

Making ZINEs

Embodied Understanding and Its Articulation

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This thesis examines making ZINEs as a way of “talking about my favorite things”. ZINEs are small-circulation, self-published print materials. Along with my photographic artwork, I have continued making ZINEs; however, these practices stand in contrast. While the production of artwork maintains a certain distance from my everyday life, making ZINEs remains continuous with it. It captures emotions and intensities that would otherwise be discarded during production, functioning as a personal and comfortable act grounded in its sensuous aspect, as discussed by Joseph Monteyne.

This sensory aspect has long remained subjective and difficult to articulate. Therefore, this thesis addresses the questions: “What does making ZINEs mean as an act for me?”, “Who am I as a person who makes ZINEs?” To distinguish it from artwork, I intentionally differentiate between “producing” artwork and “making” ZINEs in my discussion. Because of their undefinability and underground origins, ZINEs have often distanced themselves from academic frameworks. Their private and autonomous nature also complicates their treatment as research objects. In response, I adopt the position of both maker and researcher, examining my own practice. Drawing on Kayoko Komatsu’s notion of artists researching their own work, I construct an intentional interface between “the me who makes” and “the me who researches.” By carefully describing the thoughts and sensations generated in this interface, I attempt to bring subjective elements such as ZINE-ness and the sensory aspect of making ZINEs into a condition where they can be discussed as research.

Chapter 1 traces ZINE history from SF fanzines of the late 1920s to the diversification enabled by punk’s DIY ethos. While prior research, following Stephen Duncombe, emphasizes ZINEs as non-commercial and non-specialized media that support social movements and community formation, he characterizes them as “the variegated voices of the subterranean world.” At the same time, this thesis clarifies the position of ZINEs discussed here through comparison with chapbooks, little magazines, dojin-shi and artists’ books.

In Chapter 2, rather than redefining ZINEs, I reconsider what may be called a ZINE. Building on the undefinability noted by Duncombe and Alison Piepmeier, I describe ZINEs as existing in a state of parataxis, lacking a single shared foundation. From this, I treat ZINE-ness as a provisional

criterion grounded in my experience. I identify three key aspects: improvisation, materiality, and the ZINE as a book-like object.

Chapter 3 situates making ZINES within the field of independent magazines. Referencing Tim Holmes, I interpret my ZINES as “magazine-like acts that give voice to meaninglessness.” Even “meaningless” ZINES without social claims perform a form of active making, as described by Joseph Monteyne. Drawing on Duncombe, I argue that the maker does not precede the ZINE; rather, the maker is revealed through the ZINE.

In conclusion, making ZINES is not an exceptional act but a way of giving form to the casual, “somehow likable” elements of daily life. It is continuous with living, freeing me from the demands of meaning in artwork and allowing me to speak about my favorite things, in my own way. Through writing, I acknowledge what cannot be written, and simultaneously trace the outline of the me who makes ZINES. This, for me, is what making ZINES means.