

BEHIND THE ZINES 20

A ZINE ABOUT ZINES
SEPTEMBER 2025



BTZ #20

Sept. 2025

Behind the Zines is a collaborative zine, put out twice a year by Billy McCall. Contributions and suggestions are always welcome. Zine reviews, zinefest stories, tips on how to fold or staple or copy, all that stuff is more than welcome.

Get In Touch!

iknowbilly@gmail.com

The soft deadline for issue #21 is January 1st, so get me those rough drafts. Next issue will not be themed, but issue #22, in fall of 2026, will have the theme of "Zine Libraries." Get those gears turning and get me some articles.

This issue's cover was designed by Pat Gao, whom I met at GridFest in SLC back in March. Along with this awesome cover, the first 200 copies of this zine will also come with one of her stickers. Do yourself a favor and look her up online:

nopatno.com

or

[@nopatnocomics](https://www.instagram.com/nopatnocomics) on IG.

Distro Dedication

There are an infinite number of ways a person can distribute their zines, one of which is with an actual *zine distro*. A zine distro is really nothing more than a single person who is willing to help promote other people's work.

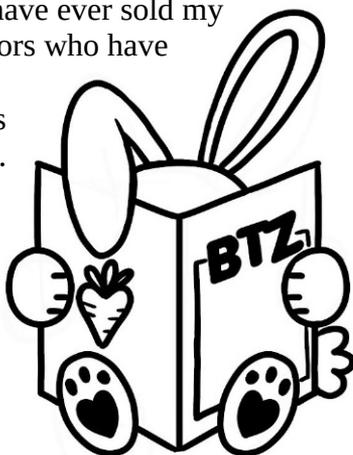
I have run two different distros in my time. The first was Loop Distro, based in Chicago from 2002-2009. The second, which I run now, is Behind the Zines Distro, which I've been doing since about 2020. My main motivation is simply to help promote zines that I like. When I read a zine that I think is good, I want to make sure other people read it as well.

Every distro-owner operates in their own way. I do what is easiest for me. It's a lot of work, but some things get easier with time and practice. I've made plenty of mistakes, but I do my best and I try to learn as I go.

I've also spent plenty of time on the other end of the spectrum, submitting my zine to distros and hoping for the best. Excited when a distro places an order with me, disappointed when they aren't interested in what I do. It's all part of the game, and over time we'll all have good and bad experiences with distros.

I'm so thankful to all the distros who have ever sold my zines, and also thankful to all the authors who have allowed me to sell *their* zines. This issue's theme is "Zine Distros," and is dedicated to distros and distro-owners. Listed on the back cover are twelve fantastic distros; you could order from a different one each month for an entire year, isn't that a nice idea?

Take care out there, and keep up the good work!
-billy-



BEHIND-THE-ZINES.COM

More than Zine-Acquaintances

by Ed Kemp (Of The Word Distribution)

In the days leading up to Princeton Zine Fest, the juxtaposition of what I like and what I don't like about running a distro could not be any clearer. I have always known the various pros and cons, but this time they played out so perfectly that I could not ignore them.

On one hand, I was preparing to table at a fest, which is preparing for something I *love* to do. Yes, some fests require an early alarm on a Saturday, or many hours behind the wheel. Sometimes a zinefest can be an absolute bust, but by and large they are almost always very rewarding. Tabling at zine fests are, to me, one of the best things about being a zinester and easily the best thing about running a distro.

For starters, tabling as a distro helps the finances of it all. Yes, my zines sell fine and I do make the most profit on them, but what really helps me even come close to covering costs is carrying zines from well-known, industry heavy-hitters like Joshua James Amberson, Liz Mason, Joe Carlough and editor in chief of this here publication, Mr. Billy McCall. These are the names that move the needle, are recognizable, and keep people coming back since they, and others, always have something new out.

The second thing is, I personally know about 90% of the zinesters that I carry. This 90% consists of people that I talk to, text with, or see on a (semi) regular basis, which makes me feel like we may actually be legit friends and not just zine-acquaintances. This makes me feel good about putting their work on my table for an event that they cannot make it to and exposing them to a broader reading base. I'm there in proxy for these people and they are at the fest in spirit. It's very easy for me to talk up someone else's zine and make a sale that way. It's all in good faith too, as I would not carry a zine or zinester I do not believe in. This results is what the industry likes to call a win-win-win scenario - The customer gets a great new zine, I made a couple of bucks for my friend, and I came that much closer to covering my costs.

That brings me to the third leg of this – I cram a lot of zines on my table and, because I am a distro, can offer a wide variety to the attendees at a fest. The zines I write are only on topics that interest me, but adding in the things I distro, it's only a minor stretch to say that if you enjoy reading zines, I probably have something that would pique your interest. This is a great feeling, especially when someone seems super hyped on a zine that they get from my table, whether I made it or not. I've had people come back to me at a fest, telling me that they already read the zine outside on a bench and loved it, or, maybe even better, when they remember me from the previous fest and tell me which zine they got from my table last time, and how much they loved it. This information can usually be given back directly to the creator of the zine because of reason number two. I love to be able to deliver news like that.

There are more branches to this tree, but I think you get my point. I get to help out myself, my friends, and the reader, all while having a good

time, being social and talking about a hobby that is near and dear to my heart. What is not to love about all of this?



(Ed Kemp, Princeton Zine Fest, 2024)

Now, on the other hand, in those days leading up to the Princeton Zine Fest, I also listed five zines on my website, three of which I have had for a really long time already. Like an *embarrassingly* long time. This part, the whole getting stuff done and business side of running a

distro, is by far the worst part about running a distro. Taking photos, writing descriptions and listing items all definitely rank up there as the things that are the least fun for me, but there are other aspects too. I dislike taking inventory, keeping track of the very few consignments I have is annoying, and packing envelopes when I'd rather be working on my own stuff is aggravating. The only silver lining to packing up an envelope is knowing that the person on the other end is getting a killer zine in the mail. That, at the very least, is something enjoyable to think about.

And I know what you're thinking - Just stop with the e-commerce then. Yes, I have had that thought as well. Unfortunately, it's a bit of a double-edged sword though. See, sending zines off to rural parts of the country, where the closest place that would even carry a zine may be miles and miles away, is exciting and makes me feel good about my place in the zine-food-chain. I'm taking zines from individual creators, grouping them together up in one place, and getting them into the hands of eager readers. The concept of it all hypes me up to no end, but it's the physical time and effort it takes to pack up the envelopes is the drag of it all.



An online store is the best way to move product when I am not tabling.

The other thing is, zine fests are few and far in between. I feel fortunate enough to live here in the North East and am blessed to be able to attend anywhere from 4 -6 fests a year, but even that is just minimal opportunities to sell zines. I need more bites at the apple because if I haven't sold all of Issue #6 of your favorite zine, I'm less likely to bring in Issue #7, and then my selection and table becomes old and stale; new stuff doesn't get ordered and this doesn't benefit anyone. So, an online store is the best way to move product when I am not tabling. E-commerce is an evil, but in this case, probably the lesser of two.

So yeah, the business part sucks but the rest is really rad. The good more than outweighs the bad, which is why I'm still doing this 10+ years into the game and don't see an end in sight. *DIY Till You Die!*

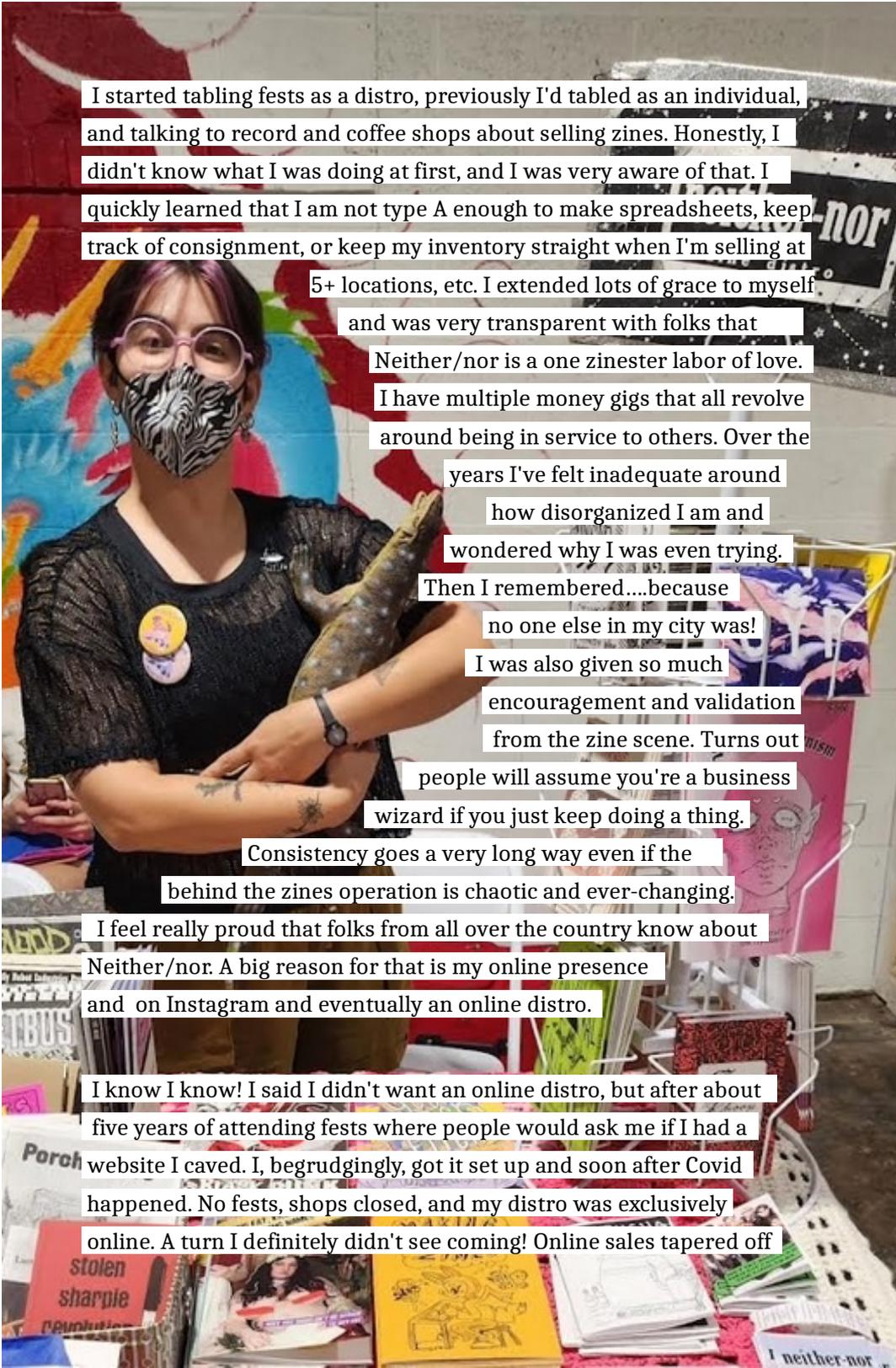
How to be a Business Wizard by Jaydream

I've run Neither/nor Zine Distro for almost 10 years. I started it back in 2015, about two months after the success of the first Kansas City Zine Con. It was really inspiring to see all the locals who make zines come out to table, volunteer, and attend. It showed me that there's clearly an audience for zines. People were eager to read them, make them, and buy them year round, not just one day a year. So, I began to think about how I could make that happen, or how that could come to be, in general.

I thought back to where I got my first zine. It was a gift from my older sister; her friend had made it. It was a cute comic perzine that featured people and places I knew. After that, I went out, seeking more zines on my own. Punk shows were always a good place for new material, whether it was bands selling fanzines or anarchists giving away free zines. Eventually I discovered the world of online distros as well. Some had free pdfs that you could print and others were actual online stores. Online distros gave me a way to get my hands and eyes on more zines. They helped expose me to a world outside of KC and beyond the genre of DIY punk zines.

So, based on my experiences, a need that had presented itself, and basic PMA*, I decided to start a distro. Since technology isn't my strength (and/or maybe it was a fear of not being able to manage something that big or time consuming or businessy) I figured I'd start small and learn as I went, DIY baby! Like I said, there were tons of people in KC interested in zines, so why not give my city the opportunity to stumble upon them IRL?

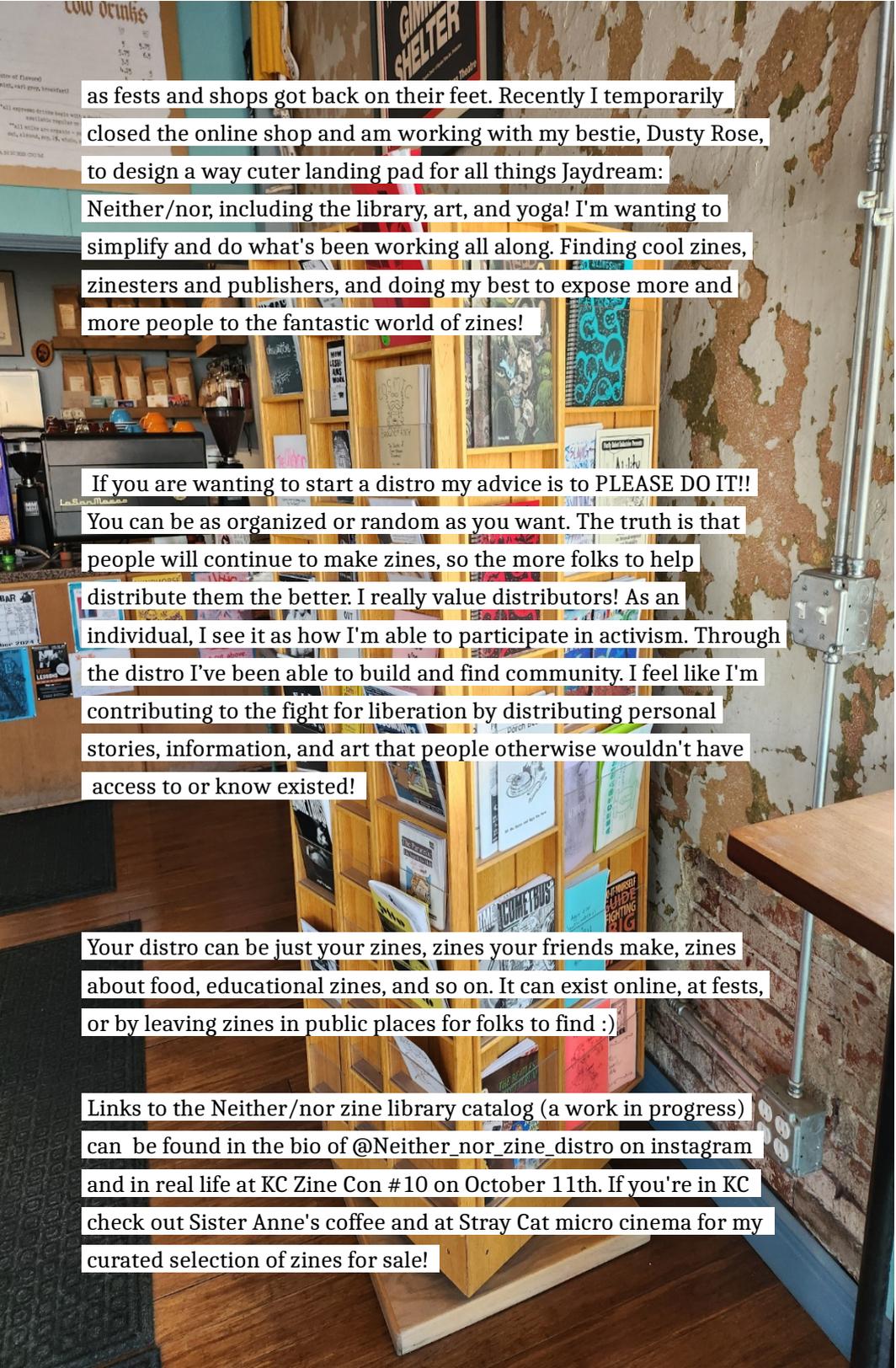
(*Positive Mental Attitude!)



I started tabling fests as a distro, previously I'd tabled as an individual, and talking to record and coffee shops about selling zines. Honestly, I didn't know what I was doing at first, and I was very aware of that. I quickly learned that I am not type A enough to make spreadsheets, keep track of consignment, or keep my inventory straight when I'm selling at 5+ locations, etc. I extended lots of grace to myself and was very transparent with folks that Neither/nor is a one zinester labor of love. I have multiple money gigs that all revolve around being in service to others. Over the years I've felt inadequate around how disorganized I am and wondered why I was even trying. Then I remembered...because no one else in my city was! I was also given so much encouragement and validation from the zine scene. Turns out people will assume you're a business wizard if you just keep doing a thing. Consistency goes a very long way even if the

behind the zines operation is chaotic and ever-changing. I feel really proud that folks from all over the country know about Neither/nor. A big reason for that is my online presence and on Instagram and eventually an online distro.

I know I know! I said I didn't want an online distro, but after about five years of attending fests where people would ask me if I had a website I caved. I, begrudgingly, got it set up and soon after Covid happened. No fests, shops closed, and my distro was exclusively online. A turn I definitely didn't see coming! Online sales tapered off

A wooden zine rack filled with various zines is the central focus of the image. The rack is situated in a cafe or shop, with a counter and coffee-making equipment visible in the background. The walls are decorated with posters and have a rustic, peeling paint aesthetic. The text is overlaid on the image in white boxes with black text.

as fests and shops got back on their feet. Recently I temporarily closed the online shop and am working with my bestie, Dusty Rose, to design a way cuter landing pad for all things Jaydream:

Neither/nor, including the library, art, and yoga! I'm wanting to simplify and do what's been working all along. Finding cool zines, zinesters and publishers, and doing my best to expose more and more people to the fantastic world of zines!

If you are wanting to start a distro my advice is to PLEASE DO IT!! You can be as organized or random as you want. The truth is that people will continue to make zines, so the more folks to help distribute them the better. I really value distributors! As an individual, I see it as how I'm able to participate in activism. Through the distro I've been able to build and find community. I feel like I'm contributing to the fight for liberation by distributing personal stories, information, and art that people otherwise wouldn't have access to or know existed!

Your distro can be just your zines, zines your friends make, zines about food, educational zines, and so on. It can exist online, at fests, or by leaving zines in public places for folks to find :)

Links to the Neither/nor zine library catalog (a work in progress) can be found in the bio of @Neither_nor_zine_distro on instagram and in real life at KC Zine Con #10 on October 11th. If you're in KC check out Sister Anne's coffee and at Stray Cat micro cinema for my curated selection of zines for sale!

Towards a Model for Local-facing Microdistros

I started Tangent Distro in early 2024 to fill one crucial need. My city, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, had few places to get zines in hand. Our local infoshop, The Big Idea, was the only place I knew where one could expect to find a continually updated selection of zines. I love The Big Idea, but theirs is a particular niche. If you're looking to start a squat, join CrimeThinc., or learn about the organizing history of tenant farmers, they've got you covered. That leaves out an absolute wealth of oddball topics from across the decentralized zine spectrum. Where are the soap and pencil and cigarette reviews? Zines about dying malls and shit jobs and the weirdness of growing up in the Midwest? Where to find perzines east of Perzine Alley?

In my quest, I was inspired by an article in BTZ #8, a self-interview with Jaydream of Neither-Nor Distro in Kansas City. In 2015, Jaydream found themselves in a similar situation, loving the friendship and energy of KC Zine Con (which they helped organize) but wishing there was more year-round access to zines in KC, particularly "zines about colonization/ decolonization and zines made by poc, black, and indigenous folx." They started out stocking zines one day a week at a flea market, and when they built up the courage to expand, they approached some record stores about a zine collab. The stores were enthusiastic, and Neither-Nor was born.

So I plunged right in, building up my initial tranche of zines through wholesale purchases from Antiquated Future, Microcosm, and BTZ Distro (I was maybe a little unclear to Billy as to why I needed 43 zines, but I think he's cool with it now), as well as directly approaching a few makers I admired. Then I bought a 12-slot rotating greeting card rack, perfect for carrying half-letter-sized publications.

I made my elevator pitch to Josh at my neighborhood clothing exchange, called Clothes Minded. I sidled up to Josh's counter and slid an armful of zines across it. "So do you like zines?" I didn't believe zines would be the key to success for his business, and neither did he. But he heard my idea, took me at my word, and offered a home for Tangent Distro on top of one of the display cases, rent free.

From the beginning, I imagined Tangent as a local-facing, in-person-only microdistro with no online sales presence. I loved

the idea of creating a distribution point for physical copies of insanely cool small press items that could not be found elsewhere in the city. Just as much, I couldn't be arsed to visit the P.O. every time an order comes in. I take my time collecting inventory piecemeal and then stop by to refresh the distro about once a month. Zines have always been priced at \$5 each or discounted to \$4.50 for purchases of two or more at a time. That cuts the "profit margin" close to the bone, but the goal is to exist and get zines in hands, not make money.

This is distroism at its most lithe and nimble. You don't have to worry about selling enough zines to pay rent. The whole "distro," not counting backstock, could be picked up and moved around even without the aid of a car, to moonlight at a punk rock flea market or to be ported to an alternative home, if needed. Overhead is fairly low, limited to the cost of zines and whatever deal you can work out with your host venue. I paid for a display rack, but someone with basic skills could easily construct their own. The biggest downside is that I'm limited to offering about 12-14 titles at any given time. Ideally, I'd double that with another identical display, but there isn't room at Tangent's location – and my host is being generous as it is!



In these hard times, I find zines to be an oasis from screens and the relentless fervor of online echo chambers and piping hot takes. The effort involved in these things – brainstorming, writing, laying out, collaging, copying, assembling, and distributing – a labor of love – shines through in a personal way that's tactile to the pages. My hope is that those who are called will come to find Tangent Distro unexpectedly – *I stopped in to offload my winter flannel, and there were these zines there* – just as I've come upon zines in incongruous locations many times in the past.

The local microdistro model is eminently replicable. Go forth, be fruitful, and multiply the distros!

August Personage – @tangent_distro_pgh

Mid-'90s to Mid-'00s Zine Distribution Largely Sucked

by Todd Taylor

In 1996, I started working for *Flipside*, which had been a punk zine in continuous publication since the summer of 1977. When I began, *Flipside* had recently ended a long relationship with **Mordam**, the distributor (and label) that made their mark with Faith No More, distributed *Maximum Rocknroll* and Alternative Tentacles Records, and made a ton of money off of the Lookout! catalog. The simple version of distribution during this time is that instead of sending zines to hundreds, if not thousands, of stores across the country, you sent the bulk of your zines to a distributor. The distributor used their connections to stores and regional distros and bundled your zine in with other orders. Distros were the conduit. They took their cut, then paid you. Stores one-shopped at a strong distro for a bunch of titles in one order. All boats rise in the tide. That was the pitch.

I eventually became the general manager at *Flipside*. I inherited a post-**Mordam** web of distributors while we looked for the exclusive one that would take the bulk of the print run. During that search, we cobbled together a patchwork of regional and corporate ones. One was absolutely fantastic. **Tower Records** regularly ordered hundreds of zines and sixty days later, a check came along with the cut-off mastheads of returned issues. A couple distros—**Revolver** comes to mind—were always fair and, although sales weren't great, they were communicative and did always eventually pay after settling returns. The rest, however, were corporate-speaking bullies and crooks. **Desert Moon**, for example, refused us payment until another issue was sent, even if they were thousands of dollars in arrears. They eventually declared bankruptcy and took down a whole generation of zines with them. At the end, *Flipside* signed to a magazine distributor that'd made the lion's share of their money with *Lowrider* magazine. To say it didn't go well is an understatement. I can't even remember their name.

After *Flipside* imploded and I helped start *Razorcake* in late 2000, we had to restart distribution from scratch. Keep in mind,



this is prior to the hold of social media and internet shopping. Big box and chain stores like Barnes & Noble were decimating mom and pop stores. Unexpectedly, it was with the national magazine distributors where I learned how organized crime operates and money laundering works. We signed non-exclusive contracts with businesses like **Ingram**. Here are some terms I learned in short order.

“Shrinkage” is stolen merchandise. We got charged for all “theft” of *Razorcake* (without proof beyond a line on a receipt, mind you). “Re-ship charge”: even though we paid to send the zines to the distributor, they charged us further shipping to individual stores, often re-shipping the same issue multiple times. They also often over-shipped to stores intentionally to increase these costs. All shipments of zines to **Ingram** had to happen within a very restrictive time window. If the shipment showed up early or late, we were penalized. Their invoicing statements were intentionally misleading. At first glance, after thirty days of receiving the zines, the distro almost always declared a high sell-through rate. “Great,” you’re thinking, “we’ll get paid that amount.” Nope. They held payment against all returns—for years at a time. They’d have the temerity to “return” a zine that was shipped three, four years prior and credit themselves against paying us. “Return” is in quotes, because they never provided proof. It was brutal.

they'd have the temerity to "return" a zine that was shipped three, four years prior and credit themselves against paying us.

So, why did we do it like that? We couldn’t find another option. We were cautiously optimistic when we were in negotiations with the distributor **Big Top**. They’d made a lot of money distributing the “Chicken Soup for the Soul” franchise. They seemed “progressive” enough. They were already carrying *Punk Planet*. Due to our previous, and ongoing, troubles with distributors,

we scoured the contract and gave ourselves a clause to quit them within a year without penalty if they didn’t live up to their promises. They agreed. It was during this time that **Ingram** was turning the screws on us. According to their math, after sending them tens of thousands of zines over several years, *Razorcake* owed *them* over \$3,000 for the privilege of using them as a distro. They justified it with all of their charge-backs and promotions (like putting us on endcaps) that we stridently asked never to be a part of, and for them to remove those charges when they appeared on invoices over and over. (In the end, a sympathetic employee just told us to not answer **Ingram**’s inquiries. After five years, they’d drop the threats and counted the “loss” on their taxes. Capitalism’s awesome. As of this writing, **Ingram** has not sued us for the “debt” they claim we owed.)

Back to **Big Top**. They promoted themselves as an alternative, but they quickly proved to be like all the other large distros we’d dealt with. They chastised us for not having “a consistent cover” or “covering bands no one’s heard of.” We told them, “We’re a fanzine. We celebrate the artists who design the cover, as well as who’s on the cover. Popularity’s not the point. Good music and good people are.”

“Do you know of any bands fronted by young women?” was the question our rep asked that still rings in my ears.

Sean Carswell and I had a ritual in the early days. After picking up the issue at the printers, we'd have a celebratory Slurpee on the way home. We both scanned the magazine rack as we stood in line to pay. It was disconcerting to see how many magazine covers featured very young women, many in bikinis, with fingers in their mouths, staring back at us. Amongst those magazines were *Lowrider*... and *Punk Planet*. And right there and then, I thought, “This is doomed to fail.” Why? There's no way in hell that a random 7-Eleven in the suburban San Gabriel Valley could move ten to fifteen *Punk Planets*, and if that 7-Eleven had that many, and **Big Top** was doing an L.A.-wide push, *Punk Planet* would be looking at massive returns. It was obvious to me that it was unsustainable.



As the months racked up, a familiar pattern emerged. We knew **Big Top** was using all the tactics to make it look like *Razorcake* was going gangbusters, attempting to stroke our egos, until it came time to pay. Partial payments were replaced by promises, then hostilities, then **Big Top's** declaration of bankruptcy. The first day we could end our contract with them, we did. I saw it months in advance because I pay close attention to actual payments, balances, returns, and our costs. It's so unfun, but I track that shit because the zine is my livelihood, and I truly love it. In the wake of **Big Top's** deflation, *Punk Planet* ceased publication. They couldn't absorb the financial blow we'd actively protected ourselves against.

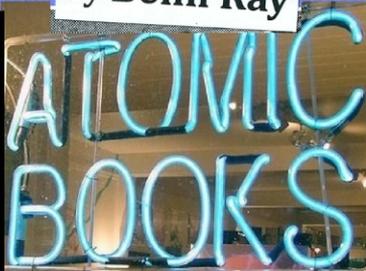
Razorcake is currently in the privileged position to be able to service all of our distribution directly. In addition to subscriptions, our most popular option is a box of 25 zines that we currently send to 134 locations in the U.S. We send off 6,000 zines (almost all prepaid) every two months, directly from HQ without a middleperson. Right now we're the strongest we've ever been, but traditional magazine distribution was a really tough education that almost put us out of business several times.

layout and illustration by Ed Tillman

DISTRIBUTION AIN'T SEXY

*(BUT IT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT
ELEMENT TO A THRIVING SCENE)*

by **Benn Ray**



Talking distribution will frequently result in eyes glazing over. While I'm fascinated by the subject, every time I've tried to have intense conversations about the nuances of distribution and the impact they've had, all I've done is bored the shit out of people.

Rarely do you hear creatives get together to have a focused conversation around the topic of distribution.

But who needs it, right? Not only do zinesters control the means of production, they control the means of distribution. And as we all know, technology will set us free.

So who needs distributors?

Who needs consignments?

Who needs stores?

Thanks to platforms like Etsy, you can now cut out the middlepeople (in this case, typically members of your own community who love you and want to be a part of what you are doing) and support a large corporate entity (who really only seeks to exploit you for their own profit) and sell your zines directly to consumers.

No 50/50 wholesale.

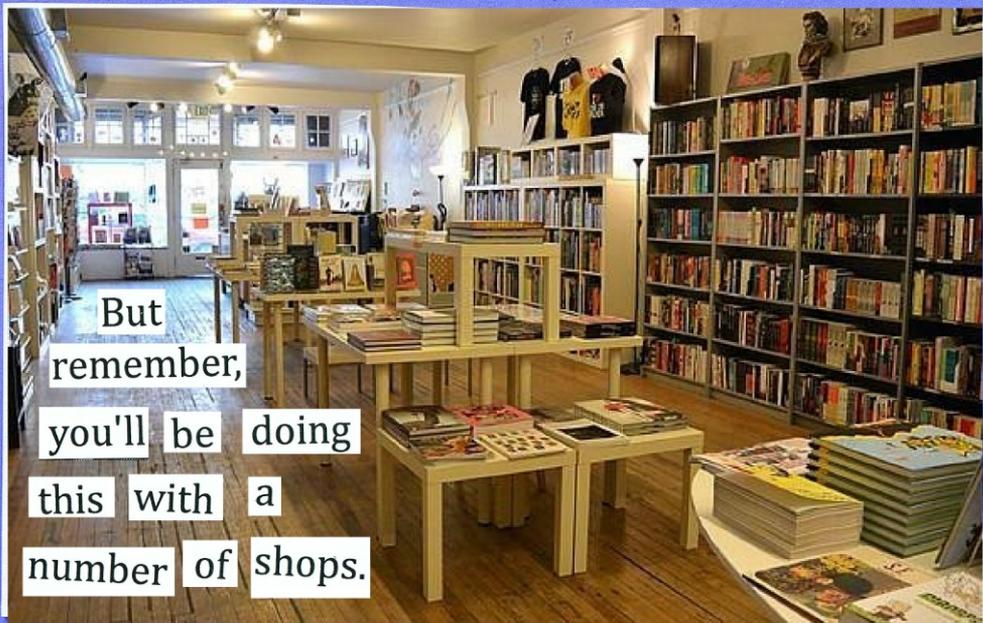
No 60/40 consignment.

Just pure, 100% of the cover price. Well, after their transaction fee, their payment processing fee, their listing fee, not to mention if you pay for Etsy Plus, etc. And that's if Etsy even allows you to list your zine in the first place (please see the recent controversy over Etsy delisting Trader Joes Exposed zines due to pressure from the grocery chain). So that's anywhere from 90%-75% of your MSRP, depending on who you ask. Are those few extra percentage points really worth it?

And while distribution, as a topic, is not particularly interesting to most people, it is the single-most important element for an artist or writer, work of art, movement, scene or community. You may have the best zine in the world. You may have a zine that's going to change the world. A zine that will cure the rise of fascism. But if you don't have distribution, it could sit forever unseen in a box in the basement, never realizing its world-saving potential.

If you rely simply on your own online store for zine sales, the only people buying your zine are those who know specifically to look for it - which, a great review in a reviewzine notwithstanding, are most likely just your friends, your family, and maybe a handful of acquaintances who follow your socials. You're not going to expand your audience. You're less likely to get your zine in the hands of a complete stranger who your work may touch. Without distribution - you limit your community - and really, aren't zines about community? Well, my favorites are.

To get your zines into a shop like Atomic Books you can contact us directly about consignment. We'll review the zine (through pics, look at your description, specs, pricing, etc.) and if it's something we think we can sell in our shop, we'll send you a consignment form and ask for anywhere from 5-25 copies. Then you gotta fill out a consignment form, and send it in with the zines. Then you have to keep track of your consignment. This system works well for zinesters who regularly turn out zines. You get into a rhythm or cycle. New zine coming... contact the stores and inquire how many they want and check on sales of the old zines and collect. Then send out copies of the new zine.



But
remember,
you'll be doing
this with a
number of shops.

Or, you could contact a zine distro and they could help you get your zines into stores instead. And I mean a REAL zine distro, not one of those fake online "zine distros" that are just shops selling direct to readers but calling themselves a distro. That's not a distro, it's a store. A real zine distro's primary purpose should be getting your zines into shops that sell zines.

Sure, as the zinester, you may lose a few percentage points off the cover price when you use a distro. And as a store, the retailer may lose a bit of profit. But the zine distros are doing some significant work here. They're keeping track of your sales and paying you. If you're a store, it means you don't have to keep track of dozens (or in our case, hundreds) of vendors and their consignments.

Plus, most of the people who run zine distros aren't doing it for the big bucks, they're doing it for the love of the zine. Just like most stores who carry zines aren't doing it for the money. We're all doing it for the love of a zine. No one's getting rich off of zines. Well, except maybe Billy. That guy's built an empire. [*Editor's note: Even with my vast empire, I have not yet gotten rich.*]

And for zine distros, stores like ours are more likely to order from you if:

1. Your discounts and shipping rates are reasonable.
2. It's easy to order from your zine distro (the easiest is being able to log into to an account, place an order and get our wholesale discount automatically or having a wholesale discount code we can use).
3. You regularly update us via a newsletter or direct contact about the titles you have. (Don't rely on the vagaries of social media algorithms to show us anything.)

A productive zine community, with a number of active zine distros supplying stores who carry zines makes for a thriving zine scene.

The more strangers who are able to pick up your zine in stores and be inspired, the more zines there will be. The more zines there are, the happier we all are.

Just as long as we don't make the mistake of the early 2000s when a number of zinners came to rely on only one distro, who then went bankrupt and caused the Zinemageddon. I'm talking about the demise of Desert Moon. But that's a subject for another article.



KARI AND THE DISTRONAUTS

by Kari Tervo

Overall, I love the idea of distros: organized curation of zines of all kinds, or of a specific genre. From all kinds of zine-makers! You find a zine you like, you pay the distro, they pay the zinester, bing bang boom, everyone gets something good, there's only love here.

But, in my experience as a zine-maker, that's not really what happens.

What really happens is you and a distro agree to a consignment cut on your zine, and they have all kinds of very specific and idiosyncratic rules about how and when you can get your cut of sales money.

If you don't meet all of the criteria, YOU FAIL and they owe you NOTHING. Didn't you read the agreement? Of course a jerk like you didn't realize you needed to send the distro runner's third cousin garlic toast on Lady Gaga's birthday.

And if you DID meet all of the criteria? WELL. LISTEN HERE YOU LITTLE SHIT. I will make you wait six months to get a check for three dollars and forty-two cents. And if that's the wrong amount, or you complain about the delay? I WILL BLAME THE PANDEMIC. EVEN THOUGH IT'S 2025. JUST WATCH ME.

: dramatic pause, distro owner stares menacingly into camera :

AND I WILL RETURN YOUR UNSOLD MERCHANDISE COVERED IN STAINS OF MOUNTAIN DEW AND CHEETOS!

(true story--if you give me enough temporary cat tattoos, I will name names)

Also, there are distros that sold my zine and I didn't find out about it until I was performing a google search of my own name. I withheld my rage so as not to reveal my shameful act. I really don't care though--get your one dollar profit every 12 months off of a zinester's desire to review my tomfoolery based on your implied or stated recommendation. Your blurb was chef's kiss, and I made out with it in the mirror.

Yeah, like, it's kind of flattering and exciting when a distro carries your zine. You're like. . . *in a catalog*. It's a messy process, but it's fun! Dist-roll-with-it.

I LOVE LUCY. SHE'S SO RAL



rock candy
(1.50 / 1.95)



riot =
not quiet

MARIE - 11 days

The brand new pisces catalog is here!

The new pisces catalog... (unreadable text)

Please a notice for homophones... (unreadable text)

Send this ad along with \$1 to get your copy today to: pisces, 200
500 dorchy dr #106, Beverly hills ca 90211 USA

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____



THE SUPER-8
UNDERGROUND

RIOT
GIRL



alien girl

awesome t-shirts,
patches, posters,
stickers & even
stationary! all

everybody
loves a cutiepie...



postare oursel
alien gir

PRO-GIRL
PRO-QUEER
BOY-FRIENDLY
FAIRY FLOWER DISTRO

wanted;
female punk/
riot grml
bands
for compilation
tape
SLAPPY DUCK

YOU'RE RIGHT, YOU WOULD
MAKE A GOOD QUEEN!



SOAL-SISTER,
CHILDHOOD FRIEND,
REBAL GIRL,
QUEAN.

ALL HAIL LUCILLE VAN PELT

Eat
me



Distro shit

Jolie Ego ♡

3 SB/MC CD'S

Ego records - this is a catalog for Jolie's tape label where there are so many compilations with new bands that are making their way to yr stereo. you can get her spoken word tapes until June + after that you get on through Bratgirl distro, ladybug ... get this catalog! Ego Records

ego records

UNION CITY, IN 47390



SEND A STAMP FOR A CATALOG



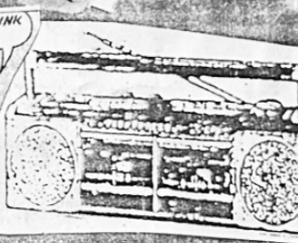
5 sleepee 7" RIOT 'GIRL PRESS'



this game isn't fun anymore... CS-eat paste tape



the Legendary Never Ending distribution service for zines & films by women



Sarcastic Ditch

septophilia mailorder



girl friendly + vinyl only + 2 stamps = 1 catalog



RADIO TRANSMISSIONS



Ten Milestones in the Life of Antiquated Future

by Joshua James Amberson

Seventeen years ago, I started the Antiquated Future distro. It's quite possible you've never heard of us, since we've never really advertised much, we've always had an inconsistent-at-best social media presence, and we haven't made a ton of branded merch aside from occasional stickers. But we have a quietly dedicated fanbase and basically every day someone new finds us (somehow). Over the years, we've carried over 2,000 individual zine titles, a few dozen of which we published ourselves, and also released 60 different albums (mostly on cassette) through our label. We carry around 300-400 zines at any given time and around 700-800 total



items across our different sections (Zines, Music, Books, Paper Goods, Stickers, and Odds & Ends). Somehow this all mostly fits into the office of our apartment in Portland, Oregon.

I almost never talk or write about Antiquated Future unless asked, since defining it is a bit convoluted and I still feel a little sheepish—even all these years

later—that something I started just to be helpful turned into a business. Despite this sheepishness, though, my deep-down feeling is this: in our capitalist system, at least *some* of the organizations that support zines and DIY art/artists need to be businesses, if only in the interest of sustainability. Short-term labor-of-love projects are great, but it's not ultimately what people—artists and lovers of DIY art—need most. We need organizations we can depend on, ones that will stick around. And sticking around, unfortunately, takes money.

That said, we're really only a business by zine-world standards. We've never had an official employee (anyone who's been paid for their work is considered an independent contractor), we've never even had a long-term volunteer or intern, and we don't pay ourselves in a formalized way (we get paid when all the artists and bills have been paid or just when rent is due).

So far, we've yet to have a major falling out (at least one I know about) with anyone whose work we've carried, and we haven't been sued or run into any legal trouble. It hasn't been the smoothest of rides, though, and I have a feeling that most people would have called it quits years ago. But I'm stubborn and it often

feels like the most broadly useful thing I've done in my life, so I insist on us continuing.

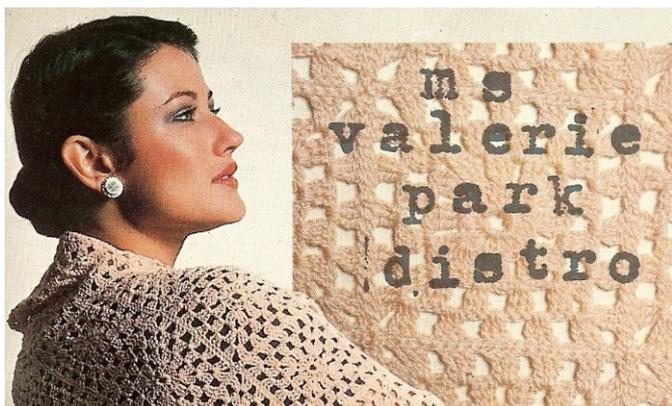
While it turned from a pure labor-of-love to a poorly constructed business fairly early on, we've never tried to make it our sole source of income. But even so, to do a distro on this scale has come with some sacrifices. Traveling is hard, taxes are complicated, and spending 20+ hours a week on the distro means I haven't reasonably been able to take a full-time job in all these years, so I'm always piecing together my income with an assortment of part-time jobs and I will likely never be able to retire. But I get to do something I really love.

I think we occupy a somewhat unique position in the zine distro world for a number of reasons:

- * **We're a bigger distro, but we don't have a formalized publishing/book press component.**
- * **We're also a tape and record label.**
- * **We're also a reseller of vintage cassettes (online) and general used odds and ends (through a brick-and-mortar artist co-op shop we help run).**

How did we get here? By request of *Behind the Zines*' editor Billy McCall, here are ten milestones to shine some light on that (for you and me both).

One (2008): The Beginning I got back from my first tour with a band. Since the band only had one CD, I'd asked my friends for stuff they'd made—zines, handmade stationery, silkscreened shirts and patches—essentially as a way to have an informal, two week-long traveling distro. When I got back, I asked everyone if they wanted their stuff back and most said no; they'd take the money from what sold, but they really didn't have a place to sell these things. So this small box of stuff sat on the floor of my room until one day I woke up and decided it needed to have an online home. I used my limited HTML skills to turn a free Blogger page into a store. I called it the Ms Valerie Park Distro in tribute to a local artist I loved, and emailed everyone about it. I told them I could take their stuff down if they didn't like it, but if things sold I'd pay them. Everyone seemed to like it and soon people were bringing me more.



Two (2010): Teaming Up After almost two years of running the distro with only the occasional help of friends and roommates, my new roommate, Chask'e, expressed interest in helping out more regularly. This turned into several beautiful years of us running it together, splitting the labor roughly evenly. To this day, I can call up Chask'e to work on a distro project.

Three (2011): Getting Official Up until this point, we'd been



using the same weirdly hacked Blogger page to run our growing distro. When I saw that my friend from the music scene, Evan Hashi, had started doing freelance website design,

I asked him if he could build us something. It's with his help that we're able to have all the various filtering functions that we have. It's hand-built, so sometimes it has quirks, but to this day he's always there to fix them. He's totally behind-the-scenes, but he's why we're able to do what we do.

Four (2011): Shit's Fucked We had our first zine go viral in 2011. This wasn't something we tried to do—it wasn't even something we thought a zine *could* do. But somehow, overnight, Reddit (a site I'd never even heard of at the time) went nuts for my pal Gina Sarti's zine *Shit's Fucked: A Positivity Guide*. We woke up one morning to hundreds of orders; when that first week was all said and done, we'd sold well over a thousand. In smaller waves, via various blogs and sites and message boards, this kept happening for years to come, then happened with a few other zines several years later. This is basically what turned our little distro into a makeshift business and cemented Gina's place as a collaborator and part of the family.

Five (2011): A Label Too After the initial dust settled on the *Shit's Fucked* craze, we each had a small (but big-to-us) pile of cash. I considered taking a little time off from my job and going on a trip. Instead, I decided to start a break-even cassette label. Olympia has always been an incredible place for independent music and I'd been playing in bands, taking little tours and meeting people, hosting shows in our basement, and I knew there were so many people who needed a home for their music. This is also where the Antiquated Future name originated, as a name for the label and a

way to describe the music I was most drawn to at the time. This was also the time period when Rachel Lee-Carman started doing art for us, which she still does on occasion to this day.

Six (2013): New City, New Name Though I'd been writing and publishing in various forms since I was a teen, I'd never taken it seriously in any traditional sense—never taken classes, never tried to submit to non-DIY publications, etc—and in the wake of a relationship ending, my writing group folding, and turning 30, I made the decision to move to Portland after 11 years in Olympia. Soon after arriving, I also decided Antiquated Future would become the name for both the label *and* the distro. The hardest part of the move to Portland was that Chask'e couldn't have as big of a role, but he kept working as much as he could from afar until he got too busy. I soon started volunteering as an events coordinator at the Independent Publishing Resource Center and as an organizer and workshop coordinator for the Portland Zine Symposium. I met so many people through these gigs, tabled countless times with Antiquated Future for events big and small, and the community around AF grew and changed.

Seven (2016): Old Tapes At a very busy time in my life, I got unusually interested in picking up vintage cassettes. While I'd

always listened to and casually collected cassettes, it suddenly became my way to decompress—when I needed a reset, I'd take the bus to thrift stores and dig through the junky piles. I wanted to listen to way more than I wanted to keep, so I started selling little grab bags on our Etsy. While this wouldn't initially be that significant, when the pandemic hit people started picking them up in quantities we could barely keep up with. Ever since, we've sold tens of thousands of vintage cassettes each year, and that fuels both the distro and the label—I'm honestly not sure if we would have survived the last few years (inflation, countless USPS price hikes, every fee and small-business tax increasing, etc) without vintage tapes.

Eight (2020): Pandemic While everyone else was baking bread, I was teaching writing classes online all day and packing orders deep into the night. It wasn't just the Etsy cassette orders but also zine orders like we'd never seen before, at least outside of the holidays—dozens each day, largely from people who had never ordered from us before. How were they finding us? There was no time to figure it out. We started the Free Zine Care Package project for those in need, which we kept going until last year. Gina started an Instagram for us and ran it for a couple years, as well as an AF

penpal club. My long-time collaborator, Andrew Barton from Two Plum Press, became an official collaborator on the label. Most significantly, this is when my partner Novie started helping out. and today she's the other half of the distro's daily operations.

Nine (2023): Brick-and-Mortar My writer friend Martha Grover (*Somnambulist* zine) started a little shop in Southeast Portland called Grover's Curiosity Shop and was looking to bring people on board as artists in residence, so I connected her and Novie. Novie and I had been reselling vintage and quirky things throughout the pandemic by doing pop-up sales in our friends' yard, and she had periodically price-checked booths in antique malls and vintage shops. She'd also started a business/community organization (now called Selkie School) that led witchy, crafting, and film classes and wanted a reliable public space to host them in-person. The curiosity shop supplied both a shop space and a class/event space. Initially, we didn't put much AF stuff on the shelves. But when one of the other artists stepped away, I came on board too. Now there are five of us in total, running the space together. It's a little off the beaten path, so business is inconsistent, but people are finding us and word of mouth is spreading. You can now find the zines and goods we carry all over the little shop.

Ten (2025): Structural Changes Seventeen years ago, I never thought the distro would grow this much. But somehow it's also harder than ever to stay afloat. While we get orders every day, the quantities fluctuate wildly; I'm really glad we never tried to make this our sole income. Novie and I teach classes, I do freelance book editing, we work the curiosity shop, and we both work random jobs. But we're still scraping by, living in our apartment by the train tracks. We both have significant chronic illnesses, which makes the current possibility of losing our healthcare pretty scary. Our big motto for Antiquated Future in the last couple years is *sustainability*. How can we keep doing this—keep picking up more zines and releasing more albums—without burning the candle at both ends? As a result of this constant question, we've probably made more micro-changes in the last two years than we made in the whole decade prior. How we wholesale to stores, our submission process, our consignment payouts, how the website is organized—each detail has been thought about, discussed, and changed (ever so slightly) multiple times. Hopefully, as a result, we can keep making this work for years and years to come.



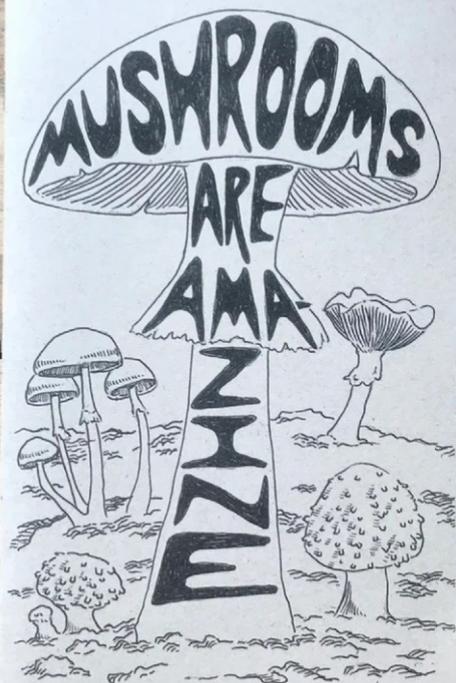
Slinging Zines

By Heather Andhercats

I remember the first time I submitted a zine to a distro. I was so excited, my friends all liked my silly little zine about pizza and I thought that this distro surely would too. It was called *Pizza is Awesome Everything Else Sux*. Sadly, I heard nothing back. Which I did take as a personal failing at the time. Looking back, I think that my zine needed a little more polish, and maybe it was not the right fit for that distro anyway. Nowadays I have learned to take things less personally. It's not personal, it's zine business. If my zine truly wasn't a good fit for their audience, they are doing neither of us any favors by accepting it. [Editor's note – If a distro decides not to carry your zine, the respectful thing to do is at least tell the person that they are not going to carry the zine.]

My first truly successful zine was *Mushrooms Are Ama-Zine*. This zine was a collaboration that I made with my college friend, Krista Feld.

Who knew how much mushrooms were going to pop off? Not us. I have no idea how many copies of that zine I have sold, but I can say with confidence that the number is in the thousands, which is completely wild to me. I knew I had something special with that zine, so I sent it, and a few other tried and true



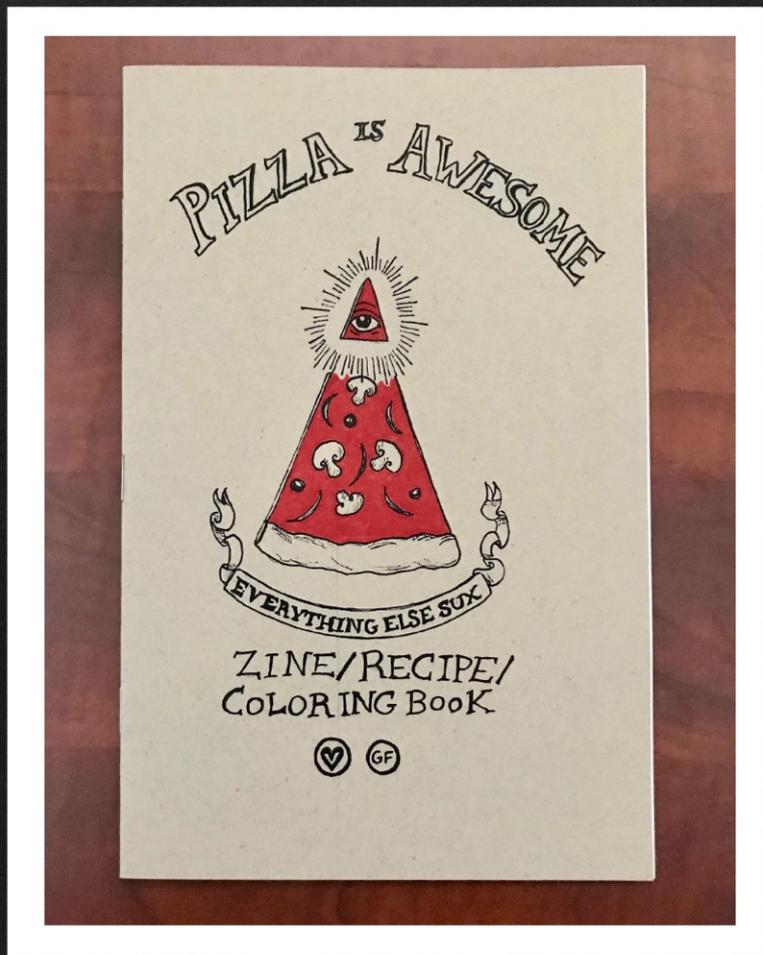
zines, to various zine distros. I never heard back from some of them, but this time a few said yes!

Up until I started selling through distros, it was up to me to approach any indie bookstores with whom I wanted to sell zines, convince them to consign my work, and when they did I had to keep track of what was where. I also had to track when I needed to restock, and try to get paid in a somewhat timely-ish manner for my consignments. I am a person who hates spreadsheets, so keeping track of all that (and inevitably getting burned on payments from time to time) was pretty disheartening. Selling my zines through distros has been a game changer for me. They do all the leg work of getting my zines in the hands of zine enthusiasts and indie bookstores across the country, and they make sure I get paid. In return, I try to restock in a timely manner and be easy to work with.

I still have a few personal relationships with indie bookstores that I hope to maintain for years to come, but only with the ones who are easy to work with. If you are a zinester who wants to expand the reach of your zines without the headache of keeping track of everything on a massive spreadsheet, I highly recommend submitting your work to some distros that you like, and whose holdings match your vibe.

By the way, my *Pizza is Awesome Everything Else Sux* zine did eventually get its time in the sun. I had submitted my pizza zine to a distro circa 2016, but heard nothing back. But a friend of mine loved it and bought a bunch of copies to give away at an event called **Pizza Against the Patriarchy**, (this was a very proud zine-creator moment for me.) Then, in 2018, I moved to Chicago and started to consign zines at local zine-centric bookstores. After seeing other zines out there, I decided to rework my pizza zine. It felt a little too short, so I added a Pizza Cootie Catcher at the end that people could remove from the

zine and use to tell their future. I also edited a tiny bit of text that felt clunky, then printed the cover on some nice cardstock. I even colored the pizza on the cover to really make it pop. I felt like I gave it the finish it deserved, and after that rework it enjoyed more commercial success through my new bookstore friends.



I even got to hear a story about how a couple each bought a copy of my zine to gift to the other for their **Pizza-versary** (they were married in a pizza shop). Stories like these are a big reason why I continue to peddle my zines and endeavor to get them out into the world, so that people who didn't know that they needed them can find and enjoy them.

ZINEFEST? DISTRO? FESTRO?

BY JOHN DISHWASHER

A new trend is emerging in the Southern California zine scene that isn't quite fitting normal categories.

A cat-themed shop and artist community in Long Beach called

The Cool Cat Collective recently decided to have a "Cat Zine Fest." They accepted zine submissions featuring cats from around the world, curated and bought a bunch of them at 50% retail, and then sold them out of their storefront over a weekend. One dollar from each sale went to a partnering cat rescue organization. Is that really a zinefest? Could that be a distro?

Next, event organizers Ra and Evan and NG and James, also in Long Beach, solicited zines from anyone who wanted to offer one for sale. They put all the zines on some tables outside an independent bookstore-community space called Page Against the Machine and named their event "The Biggest Little Zine Fair." Next door was a busy bakery with a line out the door, and what were those people doing while they waited for their brunch scones? Buying zines! This crew sold more than \$850 dollars worth of zines that day! And then remitted all that money back to the zine-makers. Is this a zinefest? It's calling itself one. Or is it a kind of distro?

The first manifestation of this trend that I know of here in Southern California was Valeria J. Bower setting up a Photo Zine Swap Meet in February 2024. (She ended up doing four altogether.) Valerie is a gifted street and show photographer and has been in the scene a long time. She gathered zines from more than 20 other photographers she knows. Then she participated in an occasional Sunday arts event that takes place in downtown LA and sold her friends' zines. Hm. This feels kinda like a distro. But could it be a kind of zinefest?



From a long-time zinemaker's perspective, these probably look more like distros than fests since there are not a bunch of different zinesters gathering to table their zines, and because the organizers are doing more or less what distros do. But from the perspective of someone passing by on that sidewalk in Long Beach, I could definitely see why it's appropriate to label it a fest. *Look at all these zines! OMG, this is a total festival!*



Indeed, Ra told me the BLZF crew is consciously using a distro model for their event but call it a “fair” because the word distro “only makes sense within some communities.” Additionally, “We were trying to figure out how to open up the magic of [zinefests] to people who may only make one zine in their entire lives.” Valerie’s event unfolded almost accidentally. She was offered a booth at that downtown fair by a friend

“but when he told me the booth size it felt too big for only me so I invited other photo zine makers ... I wanted to make sure the artists got 100% of their sales because my friend gave me the booth for free.” And Matt from the Cat Zine Fest said, “We’ve had cat zines in our shop since we opened. The idea is a ... pretty natural extension of what we’re already doing. The main difference here with the fest is making it an open call for submissions.”

So are these events something between zinefest and distro? Both, maybe? Does it matter?

Because the best part of this, for me, is the empowerment! Any one of us can do this. We can gather up a bunch of zines from our friends, set up a TV table in front of that indie cafe where we happen happen to know all the baristas, and either put on our own mini “zinefest,” or “distro” zines we care about. It could be theme-based like Cool Cat Collective’s. It could be smorgasboardish like The Biggest Little Zine Fair’s. It could be medium-based like Valerie’s. It could be anything!

Text & photos by John Dishwasher, layout by Ed Tillman

PAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

**2714 EAST 4TH STREET
LONG BEACH, CA 90814**

I 562 588 7075

WWW.PATMBOOKS.COM

EVENT REVIEW:

Printed Matter's L.A. Art Book Fair, The Zine Rooms

Text by Ed Tillman,
Photos by Denise Bratton
& Ed Tillman

HEYy'all. This article is a little off-topic, but I recently attended Printed Matter's LA Art Book Fair and wanted to give a quick report on the state of the *zineaverse* as it was presented there.

I've attended the Art Book Fair for many years. While its thrust has always been high-end art history books and monographs, they've consistently included a zine room component as well. Printed Matter's website describes the event as hosting "works by artists, collectives, small presses, galleries, antiquarian booksellers and more."

Unfortunately, a bout of COVID stopped me from attending this year's LA Zine Fest, hosted by the Broad Museum. I heard it was very well attended. Because I missed that event, I was extra excited to check out the book fair. It was held from May 15–18 at ArtCenter in Pasadena.

I went with my friend Denise, who's a book editor. She had attended every day of the fair but wanted to hit the zine rooms with me. And *rooms*, there were. Rooms and rooms, actually. I can't remember an Art Book Fair with this many zinesters present. In fact, we were there for over five hours and didn't even make it to the end of the zine tables. In the end, the sheer onslaught of publications left us overwhelmed. Here are some takeaways:

ONE: Photozines, Everywhere

There's no shortage of photographers publishing zines of their work. Look—I publish photos in my perzine. I'm not disparaging the practice. I'm just letting you photographers know: there may be a glut of photozines.

Actually, there *is* a glut of photozines. I've been to the mountain, and I have seen the glut. I've suspected it for a while now.

That said, both Denise and I were drawn to photo projects with a cohesive story behind them. I'm as weary of conceptual art as the next person, but I learned from the fair that having a self-contained photo project really helps keep a zine afloat.

If you're thinking about making a photozine, I urge you **not** to publish a retrospective-style collection of your work. Instead, either: document a photo project with a very narrow and definable premise **or** collaborate with another photographer—or a small group of photographers or artists—on a single publication.

Those were the styles of zines that really stood out.

TWO:Risograph is not Dead!

Or even all that rare. When it comes to zines with illustrations and text, Risographs rule. Poor Xerox was nowhere to be found. Again, no judgment here—I've loved Risograph since I first learned about it from the Never Press demo at Giant Robot. I love that the community is keeping this niche printing technique alive.

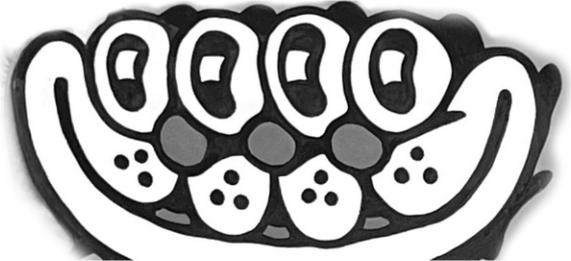
But I *will* bemoan it if it becomes a barrier to entry for zinesters. Risograph is expensive. The day a poetry zine can't be dashed off at the local copy shop with the sweet, sweet smell of warm toner will be a sad day indeed.

THREE:The Price of Zines.

I don't know how much each zinester paid for their table, but the days of \$2 and \$3 zines seem to be gone. I had a back pocket full of zines, but I didn't dare mention a trade after seeing the prices. Art zines come with higher standards, and with those, higher prices, I suppose.

Still, I miss being able to take home a stack of zines for the cost of a burrito.

A Four-Eyed Cat, included in an art installation as part of a zine booth.



FOUR:Art, Merch & Installations

Maybe we can chalk this one up to the venue, but there was more than just zines on zine tables. Posters, t-shirts, mugs, totes—all for sale. There were even art installations that were display-only. One fellow had a floppy hammer made of faux flesh (with hair, no less). Yay?

FIVE: Where Are My People?

There seemed to be a lack of queerfolk in the zine rooms. I'm sure they were there—this may just have been a function of the venue drawing more art-focused rather than lifestyle zinesters. I don't think it's an issue of inclusion or unwelcoming vibes. In the past, LA Art Book Fair has curated excellent exhibits on the history of queer zines. I just didn't see as much queer presence this time, as I have in years past.

Test Strip is a photozine published in a unique horizontal format. It features a different artist every issue.



SIX: Zines Are Popular Again

I think we can safely say zines are having a moment. I've noticed that in election years or times of political uncertainty the number of zines seems to explode. Zines as a medium can always carry the message of the day or, more importantly, the counter message of the day.

The LA Art Book Fair 2025 is in the can. It was well worth the few dollars admission. I made it through four of the six zine rooms. I was too tired and too hungry to press on. Next year, I'll bring snacks and running shoes.

Some links to zinesters/distros we liked:

- **Tyler Rico** – tyler-rico.com
Photographer and graphic designer interested in changing environments and landscapes.
- **New Poetics Publishing** – newpoeticsoflabor.com
A collective publishing house featuring many different artists and photographers. Their work is bold and provocative.
- **Unpress** – unpress.cc
Run by three artists who share a very specific aesthetic vision.
- **Zach Clark / National Monument Press** – nationalmonumentpress.com
Zinester and photographer working with Risograph techniques.

A Few Good Distros

(to get ya started)

The Word
Distribution



East-Coast Ed,
out in Jersey
City. Perzines,
sports, silly
stuff, fun.

www.theworddistribution.com

ROOSTERCOW



Chris Auman,
Chicago. Comics,
zines, books. Also a
publisher, also a
record label.

www.roostercow.com



Run by Jaydream, from
Kansas City, focused on
Kansas City. Personal,
political, DIY, self-help.

www.instagram.com/neither_nor_zine_distro/



Josh and Novie,
Portland. Personal,
historical, pop
culture. Also a
music label.

www.antiquatedfuture.com



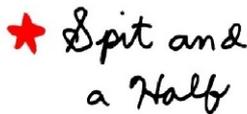
Billy McCall, Albuquerque.
Perzines, pop culture,
educational, and a few
books. Selling cool zines that
his friends made.

www.behind-the-zines.com



Comic distro,
California. Marvel
and DC, but also lots
of hard to find,
small-print, and indie
comics.

www.wowcool.com



John Porcellino, of
King Cat Comics.
Zines and comix from
around the world.

www.spitandahalf.com



Neil Brideau, out
of Florida. Self-
published comics
focused on
storytelling.

www.radiatorcomics.com



Alex Wreck and Paul Burke.
Zines, books, comics, witchy
stuff, tarot. Making and
selling custom pinback
buttons.

portlandbuttonworks.com



Julia Eff, from
Buffalo, NY.
Goth shit,
gender stuff,
DIY, etc.

crapandemic.storenvy.com/



Independent publisher
of socially conscious
comics, books, and
graphic novels, out of
San Francisco.

www.silversprocket.net

WASTED INK
ZINE DISTRO

Distro, retail
store, community
space in Phoenix,
AZ. Organizers
of PHX Zine Fest.

www.wizd-az.com