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**PUSHING AT THE SEAMS:  
FRENCH ZINES & BRICOLAGE  
AS A LIBERATORY ACT**

by

**SHAYNA MARIE DAVIDSON**

**B.A., FRENCH,  
UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO, 2019**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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## **DEDICATION**

For Adelynn.

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**M.A., French, University of New Mexico, 2022**

**ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the contemporary literary value posed by independently produced French fanzines. French fanzines represent a convergence of textual and graphic narratives, echoing *la bande dessinée* in many senses. I argue that the liberty of form and expression utilized by the fanzine creator permits a more nuanced iteration of life-writing. The circulation of texts amongst informal economies based in social networks suggests that creators are able to explore narratives of self-hood that do not conform to neoliberal market-oriented categories of identity. Furthermore, the influx of digitally stored and distributed French fanzines confounds their traditional categorization as ephemeral text-objects; as a result, their utilization as informal archives suggest an anachronistic interrelatedness across generations of fanzine creators. In situating how fanzines creators have engaged the form itself in a continual process of movement and metamorphosis, I identify the need for an equally flexible academic approach to a form that remains (and will continue to remain) ever-elusive.

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## Introduction

De ce chaos sortiront quelque jour des mots qui tireront à bout portant sur nos ennemis.

— Raoul Vaneigem, *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*

Silhouetted against the backdrop of a growing worldwide liberation movement, students of the *École des Beaux-Arts* and the *École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs* joined in solidarity with a larger Paris moving towards the brink of near revolution in May of 1968. This anonymous group of students, dubbed the *Atelier Populaire*, occupied their campuses and began producing hundreds of posters and fliers that both documented and fueled the protests then sweeping through the city (Deaton 29). The posters, visually striking



Figure 1. From Atelier Populaire, *La beauté est dans la rue*, 1968, Paris (France).

in their bold yet minimalistic approach to iconography and typography, were ripe with messages of worker and immigrant solidarity, anti-consumerist resistance, and political critique that sliced sharply through the heart of the social and economic conditions from which the events of May '68 sprung. In a 1969 self-published book displaying a selection of the *Atelier's* flyers, it was asserted that the act of displaying their work “in bourgeois places of culture or to consider them as objects of aesthetic interest is to impair both their

function and their effect” (4). While often nodding graphically to the visual style of comic books, contemporary art, and advertisements, the *Atelier Populaire* strongly emphasized their artwork’s use-value as tools of resistance and in shining a spotlight on discourses and modes of existence previously considered too radical or unattainable.

It could readily be said that the longer-lasting influence of the *Atelier Populaire* has devolved into an aesthetic nostalgia of mass-produced and replicated media – precisely what they denounced in their 1969 text. These posters are nonetheless useful in looking at the overreaching role of ephemeral texts and visual narratives during revolutionary moments in history, serving as a “clear example of revolutionary interruption—interruption not just as a strike, but as the short circuit of everyday life, as the interruption of a continual cycle of production and consumption” (Deaton 32). Indeed, these modes of *ephemerality* and *interruption* are particularly captivating. These terms, as well as the work of revolutionary groups like the *Atelier Populaire*, Dadaists, and the *L’Internationale situationniste* have often been associated (Hinde “Arts & Revolution”; Frank 55; Spencer 125 ) with the influx of another form of ephemeral visual narrative – fanzines.

Fanzines present another creative intervention in the purposeful interruption of power relations between producer and consumer, yet their contemporary prominence in French counter-culture scenes has seen little scholarly attention. Parisian zinester Alexandre Simon, attributed with creating one of the more oft-read fanzines throughout the early 2000’s, refers to French fanzine culture as the “héritière bâtarde de la contreculture américaine et du vide existentiel de la banlieue Parisienne” (Simon 149). Most often associated with punk and riot grrrl culture in America, fanzines could easily be imagined as one pinpoint in the ongoing dialogue of cultural transfer between France and the United States. At the same time, as

Simon points out, there is a marked specificity to be accounted for within French fanzine culture that remains largely unexplored. This thesis seeks to situate French fanzines as sites of complex, innovative sociopolitical engagement, especially in destabilizing conceptions of formal authorship, binaries of identity and gender, and other State bound regulatory social and political structures of power and control. Their particularly unique patterns of production and distribution are resolutely varied in form, which I argue enables fanzines to pass, at once underhandedly and in accessible fashion, throughout informal social networks.

In the interest of developing a working definition: fanzines (or also known simply as *zines*, from here on out) are small-print, independent booklets wherein writers/artists independently create, self-publish, and trade or distribute their works within a small community (among small social groups, at zine festivals, or often via the postal system). By nature of the fleeting and fast-moving zine economy, zines are generally highly elusive, their origins and trajectories rooted in the ambiguous. The conception of authorship then too is disrupted or otherwise blurred, as many zine creators choose to publish under a penname, or just as commonly, without a name attached to their texts at all. Zines are also known for the vastness of their scope; zines can be found spanning genres from poetry to polar, covering topics from how to organize a protest successfully to how to grow a garden. A critical point of departure from standardly published books is that there is virtually no limitation to subject matter, and virtually no limitation to who is capable of participating in literary production. The term *bricolage*, defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss, is often attributed to the DIY (Do-It-Yourself) attitude, describing its focus on enabling individuals to draw from materials in their immediate environment. A zinester thus closely resembles a *bricoleur*: “qui doit se retourner

vers un ensemble déjà constitué, formé d'outils et de matériaux; en faire, ou en refaire, l'inventaire; enfin et surtout, engager avec lui une sorte de dialogue” (Lévi-Strauss 28).

Particularly useful here is Sheila Liming’s articulation of zines as “a final cry for the era of alternative print communication, and print in general, amidst the dawning of an age that wants to stifle such voices” (129). Caught inevitably in the complex network of relationships of production and power, artists/writers face the dilemma of publishing amidst a competitive market, as well as resisting participation in a *régime du savoir* (Foucault, “The Subject & Power” 780) which privileges knowledge and information. It is this very *régime du savoir*, through which control is garnered and power is expressed, that zines tend to target and pull into question, thus shining a light on those very modes of operation and the artists’ role in participating within or against those modes. While Foucault describes the “disarray and relentless energy” (“Lives of Infamous Men” 159) generated within internment records and other snapshots of “stifled” lives from the early eighteenth century, one of the common qualifications of zines is that they favor “[being] as brief as possible” (159). While zines certainly afford more variance in length<sup>1</sup>, it is nonetheless rarer to encounter a longer-print zine (and if they do, they usually exist in the more standard form of a magazine). Indeed, a similar emphasis on the prevalence of “flash existence... [of] poem-lives” (159) and the presence of “an energy all the greater for being small and difficult to discern” (161) across the zine world as a mode of expression will be a concerted point of interest in this thesis.

Speaking once again of the material characteristics of a zine (often small in size, hand-written, stapled, folded together by the hands of the person who created it), I identify

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<sup>1</sup> The most common introductory method for zine making uses a single sheet of paper, folded to create eight pages.

this handmade quality as, above all, anchoring these texts in “the greatest possible number of relations within reality”, ensuring “that they be operative within it” (160). The physical object itself of the zine is, of course, a major indicator as to its bounding to the real, tangible, and everyday circumstances in which it was created. To this effect, a “different type of relations is established between power, discourse, and the quotidian” (166), wherein artists/writers who utilize the zine format at once acknowledge and put pressure on the networks of power within which they themselves occupy a key role. In choosing to utilize an alternative form of print communication such as zines, a spot of tension is then outlined and rendered more salient, constitutive of zine artists’ awareness of both the restrictions and openings surrounding their access to cultural production and expression.

We can readily draw on Foucault’s identification of authorship itself as ultimately a method of the legal system to exert power over authors and their writings (“What is an author?” 210). Whereas the construction of a rational entity surrounding the author-function of a particular piece of writing is used to denote authenticity and reliability, it too draws a clean line of both limitation (who is *able* to publish) and of potential culpability in the case of transgressive discourses. While anonymity is often but not always the case for the zine producer, the nonetheless inherent ambiguity and disruption of a rigid adherence to the author-function appears to be a cornerstone of the genre, and points to the potential of the zine in unfettering the creator from the constraints of a capital driven literary market. In the struggle against privileges of information and knowledge which often operate via “secrecy, deformation, and mystifying representations imposed on people” (Foucault, “The Subject & Power” 781) the zine artists’ choice to not only refute the abstraction of limitations on creative production, but also to operate themselves under a pretense of anonymity and of

secrecy, targeting the very technique of this expression of power. In doing so, zinesters reflect the ability to create a self-sufficient literary economy existing in parallel to the culture-capital machine.

While many (but not all) zine artists select to publish anonymously, a second so-called ‘safe-guarding’ measure of the zine is ensured by the form’s inherent fleetingness and disposability. Zines in general are often scrapped together from one piece of paper folded in just the right way, are often crisp leaflets stapled or sewn shut, sometimes pencil written, sometimes still barely cigarette smelling. They are printed in small batches (generally under 50 prints per run), meaning that often only a few readers will encounter any given zine. To this point, I turn briefly and gratefully towards José Esteban Muñoz’s discussion of the invisible evidence of queer performance and acts that “stand as evidence of queer lives, powers, and possibilities” (6). Here, Muñoz maintains that it is often only through brief instances of performance existing obscurely within society or on the margins of visibility that queer artists are able to exist safely and articulate freely specific structures of feeling. To elaborate on that point, we may additionally cite, as Muñoz does, Raymond Williams’s consideration of the specific networks of aesthetic systems serving as ephemeral articulations representative of shared sets of emotions and lived experiences. In other words, Williams asserts that art is adept at encapsulating, affecting, and rendering material “which may lie beyond or be uncovered or imperfectly covered by, the elsewhere recognizable systematic elements” (133). However, the post-digital age and prevalence of online zine archives have prompted the need for scholars to fundamentally reconsider this categorization of zines into the realm of ephemerality. Nonetheless, there is a distinctive quality of transience to be

accounted for within zine culture, both in their material form (digitized or not) and in their affective content. Both will be explored throughout.

My thesis proposes to study the role of zines within third-wave feminist movements and queer discourses in France, drawing attention to a meaningful artistic movement, notably spearheaded by feminist and queer artists within the counterculture literary scene. Artist lolagouine (aka Riot Coco) and author of the popular queer and feminist comix zine *Il pleut des gouines* states that zines serve as a “a conscious choice: drawing is simple, cheap, sensible, and easy to read. I consider that, as an artist, I have to be part of the building of alternatives. That's why my works are material realizations of DIY values: skill sharing, self-representation, and alternative spaces and moments” (67). I argue that zines embody the power of individual narratives in challenging contemporary neo-liberal politics wherein lived identities and personal subjectivities become materialized by and for a capital-driven cultural market. The elusiveness, ambiguity in form, and handmade informality permit a constant and efficient slippage between the margins and the mainstream of culture, meaning that zines at once represent and evade association with the communities from which they stem. At the very same time, artists/writers who choose to publish via zines tap into the form’s capacity as “language rituals to the anonymous mass of people so that they might speak of themselves” (Foucault, “Lives of Infamous Men” 172), thus reflecting a collective reimagination of means for pulling discourses into the public sphere and imbuing them with covert power and visibility.

To further elaborate the fleeting nature of the zine, it is necessary to consider the anchoring aesthetic of informality. Browsing through any selection of zines, it is easy to identify (and rather challenging to articulate) the shared visual characteristics that are entirely

free, vastly varied, and distinctly handmade in form. To cite zine maker Bruce LaBruce's acknowledgement, zines "aren't supposed to be catalogued and historicized and analyzed to death, for Christ sake. They're supposed to be disposable. That's the whole point. Throw your fanzines away right now. Go ahead. Xeroxed material doesn't last forever anyway, you know. It fades" (193). To this important point, the informality that so drives the aesthetics of the zine moves beyond the visual, gesturing towards the intentional embracement of limitations and the impermanency of the intertangling of the artist with their art.

Within the academy, zines constitute a now rich and diverse field of study, emerging over the course of the last three decades; notably, very few works have inquired into the cultural value of zines from a *French* perspective. Early American zine scholarship beginning in the 90's focused largely on the general task of encompassing the scope of zines' influence within radical subcultures and larger literary studies, as well as simply attempting to define a genre that so strives to defy definition. Stephen Duncombe's *Notes from Underground* serves as an important first touchstone in the field of scholarly work which focuses on zines and their surrounding culture. Duncombe provides us with a foundational definition of zines as "noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves" (10). The text claims to mirror "the structure of zines themselves", favoring a fragmented, informal stylistic approach of literary analysis that comes "together inevitably to reveal a world, provide an analysis, and make a point" (20). Emphasizing the ambiguous non-market and small-print, temporary lifespan of zine booklets as a cornerstone of academic interest, we can additionally look to zine librarian Jenna Freedman's blog post "Zines Are Not Blogs: A Not Unbiased Analysis". Freedman holistically explores the benefits of zine publishing, citing the freedom permitted



by a platform wherein “the publisher doesn’t answer to anyone” and faces virtually zero economic barriers to publication.

Much of zine scholarship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has sought to illuminate the zine as an important site of (feminist) cultural production. Alison Piepmeier’s *Girl Zines* serves as a first academic text that specifically focuses on zines made by women and girls. Piepmeier illuminates how the informal, handmade aesthetic can “in part, explain the reluctance of literary and art scholars to analyze them: zines revel in informality and threaten conventional boundaries” (228). With frequent callbacks to riot grrrl subculture, punk, and youth counterculture/literary scenes, Anna Poletti’s *Intimate Ephemera: Reading Young Lives in Australian Zine Culture* critically rethinks resistance by proposing that the private sphere has transitioned into an active site of political engagement and cultural production for Australian youth, which is epitomized by zine culture. Poletti frequently denotes the potentiality within zine scholarship yet remarks that the invisible nature of zines and their consequent (private) narrative communities present a particular challenging interplay between intimacy and exploitation for the zine scholar. She points to the sensitivity needed of such dialectic, calling for a literary approach that embraces the ephemerality of the form itself and a reading that does not “metonymically fix the author’s identity” (229). To achieve this, Poletti treats these texts for what they are: valuable pieces of literature containing unique narratives that necessitate a deep textual engagement. In this light, Poletti’s work within the field of Australian youth zines revolutionized how scholars might approach such media and serves as a fundamental touchstone for this thesis.

Using an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, this thesis focuses largely on zines produced by communities of queer and/or feminist artists. Textual/visual excerpts from

various zines are sourced from public online zine archives/libraries or directly from artists themselves via social media platforms or the postal system. My textual analyses rely on Marxist literary and anti-capitalist cultural critique, as well as a grateful reliance upon gender studies, queer theories and feminist media approaches that are centered in reader-response theory and post-structuralism. I will also notably rely upon Foucault's consideration of networks of power relations and subjectification as they relate to the zine creator. I argue that zines are used in a way that reflects an awareness of the material and economic conditions that limit participation in the transfer of knowledge and culture. This usage is especially nuanced within the French imaginary of high-brow cultural value which has been informed largely by white, cis-heteronormative, and bourgeois interests. In this way, French zine artists problematize the linking of individualization to capitalist State powers and position themselves as active members in resistance. Particularly considering the general lack of scholarly attention assigned to zines in France, young people's creation and distribution of zines constitutes one way they may select to become agents of cultural production and forge distinctive economies of value.

One major aim of this thesis is to begin a dialogue concerning the methodologies applied to studying *la bande dessinée* and its possible intersections with zines. In particular, I am interested in the usefulness of viewing such visual narratives as a surface of analysis for memory/trauma studies and feminist discourse. I borrow from Hilary Chute's identification of the visual narrative as a "self-contained narrative able to exist on its own, its only constraint being the medium (paper) itself upon which it exists, opening up drastically the avenues of expression, pointing directly towards the reimagining of how one recounts their narrative" (10). In similar veins, zines and graphic novels share like-minded narrative

structures and furthermore are typified by a stabilized relation between text and image. Chute notably calls attention to the handmade craftedness of graphic novels, wherein the ‘hand’ of the artist is oft represented through visual imperfections and ‘quirks’ that signify its originating from an individual creator. Amidst a growing culture-market that mechanically churns out media and destabilizes the power of the individual (especially non-white, non-cis-male creators) in participating meaningfully in cultural production, the reemphasis of ‘the hand’ of the artist is remarkable. Thus, I see a strong potential in utilizing Chute’s analysis of *la bande dessinée* as a lens for viewing zines, drawing attention to the ways in which zine artists represent themselves and reclaim their own capacity to create.

This reasoning is reflected in Chapter 1 “DIY Selves”, where Poletti’s narrative-centered approach is applied to the realm of French zines. In particular, I focus on *graphic* zines which contend with questions of subjectivity and self-hood, exploring how the loose form of zines lends itself well to a more nuanced exploration of the non-linear and non-rigid trajectories of personal identity. Here, I work to develop a framework of graphic zine analysis by synthesizing Poletti’s text-based approach with visual analytical strategies commonly employed when viewing *bande dessinée*. I explore how these artists rework concepts of rhythm, temporality, and space to at once echo and reject the format of a comic strip. Their creations represent powerful innovations in replicating the self in a visual narrative, utilizing the format of the zine in order to draw attention to the uniqueness and fleetingness of their stories. In tracing the historical French affiliation with comics, I underline the unique cultural value that these graphic narratives pose in destabilizing formal construct of identity and of belonging.

Whereas the question of zine textuality is privileged in this first chapter, Chapter 2 targets the collapsed domain of legibility that emerges when zines are viewed as text-objects, carrying upon their forms the physical traces of their creators. This phenomenon is further heightened in light of the common practice of group-assembled zines. I explore the prevalence of group-assembled poetry zines, most often containing strong investments in feminist discourse. Quilting theory serves as a useful scaffolding in pinpointing the zine's relation to *femmage* — a term evoked by Mariam Shapiro and Melissa Meyer to highlight the historical need for women to piece together fragments of their material surroundings in order to engage in cultural participation. In this way, the zine is imagined as encompassing both textual and material nuances; a focalization on experimental poetry practices furthermore nourishes an understanding of the zine form as one which habitually places pressure around the binary constrictions of Western contemporary thought. Here, we encounter the notion that due to the multiplicitous manners in which artists might engage in poetic zine production, i.e., their replication into online spheres, the standard conception of zines as highly ephemeral text-objects becomes muddled.

Developing upon a destabilized post-digital materiality, my concluding section reflects upon the capacity for zines to serve as archives. In particular, it explores how the transmission of affect might be of particular interest to zine makers in the face of a market-driven system that otherwise determines which creative expressions are held in mainstream public esteem. Rather, zines reflect innovative and subtle investments in imagining new methods of engaging in futurity. The looming question of post-digitality reveals itself to additionally be a method for zines creators to remain engaged in an ongoing dialogue of creativity and preservation of the form, one which has undergone numerous transformations.

I therefore argue that a noteworthy aspect of the zine form is its agility in repetitive self-transformation through time and a sustained ability to be continually reconstructed under new forms and guises.

Zine libraries, social media, and digital archives have undoubtedly altered the landscape of zine production and distribution. I am humbly indebted to the artists and writers who have donated to independent media libraries and who have sent me unnumerable zines across the ocean. The DIY attitude and aesthetic is one which roots itself in the collective, and fundamentally recognizes the value that each individual has to contribute to this culture. This viewpoint is embodied in the handwritten opening introduction to *Des paillettes dans un micro* by zine artist Shei. Here, Shei draws attention to the radical creative potential of zines as their chosen format, wherein any individual is “libre de prendre la plume et de s’exprimer”. As both a gesture of recognition for the zine makers who have come before and an open invitation to those makers still to come, the call for engagement constitutes a common point of departure for many zines and signals a major distinction from that of the formal literary canon which remains guided by capital hegemonic interest. Instead, the zine space is one which “belongs to disorder [and] noise” (Foucault 91), rendering itself through the mess, the chaos, the multiplicities and contradictions of subjectivities.

Chapter 1  
DIY-Selves:  
Zines as Graphic Autobiography

In citing the bureaucratic, anonymizing force of Australian audit culture experienced by many young zinesters in the country, Anna Poletti proposes a major function of the perzine (shorthand for personal zines) as “a creative response to the unsatisfying and insufficient modes of self-representation available” (39) to young artists. Dealing notably with the realm of the perzine, Poletti explores how textual representations of self via zines prompts a multifaceted engagement with autobiography that merits further inquiry. Much zine scholarly work leading up to Poletti’s study on perzines in Australia have been dedicated to the task of rendering salient the jagged outlines of the genre, with many investigations ultimately gleaning a decidedly *resistant* quality. This notion remains largely uncontested, and many of the zines discussed in this chapter do indeed lean towards brazenly undoing traditional constraints around form and narrative as testimonial. However, as Poletti points out, privileging the behaviors and attitudes driving the medium denies a critical view of zines as also “acts of inscription, representation and narration as complex as the more recognized modes of writing” (29). The majority of zine scholarship—while nonetheless important in negotiating the political and indeed, resistant nature of the genre—has seldom engaged with the narrative value posed by the works of zinesters. The zines analyzed in this chapter contain profound reflections of self and identity using experimental blends of image and word, and I argue that they serve as noteworthy interventions in the fields of *la bande*

*dessinée*, graphic narrative, and autobiography. Drawing gratefully from Poletti's textual and narrative-focused approach to a genre that has been long understood by critics for its boundaries rather than its contents, this chapter stems out of a curiosity of what happens when zine narratives-of-self are viewed for their combined textual *and* graphic potential.

As a simple starting point, the zine genre's fundamental divergence from standard print form, formal authorship, and mass media distribution problematizes the tension that Michael Chaney identifies between objective and subjective truths. When life stories are furthermore told in pictures, it necessarily brings into question "how it is that we have come to visualize identity in particular ways according to particular sociohistorical contexts" (Chaney 7). Many of the graphic perzines discussed in this chapter contend accordingly with destabilized depictions of selfhood and erratic narrative progressions. They are strikingly intimate and made all the more so due to the discernable quality of being handmade and hand drawn. At the same time, a small-scale and anonymous publishing style points towards an erosion of ownership and authority, reaffirming Stephen Duncombe's claim that zinesters often embody an attitude of: "this isn't *the truth*, it's just what I think" (36). In stepping away from asserting any stakes in *Truth*, zine artists enable themselves to approach depictions of personal identity and experience as they often are—fleeting, unique, unfixed. Like graphic narratives, they are similarly invested in the task of "unsettling fixed subjectivity" (Chute 5), serving as a rich and multilayered structure through which individual experience may be materialized.

While drawing a line of comparison between zines and *la bande dessinée* is necessarily fraught with exceptions and inconsistencies, the graphic perzines discussed in this chapter nonetheless pose the need for a convergence of analytical methods due to their

very cross-discursive nature. Just as the highly stylized representation of self in comics results “in a departure from the seemingly substantial effects of realism that traditional autobiography presumes” (Chaney 7), zinesters engaged in graphic life-writing often rework concepts of rhythm, temporality, and the usage of space to a similar effect. Indeed, much of the visual techniques informing the development of zines throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century was driven by a similar investment in turning away from traditional artistic practices, carving the way for the new. Amy Spencer notes that “the Dadaists developed an accessible design and writing style, which suited their agenda and would in turn suit zine writers from punk onwards” (124). Techniques like *détournement* [a subversive method of creating art which mimics both the source and style of well-recognized *œuvres*] would surface again in the 60’s and 70’s, reinterpreted via the ‘cut and paste’ style of punk zines or notably, subversive magazine comic strips (125).

One important visual impetus to the modern graphic zine can be linked to the Paris-based *L’Internationale situationniste*. The group believed in the potential of self-publishing as a means to bring art into the everyday and are often attributed as “pioneers as many of the features and styles found later in zines” (Spencer 125). Most notably, the Situationist International “was perhaps the first philosophical movement in the history of Western thought to place a value on the production, consumption and overall worth of comics as a medium” (Paylor 1010). The Situationist International’s intersection in time with the mass popularity of comics in France is a primary reason for their interest in the form. However, they additionally found comics to be well-suited to convey situations, or ‘moments of life,’ in which there lies a possibility to deliberately transform everyday existence (Situationist International, 1958, 51). Comics became ripe sources for constructed situations and cultural



détournement, as well as a method to subvert the *spectacle* of the commodity fetishism of human lives. The continual dichotomy of *la bande dessinée* in France, viewed simultaneously as a budding art form by some and a source of childish youth corruption by others (Paylor 1014), fascinated the Situationists and prompted an involved engagement. The Situationists thus provide a link between French comics and the continued utilization of self-published graphic and comic zines among French youth today.

Another noteworthy dichotomy shared among zines and comics alike appears at the interplay of borders between public and private life. Zines have “never been a one-side dialogue, but a means for communication between writer and reader, a means to find allies and transmit ideas” (Spencer 92). Zines thus cross a gap between life-writing as a public act of visual/narrative performativity (via more formal modes of mass publication) while nonetheless still engaging in dialogues concerning personal experiences with a more selectively created collective. Comic artist and online zinester Mirion Malle embodies the potential for community building through independent comic creation, often explicitly addressing the uncomfortable weight of solitude and the search for commonality amidst a social climate increasingly based on online platforms. She writes on her personal blog: “ma solitude n’a pas de goût, elle n’est ni triste, ni amère, ni joyeuse et piquante... je rêve d’embrassades, ou peut-être, simplement, d’une foule qui se colle”. Her autobiographical comics and personal zines frequently depict her dichotomous relations with social media and communication technology, often representing them as devices which inflict painful distance or offering more positive visions of them as cushioning her desire for an engaged community “qui se colle”.

Especially in the internet era and in the interest of sharing personal life-writing, zines inhabit an intermediary zone between the private and public eye. Crucially, zinesters like Montreal based Mirion Malle are empowered to straddle this socially constructed rupture to the extent that they wish while nonetheless engaging in literary production without necessarily adhering to mass standardization. Justine Mascarilla is another artist navigating this rupture via her short graphic zine *Chère Léa*. The zine itself is a tiny, red booklet sewed and tied carefully in a knot at the binding with white thread. Only fifty prints were made of the zine. The narrative reads as a letter-to-self, with its first lines of text repeating the title, “Chère Léa, si tu pouvais recevoir cette lettre, tu aurais 12 ans”. The majority of images involve Léa gazing at her reflection in the mirror, speaking to her younger self. She muses upon her adolescent years, recognizing that she did not become “la femme forte et froide que tu aurais voulu être. J’ai appris d’autres choses. Une certaine forme de douceur, de bienveillance”. The narrative moves slowly along, with only one panel per page. As Léa steps away from her reflection, we are met with a blacked out panel and a sudden shift in narrative voice as she exits the bedroom door: “tu as grandi / j’ai grandi” (Figure 2.1). In this way, the temporal and spatial aspects of the narrative work in cadence with one another; at the same time, the limited legibility of the text (which I will detail further below) works to



Figure 2.1. From Justine Mascarilla, *Chère Léa*, 2019.

inverse the standard role of text as the top signifier of meaning. The combined yet inverted image/text functions in tandem to craft a narrative that confronts the shifting space in the author's experience of writing for the self and writing for a presumed audience. At the very same time, the choice to publish independently via a zine and the inherent sense of anonymity that comes along with it, grants an entirely separate notion of autonomy to the work itself. The narrative contents, in this way, are rendered self-actualized, rather than serving as a container in which the author's identity fixes itself.

To speak further to *Chère Léa*'s form, its title page is the only appearance of typed text, the font here is charmingly typewriter-like. The remainder of the zine's captions are handwritten, scrawled, often difficult to read, and made all the more difficult for the smallness in size of the zine (about 9cm x 6cm). Both the booklet's size and its difficult-to-discern handwriting work to emphasize a sensation of privacy, serving as a self-aware nod towards a breaching of the gap between what is chosen to be shared and what remains undisclosed. Mascarilla assigns an immediate agency at the base level of her work's form, speaking to Hillary Chute's acknowledgement that graphic testimony "accommodates the interaction between the seeable and the sayable without, crucially, trying to overcome the gap" (217). When immediate readability is denied, the viewer is forced to concede to an awareness of identity as one which remains approachable and viewable, yet ultimately never fully penetrable.

Whereas collective life and cultural consumption, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, are increasingly crafted into a monopoly of sameness wherein "differences are hammered home and propagated" (97) into easily consumable bites, zines and more generally, experimental graphic narratives present a diversion from the categorical creation

of readily marketable identities. Instead, they serve as a platform for what Hillary Chute refers to as an *idiom of witness*, or an engagement with testimonial in which visuals are set in motion “with and against the verbal in order to embody individual and collective experience, to put contingent selves and histories into form” (3). In doing so, such narratives are able to approach more holistically the ephemeral nature of identity and of existence. My aim here is to show that zine personal narratives often reach beyond “the fictitious quality which has characterized the individual throughout the bourgeois era and... this murky harmony between universal and particular” (Adorno and Horkheimer 125) and instead move towards the task of materializing discordant and multiplicitous representations of self.

The overt embracing of innate dichotomies and juxtaposed realities is part and parcel of what makes small-print zine *Non* by Paris-based freelance artist Éléonore (aka North) so compelling. *Non* is a short, graphic zine of ten pages that consists primarily of a bricolage of self-portraits. Its structure both calls attention to and rebels against the standard comic strip form, playing instead with experiments in constantly shifting style, sporadic rhythm and inversions of space. *Non* is a contemplative engagement with a non-narrative self, fueled by a distinct lack of adherence to any fixed signifiers of identity; its subject is alternately represented as playful and child-like, self-destructive and contemplative, humorous and self-pitying. They appear as the primary figure in the zine, performing various tasks and holding different poses throughout; yet the subject in both its narrative role and its visual representation is distinctly inconsistent. In some instances, their figure is simplistically drawn in a black-and-white outline. Other times, the outline is incomplete, zig-zagged, given a mermaid tail, or abstracted so as to evoke a Picasso-like portrait.

Indeed, it could be said that *Non* as a whole more closely resembles a collection of portraits rather than a narrative-of-self. However, it is precisely this lack of harmonious cohesion concerning narrative trajectories that renders *Non* a prime example of the artist’s aim to integrate an “esthétique poétique, enfantine et rêveuse” (North) into their work. The simultaneous overlap of styles which are informal and child-like as well as technically polished within graphic narrative “leads to a confusion of the past and present” (Baetens 86) positing a temporal dimension that is both linear and regressive. The amassment of portraits reveals itself, additionally, to being self-aware of this very process. At one point, the text self-reflexively calls attention to the visual choices made by the artist—“je sais pas pourquoi je me fais toujours un gros nez”. A comic-like representation of self is underlined as a conscious choice made by the artist, which both contributes to and undercuts the reader’s immersion in this hyper-stylized world.

Interestingly, the core assemblage aspect of portraits in *Non* could very well be likened to that of a list-making schema, wherein the narrative is driven largely by sequences



Figure 2.2. From North, *Non*

of actions visually ‘listed’ within the same panel (Figure 2.2). In this figure, multiple forms co-exist on the same page, with lines intersecting and blending each iteration of the subject in a cacophony of conflicting behaviors. This collection of subjects is accompanied by the text: “certains matins je me lève et j’ai envie de rien”, further underlining a juxtaposition in signification between image and word— “rien” is now categorically equated with tension, movement, and disorder rather than *emptiness* as a result of the visual list format. Jan Baetens first remarks the list-structure in the avant-garde graphic novel *Portraits Crachés* by Dominique Goblet:

What is typical of Goblet’s book is the simultaneous combination of the list or database principle on the one hand and the portrait or story logic on the other.

Through such combinations, she demonstrates that the splitting of these two principles of sequencing—the nonlinear logic of the database and the linear logic of the narrative—can be overcome (Baetens 86).

In the case of the graphic novel, Baetens characterizes the effect of a structured congruent non-linear/linear structure as being twofold: first, it enables a “short-circuiting” of time and space in the narrative, that is, the temporal and spatial relationship of text and image. Citing Anne-Marie Christin (1995), Baetens notes that the result of this is a “conversion of text and image into the heterogeneous field of *written images*” (86). Second, he correlates the perturbation of classic hierarchies of meaning as reflective of a more overarching investment in Gilles Deleuze’s understanding of *becoming*: “there isn’t a subject, there are only collective assemblages of enunciation” (Deleuze and Guattari 18). In this respect, graphic narrative can be engaged in not solely the aim of rendering formlessness into a form, but

rather “a thorough critique on that very process and an attempt to think the permanent questioning of all things ‘fixed’” (Baetens 87).

In one memorable sequence, North evokes another visual list-structure while depicting scenes of the figure performing various “*oups*”—spilling coffee, staying up too late, wearing mis-matched socks (Figure 2.3). The



Figure 2.3. From North, *Non*

standard frames and gutters outlining and separating comic sequences, however, are absent, and the multiple scenes blend seamlessly into one another. Again, this underlines the potential for overcoming the distinction between structures of linearity via a subverted relation between image and text—the repeated word “*oups*” functions more at a rhythmic verbal register that corresponds in tandem with the unfolding visuals. Additionally, we begin to see a mirrored relationship between “*oups*” and the imagery of a *tache*, or stain, which appears not only on this page (as a coffee spill) but additionally as a visual motif threaded throughout the entire text. This points once more to a synonymous linking, rather than a disjunction, between a progressive linear trajectory and one that is narratively fragmented.

*Non*’s abandonment of the classic utilization of distinctive frames and gutters speaks to the larger question of presence and absence in the text. The narrative’s construction of the relation between emptiness and wholeness is epitomized by the zine’s *tache/vide* motif. It must first be noted that the initial introduction of the stain motif at the beginning of the zine



Figure 2.4 . From North, *Non*

is catalyzed by a textual inclusion of the word “*tâche*”— indicating a task or job to be performed. Not only is the lexical meaning of the word disturbed, but the visual representation of the stain from here on is informed by the imposition of the meaning “task,” something that must be addressed, enacted upon. The figure is shown trying but failing to remain concentrated on their task at hand, instead staring off intently at “cette *tâche* sur le mur” (Figure 2.4). This scene triggers the narrative’s unraveling, remaining threaded together by the repeated image of a literal *tache*—a stain. This progression is more or less resolved near the end of the text, as the figure is portrayed staring off once more, this time with the added caption: “contempler le vide et ne rien faire” (Figure 2.4). Here, we find that the *tache* and the *vide* become categorically interchangeable.

The transposability between presence and absence does not only occur at a textual level but is furthermore heightened by the zine’s largely black-and-white color scheme. The sole inclusion of a third color, red, appears only sparingly, emerging once as another representation of the stain upon the figure’s chest, once within the Picasso self-portrait, and once as a textual anomaly: “J’ÉCRIS EN ROUGE” (See Figure 2.2) wherein the handwritten





caption shifts suddenly from black to red. First, this abrupt visual marker calls back to the dichotomous child-like yet sophisticated nature of the zine. Second, it establishes color, from this point on, as a double indicator of the narrative's self-reflexive and conscious nature.

In this case, we may read the final panel of the zine (Figure 2.5) in a richer manner. Whereas the figure has, up until now, been typified by moods of instability or chaos, the final scene portrays them silhouetted against blackness, gazing quietly downwards into the glowing whiteness held by their arms. Here, 'emptiness' is conversely represented by white, rather than blackness as it has been previously. The *vide* is now assigned a role of simultaneous emptiness and wholeness, and strikingly as a source of illumination. It is a space void of objects and yet a space of quiet contemplation, open for projection and ready to be filled. North's *Non* deconstructs, inverts, and pieces together fragments of traditional conceptions regarding streamlined narration of identity in a truly systematic way. In destabilizing these many binaries and hierarchical positionings, *Non* reaffirms the potential for personal narration and life-writing to hinge itself upon notions of disarray and non-linearity, while still providing a forward moving narrative vehicle of growth and development.

Jade Padey's graphic zine *Présente* affords us with another opportunity to view an instable, impersonal subject in a continually shifting process of being, yet situated this time on "la sensation d'un corps" according to the one-lined blurb on the back 'cover' page of the zine. The narrative follows the principal figure moving through the minutiae of daily life as a

shadow-like being, often removed of all features and enveloped by patterns of darkness. This is a zine invested principally in the construction of atmospheres as a means for story-telling, meaning that little action occurs beyond a voyeuristic gaze of a young person getting ready in the morning, leaving home, or navigating city life. Much like Foucault finds it of the upmost importance to “dire les derniers degrés, et les plus ténus, du réel” (“La Vie des Hommes Infâmes” 29), a high level of signification is given to the most minute of interactions with reality. The brush of fingertips with a partner before leaving home, a fleeting interaction with a kind stranger, catching one’s reflection in a window on the street, all are central situations in the text, which inform the narrative’s larger stylistic qualities.

The panels are more apt to follow the traditional grid-like structure of comics, including more consistent frames and rigid separation between scenes via gutters. However, one striking quality of Padey’s illustrations is the inclusion of *filters*, wherein scenes are often tinted with patterns or objects triggered by and reflecting tangible interactions. When the figure wakes up in the morning, for example, the images of them slowly getting dressed, brushing their teeth, and applying mascara are all blurred by a swirled fogginess. When leaving home and parting ways with their partner, however, two panels are briefly accompanied by a floral pattern which echoes the wallpaper initially seen

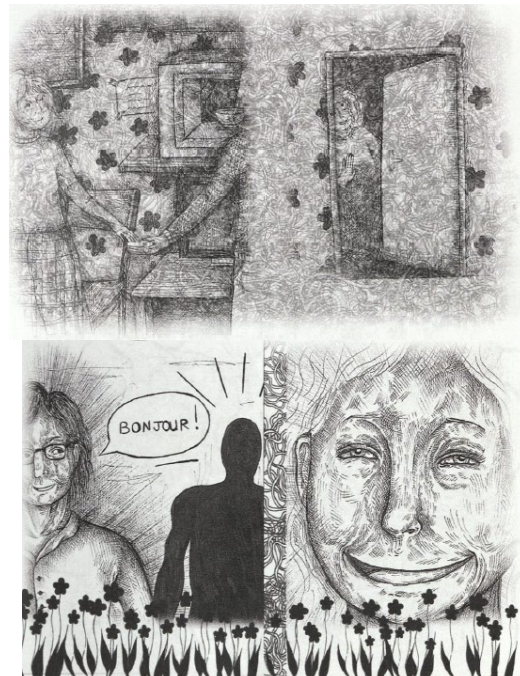


Figure 2.6. From Jade Padey, *Présente*.

in their bedroom (Figure 2.6). Later in the narrative, the figure is

harassed by a man in a car while walking on the street. His hostile words—"dégage, pauvre meuf!"—are repurposed into a slinking, snake-like pattern and begin to infiltrate the figure themselves, taking over their form. Immediately following, the figure is briefly relieved from this constrictive pattern after a passing stranger offers a friendly "bonjour". In its place, flowers sprout (Figure 2.6) along the forefront of the panels.

In donning such 'filters' as a means to communicate atmospheric shifts throughout the narrative, Padey works to establish how day-to-day interactions and material realities form an ultimate interconnectivity with our world view. Especially, we bear witness to the intractability of meshing internal and external worlds, private and public domains. The bedroom is represented both as a source of comfort and sameness, yet the glimpse of everyday tenderness with their partner is reflected in the city via the repeated filter of flowers during the kind stranger scene. At the same time, the city is undoubtedly portrayed as a place of movement, collision, and confrontation with the self as one who is inherently social and thus viewable, interactable. In one scene, the figure quite literally collides with another passing shadow-stranger on the street (Figure 2.7).

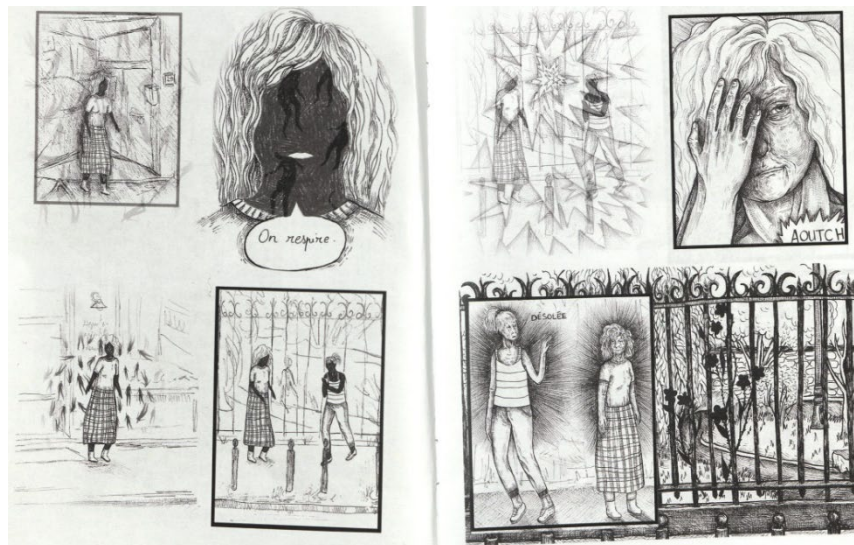


Figure 2.7. From Jade Padey, *Présente*.

Both of their forms are then encompassed by dark lines of sun-bursts, before turning away and continuing on in opposite directions. Despite the figure's tendency to be visually represented as shadow-like, they are nonetheless unable to remove themselves entirely from coming in close contact with social movement. To this extent, Padey aptly articulates a desire to retreat from the continual, never-ending need to exist and interact amongst others in such a disconnected, fleeting, transitory way. Individuals must co-exist between the opposing poles of being both invisible and on display, with little opportunity for representation of our true selves, our unique selves, our vulnerable and unmediated selves.

*Présente* can thus be read as a meditation on the trivial, contradictory nature of the quotidian—often tiring, sometimes sweet, and in the grander context of our existences, wholly overwhelming. *This* is “la sensation d’un corps,” one that reacts to as well as informs the surrounding environment in subtle, atmospheric ways, and equally in grandiose and clashing ways. Foucault writes in “La Vie des Hommes Infâmes”:

Le quelconque cesse d’appartenir au silence, à la rumeur qui passe ou à l’aveu fugitif. Toutes ces choses qui font l’ordinaire, le détail sans importance, l’obscurité, les journées sans gloire, la vie commune, peuvent et doivent être dites – mieux, écrites.”  
(23)

In materializing and rendering visual this sensation, Padey breaks through the surface of silence applied to experiences within the daily and sometimes dark mundane that do not conform to easily marketable standards of identity depiction. Looking back to Anna Poletti’s analysis of Australian zinesters using zines as a means to confront economic structures of control and their absorption into daily existence, we recognize once again the need to forge new methods of life-writing. Especially amidst a climate of control and capitalization that

render narratives nothing but a box to place and seal identities for mass appeal, zines offer a format that is endlessly malleable in their capacity to materialize the most minute, the most mundane.

Rather than claiming any sort of authentic expression in the previous zines, I have revealed the ways in which these personal graphic narratives undo marketable understandings of identity and truth by demonstrating how they engage with heterogenous, shifting portrayals of 'being'. Life-writing via zines operates against the grain of mass print-media which commodifies identity into a neat box, and instead enables the exploration of identity representations that may exist unfettered by market stipulations and easily identifiable materializations of selfhood. In many of these zines, frames dissolve, absence overcomes, and first-person narrators shape-shift into oblivion. Just as daily existences and their forward trajectories never meet a fully-fleshed, plot-oriented conclusion, so do the aforementioned zines.

One of the most striking characteristics among these works is their shared tendency to self-reflexively call attention to the very process of producing the work, whether that be by explicit textual indicators like in *Non*, the handwriting and white thread binding *Chère Léa*, or the staples at the seams of *Présente*. Whereas Chute identifies the intentional aesthetic of craftedness in comics as a signifier for the "subjective presence of the maker," in the case of zines, handwriting is not the only "mark of the body rendered directly onto the page" (11) and does not serve as a form of performativity; rather, the whole of the object itself is constitutive of the maker's 'hand' and demarcates a shift in how the reader views the narrative in its entirety. The text-objects origins are no longer alienated from the individual and prompts from their readers a similar demand as that formulated by Walter Benjamin in

“The Author as Producer”: “to think, to reflect on his position in the process of production” (779). In calling attention to the process of production, the discussed zines represent powerful innovations in replicating the self within a graphic narrative and open up alternative methods of representing oneself on the page and pulling these representations into wider public discourse.

Chapter 2  
(Un)Stitching Seams &  
The Poetic Everyday

Toutes les beautés contiennent, comme tous les phénomènes possibles, quelque chose d'éternel et quelque chose de transitoire — d'absolu et de particulier.

— Charles Baudelaire, *Curiosités esthétiques*

While the graphic perzines discussed in the previous chapter exhibited French youth's engagements in reworking personal subjectivity, they additionally lead us towards a broader inquiry on the boundaries between text and object. We have seen that the reading experience of zines occurs at a fundamentally different register; as a result of the unabashed display of the process itself that goes into producing a zine, the reader is able to trace the extent to which the text-objects bear upon its form the lingering physical trace of its creator. Rather than serving as either straightforward literary text or crafted object, zines often collapse these two domains of legibility. This is certainly the case for zines. Further confuddling this dynamic, however, is the common practice of group-assembled zines wherein the text-object becomes inevitably imbued with a plurality of influence. In this chapter, I situate collective poetry zines within a larger discourse surrounding feminist literary text(ile)s and materiality. In particular, recent critical examinations of quilting as a metaphor for the sketching of fragmented subjectivities will be useful as a starting point in teasing out the textual/material intricacies of collectively produced poetry zines.

I have selected to concentrate on poetry zines in part due to their sheer prevalence. Many group-made zines spearheaded by artistic collectives tend towards incorporating poetry in their publications, and I will explore three examples throughout this chapter (*Le Castor*, *Poésie Civile*, *À poil*). I am equally interested in the paradoxical cultural perception of poetry writing as either a high-brow expression of masculine bourgeois cultural engagement (especially within the French poetic canon) or as grounded in the starry-eyed realm of the feminine (especially when privately produced). Zines, teetering between the gap of private and public engagement as they do, offer an alternative engagement with this culturally constructed duality, and yet the question of their materiality remains largely elusive and unfixed within scholarly inquiries.

As has been mentioned, often closely associated with the zinester is Claude Lévi-Strauss's consideration of the *bricoleur* who works to continually (re)create from that which is "déjà constitué" (28) and when, taken altogether, creates a sort of cultural dialogue. *Bricolage* becomes familiar here in recognizing the multiplicitous energy and form driving zines, as well as their tendency towards calling on readers to move beyond the position of reader and engage actively in the "dialogue" by producing their own zines. In an attempt to move beyond a male-centered structuralism, Miriam Shapiro and Melissa Meyer's conception of *femmage* is additionally relevant. For Shapiro and Meyer ("Waste Not, Want Not: An Inquiry into What Women Saved and Assembled"), Strauss's *bricolage* does not accurately capture the unique framework of women's culture and artistic practices throughout history. Often erased from mainstream artistic developments and delegated rather to domestic 'crafting', Shapiro and Meyer note that women's work has consequently needed to root itself in "collected, saved, and combined materials" as crucial "acts of pride,



desperation and necessity” (Shapiro and Meyer). *Bricolage* is certainly adept at pinpointing the wider ‘Do-It-Yourself-ism’ behind the zine movement as one which values an attitude of ‘making do’ with what one has readily on hand. I argue however that *femmage* serves a valuable purpose in contextualizing the cultural preciousness that goes along with women’s need to collect and combine in order to sustain threads of feminine creative expression amidst historical erasure from the mainstream.

Shapiro and Meyer notably evoke the quilt as epitomizing the combined utilitarian and aesthetic methodology of *femmage*, containing “a secret language... a covert imagery” and which necessitates “a sort of archaeological reconstruction” in order to parse together layered forms and meanings. In many ways, zines and quilts share some striking similarities, both in the process of their production and in the effect of the final artistic result. Anna Poletti notes that both strive to privilege “communicative power of the handmade over the economic potential of laboring,” (47) and face similar changes in their respective fields due to technological advancements. They both, nonetheless, draw on a sort of nostalgia for a time prior to mass mechanical production, wherein quilts were, indeed, made out of necessity to warm and decorate, and pamphlets were distributed widely as political thought pieces. Just as Amy Spencer identifies the boom of feminist zines in the 70’s as a conscious recentering on women’s issues otherwise ignored in the mainstream (40), contemporary quilt-maker Radka Donnell-Vogt explains that quilts “have been rallying points, platforms, banners, for the neglected and self-forgetting persons, for women” (51).

Judy Elsley’s utilization of quilting as a lens for reading women’s writing becomes additionally useful for our purposes. Elsley draws attention to its application as a metaphorical representation of the piecing together of the often fragmentary nature of

women’s narratives: “the process of making fragments creates a necessary space, one that is often disruptive and destabilizing, from which a woman can begin her task of self-creation” (Elsley 10). The quilt becomes consequentially synonymous for both a textual consideration of feminist creative expression and the ways in which women work to piece back together the segments of their lives which have been isolated by a patriarchal status quo. For Shapiro & Meyer, the most effective way to assert women’s position in meaningful cultural production does not hinge upon any integration into the mainstream, but rather in connection, “...in sharing women's information with women”. In utilizing a similar approach to that of Elsley’s and Shapiro’s, my aim is to elucidate the ways in which the collective zines of this chapter might operate similarly: as tools of connection and as a conscious weaving together of fractured subjectivities in order to create something wholly new.

*À poil* is a collectively published fanzine created by Toulousaines Élise and Marion, with each edition addressing a distinct theme but largely exploring “tabous entourant les corps féminins, trans, non-binaires”. The larger questions of materiality and physicality are highly privileged in the zine. According to their online blog, their aim is to create a zine “en papier, bricolé, authentique, physique comme le corps”. The seventh publication specifically



Figure 3.2. From *À Poil*, N7, 2019.

depicts “le corps qui vieillit,” consisting of a hodgepodge of photos, collages, and poems that address age and ageism. A two-page spread of collaged (Figure 3.1) newspaper clippings, quotes, drawings, flower cut-outs, women’s portraits, and comic strips is a strikingly apt

confirmation of Shapiro & Meyer’s stipulation of “scraps... recycled in the work,” as being fundamental for a piece of *femmage*. The collage serves as a visual exhibition of the process of cutting, tearing, and pasting together disparate pieces, mimicking the actual physical acts that go into creating a zine. In openly displaying the pieced-together process while addressing a topic commonly erased in mainstream thought, the zine speaks to Elsley’s identification of how the act of turning “being torn into tearing [...] turns object into subject” (9). The collage thus serves as a potent visual indicator of a reclamation of active subjectivity.

Among the words in the aforementioned collage, which we could read as its own instance of poetry, is the phrase “je ne cherche pas la jeunesse, je cherche la beauté”. We also find various descriptors throughout the page, such as the close pairing of “belles” & “vioques”; the repeated combination of these dualities points to an attempt to collapse the consumeristic cultural intertwining of youth with inherent beauty. Instead, the collage interposes aging and its associated descriptors as a potential instantiation of an entirely new conception of beauty. Whereas the aging feminine body has been a subject riddled with shame and secrecy in contemporary Western cultural depictions, *À poil* works to afford visibility and reverence to the aged form. Accompanying the poems are zoomed-in snap

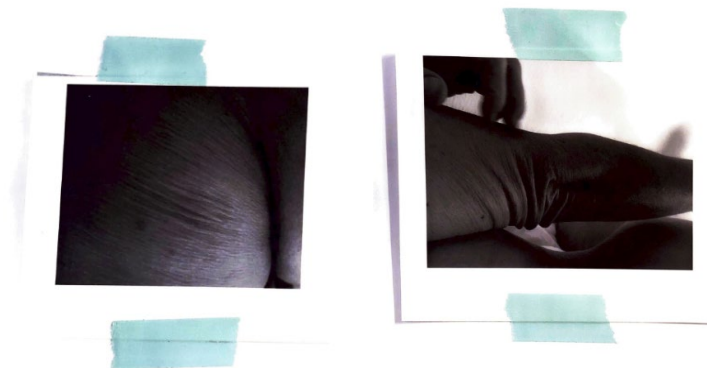


Figure 3.3. From *À Poil*, N7, 2019.

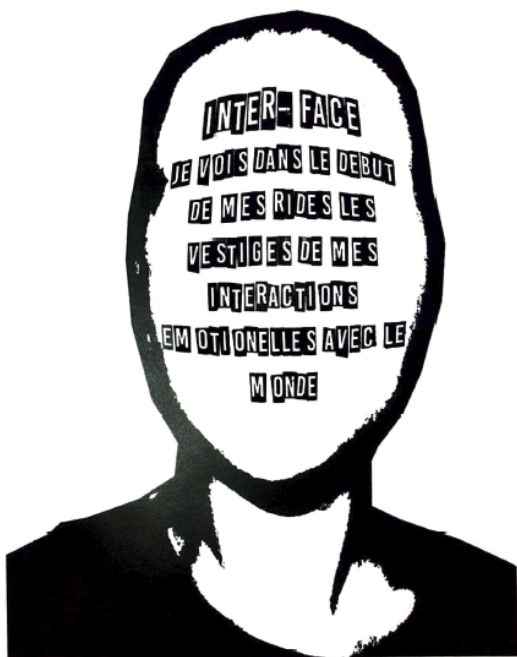


Figure 3.3. From *À Poil*, N7, 2019.

shots of wrinkled skin and bits of bulging flesh which are adhered to a page with tape and photocopied (Figure 3.2), pointing again to the physicality of the zine work itself and an additional layering of form and meaning.

The final poem of the zine (Figure 3.3) “Interface” is a brief, block-lettered poem transposed onto a blank face. In localizing the poem to the figure’s face, it becomes a textual stand-in for the evoked “rides” and thus signifies

an interconnectivity between “interactions émotionnelles”, corporality, and textuality. This posits the aging body as one which is physically inscribed with poetic signification, openly embracing the unstoppable interactivity of the body with the surrounding, everyday world.

In selecting to engage in a conspicuous, overt display of the physical signs of aging — that which Julie Kristeva closely likens to the experience of abjection (1-13) — the zine artists of *À Poil* work to subvert a Western economy of materialistic visions of perfection and unending productivity. The intentional collection of ‘abject’ details which do not conform to standards of commodifiable beauty or utility additionally calls to mind Agnès Varda’s *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*. Varda’s curious eye towards her own aging body serves as an important touchstone for her careful gleaning of other tossed aside aspects of consumeristic society. If “the process of aging has been a process of nullification” (Beugnet 2) in contemporary Western culture, then the act of materializing its signs can be interpreted as a meaningful subversive tactic. I argue that *À Poil* is invested in a similar process of gleaning

as is Varda, that is, a concerted effort to unveil systems of invisibility and objectification by granting an open eye to what fragments have been pushed to the margins of society.

Already, we have encountered several instances of an underlying relational paradigm of binary opposition: author/audience, public/private, old/young. The work of Hélène Cixous becomes crucial in understanding how contemporary media and mass thought have been guided by such a construction. In *The Newly Born Woman*, she provides a similar list: “Activity/passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature,” (64) and asserts that “thought has always worked by opposition” via the creation of hierarchies. According to Cixous, that process of “hierarchization subjects the entirety of conceptual organization to man” (65). This is the structure through which precedence is granted to man over woman, or youth over age, (or novel over zine) and which delineates difference “as both nominally acknowledging and not deemed worth noting” (Elbert 888), to the extent that anything outside of the masculine norm is deemed abject and invisible.

Another poem in *À Poil* speaks well to this point, confronting how time is perceived to act upon the (feminine) body as if it were a passive object. The poem begins by denoting how one often skirts around the subject of age “poliment”, all the while viewing time as an actor who “fait son œuvre...insidieusement”. Yet, the poem quickly subverts this perspective: “[l]e temps ne fait rien à l'affaire, chante le poète”. Gone is the viewpoint of aging as a process indicative of withering into shame, abjectness, or which renders the subject invisible and acted upon. Rather, this poem situates the process of aging as the accumulation of unique beauties and agential actions: “une patte d’oie rehausse un regard qui observe,” or lips which retain imprinted “en mémoire des bouches goûtées”. The perceived

incompatibility of beauty and aging dissolves and is instead privileged as a reflection of agency and a site of the collection of memories.

The foreword to the second edition of fanzine *Le Castor* sets out to unravel another common binary conception surrounding poetry: its habitual placement within the inaccessible realm of the elite. Amélie Sioux, creator and editor-in-chief of the collective fanzine since its initial debut as a webzine in 2014, writes:

“...une vieille conception erronée fait que de nombreuses personnes regardent volontiers la poésie comme une chose parfaitement étrangère à la vie réelle, tenue pour une espèce de luxe... Aujourd’hui, à chaque fois que l’on sous-estime ou renie la réalité poétique, en rangeant la poésie dans la catégorie des illusions, cela a le don de m’énervier,” (Sioux)

Here, Amélie cuts to the heart of the French poetic canon as one which has been guided by classist, racist, and gendered understandings of culture in Western (European) binary thought. In response, *Le Castor* aims to offer “un espace multi-identitaire, multiforme et multigenre,” where women and people restricted by patriarchal barriers are enabled to disrupt the systematic situating of creative expression to zones of inaccessibility. By delineating daily reality as one which is itself inherently poetic, the foreword works to establish an integration of creative expression into routine existence instead of one demarcated by capitalist systems of value.



Figure 3.4. *Enflammons nos rêves*, Jules of the Forest, From *Le Castor*, N1, 2019.

In an interview, Amélie, emphasized the group’s desire to “comblent un manque dans les médias, où plein de personnes peuvent participer ; n’importe qui puisse prendre la plume pour dénoncer quelque chose qui leur énerve” (Sioux). A common thread of expressions of anger as driving creative expression tinges many of the works present in the zine (Figure 3.4). The poem “Le Mythe de la Féminité” by Thyrippème is likewise embedded

with a mood of frustration while initially addressing the incompatibility the speaker feels

when confronting unrelatable, standard visions of femininity which “s’agitent sous mes yeux”. The speaker explains that “ma féminité me laisse un arrière-goût pâteux, comme de la boue”. The world created by others is one of “parfums et de couleurs”, whereas the speaker remarks that theirs is crafted “de granit”. The poem ends with “une révélation” — that it is somewhere between “les roches massives et les eaux dormantes,” where lies their unique embodiment of gender. Rather than adhering to a prescribed performance of traditional femininity based in “parfums” and “fleurs,”—which the speaker never denounces but rather honors with “un mélange de frustration et d’admiration,”—they are able to approach an entirely new construction of identity and performance which situates itself outside of binaries of gender. In this way, we encounter an important unfastening from Miriam and Shapiro’s conception of *femmage* as hinging upon a clean-cut adherence to womanhood. Instead,

Thyrippème's work in *Le Castor* represents the possibility for the bricoleur to build upon constructed notions of genders through critiquing the limited modes of identification these binaries pose.

We additionally discover then that for collective zines like *Le Castor*, standard conceptions of formal authorship which link to linear, individual narratives are effectively abandoned. The resulting poetry zine is one that is a pieced-together collage of disparate forms, medias, styles, and subjectivities: *Le Castor* may lay simultaneous claim to all of them *and* to none of them. A similar remark is made by Elsley on the jointly-made nature of quilt-making: “the process of making the quilt becomes more important than who eventually owns it” (17). For Elsley, when piecing together narrative fragments, the quilt represents a paradigmatic shift in perception of an alternative type of commodity, one which privileges group connection of process over singularized authority over product. *Le Castor* similarly is invested in exploring what happens when expression and connection occur outside of a codified, commodified market. To this point, Amélie describes how even in an independent magazine format, the task of writing traditional columns nonetheless involves restrictions:

Pour les femmes et les personnes LGBTQ+, je trouve que les articles [formels] sont hyper codifiés. Je me suis rendu compte de ça au début du *Castor*, parce qu'on ne publiait que des articles et des dessins, et il y avait beaucoup de personnes qui me disaient : je ne peux pas, parce que c'est trop codifié'. Ce qui est bien avec la poésie, c'est que tu n'as pas ces codes, tu n'as pas ces règles, tu es libre au niveau du format. Et du coup, les personnes se sentent moins bloquées, elles sont plus libres. Tu peux te mettre sur ces formats quand tu veux. (Sioux)



While offering a platform for artists otherwise inhibited by codes of publication which dictate standards of expression, *Le Castor* notably straddles the gap between informal zines and sleeker, polished independent magazines. The attitude however driving its publication—everyday experience, uninhibited expression, and collective collaboration—situates it strongly in the culture of zine creation.

We can therefore see a confluence of Cixous's identification of hierarchical systems as intrinsically patriarchal with the habitual delineation of certain modes of cultural expression to the private (feminine) sphere. To this point, in *Le rire de la Méduse*, Cixous writes that the history of writing has been "homogène à la tradition phallogcentrique" (44), guided by the focalization on male subjectivities. An exception to this, according to Cixous, consists of:

Les poètes seulement, pas les romanciers solidaires de la représentation. Les poètes parce que la poésie n'est que de prendre force dans l'inconscient et que l'inconscient, l'autre contrée sans limites, est le lieu où survivent les refoulées : les femmes. (45)

We find a similar sentiment in a poem from the collective fanzine: *Valeur d'usage, valeur d'échange de la poésie* published by *Poésie Civile*. Positioned amidst an amassment of poems, book scans, social media screenshots, and doodles, this poem begins by critiquing an unnamed feminist publication for deciding "de ne publier que de la prose, en expliquant que la poésie était une forme artistique moins rigoureuse". It goes on to explain that given the material costs required to write and publish novels, the reduction of poetry as a written craft "moins sérieuse" quickly becomes a question of class division. They write: "à l'heure où nous, femmes, revendiquons notre propre littérature, la poésie est en train de devenir le principal moyen d'expression des pauvres, des personnes issues de la classe ouvrière, des

femmes de Couleur”. Very much in line with Cixous’s view of poetry as a means to destabilize a patriarchal-hierarchical literary canon, *Poésie Civile*’s emphasis on collective creation and, particularly, on oral poetry reading (which I will detail further below) serves as a valuable instance of the possibilities with which we may engage with Cixous’s call for defiant rupture.

*Poésie Civile* is a free writing group that meets monthly in the city of Poitiers to “discuter [...] autour d’hypothèses poétiques” over an open buffet of homemade food and bottles of wine. They produce monthly zines based on these workshops, with their zines and meeting transcripts distributed freely online. Their publications are especially oriented towards overlaying of text and image, to the point where ease of legibility is often compromised. The larger question of the intermingling between politics, art, and subjectivity is frequently approached (Figure 3.5). The group emphasizes the act of reading poetry “à voix haute, les prises de parole spontanées” which they believe nourishes “la réflexion et la perception physique, psychologique, intellectuelle, de l’entité ‘tous’ et de chacun”. We encounter another reversal of a historical hierarchization, one which is especially Derridean, in that speech and text function hand in hand with one another. Writing zines and discussing zines, in this context,

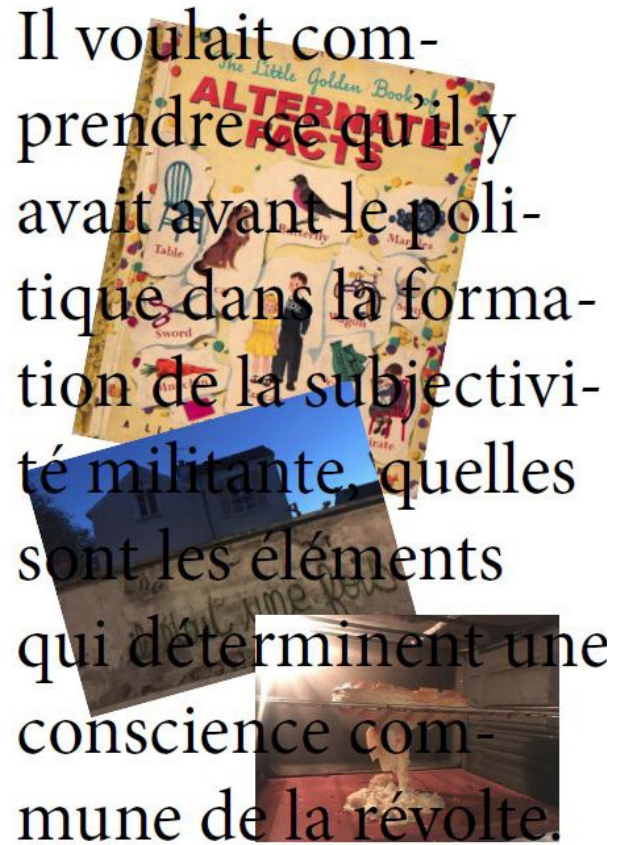


Figure 3.5. From *Poésie Civile*, *Valeur d’usage, valeur d’échange de la poésie*, 2017.

occurs jointly, simultaneously. As each meeting is accompanied by a zine that serves as a launching point for discussion, we encounter an alternative usage of the zine as text-object: one which documents collectively assembled information, enables shared understandings and prompts real-time dialogue.

In the meeting transcript for *Hypothèse poétique #3*, the month's theme concerning the exchange value of poetry vs. its use value is discussed in depth. Specifically, the speakers work to unravel the paradoxical relation of value assigned to certain objects, mulling over how "il n'y a rien de plus utile que l'eau, mais elle ne peut presque rien acheter," yet how conversely "un diamant" has virtually no use value yet a very high exchange value. The speakers conclude by likening poetry to water in terms of its value as one that is indispensable: "elle se situe du côté de la résistance... au pouvoir, à la contamination d'un discours de domination... elle pense et crée avec le monde, elle rend le monde au monde". We find therein the belief that poetry holds intrinsic value to the everyday reality of our world, and additionally a value which, like Cixous remarks, is capable of positioning itself in opposition to the hierarchical capital culture that arbitrarily assigns value to only that which acquires profit. Rather than situating poetry within a predetermined capitalist economy of product and labor exchange, *Poésie Civile* works to establish their own economy of value, granting poetry and zine writing as a currency upon which community is built, bellies are filled, and discourses are created and shared.

At the same time, one must acknowledge, that positing zines as an inherent, totalized foil to mass-media print consumption does not necessarily account for incompatibilities in this thought construction, which, too, reveals itself to be binarily guided. "Selling-out" is commonly associated with zine makers for taking book deals or even posting their zines for

sale online. For tactile and intimate art forms like quilts or zines, the question of technology, or the potentiality of a wider audience viewership via the internet, is one which often prompts a perceived loss of ‘authenticity’ for the medium. For zines, it seems that this perception of ‘authenticity’ boils down to their presence as highly ephemeral text-objects, and their online rendering strips the zine of its artistic aura. Poletti additionally views certain similarities between quilting and zines. She contends that the quilt and the zine, though related in their “function as personal expressions and legacies on women,” are fundamentally juxtaposed due to the quilt’s status as a permanent object, whereas the zine is necessarily defined by its “contemporary ephemerality” (Poletti 49). While I agree that the application of quilt theory for reading zines can only go so far, I also contend that in attaching a defining level of ‘authenticity’ to zines, only to be achieved via a practice of ephemerality, neglects the utilization by many zinesters of the internet, of zine archives, of zines-turned-to-published-books, etc., all of which nonetheless comprise the fullness of zine culture and history up until the present day. Thus, the question of assigning ‘authenticity’ to zines based on their materiality or presence as text-objects is problematic at its outset.

An elaboration on the dynamic relation between zine materiality and technology is found in an extract from *Hypothèse poétique #3*. Rather than disengaging with the traditionally anomalous confluence of zines with technology, this page instead aesthetically reproduces and embraces the influx of the internet as a site of zine creation. Especially in light of the purposefully fragmented arrangement of the pieced-together whole (in zines and in quilting), it seems relevant that the poem in question is positioned as mirrored to that of a photo of a television interposed with an open room, as well as a textual excerpt which evokes the Fluxus movement. The late 20<sup>th</sup>-century artistic movement similarly emphasized

accessibility and everyday objects as vehicles for artistic expression for the masses. George Brecht, an American artist associated with the loosely organized Fluxus group writes: “the bounds of art are much wider than they have conventionally seemed, or that art and certain long established bounds are no longer useful”.<sup>2</sup> To this extent, we may read the selected poem as meaningfully informed by and interacting with the other art pieces surrounding it, rather than as one singular piece (Figure 3.6). The zine, like the quilt, is a composite reflection of disparate pieces wherein “discontinuity, the space between things, the constant interruption becomes a working condition” (Elsley 12). Here, the boundaries between poem, image, and prose become instable and fluid.

The poem refers to “les Grandes Machines électroniques” and asserts the need to render them as “vivantes, humaines, physiques, vibrantes”, rather than “les prendre pour but”. It goes on to explain that many art forms have become restricted and defined by the



Figure 3.6. From *Poésie Civile, Valeur d'usage, valeur d'échange de la poésie*, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/fluxus/>

machines through which they are inevitably produced in the modern era. However. “le poète et le musicien n’ont jamais travaillé pour le scripteur, pour l’imprimeur”. It must be recognized that the technology that we are now able to apply to artistic expressions signifies a crucial departure from what was “impossible hier : les multiplications infinies des sons, des signes, des images”. This final poem points to an awareness of the history of zines as one continually in the making. Similar to the Fluxus orientation as a shifting pattern of social activities and networks that emphasizes “the underlying ideas or attitude around which it is constituted” (Chandler 118), the poem works to underline the ongoing process of shifting modes of creativity through time and human-made advancements. Rather than degrading these forms, the poem asserts that it is through continually looking forward that expression can reach new possibilities and significations.

The ongoing debate that attempts to elucidate the outlines of the genre, in fact, works to reveal that it is not ephemerality which characterizes the form as zine scholars once believed, but rather its ever-evolving elusiveness. While our current position in history remains one guided by systems of hierarchization, Elsley notes that it is possible to reappropriate division to the point that “fragmentation becomes not a limitation, but a strength, a defining characteristic” (18). Zine’s continual rejection of categorical definitions and location within a network of involved connection and dialogue enables zinesters to perpetually re-constitute the materials and aesthetic qualities needed to create a zine. Zine materiality is thus delineated as one which has been and must remain boundless in limitations and potential iterations, wholly contingent on the shifting day-to-day realities which alter our engagement with reality and structures of signification. Any analysis of the material format

of the genre must accordingly propose an open-ended engagement in the unfixed possibilities with which people may engage—and will continue to engage—with zines.

Conclusion:  
Alt-Archives, Affect &  
The Technology of Destruction

Rooted in the influence of turn-of-the-century punk music, LSD, and brash youth angst, *Ratcharge* was, at its heart, a zine about growing up in the banlieues of Paris:

C'était un désert émotionnel, tueur de créativité. L'horizon? Ils le montraient, parfois, à la télé, mais personne n'y croyait. Les perspectives d'avenir? Les bureaux pour les gagnants, l'usine pour les autres. Coincé entre un néant et un autre, personne ne se rebellait. (22)

Cornered by the impossibility of carving out a life between the two options of “un néant et un autre” — of living as either erased or abject amidst a France ravaged by downward social mobility and divisiveness — Alexandre Simon began to make zines from within this gnarled space. Often autobiographical in nature, the larger focus of *Ratcharge* during its initial run (2004-2014) was that of archiving Simon's meandering through the worlds of French punk, comics, and politics. The narrative aspects were stripped down and reconstructed as a self-published anthologized chapbook in 2013, later to be absorbed by a small publishing firm *Les éditions des mondes à faire* in 2017. Rather than serving any nostalgic interest, the preface to this most recent edition describes these stories and their various publications as “un appel dirigé dans le néant, vers la prochaine ville, le prochain visage, la prochaine histoire” (7). Not only does this work to signal the usefulness of these renditions in propelling a particular set of memories into the future, but it additionally points to a more



nuanced understanding of the zine form as itself engaged in a constant state of movement and metamorphosis.

Along with *Ratcharge*, the selection of zines I chose to highlight in this conclusion contend broadly with narratives of (re)construction, self-shattering, and unraveling; their ensnared positions within a discourse concerning the potential for (ephemeral?) zines to serve as historical archives becomes even more so obfuscated. I argue that the act of leaning into this space of friction might function to heighten the zinesters' engagements with the dissonant feelings of anxiety and fettered hope that arise from living amidst contemporary Western capitalist hegemony. In their own respective ways, the following texts each attempt to embody the sensations of coming up against hierarchical systems of power. Especially if we are to take a step back and view the long tradition of zines as a sort of dialogue between artists and writers taking part in cultural expression by whatever means and tools necessary, we may begin to approach a conception of zines-as-archives as continued investments in imagining new ways of creatively enduring.

We might first look to Foucault for an understanding of the cultural implications of the archive; rather than representing a set of preserved documents stemming from a particular period in time, Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* emphasizes the archive as conveying 'the general system of the formation and transformation of statements' (130). The archive becomes much less rigid in form, as Foucault selects to privilege the conditions and relations surrounding the production of sets of discourses. In this light, the gradual back-and-forth development of zines as sites of cultural transfer rings quite true, and it illuminates the historical need to create and preserve independently produced media as situated against a formal system of culture and knowledge diffusion. Spencer, on the topic of zine archives,

refers to their specific capability in revealing a ‘network’ wherein we are able to “experience a sense of the scope of the scene” (37), again indicating that archival reaches beyond the presence of set documents. Perhaps most notable to this chapter’s interest is Derrida’s observation in an interview: “[l]’archive pré-occupe l’avenir” (2001). From this standpoint, the future is inescapably bound up in the signification of the archive, and it therefore *preoccupies* our present reality, too: “the archive concerns us, matters to us... occupies us in advance” (Naas 20). So, while Foucault challenges a traditional conception of archives as material bound in favor of the why and the how surrounding the occurrence of particular statements, Derrida additionally stretches the temporal binding of the archive as one frequently understood as resting inertly in the past.

In *Archive Fever*, Derrida goes on to reaffirm that the archive is not a relic of the past, but the “question of the future itself... of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow”

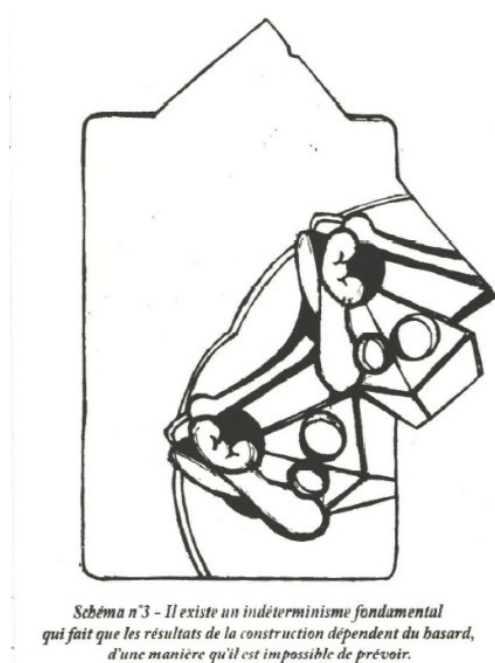


Figure 4.4. From *Waiting Room, Construction d'un Monde Meilleur*, 2017.

(36). *Construction d'un Monde Meilleur* (2017) is one zine in particular which demonstrates an interaction with the possibilities of different sets of futures and the strangeness of the present moment. A selection of abstract sketches delineated as “schémas” accompany brief musings on the “flou probabiliste” guiding the underlying structure of our world “qui est au-delà de l’espace et du temps”.

While typically the imagery of each schema conforms to a rigid framed outline, there is one notable divergence in Schéma n°3 (Figure 4.1).

Here, the contents of the image spill outward onto the blank space surrounding the frame. While the rest of the notes speak to the development of an established universally imposed logic of “symétrie” (Figure 4.2) represented both textually and visually, we are offered a glimpse here at “un indéterminisme fondamental”



*Schéma n°4 - DEVELOPPEMENTS DU MONDE ET DES DETENTES DE L'HORLOGE UNIVERSELLE*  
*Lors de la première mesure, l'état du monde a été modifié,*  
*de sorte à ce que la seconde mesure de l'observable donne toujours le même résultat.*

Figure 4.5. From Waiting Room, *Construction d'un Monde Meilleur*, 2017.

that remains adjacent to and attainable amidst these systems. This mimics the final schema of the zine, which proposes an entirely new set of logic, suggesting that “on ne peut plus imaginer le monde comme construit à partir d’un état défini”.

Though largely fragmented between each section, there emerges a stream of logic which permeates throughout the totality of notes. Schéma n°4 describes “des détentes de l’horloge universelle,” wherein the primary temporal metric applied to the “développements du monde” is figured as having fundamentally modified this world, “de sorte que la seconde mesure de l’observable donne toujours le même résultat”. The invocation of “des détentes” in the universal temporal structure establishes an at-conflict relation between the product of such modifications and the ‘natural’ rhythms of the universe. If interpreted as follow ups to this conflict, Schémas n°5 and n°6 posit a consequent rupturing into “dimensions supplémentaires... enroulées sur elles-mêmes” which serve only to “satisfaire des contraintes de symétrie”. Though coiled upon themselves and thus difficult to dissimulate, “l’observateur” is visualized as a catalyst of their unraveling and may “introduit une

perturbation”. The sudden shift from a repeated utilization of “l’observable” to the more agential position of “l’observateur” who acts upon “le système observé” demarcates a possible aperture in these hegemonical constraints. An assumption of Derrida’s “responsibility for tomorrow” embedded within an archive is straightforwardly addressed, and it is imagined as attainable through simply observing these regimented operations at their most fundamental register.

*Construction d’un Monde Meilleur* provides a keen example of how a zine might contend with an abstracted portrayal of futurity. While not representing a standard instance of memory documentation, the personalized zine form nonetheless carries with it the hand produced quality of the author and their particular perceptions. It utilizes the liberty provided by the zine format (free-form blend of image and word, non-linear/non-existent narrative structure) to depict the more disembodied reverberations of a breakage with a hegemonic (temporal) order contemporarily dictated by the commodification of time. Though the position of ‘observer’ is generally conceived of in a passive and non-productive sense, the zine treats the simple act of ‘observing’ as constituting a valuable and boundless method of interaction with reality. I also argue that the tone, distinctly sterile and detached, serves as an interesting juxtaposition to the zine’s central claim — that is, the underlying structure of our universal relations are wholly indeterminable and illogical. The zine’s aim of bearing witness to one’s transient presence within a larger trajectory of human processes begins the work of uncoiling the very bounds of time.

Yet, if as we saw in Chapter 2, the zine as ‘ephemeral’ text-object is rendered an unreliable, ever-evolving construct due to its anachronistic integration into contemporary (digitized) culture, then its figuring as a historical object becomes slippery in nature.

Previous scholarly work has often centralized the examination of zines as artefacts of old print media that link the present with the fading pre-digital past, like Duncombe's identification of zines as pre-digital anecdotes to magazines (18). More recent inquiries, such as Benji Nothwehr's, look closely at the zine's capacity to spur interconnectedness of marginalized subjects "across time and space, and even across the boundary of life and death" (43). Drawing on Ann Cvetkovich's overarching suggestion that rather than material significance, it is *affect* which renders a historical object noteworthy, Nothwehr views zines as embodied archives of the emotional atmosphere throughout the onset of the AIDS crisis. We find therein an echo of Jack Halberstam's call for archives to be reimagined as "floating signifier[s] for the kind of lives implied" (313), affirming that archives must not be invested in preserving solely material objects, but more so in the ongoing transmission of fleeting affects.

To return briefly to *Ratcharge*: the snippets of autobiographical stories told throughout the collecting are resolutely heavy in their emotional range. Simon openly embraces the existential ennui encountered when fading from adolescence into a future of "les bureaux" or "l'usine", or the grief of friendship ending in suicide. Enclosed within the pages, however, we also gain glimpses at brief moments of freedom throughout Simon's youth. One, in particular, stems from the sensation only to be obtained from riding a skateboard with neighborhood friends on a particular block on a particular Sunday morning, when one is tempted to believe that "le quartier avait été pensé exprès pour ça, pour faire du skateboard plus vite que dans les autres banlieues, plus vite qu'à la ville" (37). Images, such as this one, are nonetheless tinged with melancholy and are often silhouetted against more dismal

climates, like the omnipresence of police (39) on their street or the eventual splitting off of his friend group based on whether “ils votent FN ou PS” (29).

Simon is clearly interested in the evocation of sets of moods and the contexts around which they were produced. Never treated as immutable parts, Simon does what many of the zinesters we have seen thus far do so well — interweave the multiple and contradictory aspects of existence under varying forms and modalities. One perceivable effect of this enmeshment is that zines, like Simon’s, can be apt sites for articulating and preserving structures of feeling, to use Raymond Williams’s phrase. As Williams explains, “[t]he most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period, is this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time” (36). For Williams, any cultural expression of affectivity is necessarily enmeshed within a larger web of “the whole [social] organization, which is more than the sum of its separable parts” (37). In *Ratcharge*, Simon approaches a similar phenomenon in the postface of the 2017 edition while describing the experience of republishing his narratives: “le message, c’est la *confection* du medium. Pas le résultat d’un échange contre un autre fanzine ou une somme d’argent mais les modalités qu’il aura fallu mettre en place pour le concrétiser” (146). He refers to each instance of a “prise de rendez-vous, rencontre, discussion, échange de bises,” and additionally the “dix mille objets qui ont été pliés, agrafés, ramenés à pied à la maison... enfournés sous enveloppe et trimballés à la Poste par mes petits doigts” (146) that each went into the publication of his narratives and are inevitably reflected in the sum of the project as a whole.

The notion that the aggregation of these presences might constitute an ineffable marker retained within the text through time calls to mind Derrida’s notion from *Archive Fever* that “a spectral messianicity is at work in the concept of the archive” (27). If the archive is

figured as capable of inscribing within in it phantom desires and unconcreted futurities, Carla Freccero’s discussion of ‘queer spectrality’ becomes furthermore useful. For Freccero, this spectrality speaks to “the affective force of the past in the present, of a desire issuing from another time and placing a demand on the present” (163). Similar to the erratic non-linear narratives explored in Chapter 1, *Galaxie Érotique* is a zine which fundamentally rejects a unified subject and instead relies upon the abstract visual materialization of desires. It reads as intimate poetry: “Tes courbes vont dans le même sens que mes caresses, parfois se perdent sans gâcher leurs saveurs, et, s’oublent, assommées, devant un ordinateur.” The abstract imagery of desire works to embrace the gradual and inevitable dissolution of physicality, culminating in this structure of desire as an instance of incorporeal, fragmented *jouissance* (Figure 4.3): “quand nos rencontres se heurtent à nos envies... qui rencontrent l’infini”.



Figure 4.6. From JQNUS, *Galaxie Érotique*, 2018.

This final culminating image calls to mind Cvetkovich’s remark that “self-shattering is not just a metaphor but a fleshly enactment of survival as an ordinary or everyday miracle” (18). Particularly true and urgent for queer desire which is historically bound by patriarchal and colonial visions of cis-heteronormativity, self-shattering and breaking apart desire

becomes stances of resistance. In *Galaxie Érotique*, the shifting of space occupied by desire from a physical, worldly setting to that of a fragmented and infinite formation does not indicate an inevitable suspension; we might think to José Esteban Muñoz's central claim in "Ephemera as evidence" that ephemera do not disappear, but leaves "traces, glimmers, residues, and *specks* of things" (10). Though fundamentally transformed, desire as an affective quality resides, transforming its ephemerality into the ceaseless infinite. Returning to Freccero's understanding of queer spectrality as preserving transient affects onward into an unimaginable future, *Galaxie Érotique* functions doubly as itself a piece of 'ephemera' which stretches the bounds of supposed transience. It furthermore transmits its proper "traces, glimmers" of desire as documentary "evidence of queer lives, powers, and possibilities" (Muñoz 6). If we are to read this zine as another invocation of the bricoleur and the pieced-together nature of works created by historically oppressed communities, it seems JQNUS expounds that explosive rupture, too, can be a valid interpretation of creative liberation.

For zines, as we have seen, this process of documenting "lives and possibilities" relies upon a variety of materials and machines. I am interested here in examining how zines, and the "radical archives of emotion" (Cvetkovich 241) they might evoke, could be situated within the destabilized material reality of post-digital zine production. Here, too, is a space where the limits of ephemeral existence are shattered by the perceived permanency invoked by online spaces. Miloš Hroch notes in "Not Out of Date, but Out of Time: The Materiality of Zines and Post-digital Memory" that zine and their various communities are the sum of "an assemblage of different bodies, spaces, objects, machines and capital" (21). Amy Spencer writes: "the networks that developed through zine distribution mirror in many ways



the internet communities that exist today” (33). Even prior to the advent of zine culture on the internet, Spencer conveys how it nonetheless operated as “a network, a trail, much like the linked computer network,” (33). The post-digital era introduces into the domain of zines “new speculative strategies and poetics” which enable the establishment of a “complex architecture for thinking and creating within contemporary institutional, economic, environmental, and technological constraints and possibilities” (Bishop 13). These new technological “constraints and possibilities” posed by post-digitality, in effect, multiply the methods by which zinesters might engage with expression, documentation, and preservation of their affective experiences.

The post-digital signals our collective arrival at a time where “the integral parts of our lives have been digitized,” with one result being that sense of time is so affected that “past, present, and future collide,” within the same space (Hroch 20). It remains relevant here, both as something which necessarily feeds the chaos of 21<sup>st</sup> century existence, but furthermore in underlining how the attitudes surrounding zines have, in fact, always resided in a state of fluid adaptability given the context of historical structures at play. Duncombe’s identification of zines as pre-digital anecdotes to magazines (18), while valuable at the time, certainly does not account for today’s mass digitization of zines and zine archives wherein the act of ‘being’ online plays a key role in their production and distribution. The post-digital era is consequentially one which is rooted in the fundamental interconnectedness of old and new media, prompting the need for recurrent reconsiderations of how zines fit into that mix.

*Brûle-moi* by Bérénice Tresorier is a zine that sticks out as a representation of how the coalescence of past and present might be embodied as it relates to “new constraints and possibilities” (Bishop 13). To speak first of its material nuances, the zine is unlike any of the



Figure 4.7. From Bérénice Tresorier, *Brûle-moi*, 2019.

booklets we have seen thus far. It is printed on a roll of receipt paper and coiled around a small, match-like piece of wood (Figure 4.4). The unraveling process of the zine leaves an unmistakable impression on the reader experience: in one respect, it results in a process of required play, as the reader must physically work to unravel the contents in order to read the zine, and finally roll it back up as an act of respectful maintenance. Though necessitating and embracing technology as its site of production, the reader experience is distinctly tangible as a result, thus scrambling the expectations of a technology/tactility duality and instead posits them as functionally homogenous. However, its form additionally renders its documentation into an online form (scanning for social media or onto an archive, for example) notably tedious, yet possible. While the reader becomes a participant in the exercise of this zine's fruition by being prompted to unravel in order to reveal what is within, this engagement is furthermore book-ended by a direct invitation to participate in its destruction — the title, the closing line, and the material contents of the zine contain the imperative instruction, “brûle-moi”.

As Hroch notes about post-digital zines, we encounter the indication that the discursive and material are capable of sharing “the same space, and both are articulated in the non-hierarchical relationship, where one influences the other” (25-26). An understanding of

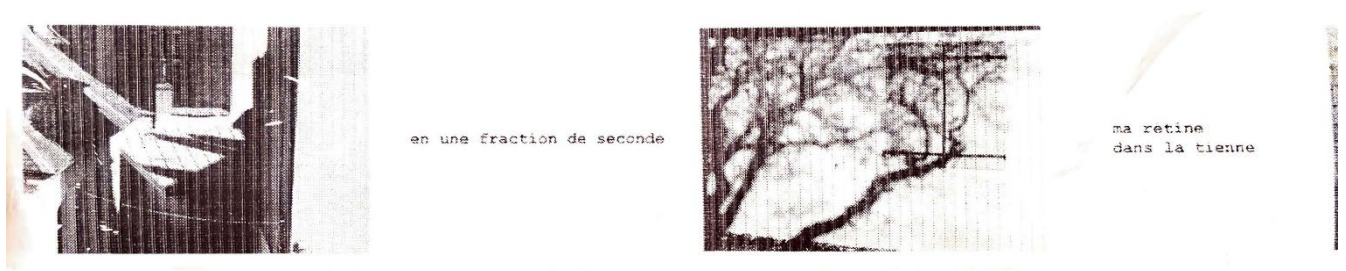


Figure 4.5. From Bérénice Tresorier, *Brûle-moi*, 2019.

the zine’s unhurried textual narrative is informed by the measured gestures required to successfully unravel a narrative. The textual ‘thread’ of the zine is one that is similarly marked by a procedure of slowing down; here, this is achieved through short lines of poetic enjambment posed between various urban imagery (Figures 4.5): “en une fraction de seconde / ma rétine dans la tienne / fragmente mon souffle et / tranche le chaos.” Tresorier decorates the zine with urban photos of architecture, graffiti, street-pot holes, and interior stairwells, as if we are following along a daily commute and interactions with the day-to-day material where cultures and ideas are merged together, and additionally posits the day-to-day navigations of the city as a site of artistic production. The images are markedly digitized and distorted by a static reminiscent of a channel-less television screen. With all of these various threads combined, *Brûle-moi* could be seen alternately as a roll of film, as a receipt of commodity purchase, as an ancient scroll. The material and the textual so combined into a knot-like structure, the directionality of old/new media as either indicative of past or of futurity is meaningfully revised. Hroch remarks that such an approach “upsets the hegemony of digital immateriality,” and works to “extend our perception beyond the blue screens and sets of discourses surrounding them to touch and intimacy” (17). Ultimately, Hroch contends that the omnipresence of post-digital culture radically alters the ways in which we are able to create within the process of archiving memories and expressions (28), to the effect that the supposed gap between hapticity and discursivity is collapsible.

Indeed, technology has always been an integrated aspect of zine production, from the wave of Xeroxing to the scissors and glue used for collaging, and all the way back to the first simple gesture of putting hand to pen to pamphlet. Florian Cramer is an art historian and comparative literature scholar that focuses on multidisciplinary and DIY art practices, writing that “material creation from the word is an idea central to magic in all cultures; it is precisely what magic spells perform... at its core, a technology, serving the rational end of achieving an effect” (14). In likening the input-output operation of software systems to that of the “radically pragmatic and goal oriented” act of magic, Cramer remarks that it is not surprising that magic continues living on in software (15). ‘Old’ media forms (like zines, like affective ephemera) similarly do not die out in the process of digitization, and instead “carry their history with them” (22) as they are continually re-purposed through the passing of time. The ongoing presence of zines and their entanglement within in a 21<sup>st</sup> century post-digitality signals a new stage in the form’s ongoing history, one which has been typified by continual investments in dialogues of self-destruction and reinvention.

The postface of *Ratcharge* speaks poignantly to this, as Simon writes that “si l’apprenti romancier que je suis” were able to convey something to the young creator of fanzines that he was, “c’est la fois... toute-puissante dont le réel objet n’est pas une communauté ni une utopie ni un style de musique, mais une façon de faire” (147). Here, the bounds between author-of-novel and author-of-zines does not encounter the same rigid categorization as has previously been supposed; instead, the attitude of zine making is imagined as one which can be fluidly applied, adapted, and informed by other creative modes of expression. It is, above all, a way of doing and a way of creating, which is not an immutable mode of behavior suitable only to zines. We have seen that among the attitudes

driving zine production is a concerted effort to navigate a capital-culture system wherein human affects, creative expressions, and identities are whittled down to market-driven constructs, to exchanges of labor and profit. To future zine makers, Simon writes that, if anything, zine making has taught the possibility “à travailler selon nos propres règles, sans rien attendre en retour” (147).

In many ways, each of the explored zines carries Simon’s sentiment at their core, seeking always to break with a restrictive status quo, looking inward and onward for opportunities to imagine something new. For many, this involves staking a claim on disarray, on anger, on hope, and on leaning into the chaos as a way to restructure how we conceive of identity and social change. In the process, all of the shifting materials at our disposal and which present themselves as ready to be newly assembled are pulled together into new shapes and spaces of harboring creative expression, just as the position of the *bricoleur* would entail. This is how zinesters profit from the marginal remnants of a hierarchical society which commodifies identity and delineates structurally which histories are worthy of preserving. Not only do zines reflect intimate narratives and reflections of the intersecting self, community, and politics, but they do this with a spirit of creation and of meaningful bricolage that is thus materialized and preserved. A note in Foucault’s “La Vie des Hommes Infâmes” privileges “le désordre, le bruit...le travail du pouvoir sur les vies, et le discours qui en naît” (30); I remark that an appreciation for ‘noisiness’ and disorder could be gleaned as well from zine creation and seen in the continuation of a discursive creative economy constructed against standard print publishing. Yet, zines lives read as not so stifled as Foucault’s internment records. Despite the oft-prescribed ephemerality of zines, zinesters

have utilized the agility of the form to invest directly in the creative communities surrounding them and coming before them, in order to keep that moving energy alive.

Throughout this project, I was never not surprised by how difficult it was to find a zine, even in this newly post-digital world where everything is imagined to exist at the touch of our fingertips. Increasingly vast in scope, the internet's winding avenues renders zines just as elusive as they would be if tucked away on street corners, hidden in basements, stuffed in library shelves. It is this purposeful act of creating outward, into the void of fluid time and thought, without knowing who or where that content might reach, that continues to evolve in form, and which renders the field of zines ever fascinating and worth exploring. Future projects set on the world of French zines might consider looking more closely at the leap many zine makers make into blogs, self-published novels, or independent magazines as indicative of this ebb and flow process of re-invention. Just as the innovative ways zine makers continue to utilize the form will inevitably crumble and shift into newness, zine scholarship will, too, need to acquire an agility in navigating such developments. We must commit to constantly reviewing our pasts with the intent of re-making ourselves into newness whenever necessary, by whatever tools necessary, stitch-by-stitch.

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