

A zine about a paper about data visualization

By Andrew McNutt

On the Potential of Zines as a Medium for Visualization

What is a zine?

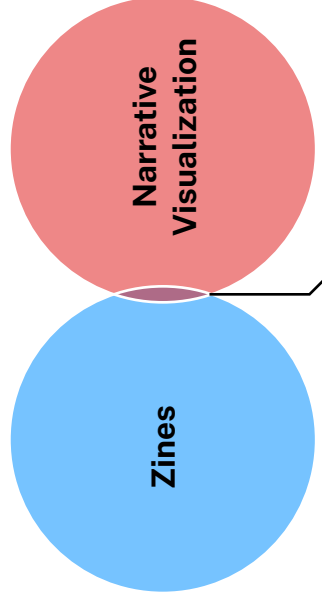
This is a zine! But if you want a more formal definition:

Zines are non-commercial, non-professional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves - Duncombe

They come in all shapes and sizes. Some are small, some are large. They appear in forms that are familiar and forms that are weird. They are often only available in the physical world, but sometimes they're collected online.

Anyone can make a zine. They can be produced using high-end digital tools as well as with juxtaposed pieces of paper and a photocopier. This makes them accessible to everyone!

Despite these enticing features there has been little work in vis zines!



Zines seem to be a natural place for vis work, as their intimate physical form offers a range of affordances that are advantageous to vis. But there hasn't been any scholarship and there has been relatively limited practice. In this zine we argue that **zines should be seen as a viable medium for visualization.**

At least that's our belief! Zines are often purely physical objects and so it's difficult to completely survey their usage

Abstract
Zines are a form of small-circulation self-produced publication often made by hand. This form of medium has a long history and many uses. This paper explores the potential of zines as a medium for visualization. It opens the door to interesting questions such as: Zines are often told from the first person; how does this affect the way that people trust data displays in that mode? Zinesters often have rich knowledge about particular topics and ways of expressing themselves about those topics, which would seem to make them ideal collaborators for data projects.

1 INTRODUCTION
Visualization is considered in a vast array of mediums, ranging from the printed page to the digital screen. Zines are a form of small-circulation self-produced publication often made by hand. This form of medium has a long history and many uses. This paper explores the potential of zines as a medium for visualization. It opens the door to interesting questions such as: Zines are often told from the first person; how does this affect the way that people trust data displays in that mode? Zinesters often have rich knowledge about particular topics and ways of expressing themselves about those topics, which would seem to make them ideal collaborators for data projects.

2 RELATED WORK
Zines are commonly identified as originating with science-fiction fanzines in the 1930s, followed by an explosion with punk rock in the 1960s and 1970s. They have only become objects of academic focus in the 1990s and 2000s. This paper explores the potential of zines as a medium for visualization. It opens the door to interesting questions such as: Zines are often told from the first person; how does this affect the way that people trust data displays in that mode? Zinesters often have rich knowledge about particular topics and ways of expressing themselves about those topics, which would seem to make them ideal collaborators for data projects.

Data is often seen as objective. Zines can help this **Shatter the View from Nowhere** by locating the author and the works provenance as a prominent part of their design.

Their printed form **Imparts an Intimacy** that can help build community and offer a foundation to talk about difficult topics.

Zine's accessibility helps **Surface Other Voices** that might not normally find a venue for their perspectives.

In our class and in our search we found several **design patterns** that are unusual among forms that vis typically appears in, including

Observations

To understand the potential of this combination we sought out zines with visualizations

By searching we identified **44** zines that use visualization in some way

- ▶ online zine repositories
- ▶ bookstores and zine fairs
- ▶ institutional archives

We then coded the way that vis is used in each zine in our survey. There are doubtless other reasons to use vis in a zine—our sample was limited by social distancing, and favored examples found online—but we believe these are evocative of the general case.

Zines about visualization seem to address every conceivable topic, vis included. **Market Cafe Mag** is a prominent example of this style of usage. (despite being a series, we only count it once)

Zines about data can be used to tell complex data stories in a friendly and accessible way. This can involve classic-zine practice of list making, as well as usages like advocacy and activism through maps and charts, such as in the splendid **(Dis)location Black Exodus** from AEMP.

"Being able to turn pages like a book so that certain visualizations are hidden can help drive story-telling"

"Made me think about the position and description of graphs and how they connect to previous/next pages."

"I really enjoyed the process [of zine making] - I found it easy to build the narrative through the process, and felt able to communicate what I wanted to communicate through my zine."

"The ability to order visualizations sequentially or thematically, and to accompany them with text, gives you a lot of control over the narrative structure, and I think zines come with audience expectations of being a melange, so you can have a diversity of visualization types instead of cleaving so strictly to a single polished (and more bland) house style."

Student comments:

Project Breakdown

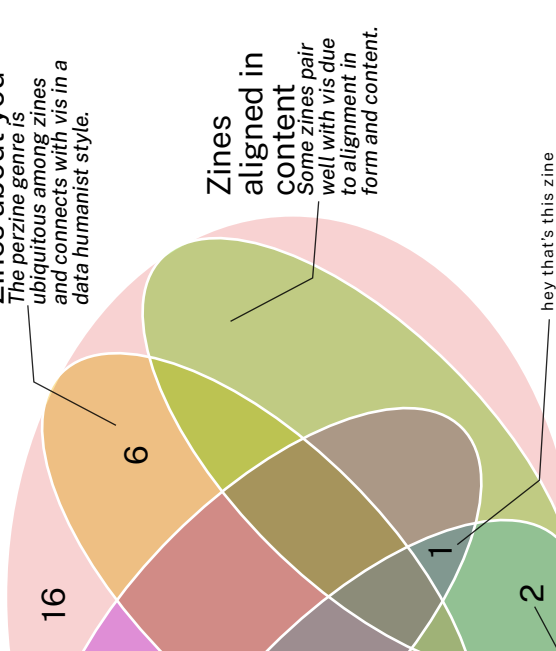
- Zine (16)
- Other (7)
- Maybe Zine (5)

In a recent course on Data Vis for Public Policy Course students were allowed to make zines about policy topics for a project. A majority of the students made zines for the project, and spoke positively about the experience.

We explored vis zines as a class activity

Although there are definitely more! Our search was meant to show that the intersection is not empty

This excludes the zines students made in our class, as we wanted to establish that this the intersection of vis and zines is occupied in the wild.



hey that's this zine