7. ZINECRAFT

ZINES AS COMPANIONS TO GAMES RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Zines are small-circulation magazines that creators make themselves, often through simple means. Zines and zine creation are linked to marginalized voices, and have historically amplified the voices and perspectives of these communities. Their very design is personal, reflective and beginner friendly. Zines have also been used as, and alongside, research, including interdisciplinary research and games criticism. Though intersections between zines and games have been identified, zines remain largely underutilized in games studies. In this paper, we apply our individual creative practice methods to argue that zines can be created as

companions to games research and conferences. We argue that zine creation, as a companion to research, makes for more personal and relatable outputs, and helps the creator visualize, reflect and make previously unmade connections. Conference zines can be used to capture trends, record proceedings, and communicate personal experience. Games studies can benefit from embracing zines and their interdisciplinary potential.

KEYWORDS

fanzine, creative industries, creative practice, travelogue, conference

BACKGROUND

Zines are "non-commercial, non-professional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves" (Duncombe 1997, 6). Also known as fanzines, zines are considered DIY (do-it-yourself) publications that express "all variety of personal and political narratives" (Peipmeier 2008, 214). Historically, they have been used as a way for marginalized communities to express themselves and disseminate information.

Zines, and the scholarship surrounding them, are interdisciplinary in nature (Hays 2020). Zines can be about any subject, and made up of images, poetry, writing, collage, drawing and/or any other means of creativity. Zine-making has been used as a way for marginalized groups to document, reflect and call to arms. Similarly, zines have also been used in research to document and reflect on scientific subject learning (Brown, Hurley, Perry and Roche 2021; Dunwoody, 1992; Yang, 2010; ScienceGrrl, 2018; Liu, 2019), as part of social science and educational teaching pedagogy (DeGravelles 2011; Desyllas and Sinclair 2014) and as (self-)reflection tools (Lonsdale 2015). Zines have spanned several different subjects, like art, science, and social sciences, among others. The interdisciplinarity of zines and zine-making allow them to encompass and connect several seemingly separate spheres, especially as a means of reflection.

Zines have been used as an aid for students to reflect on their research experiences (Vong, 2016). We argue that zines are also powerful tools for research practitioners because the materiality of zines enables self-reflection, which is critical to understanding research, experiences and processes in a unique way. Biagioli finds that "Via the Zine Method, complex sets of elements can be represented in one package (the zine) letting ideas emerge from the active handling of the paper matter [...] by setting up the zine into a three-dimensional structure that refers to a larger concept taking shape in the mind of the participant" (2018, 2). The material nature of zines and the act of making them sheds light on the importance of the process and also the final product, allowing inferences and data collection to happen from multiple points. Zines offer a form of reflective support that makes them accessible to participants and researchers alike (Carlile and Jordan, 2007). While Biagioli has argued that zines can be used as a research method in and of themselves, we find that they function well as companions to research.

In this paper, we argue that zines can and should be embraced as a unique research tool for creative industries, especially games studies. Zines enable self-reflection through materiality, allowing the creator to process a myriad of different theories and narratives in a unique manner. Zines have the ability to physically capture data, information, and methods in a way that papers alone cannot.

Zines are an underutilized resource in games studies. For the most part, zines are equated with indie games and the DIY publication culture (Westecott 2013). Henderson and Iacovides argue in a 2020 DiGRA paper that "the culture of DIY groups, personal expression and social activism is well established in game creation" (2020, 3). They go on to equate the self-expressive elements and inherently playful creativity of vignette game design with the DIY culture of zines (Henderson and Iacovides, 2020). Similarly, Keogh describes the emergence of DIY developers making personal zine games, citing these developers as often taking advantage of the lower barrier of entry into videogame production for marginalized people (2015). Saklofske (2020) and Hughes (2017) argue that games criticism, rather

than scholarly games studies, have moved to alternative publishing formats like zines, blogs and websites.

Though parallels have been drawn between zines and indie games due to their methods of publication and self-expression, zines are largely absent from current games studies. We hope to demonstrate their interdisciplinary potential to the field. To do so, we have broken the article into sections that give context to our argument and method. First, we explore how the zine medium gained popularity in Sweden and influenced the games industry there. Then, we demonstrate the parallels between games and zines in a broader context, showing the various intersections between games and/as zines. In the following section, we discuss our individual creative practices using zines as research companions and reflection tools for academic conferences while documenting our methodologies. Finally, we detail our process for Nordic DiGRA's 2023 zine-making workshop, and suggest companion zines for future research and conferences.

ZINES IN SWEDEN

Before discussing zines and games as a whole, we have chosen to discuss the rise of zines in Sweden, and their connection to comics and games. Research into Sweden's creative industries prompted the creation of Hailey's travelogue zine and the creation of this paper. Hailey's report titled *Sweden's Female-Forward Creative Industries* found that comics and fanzines are an ingrained part of the Swedish culture that have shaped the current games industry there (Austin 2022b). Because, historically, comics and zines were adopted as high art early on in Sweden, they were well-integrated into Swedish culture as serious mediums and artefacts. The 1964 art exhibition titled *Amerikansk popkonst. 106 former av kärlek och förtvivlan* (*American Pop Art. 106 Forms of Love and Despair*) was the first Pop Art exhibition ever held by a major European art institution (Andersson 2017, 45). According to Krantz, this was a transformative part of both comics and fanzines in Sweden (2018, 268). This led to the first comic exhibition *Seriernas fantastiska värld* (*The Wonderful World of Comics*)

opening in December of 1965 (Krantz 2018, 268). The emergence of the Swedish Comics Association in 1968 led to a comic fanbase that began to share reviews and feedback, leading to fanzine fairs and fan meet-ups (Austin 2022b). The culture surrounding art in Sweden led to the popularity of comics and other forms of 'pop' art, and established fan cultures that produced fanzines. Krantz and Ingemar Bengtsson created an in-depth *Swedish Comics Index* in 2001 detailing all of the fanzine artists they were aware of at the time (Austin 2022b).

The rise of the feminist movement has also played a large role in the number of women making and consuming comics and zines around the globe. In particular, the Swedish feminist and punk scenes have created, and continue to create, a fervor and interest in fanzines. According to Nordenstam and Wallin Wictorin, original feminist comics were being produced in Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s, establishing comics as a feminist medium (2019, 77). These comics and fanzines were part of the women's liberation movement and socialist women's movements in the 1970s that were attempting to use activism and social movement to change the patriarchal world (Nordenstam and Wallin Wictorin 2019, 78). Zines also share commonalities with media used in earlier women's movements, such as scrapbooks, manifestos and pamphlets (Creasap 2014, 157). While in the 1970s there were only a few female comic artists active in Sweden, by the 1980s the number of women publishing comics in independent fanzines and in comic anthologies grew (Nordenstam and Wallin Wictorin 2019, 79). In 1986, there was an exhibition of comics at the Kulturhuset (Culture House) in Stockholm titled *Serier (Comics)* where art historians and other researchers published about comics (Sommerland and Wallin Wictorin, 2017, 3). A catalogue accompanied the exhibition titled *Boken om serier (The book about comics)* that discussed several prominent feminist comic creators such as Christina Alvner and Cecilia Torudd (Nordenstam and Wallin Wictorin 2019, 81).

In the 1980s, Swedish female humorists were working to be visible in the male-dominated cartoon landscape (Lindberg, 2016, 5). Women's creativity was restricted in the 1990s because comic creators

and editors were male-dominated (Lindberg 2016, 6; Strömberg 2012). However, there was a boom in alternative comics when feminist creators like Liv Stromquist published fanzines of their own and used fanzines as proof of concept for larger comic works (Austin 2022b). This led to the creation of the Serieteket (comic library), which is Sweden's foremost specialist library for comics, cartoon, zines, and graphic literature. In November 1996, Kristiina Kolehmainen and Elisabet Andersson created the Serieteket as part of the Stockholm public library system in Södermalm (Gardner 2016). They recognized that these forms of literature did not fit within the Swedish library classification system and were, instead, separate and deserving of their own classification (Gardner 2016). In October 1999, the Serieteket moved to the Kulturhuset in central Stockholm and later began hosting Fanzine Heaven, or the Small Press Expo for local comic and zine makers (Gardner 2016).

Zines have allowed women and girls to write about issues that were not written about anywhere else (Flannery 2005; Piepmeier 2008; Creasap 2014). As such, it is natural for zines to look to feminist tropes and women's involvement in Sweden's creative industries. With their ties to underground movements, zines are inherently feminist. Thus, zine-based methods reveal feminist movements and challenges in male-dominated spaces and cultures. Making zines elicits three principles of feminist pedagogy: "participatory learning, validation of personal experience, and the development of critical thinking skills" (Creasap 2014, 156; Hoffmann and Stake 1998).

Today, contemporary Swedish comic creators also tend to create fanzines to test their comic ideas and as part of serieskolan (comic school) (Austin 2022b). Fanzines are not only found in comics or zine conventions, but also through online distribution. In Sweden, newspaper shops and bookstores sell a broad spectrum of zines, from scratchy feminist comic-style works to highly polished books with high-quality printing and binding (Austin 2022b). The Serieteket also boasts an entire fanzine section of work made by local zinesters for loan from the library (Austin 2022b).

Zines in Sweden have a link to the popularity of comics and pop

art, the fan cultures surrounding that pop art, as well as feminism. Their popularity has aided the legitimacy of other creative industries in Sweden, including the games culture. Zines and games have intersected, and continue to intersect, in different ways.

ZINES AND/AS GAMES

Games and zines are not only linked to the rise of the Swedish creative industries, but also have similarities in and of themselves. Both games and zines give the creator (and player) the tools to transfer something intangible (in their minds) to another medium, whether on screen or on paper. They both fuel creativity. As discussed in the above section, zines contributed to the Swedish creative culture and were a companion to the popularity of games and gaming in Sweden. Internationally, we find that zines and games have several other intersections, such as being used as aids for game programming, zines made of games, games created as zines, and zines made as games criticism.

Anna Anthropy suggests in her book *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters* that games have the potential to be considered "as zines; as transmissions of ideas and culture from person to person, as personal artifact instead of impersonal creations by teams of forty-five artists and fifteen programmers" (2012, 9). Game creation can be like zine creation in that it transmits personal stories to broad audiences in a cost-effective manner and without mainstream publishing constraints. Just as zine creation is meant to steer away from established publishing houses, Anthropy argues that videogames should speak to more than just the people already engaged in making and playing them (2012, 16). The zine format and the culture surrounding zines are well suited to the task.

Dev Zines have been used and distributed in order to help digital games developers and other creators with different programming tools (devzines). Kate Compton's (@galaxyKate) zine titled *Tracery: A text generation JS Library* (n.d.) was made as part of her PhD (Figure 1). It is free and open-source, and details how other programmers can

use Tracery, her author-focused generative text tool, in order to "make generative text for NPC dialog, gameplay collectables, twitterbots, music and more" (galaxykate). The Tracery text tool itself is also designed for a broad audience of creators and as an open-source tool (Compton, Kybartas and Mateas 2015, 155). The zine that demonstrates how to use the text generation tool utilizes similar principles of accessibility and collaboration, further demonstrating the links between zines and games.

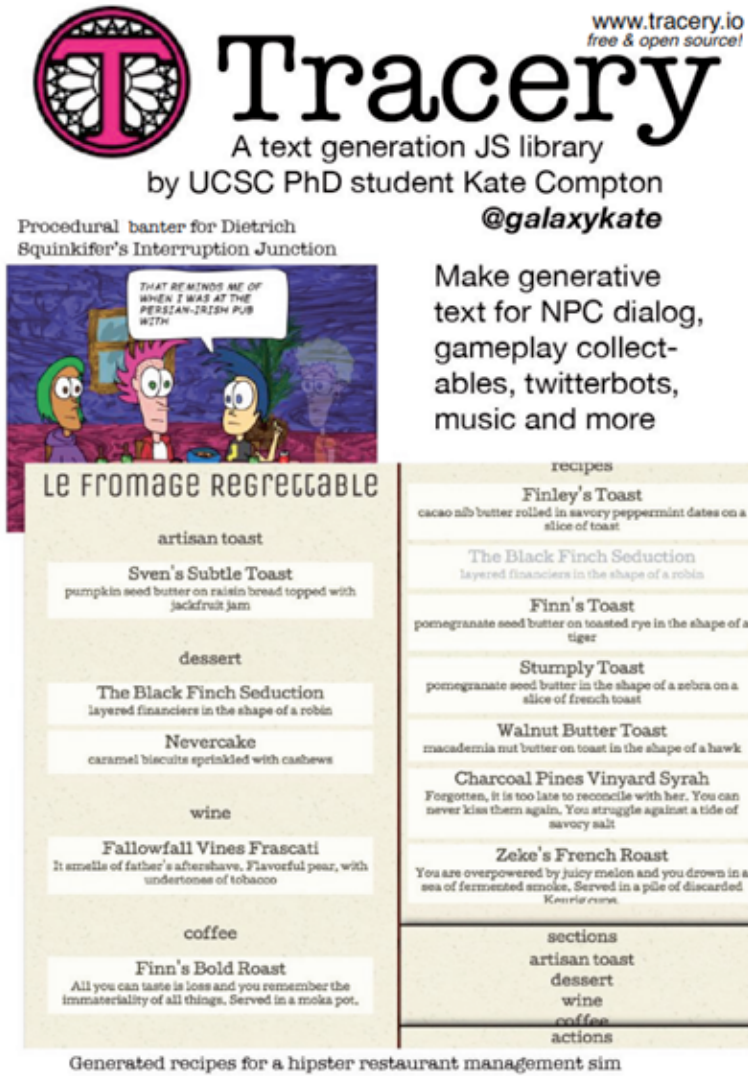

Figure 1: *@galaxykate (nd)* Tracery: A text generation JS library by UCSC PhD student Kate Compton. *[zine] Accessed 18 May 2023*

Similarly, Julia Evans' (@bork) Wizard zine collections break down fundamental programming tools in an accessible way. According to Evans, the wizard zines focus on "fundamentals: things that haven't changed much in the last 10 years and probably won't

change much in the next 10 either" (2021). Zines like *Oh Shit, Git!* and *HTTP: Learn your browser's language* help readers build foundational skills in program and languages that can be applied to other tools as well. These zines are informal, approachable, informational and often free to download, which helps lower the barriers for people wanting to get into games and programming, in an effort "to de-monopolize game creation [and, thus] to de-monopolize access to games" (Anthropy 2012, 16).

Roleplaying games and printable boardgames have historically shared similar methods and distribution channels as zines. They are often published as low-cost booklets that can be purchased at conventions, or directly from the author by mail. There are zines that are created to be played as games, like Everest Pipkin's *The Ground Itself* (c.2019), an RPG-style game printed as a zine. The crowdfunding platform, Kickstarter, also promotes zine-making RPGs every year in February through their ZineQuest event, which boasts nearly 1200 zine RPG games (Kickstarter). Zine games are not limited to role playing games or even paper-based games. Jo Reid's successfully Kickstarted 2023 game *Border Riding* is a collaborative map drawing game about borders and intergenerational trauma, inspired by the Scottish border riding tradition and its history.

Many comic creators, zinesters and game makers use Kickstarter to crowdfund their work, making digital creation and distribution outside of the mainstream more accessible than ever. As Anthropy points out, "It's now possible for people with no programming experience – hobbyists, independent game designers, zinesters – to make their own games and to distribute them online" (2012, 9).

Another platform for selling and housing games and zines is the open-source website, itch.io. It hosts numerous hobbyist and/or student games for little to no cost. One such game is Natalie Lawhead's (@alienmelon) Electric Zine Maker, a digital game that allows the player to create zines in an electronic format (Figure 2). The game maintains the look, feel, method and ethos of zines. It is a tool with a drawing interface where players can import images, write text, change fonts, smudge, paint, etc. in order to make zines. The

creator states that "some tools are meant to be playful, goofy and interesting. Exploring it is just as fun as creating in it!" (unicornycopia)

Figure 2: *alienmelon. n.d. Home page of* Electric Zine Maker. *https://alienmelon.itch.io/electric-zine-maker*

Lawhead's game can be accessed for free, and players are encouraged to give a donation for the continued refinement and development of the game. *Electric Zine Maker* was created and developed by one person "around the old-school concepts of sharing and distributing free small experimental software [...] a lot like what zines are" (unicornycopia). Several zines made using the program have been featured in *The Guardian* (Griffin 2021), and it was nominated for an IndieCade award in 2020 (McAloon, 2020). In the spirit of collaboration, another user, Jeremy Oduber, made an html template that turns zines made with the *Electric Zine Maker* into web-ready html zines or web zines that can be hosted on itch.io (Oduber 2021). Naturally, the instructions are given in a zine format, as seen in Figure 3.

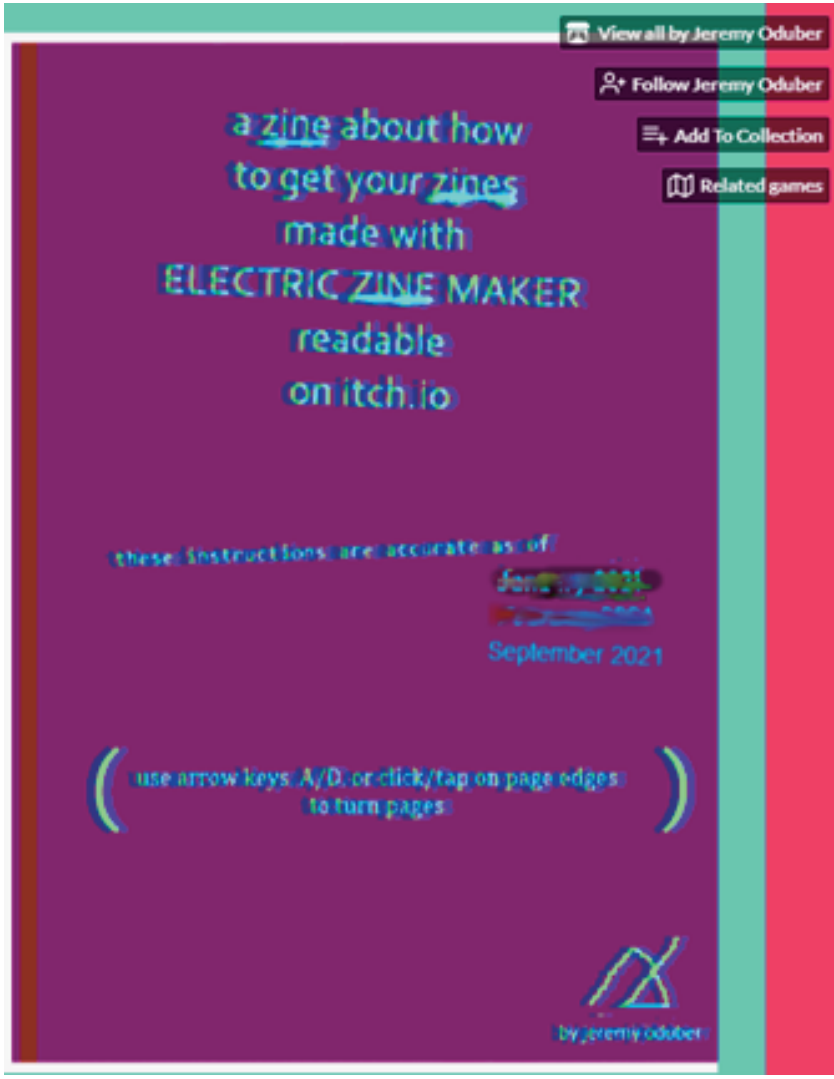

Figure 3: *Jeremy Oduber. 2021.* A zine about how to get your zines made with ELECTRIC ZINE MAKER readable on itch.io *https://jeremyoduber.itch.io/js-zine*

Zines have also been used in games criticism and journalism. Hughes argues that "we are living in a golden age of game criticism. A constellation of scholarly journals complements entertainment journalism and the blogs and zines of game enthusiasts" (2017, 283).

Saklofske finds that "scholarly critical work on digital games is not just limited to print-based output but has evolved along with the emergence of the internet and social media platforms," going against the traditional scholarly publishing models of academic fields by producing zines, podcasts, and video essays (2020). Games criticism websites such as Game Developer have featured games criticism zines such as Devon Wiersma's *Dare to Suck* zine, which discusses why game developers should pay more attention to seemingly 'bad' games (Wiersma 2017).

Similarly, Saklofske discusses 'digital scholarship zines' as a large part of modern games criticism (2020, n.p.). For example, Gareth Damina Martin's *Heterotopias* zine anthologies are high-quality photo essays on the intersections of games and architecture. Each issue focuses on a particular topic; for example, landscapes featured in the 4th issue in Figure 4. Martin Robinson, the features editor of Eurogamer, described *Heterotopias* as "a smart and beautiful zine, the meeting point between Foucault and video games I never knew I wanted" (Heterotopiaszine, n.d.) There are now nine issues of the zine available digitally through itch.io and there may be print versions available in late 2023.

Zines are linked with games, intersecting through their relationship with the creative industries; the use of zines to help people make games, games being played in the zine format, digital games where the player creates zines, and/or games criticism through the zine format. Zines have historical links with games and research, but are not often used in games studies research.

Figure 4: Heteretopias Zine *Issue 4, https://www.heterotopiaszine.com/*

In the following section, we discuss how zines have been used for academic research through our individual creative practices. Because these are about our personal creative practice, the following sections are written in the first person.

ZINES IN RESEARCH

As mentioned in the background section, zines have been used in interdisciplinary research (Hays, 2020) from science (Brown, Hurley, Perry and Roche, 2021; Dunwoody, 1992; Yang, 2010; ScienceGrrl, 2018; Liu, 2019), to social science (DeGravelles, 2011; Desyllas and Sinclair, 2014) and beyond (Lonsdale, 2015). Zines have also been used as research methods, as described by Biagioli (2018), French and Curd (2022), and Biagioli et.al (2016). Additionally, Lucy Robinson finds that "punkademics produce (aca)zines rather than conference packs to match form with content in the history of subcultures" (2018, 49). Thus, zines have been used as part of academic research across disciplines as reflective companions to research, as a method in and of themselves, and in conferences. While some research has gone into the use of zines as reflective of student research work (Vong, 2016), our argument is that zines are well-suited as companions to research and as reflective tools for researchers alongside their main publications.

Below, we detail our individual creative practice in the creation of a research travelogue as well as conference zines. We then discuss our methods of creation as well as the concern with using zines as a sole method of research.

Nej Men Hej: A Research Travelogue

In *Sweden's Female-Forward Creative Industries* (Austin 2022b), I (Hailey) studied what the UK could learn from Stockholm's creative industries, such as videogames, comics, zines, and board games. To accompany the research paper, I created *Nej Men Hej: A Research Travelogue* zine that serves as a material, physical representation of the human-side of the research project (Austin 2022a). The cover can be seen in Figure 5. In my write-up of the travelogue zine, I identified three key findings: 1) that the act of zine creation allowed for self-reflection of my research, 2) the tactility and physicality of zine

creation helped me condense and visualize larger concepts, and 3) adding a personal touch to research makes it more relatable.

Figure 5: *Austin 2022a.* Nej Men Hej: A Travelogue Zine *cover.*

For me, Biagioli's zine method holds true; zines are a useful self-reflection tool and help visualize relationships between previously disconnected elements (2018, 6). By reflecting on the fieldwork from

the trip, I was able to make several connections between mentions of menstruation in my zine, Liv Strömquist's *Kunskapens frukt [The fruit of Knowledge]* (2014), which was purchased on the trip, and the 2014 comic anthology *Kvinnor Ritar Bara Serier om Mens* [*Women only draw comics about periods*] which was mentioned in one interview with a comic creator (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: *Olausson, S. 2014.* Kvinnor Ritar Bara Serier om Mens [Women only draw comics about periods*] Carthage Publishing. Photo by Hailey Austin.*

Looking through my notes and listening again to interviews, I was able to add to the period discourse in Swedish comics by creating a page about losing a day (and half a life) to menstruation (Figure 7). This page has red seeping over the previous and following pages to

demonstrate the effects of menstruation on multiple days of the research, and in an effort to normalize some people's experience doing research. Similarly, I was able to reflect on the cultural landscape of Sweden and Scotland, noting that in several interviews participants noted that period products were freely available in their offices, while in Scotland a policy was implemented to tackle period poverty through local authorities and education providers' free provision of period products. By creating the zine, I was able to "maintain a more overall sense of what the experience was for an individual participating in an activity" because "retaining more of a holistic sense of an experience is also crucial at the analysis stage," as Biagioli, Owens and Pässilä suggested zines were uniquely able to do (2016, 3). Creating this zine enabled me to condense and analyze my trip in a visual form, make previously unnoticed connections, and create a material way to hold these reflections.

***Figure 7**: Hailey Austin 2022a.* Nej Men Hej *excerpt.*

For me, the physical creation of the zine is just as important as the finished product itself. As Biagioli notes, "setting up the zine into a

three-dimensional structure [...] refers to a larger concept taking shape in the mind of the participant" or creator (2018, 2). My travelogue zine is produced from envelopes that physically hold the notes and images from my trip, as well as the metaphorical memories I made along the way. The first page includes real sticky notes and to-do lists from planning for the research trip, as seen in Figure 8. I cut pieces of travel tickets and placed them in the zine to give authenticity to the representation of traveling for research purposes after lockdown. Similarly, the backgrounds of the zine are just as important as the text and images pasted on top of them. They were created in an art studio with my co-author Mirjam who was my research advisor during the trip. Thus, the materials are intrinsic to the trip itself. Painting and monoprinting were mixed on a Gelli-block to create unique, one-of-a-kind prints, as opposed to screen prints, which can be replicated multiple times. Just as the prints could not be perfectly recreated, neither could my time in Stockholm.

Figure 8: *Hailey Austin 2022a. Nej Men Hej, excerpt.*

Finally, by creating a zine about my experiences of the trip, I added a personal touch to the research project. Data and papers by themselves only provide part of the whole story of research, losing

many important elements like "tacit engagement, experiential knowledge and individual judgement" that human creative input can capture through creative outputs. (Biagioli et. al 2016, 3). I added photographs of myself and horses to the front and back covers of the travelogue zine to literally add a face and name to the research project, making it more personal and relatable than black text on a white page. These also bookended (literally and metaphorically) the trip and the zine.

The title of the travelogue zine is "Nej Men Hej," which is pronounced *neigh men hay* in Swedish. It literally translates to "No, but hi" in English. This phrase is used in Sweden when greeting someone you have not seen in a long time. While in a comic store, I found a very popular meme (Figure 9), where a man (unseen in the image) says this to a woman, whom he has not seen in a long time. She responds by saying, "Hej men nej" or "Hi, but no". In doing so, she is essentially rejecting his advances by flipping the phrase around.

Figure 9: *Jan Stenmark nd "Hej men nej" https://www.comicsheaven.se/prylar/magnet-jan-stenmark-hej-men-nej*

This not only fit what I learned about Swedish feminist culture in the creative industries, but also worked as a self-reflection tool that brought together the significant take-aways from my work. I also loved the sound of the words in English, and their connection to my experience. Nej means no, but sounds like neigh, the sound that horses make, relating to all the horse games I'd played and horses I'd ridden while in Sweden. It further captured the gendered focus of my research with men being spelled and sounding like the English word

men, or male. Finally, hej, meaning hello and sounding like hey and hay, English words that have multiple meanings. For me, it related to a level of familiarity. In English, I would only say "Hey" to someone I knew, whereas I would say "hello" to someone I did not know. Having people all around me say "hej", which also sounds like the beginning of my name, made me feel a level of familiarity with those around me. It also sounded like hay, the food that horses eat, which fit well with my horse theme. For me, the title captured the ambiguity and familiarity of my research trip, while also referring to the feminist comics and horse games I encountered there.

This personal touch came across in the presentations of my research. At the Scottish Funding Council's Team Saltire Awards, my Flash presentation (or three-minute thesis) was shortlisted for Public Engagement in the Culture and Creative Industries category. It was the personal touches I added, as well as the way I was able to relate my research effectively to an audience, that won me the People's Choice award for Public Engagement that evening. This was not only from my research, but largely because the zine rooted my research in the personal as well as the professional.

Zine creation as a companion to research makes for more personal and relatable outputs, and helps the creator visualize, reflect and make previously unmade connections

Suggested Method for Research Companion Zines

In this section, I explain the method I used to create my travelogue zine in the hopes that others who are interested could implement a similar method for zines as a research companion. As Mirjam will discuss below, we see zines as a helpful addition to research and a reflection tool whose materiality offers unique insights. We do not necessarily view zines as a method themselves.

To make my travelogue zine, I implemented five steps:

Plan and Document: While on my trip, I took notes about what I did and felt each day with the intention of creating a zine when I got back to Scotland. This was an intended output from the trip. I also told my advisor in Sweden, so she helped me find zines in Stock-

holm's zine library in the *Kulturhuset,* as well as find materials and generate backgrounds for the zine while I was in Stockholm.

Reflect and Map Out: I waited at least one month after my research trip to begin reflecting on the findings that I had been analyzing scientifically for a research output. I then had to reflect on what I'd gained as a researcher and as a person from the trip, rather than the hard data. I then began to map out and plot the narrative I wanted to tell in my travelogue zine.

Create: With my outline in one hand and collage materials in the other, I began to create my zine. I deviated from the outline, but it helped to center and ground my thoughts.

Accept Mistakes: I made several spelling, drawing and linear storytelling mistakes in my zine. But I had to accept that this was part of the process, and embraced the mistakes.

Scan and Distribute: Once I'd completed my zine, I scanned all the pages and prepared it for printing. I have since been distributing it at comic conventions and research conferences.

CONFERENCE ZINES

Prior to the Nordic DiGRA Conference in the spring of 2023, where the work in this article was presented, I (Mirjam) took stock of past DiGRA conferences I'd attended. I leafed through stacks of handwritten notes and browsed folders of digital photographs dating back two decades to the first DiGRA conference held in Utrecht 2003. Through these notes I could see the emergence of game studies as its own discipline. I could see colleagues' development over the years, and I could sense my own. There were moments captured of when I had met long-time friends for the first time, and notations of sparks for future research projects being ignited. I made a zine to bring with me to the Nordic DiGRA conference (Eladhari 2023a). Having these memories fresh in my mind gave me a sense of history and connection when I arrived for the introductory speech given by the organizers of the conference. Lina Eklund recalled the sense of coming

home when she first presented at Nordic DiGRA in 2013. I remembered her talk well because of the notes and photos I had taken.

Over the years, I have used my notes to make sense of my experiences at conferences. Some of them I have put on a blog (Eladhari 2023b). To me these blog posts are important, partly for helping my memory, and partly for enabling me to have my say without having to ask for permission or approval. In this respect the blog shares some of the advantages of zines – documentation of one's own voice. Zines, however, have a quality that production of digital publications lack: the physical process of fiddling with notes, gluing, taping, tearing out and saving particularly interesting pieces from a printed conference program, as wells as ticket stubs, receipts, luggage tags, and flowers plucked in a backstreet, dried in whatever booklet is at hand.

This sets zines aside. From what? you may ask.

I see three main utilities of making conference zines, especially zines that are about personal experiences at particular conferences. One use is for posterity, for capturing the otherwise not told. Perhaps they could be useful for someone digging into the history of ideas as they have emerged in the field of game studies. A second utility is the process of zine making, for sense making. A third utility is communication, where personal experience is the focus.

The first utility, documentation of the otherwise not told, is not unique to zines as a form. Other types of informal documentation that may capture what may not fit into the modus of research papers and articles, including blog posts (dependent on being online), posted photographs, shared slides from conferences, keynote presentations, and even video recordings. Zines are part of this body of informal documentation that may be of interest to people trying to make sense of the past.

The second utility is the process of creating zines, and this is unique to the form. The zine making process allows for a moment in time when connections can be drawn that would otherwise not have been made. Hailey's recount of her time visiting Stockholm is an example of that, and the zine making workshop described in the following section is another.

Zine making, the toying with ephemera, creates a space for debriefing, a space for making sense of what one has experienced during a conference trip. It is costly to go to conferences, both in money, but also in time for travel and socializing, something that for many is expensive in terms of mental energy. The travel is costly to the environment as well. To not take time to appreciate the experiences and/or make sense of them seems like a waste. If we immediately, when coming back from a trip, focus on our next duties, we risk losing the memories. Even more importantly, we risk not fully appreciating light bulb moments, topics that have resonated deep within us, or things we noted in a passing interaction. Fiddling with the physicality of ephemera collected, flicking back through photographs taken, making notes of who to send a follow-up question to about their work: all these things create value, feeding into our future trajectories of thought and even the application of our research.

As communication tools, zines are relatable to readers in a similar way as art, in that they convey a personal perspective. They are distributed between individuals on a small scale. If published, the publisher is the zine-maker themselves rather than an organization. Therefore, zines are not subject to being edited by other people, for example from an organization's information department, nor do they (in most countries) need the approval of an organization. Another important quality is their immediacy – they can be given to peers while the experience is still fresh and can feed into a shared memory of events.

The Issue of Method with Conference Zines

With these three qualities in mind, let's address the issue of method with regards to conference zines.

In this article we argue for zines to be used as a research companion – a tool that affords more informal ways to document, process, and communicate potentially valuable data that might otherwise not be captured. Previous work informing this stance relies, besides our own experience, on studies conducted by Biagioli

et al. In Biagioli et.al. (2016), they propose "the Zine method" as a way to collate research data from conference participants. In their study, they juxtapose a quantitative outset of data collection to a qualitative one, aiming to draw summarizing conclusions of experiences from specific conferences using qualitative approaches. They demonstrate how, for several years, they experimented with different ways of collecting and making sense of the zines created by conference participants. One of the examples was a conference where they aimed to create, from zines collected from participants, a curated, summarizing zine. The curated zine would highlight the topics the participants had found noteworthy. Biagoili et al. show a remarkable sensitivity to their material when they describe the change of course in their process – they concluded that the material did not lend itself to generalizations. Interestingly, instead, they created an exhibition where all the individual zines were displayed as art pieces.

Based on our own and Biagioli et al.'s work, we see zines as pieces of art. In their nature, they are generally closer to art than other forms of communication, in that they offer unique perspectives on, and representations of, an experience, which in the case of conference zines – are perspectives on a shared experience. Having made this statement we do not mean that other ways, especially approaches where conference zines are analyzed in a quantitative manner, examining occurrences of types of content, would not hold value. On the contrary – studies assessing zine data, perhaps analyzing common themes have, to our knowledge, not yet been carried out. Studies regarding the development of ideas in the field of game studies have been done using data about publications including Melcer et al. (2015) and Martin (2018). Melcer et al. took a network approach and examined over 8,000 papers from 48 core game research venues. They studied how keywords of papers cluster around particular game research themes, identifying 20 distinct themes. They were also able to find a fundamental separation between technical and non-technical fields. Acknowledging the importance of fields, Martin (2018) is concerned with research communities. Martin's work shows the broad strokes of the emergence of ideas in game studies by identi-

fying five main communities: Education/Culture, Technology, Effects and Medical. Co-citation analysis identifies five communities: Education, Humanities/Social Science, Computer Science, Communications, and Health.

If zines were to be analyzed in a manner similar to scientific publications it would be problematic. Zines do not have keywords, and would as a corpus be a plethora of anecdotes and outliers, represented in ways of art, or close to what we perceive as art. The state of the current technological advancement, along with researchers' skills in defining datasets and schemata for how to interpret the material (drawings, personal annotation styles and more) pose a difficult challenge at the moment.

For the time being, we see the main utility of zine making lies in the process of their assembly. This process may help capture what may otherwise be unrealized. In this respect, they offer a unique affordance: zine making allows for sharing the otherwise untold and intangible. Zines allow forms for considering and expressing what would not otherwise be seen in the academic structure of publication that we as researchers have been and taught and socialized into.

NORDIC DIGRA'S ZINE-MAKING WORKSHOP

We implemented Mirjam's practice of creating conference zines, combined with Biagioli, Owens and Passila's work on using zines to capture a conference, as the backdrop of the zine-making workshop we ran at Nordic DiGRA '23 (Figure 10). We proposed a zine-making workshop at the end of the conference as an opportunity to demonstrate the reflective power of zines, and allow participants to reflect on their findings of the conference with a physical manifestation of their takeaways.

Figure 10: *Nordic DiGRA's Zine Making workshop. Photo by Hailey Austin*

We employed a combination of Hailey's method for creating research zines and Mirjam's previous work making conference zines. At the start of the conference, we asked participants to collect their ideas throughout the conference to prepare for the workshop.

Mapping onto Hailey's Plan and Document step, the participants were encouraged to take notes, take pictures, and keep other physical materials like ticket stubs, receipts and napkins to use in the workshop.

We had 12 participants (excluding the facilitators) in the workshop who each made a zine about their experience of the conference using the memorabilia they had collected. There was limited time to Reflect and Plan Out, due to the workshop being at the end of the conference, but the participants still had the conference and proceedings fresh in their minds.

The workshop took place on the last day of the conference, and lasted for three hours. The agenda was as follows:

Introduction. Hailey showed examples of zines, and showed how they can be made practically, for example how to fold an A4 or letter sized paper to create a small booklet. Mirjam showed the material we provided to the participants. The materials were paper, glue, scissors, thermal printers for printing small stickers of own photos, colored paper, pencils, and more.

Zine making. We sat together around a table making our zines, while sometimes telling each other anecdotes about what we had experienced during the conference (see Figure 10). This maps onto Hailey's Create step of the process.

Show and tell. The last half hour we showed each other the zines we had made, taking turns. This allowed for reflection from the participants, and many people spoke about accepting their mistakes in the zine they had created. For example, Lina Eklund reflected in her zine about the three years of planning that went into organizing the conference (Figure 11).

***Figure 11**: Lina Eklund presenting her zine at the zine-making workshop. Photo by Hailey Austin.*

We have found zine creation to be impactful in our own research, both as physical sites of reflection as well as tools for personalizing research, which can often be solitary or dry. Using a combination of our creative practice methods, we were able to deliver a workshop

that allowed participants to reflect on the games studies conference they had attended, create a physical version of their reflection (making previously unnoticed connections), and understand how zines could be used as companions to their own research. The communities and appetites for intersections between zines and games have been established, as have the use of zines for games criticism. We argue that it is time for games studies to embrace zines just as other areas of game creation and distribution have.

CONCLUSION

Zines are DIY creative tools for expression that have been used on the periphery to amplify the voices of marginalized people in various communities. Though they are underutilized in games studies, zines have intersected and continue to intersect with games in fascinating ways. Historically, zines have had a profound effect on the Swedish creative industries in particular, establishing a culture around the creative industries that has led to the booming games industry. Zines have been used to help programmers make games. Zines have been used as role-playing games. Digital games have been created to make games. Zines have been used for games criticism and in research. The physical creation of the zine is just as important as the finished product (and research) itself, emphasizing the importance of reflection on process. As Anthropy suggests, making games as zines allows "games to be personal and meaningful, not just pulp for an established audience. I want game creation to be decentralized. I want open access to the creative act for everyone. I want games as zines" (2012, 10).

Though games studies has noted the similarities in distribution between zines and indie games, zines have not been utilized in games studies as a whole. By demonstrating our use of zines in our individual creative practices, we hope to inspire others to utilize zines in games studies as companions to research and/or research conferences. Games studies can benefit from embracing zines. Zines reveal an interdisciplinary history between the creative industries. They can

be used as and alongside research to share personal stories, reflect and document. Zines are for everyone, and can be made by everyone. Like Anthropy, we want games as zines, but we want games studies to use zines too.

FUTURE WORK

Throughout the paper, we have argued that zines are helpful tools through which to reflect on research and conferences, and are under-utilized in games studies specifically. However, there is a largely untapped opportunity for zines to be used as games postmortems for game creators within the industry. The zine format is a way for game developers to document, reflect upon, and share their personal processes of game making, even if they work independently or in the commercial sector. We found one example where Avery Alder, a Canadian games creator, uses a zine as a postmortem reflection of a game (Cross 2017). After the success of *Monsterhearts,* Alder created a zine detailing both the origins of the game as well as her thinking behind updating the game and releasing *Monsterhearts 2* (Cross 2017).

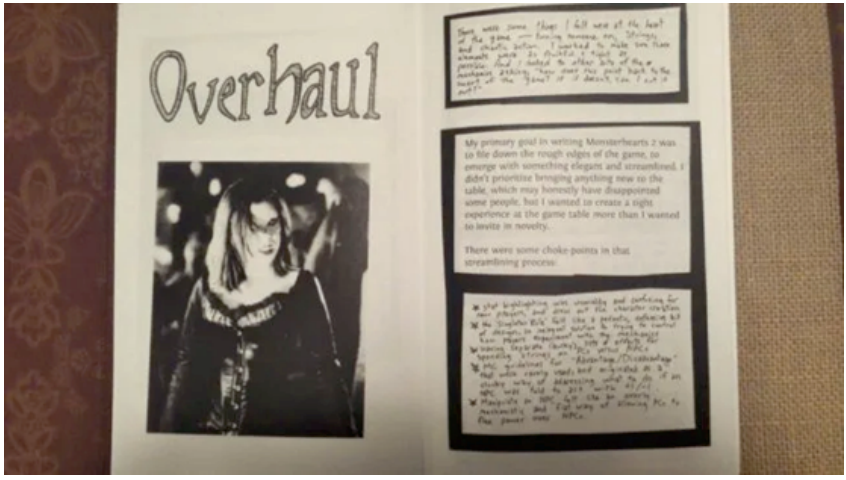

Figure 12: *Avery Alder* Monsterhearts 2 *zine, https://www.gamedeveloper.com/design/opinion-game-design-lessons-from-the-tabletop-rpg-monsterhearts-2*

As seen in Figure 12, the zine was included for people who backed the Kickstarter for *Monsterhearts* 2, and "resembles the bespoke care put into the making of an indie game" (Cross 2017). The zine acts as a postmortem for the first game, reflects on the success and missed opportunities of the initial game, and provides personal insight into the development of the second game. Zine postmortems have the potential to enable other practitioners across the games industry to utilize similar, personal methods of reflection on their games. We argue that games can, and should, be embraced by games studies and games studios alike.

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