it is pertinent to conclude that our context affects us, and when we reflect about it, we register it through literature.

Literature is a very broad term, but in this article the kind that will be mostly addressed is marginal literature. Therefore, it is necessary to briefly elucidate what marginal literature is and then talk about the object of this research: zines.

Marginal “[...] could then be understood as marching along the margins, in the limits, something very characteristic of our contemporaneity, in which we live in the limits, on the edges, on the more and more tenuous borders between the various domains of human life [...]”<sup>2</sup>. Hence, the marginality of a work walks in the margins not only of a category or a genre; marginality can be encompassed in art, culture, design, mass communication and literature.

In literature, when discussing the *canon*, we refer to a selection of texts that are considered by a community as containing important qualities, and, for that reason, should be disseminated. So, if a work of art cannot reach the status of the canon – which is something that involves power and authority –, it is automatically excluded of that relevant environment and acquires the status of

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, 1997, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Rejane Perleberg Lerm, *Leitura de textos sincréticos verbovisuais: relações entre linguagens em (fan)zines brasileiros*, 2017, p. 18, tradução nossa: “[...] poderia ser entendida, então, como andar nas margens, nos limites, característica mesma da contemporaneidade, em que vivemos nos limites, nas bordas, nas fronteiras cada vez mais tênues entre os diversos domínios da vida humana [...]”

marginal.<sup>3</sup> This is the place where we can find the zine: often referred to as the alternative market or being called the underground culture, it is the environment where non-canonical works and texts circulate.

Marginal literature arose in Brazil in the 1970s, when the political climate was tense and critical manifestations were forbidden. Thus, people began to act in alternative and marginal circuits. These groups of people acted directly in the production, adding an artisanal character to their experiences, and in the subversion of established relations of cultural production.<sup>4</sup>

According to Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda, marginalized works of literature go against what are considered the traditional ways of production, edition, and distribution. Some of them are carried out in a more personal way with the reader, since these books can be delivered directly by the author in points of the city, like in front of museums and cinemas.<sup>5</sup> In addition, these books are produced in small quantities because they are handmade. The writers do all the design and style of their works, usually including drawings or collages.

In relation to the zine, Marcio Sno, a journalist and zinester<sup>6</sup> who, since 1993, has published zines and offered advice on the subject, defines it as

[...] an alternative and independent advertising vehicle, usually reproduced in few copies and distributed to a segmented audience. It arises from the need of specific groups to express themselves and have become fertile grounds for graphic and textual experiments, thanks to their total and unrestricted freedom.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Carlos Ceia, *E-Dicionário de Termos Literários*, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda, *Impressões de viagem – CPC, vanguarda e desbunde: 1960/70*, 2004, p. 107.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 108.

<sup>6</sup> Someone who writes, produces, and edits a zine.

<sup>7</sup> Márcio Sno, *O Universo Paralelo dos Zines*, 2015, p. 19, tradução nossa: “[...] um veículo de divulgação alternativo e independente, geralmente reproduzido em pequenas tiragens e distribuído para um público segmentado. Surge da necessidade de expressão de grupos específicos e tornaram-se campos férteis para experimentações gráficas e textuais graças a sua total e irrestrita liberdade”.

Wachsberger defined the zine as a “self-published, largely low-circulation labors of love and free expression”<sup>8</sup>. Then, it is possible to understand zine as a small artisan book made by its own author, with a small amount of copies, in which the writers approach some themes that they think are relevant to society. After this, the authors go to the city handing their books to people.

Following this brief overview of the meaning of marginalized literature and zine, respectively, it is possible to define the objectives of this research. Our general objectives are to present the structure of the format and content of the zine. The specific objectives are to reflect on the publishing environment in which they are inserted and on their relevance considering the current Brazilian context.

Considering this, three selected copies of zines will be analyzed: *Geração Beat* (2009), by Renato Alessandro dos Santos; *O Ceifador de Privilégios* (2015), by Arthus Mehanna; and *Libertemo-nos* (2018), by Melina Bassoli. The analysis will follow the same order presented above. We will firstly discuss its format, the market where it is inserted and, finally, reflect on the themes addressed and on its relevance.

This study will be important and also stimulating for people involved or interested in marginal literature and in zines. It is also appropriate to reiterate the relevance of this study in order to better understand the Brazilian marginal context as well as the cultural features that zines portray and produce.

## 2. The zine - a bit of history

This independent vehicle of production and distribution of marginal literature called zine is still little known nowadays, especially by readers who are more used to classical readings, which circulate among official editorial

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<sup>8</sup> Ken Wachsberger, *Underground press veteran discovers thriving, self-described underground press scene*, 1994, p. 57.

media. Nevertheless, many people have already probably read a zine, but they just do not know exactly what it is. Valhalla Vale defined zine as something much greater than other genres like the leaflet, the flyer or the poster: a zine can reflect the interests of the authors, their obsessions and the reasons for which they stand for. A zine goes deeper in its subjects and it does not care about publicity while it is being written.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, to better understand what a zine is, it is necessary to go back and examine the context in which it emerged.

The zine, as it is seen now, emerged decades ago in a different form. It appeared in the United States in the 1930s, firstly being called fanzine – a junction of the words fanatic and magazine. The first fanzine known is *The Comet*, by Ray Palmer, released in May 1930.<sup>10</sup> It focused on science fiction and, from that point on, spread throughout the world. Although they already existed, the term *fanzines* was only properly coined in 1941 with Lewis Russ Chauvenet's publication *Detours*.

The first zines made were created by readers and fans focused on science fiction. From these groups that produced and exchanged zines among themselves, the community of writers and readers began to increase and circulate all over the world. England was the first country to be influenced by this movement of free and creative production that spread in the United States.<sup>11</sup> Then, zines have appeared similarly in many countries, created by fans of science fiction and comics, among other themes. The production grew until it really became a movement.<sup>12</sup>

In Brazil, the term fanzine only began to be used in the 1970s. Known, before that, as *bulletin*, the first Brazilian fanzine was *Ficção* by Edson Rontani, written in 1965. *Ficção* was written for people who collected comic book magazines and it had 12 editions. In 1974, the author re-published *Ficção* with

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<sup>9</sup> Valhalla Vale, *Zines!*, 1996, p. 159.

<sup>10</sup> Henrique Magalhães, *O que é fanzine*, 1993, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Henrique Magalhães, *O que é fanzine*, 1993, p. 30 a 39.

the name *fanzine*: “I sent *Ficção* abroad and a French collectors’ club sent a comment about the bulletin calling it *fanzine*. So I decided to adopt that nomenclature when I got back to editing”<sup>13</sup>.

When the *fanzine* movement appeared in Brazil, still being called bulletin, it happened in a different cultural and historical context. *Fanzines* emerged influenced by the movement of marginal literature that occurred from the 1960s to the 1980s. According to Robert Ponge, “marginal literature is literature on the margins of official literature, that is, the literature of the ruling class”<sup>14</sup>. In other words, marginal literature is at the margin of canonical literature, addressing issues of a marginal reality, in a different way from classic works of the canon usually do address.

Mei Hua Soares states that “[...] texts and works that approach the universe of crime, violence, the underworld of drugs and urban misery, whose authors originate in or represent the peripheries, can be contemplated within this criterion of literary marginality”<sup>15</sup>. Nevertheless, marginal literature is related not only to works that show marginalized realities or writers living in areas considered marginal, but also to writers who identify with the causes of minorities without proper representation.

During those decades, the expression “*generation of the mimeograph*” also appeared, because of the use of the mimeograph for the production of what was called bulletins. The term was used as a variation, as, until the late 1970s, zines were printed by mimeographs. The first photocopied publication dated from

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<sup>13</sup> Edson Rontani *apud* Ana Camilla Negri, *Quarenta anos de fanzine no Brasil: o pioneirismo de Edson Rontani*, 2005, p. 11, tradução nossa: “Eu enviava o *Ficção* para o exterior e um clube de colecionadores franceses enviou um comentário sobre o boletim chamando-o de *fanzine*. Assim, resolvi adotar a nomenclatura, quando voltei a editar”.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Ponge, *Literatura marginal: tentativa de definição e exemplos franceses*, 1981, p. 137, tradução nossa: “Literatura marginal seria a literatura à margem da literatura oficial, isto é, da literatura da classe dominante”.

<sup>15</sup> Mei Hua Soares, *A Literatura Marginal-periférica e a escola*, 2008, p. 85, grifo da autora, tradução nossa: “[...] textos e obras que abordam o universo da criminalidade, da violência, o submundo das drogas e da miséria urbana, cujos autores são oriundos ou representam as periferias podem ser contempladas no interior desses critérios de *marginalidade* literária”.

1980 – *O Lobinho*, by Raul Veiga, who produced them in the United States and shipped them to Brazil.<sup>16</sup>

This generation of the mimeograph began to make contact with cultural production in the tense political climate of the 1970s, during the military dictatorship that had started in Brazil in 1964. At that time, censorship was excessive, prohibiting any type of critical manifestation through which people wanted to expose their positions. Thus, we had a period full of persecutions of teachers, intellectuals and artists, who in many cases chose to leave Brazil.<sup>17</sup>

In this tense political environment of impediment of manifestations, the writers began to look for means to manifest themselves by circumventing the prohibitions of the government. If the critical discussions were impeded, the solution was transferring them to cultural manifestations. An encoded resistance emerged, defined by Heloísa de Buarque de Hollanda as the “culture of resistance”<sup>18</sup>.

These manifestations with encoded messages appeared in songs, in theater plays by groups with no sponsors, in movies with small productions and in literature and poetry. They occurred in a marginal environment. Therefore, “slowly, we [were] creating in our main urban centers a kind of semimarginal editing and distributing circuit, which is certainly a political response to the set of prevailing adversities”<sup>19</sup>.

A new form of literature emerged with these bulletins. They circulated with a different use of language, where the reader could more clearly identify the voice of the writers and perceive their ideas and their experiences. This

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<sup>16</sup> Márcio Sno, *O Universo Paralelo dos Zines*, 2015, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> Heloísa de Buarque de Hollanda, *Impressões de viagem: CPC, vanguarda e desbunde: 1960/70*, 2004, p. 101.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 103, tradução nossa: “Cultura da resistência”.

<sup>19</sup> Heloísa de Buarque de Hollanda, *Impressões de viagem: CPC, vanguarda e desbunde: 1960/70*, 2004, p. 108, tradução nossa: “Lentamente, vai-se criando em nossos principais centros urbanos uma espécie de circuito semimarginal de edição e distribuição, o que é certamente uma resposta política ao conjunto de adversidades reinantes”.

aspect and the marginal poetry of the seventies portrayed the daily lives of people in a critical and independent way. The context in which people lived that period was a very important factor for the emergence of this generation of the mimeograph, the generation of resistance. With this, it is possible to perceive how the context is of paramount importance in the production of literary works.

Since foreign fanzines had the same characteristics of these bulletins that were made with the mimeograph, some authors adopted that term in the 1970s. According to Henrique Magalhães, the characteristics of a fanzine include: an alternative and amateur kind of handcrafted publication with few prints, produced by fans of some specific art for specific groups, generally addressing a single theme.<sup>20</sup>

Nowadays, in Latin American countries, some authors see no difference between the terms *fanzine* and *zine*. In the United States and Europe, the difference is very clear, because fanzine, as the term itself states, is a production made by fans of some art. In Brazil, this distinction between the terms was not accentuated. However, currently, some authors prefer to distinguish them and use the term *zine*.<sup>21</sup> In this paper, the distinction of the terms was adopted; therefore, we will use the term *zine*. When the term *fanzine* is used, it will refer specifically to the productions made by fans.

Concerning the production of zines, Henrique Magalhães said that “the process of producing a fanzine depends only on the goodwill of those who want to edit it”<sup>22</sup>. One of the first things a zinester should do is choose the theme, the format and the type and weight of the paper. Besides, they should also think about the possible resources to use as collages, drawings or embossing. As for the production, what counts the most is creativity. Furthermore, Bill Brent and Joe Biel present some other aspects about the process of production:

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<sup>20</sup> Henrique Magalhães, *O que é fanzine*, 1993, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> Márcio Sno, *O Universo Paralelo dos Zines*, 2015, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Henrique Magalhães, *O que é fanzine*, 1993, p. 62, tradução nossa: “O processo de produção de um fanzine depende só da boa vontade de quem quer editá-lo.”

a zine is a functional vehicle for self-expression. Folks in the zine world do not view a zine as a 'lesser' format. Without the fear of losing advertising revenue or offending its readership, a zine can take on topics the mainstream media ignores. [...] taken as a group, zines contain some of the most unique and subversive writing and thought available in any format today.<sup>23</sup>

In relation to the distribution, which refer to how zinesters take them to the readers, the means of distributing a zine are diverse. It is possible that the zinesters go to places where there are people circulating and, once there, show their zines, in front of theaters, cinemas and parks, for instance. The distribution can occur by handing them at shows, concerts, universities, libraries and cultural centers. Another option is to send copies by mail, if the edition is more elaborate, with seams, binding or high relief, or to make them available online, in digital format.<sup>24</sup>

Recently, the number of zines online has grown over the internet, exactly because of the practicality of being digitally produced and published. Marcio Sno listed four reasons why zinesters started to switch from the paper version to the virtual when the internet became popular in the 1990s (and until nowadays): "1) the novelty [...]; 2) there is practically no cost, only the internet account is paid [...]; 3) the huge amount of audiovisual resources [...]; 4) the reach appears to be larger"<sup>25</sup>.

After this panorama about what a zine is, how it is produced and distributed, it is important to discuss the themes that zinesters usually address. According to Omar Alejandro Sanches Rico, there were three editorial lines categorized until 1980: zines that released independent music, about bands and concerts – mainly of punk and rock; those that spread comic strips; and the ones that talked about militancy, gender movements and political manifestations.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Bill Brent and Joe Biel, *Make a Zine: When Words and Graphics Collide*, 2014, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Márcio Sno, *O Universo Paralelo dos Zines*, 2015, p. 100.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 65, tradução nossa: "1) a novidade [...]; 2) praticamente não tem custo, só se paga mesmo a conta da internet [...]; 3) a quantidade gigante de recursos audiovisuais [...]; 4) a abrangência aparentemente parece ser maior".

<sup>26</sup> Omar Alejandro Sanches Rico, *Atualização da concepção sobre aquilo chamado de Zine*, 2017, p. 110.

Nevertheless, currently, many other types of zines have emerged, such as journals, travel diaries, some dealing with social criticism, biographies, addressing racism and feminism issues, among others. "There are no limits to themes. Just have an idea that it can become a topic. And it becomes a zine!"<sup>27</sup>. They can address any theme and still maintain their features.

Concerning the themes that are addressed in zines, it is possible to better understand the cultural medium in which they are inserted. All the mentioned characteristics show us that zines are, since their origin, inserted in an underground environment. Stephen Duncombe stated that:

[i]n an era marked by the rapid centralization of corporate media, zines are independent and localized, coming out of the cities, suburbs and small towns [...]. They celebrate the everyperson in a world of celebrity. Losers in a society that rewards the best and the brightest. Rejecting the corporate dream of an atomized population broken down into discrete and instrumental target markets, zine writers form networks and forge communities around diverse identities and interests. Employed within the grim new economy of service, temporary, and "flexible" work, they redefine work, setting out their creative labor done on zines as a protest against the drudgery of working for another's profit. Defining themselves against a society predicated on consumption, zinesters privilege the ethic of DIY, do-it-yourself: make your own culture and stop consuming that which is made for you.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to zines representing vehicles of resistance, freedom of expression and human rights claims, they also brought new visual aesthetics, which established new concepts for graphic experimentation and marked the aesthetics of the underground press.<sup>29</sup>

With all this in mind, we can better understand the zine. All its features demonstrate how it is inserted in the underground scenario. The zinesters, looking for ways to express themselves without worrying about success and fame, go exactly against the official media and mainstream editorial market, which refers to the ones that circulate around the great editors and the official

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<sup>27</sup> Márcio Sno, *O Universo Paralelo dos Zines*, 2015, p. 45, tradução nossa: "Não há limites para temas. Basta ter uma ideia que ela vira tema. E que vira zine!".

<sup>28</sup> Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from underground: Zines and the politics of alternative culture*, 2014, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> Márcio Sno, *O Universo Paralelo dos Zines*, 2015, p. 26.

press; the ones that print and publish materials, charging a high value from the companies to publish and then from the reading public. The environment in which the zine is inserted is entirely independent and alternative, as discussed above.

### 3. Format

As previously mentioned, the zine is an alternative vehicle through which marginal literature is expressed. Since its origins, it deals with underground themes, as well as with counterculture. Concerning this, we will focus on the objectives proposed by this research. Firstly, we will present and then discuss the format of the zines. The first one to be analyzed is *Geração Beat* (2009), by Renato Alessandro dos Santos. Secondly, *O Ceifador de Privilégios* (2015), by Arthus Mehanna, and, finally, *Libertemo-nos* (2018), by Melina Bassoli.

*Geração Beat* by Renato Alessandro dos Santos is available on the author's website, *Tertúlia*, where he makes other titles available as well as other types of information concerning literature. He is a zinester that since the 1990s has created (fan)zines. In this case, Santos prefers to call them fanzines instead of zines.

Santos designed his (fan)zine in order to talk about three topics: literature, music and cinema. In *Geração Beat*, he addresses the world of the Beat Generation. The term is used to describe a group of Americans, known from the 1950s to the 1960s, which included mainly writers and poets, as well as the cultural phenomenon they inspired. These writers and poets began to produce widely, pursuing their self-expression, contesting what society implied them to say, to freely spread their point of view about the world. They were very important within the counterculture – a movement that had its heyday during the 1960s and disseminated a new way of life and a set of attitudes that

confronted the predominant social rules, making use of mass media tools.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, to the generation of the mimeograph, the artists who led this movement were very inspiring.

This (fan)zine was made in A5 format, which is 14.8 x 21cm, and had twenty pages. This format is considered more comfortable to be handled and read.<sup>31</sup> From its format description, it is possible to infer a relation to another vehicle, the magazine. The difference from a magazine to a zine is the textual genres that are addressed in them.

A genre, as proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin, is a relatively stable typical utterance, formulated considering the discursive intention of the speaker. With their individuality and subjectivity, the speakers choose a certain genre of discourse. The choice is determined by the discursive communication, by the concrete situation or by the personal composition of its participants.<sup>32</sup>

Some common textual genres presented in magazines are: editorials – texts that discuss political, social, cultural or economic facts, from the point of view of its editors; chronicles – short texts usually signed by a fiction writer or by a person specialized in a certain area who writes periodically to a section; reviews – which provide information about books, films, plays or other artistic works, and give an opinion about them; besides, they refer to other works, comparing and making quotations to justify the point of view of the authors.<sup>33</sup>

It is possible to detect textual genres that are commonly used in magazines in this zine, *Geração Beat*. Moreover, the author makes usage of photos, drawings and varied fonts. However, despite using many resources, we must emphasize that zine is produced in an independent way. Besides, its themes are usually segmented for the underground public and minority groups.

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<sup>30</sup> Carlos Alberto Messeder Pereira, *O que é a Contracultura*, 1983.

<sup>31</sup> Márcio Sno, *O Universo Paralelo dos Zines*, 2015, p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Estética da criação verbal*, 2003, p. 262.

<sup>33</sup> Pollyanna Honorata Silva, *Os gêneros jornalísticos e as várias faces da notícia*, 2007.

The second zine to be analyzed is *O Ceifador de Privilégios*, by Arthus Mehanna. This zine is different if compared to the first. It has poems and drawings in its content. It is actually made up of just one sheet of paper folded to transform it into a book. The page is divided into three equal parts, and each part brings a poem. Mehanna combined the art of the poems using diverse fonts with the art of abstract drawing.

Zines about poetry were highly produced around the first part of the 1970s. It was known as a new kind of poetry – marginal poetry, which, more than show its poetical values, brought subversion of traditional literary patterns. The use of colloquial language became more common and it approximated the author and the reading public. This new type of literature also exposed the real life experience of the poets, revealing their stories in an ambiguous and ironic sense that worked as independent criticism.<sup>34</sup>

The last zine of this selection, *Libertemo-nos*, by Melina Bassoli, has six pages. The zinester, who is a teacher, sociologist and artist, makes usage of various tools for her production. The format of this zine is mainly digital. It is offered by Bassoli through the website *Cachalote Publicações*. *Libertemo-nos*, if compared to the last two, is the one that uses the largest amount of digital tools and visual sources such as drawings, pictures and fonts. Another interesting aspect of this zine's format is the way in which visual tools intertwine with textual content.

Besides using all these resources, the content addressed is about female freedom. It proclaims that women should stay together and must free themselves from the rules that society and men impose on them. However, a deeper discussion over the theme will be held later.

Still talking about the format and the textual part of the zine, we can observe that, in the six pages of content, Bassoli intertwined the images with the

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<sup>34</sup> Heloísa de Buarque de Hollanda, *Impressões de viagem – CPC, vanguarda e desbunde: 1960/70*, 2004, p. 108.

theme and the textual source due to the fact that the format of the font changes depending on the intonation of the speaker. The font used on page two is used to speak directly to the reader. It tells a story of resistance, the story of both the speaker and the reader. The font used on page 3 and in the first half of page 4 still tells this story; it is a voice not only of resistance, but also subversive, that seeks to break this established order. The last font, the one that says “Vem, irmã...Vamos Juntas!” (“C’mon, sister... Let’s go Together!”) on pages 4 and 5, carries an extra message: not to fight alone. On the contrary of the other font, this one changes the format in a way to reflect the difference in the speaker’s intonation. For this reason, we can see that this zine explores several aspects and interweaves them.

After this analysis, it was possible to notice that the first zine is bigger than the second and third ones. It has the style of a magazine, addressing specific information about the Beat Generation, music, literature and cinema. The second is smaller; its dimensions are different from the others and it brings us poems. The third zine shows a different and creative format, using several tools of image and text in it. Therefore, there is not a single model to create a zine. Zinesters can work in all sizes and formats; it only depends on their creativity.

There are many other types of zines. Márcio Sno registered zines of diverse formats such as the Spanish Miguel Harguindey Vidal’s *Gharabato do Rato*, 6 cm tall and 27 cm wide, *A Film With Me in It* by Fernanda Meireles, who made her zine in dimensions 3 cm x 3 cm, or even the zine *Anormal* by Wagner Nyhyw that was made in a T-shirt.<sup>35</sup>

It is possible to reflect that zines are a product of marginal literature and, at the same time, they might inspire it, because their format encompasses a great freedom of production. The world of zines can be widely expanded to various formats and styles because what really matters is creativity. There is no fixed

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<sup>35</sup> Márcio Sno, *O Universo Paralelo dos Zines*, 2015, p. 32.

model to create one. They are independent productions for people interested in its essence, the underground culture.

Thereby, zines are important in literary and cultural terms, besides communication. Those who go through the experience of creating a zine, as well as of promoting the alternative art, also contribute in a personal perspective. The authors' different views of life, focusing on values few recognized in a world of competition, can make them express themselves through zines. The zinester wants to share their experiences and opinions, and this approximates people, making them see through another strand.<sup>36</sup>

After talking about zine as a vehicle of the independent cultural environment and its format, it is possible to discuss where zines are inserted in the Brazilian editorial context.

#### 4. Where is the zine inserted?

There are two aspects that can be taken into account in order to understand and reflect on this point: the first is how the zine is presented to the public, and the second is how zines manipulate their themes and contents. As it was addressed, the differences between the official publishing market and independent publications are very big. In the official publishing market, there are many phases before a work is selected and published. Firstly, selection and reading of the material; after, it has to be sent to the editors to revision and edition; then, it goes back to the publisher for definition of the design and layout of the book; finally, editors have to plan how they will promote it, among other marketing actions.<sup>37</sup>

Besides, when it comes to the official publishing market, another thing is the message that is being transmitted. Sometimes, writers cannot transmit their

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<sup>36</sup> Márcio Sno, *O Universo Paralelo dos Zines*, 2015, p. 38.

<sup>37</sup> Cristina Yamazaki, *Edição de texto na produção editorial de livros: distinções e definições*, 2009.

messages because the editor prefers something different. Thus, writers have to adequate or accept interventions to their works if they want to be published.

On the other side, the independent production is completely free. There are not rules or procedures to follow. Writers and zinesters will produce whatever inspires them and will try to share with the readers. They focus on sharing ideas, opinions, information; they want to inspire the readers as they were probably inspired. Here, the zinester is not focused on money or great divulgation, since they do not have as their main goal to be rich or become celebrities. They go against the mainstream. The point is sharing what is important: relevant experiences.

After pointing the main differences between reading markets above, it is easier for us to reflect about the insertion of our selected zines, following the same order.

Even though *Geração Beat* is available in pdf format for free in its website, the zinester also sends the paper version to readers that contact him. At this point, it is possible to notice the zinester's freedom. He designs his zine firstly in paper, and after that he works on its digital version. This idea delights readers both digital and tangible.

Unlike the first one, Arthus Mehanna preferred not to make his zines available online through websites. He chose to physically produce his zines, make multiple copies and sell them at low cost in a more traditional and intimate way. Nevertheless, he mails it to everyone who contacts him.

In relation to *Libertemo-nos*, it is available online for free through the website *Cachalote Publicações*, where it also exposes other titles of zines referring to feminism, racial issues and anarchism. In this case, the digital file is provided.

We can conclude from the way the zines are presented and distributed that they are completely inserted into a universe of independent and alternative publications. These publications do not depend on publishers, since the zinesters

design, promote and distribute them. It is a creative environment where they do not have to follow the style of the publishers.

Although the zine is an independent publication, a question that can arise is why official publishers cannot insert it in the mainstream publications, making it available in large numbers, so that it receives greater visibility – since few people know what the zine is. However, the answer would probably be that the world in which the zine arose and everything it aggregates is part of the underground culture. The zine, as Stephen Duncombe said, represents an area of activity where people express and convey their own values.<sup>38</sup> Thus, zines are part of the alternative culture that changes the meaning of what a zine is. It is more interesting to give visibility and importance to this alternative culture instrument that is so rich – instead of transforming it.

Thereafter, it is possible to move to the third aspect of our analysis, which refers to the content. From there, we can also reflect on the relevance that zines have.

## 5. The relevance of the zine

This part focuses on understanding the relevance of the zine in our culture as marginal literature, and the best way to approach this subject is to analyze the content of our zines. After discussing how zines came about, we can say that their characteristics revolve around creativity, resistance and criticism. The zinesters mostly opt for critical issues to convey a reflection about these subjects, and also as a way to bring awareness to the readers.

By analyzing the contents of *Geração Beat*, we can see that it informs the reader about a movement that started within marginal literature. Santos had the idea of writing this zine because of a film produced by Francis Ford Coppola –

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<sup>38</sup> Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, 2014, p. 7.

celebrating the 40th anniversary of the publication *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac. He made this zine to talk about writers whose subjects are road trips, drugs and sex.<sup>39</sup>

It is interesting that Santos wants to discuss these topics – a symbol of the counterculture – nowadays, so that the message will not be forgotten. We can notice why he wants to address such a theme in his zine. The Beat Generation marked history: it relates to the scene of the 1950s and the 1960s and to what was happening after the Second World War; the Cold War, the political tension and the persecution of the intellectuals of that era. From all of this, the Beat Generation emerged.<sup>40</sup>

Consequently, we can establish this zine's importance in three aspects: firstly, in recognizing how literature is used to mark and portray the facts of history, thus keeping it alive; secondly, in noticing the importance to remember the Beat Generation nowadays, opening this subject to new readers; and thirdly, it is important to reiterate that themes related to the counterculture were addressed in zines since their origins. These themes are recurrent features of zines, making *Geração Beat* an example of consonance between the means and the content.

Throughout the reading of *Geração Beat*, it is possible to notice a connection between the aspects of literature (pages 04 - 13) and the mentions to music (page 4). We can observe this at the beginning of the zine (page 3), when the events that would happen in the *Beatweek* are presented: they joined literature and *On the Road*, poetry and Paulo Leminski, music and a big reference, Bob Dylan, and also bands like *Lovecraft*. In addition to this, Santos could mix the snippets of information about what the Beat Generation is, pointing out the relationship that it has with music. For example, the name 'beat' itself refers to bebop and jazz.

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<sup>39</sup> Renato Alessandro dos Santos, *Geração Beat*, 2009, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

What we can emphasize of more relevant about this sample is the richness of this cultural movement, whose main point was to produce more knowledge through art. Their search was to challenge the model of society and to open space for self-expression. This became a symbol of the counterculture. Moreover, the interconnection made among these individual artistic expressions is notable.

The second zine, *O Ceifador de Privilégios*, by Arthus Mehanna, includes six poems – *Orquidário Espinhoso*, *Ampulheta*, *Não-Linear Tênuê*, *A Voz é Foice*, *Arte Patriarcal* and *Ratoeira*. They are speaking very deeply of themes with a character of resistance. These themes are important to our culture, in order to produce a reflection about the topics. As an illustration, one of the poems was chosen to be analyzed.

*A Voz é Foice*. Through this title it is possible to have an idea of what the poem might say. However, in order to understand it deeply, it is necessary to analyze it in parts. Starting from the title, “the voice is sickle”; it could mean a lot of things. ‘Voice’ is the set of sounds that are formed by the vibrations of the vocal cords with the air that runs through the larynx.<sup>41</sup> Yet, the word has some implications, and we depend on the context to understand its meaning. Here, we could say that voice can mean expression, freedom and resistance.

Concerning the sickle, it is an instrument used to harvest, cut or extinguish. So, the voice is the sickle that cuts and extinguishes. After a more detailed reading it is possible to interpret that the author may be referring to the black people that served in the period of slavery in cotton farms. In the first stanza, he makes an allusion to cotton, about the way these people were mistreated and disrespected, as they tried to shove cotton down the throat of the

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<sup>41</sup> Luiz Antonio Sacconi, *Grande dicionário Sacconi da língua portuguesa: comentado, crítico e enciclopédico: o mais atualizado*, 2010, p. 2074.

slaves. It might mean that slaves should accept submission or accept to be considered inferior; and this would mute them.

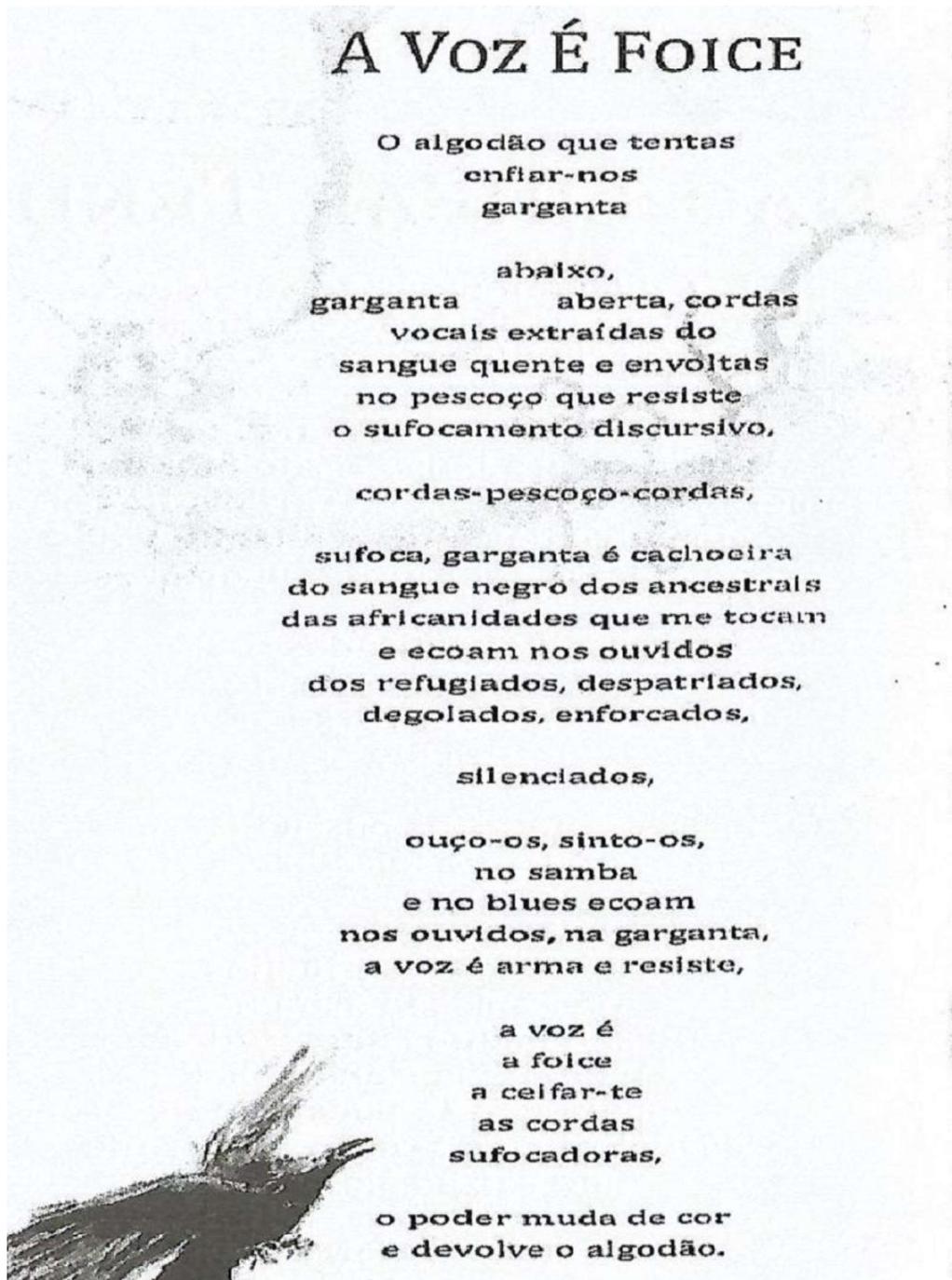


Figure 1  
Arthus Mehanna, *O Ceifador de Privilégios*, 2015.

In the second stanza, we interpret the open throat and the vocal cords being extracted as symbolizing the weakness of the slaves in being forced to accept that situation without saying anything. It represents the discursive suffocation that they suffered.

The third and fourth stanzas can be interpreted as the announcer suffocating now for his African ancestors who suffered in silence. The speaker talks about how he feels them when he listens to samba or blues, because it proves that they were here and that they influenced music, leaving these clear marks in our culture, which we must express today. Then, the speaker affirms that the voice is the weapon that resists, it is the sickle that cuts the strings that suffocate us, thus reminding it is with the power of the voice that we can resist, and we must not endure this suffocation any longer. It is a message to speak, to use the voice to resist to what oppresses us. In the end, the speaker says that the power changes color and returns the cotton, referring to the black people getting the power through their voice and resisting against those who attack them.

From this copy, it is possible to notice themes related to racial issues, such as resistance, black pride and how important it is to know our history so that we can modify it in the future. This way, it is necessary to highlight again the importance of literature because it is the mediator that, besides portraying history, enchants us with the use of its resources. Its importance lies in the fact that we can look ahead, aware of what was in the past, and thus modify our lives.

It is also good to reiterate that themes like these have always been part of zines. It is what marks them – dealing with unrepresented minorities and resistance. Marginal poetry like this is subversive and seeks to defeat the oppressor. *O Ceifador de Privilégios* aims at breaking down racism and prejudice, and it is typical of zines to represent this aspect of resistance and struggle.

Another point is the richness regarding the structural aspect. The zine innovates and deconstructs, as the zinester transposes the content to the form: for instance, when he mentions “garganta abaixo”, the word “abaixo” goes to the

lower line; when he writes “garganta aberta”, there is a large space between the words.

In this aspect, the poem can be related to another movement:

the concrete poetry movement was launched in 1956 in São Paulo by the group *Noigrandes* [...]. The dense team work generates productions not limited to poems, but extended to critical essays in spreading the new poetry [...] concretists engender a poetry of formal interest, based on resources graphics, such as drawings, figures, photomontage, which allude to the proposal of the visual poem presented by the movement.<sup>42</sup>

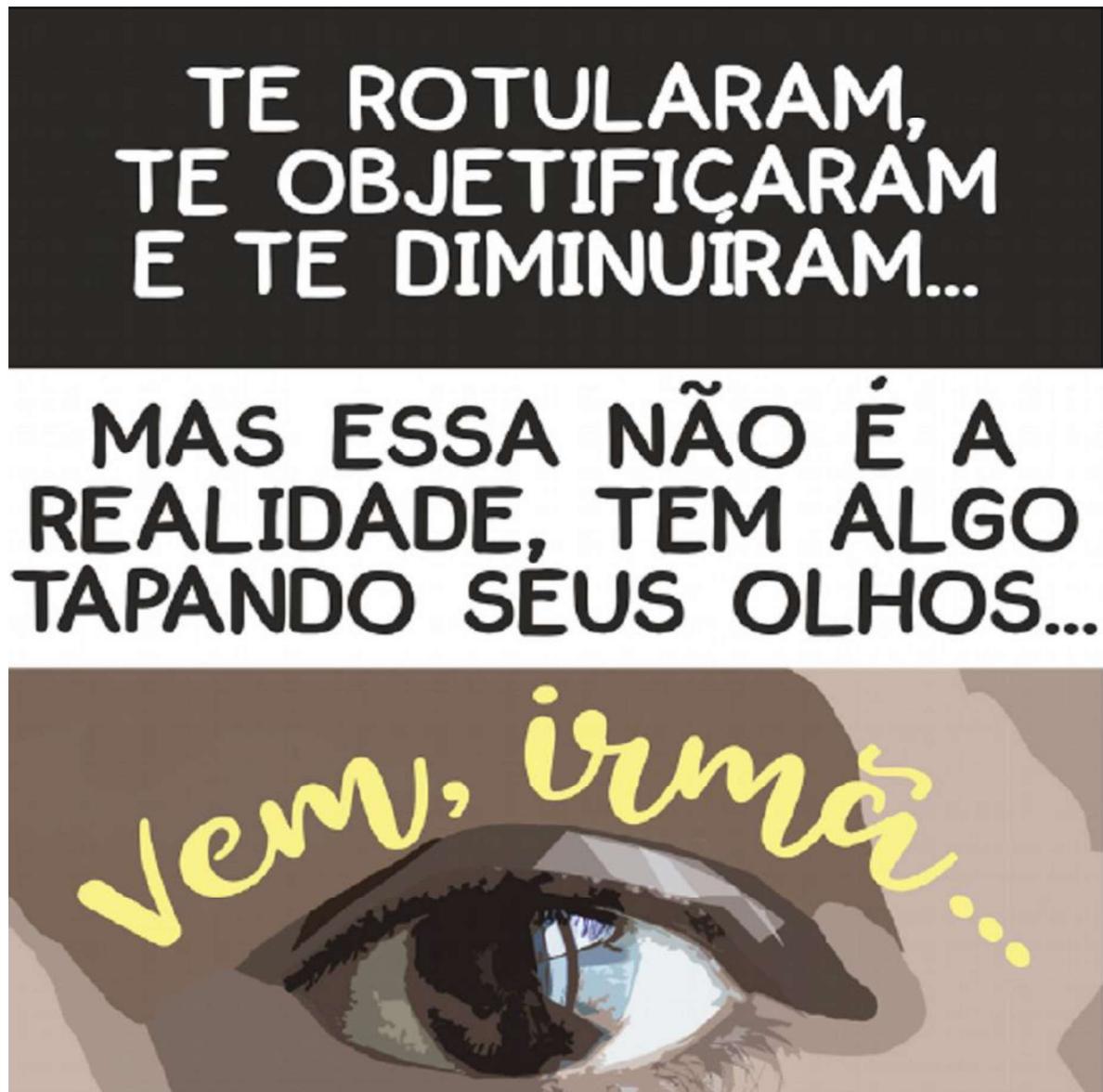
Thus, this zine demonstrates how it can go beyond the usual formal structures to add meaning.



**Figure 2**  
Melina Bassoli, *Libertemo-nos*, 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Lidiane Alves Nascimento, Solange Fiuza Cardoso Yokozawa, *Paulo Leminski: um concretista distraído*, 2011, p. 02, tradução nossa: “O movimento da poesia concreta é lançado em 1956 em São Paulo pelo grupo *Noigrandes* [...]. O denso trabalho de equipe gera produções não limitadas a poemas, mas estendidos a ensaios críticos de divulgação da nova poesia [...] os concretistas engendram uma poesia de interesse formal, pautada em recursos gráficos, tais como desenhos, figuras, fotomontagem, os quais aludem à proposta do poema visual apresentada pelo movimento.”

The last zine is *Libertemo-nos*. It addresses the world of feminism. It is possible to say this because the cover shows us a woman with blindfolded eyes and an X on her mouth; the image has no colors. These elements refer to the fact that she cannot express herself, not affirming her wishes and desires, not telling anyone whether she needs help. She is imprisoned, and the title is direct and clear: *let us free*.



**Figure 3**  
Melina Bassoli, *Libertemo-nos*, 2018.

In these other images, the language used is quite straightforward and simple, partly because of the use of modern language where the zinester can stand as the speaker and talk to the reader. The text seeks to catch the attention of women to get up and fight for their rights. This zine dialogues with the current context in which we live – a time when women must fight for their rights not to be disrespected and also not to be labeled, objectified and diminished for being a woman. It is also a time when women must strive so that more women will get up and fight. There are many women who do not know what it is to be respected; many are humiliated and suffer violence. Therefore, the intention of this zine is to spread the message that women are not alone and that they must fight together for their rights.

The content of *Libertemo-nos* is really a subject that needs to be discussed more as long as there is this discrepancy in the way in which men and women are treated. This matter cannot be extinguished. Women have yet to prove themselves capable, and this is where this zine works, saying that they are capable.

This is why *Libertemo-nos* is so important nowadays, as well it will be in the future, perhaps being remembered for dealing with the problems we faced. Once again, the zine plays its role as a medium for dealing with minority issues, for representing a public, for being a means of expression for someone who needs to get this message across.

In this collection, the authors talk about marginalized themes and discuss issues that do not receive the same attention from the official media. We can find aspects of their connection to our culture and to the context in which we live. Zines are a great tool for sharing opinions that can be worked out on some relevant subjects to be discussed by our society. Moreover, the importance of zines to mark history is transcendental – since they can contain values, experiences and perspectives and transport all that through the ages. They can

bring the whole cultural context of an era with them; this is why they might transcend times.

This selection covers several different formats and contents, from racial issues to feminism. In fact, as previously mentioned, there are many styles and formats of zines that cover many other themes. It is possible to notice the richness in the form, content and in the production of zines. From its richness, we can understand their relevance to our culture as a way to represent it, to look at our past and reflect on the future. The zinester marks history and culture in every zine produced. As Edgard Guimarães said, the first and most important aspect of the fanzines is cultural.<sup>43</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The zine is little known by the great public; many people do not even know it has a proper name. Nevertheless, there is much substance in these works. The purpose and objectives of this research were to discuss the zine, to examine where it is inserted in the editorial environment and to reflect on its cultural relevance, also as a way to increase its visibility. From the three samples, *Geração Beat*, by Renato Alessandro dos Santos, *O Ceifador de Privilégios*, by Arthus Mehanna, and *Libertemo-nos*, by Melina Bassoli, it was possible to analyze them in search of trying to understand these aspects.

Through the three zines, it was noticed that both their format, which has no established model, and the medium in which they are inserted are characteristics of the alternative and independent culture. The chosen zines showed this diversity of models and formats. In *Geração Beat*, there are 20 pages in A5 format and presenting a model similar to a magazine; *O Ceifador de Privilégios* has only one page, which folds dividing the six poems included in it; it is also possible to say that the poems are related to marginal poetry themes and

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<sup>43</sup> Edgard Guimarães, *Fanzine*, 2005, p. 32.

have a few features that could link them to concrete poetry; and in the last one, *Libertemo-nos*, there are five pages, being firstly produced and made available in the digital format, using a mixture between written and visual language.

Concerning the editorial environment, it is possible to identify the zines' alternative character through both format and content. We have seen they are not inserted in the official publishing market, because this is one of the aspects that link it to the alternative culture and medium. The themes of the zines also help reflect on their relevance. The first zine that we analyzed deals with the Beat Generation – a product of counterculture. The second zine presents marginal poetry, addressing oppression, racial issues, the struggle for voice and freedom. The last one has a feminist character of resistance, showing that women are not alone and should not shut up.

Thus, from the mentioned aspects: the format, the content and the means by which the zine is produced and distributed emphasize its value as a product and as an instrument of marginal literature – that is, literature that does not belong to the *canon*; literature that is made by its own authors; literature that discusses themes that matter to minority groups.

The zine is a vehicle for marginal literature that proposes the reflection on themes that mark our history and culture and help in the understanding of our past and future. It portrays the identity of self-expression, creativity, resistance, escape from the mainstream, *do it yourself* and *share your ideals*.

Finally, the great value of the zine is its democratic aspect. This is the reason why it is used to convey minority groups' ideas about resistance and opinions with no place in the mainstream market, suffocated by the editorial media. The three analyzed zines reveal these characteristics, dealing with marginal themes, following an inexpensive and accessible format, thus being alternative. They represent this freedom, this democratic aspect that involves dealing with marginalized issues.

These are some important features that we can point out about the zine and what it represents. Therefore, the zine turns out to be of great relevance to any reader as it helps build the consciousness of the cultural context in which we live. The zine also reflects the non-prevalence of the mainstream media – where the information that circulates is mostly manipulated and edited. With zines, the expression is free.

This research means, for the area of literature in general and for marginal literature in specific, a quest to broaden the knowledge about what the zine is. Its importance is perceptible through its cultural, social and historical relevance, so we can reiterate the need to expand the studies in this area so that it may receive more visibility.

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