

## Introduction

In our struggle for responsibility, we fight against someone who is masked. The mask of the adult is called 'experience'. It is expressionless, impenetrable, and ever the same. The adult has already experienced everything: youth, ideals, hopes ... It was all an illusion. Often we feel intimidated or embittered. Perhaps he is right. What can our retort be? We have not yet experienced anything. (Benjamin 'Experience' 3)

Before he became an influential philosopher of culture and capitalism, Walter Benjamin was a young person. Like many young people today, he was also a formidable theorist of youthful experience; however, these writings are not frequently referred to in youth studies or in fields such as cultural studies, where Benjamin's theories are often in use. Benjamin's short essay 'Experience', written when he was twenty-one, speaks with his characteristic insight about the central problem facing the young: that they are lauded, and hated, for their lack of experience, that they are denied any serious political or cultural respect because experience is seen (by the dominant, adult culture) as the necessary condition for such respect. In Benjamin's critique,

youth is followed 'by grand "experience", the years of compromise, impoverishment of ideas, and lack of energy' (4)—at least, that is the state the young are told they must achieve before they will be taken seriously. Writing eighty years after Benjamin, youth studies theorist Henry Giroux describes a situation which is essentially unchanged:

Youth as a complex, shifting, and contradictory category is rarely narrated in the dominant public sphere by the young ... they are restricted from speaking in those spheres where public conversation shapes social policy and refused the power to make knowledge consequential with respect to their own collective needs. (Giroux 24)

Later arguments such as Giroux's posit the attention paid to young people in the media and academia as a homogenising discursive force. Several theorists have recently argued that the discourses of youth are structured by external, adult influences such as the interests of consumer capitalism (Latham), a new critical field such as cultural studies (Evans) or, as Benjamin argued to his youth club counterparts in 1913, the persistent trivialisation of youthful experience by a sentimental adult culture ('Experience'). These discursive critiques of the concept of youth encourage us to consider the historical contingency of young people whose 'common experiences ... [are] examined not from the standpoint of their own perspectives but more often than not as evidence of the nature of capitalism, or of the growth of the humanitarian conscience' (Hendrick 1). In his article 'Hiding in the Light: Youth Surveillance and Display', Dick Hebdige observes that 'the category "youth" gets mobilised in official ... discourse ... when young people make their presence felt by going "out of bounds", by resisting through rituals, dressing strangely, striking bizarre attitudes, breaking rules, breaking bottles, windows, heads, issuing rhetorical challenges to the law' (17–18).

The close reading of personal zines offers one avenue of investigation which, by taking narratives of youthful experience produced by the young as its focus, seeks to put the perspective of young people at the centre without that attention being drawn by the spectacle usually associated with youth subcultures. The predominantly invisible nature of zine culture sits in sharp distinction to the dominance of

the visual and the visible in studies of youth (Hebdige). Such a reading can extrapolate the discourses and modes of employment employed by young people to communicate their experiences and provide valuable additional material to the analysis of the issues facing youth in contemporary Australia.

However, any engagement between the mainstream or the academy and a subculture is bound to be fraught, and has the potential to produce dissatisfaction on both sides. Zinester and underground filmmaker Bruce LaBruce performs this tension when he spends several pages problematicising his invitation to write about queercore fanzines for an anthology on gay and lesbian popular culture:

I'm not going to be a fucking sentimentalist now, and I'm not going to write about punk, because whenever anybody tries to, they come off sounding really stupid. Punk isn't supposed to be written about, just like 'queercore' fanzines aren't supposed to be catalogued and historicised and analysed to death, for Christ's 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. (LaBruce, 193)

In his cynical and playful assessment of what might be gained from writing about queercore fanzines, LaBruce exposes the specific challenges zines present to institutionalised modes of reading and valuing texts. Epitomised by the inevitable fading of photocopied text, LaBruce portrays the disposable, ephemeral zine and the reified practices of cataloguing and analysing which are seen to define the critical process as locked in an irreconcilable opposition. Many Australian zinesters will no doubt agree that zines are better off in the bin than in an academic monograph. However, this book rejects this opposition between disposability and analysis by proposing a methodology for reading ephemeral texts such as the zine that does not seek to *fix* them or pin them like butterflies underneath the glass of academic categorisation. We, as readers, can develop the skills and sensitivities the zines seek to coax out of us; rather than taming them, we can allow them to influence, change and expand our reading practices.

Like the diary manuscripts read by Cynthia Huff, zines employ a 'visual rhetoric [which] uses sensory data to complicate and extend spatial and perceptual boundaries beyond the merely written' (518). In recognising the zine as a medium of writing and publishing deserving of close textual interpretation, this rhetoric and its interface with narrative become of primary interest. This approach contributes to, and to an extent challenges, existing critical approaches to zines that have maintained a distance from the specificities of zine texts by focusing on the social and political organisation of zine culture (see Duncombe; Harris; Atton; McLaughlin). The detailed interpretation of personal zine narratives presented here seeks to establish that the zine can be fruitfully introduced into broader critical considerations of writing and reading, taking auto/biography scholarship as the case in point.

At the same time, we will investigate how 'form and subjectivity work together' (Huff 508) in personal zines to present consistent thematic preoccupations; the bedroom, consumption, depression and a relationship with the past will be established as issues common to the autobiographers publishing in Australian zine culture. These themes also powerfully shape the construction of subjectivity in the texts. A focus on unpacking the notion of zine culture as a narrative community, using close reading and narrative analysis to establish how this community works to construct and perpetuate discourses and strategies for the representation of individual identities and shared experiences, is central to this project. This element of the work contributes to auto/biography scholarship by presenting an empirical study of a previously untheorised mode of life writing, and by illustrating how existing methods of reading auto/biography can be applied to life writing texts which occur outside traditional, mainstream publishing, while at the same time undergoing augmentation in the process of interpreting these texts.

Unlike diary manuscripts or other handmade objects of communication such as letters, personal zines are created and circulate within an existing population of readers and thus do not need to be brought to readers by being 'accepted for publication', and 'fulfil[ing] several criteria of accessibility' (Temple 77). Indeed, the reading and writing practices that constitute zine culture give compelling evidence that everyday (that is, non-specialised and non-academic)

readers are interested in developing reading strategies which extend beyond those encoded in mass-produced, professionally published texts. Furthermore, zines eschew the value attached to the 'accessible text' as both a mass-produced object available for purchase in a plethora of locations and as an ideology of text construction and layout, in favour of intimate, handmade and decidedly gestural text-objects which invite the reader to negotiate the gaps in texts that often present themselves as proudly messy. Jennifer Sinor suggests that in making such texts zinesters are 'some of the most savvy life writers I know' (242); however, I believe that it is as a community of adventurous writers *and* readers that zine culture offers a compelling instance of people developing savvy modes of representation which seek to reward adventurous readers with handmade gifts, unique narratives, and a distinctive and intimate connection to the author. To this end, I hope to demonstrate how zine producers make a decisive contribution to the nuances of the reader/writer relationship in contemporary autobiography through their unique experiments with narrative and materiality.

Finally, I aim to exemplify how a 'collaged and contextualised' (Huff 508) reading strategy may be constructed in response to complex and deeply situated texts. The reading method practised here traverses many modes of reading, using genre-specific narrative theory in the case of the Gothic, reader-response theory, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism and readings of materiality and affect in an attempt to expand upon the unique sense of possibility and intrigue which comes with holding a zine in your hands. Moreover, the strategy is to foreground the zines themselves, presenting a range of quotations and images to facilitate the readers' ability to assess the interpretation offered here against their own reading of the text. Of course, this can only truly be done by coming into contact with the publications themselves. Thus, I have attempted to theorise and dramatise the affective and narrative meanings perzines seek to communicate, and those which they also construct and rely upon through their circulation in a specific economy of gifting and exchange.

In summary, I hope to demonstrate how to negotiate the anxieties of 'disciplin[ing] undisciplined subjects' (Duncombe 15) which is often attendant in subcultural studies by taking the risk of not accepting 'that it is easy to dismiss as uncomplicated or juvenile what

a 16-year-old girl ... is writing late at night at her computer' (Sinor 242). By reading zine narratives against contemporary discourses of youth, it becomes possible to flesh out the dialectical relationship perzines create with mainstream, adult, consumer society and their critique of its assumed dominance. To an extent, this dialectic is dependent on perzine-makers embracing the potential of juvenilia, of marking their territory and engaging their readers precisely through the stereotypes of adolescence and adolescent immaturity of style that prohibit their access to established cultural forms. After all, many readers (zinesters among them) could easily resituate the analysis of narratives of depression presented here as merely 'teen angst' and let that be the end of it. But to do so would radically impoverish our investigation of writing and reading practices in contemporary culture; and it would only serve to validate the suspicion among many involved in DIY culture that 'to explain is to weaken' (LaBruce 192).

### **Defining the zine**

The development of an informed reading practice for the zine must negotiate several issues, the first of which is the problem of defining it. To date, most critical definitions of zines take their status as the products of amateurs or alternative presses as the central defining feature of the publications. This approach foregrounds the zine form as the result of low-budget, unprofessional and often haphazard modes of production. An example of this can be found in Stephen Duncombe's definition of the zine in the opening pages of *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*: 'zines are non-commercial, non-professional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute themselves' (6). Similarly, Chris Atton sees zines as defined by 'the processes, formations and significations that constitute zine culture', presenting zines as particular instantiations of social relations constructed through the media (*Alternative* 59–61).

Any attempt to devise a succinct and suitably flexible definition of the zine form is bound to be troubled. As a mode of subcultural publishing, zines are characterised by their material form, as well as by their content, mode of production and circulation. To begin with form, the zine can have any number of physical features and variations in dimensions, weight, paper stock, and binding; indeed, zines

are characterised by an ever-expanding use of materials. Some examples taken from the zine collection gathered over the four years of research that inform this book illustrate the diversity of physical characteristics: *Canteen Zine* is a small photocopied publication bound with staples which comes in the long rectangular greaseproof paper bag used to serve a chicken and corn roll; *Grrowl #3* is A5 in portrait orientation and photocopied on red paper; *Kitsch* zine is A6 and bound with staples and gaffer tape, and mixes pages of white paper with transparencies, both printed with text and images; a copy of the weekly zine *YOU* was presented as an A4 page photocopied on both sides, folded and placed in a cassette tape case. The physical diversity of the publications, their extensive range of sizes, colours, shapes and use of materials, is itself constitutive of the zine form. That is, there is little use in offering a physical description of the 'typical' Australian zine, when it can only offer an arbitrary set of attributes that reduce the eclectic features of different zines to a constructed, normalised form.

Zines are also defined by their specific materials and strategies. The recycling of pre-existing media material and found-text in collage, the use of the photocopier as the means of production, and the personalisation of the photocopied text are common features of Australian zines. With this in mind, zine production may be considered a kind of art practice, defined by the application of particular materials and skills in the production of a specific kind of object. This approach is adopted by Liz Farrelly in the book *Zines*, which presents visual documentation of a wide range of zines, eschewing content in favour of examining the unique graphic design and text-building characteristics of the publications. The variety of publications analysed in this book is intended to give the reader a clear indication of their physical diversity.

Attempting to build upon this kind of material characterisation of zines with a description of their content further complicates matters. Duncombe attempts to map the diversity of topics covered in zines by producing a 'zine taxonomy', which offers the following genres of zines: fanzines (broken down into subcategories by subject, that is, music and sports), political zines, personal zines, scene zines (covering local and community events in the zinester's area), network zines (which review zine publications), fringe culture zines (covering

UFOs, conspiracy theories and so on), religious zines, vocational zines (detailing 'life on the job'), health zines, sex zines, travel zines, comix, literary zines, art zines and 'the rest' (9–13). While many of these genre distinctions reflect divisions operating within zine culture itself—for example, Sydney's (now defunct) Vox Populis Zine Distro catalogue includes the categories general zines, comix, music, art zines—the collapse of Duncombe's taxonomy into 'the rest—a large category' underscores the futility of attempting to solidify or organise a definition of zines based on their content. As Kirsty Leishman argues: 'Duncombe's work reveals that zines are ill contained and thus it is useful because it relieves subsequent researchers from pursuing such an arduous, yet futile, endeavour' (7). Chris Atton also suggests that the generality of the taxonomy, and its unavoidable dissolution into 'the rest', offers little guidance for the construction of a definition of zines (*Alternative* 58–9). A more useful categorisation of the contents of zines is offered when Duncombe himself says that 'zines span almost every field, from the sublime to the ridiculous, making a detour through the unfathomable' (9). The unquantifiable diversity of topics covered in zines resists a content-based definition, and is one reason why several critics have chosen to focus on specific kinds of zines, such as those produced in the riot grrrl movement and British football culture where the zine is interpreted as serving particular topical interests, rather than adhering to a specific generic format (see Harris; Haynes). The problems presented by the ever-expanding diversity of topics covered by zines are one explanation for the prevalence of the emphasis on the broader practices of zine culture such as mode of media production in critical studies of zines, as well as reflecting the expansion of zine-making and reading beyond the specific practices of fanzine publications which were dominant earlier in the twentieth-century (see Wertham).

I have chosen the personal zine—or 'perzine' as it is commonly known—as the zine best suited to an investigation of the narrative and representational modes of the contemporary zine. As well as being a popular style of zine-making in both Australian and America at this time, the personal zine is often positioned in scholarly work on zines as exemplifying the characteristics of self-publishing (Sinor 243) and therefore, as we shall see in Chapter 1, is an important subject for further investigation in the nascent field of zine research.

As an autobiographical mode, the perzine is adopted by life writers who are not traditional authors of autobiography. Current scholarly analysis on zines has emphasised that zine culture is made up of young writers and readers predominantly under the age of thirty-five, and more commonly adolescents, who do not have established cultural sites reserved for their self-representation (Harris; Sinor; Schilt; Leishman). For this reason they propose an exciting challenge for autobiography and cultural studies, as the close analysis of perzine narratives requires the development of a framework for interpreting how age-specific discourses contribute to the construction of identities in life writing, responding to what Kathleen Woodward has argued is the consistent invisibility of age as a category of social division (90).

Thus this investigation resists LaBruce's diagnosis of the terminal effects analysis may have on the zine. In assuming that the interpretation of zines will necessarily result in the demise of the texts, LaBruce posits the practices of cataloguing, historicising and analysis as the only tools available to the critic, and assumes that they necessarily have destructive consequences for their subject. This anxiety about the effects of analysis is shared by Andy Medhurst, who is suspicious of the capacity of cultural studies to account for punk:

Analysing punk through the chilly lenses of academia can only subject that passion, my passion, to scepticism and challenge. It could be argued that scepticism and challenge are exactly what should constitute the core of politically responsible academic practice, and ninety-nine times in a hundred I'd completely agree, but I still flinch from taking the analytical scalpel to punk. (Medhurst 228)

Chilly lenses, scalpels and death need not be the fate of the zine when approached with a critical gaze, and while these concerns are often grounded in fears about how analytical practice approaches marginal texts, they are also founded in assumptions regarding the scholar's role as a privileged arbiter of meaning.

Philippe Lejeune offers a means of breaking this deadlock by rejecting the role of the critic as a 'definer' and adopting the position of the reader:

By taking as the starting point the position of the reader, (which is mine, the only one I know well), I have the chance to understand more clearly how the texts function (the differences in how they function) since they were written for us, readers and in reading them, it is we who make them function. (Lejeune 4)

As I discuss later in this introduction, it is precisely as readers, and not as undertakers, definers or assassins, that zines seek our engagement. Yet scholars reading zines have intimated that this is no easy task, as Jennifer Sinor suggests in her recent article 'Another Form of Crying: Girl Zines as Life Writing', where she articulates the issues facing the critic reading zines in highly personal terms:

I am a fraud. Writing about girls zines like Valerie's, asking girls and young women across the country, strangers, to send me their writing, their self-published souls, fills me with uneasiness. Not only have I never written a zine, the politics they practice—leftist, feminist, gay-positive—are beliefs I came to as an adult. My adolescence was far less informed, far less empowered, and far more marked by passive conformity. I poach. I ramble the pages, read their anger, consume their passion and their complexity. They awe me, but they are not me. (Sinor 240)

For Sinor the aura of intimacy around personal zines forces her to confront her position as a reader situated beyond the realm of readership imagined by the texts. On the one hand, Sinor's uneasiness is a recognition that the critical analysis of zines occurs outside their sub-cultural context; yet the awkwardness of receiving such personal and often confessional texts from strangers is, I will argue, a constitutive part of the zine medium. While zine culture is often interpreted as an underground network or subculture—terms that imply connection and knowingness—Australian perzine narratives exert much energy reflecting on and constructing a reader who is not known to the author. In this way they explicitly confront the reader with their personal and productive role in the text, a confrontation LaBruce takes up by challenging his reader to 'throw your fanzines away right now'.

Rather than disposing of zines, Jennifer Sinor suggests that ‘zines do not arrive “already read” in the way other texts do’, arguing that we need to contextualise the production and circulation of zines to understand the way they function as autobiographical texts (242). Going beyond the parameters of Sinor and LaBruce’s articles, I propose that we should investigate the physical and narrative idiosyncrasies of the perzine as dramatising and exaggerating the characteristics of all textual encounters. In both their narrative qualities and their materiality, zines provoke reflection on cultural permanence. Their circulation and construction within a specific cultural practice is in distinct contrast to institutionalised, globalised and capitalist modes of textual production and reception, where the practices of professional publishing are ‘associated with fixity, permanence and a consequent gravity’ (Rivett 31). The reading stance(s) required by the zine draw our attention to and disrupt established methods of reading, textual analysis and critical practice.

In this respect, this analysis is also concerned with questions of production. Personal zines do not share many of the characteristics of the texts that make up the bulk of sources studied in literary or cultural studies and, more specifically, scholarship on auto/biography. Of central importance to these non-traditional texts is the fact that zines are not mass-produced; they are not published by a professional publishing house, and thus not ‘sanctioned as significant by [their] status as a mass produced commodity’ (Huff 510). Moreover, zines are not easily available, do not participate in standardised modes of presentation and distribution, and are not well recognised within literary communities or among the reading (most commonly constituted as ‘book-buying’) public. Zines are homemade, ephemeral and amateur. They circulate among communities of readers through the mail, in out-of-the-way spaces, and are passed around hand-to-hand among social groups. They are also non-traditional because of the modes of emplotment that characterise them; in the case of personal zines, we find a unique mixture of established modes of life writing, such as the diary, alongside zine-specific narratives such as cut’ n’paste collage. These material and textual idiosyncrasies challenge the literary critic to practise ‘connected reading’, which Gillian Whitlock describes as a practice which ‘pulls at the loose threads of autobiography, and uses them to make sutures between,

across and among autobiographical narratives' (*Intimate Empire* 204). Thus this book seeks to further the field of zine studies by bringing these sensitive and investigative reading strategies to perzine texts, and considering how we can extend the practice of connected reading to texts which perform the 'loose threads' explicitly in their material and narrative presentation.

### **The zine economy**

Most people have not heard of zines because they are not easy to find (unless you know where to look) and their lifespan—as objects circulating in a particular economy—is short. The producer of a zine can run out of copies in a few hours at a zine fair, or may mail out the entire print run to their readers in the course of a day. The particularities of the zine economy indicate the ephemeral nature of the publications themselves.

Australian zines are circulated by three main strategies: commission selling through online distributors and sympathetic stores, direct distribution of zines at zine fairs and markets and individual postal circulation. In Australia, most zines are priced between one and five dollars, with some publications costing up to fifteen dollars. Consignment selling in Australian zine culture is practised in two distinct ways. One is through online zine distributors, which are run on volunteer labour by zinesters or individuals dedicated to zine reading, and offer a service to zinesters by advertising and selling zines through mail order. In the last few years the two largest and best-known online distributors of Australian zines, Smitten Kitten Zine Distro (see Zobl) and Vox Populis (see Amelia), have both folded and this practice is currently waning as a means of national distribution. The most important function undertaken by these zine distributors was on the international stage, giving Australian zine culture a definable showcase online and linking it with the zine cultures of the United States, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Distributors such as Smitten Kitten and Vox Populis also stocked zines from overseas, offering Australians a relatively simple means of accessing zines from other countries by circulating overseas publications through the domestic postal service, rather than individuals having to seek them out and order them internationally. Online distributors are also one of the most public sites of zine accessibility, allowing anyone to obtain zines

without direct engagement with the individuals who produce them. Current examples of online distributors based in Australia include Fat Cheeks Distro, based in Perth, Disruption Distro in South Australia, and Crimson Regret in Sydney.

Selling zines on consignment in sympathetic stores is a more haphazard process, where some stores have established reputations for selling zines (such as Polyester Books in Melbourne) while other stores may briefly stock zines whilst a zinester is a member of staff. Operating on the basic philosophy of consignment where money is received once all the goods are sold, this method of distribution is usually only taken up by zinesters who are willing and able to negotiate the business relationship it requires. Consignment selling in stores requires infrastructure support for the production of invoices, the on-going visits to the store to collect payment and restock, a matter further complicated by the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax in 2000, which requires the producer to collect and pay to the tax office the 10% tax due on their goods. The percentage of zines produced which are stocked in independent book and record stores is low and would constitute less than 20% of the zines in circulation.

The exception to this is Sticky, a zine-dedicated store operated as an artist-run initiative in Melbourne, Victoria. Sticky has a high turnover of stock from both Australia and overseas, and is organised around the principles of an art space rather than a commercial outlet, which relieves it from the pressures of making profit from sales. As the only fixed physical site dedicated to the sale of zines in the country, many institutions seeking information or to collect zines do so solely through Sticky. This has given Sticky the ancillary task of being a point of intersection between established educational, art and community institutions and the decidedly ephemeral zine culture. In recent years Sticky has extended this role by hosting excursions of school groups and presenting zine workshops to schools and local libraries.

Another means of circulating zines has more recently developed in the organisation of zine fairs. Several urban local councils, arts organisations and community groups throughout Australia now organise zine fairs, which most commonly take the form of a market where zinesters are stall holders. These fairs involve the direct sale of zines as well as trade, with zinesters mixing with readers and other interested parties in a market environment. While money-for-goods

exchange is accepted at these fairs, many zinesters have signs at their stalls explaining their preference for trade or barter. Usually exchange involves zine-for-zine trade, however some zinesters will trade for anything; at the Honey Bee zine fair held in the Sydney suburb of Newtown in 2003, three zinesters (who were also housemates) traded a selection of their zines for a kitten, who later featured in their zines (*Flight Path*, *Secret Archives of the Recent Past*). Many zinesters will also have free zines available, such as the perzines *Sleeping in the rain*, *Neverending Irony* and *You*. At the larger zine fairs, such as the one held at This Is Not Art in Newcastle, stallholders also include independent record labels, comic makers, small press, t-shirt and patch designers.

However, Australian zine culture's primary mode of distribution is the postal system, which is utilised both by distribution services and individual zinesters. A large part of zine circulation is conducted via one-on-one communication through the postal system, and this practice has influenced the development of an attendant letter writing culture. Once a trade relationship has been established, zinesters will often include their trade partners on mailing lists, transforming the negotiated trade relationship into a less structured one. Many zinesters I have made direct trades with subsequently send me each new issue of their zine, regardless of whether I had something to trade at the time. These implicit trade relationships—where each sends the other a new zine when it is completed—are more akin to connections established and maintained through practices of gifting, rather than being organised around explicit exchange. I will examine these practices in Chapter Six, which investigates how gifting is registered in the material form of the zine.

While these practices of gifting and exchange form the community of zinesters, many zinesters also give their zines away to family members and friends who are not part of the zine community. For example, the zine *Another Dental Visit #1* which details Carmen's experiences with depression and her research into the condition and its treatment, was initially produced as means of communicating with friends and family with whom Carmen wanted to share her experiences. In the introduction to the second printing of the zine, Carmen credits the positive feedback of the original readers for her decision to distribute it more widely. Zines are also commonly left in public

places: on trains, in cafes and pubs, and slipped between the pages of slick magazines in newsagents. These strategies extend the potential audience of the zine by placing them in spaces where they directly intersect with the public, and many zinesters practice only this kind of distribution, shunning the more organized aspects of zine culture. Adam Ford, for example, circulates his personal zine *Jutchy Ya Ya* mainly in these informal ways, handing them out in person at social events, leaving them in various public places and sending them through the mail to a small collection of recipients. The anonymous producer of *You* zine—a weekly letter addressed to ‘you’—leaves the zine in small piles in venues and community spaces around Melbourne, and also sends them to friends in other states and cities to leave in public places.

The practice of trade and gifting functions not only as a primary means of distribution but is also constitutive of how perzines construct and communicate meaning. Amy Spencer describes this aspect of zine culture as ‘the zine [being] passed physically through the network connecting people together, sharing a sense of solidarity in their interest in the underground of independent culture’ (15). While the physicality of zine networks has received some critical attention, this network and the practices that constitute it also function as the context in which zine narratives produce meaning. The trade transaction works upon the narratives presented in the publications as the text bears the trace of the negotiated exchange that brought it into the reader’s possession. This affective trace and its resonance within the act of reading is one of the features of zine culture I seek to address, as they raise questions regarding the affective difference in the experience of reading a text which you acquire by giving its author a kitten, or something you have made yourself. How do these factors contribute to the reader’s relationship to the narrative? These aspects of zine practice introduce new sets of considerations into the theorisation of the identifications and disidentifications occurring between the reader and the writer’s text (Miller 2-4) that extend beyond the function of the narrative into the physical and social components of text acquisition and reading. One response has already been illustrated in Jennifer Sinor’s assessment of herself as a fraudulent reader, where Sinor is unable to locate a position for herself within the narrative economy that delivered the texts to her through the mail.

Similarly, Thomas McLaughlin negotiates this complex positioning of the reader in the zine text by responding to the zine *Attitude Problem* by asserting 'I am of course exactly the reader he detests' (62). These negative reactions belie the complex investments of the zine in discourses of authenticity, youth and subculture that challenge readers who may fall outside the community. In McLaughlin and Sinor's encounters we see the institutionalised reader respond to these issues by self-effacement. However I believe we must be prepared to explore how we may respond to and engage personal zine narratives beyond acknowledging that they 'are not me' (Sinor 242), and by braving the possibility of 'com[ing] off sounding really stupid' (LaBruce 193).

These aspects of the zine economy stand in juxtaposition to the dominant world of professional publishing, where writer's festivals, readings and book-signings function as the special, rare events where authors 'step out' from behind their texts to become embodied subjects before their readers. These momentary instances of author and reader occupying a shared material space are predicated on pre-existing knowledge, constituted by fame or notoriety and an established literary career; in these instances the reader is already established as constituting the writer's audience. In their rarity these literary events constitute an uncommon mixing of the textual and the material which professional structures, constituted within discourses and practices of capitalism, professionalism, and hierarchy, usually work to keep segregated. Published authors can only usually be contacted through their publishers, their books accessed through the mediating institution of a bookshop or library, and their personal contact details, such as postal or email address and phone numbers, are protected information. In mainstream commercial culture, the absence of the author is a precondition of acquiring a text; a distance which frees the reader-as-consumer to select a text shielded from the gaze of its creator, which in turn structures the position of the individual reader as having no definable relationship with the individual author. Philippe Lejeune characterises this relationship as follows: '[f]or the reader, who does not know the real person, all the while believing in his existence, the author is defined as the person capable of producing this discourse, and so he imagines what he is like from what he produces' (11).

The practices of trade via the postal system or in person at zine fairs predicates access to the text on a personal exchange between the

potential reader and the author, and while this aspect of zine culture has received relatively substantial attention in critical commentaries on zines, the focus has been primarily on illustrating how these practices constitute a resistance to capitalist modes of exchange. By contrast, I believe that the specific reorganisation and reconstitution of the reader/author relationship in zine culture offers unique material for analysis to those of us interested in theorising practices of contemporary cultural reception. Moreover, the close reading of the textual and material characteristics of the perzine, and their dynamic interface occasions a re-evaluation of the elements of our reading practices which are structured by global late-capitalist systems of publishing, distribution and the mass-production of texts. This reconsideration may lead us to reconsider through what codes and practices the status of 'author' is constituted and with what assumptions the reader approaches the text. For example, the zine suggests a rejection of Lejeune's suggestion that the position of 'the author' of autobiography is predicated on the publication of several books, the existence of which lend veracity to his existence beyond the text (11–12). By contrast, the ephemeral, personal yet public circulation of zines constructs a very different concept of 'the author' which is embedded in discourses of independent cultural production, community building and experimentation with narrative and material form. The question then becomes how we read autobiographical texts that do not utilise the permanency and gravity associated with the book form to metonymically fix the author's identity, and existence, in the reader's mind.