

The Past is a House Next Door

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Abstract

When we imagine history, we envision it as a distinct schism between ‘then’ and ‘now.’ Yet, the foundational expectations of the zine as a medium (colloquial language, appropriated imagery, anachronism) often disrupt this temporal separation. Because certain groups living on social or political margins have disproportionately embraced the zine format, both creating and following the expectations of the medium, the zine acts as a collapse of the past and present for these groups in particular. Marginalized people often experience a kind of blurred chronological distinction, even outside of the zine format; this is a reflection of the necessity of self-archiving for community safety and remembrance, and is a need reflected in the culture and format of zines.

I’m an illustrator and cartoonist. In this zine, I write and illustrate a visual essay exploring this theme of the zine closing the separation between ‘then’ and ‘now,’ citing primarily diaristic zines and perzines but working through a framework presented by Walter Benjamin’s idea of the ‘storyteller.’ Perzines’ often undated, anonymous formatting especially leads to a confusion between past and present — a confusion that can act as a political stance, but also as a personal balm. Ultimately, I argue that perzines are a way to remind one another that we are not alone and our experiences are not unprecedented. It is a disorientation and a relief to know that thirty years ago or yesterday, a writer with no identification but a hotmail email address and a wonky self portrait had the same political fights you do, the same elations and anxieties. Zines exist as a reminder that the past is not a foreign country, but the house just next door.

Printing Instructions

This zine is formatted to print on 8.5x11 paper. Print on both sides, flipping on the short edge, fold in half, and collate.

References

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