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Zine Preservation

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ZINES ARE AN EPHEMERAL MEDIUM (AS MUCH AS ANY GENERALIZATION can be made about zines and zine culture). They are creative endeavors of a particular time, mindset, and sociocultural milieu, and are born from an environment of ideals that, as Anna Leventhal notes, "purposefully chose rapid, cheap dissemination over stability and canonization" (Leventhal 2006). This publishing cheapness done at speed and with low budgets, combined with the publishing ethos surrounding zines, results in a double problem for the zine librarian.

On the one hand, the very physicality of zines presents problems. More often than not, zines are printed (or photocopied) on cheap paper (hence, acidity shortens the life of the material), collated and bound using simple staples (hence, rust that produces stains, discoloration, and flaking), and use a variety of inks, colors, and other materials in their construction (hence, a range of constituent parts that vary widely in their life spans). Zine-makers use different techniques of printing, media, and types of bindings for their works. Some zines may include or be composed entirely of non-paper media such as compact discs or audiocassettes. In addition, some zines are accompanied by supplemental materials—such as buttons, pins, stickers, or other ephemera—with their own particular storage and preservation needs. Given the fragile nature of physical zines, and the wide array of materials that can constitute a zine, archivists and librarians will find that in some cases digital preservation is actually the wisest, most practical, and resource-effective course of action.

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TO PRESERVE OR NOT TO PRESERVE?

On the other hand, zine preservation is also a knotty proposition because of the independent and nonconformist nature of their creation and the ideals behind them. Zines are philosophically unlike other kinds of print materials, inasmuch as the communities that create them often have a vested interest in preventing a wider degree of access to them. And since access is a key motive for preservation, this can create a tension between these two library functions. Creator intent in many cases argues against access, yet at the same time "the frailty of their creations seems to require extensive care" (Woodbrook and Lazzaro 2013). Not every zinester is Kathleen Hanna, founder of the riot grrrl band Bikini Kill and an extensive zine creator in the 1990s. In a 2011 interview, Hanna was asked for her feelings about these DIY items, born of an active and confrontational counterculture, being preserved in an academic library. (Hanna had donated her archives, including her zines, to the Bales Library at New York University in 2010.) It certainly seems antithetical to the concept of zines as radical and temporary products of their age, to "entomb" them in marble repositories as "artifacts." But Hanna argued that "at the risk of sounding defensive, 'locking away all this stuff in an academic library with restricted access' sounds better to me than having it deteriorating in my basement where NO ONE has access to it" (LaCoss 2011). Hanna went on to point out that this kind of preservation of the original materials in an archival setting has the advantage of avoiding the kind of decontextualization that might result from zines being digitized and slapped onto the internet with no metadata or historical context.

In fact, the presence of zines in a number of libraries reflects the popularity of Hanna's belief that zine preservation by institutions results in a wider degree of access, which is a net positive in Hanna's view. Many, if not most, zinesters who are aware of the presence of their zines in libraries and archives have reacted with enthusiasm or at least acceptance. Indeed, some have been active partners with institutions in ensuring that their zines are preserved and made accessible. These zinesters realize the importance of preserving these alternative cultural media that, as Leventhal notes, "are small markers of a minor consciousness that has the potential to educate, disrupt, empower, and even liberate" (Leventhal 2006). That is no small thing, and many know it.

However, this positive reception is not a given. Some zine creators object to the very notion that their temporary creations should be preserved, for a number of reasons. Some believe that their creative efforts were part of a particular time and place and were not meant to be preserved beyond a small circle of like-minded individuals. Thus, these zinesters react poorly to the idea of their works going forth into the larger world. Some zinesters have "legal" personas that they regard as distinct from their fannish or other zinester personas, and while invested in the latter, they may not want people outside their zine circles to be able to find out about them. Many zinesters write or wrote under pseudonyms or constructed identities and do not choose to have those facets of their lives receive wider circulation and the chance of discovery (Brett 2013). Kelly Wooten, the curator of the zine collections at Duke University's Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, noted in 2009 that she was "contacted to remove a last name from our database that was associated with a zine title that the author felt damaged her reputation in her current career—at age 16, she had no idea that the flippant title would ever be available online" (Wooten 2009). Zine librarians have received requests to withdraw old zines from their collections; the creators had embraced new sexual orientations or other identities and felt that the people they had been when they composed those zines no longer existed, and their zines therefore no longer had legitimacy and should not be preserved.

In my own experience at Texas A&M University as the curator of a growing digitized fanzine collection, I faced concerns from a fan who in her younger days had written several fanzine stories of slash fanfiction—she was not ashamed of her writing, but pointed out to me that she was now a deacon in her church and wanted to obviate the risk that her past might be found out. (For our collection, by the way, we do not tie full real names to zines, to prevent just such a discovery and to preserve fan privacy.)

Note, for example, the array of online comments offered in 2009 when the nonprofit fan group Organization for Transformative Works (OTW) announced its partnership with the University of Iowa on the Fan Culture Preservation Project, a large-scale endeavor to acquire, preserve, and make accessible fanzines of all kinds. Though many reactions to this effort were positive, some online commentators instead expressed trepidation or outright hostility. Comments such as the following were not uncommon:

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- "I just never thought that non-fans were going to have my zines in hand, no. I'm sorry if my surprise at that information—that it might be possible, surprised you. Most fans I know prefer to be underground, maybe with some good reasons. Some of us have got C&Ds, some of us are not fannishly out to our families or workplaces."
- "I don't want my fanzines included in any way. I do them for fun and sharing with friends and like-minded fans, I don't want them photocopied and sent to 'researchers' and 'students.' I keep in print those I want to keep available, and some have purposefully been taken out of print and allowed to quietly fade away. If I wanted them made public and accessible, I'd have done it. Just because someone got their hands on one of my books through whatever source, and it could have been out of a secondhand box at some convention, does not mean it's OK to put it in some college library. If I wanted colleges to have my fanzines, I'd have sent them around."
- "I know I have no control over what people do with my zines once they own them, but there is such a thing as courtesy and respect for the intent of the work in question. Not everyone is excited about the idea of their writing being made public, even in an archive format. There are authors who wrote long before anyone could have conceived of something like the internet; how are their rights being considered? Now, most of my authors write for fanzines—rather than post online—because they don't want their work available to the public in general; they're writing for that particular, small fanzine fandom."

On the other hand, comments also included:

- "I'm fully in favor of anything I've ever written for any zine, website, or other publication being preserved for as long as possible and put in front of as many people as possible. . . . Concerned about being outed as a fan? Why on earth were you publishing stuff, then?"
- "Your attitude seems antithetical to the whole idea of zines in the first place. Most people began publishing zines using photocopiers and sold or gave them out to people they probably didn't know. How would this be so different? . . . I don't know why you're so surprised that the physical copies of any zine are beyond the publisher's control. Why did you bother publishing zines if you didn't want anyone to read them? . . .

> You care so much about zines that you don't want anyone to be able to read them, and when they die out because of waning interest, you don't want there to have been any record of their existence. And now some other people collecting zines you didn't create or have any part in is getting you so twisted up that you're not going to do another zine as long as you live. Okay, fine." (Organization for Transformative Works, n.d.).

All this is to say that the situation of zine preservation is not as simple as it might appear. It is, as Leventhal notes, "not only a matter of holding onto the paper, toner, and binding that make up the majority of zines, but to consider access, circulation, and institutionalization with regard to keeping the work viable" (Leventhal 2006). Zine librarians and archivists are likely to discover that the physical side of zine preservation is often the least challenging aspect.

PHYSICAL PRESERVATION OF ZINES

The cheapness of zine publication and distribution acts against the ease of their preservation. Most zines were made (and certainly most were photocopied) on inexpensive paper with high acidic content; and of course, that degradation is unstoppable. But the process can be slowed (and kept from migrating to other materials) by storing zines in acid-free, lignin-free folders or archival plastic enclosures, which provide structural support. In addition:

- Like other paper materials, zines should be stored, ideally, in low-light conditions. Storage areas for zines should be maintained at room temperature or lower, in conditions of relatively low humidity (35–40 percent) and environmental stability.
- Assuming that the existing physical structure of the zine is not key to understanding its context, fasteners such as paper clips and staples should be removed from it. Any subsequent loose pages make it even more important that the disbound zine be kept in an archivally suitable enclosure.
- As mentioned above, zines often come accompanied by ephemera. These include all sorts of materials: stickers, buttons, cards, postcards, and a plethora of others. (I recall receiving a zine at one point with a condom attached to it. . . . Helpful!) These materials are part of the zine's story, purpose, and identity, and they need to be retained. If feasible, they

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should remain physically stored with the zines. But these items might have particular storage and preservation requirements, and so zine librarians may have to store them separately. In these cases, librarians need to ensure that the supplementary items are intellectually connected to their zines via a cataloging record, finding aid, or some other descriptive tool, so that readers and researchers can access them, match them with their zines, and place them in appropriate context.

- However, in cases where institutions retain multiple copies of zines (see below, for example)—one or more for preservation and another one or more for access—another storage option may be considered. For the preservation copy or copies, one might store the zine with its accompanying ephemera attached. This will preserve the zine and supplementary materials together as the whole object it was at the time of creation, and it will experience less stress through handling or variable environmental changes.

The preservation of zines is often an easier proposition when they are housed in archives or special collections libraries that provide reduced levels of access. There is, obviously, a greater level of control for noncirculating institutions. By contrast, zine-lending libraries have a higher risk of damage or loss to their materials, due to increased use (and to the zines leaving their repositories and the environmental protections they provide). Some libraries, such as the Barnard Zine Library at Barnard College in New York City, acquire multiple copies of zines, one as a circulating copy for access and another as the archival copy. This may be a viable option for some institutions. The now inactive Seattle-based ZAPP (Zine Archive and Publishing Project) also pursued this practice.

The ZAPP collection has as many as three or more copies of the zines in the collection. It is recommended that two copies of a zine be retained for the collection and, as the preservation plan proceeds, there result (a) a preservation copy and (b) a browsing copy. The preservation copies of zines will be the archived originals and should be stored appropriately, and only handled under special circumstances. Third copies could be traded with other zine libraries/archives or serve as a display copy for exhibits or tabling at events. Zines in pristine condition should be removed from the browsing collection and placed into an archival storage box. This duplicate copy will serve as the preservation

copy of the zine and should only be handled under special circumstances (Davis 2009).

If an institution can only acquire a single copy of a zine—and this is certainly a more realistic prospect for many repositories—then procedures should be in place to promote appropriate behaviors of care and handling for patrons who check out zines. If circulating zines are cataloged, librarians should avoid marking or labeling the zines themselves with irreversible features like ink, barcode labels, or sticky tags. Instead, librarians should use softer methods, such as marking the enclosure rather than the zine itself; writing the identification information on the zine in light pencil; or attaching the ID information (e.g., a barcode) to a strip of acid-free paper and including that strip with the zine.

DIGITIZATION

Of course, digitization is an option both for preservation and access (as, in a more low-tech style, is scanning or photocopying). The technical aspects of zine digitization are beyond the purview of this chapter, but zine librarians and archivists should be aware that the decision to digitize raises once more the issue of zine creator permission. In fact, the decision to digitize zines can be even more fraught with controversy and hostility than the original decision to preserve them. Because digitization (except that done strictly for preservation purposes) means a wider degree of access, it may only exacerbate zinesters' concerns about their zines escaping into the wider world. Therefore, digitization should be undertaken as part of a zine collecting program only after the most thoughtful consideration. For my aforementioned digitized fanzine collection, we allow differing degrees of access depending on permissions. Most of the zines are only electronically available on-site for access by researchers. However, we actively seek explicit permission from zine creators (or editors or publishers) to grant online access—meaning the zines can be accessed outside the campus, and we do not allow general public access without these permissions. This has had the effect of encouraging amicable relations between our library and the fanzine community.

Again, repositories that choose to collect, preserve, and make zines accessible face the issue of the zine-making ethos. Woodbrook and Lazzaro note that "the materiality of a zine—be it photocopied, hand-screened, or hand-colored—

reflects its production by one or more individuals rather than a corporation, and bears witness to its purpose in the wear and tear that it acquires through reading and circulation" (Woodbrook and Lazzaro 2013). In other words, while repositories may try to collect zines simply as objects, they are also collecting examples of an informal creative and distribution process, and they need to decide to what degree their zines will "remain a part of their creating community." Thus, some institutions allow zines to circulate and continue their journey as cultural voices and connectors, while others choose to maintain them as noncirculating library or archival objects, thereby preserving their material lives for longer periods and thus access by future generations. Each repository needs to decide its most acceptable methods of preservation and access, within the context of its mission and/or collecting policy.

The important thing to note is that the zine creator or publisher's input can be crucial for establishing a workable zine preservation program. The goodwill of the zine community is necessary to encourage and foster donations, partnerships on zine-related events, and general outreach. If a repository demonstrates an understanding of and concern for zinesters who may be reluctant to see their zines preserved for the use of "outsiders," and if it shows a real commitment to including zines only with the zinesters' permission, then the repository will very likely see increased rates of donations and a better understanding of the value that libraries and archives can provide in making sure that zines live on in our culture.

I close this chapter with a heartfelt rationale for zine preservation from the Barnard Zine Library's Jenna Freedman. Jenna is that most valuable of combinations, a librarian *and* a zinester herself, who understands zines as a creator, receiver, and preserver. In 2014, Jenna offered up, in the pages of "Zine Capsule Zine #1," her own motivations for collecting these important cultural objects within the walls of a library and ensuring their preservation. She writes:

> For me the three most important reasons have to do with culture (preservation of the thinking and artifacts of a movement), providing access to publications that reflect a different aspect of society than is normally housed on library shelves, and making these smart, funny, observant, and important works available to the reading public. They are also an invaluable educational tool, teaching people that it is easy and rewarding to create media, not just consume it. An added bonus is driving fussy catalogers nuts with the various problems presented by those wacky ephemeral objects that are

often lacking in identifying information; come with oddball attachments like condoms, tea bags, and tarot cards; that may or may not have copyright information; and sometimes have inconsistent or even contradictory titles and other metadata.

At times people have asked me if it's weird or even insulting to the publishers to put an underground culture in what might be perceived as a mainstream establishment, especially a fancy Ivy League library like mine. While I am sensitive to that concern, especially being a zine publisher myself, I feel mandated by the first two items in the Library Bill of Rights to collect the little buggers, regardless (Freedman 2008).

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