CREATING ZINES, CONSTRUCTING PLACE: PLACE-MAKING AND COMMUNITY-BUILDING PRACTICES OF ZINE MAKERS

By

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A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Rhetoric and Writing – Master of Arts

2025

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the value of zines as multimodal texts that can create a sense of space, place, and/or community for both zine readers and zine-makers ("zinesters"). In this thesis, I discuss the contributions of space and place to the production of, engagement with, and preservation of zines within communities. After reviewing literature on the archival, pedagogical, rhetorical, and methodological implications of zines, I interview three zinesters – Remi Germaine, Bre Upton, and Alice Wynne – and pose a series of questions about their zine-making processes and conceptions of space, place, and community. I respond to the same questions as a fourth and final case study, then collate, summarize, and expand on my takeaways in the form of a "summative zine," included in the appendix of this thesis. By analyzing and assigning descriptive themes to the interview responses, I identify and explore five key takeaways in the summative zine: among them, the capacity of zines to fight sterility, facilitate placemaking through provenance, and function as rhetorical infrastructures for personal and communal expression.

This thesis is dedicated to my family (Mom, Dad, Camille, Gabe, Camille, Fiona): I love you all so much, and you are a part of my community wherever I go.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to acknowledge and express appreciation for my three committee members: Dr. Danielle DeVoss, Dr. Kristin Arola, and Dr. Nancy DeJoy, who offered their support, kindness, and thoughtful questions and insights throughout this project. I am grateful for and inspired by my committee, as well as my graduating WRAC cohort and other classmates, my family and partner, and various friends in the Eastside neighborhood in Lansing, Michigan, where I've built a home and community over the last two years.

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Zining My Way to a Definition of "Place"

Last fall, I spent a long and slow Saturday morning re-adhering the various doodles, letters, notes from friends and sisters, and other paper ephemera onto the back of my bedroom door. Interior design via Scotch tape is a flimsy and time-consuming affair, and while I often tell myself I'm too old to continue taping all of my decorations to the wall, I still feel too transient to nail anything down.

If asked to describe the meaning of "place," I'd associate the word with a sense of stability, warmth, and groundedness: a pin on the map, a nail in the door. Yet transience – and tape – are parts of my definition, too. In the past few years, whenever I've left one place for another, the loss of my previous home sits heavy in my body. I miss the too-small bed, the creaky floor, the housemates with their particular laughs and coughs and odors; my door collaged with cards and doodles I scrawled during work, classes, or bus commutes. My body, finally arriving at the next funky house I found on Facebook with one too many housemates, is a low-budget lodging for longing: longing for my previous home, until I redecorate my new door and begin to settle into the next new place.

Since moving to Michigan, my bedroom door has functioned as, well, a door, partitioning off my space and body and assorted stuff from the bodies and stuff of my housemates. But the door is also a collaged reminder of the people, places, words, and images I love, all taped or sticky-noted along the perimeter of a smudgy mirror I inherited from the previous tenant.

Each time I close my door, I'm reminded of the place I inhabit now, here in my bedroom in the capital city of Michigan, but also of the places I've moved and related through to land here. Traveling through these places in my mental-mobile, I arrive at a definition of "place" that describes where I'm standing geographically, emotionally, and relative to the communities and spaces I engage with now.

My sense of place evokes a sense of finding somewhere to stand, to be held by the ground below. It reminds me of "the doctrine of stasis" described by Arroyo and Alaei (2012), which I first read about last spring in a course on multimodal composing. Arroyo and Alaei use the metaphor of a dancing floor to exemplify "the very dance of maintaining stasis," a word that translates to "standstill" and can be expanded to "finding a place on which to stand and generate arguments." Around this time, I dove deeper into my zine-making practice, exploring how zines serve as paper places on which writers and makers can "stand" with their arguments, hopes, ideas, feelings, half-formed thoughts, and any other mental moves folded into the choreography of a human life.

Before beginning my thesis, I tried to capture the choreography of my life in Lansing by creating *Lan-zine* (ha, ha): a zine about Lansing, filled with suggestions about places to see and visit

via bike, bus, on foot, or any other mode of transportation favored by Lansing locals. I crowdsourced suggestions from folks on r/lansing, who responded with thoughtful enthusiasm to the draft of the zine I shared in the fall of 2024. I turned to r/lansing as an immediate, responsive, and digital source of "community" in Lansing. I visit the subreddit almost daily for information about things happening in the community, funny or inquisitive musings about the city's quirks, and other fun facts I get to share with my IRL ("in-real-life") communities. Because I find daily value in r/lansing, it felt natural to turn to that community for zine suggestions, but I would have had different results if I gathered suggestions from in-person spaces in Lansing and/or the MSU campus in East Lansing. Posting and waiting for replies was the easiest way to gather multiple suggestions at once, but the final "itinerary" I share in *Lan-zine* reflects suggestions I've gathered and experiences I've enjoyed through in-person conversation and exploration. In-person exploration of Lansing is almost always richer and more meaningful to me; but r/lansing, as a digital community, has also inspired many of these explorations by way of recommendation and random posts about a hidden gem or hot take about a local establishment.

I could not find much demographic information about folks who post on and visit r/lansing, but I would not be surprised if the r/lansing community reflects the broader demographics of Reddit: young (below 30), white, liberal, college-educated men, based on 2024 data from Pew. Someone recently addressed the youth of redditors on r/lansing in a post about the demolition of Lansing Eastern High School, which will be replaced with a psychiatric hospital. "Newspaper reader demographics skew older" and "Reddit users don't," a journalist wrote in the comments, in response to why the demolition is better received by younger, more progressive users on r/lansing than older Lansing locals, some of whom have stronger attachments to the high school and read about the demolition in the newspaper.

"It seems obvious," writes another commenter on the post, "but all too often, Redditors forget that this sub isn't necessarily representative of the city's population as a whole." While the suggestions I collected for my zine hopefully make space, place, and community for folks from all backgrounds, I'm also mindful of the demographics of Reddit as a social media website and would love to have more information about r/lansing as a community to better frame these suggestions.

Ultimately, by reflecting on the characteristics of r/lansing and "zining" about this city, I started conceptualizing zines as tools to expand and preserve a sense of place, both personal and communal, and thus unwittingly wrote the first pages of my master's thesis. In this essayistic portion, I draw from my visual arts background and continue the work I began in *Lan-zine* by reviewing literature on rhetorical and creative conceptions of space, place, and community. This

discussion is shaped by my interests in community-building and "creative placemaking" (CPM), both physically and digitally. After discussing more relevant literature on and conversations about zines in the field of rhetoric and writing, I present my methodology (including my interview questions) followed by the storied responses of Remi Germaine, Bre Upton, and Alice Wynne, each presented as a different zinester case study. I also respond to the interview questions as a fourth case study, drawing from my experiences making and publishing *Lan-zine*.

After analyzing major themes across these four case studies, I conclude with a textual discussion that I continue into zine form. In this summative zine (see Appendix), I discuss how zinesters create space, place, and/or community through their zine-making practices, and how and why zine-making is a powerful form of multimodal composing within and beyond the "academy" of rhetoric and writing studies.

Zine-Driven Definitions of Space, Place, and Community

Conceptions of space, place, and community have been highly academicized and theorized. In this project, I do not firmly define nor enforce hard distinctions between space, place, and community, nor do I dwell too much on the relative importance of digital or physical creative placemaking. For the most part, the zinesters I interviewed tend to use "space," "place," and even "community" interchangeably, and in fluidly generative ways that I discuss in later sections. Even so, I find value in referring to other scholars' definitions of space, place, and community to inform my own, and thinking about the affordances of physical and digital placemaking via zines and other creative practices.

While spaces "are geographically-designated areas," Vazquez (2012) writes in a white paper on creative placemaking, "places are made up of physical and psychological connections among people and their environment. Objects alone do not make a place" (p. 5). Perhaps the same could be said of a zine sitting alone in a bedroom, without makers or readers to generate meaning from its pages, whether those pages are read in person and online. In the world of zines, these makers and readers arguably make up a *community*, which depends on both spaces and places for sustenance. I appreciate and often refer to the definition of a "cultural community" provided by Powell et al. (2014): "any place/space where groups organize under a set of shared beliefs and practices—American Indian communities, workplace communities, digital communities, crafting communities, etc." (Act I, Scene 1).

As DIY ("do it yourself") publications that often originate from "underground" subcultures and cover a wide variety of topics, zines generate alternative definitions of place for the alternative communities they support. Matich, Parsons, and Ashman (2024) theorize zines as "alternative infrastructure– with alternative processes and 'means of transmission' (cited from Withers, 2015)," based on a six-year study using "netnographic" methods to examine the emergence and growth of an intersectional feminist zine community on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. They find that zines-as-infrastructures, which "cut across the social, digital, and material" (p. 1049), are "based on solidarity and communal forms of identification" (cited from Bold, 2017; Chidgey, 2013) and emerge in response to "being in common with others" in a particular space and time (p. 1059).

In addition to the texts themselves, which can provide infrastructures for zinesters to connect with likeminded makers and also "'find themselves'" on the pages (Matich, Parsons, & Ashman, p. 1053), other spaces that emerge around zines include in-person zine fests, which are the focus of Kempson's ethnographic study (2015). Kempson explores the placemaking capacity of zines in her study of "negotiating belonging" in the UK zine subculture. Although Kempson

interviews zinesters at in-person zine fests, her findings suggest that participants' sense of place within zine subculture is both ideological and geographical (p. 1093): the former based on zinesters' perceived positionality to the dominant values of the DIY subculture, and the latter influenced by zinesters "spatial proximity to the geographical 'centres' of zine subculture," which tend to be more accessible and urban spots in "mainstream" cities (p. 1082). Kempson's work illustrates how definitions of place can shift in response to urbanization, accessibility, the values of our chosen communities, and how (ideologically) and where (geographically) we stand relative to those communities.

As a concept that bridges physical and digital infrastructures, creative placemaking (CPM) influences the way I think about space and place relative to zines. A widely circulated definition by Markusen and Gadwa (2010), cited by Vazquez (2012), describes CPM as a process that "'animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired'" (p. 1). Vazquez finds that CPM projects are most successful when they prioritize intent over action, the intent being to improve quality of life and "enhance the environment for cultural expression throughout a place" (p. 6). Successful CPM projects are also asset-based and place-based, rather than space-based; scholars who adopt CPM as a framework thoughtfully leverage the existing connections in a place. Examples of CPM provided by Vazquez include the Mall of America in Minnesota, framed as a creative contributor to the "experience economy" (p. 39); and Project Row Houses, which transformed vacant properties in Houston, Texas into "a community development program that included services to women and children and community-based planning" (p. 11).

In recent years, CPM has been expanded to "creative digital placemaking," accounting for the influence of augmented and virtual reality, social media, location-based mobile applications, and other digitized experiences on an individual's or community's sense of place (Basaraba 2023, p. 1474). Examples of digital CPM are "emerging in creative tourism and the cultural heritage sector" (p. 1471): for example, creating a game-like phone application to accompany a public art walk, or "location-based mobile applications with narratives about significant places of memory along heritage trails" (p. 1473), both of which rely on digital technologies to promote immersive, educational, and embodied experiences of placemaking.

Basaraba completes a bibliometric analysis to better understand how CPM has been used across disciplines and, more recently, applied to digital projects. She finds that papers about digital placemaking "primarily used ethnographic methods that combined data gathering from both

observations and interviews" (p. 1491). Basaraba argues that future digital CPM projects must be more considerate of citizens' needs before implementation and allow for participation through co-creation (p. 1493), compared to the relative passivity of observations or interviews. While these methods are valuable in tandem with participatory practices, their solitary use may encourage "top-down" approaches to CPM projects (p. 1489) that neglect or dismiss citizens' actual needs, desires, and visions for their communities. Conversely, a bottom-up approach to digital CPM projects begins with citizens as well as an awareness of the digital divide, which Ragnedda and Kreitem (2018) divide into three levels: accessing the internet, digital skills and capabilities (p. 7), and becoming aware of the tangible benefits of using the internet.

While a further exploration of CPM warrants an entirely separate paper, I bring up digital CPM because an increasing number of people experience zines for the first time in a digital context, often on social media, as opposed to encountering their first zine in a bookstore or in-person workshop. I, for one, have learned more about zines via the r/zines subreddit on Reddit, various YouTube channels, and scholarly and journalistic coverage of the genre, than I've managed to learn through in-person events and communities. In large part, this is circumstantial: I live in a city without a significant and consistent in-person community of zinesters, save for a couple of friends who also enjoy making zines as a hobby. Consequently, I embody a physical-digital definition of CPM as an "artist-in-residence*s*." This plurality honors my current physical residence in Lansing, MI as well as the contributions of previous residences (Philadelphia, Spokane, Everett) and their pixelated relations with digital places like Instagram and Reddit, where I share and engage with other zinesters.

As a zinester exploring my own sense of place relative to both geography and community, I've identified the precarity and transiency of everyday places – my rented bedroom in Lansing, my bus stop, my favorite local breakfast spot – as elements that make these places feel precious, even beloved. Zines give me hope that lost, precarious, and transient places can continue standing on pages penned by DIY publishers, through the words and images they use to express where they are now and where they hope to go. As a fourth and final "participant" in this project, I primarily draw from my everyday experience of place – shaped by my interactions with CPM, definitions of space and place, stasis, and other rhetorical groundings – to guide my answers and reflect on the responses of three other zinesters.

Why Does Any of This Matter?

Whether they're created and shared online, in a classroom, a library, a bedroom, or somewhere in between, zines illuminate the contributions of space and place to the production of,

engagement with, and preservation of creative artifacts within communities. Throughout this project, I reference the words of Bre, Remi, and Alice, their zines, and supporting scholarship and writings to explore the importance of space, place, and community in both the creation of and engagement with creative artifacts. Questions that catalyzed this exploration (and influenced the final questions listed in the Methodology section) include:

- Where and how do people make, share, and read zines?
- Why do people make and read zines, and in the formats and settings they choose: circulating in communities, or situated in four-walled places, like schools and libraries?
- How do zines encourage and enrich someone's sense of place – and, in turn, support and enrich the places and communities that form around zine-making?

I'm interested in these questions as a zine-maker and current resident of Lansing, Michigan, where I first started reading and making zines in earnest.

Literature Review: A Developing Conversation with Librarians, Scholars, Writers, and Community Members

In addition to various online communities and in-person conversations with friends, local artists, and zinesters, I also want to acknowledge the influence of the 2024 Watson Conference on this project. As an attendee last spring, I participated in a collaborative zine project entitled "Aca(DIY)mia," which I now mark as one of the places on my zine-making map. I left the conference with a renewed understanding of the importance of in-person zine communities, and how I might continue to intertwine zine-making with community-based writing, writing pedagogy, and the act of writing itself, however we might define it.

Excitingly and encouragingly, my literature review – mapped broadly in this section as a conversation with various voices and disciplines – suggests many possibilities for intertwinement. This literature also helped me identify what gaps I might fill or contribute to by focusing my thesis on the place-making, community-building, and spatial practices of three contemporary zinesters.

Zines in the Archives

The library at MSU is a prominent zine force in the Greater Lansing area. Under the direction of "zine librarian" Joshua Barton, the MSU library maintains a Special Collection of zines that can be viewed via appointment in the Special Collections Reading room, or incorporated into lesson plans or assignments with support from Barton. Special Collections appointments are available to "all researchers, regardless of academic affiliation or place of residence," creating opportunities for individual graduate students like myself, instructors interested in facilitating on-campus "field trips" for their students, or anyone else attempting to design a zine workshop. I first interacted with the Special Collections last spring, when I attended a "Zine Jam" facilitated by fellow graduate students employed at the MSU Writing Center.

The MSU Zine Collection is an incredible educational resource and ongoing archival project, eliciting crucial but challenging questions about the ethics of archiving and citing zines (Berthoud et al., 2015; Barton & Olson, 2019; Fife, 2019). Zines are sometimes positioned as objects of the past: for example, as sources for urban planning history (Gimeno-Sánchez, 2022). This past-oriented perspective is not forwarded by all contemporary sources, however; some scholars, like Hays (2020) and Watson & Bennett (2021), illuminate the zine as a living, hopeful genre with "felt value" (Watson & Bennett), powerful articulations of identity and the self (Hays, p. 15), and significant implications for participatory, community-based research (Valli, 2021).

Based on my conversations with Joshua Barton at MSU Libraries and the information provided on the webpage for "Zines at the MSU Libraries," the libraries demonstrate an awareness of the archival opportunities and complexities of zines. Barton and other zine librarians actively seek for ways to "activate" zines as communal artifacts, such that zines can more readily travel from the archives into the hands of community members – or, if not their physical hands, at least into their awareness. During a one-on-one conversation last spring, Barton described how zines call into question the "underpinnings of what we're doing in libraries." He described how the "instrumental orientation toward research" in academic libraries might depict zines as raw materials for scholarship, as opposed to living articles engaged in collective memory. "This entails affective responsibility to a wider range of people, not just scholars," Barton shared.

This desire to "activate" zines in a larger public consciousness, while honoring the rights and desires of zinesters *and* of zine readers, comes up in the Zine Librarians Code of Ethics (Berthoud et al., 2015), which outlines a set of core values to guide zine acquisition, collection, organization, archiving, and access in library settings. The Code acknowledges that "access to zines in libraries and archives carries an inherent tension" (p. 8), as zines often originate from creative communities and individuals working and writing against large institutions – like universities. Holding these tensions, the Code encourages zine librarians and archivists to do their best to preserve zines "and make them accessible to future readers and researchers, via physical access and description" (p. 9).

At the MSU libraries, I view the Maker Space Zine Kit as a lower-level example of this accessibility work, "activating" zines by way of community engagement. By enabling students to check out materials (including a folding tool, brush pens, scrapbooking paper, and other crafting necessities) to make zines on their own, the library positions zine-making as a contemporary and accessible endeavor. The library also hosts a "Zine MakeStation" at its Hollander Makerspace. The Station, designed to make zine-making accessible to students on campus, also recalls the tension described in the Code by inviting students to make personal publications in the surveilled space of an academic institution. As someone who utilizes and appreciates this station, it's very difficult to imagine anyone (staff or fellow students) looking at the work created in this station without creators' consent. Even so, there's something different about making zines in an institutional space, compared to doing the work in your bedroom in pajamas and staying up way too late on a Tuesday night to make perzines about an embarrassing and/or emotional experience.

Fittingly, Fife (2019) describes zines as "personal archives" that also contain traces of a society's memory, channeling an interplay between "me" and "us" (p. 5, cited from McKemmish,

1996). Depending on the relative balance of intentions (and power) between "me" as zinester and "us" as archiver, zines may end up shoved in a bedside drawer or carefully stowed in an acid-free folder in the Special Collections of an academic library. Fully analyzing the ethics of zine preservation is beyond the scope of this project, but I view librarianship as central to the ethos of zines as accessible, communal, deeply embodied artifacts. These alternative texts are necessarily embodied modes of knowledge-making and acquisition, and can be difficult to describe and archive as physical representations of ephemeral, deeply felt experiences.

Zines in Writing Pedagogy

As a student, maker, and someone learning about writing instruction, zines have brought me closer to the "punctum of recognition," described by Arroyo and Alaei, which "emerges from and provides access to knowledge inside the body." This puncturing process instigates "disruption, disturbance" in my previous understanding of what writing can or should be. Arroyo and Alaei move from *puncta* to *chora*, which they describe as "an open-ended mode of invention" that "both unsettles us and moves us to respond." VanKooten (2016) paraphrases other definitions and notes the older connotation of *chora* as "place," before summarizing it as a methodology "through which we compose and feel out meanings from diverse materials, patterns, emotions, bodies, and memories."

Last spring, in a zine titled "I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M DOING FOR THIS PROJECT (YET) (A ZINE)!" created for a Multimodal Composing course, I described zines as "choral spaces" that literally fold "time and space" (Arroyo & Alaei) in and out of their pages. Arroyo and Alaei describe pre-2010 YouTube as a choral space; its community "forms a network of creative practice" that transcends a fixed place or time, reminding me of zine communities. In reflection, VanKooten's summative description of *chora* is a fitting way to frame what I was doing (even unconsciously) in that zine, as I unpacked the meaning of choral spaces and the potential benefits of teaching writing and composing through zines.

In a writing classroom, some scholars introduce zines as texts that complicate students' understanding of what "good writing" looks like, as expressed by Helmbrecht and Love (p. 166, 2009) in their comparative analysis of two "mainstream" feminist zines, *BUST* and *Bitch*. Relatedly, instructors might cultivate more excitement and confidence in students by introducing them to the genre and granting opportunities for zine-writing *without* assessment. In her exploration of zines as a modality to support students' diverse identities, Lonsdale (2015) emphasizes that "zine-reading and zine-making should be supported through an in-depth genre study… so that students (and

teachers) understand the history, purpose, and potential of zines as they are created and circulated in their natural environment" (p. 15).

Based on my reading, literature on zine pedagogy from the early 2000s seemed to focus less on the assessment and embodiment of zines and more on their function as pedagogical texts to be created and/or analyzed by students. Doreen (2002), for example, describes how writing instructors might use zines to help students practice rhetorical and cultural analysis. She outlines a three-part paper assignment based on a "web zine" of each student's choice, describing how students can use qualitative, ethnographic methods to study the "electronic subculture" represented by their zine. The subculture may be "organized around issues of identity that concern sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, and race," or "around a particular cultural icon or subcultural practice," such as a fan community (Doreen, "Assignment Summary").

Although Doreen shows how zine-based assignments can promote critical thinking about subcultural production and non-mainstream texts, other educators caution about integrating zines into writing curriculum, noting the intimacy of zines as embodied and often (but not always) highly personal texts. Liz Mayorga, an educator and artist involved in the People of Color Zine Project, calls on educators to consider whether a "zine assignment" is the "best or most appropriate way to connect with your students or articulate a particular concept." Educators assume privilege and authority in a classroom space, and they cannot assume that students "are totally free to share private details of their lives without consequences" (Mayorga, 2010) through the intimate format of a zine.

Zines in Rhetorical Scholarship

Moving beyond the classroom to more general rhetorical scholarship on zines, Rhodes (2002) employs the term "radical women's textuality" to express "the idea of a networked community composed of writerly activists who work individually and collectively through their texts" (p. 128). These texts include zines and other feminist writing that "emphasize a type of agency that Susan Miller has called the 'textual subject:' a subject who consciously fictionalizes stability in order to write, to resist, and to act" (p. 128). Rhodes emphasizes the importance of digital, creative, textual spaces for women who may struggle to write their voices into being in physical, more regimented and gendered spaces.

By fictionalizing stability (which we might understand as the apparent "finality" of a zinester publishing their stance, belief, or even a seemingly silly hot take), zines encourage the kind of soul-seeking and stance-taking described by Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004) in their study of adolescent girls writing zines for social justice. Their findings reinforce the archival power of zines

to “fill the gap” (Gimeno-Sánchez, 2022, p. 1117), creating a deserved and even sacred space for minoritized voices in historical records. The adolescent zinesters of Guzzetti and Gamboa’s study demonstrate another use of zines in qualitative, interview-based research, as well as the community- and identity-building enabled by zines. Above all, Guzzetti and Gamboa illuminate “the opportunity zining gave [the interviewees] to stake a position in the world” (p. 431) and historicize their positions in zine form.

As shown in the previous section, zines are often academicized in the field of rhetoric and composition in terms of their relationship to writing pedagogy. One work that focuses on the rhetorical applications of zines outside of the classroom is rhetorician Adela C. Licona, author of *Zines in Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetoric* (2012), wherein she focuses on “feminist-of-color zines that are co-authored and co-produced” (p. 15). Most of these zines are found in the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, at Duke University (p. 123).

In the opening chapter, Licona describes how her upbringing on the “U.S./ Mexico borderlands” oriented her toward “borderlands rhetorics,’” which she broadly defines as “third-space discourses “that can liberate us from the confines and constrictions of dominant dichotomous thinking, knowing, and being” (p. 17). She finds that zines, which “can be highly imaginative and connectional,” are “an excellent site” for studying borderlands rhetorics (p. 34). In an academic context, Licona defines third space “as the space resulting from the crossing of disciplinary borders… Academic border crossings can be knowledge-generating acts of resistance to imposed disciplinary orderings—be they scientific, social, sexual, historic, or cultural” (p. 170). “In short,” she summarizes in her introductory chapter, “third space is a space that materializes what borders serve to divide, subordinate, and obscure” (p. 11). More generally, Licona describes space as “a relational production, that is to say, a product of social relations, and thus, necessarily political” (p. 115) – a conception she attributes to feminist and critical geographer Doreen Massey.

From her positionality as a Chicana scholar and based on the zines in her analysis, Licona argues that these texts serve as “materialized third spaces, ultimately reflecting “borderlands rhetorics through the language of resistance, opposition, and, most importantly, coalition” (p. 116). While she acknowledges the “pedagogical potential” of zines, her moves beyond the classroom illuminate their radical coalitional, community, and activist potential (p. 120). In a 2014 review of the book, feminist rhetorician Jenna Vinson summarizes Licona’s book as one that “provides activists, researchers, and educators with 1) a new theoretical framework through which to analyze

community literacies and coalitional practices and 2) a vibrant genre to consider for community literacy projects and rhetorical analysis: zines" (p. 92).

I include Licona's book here as a key example of zines doing community-driven rhetorical work and, when understood as third spaces, capable of "revealing an intimate connection between place and self" (Licona, p. 22). Licona cites Patton and Sánchez-Eppler's definition of place as "'a mobile imaginary, a form of desire'" – that, when viewed through a third-space framework and applied to zines, positions "third-space zinesters as multiply-situated subjects" who "embody multiple sites, social locations, and various and fluid identity markers" (p. 22). The definitional flexibility of place recalls my earlier conception of "artist-in-residences" and reflects the fluid nature of third spaces, which can be physical or geographical locations, methodological approaches, or even practices of "embodied knowledge." As embodied and "desiring beings," Licona writes, we are "more than our skin and always circulating in the potential of (intimate) realignments and of becoming an/other in the crossing of our daily borders" (p. 67), which we might describe as daily practices of navigating third spaces: of "being conscious of both/and possibilities as opposed to either/or distinctions" (Vinson 2014, p. 92).

Licona calls upon readers to consider and honor "nondominant ways of knowing and being" (p. 120), which we can often find in the pages of zines. Her reflections and spatial framework inspire me as a student planning to work outside of the academy, reinforcing my view of zines as dually choral and third spaces that "resist dominant dichotomies, build coalition, share lived knowledge, and promote grassroots literacies" (Vinson, p. 93).

Doing Research With and About Zines

As I designed this study, I drew inspiration from Guzzetti and Gamboa and other researchers who reposition zine-making and zine analysis as a mode of qualitative research. From the mid-2010s and onward, various scholars have studied zines and their surrounding communities, both by analyzing archived and contemporary zines and asking study participants to create their own zines as an alternative form of interviewing.

Biagioli, Pässilä, and Owens (2021) present the zine genre as a "visual ethnography approach" (p. 172) and a "qualitative method of collection and analysis" (p. 173) that can be used in a range of disciplines, complementing the data gleaned from other qualitative methods such as interviews, testimonials, and case studies. The three authors — all coming from different disciplines — illustrate how zines can be implemented as self-reflective tools to (1) record participants' experiences in an academic conference environment, and (2) support student

reflection and learning, specifically in graduate-level "Service Design" and "Documentary Photography" courses taught by Biagioli.

Shifting from participatory zine-making to zine analysis from an archival lens, Gimeno-Sánchez (2022) focuses on a specific sliver of zines – environmentalist zines published in Europe during the 1970s – and illustrates the value of these alternative texts for qualitative research in urban planning history. Through collection and analysis of seven transnational zines, Gimeno-Sánchez explores and enacts the potential of zines as "'minor' sources," which "can help reveal new readings of existing narratives" (p. 1117): in this case, of the relationship between urban planning history and environmentalism.

Recent studies also leverage the increasingly digital creation, production, and distribution of zines, including Matich, Parsons, and Ashman (2024), mentioned previously, who theorize zines as infrastructure for digital feminist activism. Focusing their study "on a London and online-based zine community which coalesces around the *gal-dem* and *Polyester* zines" (p. 1054), the authors emphasize the value of zines for feminist political organizers with the desire, resources, and "strategic intent" to engage with "differing media forms" across social, digital, and material spheres (p. 1068). This study evokes the thesis of Sarah Rayner, a PhD candidate in Cultural Studies at Trent University, who invites future researchers to pay closer attention to "zines in a community and cultural context," noting that much of zine research purely "focuses on zine as a piece of media" (p. 99). I find that Matich, Parsons, and Ashman approach zines from the cultural and community perspective that Rayner describes, and I attempted to do the same in my thesis by attending to the individual stories and larger communities of each zinester.

Pre-Methodology: Reflecting on Positionality, Identity, and Definitions

When thinking about the design of any study, I find Aja Martinez's definition of methodology in the opening chapter of *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory* (2020) to be incredibly helpful. Martinez distinguishes between methodology as a "verb" – the process, the theoretical justification (p. 2) – and method as the "noun, the genre, the research tool" (p. 2). "Articulating a methodology simply makes that approach transparent to your audience and clear to yourself," add Clary-Lemon, Mueller, and Pantelides in their book *Try This: Research Methods For Writers* (2022). In this section, I will take note from these scholars and clarify my methods and methodology, as well the rationale and positionalities that shape my approach.

I designed this study from the perspective of an artist, researcher, writer, and zinester, and thus with an interest in arts-based methodologies, which assert that "the integration of creative practices and artistic work is part of the research process" (Beck, 2021, p. 18). Some representative methodologies could include visual art-making, designing a choreography, or co-creating with participants, which Beck explores through the creation of "Queer in the Kitchen": an online gallery made collaboratively to archive moments of queer domesticity.

I gravitate toward these creative methodologies as an artist and former visual art instructor. My students and co-instructors showed me alternative ways of communicating and storytelling via drawing, painting, plaster-making, papier-mâché, or simply sitting on the floor when creative media felt too stimulating. I worked with students from a range of cultural and racial backgrounds, and the same was true of my previous work as a case manager at a shelter. When co-creating "Safety Plans" and "Care Plans" with people experiencing domestic abuse, creative acts of care – for example, identifying a favorite song or a safe spot to write, reflect, and reset – often surfaced alongside the more "standard" actions of blocking unsafe people on social media, changing phones, and applying for jobs and assistance. While these technical documents were designed to collect basic information and also protect our organization in the event of an audit, they also offered subtle opportunities for reflection on the creative, imaginative, and hopeful acts that bring us back to ourselves.

As I've transitioned to working with and making zines, many of which have been made by communities discriminated by race, gender, sexuality, and other forms of identity, I think about the complexities of engaging in community and social justice-oriented work as a cis white woman. I also think about the harms that can happen if I do not approach this work with respect, honesty, and a desire to learn and listen. As a model, I appreciate Breanne Matheson's sentiment that, as a

white woman and technical communication scholar, "privilege is woven through her work" (2021, p. 22). Here, I think about how my willingness to create and share certain perzines (especially ones on more vulnerable topics like sexuality or intimacy) is tied to the privilege I have to share these stories with some degree of comfort, feeling of safety, or support from others. Throughout and beyond this thesis, I consider how projects based on zinesters' stories might serve as platforms for voices and communities other than my own, modeling the "openness and accountability" about the limitations of my individual perspective and analysis in social justice work, as Matheson describes (p. 22).

Finally, I reflect on my positionality as a graduate student immersed in discussions about the disciplinary "home" of rhetoric relative to English, Composition, and related disciplines. Reading the four "Octalogs" emphasized, to me, the foundational notion of rhetoric as "a transdisciplinary subject" (p. 33), as Mountford describes in the second Octalog (1997), and how transiting across disciplines – including the arts – encourages more creative and inclusive methodologies, like those documented in the upcoming case studies and other zine-based research.

In addition to reflecting on my own positionality and identities, I drew on oral history approaches to guide my interview methodology. These approaches can include storytelling via video or phone interviews, questionnaires, zine-making, and artifact gathering and analysis, many of which are employed by the scholars mentioned in the previous section. However, because these scholars do not explicitly categorize their research tools as oral history methods, I turned to the Oral History Association (OHA) to learn more about the core principles and best practices of oral history projects.

OHA defines oral history as "both the interview process and the products that result from a recorded spoken interview (whether audio, video, or other formats)," and contends that the "hallmark of an oral history interview is a dynamic, collaborative relationship between the interviewer and the narrator." Because my participants were geographically scattered, I had to conduct all interviews online. To promote a more collaborative relationship beyond the one-time interview, I shared each case study section with the respective participant and invited feedback and revisions via email. Participants will also receive copies of the summative zine from this project and *Lan-zine*. While these actions in no way replicate the dynamism and depth of an ongoing, in-person relationship, I wanted to involve participants as much as possible within the scope and timeline of this project.

Methodology

With these disciplinary considerations and precedents in mind, I finally arrived at this arts-based methodology as someone interested in the historical, communal, personal, and embodied nature of zines, which can be explored via archival and creative methods. In this case, I utilized storytelling, facilitated by interviews and zines, as my primary method, and approved the study through Michigan State's Institutional Review Board. I chose to interview three zinesters, two via email and one via video call. As I worked on this project, I engaged in informal conversations with other zinesters and scholars about their creative practices and communities, some of which are referenced in the preceding literature review. For the final project, I chose to focus on the experiences of three individuals, allowing for closer analysis of their responses and a careful "case study" approach to each zinester.

During the interviews, I reviewed informed consent and then asked each zinester to digitally share one of their zines as "artifacts." All interviewees responded to the following questions about their artifacts and zine-making practices:

1. Why do you make zines?
2. Who do you make zines with (if anyone)?
3. Do you have an intended audience(s) in mind for your zines?
4. How do you distribute your zines?
    - Online, in-person, or both?
    - Why do you distribute zines in the way(s) you've indicated?
5. Do you sell your zines?
    - Why or why not?
    - If yes: Online, in-person, or both? Why?
6. I'm interested in zines as texts with "felt value," referencing the potential power of holding and reading a zine in your hands.
    - Keeping this concept in mind, do you feel that you experience zines differently when they are print/material as compared to when they are digital/online?
        - Why do you feel that way? Can you say a bit more?
7. Do you belong to any communities related to zine-making (clubs, distros, reading groups, etc.)? If "yes":
        - Are they online or in-person?
        - What is the purpose of this community (or communities)?

    - What is your purpose for participating in the community? What do you get out of it?
8. **Artifact-Based Interview Question**: Now, we'll talk about the example of your zine work that you believe shows connections to community, space, and/or place.
    - How did you conceptualize "space," "place," and/or "community" as you selected your example?
        - What does "space" mean to you? "Place?" "Community?"
    - How does this example show connections to space, place, and/or community?
    - Of these three concepts (space, place, and community), which one(s) resonate the most with you in the context of this zine, and why?
9. **Closing Question**: How do you envision the future of zines: the future of your zine-making practice, and the future of zines as a genre, more broadly?

By presenting the zinesters' responses to these questions in the upcoming case studies, I create space for myself and readers to get to know each zinester and the ways in which they engage in place- and community-building practices in their zines. Across all three interviews, I identify key terms or words and then assign descriptive themes, which indicate areas where the zinesters' responses overlap, complement one another, or diverge.

Finally, I analyze and "collate" these themes in the final summary, which I begin in this essay and continue as a zine. By creating a summative zine to communicate the takeaways of this project, I aim to make the experiences of these zinesters more accessible and meaningful to a larger audience, as other zines have done for me on a variety of topics: from the anatomy of giraffes, to resistance strategies, to first-time motherhood. I also desire to expand the boundaries of what counts as meaningful research in the field of rhetoric and writing, honoring the work of other researchers, historians, artists, writers, makers, and readers whose enthusiasm for alternative texts has inspired my own.

Results: Zinester Case Studies

Before writing each of these case studies, I completed several analytical reviews of the transcripts from each interview. The main themes that emerged from the three transcripts are:

- Distribution of zines
- Production of zines
- Community
- Place
- Space
- Feeling/ Emotion
- Self/ Identity
- Monetization
- Zines as artifacts

Predictably, some zinesters touched on certain themes more than others. These are also themes that I – as someone wearing the hats of both researcher and zinester – formulated on my own, informed by my biases and experiences as a reader, maker, and interviewer. As a result, it's very likely that other interviewers may have surfaced different themes than the ones I outline above. Considering the inevitable biases and differences in perception, I aimed to identify enough themes to honor the breadth and depth of my interviewees' responses within the scope of this project.

1. Remi Germaine

Remi Germaine runs a zine distro under the name Peachy Keen Zine Press. On her website, she briefly describes how the press began when she signed up for her very first zine festival. Many zinesters (including myself) identify and distribute their zines under a "distro" (distributor), which may be run by a group but is often headed by only one individual.

On her Instagram profile, Remi describes herself as a letter writer, zine maker, and illustrator. Based on my interview with Remi, which we completed over email, I'd also describe Remi as an especially sensitive, attentive, and curious creator; someone who creates zines to "connect with people," she summarized. Remi is not currently active in any zine communities, although she has organized some in-person zine-making events and groups in the past. These days, she primarily makes zines by herself, with a few exceptions: including the zine she shared with me for this project, made collaboratively with her twin sister.

Remi's response to the third question about intended audiences reinforces her view of zines as part of a connective genre, dually inward and outward. Each zine is a process-turned-product that connects her not only to other people, but to herself – and this makes sense, as Remi is her own target audience. "My main goal when making zines is to make them for me," she explained. "I think this helps keep my zines genuine and personal. My hope is that the reader ends up seeing a bit of themselves in my zines. I really want to create those little human connections."

By sharing her "stories and thoughts" in zines, Remi hopes to create "genuine and comfortable connections" that resonate with readers. To promote these connections, she distributes and sells her zines through a variety of channels: on Patreon, where her readers can sign up to receive a monthly perzine; at zine festivals in Utah, where she currently lives, and through online trades and submissions, facilitated mostly by Instagram. "Surprisingly Instagram has been a great way to connect with other zinesters, as much as I hate social media," Remi shared.

Remi described online and offline distribution as "very different experiences": in-person experiences at zine festivals are "more exciting but fleeting," she said, while online interactions are primarily with people "invested in me as an artist and friend." In both spaces, Remi sells her zines at a low cost, guided by the belief that zines should be affordable. "In the end, anyone who is willing to spend money on zines knows that it's about the ideas and community, not the product," she reflected. Some of the "ideas" embedded in the zine community include an appreciation for print media, which Remi favors wholeheartedly. "I love print tangible print media," she exclaimed, then continued:

> For me, zines are incredibly personal, and having a zine to hold solidifies that concept in a different way than a digital zine can. The more mistakes, the more charm, and you don't get that in digital media. Everything is so clean and perfect, I wanna see where the printer ink ran out, ya know?

In the artifact portion of our interview, Remi described the relationship between her zine-making practice and ongoing journey "of discovering what being half Hawaiian" meant to her, specifically through a zine series titled *Hapa* (Figure 1) co-created with her sister. As a result, I categorized the most keywords from Remi's interview under the "Self/Identity" category. Many of Remi's references to personal and cultural identity interacted with her conception of space, which she explored with her sister in *Hapa*. "To me 'space' means getting to claim it as my own," Remi described. "This *Hapa* zine series is really to remind myself that I don't need to know everything to claim this culture as my own. There is enough space in all culture circles for mixed race humans to exist and to claim space."

Throughout our interview, Remi used the word "space" with greater frequency than "place," which she used only once. She conceptualized her sense of space as "the space I allow myself to occupy" as both a "mixed-race human" and someone who has "felt so quiet, mousy and invisible most of my life," she shared. In connecting space to "community," Remi wondered:

> Who gets to decide how much is enough and how much space in the Polynesian communities I get to occupy? I view community in the same light [as space]. What communities am I allowed to participate in? Who gets to decide what communities I lay claim to?

The *Hapa* series thus became a space for Remi and her sister to explore these questions and, if not answer them with certainty, at least give themselves "permission to join whatever community you feel lifts you up the most," Remi reflected.

One of Remi's final sentiments illustrates her interchangeable sense of "space" and "place," which I think creates a fruitful fuzziness. Strictly defining and dividing these terms as "separate" seems, in many ways, antithetical to the complexity of belonging to and embracing one's cultural identities and communities. Remi writes:

> Getting to create a zine series that highlights one of my biggest insecurities is the pinnacle of the work I've done to find my place. Exposing my insecurities of not feeling Hawaiian "enough" helped me further sink my feet into the space that I have claimed for myself.

From space to community to feeling "enough" in a community, Remi illuminated the spatial and cultural power of zines for both their makers and readers, especially when held in physical form. For the makers, Remi and her sister, the *Hapa* series gave them space and time, over a series of zines, to discover "what it means for us to be Hawaiians not raised in Hawaii," Remi shared. Referencing the readers of *Hapa*, Remi explained that "one of our goals in creating this zine series is to let people know that you don't need to know everything about a community to be a part of it."

In this way, this zine series functioned as a source of reassurance and an impetus for spatial and cultural exploration, for "discovery" among both readers and makers. Remi does not explicitly use the word "healing" to describe this zine or the surrounding process, but the word strikes me as one way to describe her zine experience. For both their makers and readers, zines can reorient us toward our communities and ground us in space, in place, and in community, in ways that are humanly complex and messy, creatively inspiring and rewarding, and healing.

Figure 1. A photograph provided by Remi, showing a hand holding two copies of the *Hapa* zine series.

2. Bre Upton

Bre Upton is a zinester and professional artist with a significant Instagram presence and "Tiny Print Shop" website, where she sells zines and related merchandise. I interviewed her via email, and with the hope of learning more about digital practices of place- and community-building among zinesters.

I categorized the most keywords from Bre's interview under the "Distribution" category, followed by "Community": both domains that Bre must prioritize as a small business owner. Because publishing her work online is "not enough," Bre said she often walks into small bookstores or shops and asks them to do wholesale with her. This practice supports local businesses while enabling her to reach more readers. Bre also trades and gives zines away for free at zine fests, or as donations to local libraries, schools, and teachers. These relationships, while sometimes framed as

"business" relations, appear more communal and reciprocal than transactional, as they increase Bre's exposure as a zinester and professional artist while supporting local businesses and educational systems.

In response to the first three questions, Bre articulated her "why" for zine-making as "a form of self-expression." She usually only makes zines alone and without a specific audience in mind: "I just hope whoever experiences my work can resonate with it," she said. Bre also resonated with the conception of zines as texts with "felt value," stating her preference for "zines that I can hold in my hand, because then I feel transported to the creator's energy at the time of creation," she described, then continued:

> Digital zines are great, cheap, and accessible...but it keeps me wanting more. I feel like I experience zines differently when they're printed because it lingers with me longer, which inspires me in my own work. Unfortunately, digital zines have a harder time leaving an impact on me because I'm so used to being on my phone that it becomes way too easy to scroll past zines on the internet.

Although Bre perceives digital zines themselves as less imbued with the energy of the zinester, she finds most of her zine communities in digital spaces, including her YouTube channel, Instagram, and an open Discord server where she can "connect to other zine makers from all over the world." In these online communities, she gains friendships, other eyes for her work, and constructive feedback, as well as information about zine-related events across the U.S.

Bre shared a zine titled *Oh! The Places You'll Cry* (Figures 2 and 3), "a short perzine about different places in my city that I've had mental breakdowns or have gotten so emotional I couldn't contain it and just started crying in public," she said. Bre shared the PDF of the zine with me: the cover page is a Seuss-inspired introduction to "A guide to Downtown Long Beach through tears!" The inner pages include collaged images of Bre, friends, and scenes from the film *La La Land*; typed and handwritten entries about life experiences; and, true to the zine title, detailed entries for each location on Bre's tearful journey through Long Beach.

In response to the questions framed around this zine, Bre first conceptualized "space," "place," and "community" collectively: "as a third area of comfort away from whatever other places we're required to be such as home, work or school," she defined. "Spaces that feel comfortable and safe to me are things like zine communities, fests, or workshops because you can truly be yourself and let go of any societal expectations of how you should behave or act. Within zine spaces, you're only required to create and express yourself and I think that's so important." Zines thus become

spaces within themselves: self-published infrastructures for crying (and, hopefully, healing) *and* facilitators of more communal spaces, like zine fests and workshops.

Bre connected her personal definitions of space, place, and community to *Oh! The Places You'll Cry* "through the emotions" expressed by the zine. "Since crying is something we typically do alone, or within a confined "safe space", me crying in public is making any third space now one of my primary ones," she explained. Similar to Remi, Bre didn't make significant distinctions between space, place, and community – but of these three concepts, she resonated with "community" the most. She continued:

> ...while we may often find ourselves in various "spaces" and "places," it sort of means nothing if other people aren't there to experience. The context of this zine focuses on how I can feel my emotions while still being perceived by others, and that not all healing needs to be done alone.

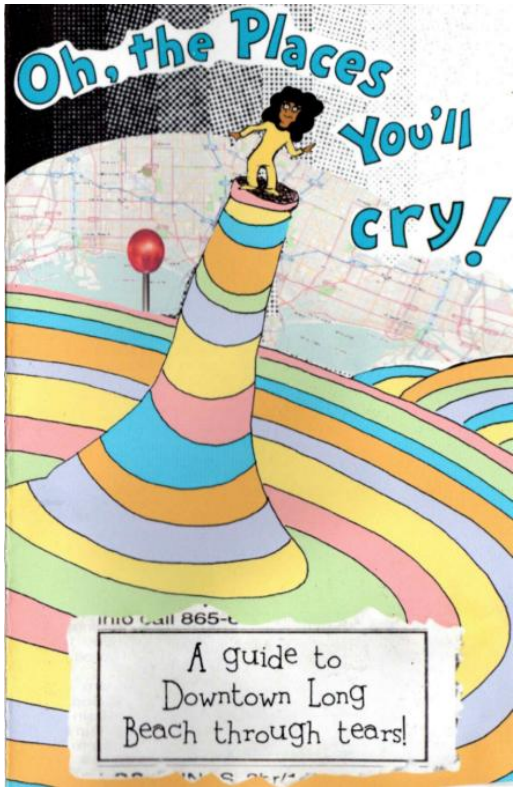


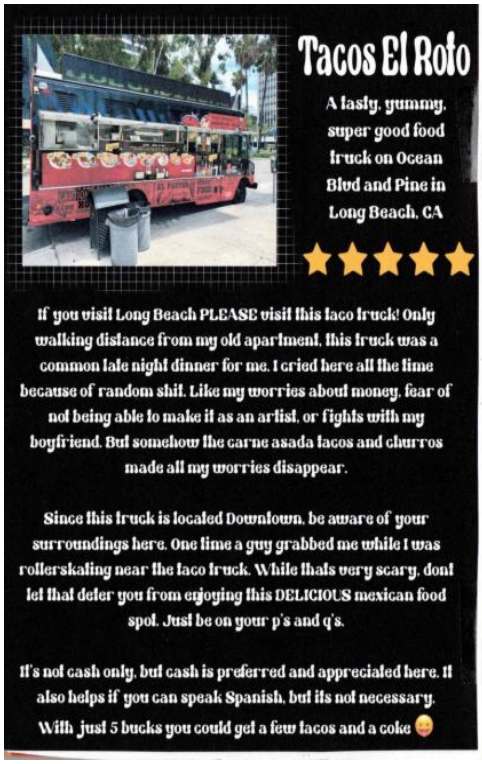
Figure 2. The front cover of *Oh! The Places You'll Cry*.

Bre's concluding thoughts on zines allude to their healing and human qualities compared to internet spaces, which she described as "sterile." She interprets the growing popularity of zines as a response to this sterility, and believes that "society at large is seeking something more meaningful, real, and raw, which are areas zines can fill."

Figure 3. The full spread of Bre's *Oh! The Places You'll Cry* zine.

Figure 3 (cont'd)

Figure 3 (cont'd)



Tacos El Roto

A tasty, yummy, super good food truck on Ocean Blvd and Pine in Long Beach, CA

★★★★★

If you visit Long Beach PLEASE visit this taco truck! Only walking distance from my old apartment, this truck was a common late night dinner for me. I cried here all the time because of random shit. Like my worries about money, fear of not being able to make it as an artist, or fights with my boyfriend. But somehow the carne asada tacos and churros made all my worries disappear.

Since this truck is located Downtown, be aware of your surroundings here. One time a guy grabbed me while I was rollerskating near the taco truck. While thats very scary, dont let that deter you from enjoying this DELICIOUS mexican food spot. Just be on your p's and q's.

It's not cash only, but cash is preferred and appreciated here. It also helps if you can speak Spanish, but its not necessary.

With just 5 bucks you could get a few tacos and a coke 😜

Thank you for exploring Long Beach w/ me! My intent was not to trauma bond - but just share some vulnerable moments at my favorite places ☺

Thank you for supporting this zine, it was fun & cathartic! ♡

Special extra thank yous to: ciara elfa, Sarah Chrosniak, Adam V, Julia Grace, Jay Dubayu, Niach, Teegan Muggridge, Angelfish, Hannah Grace, Karine Gacha, Katherine, Baby Ballou, Sey, Leo, Lindsey Fernandez, Wayne Carter, Francesca Scaraggi, Anna N, Nurina Junus, Bozo Texino, Briana Mendez-Padilla, Andrea, Kendal Burridge, Danielle, Jacob, Meghan Widger, Darb, chloe May, Margaret K zimmerman, Kai Montgomery, Melissa strong, Blanca carla Arriaga, Destinee Wilson, Shay A.

This is a 2021 Journal entry thats included in the zine.

I should be happy, shouldn't I? Just another wasted body of air in apartment 211. 35 units. 3 stories. Sandwiched in the middle of this rickety, chipped building – all the way in the corner – is me.

Growing more empty as each day passes, I regret being an artist. Artist, pft. How presumptuous to even consider myself in the league of other people who *make* art. I'm the only artist in the world who doesn't make art. Writer. Maybe that's the label that rests on my arm like an invisible patch, signaling to other eclectic souls of Long Beach that I too struggle with my existence. That I too question my worth by how many dollars don't exist in my savings account.

I quit my job again, but this time seems more daunting because rent is due on January 1st. In about 20 days is the electricity bills. 10 day count down until Spectrum wants their $64.59. And my parents keep reminding me they're gonna put the car insurance in my name. Every *beep* of the scanner at Target gives me a rush of serotonin, but as soon as I reach the parking lot it's gone. Now I'm out $28 and left with shit I don't need.

Being vulnerable is getting easier, yet more painful. Each word I admit out loud to myself and to Jason is like a tiny needle added to a heap of other needles that are slowly bleeding me out dry. "What if I don't make it?" I cry, snot running down to that little dip in my lip. "You will make it," Jason lies, kissing my forehead like he has a million times before.

The talks get more and more repetitive. We are both terrified of the future. What this disease has done to our lives – not only plaguing the lungs of the most vulnerable, but also plaguing the spirit of the most hopeful. The dreamers. The sickness has darkened the dreamers. Those of us foolish to believe that if we just take that leap, a soft billowy coushin called success would catch us.

9 hours a day the soundtrack of my decay is the theme song of The Office. I wander around the apartment looking for purpose in the little specks of dirt I brush into the dust pan.

"Maybe if I find a job cashiering, with less hours, I'd have more time to be happy." But then the thought is quickly demolished by the reality that I've been unemployed for a week, all the time in the world, and I'm more sullen than ever. Parts of me wish it would end. All of it. The sounds of Long Beach used to startle me; thinking death was approaching a stranger nearby. Now the sounds of Long Beach make me hope, that just for a second, just for teeny tiny millisecond, that the event is for me and not a stranger.

3. Alice Wynne

Alice Wynne is a zinester, artist, writer, and librarian. When I interviewed her over Zoom in the fall of 2024, she was working on her Master's degree in Library and Information Science at San José State University, and she completed the degree in December of 2024.

When asked why she makes zines, Alice emphasized the importance of fun and the power of printing. "It's a fun way to combine words and visuals, and I can write about whatever I want, and I love photocopying stuff. The Xerox is a really good medium," she said. Of the three zinesters I interviewed, Alice emphasized the role of Xeroxing most in her zine-making process, from her initial conception to final printing and distribution. She offered another reason for making zines as a way to bypass traditional publication routes: in zines, "you can write about whatever you want and publish it, and you don't have to ask anybody for approval. So you can be a journalist, albeit not part of an organization," she explained.

Community and Self/ Identity emerged as the two most prominent themes across Alice's responses, although she also made significant references to Distribution, Production, and Monetization. Freed from the constraints of mainstream publishers and editors, Alice mostly makes zines alone, enjoying the autonomy of a freelance writer or independent journalist with access to words, images, and distribution channels of her choosing. In the past, however, she has made collaborative zines, as well as a zine that compiled community contributions when she lived in Olympia, WA.

Alone and in community, Alice's zine-making precedes adulthood and even her conscious awareness. She started "consciously making" zines at 14 and first sold them at a bookstore, she recalled, but her "unconscious" zine-making era coincided with a lifelong passion for magazines and early access to a photocopying machine:

> ...my mom was a teacher at my school, and so I had a lot of free time. So I would make zines and then go into the teacher's office and photocopy them… And then my cousin introduced me to zines, and I was like, "Oh, I've been doing this for a while."

As an adult, Alice's zines have evolved into "mainly humorous takes on pop culture and current events." With this content in mind, she described her audience as "anyone that likes to laugh," and "people that like to read about pop culture and politics." While Alice used to sell zines at other bookstores, online, and at zine fests (including the upcoming LA Zine Fest, where she first tabled in 2015), she described the various difficulties of selling and distributing her work, both in person and online:

> I started to get really overwhelmed with Zine Fests, tabling at them, but now I'm also overwhelmed at going to them. I think that's one downside of the popularity of zines because they've gotten super popular, which is really great, but it just means that there's going to be a lot more people at events. For a claustrophobic introvert, that's not fun. I actually don't really sell my zines anymore. One reason is that I don't want to do the work of setting up a profile on the internet or updating a profile on the internet.

Although Alice doesn't currently sell her zines, she remains committed to zine-making as a practice of fun, connection, and humorous exploration of different topics, often inspired by mainstream magazines and her lifelong desire to be a writer and photographer. As Alice considers her professional future as a librarian and writer, zines remain a source of constancy in her life. There's no media conglomerate to pitch to, no approval-seeking from a finicky editor; just Alice, a pitch to herself, and a Xerox machine.

The resulting freedom of Alice's zine-making process shapes the publication and finally distribution of her zines. In theory, the steps are straightforward: finish collaging a zine, find a printer, and make as many copies as desired to share with the intended audience, each step determined by Alice as the leading editor. But in practice, the path from zinester to reader, or from reader to some form of archive, can be much more complicated.

To illustrate this complexity as well as the sense of "community" embodied in her zine example, Alice described her journey to photocopy a zine she made at the 2024 Zine Librarian unConference in New York City (Figure 4). Inside the zine, Alice humorously references the contributions of different friends: for example, she thanks "Liza for the glue; someone else for the fun; you, dear reader, for your social security number." Alice wrote about both "Los Angeles and New York City" and "referenced all my friends," she said. "And so in the actual document, I reference the conference community, but I think the document itself has the energy of different people in New York City."

Alice first read the original, uncopied zine to her conference community, then walked to the Brooklyn Public Library to photocopy the original with the help of a Young Adult librarian. "I couldn't understand the Xerox machine," Alice reflected. "It was like a touch screen and blah, blah, blah…". The librarian helped her, and Alice gave her a copy as a parting gift. The library did not have a long-arm stapler, however, so Alice ducked into a UPS store to find a stapler before dropping off a copy to Barnard College "because there's at least two zine librarians that work at Barnard," she explained. She set the scene of the UPS store:

> The people working there were just talking, and I was like, "Can I use your stapler?" And they were like, "Yeah, whatever." And they were talking about their night. Just every step of getting this zine out there, I communicated with someone. And that's a really fun element of zine making. You can make it and photocopy it and distribute it without telling anyone. But I think that zine-making, for me, is a great way to connect with people.

Before the final zine drop-off at Barnard College, Alice stopped at a bookstore with some friends:

> It had been raining, and a feeble wet rat crossed our paths and stopped at this iron gate. And on the other side of the iron gate was a drop into a stairwell. And I got really upset and I wanted to help it. And my friend was like, “We can't. There's nothing we can do.” And this woman stopped with me and was like, “I wish I had gloves."

Defeated by the circumstances, Alice and her friends entered the bookstore, and Alice exited about 45 minutes later to go to Barnard. She looked over the iron gate to check on the rat, and the same woman walked up and said: "You're looking for it, too?" The two “got to walking and talking,” Alice said, “and I was like, ‘I'm here for a zine conference. I'm a zinester. Do you want my zine?’ And she was like, ‘No.’ And then I said, ‘Okay, well, I'm just going to drop it off at Barnard right now.’ And she was like, ‘Okay, I'll take a copy.’”

Alice prefaced that this story might not be relevant to my thesis. Yet the zig-zag path from the Brooklyn Public Library, to the UPS store, to a wet rat, and finally to a prestigious institution speaks to the hidden complexities of zine production and distribution, and how many different “scenes” a zine may complete before settling on someone’s bookshelf, a coffee shop, or a public library.

In all steps of the process, Alice expressed her preference for physical zines: “I think that the act of making things with your hands, if you can, is super beneficial to your brain,” she said. In production, she loves “making zines the old-fashioned way,” as opposed to using Adobe or other advanced digital programs. “You're cutting and you're pasting, and you're flipping through magazines,” Alice said of her collage process. In distribution, “I also prefer print because I love holding things,” she expressed, before expanding on the uniqueness of zines as texts with felt value:

> …it's more of an artifact when it's in print, especially with zines where they're so cheap, so you can send them anywhere. And I've come across my zines in random places, zines that I've seen that I know I didn't sell to this person. They just somehow came across it. I don't know how many hands that traveled through, but thinking about that is super cool. I have a bunch of zines from the '90s. That's lived through so many decades, and how many scenes

has that object gone through? So since it's not an object on the internet, you don't have that provenance, and the provenance is not as special, I guess.

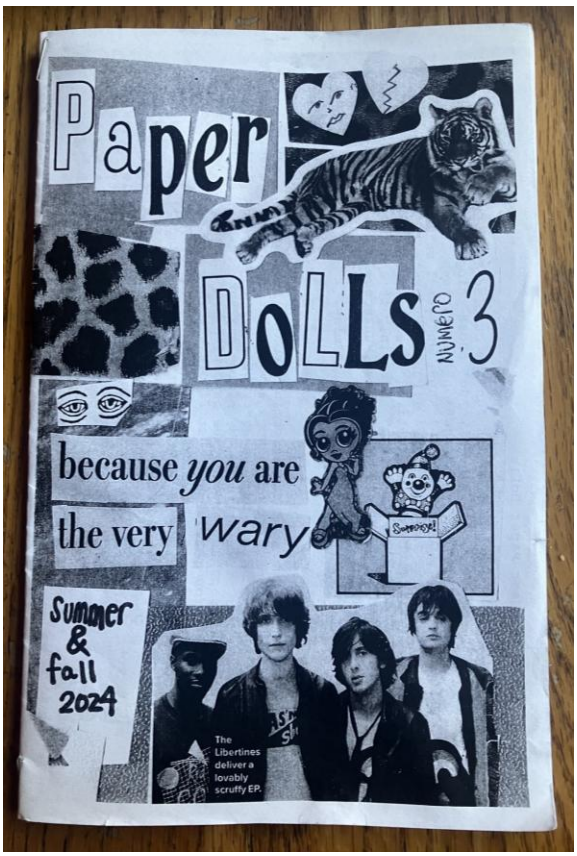


Figure 4. The zine Alice worked on during her time in New York City.

Even so, Alice has uploaded her zines online "when I really just want people to read them," she said, referencing the accessibility of digital zines. "You don't have to reach out to me to get a digital zine. You don't have to pay me. Just download it. So that's really cool. It's easier for some people that way… I also think that digital zines are more accessible for people with visual impairments."

As a zine librarian, Alice has spent years thinking about the benefits and qualities of different kinds of zines. She identified other zine librarians as a primary source of community that connects her to zine enthusiasts across the world through different events. In addition to the 2024 Zine Librarian unConference, Alice attended the 2023 American Library Association conference and helped with the "Zine Pavilion," a designated area "where you could make your own zines, attend a tiny little discussion about zines, and then you could also leave your zine and read someone else's zine. And there were actually people selling zines there too," Alice reflected.

These temporary gatherings and professional networks contribute to Alice's sense of community via zine librarianship. She emphasized the physical nature of this community, particularly at the New York unConference, where "it just felt really great to be physically a part of that community," she shared; "to hear other people's perspectives and to hear about the projects that they've been working on." At the end of the unConference, the librarians assembled in small groups to talk about creating another draft of the Zine Librarian Code of Ethics, mentioned earlier in the Literature Review section. This community of zine librarians evidences the enduring role of in-person gatherings to connect, create zines, and document and update professional practices and standards.

Some of these standards pertain to honoring the identity or anonymity of zinesters whose works are preserved in archives. When librarians catalogue zines, Alice explained, a zinester might be able to find themselves in some online databases. As a zinester with zines catalogued in select libraries, Alice discussed the trickiness of honoring different versions of herself:

> …my zine that I distribute for free, that's on WorldCat but it's under Alice W. and sometimes I'm like, "It should be under Alice Wynne," because I want everything to be connected. I want someone to Google me and then find everything that I want them to see. But also not making that correction, not calling up a library and being like, "Actually, it's Alice Wynne," honors the twenty-year-old that made that zine and was like, 'I want to remain anonymous."

Alice's commentary on identity and anonymity illustrates the ethical dilemmas that may emerge from zine-making and preservation. By thinking about her past self as a separate creator with different desires and beliefs around zine-making, Alice can appreciate the motivations of that younger creator. Yet as a new librarian entering the workforce, she also feels "conflicted by the contradiction of wanting to remain anonymous so that I can get a job," she shared. "What if someone reads one of my zines that talks about really outrageous stuff, and then I walk through the door for a job interview? But the thing about that is that I don't want to work for or with someone that can't respect the First Amendment."

In the spirit of freedom afforded by zines, these questions are primarily up to the zinester to answer, and their responses for archivists to honor. Ideally, zine distribution is also driven by the wishes of the zinester (and codified by documents like the Zine Librarian Code of Ethics). While distribution is another potentially rich step of zine-making, it is not currently "a big part of my process," Alice said. "Once I get [the zine] photocopied and stapled, I'm just like, actually, it's done its purpose. I feel so great, and I've had fun, and I don't need other people's validation, but how I distribute it is an extra, it's like an added bonus."

In her concluding thoughts, Alice expanded on ethical concerns in reference to the growing popularity of zines:

> In general, I really like the fact that zines have become more popular and that they're being incorporated into schoolwork. And a lot more people are becoming zine librarians; the zine world is expanding. I think that's really cool. But then there's always at least one moment in the lifespan of a material or a medium where it gets just too oversaturated. I don't know how to put it, but there's a lot of stuff in the world that has been ruined by people trying to make a lot of money or change things to fit their own styles. For example, with neighborhoods, gentrification ... It's just crazy to see a neighborhood change so much. And the current style, the contemporary style for architecture and design is super sterile, but also there's a lot of raw wood involved and coffee shops now, they're not cozy at all.

Compare this sterility to the coziness of collaging a zine together with your hands, or the absurdity of running into a wet rat and a hesitant reader on the way to find a long-arm stapler at the UPS store. These vignettes, imbued in the zine Alice shared with me, attest to the warm, whimsical, community-driven ethos of her zine-making and inform her hopes for the future. "I think that zines are definitely going to go more down the track of corporate monetization," she predicted, "but while that is happening, there's still going to be a lot of people making and learning about zines. They're actually going to do it for the right reasons."

4. Me

My conversations with these three zinesters brought me into deeper conversation with my own zine practices and communities. In this final case study, I respond to the same questions I posed to Remi, Bre, and Alice. I continue this response in the summative zine, which highlights and expands on key takeaways shared in the final "Collation" portion of this essay.

Like Remi, I make zines to connect with other people. Like Bre, I make zines as a form of self-expression, especially when I'm unsure how to initiate a conversation about something that feels weird, challenging, and/or confusing. And, like Alice, I make zines because I have so much fun creating them, save for moments of hair-pulling while drawing, printing, or collating the final pages.

If I were to combine all of these motivations, I'd say I make zines because I have a really hard time *not* making them. Ever since discovering the genre, I can't seem to stop folding printer paper, scribbling down zine ideas during meetings, and cutting quotes out of magazines for future zines. For all of the reasons outlined above by Remi, Bre, and Alice, I mostly make zines alone out of convenience and comfort, and to spare others the embarrassment of witnessing me in my most frustrated and/or frantic states, although I started making a zine with my partner last fall. Although

that zine has stalled in progress for over a year, the experience enlightened me to the value of "opening the process," as my partner coined, and collaborating on a project as both a creative challenge and opportunity to get to know someone else – and myself – more deeply.

Whether created alone or collaboratively, I would describe zines as "soul dumplings": a phrase I attribute to my friend, Katie. "I'm so excited to finally swap some soul dumplings tomorrow," Katie texted me last spring from somewhere far, far away from Lansing, where I'd been churning out zines for weeks and trying to come up with a name for my bedroom-based zine machine.

I loved the phrase so much, I decided to use "soul dumpling" as the name of my zine distro. More generally, I use "soul dumpling" as a working phrase for the tiny bits of our souls that we give to the ones we love (or, at a minimum, trust and believe in, like readers of our zines), with the hope of creating and sustaining more love and trust. Soul dumplings may take the form of conversations, kind gestures, creative endeavors, or the squishy dough balls themselves that my Dad's mom, "Nana J," used to plop into chicken soup. Like writing, like zining, like making or cooking of any kind, soul dumplings may form alone but are best consumed in community, calling for compassion and empathy as primary ingredients.

Regarding the communal nature of zines-as-soul-dumplings, I'm looking for more zine-related communities to join and events to attend, especially in anticipation of moving from Lansing to an undetermined studio apartment in the Midwest. I follow and engage with a handful of zinesters on Instagram, but I've been slower to connect with folks in person and will likely benefit from more in-person connections as I create and distribute more zines. While I usually turn to digital places for zine communities and resources, I prefer to make, distribute, and read zines physically. I believe in the material value of both making and flipping through zines, feeling the "energy" of the maker, and embracing the inconsistencies of drawing, writing, and printing as reminders of each zine's humanness.

In Lansing, I mostly distribute zines to friends and family for free. As an artist who occasionally sells illustrations, I've wrestled with monetizing my work while retaining the pure joy of just making for myself. For now, I think of my zines as distinct from my illustrations (as they are categorized on my website) and free or very low-cost, maybe $1-$3 if I ever sell them at a zine festival or bookstore. Compared to traditional "fine art" spaces, I love the affordability and accessibility of the zine community as both a maker and reader. While I invest a lot of time in my zines and believe artists should be compensated fairly for their work, it's very important to me to create opportunities for other people to stumble into the zine community (as I did a little over a

year ago) and feel comfortable and supported enough to remain there and nurture their own creative practices. This is work I love doing, and work that "compensates" me in the form of therapeutic self-reflection and meaningful connection with both loved ones and strangers.

My compensation for *Lan-zine* (Figure 5) came in the form of suggestions from redditors on r/lansing, a digital place I frequent during lunch breaks and bedtime. In the fall of 2024, I posted some in-progress pictures of the zine and asked other users to "help fill out my Lan-zine!" and share "what you're eating, where you're biking, and fun things you're seeing/ doing!! 🌼 🚲".

The experience of making *Lan-zine* enhanced my own understandings of space, place, and community in relation to zine-making. While I don't explicitly address "space" in this zine, I think of making space, physical or conversational, for others in my community to feel listened to and comfortable. Over the years, I've also worked on making space for myself in conversations and opening the process in my creative and personal life, as I mentioned earlier. This practice in space-making has grown from the buds of maturity – confidence, honesty, steadfastness – as well as support from others. As an active, growth-oriented concept, "space" feels more like a temporary but meaningful transformation – of a conversation, of a bus stop, of a river walk – than a personally or culturally meaningful location, which are qualities I associate with place. For example, when I walk along the River Trail and imagine what "Lansing," as we call it now, looked like during the dawn of the dinosaurs, my physical, spatial embodiment of that moment becomes a longer, more layered interaction with all the relations that came before and will come after me. This reminds me of Licona's discussion of space as something that "emerges through active material practices" and thus "is never complete, never finished. A focus on the dynamic nature of space allows for multiple, even competing, histories and experiences to be identified and reconsidered" (p. 115).

"Place" feels warmer, fuzzier and more frequented or lived-in, even if it's only the location I live in or frequent during a finite era, as I note in the introductory paragraphs of this essay. In *Lan-Zine*, I highlight numerous places in the Eastside neighborhood, including my bedroom and the Allen Neighborhood Center, which I frequent as a shopper and a volunteer, and the Green Door, which I inhabit as a mediocre dancer. This zine simultaneously reinforced my budding attachment to these places, drawing on memories and even locational nicknames (like "Mount Frandor," the hill behind the Frandor Shopping Center) while compelling me to remember and honor the people, nicknames, associations, and relations that preceded me.

This "constellation" of relations is something my peers and I have talked about as a project of cultural rhetorics, and specifically Indigenous understandings of the material world discussed by Arola and Rickert (2022) in a conversation about the meaning and work of "new materialism" –

work that Arola, as an Indigenous rhetorician, has been doing throughout her career "'without the explicit branding,'" she says. "I move through the world, and my research and teaching, with an understanding of matter as vital, and of agency as coproduced by, through, and with all relations (humans, nonhumans, time, space, and the unknowable)" (p. 190).

Figure 5. The scanned, eight-page spread of *Lan-zine.* From top to bottom, in pairs: the back and front cover, pages 1 and 2, pages 3 and 4, pages 5 and 6.

Figure 5 (cont'd)

Although their conversation is much richer than I can do justice in this section, I appreciate Arola's attention to "lived relations" (p. 193) across space, time, humans, and nonhumans, as well as "thereness": the unwavering reality that something remains there whether or not we spend time doing the "disclosive work" of making its "relations and situations become more visibly dynamic enactions," as described by Rickert (p. 192). I also appreciate Rickert's description of the power and possibility of bringing "the world into presence in particular ways" via different activities, spanning widely in nature from the practical to the spiritual (190). By dancing and biking and wandering around this city, by being here *and* there, and by zining about it all, I hope that I've become acquainted with the Lansing community, and the lifeworlds within it, in more particular and complex ways than I would have experienced without creating *Lan-zine*.

In the context of *Lan-zine*, "community" resonates with me the most as I reflect on the many moments I've experienced, practices I've cultivated, and relationships I've developed here. As I anticipate moving in just a handful of months, I also think of the community I'll be leaving behind, which is equal parts depressing and exciting as I consider the new communities I may build by zining in different places. Wherever I bike, walk, or begrudgingly drive to next, I expect to keep making zines for as long as I am able, supported and inspired by the spaces, places, and communities around and within me.

“Collating” Four Case Studies

At the beginning of this essay, I contended that zines illuminate the importance of space and place in the production of, engagement with, and preservation of creative artifacts within communities. Based on the experiences and zine artifacts of Remi, Bre, and Alice, along with my experiences and *Lan-zine* example, I would both reiterate and expand on this argument. As zinesters and members of geographical and cultural communities, our understandings of space and place shape the zines we put out into the world, and vice versa. But instead of clearly defining or “conceptualizing” space, place, and community, as I asked my interviewees to do, I wonder how these interviews may have unfolded if I began by asking zinesters to simply tell a story about making and distributing a particular zine, instead of explicitly asking them about space, place, community, and other logistical questions about making and distributing zines.

Even so, the zinesters’ varying responses favor stories, anecdotes, and artifacts over bounded definitions. They live, work, connect, question, and zine in the definitional fuzziness of these concepts, with purpose and honesty and joy. Their varying experiences and applications of these concepts speaks to the importance of bottom-up approaches to CPM referenced earlier in this paper (Basaraba, 2023), and my approach to interviewing zinesters is no exception. In retrospect, I may have changed the ordering and nature of my questions to encourage more organic, intuitive conversational movement: starting with a zine as the “base” to explore the zinesters’ senses of place, space, and community related to making and distributing a particular zine.

All of this said, collating these four case studies attests to the value of reflective methodological practice – what worked well, what may have worked better? – and the slipperiness of asking for conceptions or definitions, which are bound to vary and even contradict within a single interview, and certainly across multiple interviews. As a zinester myself, I can appreciate and find value in this slipperiness, which reinforces my own conception of zines as “infrastructures” for soul dumplings. Zines are paperbound infrastructures that encourage us to play with our language, conceptions, and understandings, hopefully in the presence of a compassionate (or, at the very least, interested) audience. They offer a "tender and protective intimacy," writes art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson, cited in a 2024 New Yorker article by Hua Hsu, that allows us "to feel like we are still sketching the outlines of our true selves.” This is how I feel when I'm sharing a soul dumpling in a zine, as well as reading one: it is a gift, a supple moment of shared trust and intimacy, in which we puncture a piece of dough and linger for just a moment – just a bite – in the filling of our true selves.

The encouragement to view one’s partially filled self as worthy of publication is one of the things I love most about zines. In the zine-like spirit of closing creative projects without a definitive,

filled-in resolution, I continue this "collation" of key takeaways from my literature review and case studies in [insert working title of summative zine that I haven't created yet, lol]. In this zine, I respond illustratively to Remi, Bre, and Alice's experiences of space, place, and community. I also expand on my deployment of creative placemaking as an "artist-in-residences" and advocate for multimodal, artistic approaches to writing and community-building.

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APPENDIX: SUMMATIVE THESIS ZINE

I present the scanned summative zine in the following order: front cover, body pages 1 through 5, and back cover.

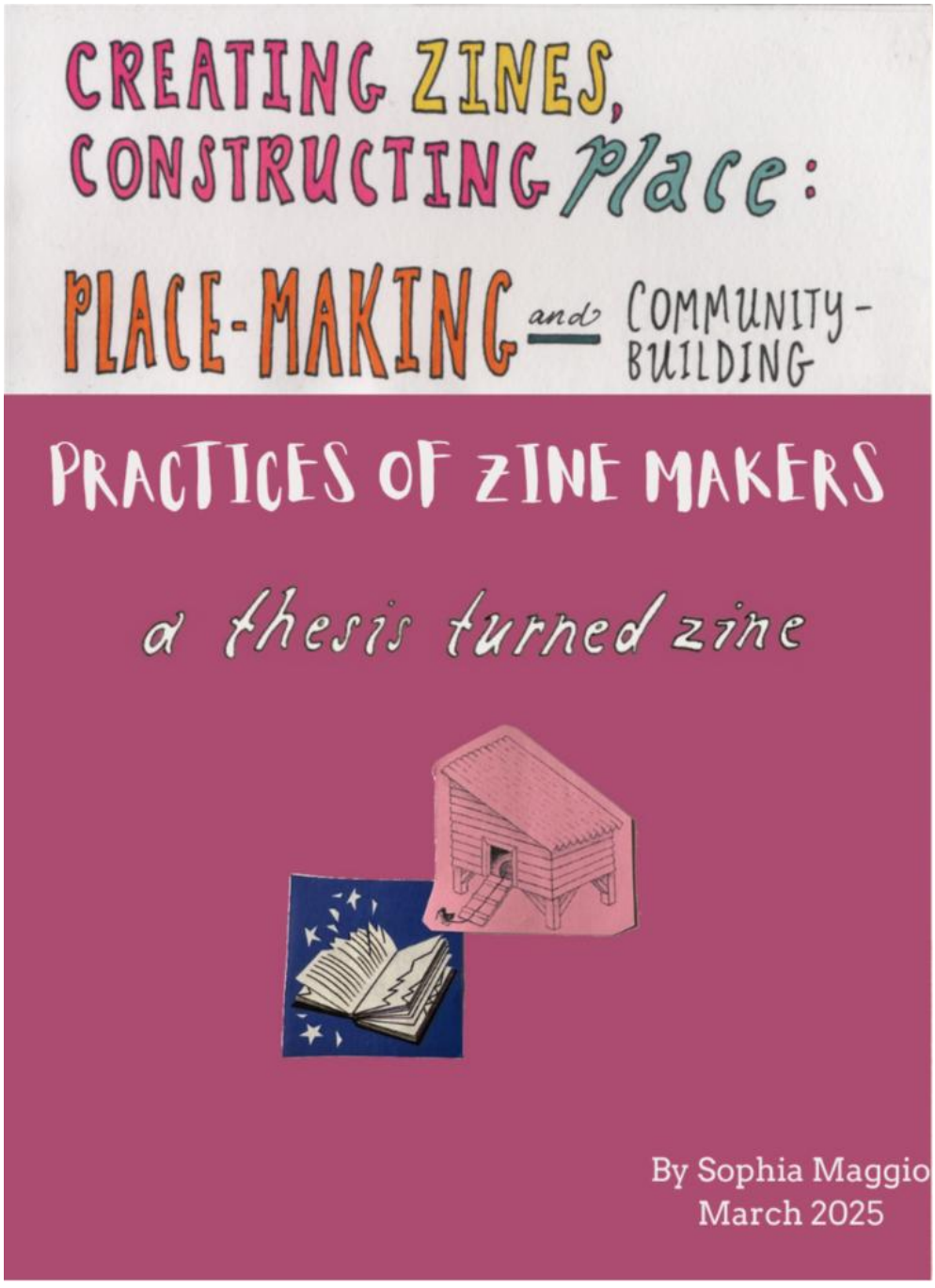

Figure 6. Summative Thesis Zine, front cover.

Figure 6 (cont'd): Page 1.

Figure 6 (cont'd): Page 2.

Figure 6 (cont'd): Pages 3 (top) and 4 (bottom).

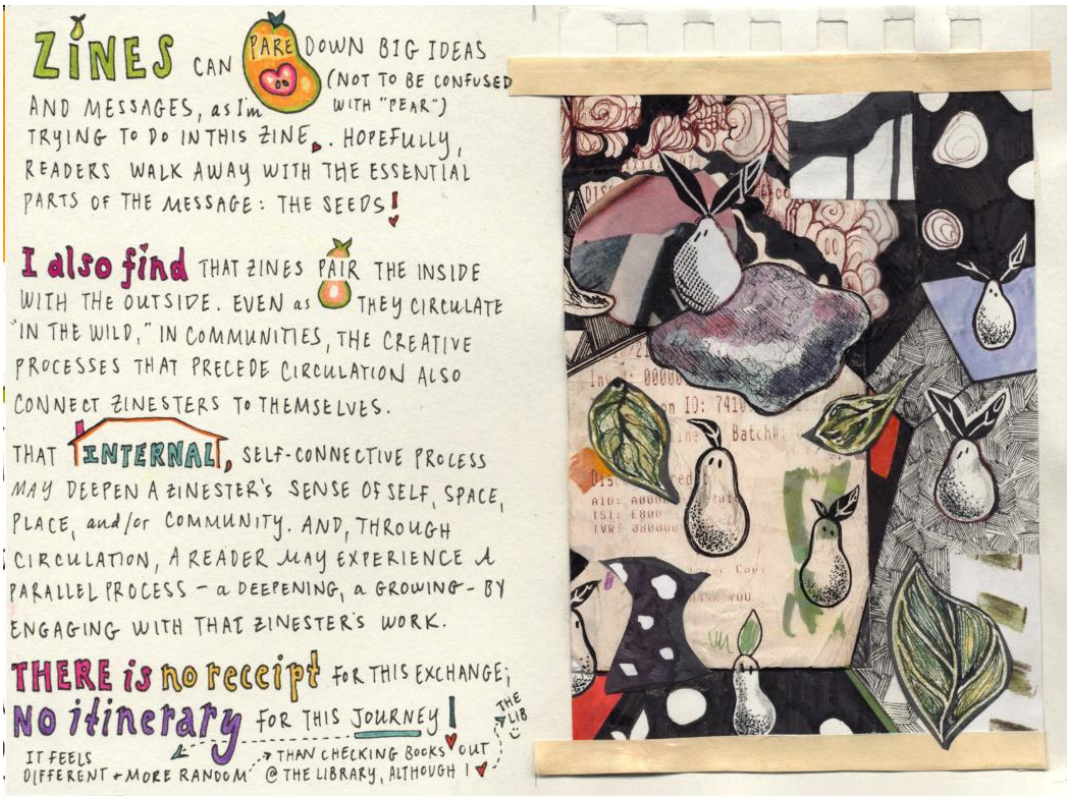

Figure 6 (cont'd): Page 5.

Figure 6 (cont'd): Back cover.