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# Zines as cultural infrastructure.

## A workshop at the 2024 global dis:connect summer school

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Punk, feminism, skateboarding, environmentalism, graffiti, queer culture: anyone who wanted to stay informed about social controversies, events and news from the underground scenes in the 1980s or 1990s could hardly do without zines. In many parts of the world, zines – DIY magazines produced by independent collectives on photocopiers and mimeographs – were a central communications medium in dissident scenes. They enabled dialogue on issues that were rarely covered in the mainstream media, received no public funding or were actively excluded from culture and its infrastructures, such as television, museums and movie theatres. The circulation of zines connected people with similar interests across cities and national borders. Zines helped to overcome political, spatial and social isolation.<sup>1</sup>

When Moscow-based Dasha Sotnikova proposed holding a zine workshop at our 2024 global dis:connect summer school, we organisers were instantly intrigued. Our intention was to approach cultural infrastructures broadly and ask that they react to geopolitical disentanglements and exclusions in global flows of capital and cultural trends.<sup>2</sup>

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1 On zines as explicitly transnational media, see, for example, Babara Dynda, 'Queering Sexual and Gender Citizenship in (Anarcho-)Feminist Zines in Post-Socialist Poland', *Journal of History* 57, no. 3 (2022).

2 My fellow organisers included Christopher Balme, Hanni Geiger, Nic Leonhardt and Tom Menger. For more on this event, see [https://www.globaldisconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/CFP\\_gdc\\_summer\\_school\\_2024.pdf](https://www.globaldisconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/CFP_gdc_summer_school_2024.pdf).

We were interested in transformations of existing cultural platforms and the emergence of new infrastructures. Zines immediately appealed to us as an exciting subject.<sup>3</sup>

Dasha's point of departure is her own experience in Russia. One might immediately think of the history of samizdat literature; that is, small-scale, grassroots publications used in the Soviet Union to circulate banned and deviant texts, including translations from abroad. Yes, Dasha is indeed interested in these historical references.<sup>4</sup>

Still, the current global revival of zines is more than just an aesthetic phenomenon that satisfies a demand for analogue, collective work with genuine, tactile results. Zines continue to break down barriers and give space to subversive, unwanted, surprising voices. In her introductory presentation, Dasha showed what zine-making means for Russia's cultural underground, for communication with imprisoned dissidents and for exchange with nonconformists throughout the country.

Our homemade zine was therefore about more than just creating an appealing product, a collective work process or experimenting with free-form text. Rather, the workshop was itself an exercise in building independent infrastructures with the simplest of means. (The shopping list Dasha sent me before the workshop included paper, black pens, needle and thread.) We not only learned about the Russian present, but also prepared ourselves for the not-so-unthinkable changes in our own environment. The directives from Bavarian authorities and universities to use gendered language and avoid more recent, inclusive terms in official publications and correspondence indicate how fragile freedom of speech can be, even in Germany.

Here we share excerpts from the zine we compiled on the last day of our summer school under Dasha's guidance. We would like to thank all participants who agreed to publish their contributions and contributed to the process. Special thanks go to Tamara Zhukova, olya chermashentseva and A.,<sup>5</sup> who contributed to this zine from Moscow. We would also like to alert readers to the fact that some contributions touch on violence and rape. Please use discretion as to what's right for you.

3 Some starting points for thinking about zines as infrastructure can be found in Maggie Matich, Elizabeth Parsons and Rachel Ashman, 'Zine Infrastructures as Forms of Organizing within Feminist Social Movements', *Gender, Work & Organization* 31, no. 3 (2022) <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12970>.

4 For more on the continuity of alternative print media in Russian-speaking countries, see A.S. Metelkov, 'Alternative Book Publishing in Russia: from a Lubok to a Zine', *Book. Reading. Media* 2, no. 4 (2024) <https://doi.org/10.20913/BRM-2-4-1>.

5 The single-letter pseudonyms in are to protect the organisations and individuals involved from persecution.

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## Bibliography

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Matich, Maggie, Elizabeth Parsons and Rachel Ashman. 'Zine Infrastructures as Forms of Organizing within Feminist Social Movements'. *Gender, Work & Organization* 31, no. 3 (2022): 1049-71. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12970>.

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