

OF YOUR  
→

WHATCHA

to  
MEAN,

WHAT'S A

ZINE?

THE ART OF MAKING ZINES AND MINI COMICS

UNIVERSITY OF  
WISCONSIN  
MADISON

School of Education  
Center for Instructional Materials and Computing

Mark Todd + Esther Pearl Watson

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY MORE THAN 20 CREATORS OF INDIE COMICS AND MAGAZINES

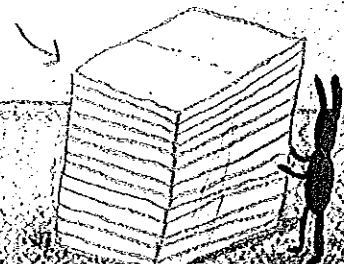
GRAPHIA

an imprint of Houghton Mifflin Company

Boston 2006



CUT



TRIM

under



A PERSONAL History of  
**ZINE.S**

by Raina Lee

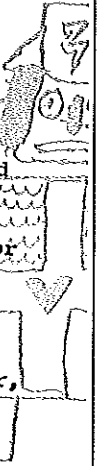
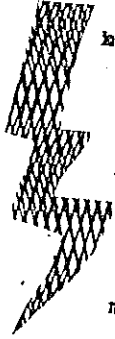
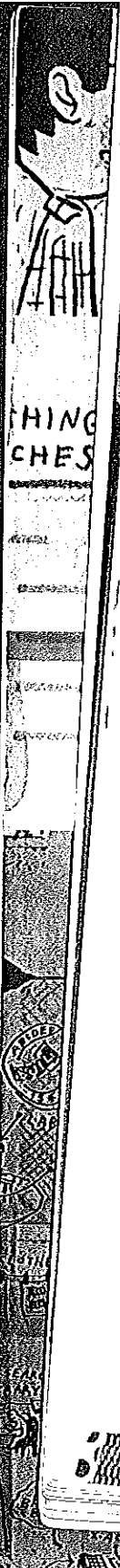
PUBLISHER OF I-UP.

When you're a teenager and nothing appeals to you,  
When nothing speaks to your experience.  
When you feel like you're the only one around who thinks what  
you think and want to find others like you,  
When you have something urgently, desperately, passionately  
to say, right away,  
When all you have, all you can afford is a pen, paper,  
and some money for the copy machine.

"When I first picked up a zine I wasn't sure what it was, who  
made it, and where it came from, but I read it cover to cover in one  
sitting. It was a half-letter-sized zine with a tiny booklet in the  
middle. It was covered with raw doodles and dense pages of text. The  
zine was irreverent and esoteric; I loved the fact that someone had  
thought so long and so hard about one particular thing, which in  
this case was ways to rip off "the Man." I had nothing but respect for  
the publisher to create something so few were going to read but would  
at least greatly appreciate.

Hence, I became enamored with the form. I became a zine collector,  
a zine publisher, and all-around zine fanatic in my teens. Zines to  
me became an instantaneous paper rebellion. Anyone with a pen, paper,  
and impassioned thought could make one, rich, poor, skilled, or not.  
Zines are for people with something to say, right now. Zines are  
for people who don't see themselves represented in mainstream media  
or disagree about what is being said. Zines are for those who go  
beyond conventional writing and opt for a melody of word and pictures,  
vision and thought - cut out, glued, photocopied, and all stapled together.

While there are too many zines dead and alive to name, I can note  
my own personal journey into the world of zines. I first became  
interested in large format general-interest zines such as Ben Is Dead,  
and the IA-based fanzine that had started as I Hate Brenda (of  
90210 fame), a newsletter which evolved into an eclectic zine parodying other  
publications and covering obscure topics. Other general interest zines  
included Bunnyhop and Giant Robot, which still covers Asian and Asian  
American pop culture and lifestyles. Maximumrocknroll was the  
quintessential punk rockers music zine, heavy on masculine energy and  
holier-than-thou punk attitude, and Punk Planet (which is still in print)  
covers music from a



politicized and community oriented viewpoint.

Zines are also hard to find since you can't find them at your nearest chain bookstore; to be keyed into the zine community check out review zines, where people send in their work to be honestly reviewed. The biggest and most widely read review zine was Factsheet Five, which is now defunct. FF5 had, in addition to reviews, updated addresses and underground publishing news.

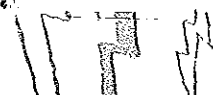
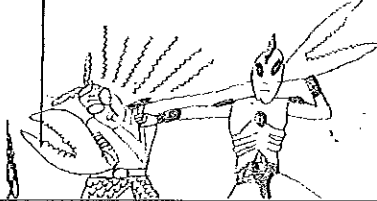
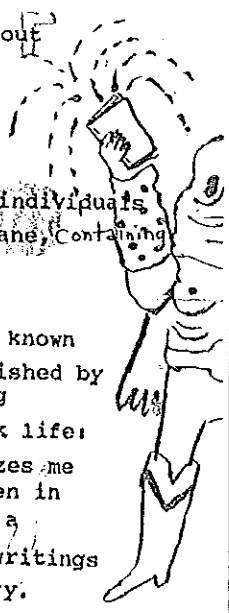
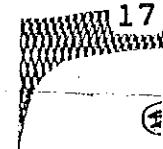
Another genre is that of the thematic fanzine, which focused on a very specific subject matter almost to the point of exhaustion. Early fanzines on science fiction fantasy proliferated in the 1950s. Some even argue that Thomas Paine's 1776 Common Sense was a zine. Zines as we know them ~~started~~ started mostly as fanzines about bands and politics in the 80's.

What I really appreciate, however, are zines on esoteric subjects - the strange, the trivial, and the obscure. A zine called The Palindromist was entirely about, um, palindromes. Beer Frame reviewed strange consumer products such as sauerkraut juice. Duplex Rx Planet published by a nursing home worker compiled interviews of older folks and their wise and comical views of life. A favorite zine of mine was Scaredy Cat Stalker, a hilarious pup devoted to ~~frax~~ fearful "stalking" of E.T. child star Henry Thomas. Stalker parodied the traditional zealous star-zine by being zealous but sarcastically mocking of its object of desire.

Another zine was entirely about making milk crate furniture.

The most common kind of zine is the personal zine, created by individuals reflecting on their everyday lives - confessional, sometimes mundane, containing even scandalous writings.

The most well known personal zine, which is still in publication, is Cometbus, published by an older punk rocker in Berkeley, California. Cometbus's endearing reflections about his travels is a kind of diary of the punk rock life: traveling, seeing bands, and visiting friends. What always amazes me about Cometbus is that the text-dense zine is entirely handwritten in uppercase; no typewriter or word processor here. Doris is like a female Cometbus about a woman who suffers from depression. Her writings and observations tend to make her readers want to hug her and cry.



Personally, I was inspired by the zines that came out of Riot Grrrl  
 [redacted], a movement that incited young women to start bands, make art  
 and create zines about their experiences. I was compelled by zines that  
six critiqued mainstream representations of gender and race. I'm So Fucking  
Beautiful, which dealt with female body issues and representations of  
 normative beauty, and Tennis and Violins and Slander, which both  
 focused on queer Asian feminist politics. Evolution of a Race Riot,  
 edited by Mimi Nguyen, collected writings by queer, women, and people  
 of color in punk rock, critiquing racism and sexism within that scene.  
 I started to publish my own zine on feminist writings that mixed fragmented  
 thoughts, essays, and cut-out graphics.

Through zining I've met dozens of other zinesters, many of whom have  
 become my closest and dearest friends. By ordering zines reviewed in  
Giant Robot I met my dear friend Scott from his zine Yob. I've gotten dates  
 from zines, too, an untold perk. Zines have changed my life, and given  
 me confidence to know that I can say whatever I want, print it, and leave it  
 in the world, so someone can read it and possibly understand.

Zines tend to have a short lifespan and sporadic publishing schedules  
 based on the whim of the publisher. The ephemeral quality of

zine publishing and the form itself make zines precious but fleeting  
 objects. Most zinesters stop publishing after a year or two, with  
 exceptions being Cometbus, and popular zines that grow and become  
 magazines such as Bust, Giant Robot, XLR8R, and Dazed and Confused.  
 However, a few vibrant new zines are being published today, including the  
 irrepressible Found Magazine which collects "found" and jettisoned  
 objects, photographs, letters, and other curiosities. Cheap Date is a  
 trashy but humorous fashion zine. Drunken Master and Pencil Fight are  
 combinations of illustrative artwork, writing, and interviews. I currently  
 publish 1-UP which collects personal writing and artwork related to  
 video game culture. Often people who have never "zined" ask why I choose  
 to print instead of publish online; I state that it's obvious-how will  
 we remember websites 5 years or even 20 years from now? I have more  
 faith in zines as a unique tangible expression, a photocopied thought  
 that someone could hold, pass to someone at a show, and find (again and again)  
 at the bottom of your underwear drawer.