



illustration by Sab Meynert



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THE AGE OF THE MATURING ZINESTER

BY
JOSHUA
JAMES
AMBERSON

AGING ZINE MAKERS ARE TAKING A MEDIUM TRADITIONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH YOUTH CULTURES AND MAKING IT WORK WITH THEIR ADULT LIVES.

When I got into zines in 1995, at 13 years old, I never imagined myself making zines into my 30s. Nor could I picture reading zines made by people in their 40s, 60s and even their 80s. I didn't think

anyone over 30 even knew what a zine was. But here I am today, looking at a scene that is no longer dominated by headstrong teens, but by what I call “the maturing zinester” — a crowd that

represents changing zine demographics and who have seen zines evolve over a number of decades.

In any area of counterculture, there's a tug of war between youth and experience that occurs. The young are often distrustful of the older generation — whose ideals tend to change as they age — while members of older generations who want to continue participating in the counter culture they grew up with can feel alienated as they get older. Surely, without me knowing it at the time, there were people over 30 making zines when I was 13, but today it's more visible. With the amount of people who are sticking with zine culture into adulthood — and even into old age — a re-evaluation of zine culture, and youth culture as a whole, is in order.

The 2012 book *Ageing and Youth Cultures* is a collection of academic essays examining how people who grew up identifying with cultures such as punk, b-boy and riot grrrl maintain or meld these identities into their adult lives. In the book, Joanna R. Davis' essay on adult punks points out that growing up is an ongoing process that can be defined, conceptualized and experienced differently by each person. "Though older punks may accommodate the fact of aging and 'growing up' to some extent, they can still find ways to challenge a normative concept of adulthood," writes Davis. This raises several fascinating questions: Are elder zinesters clinging to a youthful practice in order to keep challenging what is expected of them? Or are they contributing to the development of a medium that, like many of its early adopters, is becoming more nuanced as it evolves?

At 70 years old and with three grandchildren, New York-based writer Ken Bausert is a good person to check in with on this issue. He's been making zines since the 1990s. His current zine — *The Ken Chronicles*, which contains personal stories, philosophy, travel stories and reviews — has been running since 2006 and is up to 28 issues. "I don't feel a day over 50... well, maybe 60, physically," says Bausert. "Mentally, I'm still somewhere between 15 and 40... still a rebel in my own ways." While Bausert clearly associates zines with cultural rabble rousing, *The Ken Chronicles* is hardly a work you'd picture coming out of the unruly underground. The zine features a clean layout, runs on a quarterly printing schedule, contains letters to the editor, and has a subscription service. *The Ken Chronicles* is also the rare zine with recommendations for iPads and cameras. And you don't read many zines whose travel stories take place on tourist sightseeing buses. Bausert is aware that his content isn't exactly radical, and he's okay with that. "I'm sure there are lots of younger people, those into the punk music scene, for example, that would be bored with my material," Bausert says. "And, while I have no problem reading articles about lifestyles different than my own, I wouldn't want to read an entire zine filled with material that doesn't interest me either."

TEMPORARY BROTHERS

a zine by DJ Frederick



DJ Frederick, a New Hampshire-based zinester with six grandchildren, has a long history with self-publishing. From the 4-H Club newsletters he made in the 1960s, the literary magazines he made in the 1980s, to his impressive output today, DJ Frederick has spent five decades in independent media. The series of zines about shortwave and pirate radio culture he started in the early 2000s has evolved into two projects he keeps running today, *Paper Radio* and *Turntable Operator*. In the last couple of years, along with occasional collaborations with his wife NanSea Griggs, his work has grown to include an ever-expanding number of titles that he describes as "forgotten closets of my biography, my philosophies, the adventures and misadventures of life." This is quite a leap for someone who has mostly written on technical and historical subjects. "My writing was all clinical and detached," Frederick says, "Now I'm not afraid to navigate the shadows of personal memory, family history, personal joys and personal pain and allow people other than myself to read it!" Frederick is also known for his *One Minute Zine Reviews* blog, a review site that's evolved out of a radio program, and serves as a



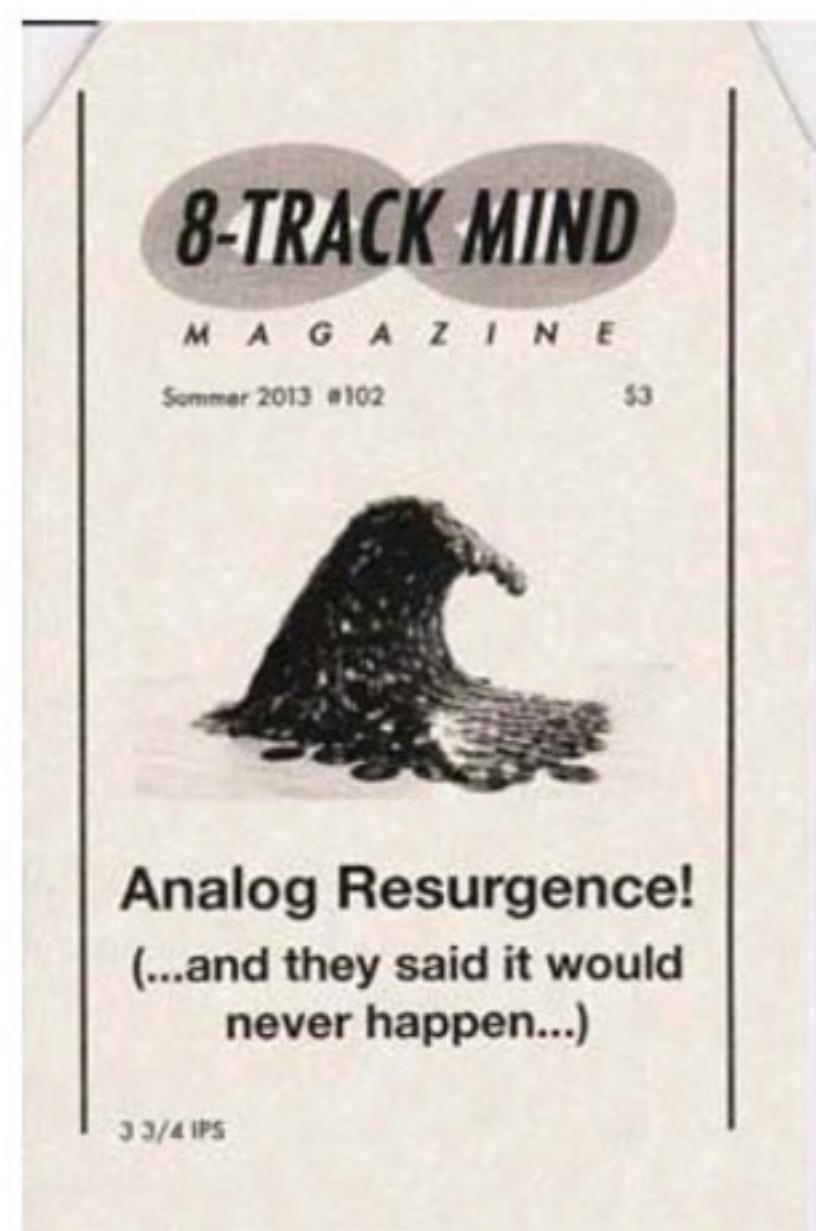
Zines by long-time zinesters
DJ Frederick and Ken Bausert



Turntable.



Operator.



New Hampshire-based
DJ Frederick's zine *Turntable*
Operator and Chicago-based
Russ Forster's *8-Track Mind*

reliable source for hearing about new zines. The variety in Frederick's work notably illustrates the possibility of evolution in this medium. From quirky pop and consumer culture obsessions to the far more revealing nuances to be found in the "shadows of personal memory," this long time zinester is allowing his life experiences to dictate the content of his expression.

But other zine makers are more resistant to the idea that as you change, the content of your zine will perhaps — as with *The Ken Chronicles* — become more placid, or — like the work of DJ Frederick — inevitably slip into memoir. Consider the work of 80-year-old Toronto-based writer Terry McAdorey who only started making zines in his 70s. Profiled in issue 52 of *Broken Pencil*, McAdorey has had a solid output of zines since he chose the medium a decade ago. From ones written through the tongue-in-cheek voice of a Depression-era drifter, to a collaborative zine with his 10-year-old grandson, he brings together the best of both the original enthusiasm of the zine, and the textures and fascinations of having the long term perspective on life without ever seeming to fall into convention or nostalgia.

"It's fucking punk," says Toronto-based artist Mark Connery when I ask him why he's been making zines and comix for the past 20 years.

When pressed for more of an explanation as to why he stays with zines, he tells me: "They're weird and not annoying." More seriously, he also feels there's a longevity to zines that he can't get from other forms of media. "Zines last longer than weird things on the internet. They can move mysteriously."

Connery is clearly still invested in the origin story of zines as a punk-rock explosion of immediacy. But he's also adopted a more nuanced take on zines that may well come with advanced experience. As he notes, compared to the prevailing digital culture, zines actually feel far more permanent. And this evolution might also be one of the reasons that long time zine makers are still interested in the medium.

After all, in the last few years, many major news sources have been covering zines' supposed resurgence. Notably *Time Magazine*, *The Independent* and *The New York Times* have looked at zines as an odd but interesting form of publishing: one that is mysteriously growing as digital media shrinks down other physical works. While major news articles in the '90s tended to focus exclusively on how weird or wacky zines were, many of the current articles are taking zines more seriously. This could be, in part, because people who grew up on zines are now the ones writing articles about them for *The New York Times*, or it could be because zine fairs are growing in size and quantity all across North America. This change in the relative public respectability and understanding of zines also comes at a time when academic books about zines have been published and most of the best-known zines running are not being written by teens, but by creators who are old enough to have teenage children.

In fact, some well-known, long-running zine makers have recently been exploring aging in their work. *Doris*, *Burn Collector* and, perhaps most dramatically, *Cometbus*, whose 55th issue was one big, fascinating, rumination on getting older in zine, punk and activist communities, are all examples of this phenomenon. There's something to be said for explicitly discussing aging in zines. Despite its prevalence, we don't see old people on TV, in our video games, our movies, or on YouTube. That's millions of people and voices that are invisible within pop culture. If the discordant trend of an aging population rendered utterly unseen in the prevailing culture continues, we may find ourselves needing zines more than ever for much the same reasons we always have — to tell the truth; to make the invisible seen.

Consider Russ Forster's zine *8-Track Mind*. 20 years after he started his first zine, the San Francisco based writer revived *8-Track* to create an interesting forum for how people are aging in D.I.Y. culture. Themed around the ways people interact with analogue technologies in the digital age — and with contributors that include

many legendary figures of '80s and '90s counter-culture scenes — it is also a home for discussing increasingly invisible technologies like print media and the cassette tape.

But many elders don't feel quite as at home and accepted by the zine community as they once did. Poet and writer Mary Wright has been part of the Toronto zine community since the late 1970s, and while she started making zines as a way to get her words published after receiving mainstream rejection, she now fears that the same rejection is coming from within the zine community she sees today. In the zine philosophy she wrote for this issue (page 31) she describes going to a zine fair in which she was made to feel she didn't belong because she was an older woman. This, to her, is a shame because new zine creators could be learning from the more experienced zinemakers.

Likewise, Philadelphia-based writer Aj Michel says her zines, which aren't necessarily targeted at an older audience, have been criticized by younger zinesters because of their slick look and their lack of loud personal or political content. Recent issues of her zine *Syndicate Product* have been compiling writers that range from 30 to 70 years old. "Unfortunately, I do feel a disconnection with younger zine publishers," Michel says. Her zines often revolve around themes and explore everything from comic history to *Jeopardy!* categories to domesticity; a wide spectrum that makes sense given that variety brought her to zines 25 years ago. "I liked that there could be zines about *anything*," she says. She feels disappointed that zinesters today have such a limited view of what a zine can be and would like to see more zine publishers explore the endless possibilities of the medium.

It's not just younger zine publishers who think it's better to leave the field to the under-30s. "Zines are a lot like punk rock or the rest of counter-culture or, perhaps, life. It's hard to age gracefully with them," says Seattle-based writer Craven Rock. Known for being an opinionated voice in the zine community, Rock (*Razorcake*, *Eaves of Ass*, *Nights and Days in the Dark Carnival*) calls zines, "a medium for the young idea," arguing for zine writers to quit before getting old, so as not to "discredit the wide-eyed and manic power of your earlier work." He says that, "It's harder to wax profoundly on a cup of coffee or the unity of a house show... because by now you've had hundreds of thousands of cups of coffee, [and] you think about your grocery list and your problems during a house show."

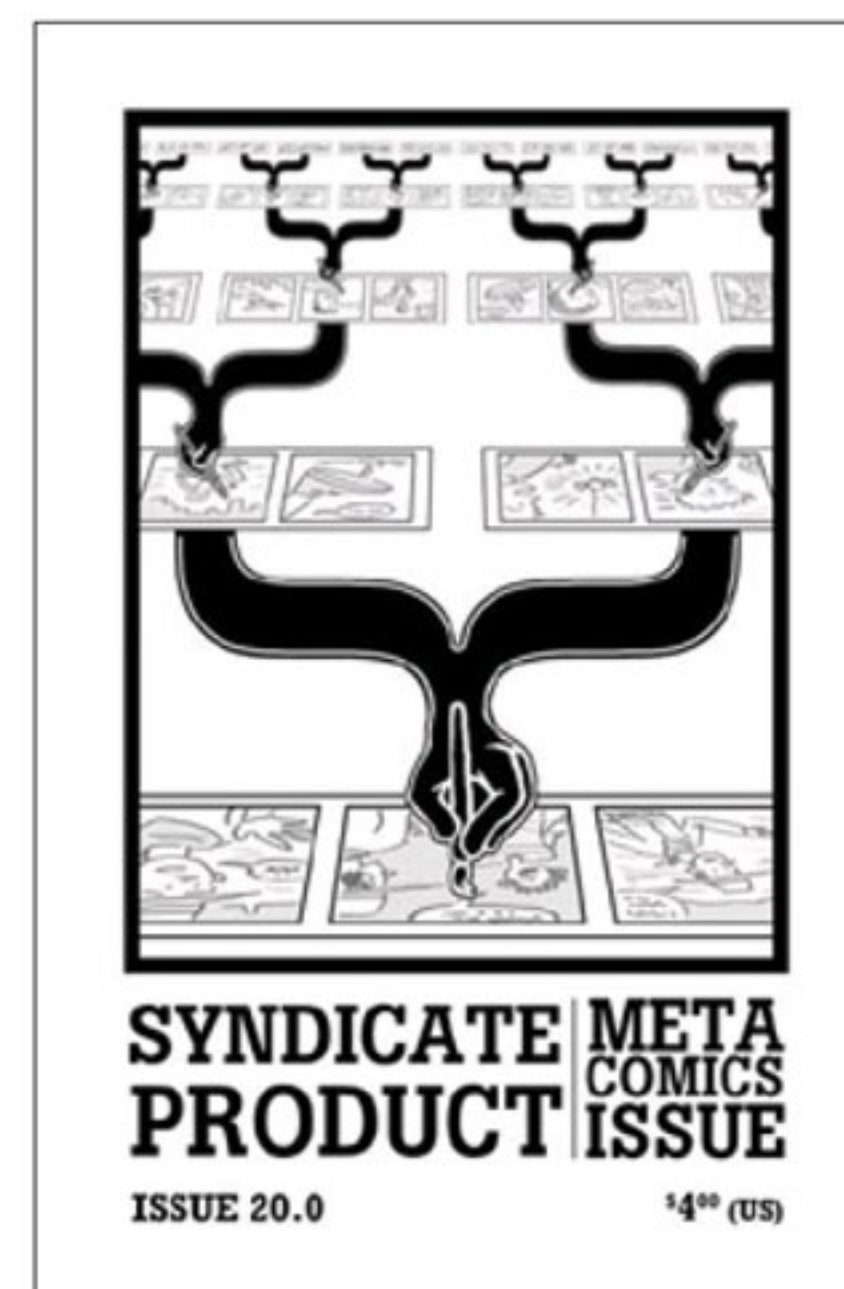
"I'm too old to make zines any more," says Toronto-based artist Stacey Case. "At least, that's how I feel. Let the kids have their fun. I'm happy to be an elder statesman." While he says this only a year after putting out his last zine, for the most part his life has moved into other realms. Having been introduced to zines in the mid-'80s, 45-year-old Case started writing the zine *Rivet* in the early '90s. "The zine led to so many

different outlets for me — writing, design, layout, screenprinting, publicity, film and video — it was my college." In 1994 he started the Cut & Paste Zine Fair in Toronto which ran for many years, and eventually led him to the work he does today. "The screenprinting that I do for bands, and the video stuff I do, is entirely based on the fact that I did zines," Case says.

Stacey Case is just one of many long-running zinesters who are finding new mediums for the work they started in zines. Anne Elizabeth Moore (former editor of *Punk Planet*) is writing books about everything from corporate greed to teaching in Cambodia. Erick Lyle (author of the *Scam* zine) is writing books about creative resistance and sidewalk etchings. Both *Hip Mama* and *Rad Dad* are transitioning to magazine formats for wider distribution in early 2014. And, perhaps most surprisingly, the guy who once wrote a zine about washing dishes has written a 400-page book on the history of bicycles in Amsterdam for a mainstream publisher. Pete Jordan, author of the *Dishwasher* zine and formerly known as Dishwasher Pete, released *In the City of Bikes* last April through Harper Collins and it's been well-reviewed in both the *New York Journal of Books* and the *L.A. Times*. Watching this transition is interesting, not only because of the quality of work being produced, but also because creators are keeping a strong connection to the zine community through their new endeavours. Most are still writing zines and all are still supporting the greater zine community in various forms, creating a precedent for how zinesters can work in other publishing worlds without losing a connection to the community that fostered them.

"I think zines have generally been the tools of the young and naïve, because it takes a youthful leap of faith to venture into a world where break-even economics is about as good as it gets," notes Russ Forster. All the same, he wouldn't suggest anyone throw in the towel just because of their age. He hasn't.

As I approach 20 years of reading zines and 10 years of making them, I find myself more interested in them than ever. I'm constantly excited and inspired by the ever-evolving medium. As a bookseller, book reviewer and book publisher, I see zines as a format that allows for possibilities that don't make sense in books. And as a zine maker, I see a medium that allows me to explore ideas, themes and voices that wouldn't be found elsewhere. While the creations of the aging zine community might make sense to me now because they speak to the next stage of my life, I'd like to think my teenage self would have also loved the work being created by parent and grandparent-aged zinesters. I have always loved seeing the possibilities of what zines can accomplish and, if anything, I see the trend of the aging zinester bringing new interpretations to what zines can be and who they can appeal to. **bp**



Philadelphia-based creator
Aj Michel's compilation zine
Syndicate Product

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