

# No Margins, No Word Counts, No Masters! Experimenting With 'Zines for Archaeological Outreach

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*Alternative forms of information dissemination have always been a crucial part of many radical forms of activism and organization. Arguably the most famous is the 'zine - popularized in the punk/anarchist subculture of the 1980's and 90's, 'zines were the antithesis of mainstream magazines, journals, and periodicals. They were an extension of the D.I.Y. (do-it-yourself) attitude that flourished within the subculture, reflecting a more informal and individualistic approach to the dissemination of information and ideas without the rigid formalities of mainstream literature. With the emergence of a new countercultural led by millennials, 'zines have once again found popularity, taking advantage of the Internet to spread information even further than before through digital means.*

*Although all 'zines are different due to the individualistic and free nature of the format, most are often educational texts that also incorporate other forms of writing and media to help engage its audience with its content in a more exciting and entertaining way. Unfortunately, it appears that 'zines have yet to find a foothold in academia as they have in social justice and activist groups – this is a shame, as there is a wealth of possibilities for the application of a 'zine format for the dissemination of information to non-specialist audiences.*

*This paper explores the idea of utilizing 'zines as an alternative approach to public outreach in archaeology. This will include documenting and reflecting on the current progress of a 'zine being developed by myself and other archaeologists about anarchist approaches to archaeological theory and practice. I will examine how practical it is to adopt this method for outreach, compare it to the more "traditional" methods of dissemination (journals, conferences, etc.), and reflect on my personal experiences with creating an archaeological 'zine of my own.*

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## I. Introduction

Over the past two decades, archaeology has seen a shift towards “outside-the-box” thinking. From queer theory to archaeogaming, the discipline has begun to embrace non-traditional approaches to the ways in which archaeologists engage with the theory and practice of

archaeology. And yet, can we say the same for our methods in archaeological outreach and communication?

In some ways, we can; with the popularity of platforms such as YouTube and Twitter, archaeologists are now able to utilise multimedia, in particular visual media, to increase their outreach and experiment with new forms of engagement. However, I would argue that there are some methods that have been mostly ignored by the archaeological community as a whole, despite the huge potential these methods have as tools for public archaeology. With a growing interest in alternative approaches to the discipline (Morgan 2015), perhaps it is time that archaeologists learn how to become 'zine makers.

## II. 'Zines as Alternative Publications

'Zines can be traced back to as early as the 1930's in the form of "fanzines"; these booklets were produced by science fiction fans and circulated across clubs as a means of distributing critiques of recent literature and publishing new works. The 'zine format as we understand it today, however, was popularised during the 1980's with the development of "do-it-yourself" (DIY) and punk subcultures that emphasised pushing against the mainstream, corporate media through creating your own material (Duncombe 2008: 11-12). To the general public, 'zines are arguably most associated (at least, aesthetically) with the "Riot Grrrl" movement of the 1990's, which combined the punk scene with the burgeoning third wave of feminism (Piepmeier 2009: 2).

Today, 'zines live on defiantly against a society whose media intake can now be found almost entirely online. Many 'zines are distributed and published digitally through websites, such as *sproutdistro.com* and *zinedistro.com*. Online shopping platforms, such as Etsy, have also become hot spots for small, independent 'zine makers to peddle their wares. And, perhaps in spite of our overall reliance on the Internet, there are still in-person 'zine fairs and swaps organised around the world.

But what exactly *is* a 'zine? Given the free nature of expression that is central to the concept of a 'zine, it can be hard to pinpoint a definition that can broadly encompass all media that identifies as such; over the last decade, this has become even *more* difficult, as the Internet allows for 'zines to overcome the restrictions of cut-and-pasted paper publications and become full-fledged multimedia pieces. Perhaps the best definition of the 'zine comes from the forefather of 'zine studies himself, Stephen Duncombe (2008: 18): "'zines are decidedly amateur". While this may sound dismissive, Duncombe quickly clarifies that this is not the case at all; to say that 'zines are "amateur" is to say that they are made with love, from love, and by love. 'Zine makers are not making a profit, nor are they professionals working within

a professional context – instead, they are working against the cult of professionalism and formality through the emphasis on their individuality and amateurism.

### **III. 'Zines as Academic Resources**

Since their first iteration, 'zines have been produced and distributed with the intent of education the masses – whether it's about the best science fiction stories of 1935 or the main tenets of anarcho-communism, 'zines are hyper-focused pieces of media that allows for free and further exploration of certain subjects. With this in mind, it should come as no surprise that 'zines have been experimented with in an academic context.

The application of 'zines within the classroom goes beyond just reading material, however. The process of writing and creating a 'zine has been observed to be a useful activity in students applying and expressed learned knowledge (Wan 1999: 18-19). As a final project, 'zine making can also be used as a creative outlet through which students can synthesize an entire course worth of information and express their own conclusions (Desyllas and Sinclair 2014: 300). For subjects that are entwined with political activism and social justice, 'zines can be a meeting ground between the educational and the personal; additionally, the informal format of 'zines can also create a space where students feel as though they can harness and express their own, individual voice (Creasap 2014: 155), in contrast to the more formal, standardised publications in academia (i.e. journals, edited volumes, etc.). Perhaps most importantly, 'zines can be weaponised against an increasingly neoliberal, commodified academy and help in returning focus to a relationship based on knowledge exchange between student and teacher (Bagelman and Bagelman 2016).

### **IV. Case Studies: 'Zines in Archaeology**

Although 'zines are becoming more popular within academic circles, there have been very few written specifically on archaeology.

Artist Peter Driver (2013) has produced a series of 'zines as part of his work as artist-in-residence for the Basing House excavations. These booklets, which were ultimately distributed as souvenirs for the archaeological team, captured Driver's thoughts and observations as a non-archaeologist watching the process unfold over a span of three weeks; the resulting artwork included drawings of the excavators at work, diagrams of the stratigraphy reflected in the trenches, and even some speculative illustrations of what the Basing House may have looked like prior to its destruction.

Over the past two years, archaeological 'zines have been used as a means of introducing more radical, alternative archaeology into the zeitgeist. For example, in 2017, Meghan

Walley (2017) edited together a 'zine called "inDIGnant", which was distributed at that year's Society for American Archaeology conference. Walley's initiative was inspired by a collective frustration she and other students felt at the lack of radical, social justice-oriented literature in archaeology. The resulting 'zine is a collection of essays, poetry, and visual media that tackle topics such as queer archaeology, Indigenous rights, and ableism, with the hopes that publication in this format will lead to further exposure and discussion of these important subjects in the larger archaeology community (Crocker 2017). Possibly the most recently published archaeology 'zine comes from the relatively new sub-discipline of archaeogaming. Florence Smith Nicholls and Sara Stewart (2018) have published a 'zine that is both an introduction text into the basics of archaeogaming theory as well as space of exploration for both the author and illustrator, allowing them the freedom to elaborate and illustrate concepts of archaeogaming that interests them.

As of the writing of this paper, a new 'zine project dedicated to exploring the relationship between anarchism and archaeology is in progress. Originally inspired by research for a paper on anarchist approaches to archaeological practice and theory (Fitzpatrick 2018), this project is now a collaborative effort between archaeologists and non-archaeologists alike. As this has been my first foray into alternative publication, the process has been very experimental; in an effort to maintain the spirit of anarchism as our central praxis, the organisation of the 'zine has been as horizontal and non-hierarchical as possible, with contributors having an equal say in how the 'zine will be edited, published, and distributed. The goal of this 'zine is to be an embodiment of challenging the assumed norms of mainstream archaeology through anarchist praxis; as such, we wanted to use a format that would allow the sort of freedom and unrestrained expression necessary to push against these norms. Ideally, this will be the first of many archaeological 'zines that promote and amplify voices of those who have become marginalised within the discipline.

## **V. Conclusion**

'Zines are clearly ripe for utilisation in the academic sector, but more specifically, within archaeology. Although there are some examples of archaeological 'zines in distribution, I would argue that the format is still underestimated not only as an alternative form of communication and education, but also as a way to involve others in engaging with archaeology. 'Zines can become highly collaborative projects, especially within public and community archaeology, and allows for both archaeologists and non-archaeologists alike to flex their various skills and expertise. As more academics become less enchanted with normative methods of publication and communication, perhaps we are due for an

“alternative turn”, where ‘zines and DIY culture help usher in a new period of accessible and creative exchanges of knowledge.

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