

Zines! A Primer



Unfold me for a mini-zine template!

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Jason Luther
Syracuse U
@jwluther
taxomania.org

Direct Action.

Although Adbusters, is often credited for lighting the spark that started Occupy, the movement spawned hundreds of zines that were distributed throughout Zucotti, NYC, and the rest of the world.



Happenings. Last summer Barnard Library zine guru Jenna Freedman helped organize the “MTA Zine Residency” (partially a response to Amtrak), where zinesters united to make quick zines on commuters on the F train.

Zine Fests. Chicago, Brooklyn, and Portland have some of the biggest zine festivals in the US, but other amazing publishing events exist in Canada (Gazline), Buffalo (Small Press Fest), and, of course, Tampa! Here, makers gather to sell, trade, or teach with zines.



Definition

Put most simply, zines are self-made, self-circulated, DIY print publications that obsess over some sort of passion, whether its music, feminism, sex, food, a job, etc. While circulations typically run small (5-200 copies), collectively, zinesters represent one of the largest networks of self-published writers.

Zines are hard to define because of their variety. They’re often made by individuals, but sometimes represent more collective efforts through compilations. They can be handmade and/or desktop published. Often they’re often stapled, but sometimes held together by stitches or rubber bands. Regardless of the kind of bindings, folds, inks, or paper used, what’s essential about zines is that they are material. They are distributed through the mail, DIY shops (called distros), or at one of the dozens of zine festivals held annually throughout the world.

History

Zines have their most immediate roots in sci-fi fanzines of the 1930s-60s, the hardcore and punk scenes of the 70s, and more recently in the identity & gender



politics of the 80s and 90s (especially riot grrrl and LGBT communities). Zines have seen a resurgence since the late 00s, perhaps as a backlash against overly saturated, commercialized, disembodied digital publishing technologies;

paradoxically, however, these same writers have embraced new media to connect with other zines and/or circulate their print publications through distros or at zine festivals across North American and Europe.

Uses

Droplifting. Droplifting (AKA shoptopping) is a form of culture jamming that involves strategically placing zines (or other printed matter) in stores, restaurants, malls, buses, libraries, or other public places. Often zinesters implicitly or explicitly critique a space (or consumption more generally), literally creating public audiences in the process. This calls into question tensions between free speech and public/private property, as shoptoppers have been intimidated or even arrested for dropping their zines in chain stores (see Anna Elizabeth Moore’s book *Unmarketable* for examples).

Archives. Barnard, U Iowa, Cal, and New York State have incredible zine libraries that make publicly available several volumes of folk records for historical research. This doesn’t include zines and indie pubs that are preserved within university special collections. See <https://zines.barnard.edu/zine-libraries> for more.



DROPLIFTERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

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