Accessibility, aesthetics, and community: lessons for designers from the zine archives

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Accessibility, Aesthetics, and Community: Lessons for Designers from the Zine Archives

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Introduction

The value of zines exceeds that of tangible reality, as they embody the ideals that were carried out through the movement’s prime. Zine culture’s influence on broader culture, aesthetics, and community, define what a zine actually is. Regardless of format, the value of a zine lives on as designers learn about them and incorporate their ideas into modern practices. The value that zines (as objects and as a representation of a shared idea) cannot be understated even with emerging technologies ranging from the printing press to the world wide web. The introduction of new modes of production and technologies in the late 20th century made it easier to practice design outside of the classroom and formal studio settings. The Xerox machine in the 1960s simplified the printing process of design materials like zines on a massive scale, especially for alternative publics of non-commercial art makers, writers, musicians, and activists. It allowed any individual with access to the technology, regardless of level of education or socioeconomic background, to not only produce designed artifacts, but to then spread them amongst publics that would otherwise be excluded from elite social circles. These designed artifacts live outside of the traditional collection of objects that are taught and retaught in graphic design history, which is not only a missed opportunity for beginning designers to learn about these countercultural histories, but also limits our understanding of what design practice can be. Zines offer graphic designers, and all makers, an opportunity to develop accessible content outside of the confines of commercial recognition. Despite the popularity of zines having peaked in the late 1990s, valuable lessons remain for contemporary designers by way of examining the accessibility of materials used in zine making, the aesthetics developed within the rise of zines, and the communities involved with making and reading zines.

Accessibility: From Analog to Digital

Access and affordability of information and aesthetic exploration should not be limited to those with the means to pursue a secondary education. One of the earliest fanzines, *Fantasy Commentator* (1943) is a great example of the affordability and accessibility of zine culture, even prior to newer technologies like the Xerox machine. The rise of zines provided an opportunity for makers to generate
new non-commercial information that could be spread through communities of individuals with shared interests. As early as the second volume of this science fiction zine in 1943, the authors note that it is intended to be anything but exclusive, saying “although Fantasy Commentator is distributed free of charge to all FAPA [Fantasy Amateuer Press Association] members, it may be obtained by anyone else interested who has fifteen cents to squander thereon.”¹ The development of fanzines is often seen as the starting point for the development of zine culture as a whole. Design historian Teal Triggs breaks down the term, writing that “‘fanzine’ is the conflation of ‘fan’ and ‘magazine’, and was coined by the American sci-fi enthusiast and zine producer Louis Russell Chauvenet in 1940 in his hectograph fanzine Detours (1940s USA) when he declared his preference for the term ‘fanzine’ rather than ‘fanmag’ as the best shortened version of fan magazine.”² As access to technology was rising, and the phenomenon around sci-fi fan bases were booming, fanzines like Fantasy Commentator were an opportunity for communities of individuals with shared interests to learn and discuss the media they were consuming.

Fantasy Commentator did not necessarily look like the zine aesthetics that were popularized later on, which involved more of an aversion to a grid-based minimalist structure and a reliance on stark contrasts, handwritten texts, and collages. Instead, the simple and affordable format of Fantasy Commentator made a blueprint for more radical deployment of information and style in the future. The zine had a straightforward typographic layout of justified margins, a table of contents at the beginning, and a large body of consecutive text following suit. As zine making evolved and molted into other disciplines and interests, the goal remained fairly constant: produce information cheaply and spread information without barring access to anyone. While professional printing and publishing costs may bar some people from generating and disseminating work, newer technologies like the Xerox in the 1960s offered those without access a means of designing, producing, and spreading content in affordable ways. In her book Adjusted Margin: Xerography, Art, and Activism in the Late Twentieth Century, Kate Eichhorn discusses the ways that the Xerox machine specifically became a catalyst for accessibility to information and the production

² Teal Triggs, Fanzines (San Francisco: Chronicle, 2010).
of printed political materials. She asserts that publics exist in relation to the mediums that they were “imagined” in, creating a symbiotic relationship between the two. The multiplicity of ideas and makers encouraged by xerography created new communities and disrupted the stability of the existing print culture. Publics are constantly mediated by their media. Everyone deserves to have access to information regardless of their socioeconomic situation. These low-tech production methods of the Xerox machine, local communities, and the postal service, allowed the distribution of ideas with less financial barriers.

Zines specifically can offer opportunities for creatives to make design, art, writing, and much more that do not necessarily have to fit within the realm of a classroom. Commercially recognized forms of art represent a mode of production that is expensive and therefore exclusive. A formal education in graphic design provides access in various forms: to production materials and technologies, to information about graphic design, to other artists practicing independently, and to people practicing within the formal design world for corporations and employers. This education can cost thousands of dollars and can be centralized to more urban settings, excluding those in more rural or impoverished communities. The 2019 Design Census by AIGA found that more urban areas (especially those on the East and West Coasts) showed more professional designers that participated in the census than in more central, rural regions of America. A participant in the study, Meg Lewis, a freelance brand experience designer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, noted: “As someone who has lived both inside and outside of major metropolitan design hubs, I can say that my career moves slower when I’m not in a large city. There are fewer events and opportunities, so it’s on me to keep everything moving at a fast pace. I’m in charge of utilizing the local community or creating more opportunities through the magic of the internet.”

Cheaper access to information can allow for designers in training to interact with a wider range of objects and audiences that may not fit into a more monetarily motivated community. While zines reached their peak in the ’90s, the influence of these accessible and broad-reaching printing methods (like the printing press, Xerox machine, lithography, and more) can still influence creatives today, providing opportunities to interrogate

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the common modes of production like big printers and online services that disconnect producer from consumer.

While zine culture intensified in the late 20th century due to these new technologies, the introduction of the internet made another great impact. Eichhorn writes, “If they were once assumed to be rooted in a particular place, by the 1990s the idea that subcultures might be defined by a fixed location no longer held.”4 The “alternative publications” stemming from subcultures can be defined as a more individually sourced object free from commercial influence, rather than an object produced by an organization for profit. Media scholar Alessandro Ludovico points at the shift between analog zine making and digital zine making as a result of the economic and social context in the ’90s. While postage was important to easily spread information, Ludovico argues the shifts within postage rates and financial barriers within major zine distributors created some conflicts within the accessibility of zines.5 Moving into a digital format, Ludovico says the main goals of an “alternative publication” always remained the same: “to challenge the prevailing medium, to formulate a new original aesthetic based on the new medium’s qualities, and to generate content which is relevant to the contemporary situation.”6 The shift between analog and digital zine making is inherently complicated because of the originally very tangible nature of zines; it also disrupts a newer print culture, like the Xerox machine did when it first emerged. Any change into a new form of media or material is typically met with some apprehension, in fear that something will be lost within the transition. However, this shift positively increases the accessibility of zines to the publics that they are made in.

In our current environment, with widespread access to the internet, there is even more opportunity for these kinds of ideas to reach broader contexts. The affordability of zines in the ’80s and ’90s was valuable then, and now bears inspection in the context of a more contemporary information field. With an overflow of information and opinions at our fingertips, the value of accessible information is something

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4 Kate Eichhorn, *Adjusted Margin: Xerography, Art, and Activism in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016), 106.
6 Ludovico, *Post-Digital Print*, 44.
that we fail to recognize at times. Designers need to be aware of the ways that affordability plays such a key role in who makes materials and who consumes them. Zines represent shared ideologies, a motivation to challenge conventions of content and mediums, and to comment on the contemporary situation in which the zine is made. If designers do not consider affordability in their work, they're limiting the ways knowledge is produced. The countercultural information that can be spread through zines, through the internet or the post office, challenges the conventions of content and mediums of the time.

Aesthetic Influence: Design and Culture

The aesthetics that makers developed throughout the zine revolution in the 1960s–90s have made long-lasting impressions on the design community both commercially and non-commercially. The do-it-yourself (DIY) nature of zine making made room for new production methods, leading to new aesthetics that did not have to be driven by monetarily controlled corporations. *Sniffin’ Glue* (1976–77) is a great example of new aesthetics that would ultimately penetrate a world saturated in modernist design tropes. *Sniffin’ Glue* was one of the first examples of a music-based fanzine. The authors, Mark Perry et al., were inspired by a lack of content in the community surrounding Perry’s newfound love for punk music and culture. He started the zine and named it in reference to the Ramones’ “Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue” (1976). The production methods adopted by zine producers, like the photocopier and other cheap materials, allowed Mark Perry and other producers of zines to make and edit them aesthetically in ways that did not match popular media at the time. Because they lacked ties to a corporate monetary world, the conventions of design rules did not apply to these creatives. *Sniffin’ Glue*, within its fourteen issues, incorporated a “spiky aesthetic made up of typewriter lettering, handwriting, cartoons, and photographs of gigs.” This idea of a “spiky” aesthetic can be tied to the symbiotic relationships that exist between zines, their makers, and the cultures surrounding them. The aesthetics of the content reflect the

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7 Teal Triggs *Fanzines*,
content and the context in which it stands. These generative forms of media allow for music to impact the styles of artmaking, and similarly, these rugged and “spiky” aesthetic styles can similarly impact the music scene as well. If designers rely on a minimal range of stylistic conventions based on ideas of “good design,” then they are also limiting their overall cultural influence. The wide variety of aesthetics in zines not only influences the art world at the time, but everything around it, ranging from the clothes worn, music listened to, topics discussed, and ideas shared. The cultural impact of zines like *Sniffin’ Glue* is the encouragement to reject formality, to express individuality, and to define one’s own reality.

In Teal Triggs’ book *Fanzines*, which explores the histories and nature of fanzine culture, the author addresses the ways that the non-monetarily based works create space for more freedom and subsequently “less [concern] about copyright, grammar, spelling, punctuation, or the protocols of page layout, grids and typography, than about communicating a particular subject to a community of like-minded individuals.”\(^9\) Formal conventions of “good” (as assigned by historians, practitioners, educators, award juries, etc) graphic design is often based on the idea of “the grid,” an underlying rule for organizing and clarifying ideas. The static requirements for objects to fit into a “good” category, is mostly based on practices that date back to the 13th century. While grids can be helpful for making work, ideas and structures like these are based in ideas of modernism, and are continually repeated in reference to Eurocentric design even if the reference is not made explicit. By adhering to conventional standards of modernist design practices, in everything from layout to color formatting, designers continue to perpetuate these ideas of one version of formal success, potentially excluding non-traditional and (often) non-commercial makers and forms. The producers of zines like *Sniffin’ Glue* were able to become their own makers of the culture that surrounded them and construct the pop culture that they would then critique. Due to the fact that no fanzines were owned by a business, makers did not have to conform to corporate strategy designed to avoid upsetting advertisers, or to prevent conflict with corporate business interests due to more polarizing political viewpoints.\(^10\)

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10 Triggs, *Fanzines*, 12.
The vast range of aesthetic possibilities that were enabled and encouraged within zine culture made space for self expression in terms of new typographic styles, color, written cadence, and more. For example, San Francisco designer Allen Cohen and his staff berated printers to let them use rainbow colors and unconventional printing techniques for their 1966 newsprint publication *The Oracle*, until the printers eventually granted his team full access to the presses. Ludovico writes of *[The Oracle]* that it “[c]litomized the idea that a magazine could be more than simply a handful of paper conveying literary and political information. By doing away with the traditional ‘static’ typographical structure, headlines could be designed rather than composed, and texts were no longer laid out as bricks of letters, but were allowed to penetrate the illustrations spread across multiple pages. Thus the magazine became an object to behold, an image to experience—in one word, a ‘trip.’”

*The Oracle* itself was aimed to serve as an outlet of expression within a world that was oversaturated with conventional thinking. Rather than digesting the voices of their parents, participants and readers of *The Oracle* were able to enjoy an alternative route of thought through artwork and language, that encouraged the aspiration of a new and exciting way of life.

Creative work will reflect the world in which it is created. The visual language of more commercial or educationally driven works are commonly bound by their scuff-free final products. David Ensminger, author of *Visual Vitriol: The Street Art and Subcultures of the Punk and Hardcore Generations* writes “[w]hile not all work created within the realm of art school is ‘clean’ or ‘refined’ there is still an additional access to materials both physically and in communities when it comes to critique and editing.” The Xerox machine required no prior access to materials other than paper and mark making materials to generate creative works that can be mass produced and spread among communities. Tools like these are said to have “freed punk graphic artists from the demands of money, time, and energy by handing

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them a machine that could act as a Trojan horse.”¹³ This simple format created a style articulated through handmade, imperfect products. Resources like public library workspaces, letterpress shops, and more, are using the hand-made nature of zine aesthetics as a lesson for today’s creatives. Replication of aesthetics that defy an adherence to modernist standards of “good” design, art, and writing, makes space for designers today to continue to question conventions of popular culture, as to not slip into patterns that perpetuate exclusivity. As community members work to maintain these accessible aesthetic practices, the defiant underlying nature of the “spiky” aesthetic can be carried out even in our saturated digital world.

**Zine Communities**

Zines provided a crucial sense of community through language and creativity within making, reading, and sharing these designed objects. We can more closely examine this communal connection fostered through zine culture with the example of *Riot Grrrl* zines. The world of political zines is vast, but one of the most influential zine movements (especially for young women) stemmed from the Riot Grrrl collective. *Riot Grrrl* was a long series of zines made up by women, queer individuals, punks, and more with the goal of putting out a mini-zine as often as possible, making their voices and ideas increasingly available to a public that was dominated by heteronormative male voices.¹⁴ The cover of one of the very first *Riot Grrrl* zines reads “riot grrrl is a free weekly mini-zine. Please read and distribute to your pals.” The language included within these zines carries a feeling of preexisting camaraderie, as if you are already “one of the pals.” Everything from the written language to the visual styles lets the viewers know that these objects are meant to be relaxed, and that the familiarity of this conversation will stand in opposition to commercially published books and magazines that we encounter on a daily basis. The casual visual and textural language of *Riot Grrrl* zines inform the casual aesthetics, which both inform the open-minded, diverse, and encouraging communities that would bond over these historical artifacts.

¹³ Michelle Comstock, “Grrrl Zine Networks: Re-Composing Spaces of Authority, Gender, and Culture,” *JAC* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2001: 387.
¹⁴ Comstock “Grrrl Zine Networks,” 386.
These creations oftentimes included sections that posed questions about the community and ways to improve the local landscape of all individuals. Similar to the way that other fanzines circulated through copy machines, the creators for *Riot Grrrl* noted that a copy of the zine made at a Kinko’s would only cost 6 cents, which broadened the audience to include those beyond the localized collective of “riot grrrls.”

Because of the smaller scale of zine production and the handmade materials, the initial beginnings of zine making (before the internet) were centralized in the areas in which they were made. Communities of zine makers and readers were sometimes limited based on the geographical relation to one another, and the politics and culture of the area specifically. Access to more readily available printmaking practices created a foundational medium for information sharing that was crucial from the 1970s–90s. The increased access to information, additionally, expanded the opportunity for education and connection among many diverse groups, which was expedited geographically with the rise of accessibility to zines on the internet.

One edition of the zine has a page with a mantra of sorts underneath an octagonal stop sign image; in all caps, it reads “STOP AND THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU DO, ABOUT WHY YOU DO WHAT YOU DO, ABOUT HOW IT AFFECTS OTHER PEOPLE, ABOUT HOW IT AFFECTS YOU.”

Graphic designers have the opportunity to impact vast audiences through the vehicle of consumerism. A job has to get done in order for the designer to afford the costs of living. Congruently, the awareness of not only the work being made, but also the impact that it will have on the communities that it enters, is a necessary outlook to have if a designer is privileged enough to make decisions about the work they are making professionally and creatively. The simple modes of production, the diverse background of zine makers, and the content included within these zines make it undeniable that the broad reaches of this zine revolution are crucial for junior designers to learn about.

The tangible nature of zines allows for the literal passing from one person to the other, of information on folded pieces of paper. The object itself becomes a catalyst for information and connection. Another major point of reference for zines as they were growing, was their consistently irregular production and distribution through zine fairs or through word of mouth.

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I was on the bart train the other day and there were these four girls, high school girls. Three of them looked just like TV, long hair that they would brush back with their fingers. All four had practiced facial expressions, small noses, lines drawn around their eyes. But one girl, she was too tall and gangly and it looked like she just got her braces off, the way she kept feeling her teeth with her tongue. Her backpack had paintings of sands and moons and flowers that you could tell she painted on there, and you could tell her friends made fun of it behind her back. She was the one I watched. Her backpack was unzipped part way and I stuck forts number one in, number one, full of my secrets. I couldn’t hand it to her because I knew she wouldn’t take it, not with her friends watching. I snuck it into her life for her to find later, alone, in her bedroom. The people on the train who saw me do it glared at me, mean and suspicious, like I’d stolen something from that girl, and maybe I had. I got off at the next stop.

The connections and communities that were developed from the passing of a chunk of paper from one hand to the next, represent so much more than merely passing an art object back and forth. The honesty and vulnerability that was carried throughout the process of zine making and sharing influenced the community to maintain those feelings of honesty for the sake of the community as a whole. If no one ever talks about the struggles of life, then how is anyone supposed to know that they aren’t alone?

**Lessons for Today**

The nature of the DIY aesthetic feels low-risk and honest as it is removed from the pressures of the commercial art world that thrives on rules and order to maintain the identity of “good” art. This more candid format seen so often decades ago still to this day allows creatives to be more transparent with their thoughts and expressions of their identities. The safety of small-scale communities within art-making settings rather than mass production processes encouraged people to create honest support groups and camaraderie free from the confinement of a more stringent commercial world. Making zines requires no degree or knowledge of anything in order to access these zines, which encourages more people to read them, interact with them, discuss them, and even make their own. As it was in the ’90s, it is still simple to print a small zine and slip it into someone’s bag on the subway, for them to find once they got home, perhaps showing them a new perspective. Today, there is no present barrier for making a zine and sharing it with friends or leaving a stack in your local coffee shop. Access to the internet also allows zines to live

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16 Cindy O. *I like things to be small.* (Green and Taormino), 71.
beyond a physical setting. The value of zines does not reside within the physical object, or even within the scanned object presented online.

Zines, and their locality, allowed for more specific and pointed discussions around topics that were removed from the world of upper-class designers and art culture. Practicing designers need more exposure to diverse communities and ideas and zines provide an opportunity for more versions of self-expression to be seen and understood as valid. The world of professional graphic design as a whole lacks diversity, which only further perpetuates the ideals of a Eurocentric dominated culture of art. In particular, this narrow scope of commercial design lacks in representation for marginalized communities, as noted in the aforementioned 2019 AIGA census, making it seem as though they may not belong in the realm of design. The census shows that 35% of practicing designers do not have secondary education, while the other 65% have at least a college degree. Design communities are shown to be most heavily saturated on the east and west coasts, while middle America is more sparse in its reach. The average age of a practicing graphic designer that responded to the census is 35, with a heavier saturation within younger communities. There are more women in the workforce than there were in 2017, at around 61% of survey participants, while individuals that do not identify as male or female make up less than 3% of the total design population that participated in the survey. Only 15% of participants identify as LGBTQIA+. 71% are white.

The ideals of zine culture can also influence commercial work, penetrating underlying notions of exclusivity and oppression. Access to materials and education about zines allows for more diversity within the world of creators and more diversity within the content that they produce. This includes underrepresented and oppressed publics such as people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, genderqueer and nonbinary individuals, women, and more, that are often not recognized within the history of graphic design. Seth Johnson, a design program director at IBM in Austin, Texas, emphasizes that “companies, programs, and people who hire designers should be looking outside of the expected four-year programs on the coasts. There are scores of nontraditional programs and two-year community colleges that are graduating highly skilled designers who, quite often, come from a much wider range of diverse
backgrounds. As the design world continues to expand, it is important to recognize the lack of diversity within leadership positions (i.e. those making hiring and art direction decisions) in particular, therefore inherently influencing the cultural impact of designed objects as well. Lessons that can be learned from the world of zines can offer designers insight into the importance of diverse, raw, community-based design.

The diversity of zine-making communities exceeded the narrow and whitewashed world of commercial design. This increased diversity allows for increased access to information that may otherwise live outside of the mainstream. Conservative worldviews and outlooks limit the amount of information that is spread to communities of learners that range from information on media, music scenes, race, sex education, female perspectives, among many others. Education through design is not exclusive to the content surrounding artmaking and how to be a designer; it is an education on how to understand the world around us. The opportunities that zines provide communities in terms of informational outreach should be recognized. Without the inclusion of zines in design history education, new designers are not exposed to these processes, materials, and people that are undeniably impacting the environments in which designers work, including the commercial design world. An awareness of the ethics behind commercial decisions can help designers make conscious decisions about the designs that they are making. Knowing the history of non-commercial print and why it was deemed necessary for spreading information can help change the ways that new design professionals encounter their surroundings.

Without the inclusion of these zines in our histories and influence, we miss opportunities to explore new content, processes, and information that go against mainstream design production.

When communities have access to this kind of information and materials, it opens up the door for creators outside of the isolated world of higher education to explore self expression. The nature of zines is open-ended, and due to its traditionally affordable techniques and wide range of makers, it minimizes the exclusivity that other forms of art production can create. An increased knowledge on the history of zines and printed material regardless of its ultimate monetary value can allow for more conscious decisions.

regarding the context of things we design, the ways that we reward and recognize design, and the ways that we communicate through design. If students are taught that design must have commercial gains in order to make an impact, then design professionals are less likely to make objects that may not have monetary value, but are important objects for interrogating contemporary culture. Once we challenge conventions of design, we can begin to understand the impact of graphic design and its history. As designers enter the commercial world, they can continue to carry the Riot Grrrl mantra with them, considering the things that they make, why they make them, and how it impacts other people around them.
Michelle Comstock, “Grrrl Zine Networks: Re-Composing Spaces of Authority, Gender, and Culture,” JAC 21, no. 2, Spring 2001


Eichhorn, Kate. *Adjusted Margin: Xerography, Art, and Activism in the Late Twentieth Century.* The MIT Press, 2016.


O., Cindy. I like things to be small. Green and Taormino)


Sniffin Glue: The Definitive First Wave U.K. Punk Zine. *(DangerousMinds, 2016)*

Appendix (zine designed by author)

This is a digital iteration of a companion zine designed to accompany the text. The following pages of this appendix shows each spread in order, creating a visual narrative in zine form to emphasize the content.
Accessibility, Aesthetics, and Community:

Lessons for Designers from the Zine Archives

by Lilith Jackson
To generate content which is relevant to the contemporary situation.
THUS THE MAGAZINE BECAME AN OBJECT TO BFHOLD AN IMAGE TO EXPERIENCE
"TOOLS LIKE THE XEROX] "ARE SPOD
TO HAVE "FREED" PUNK GRAPHIC
ARTISTS FROM THE DEMANDS
OF MONEY, TIME, AND ENERGY
BY HANDING THEM A MACHINE
THAT COULD ACT AS A
TROJAN HORSE"

-david enseminger-
AND THINK
ABOUT WHAT YOU DO
ABOUT WHY YOU DO WHAT YOU DO
ABOUT HOW IT AFFECTS OTHERS
ABOUT HOW IT AFFECTS YOU

Contact riot grrrl! Hotline:
1830 Irving St. NW 202-332-3110
BECAUSE OF THE SMALL SCALE OF ZINE PRODUCTION AND THE HANDMADE MATERIALS, THE INITIAL BEGINNINGS OF ZINEMAKING (before the internet) WERE CENTRALIZED IN THE AREAS IN WHICH THEY WERE MADE. COMMUNITIES OF ZINE MAKERS AND READERS WERE SOMETIMES LIMITED BASED ON THE GEOGRAPHICAL RELATION TO ONE ANOTHER, AND THE POLITICS AND CULTURE OF THE AREA SPECIFICALLY. ACCESS TO MORE READILY AVAILABLE PRINTMAKING PRACTICES CREATED A FOUNDATIONAL MEDIUM FOR INFORMATION SHARING THAT WAS CRUCIAL FOR POLITICAL AND ACTIVIST MOVEMENTS FROM THE 1970s-90s. THE INCREASED ACCESS TO INFORMATION, ADDITIONALLY, EXPANDED THE OPPORTUNITY FOR EDUCATION AND CONNECTION AMONG MANY DIVERSE GROUPS, WHICH WAS EXPEDITED GEOGRAPHICALLY WITH THE RISE OF ACCESS TO INTERNET (AND DIGITAL ZINES).
Zines represent shared ideologies, a motivation to challenge conventions of content and mediums, and to comment on the contemporary situation in which the zine is made.
I was on the bart train the other day and there were these four girls, high school girls. Three of them looked just like TV, long hair that they would brush back with their fingers. All four had practiced facial expressions, small noses, lines drawn around their eyes. But one girl, she was too tall and gangly and it looked like she just got her braces off, the way she kept feeling her teeth with her tongue. Her backpack had paintings of sands and moons and flowers that you could tell she painted on there, and you could tell her friends made fun of it behind her back. She was the one I watched. Her backpack was unzipped part way and I stuck forts number one in, number one, full of my secrets. I couldn’t hand it to her because I knew she wouldn’t take it, not with her friends watching. I stuck it into her life for her to find later, alone, in her bedroom. The people on the train who saw me do it glared at me, mean and suspicious, like I’d stolen something from that girl, and maybe I had. I got off at the next stop.