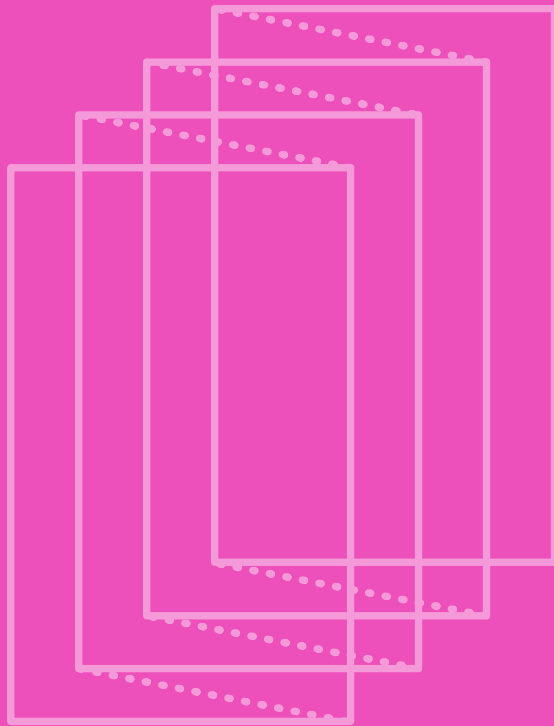


*ZINE BASED
CONFERRING
a guide*

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ESM LAB REPORT

E M M L A B

Experimental Methods and Media

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EMM LAB REPORT

ZINE-BASED CONFERENCING: A GUIDE

RATIONALE

WHY CONDUCT A CONFERENCE BY MAIL?

At first this may seem to be an anachronism. The history of academic research exchange can be told as one of progressive technological advances.¹ Letters to distant colleagues were a useful (and often sole) option in the early history of universities, configured by post and print into a Republic of Letters. However, with the rise of trains, cars, and airplanes, academics have been keen passengers on an ever-wider itinerary of in person meetings and lectures. And, when the COVID-19 pandemic put a (seemingly temporary) halt on this, we quickly upped the technological ante with streaming video talks and workshops.

This confluence of technologies and mobilities have shaped our expectations around what ‘good’ research exchange looks like. We expect academic talks to look a certain way (prim powerpoints) and for networking to happen under certain conditions (in a rush after a panel, in the hallway of a conference hotel, or—indeed—at the hotel bar).

1. Gärdebo, Johan, David Nilsson, and Kristoffer Soldal. 2017. “The Travelling Scientist: Reflections on Aviated Knowledge Production in the Anthropocene.” *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 5 (1): 71–99. <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/684539>.

When the pandemic threatened the continuity of this system, we rushed to rebuild it online, mimicking our old norms as closely as possible. This has only been a partial success; while more people than ever can enjoy a wide variety of conferences and talks from their laptops, complaints about poor attention, lost connections, and (of course) Zoom fatigue abound.

What's more, it's not clear that our old norms were doing the work we hoped them to do—at least, not for everyone. Conference travel is expensive, time-consuming, and often requires border crossing and visas. This shapes the kinds of academics who are likely to show up at conferences (namely those with favorable funding, passports and familial care arrangements) and thus the kinds of voices that dominate our fields.² It also limits the way we express and receive ideas: most often, one slide after another,³ followed by a clipped and chaotic Q&A.⁴ Finally, it's clear that all this travel⁵ (and perhaps too, all this video streaming⁶) is unsustainable for the climate system. If we want to cut our carbon emissions, and increase the equity and conviviality of our gatherings, we'll need to try something different.

2. Pasek, Anne. 2020. "Low-Carbon Research: Building a Greener and More Inclusive Academy." *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* 6 (January): 34–38. <https://doi.org/10.17351/ests2020.363>.

3. Robels-Anderson, Erica, and Patrick Svensson. 2016. "One Damn Slide After Another: Power-Point at Every Occasion for Speech." *Computational Culture*, no. 5 (January). <http://computationalculture.net/one-damn-slide-after-another-powerpoint-at-every-occasion-for-speech/>.

4. Eve Tuck. <https://twitter.com/tuckeve/status/1141501422611128320?lang=en>.

5. Le Quéré, Corinne, Stuart Capstick, Adam Corner, David Cutting, Martin Johnson, Asher Minns, Heike Schroeder, Kate Walker-Springett, Lorraine Whitmarsh, and Ruth Wood. 2015. "Towards a Culture of Low-Carbon Research for the 21st Century." Norwich, United Kingdom: Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research.

6. Obringer, Renee, Benjamin Rachunok, Debora Maia-Silva, Maryam Arbabzadeh, Roshanak Nateghi, and Kaveh Madani. 2021. "The Overlooked Environmental Footprint of Increasing Internet Use." *Resources, Conservation and Recycling* 167 (April): 105389. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2020.105389>.

Mail offers a low-tech, low-carbon, high-fidelity, screen-free alternative. It's also a usefully unusual format to academics today, free of formal expectations for what research exchange and collegial participation should look like in the medium. If you wanted to convey your research-in-progress on the page, but not yet as a formal journal publication, what would be the best way to do so? And how should your audience best share their response with you in turn? These questions matter so much at this moment because they are unanswered.

We (the Experimental Methods & Media Lab + the Low-Carbon Research Methods Group) explored one set of possible answers in running DIY Methods, a zine-based conference. Our first year was 2022, culminating in an exchange between over 90 academics in 7 different countries. Everyone got over 1 kg of zines in the mail detailing different methodological experiments and provocations in a variety of printed formats. Many involved participatory elements, soliciting their reader to fill out prompts, response forms, and to send postcards back to the author. The conference materials were also digitized and uploaded to H-Commons, where anyone could access them.

It was a lot of fun. Conference contributors made beautiful, exciting work, and reported feeling more enthusiastic about participating in the event than in their regular conferences. The zines were insightful, weird, and frequently delightful. No one got Zoom fatigue.

It was also a fair bit of work for the conference organizers. To be fair, so is every conference ever organized. But there are a fair few peculiarities to working with zines and the postal service, and plenty of lessons learned along the way. To remind our future selves, and to support the development of other such experiments, we decided to write a white paper outlining logistical and social considerations in organizing conferences by mail. We aim here to share both our enthusiasm, experiences, and a few cautionary tales. We hope that it inspires and supports many more experiments in accessible and sustainable research exchange.

CONFERENCE TIMELINE

DIY METHODS 2022

This was our conference calendar in brief:

March 10, 2022 - CFP distributed and website launched

May 15, 2022 - Deadline for pitches

May 23, 2022 - Conference acceptances distributed

June 9 + 14, 2022 - Zine drop in help sessions

July 11, 2022 - Zines due to conference team (posted/emailed)

Aug 15, 2022 - Zines mailed out to participants

Sep 19, 2022 - The conference day (check #DIYMethods on Twitter for the discussions)

CALL – FOR – ZINES

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Every conference begins with a call for participation, outlining how to potentially join in the event. This is true for both highly informal exchanges (i.e. one researcher inviting their buddies to a come give a talk) to the most baroque annual meetings of international academic societies (and the terrible submission platforms therein).

When putting out a call, you'll need to both write a convincing and clear account of what you're up to, and find a way to sufficiently publicize the news. The former should involve details like the timeline from submissions to event, the precise format contemplated, and a theme to tie everyone's work together around shared interests and investments. The latter can include listservs, academic society newsletters, social media, and of course a website you can point people back to for more information.

Through these means you'll need to clearly convey the terms of participation. For a mail-based conference, this includes some extra logistical details, such as:

- Who prints what (and how many copies)?
- What is admissible in format (page lengths, file sizes, print restrictions, etc)?
- Who mails what?
- Who pays for this all?

Once submissions come in, you'll need to evaluate them. Many events have a jury process for determining who does and doesn't get to participate. This is generally a good idea, as an event without any evaluation process or shared purpose can feel incoherent and unrewarding to participants. It's also, if done well, an opportunity to provide useful feedback to participants in advance of them executing their idea fully, and thus leading to better work all around.

Similarly, events cannot contain infinite numbers of submissions—even high quality ones. The logistics of a conference by mail imply real time, labour, and financial costs to every submission, and so organizers will need to match their capacities with an upper ceiling of contributions to the event. As belated withdrawals are almost a certainty, this internal limit number might be slightly lower than the contributions initially accepted.

WHAT WE DID

We launched our website (<https://www.diymethods.net/>) and circulated our call for zines in many listservs, social media accounts, and newsletters in March 2022. We asked for brief bios and an abstract (what we called 'pitches' in a bid for some useful defamiliarization) from potential participants, due in May 2022 to a free gmail account we set up for this purpose.

We asked for pitches between 300-500 words, detailing both the contents of the anticipated zine and the form that participants expected that it would take. In our call for zines, and in an FAQ on our website, we specified that a 'good' pitch would be one that can make a persuasive case for how form and content would ultimately support one another (and that it would ultimately be printable and mail-able). We also has-

tened to stress that we weren't exclusively looking for sleek professional design work, and invited people to use the conference as an opportunity to learn new skills.

We were very open-ended in the print formats we solicited, and to maximize the accessibility/eccentricity of the process for participants, we offered to either print digital files on our end (using a conventional print shop or our in-house risograph machine) or to compensate them for printing and shipping their own materials to us. Drawing on some internal research funds, we were able to pay for all of this without charging any registration fees.

We ultimately received over 80 pitches from a heterogeneous bunch of researchers. Science and Technology Studies was seemingly the most well represented field in the group (perhaps because of its long-standing methodological curiosity, its excellent infrastructure for disseminating CfPs, or Anne's close ties to the networks therein).

Pitches were reviewed by a jury of 3 academics doing varied and quite different methodological work. Diversity in the jury was an asset—it helped us better articulate and advocate for specific strengths, and also to cut through the murky middle of the submissions (those that looked promising, but weren't obviously an excellent or poor fit for the conference). Each jury member was required to review all the pitches in advance and assign them a quick qualitative grade (red, yellow, or green for reject, maybe, and easy yes, respectively). Then, over a somewhat agonizing few hours (the submissions were, overall, very good!), the jury met over Zoom to determine a shared short list of 40-some submissions. We aimed to balance representation from different methodological schools, career stages, and regions of the world. 36 were ultimately selected.

Notifications went out in June via email. The letter sent to all those that submitted included some general observations from the jury about trends in the submissions and some frequent areas for improvement noticed in those that were not selected. For those that were, a few sentences of feedback summarizing the jury's thoughts and potential concerns about the pitch were also included. The authors of selected submis-

sions were also asked to confirm their participation and the format/time restrictions of the conference via a GoogleForm. Everyone did so (though a few needed a reminder email).

TIPS AND POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Budget a fair bit of time for the jury process (perhaps more than you think you need) and set their deadline in advance/at the same time as the main conference timeline.
- If sharing a gmail inbox with folks in different regions of the world, it's best to add people as delegates to the account rather than simply sharing a password. Knowing this in advance would have saved us a bit of lost time to security-induced lock outs.
- Set the upper ceiling of your acceptances before the jury meets, lest they admit more than is practical. Keep in mind both the max number of zines (25-30 might have been better than 35ish in our case) and participants (some teams can be large) you want to work with.
- Be quite specific in your CFP about limitations and requirements for final submissions
- It would have been helpful to give practical/thrifty restrictions around paper size, dpi, binding types, and page length rather than leaving this totally open ended.
- If using a slightly unconventional print set up like risography, give even more specific print guidelines (for instance, the max number of ink colours per print, the viability of CYMK spoofing (especially with multiple colours on text), and the hazards of printing heavy ink on heavy ink, or mixing ink colours in small text).
- If you're planning on publishing the zines in a digital proceedings, you should also set a max PDF size (>8MB or less?) and be clear about accessibility requirements (i.e. OCR with image descriptions/parallel plaintext files).
- Rejection letters aren't fun to receive or write. You likely will not have the time to provide detailed and personalized feedback to the folks you aren't accepting. We tried to provide a general summary of common issues/weaknesses in our submission

pool, mailed out to all the unsuccessful applicants. This was probably the wrong move, as we heard from a few folks that they were more confused and worried about reading these generalizations back to their own work. Perhaps politeness and brevity are the best course of action, in the end?

SUPPORTING ZINE DEVELOPMENT

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

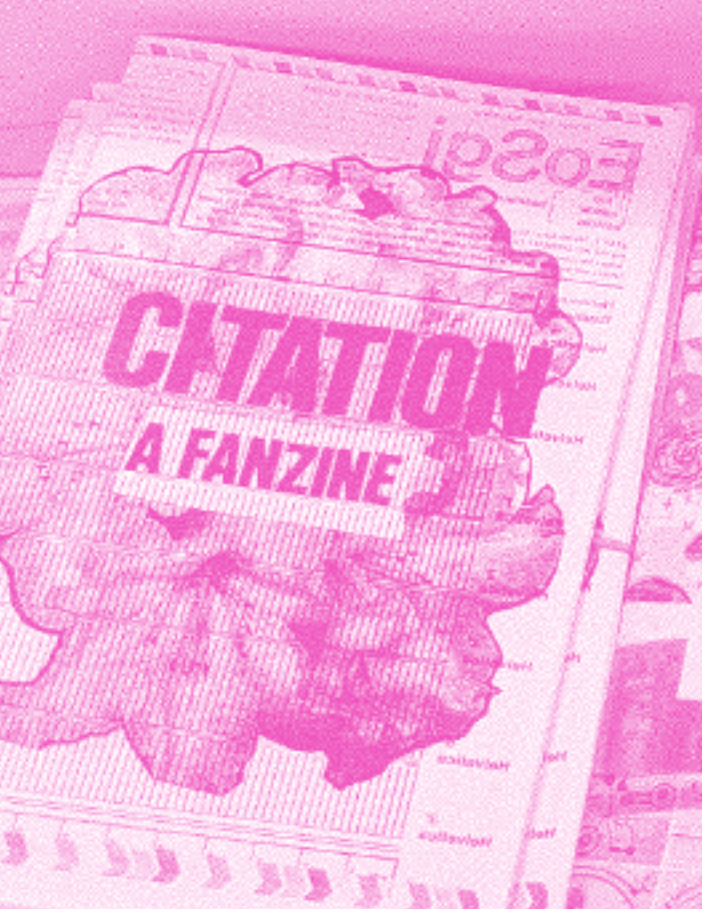
You may find that many of your participants are intrigued at the prospect of making a zine, and have an amazing idea for their submission, but need a little extra help learning how best to do so. Providing support for your participants, whether in the form of peer-to-peer learning, tutorials, or examples, can thus be both practically helpful to the success of your exchange and emboldening to those feeling apprehensive about submitting.

WHAT WE DID

We included links, examples, and blank templates in our website/CFP's FAQ section. We also recorded three YouTube videos covering the basics of risograph printing and hosted an 'office hour' via Zoom, walking participants through a few past zine projects, different printing methods, and design ideas. The office hour recording was also saved and shared with the whole conference group. Many participants said that they appreciated having these supports.

TIPS AND POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

- We could have gone even further and provided some InDesign/Affinity Design files set up for participants to work from, with dummy text, images, and accessibility features modeled.
- As well as showing some of the many 'right' ways to make a zine, we could also show a few 'wrong' paths to avoid (i.e. illegibly tiny text, unintentionally bad scan quality, and risograph printing hazards).



- If budget and timeline allows, sending out a ‘how to make a zine’ zine in the mail might be a cute and inspiring gesture.

RECEIVING SUBMISSIONS

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Once acceptance letters go out, you’ll need to prepare for final submissions to come in. The ideal portal/platform for this does not, to the best of our knowledge, exist, so you’ll have to find an imperfect but workable way to keep track of the status of your participants, your coordination tasks, and your deadlines. You’ll also need to email reminders, confirmations, and assorted updates to everyone.

WHAT WE DID

We coordinated everything through a series of folders and spreadsheets in a shared GoogleDrive. Submissions were received via our gmail account, renamed, uploaded into the shared drive, and colour-coded in a spreadsheet based on their movement through different printing queues. This required a bit more work than a more automated submissions platform might have won, but it did have the advantage of being free and familiar.

We sent reminder emails out the week before our deadline. We got a fair few extension requests, which we accommodated (though not without getting a little uncomfortably close to package mailing). This added to both issues with printing and mailing, which will be discussed in later sections.

Out of 36 acceptances, we had two teams drop out, despite confirming their intention to join the conference the month before. In a weird feat of symmetry, we had two additional authors join other teams late in the process, keeping our print quota the same.

We—foolishly!—overestimated the ability of PDF editing tools and did not require participants to submit any plaintext or image description files, thinking that this would be easy to complete on our end, at the very end. This was misguided. We also did not have any quality checks lists to run with submissions, resulting in a few sort-of-impossible-to-print files getting through our doors and not getting identified as such and addressed until we were in the middle of our print queue.

TIPS AND POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Set consistent deadlines for both on-time and late submissions, so that you can move your print queue along, provide some grace to those who are going through it, and avoid crunch time for the organizers.
- Ensure that your tracking method (spreadsheets or otherwise) includes all the tasks (confirmation emails, print shop submissions, etc.) and clear signals for task completion (check boxes, colour codes, etc.) that everyone in your team can access and understand. Be clear about who should update your tracker, and how.
- If your submission criteria are extensive, include a checklist for participants to consult when submitting/organizers to consult when processing submissions.
- Remember—and remind others of—accessibility requirements.

PRINTING

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The most integral part of a zine-based conference is the zines, and thus the printing process should be given the right amount of time and attention. If the zines and other print materials are not printed and assembled properly it can lead to headaches for everyone involved. Conversely, when everything goes well, it can be a real delight.

Zines are a loosely defined medium; they can take on pretty much any physical form with pages, from conventionally photocopied booklets to experimental mixed media assemblages. This can complicate the printing and assembly process, especially if not

MAKE YOUR OWN MEDIA

A PAPER PEEP BOX TEMPLATE

REMIx
TO
RESIST

CHRISTINA CORFIELD

USING METHODS
CREATIVELY IN THE
AGE OF PROJECTS

Jussara Rowland
Vasco Ramos
Clara Venâncio

Welcome to
**DIY
HUBS
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Part 1
Conference
Logistics

CONFERENCE 2022

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Janna Frenzel & Lee Wilkins

Composting
Research-Creation

planned out in advance. As such, creating a timeframe and hard deadline for your printing process becomes quite important. This should be long enough to account for the estimated maximum amount of time it will take to print the zines, with some additional time added for file mishaps, misprints, and general set-backs.

Three key resources to keep in mind when creating a printing timeframe include facilities and equipment (including access to printer labs and/or print shops), time, and labour. These bring forth some logistical questions that can help frame deadlines and timelines, including:

- Facilities and equipment: What printing resources are available? What is the cost? Do we have the correct resources to print the zines smoothly? Are there back-up plans in place?
- Time: How many submissions are there? How intricate is the printing process for each submission? If people are printing their own materials and mailing them into the conference, what's the absolute last date they should be in the mail?
- Labour: How many people are involved in the printing process? Can tasks be delegated to avoid printing fatigue?
- Scale: How many people ultimately need to get zines? How many do you want to archive? Do authors get multiple copies of their own zines? How many extra should you print in case of errors?

Your answers to questions such as these can help to think critically about what your printing process will look like, and can help you gauge what aspects of it might eat up the most time.

WHAT WE DID

Our printing process was unique as we were able to offer the option for either conventional printing through a local campus print shop, or in-lab printing by us using a Risograph machine. Out of the 34 total submissions, 9 were printed in-lab, 21 were sent off for conventional printing, and 4 were mailed to us by the zine-makers. We

chose to only provide 1 print zine per participant, and to restrict the distribution of print materials only to submitting authors. We opted to print 80 some copies of each zine (slightly more than our 70 something mailing list) to allow for a few orders to come with errors, and to leave behind copies for our lab archive.

RISOGRAPH PRINTING: IN-LAB

We were happy to offer the option of Risograph printing as a way to offer a form of printing that isn't widely accessible to most. Risographs can print at high-volumes with affordability, and is more eco friendly than most other conventional printing processes, which is also in line with the overarching ethos of our conference. Risographs can also be quite striking, with bright translucent inks, though combining multiple colours on the same page creates additional time requirements and opportunities for error.

The riso-curious had the opportunity to attend a how-to tutorial and had access to online guides and "office hours" for any questions. Their zines were colour-separated, and some had specific instructions attached to them. The printers, who were relatively new to risograph printing, were able to then take these files and print the zines, layer by layer, based on colours used.

The in-lab printing generally went well, despite some bumps on the road. When dealing with submissions from participants with different zine-making and printing backgrounds, though, issues of improper file formatting and colour separation were bound to come up. Though these issues were generally easily mitigated as participants were eager to help with corrections, it did push and pull the timeline around. A few zines came out in forms that differed from their creator's intentions, resulting in some disappointment. A few other creators were happy with the slightly unpredictable nature of riso printing, and chose not to 'correct' their files even though this compromised the legibility of their zines. The riso zines that did print well, conversely, looked amazing! These were generally fairly simple in their construction, using spot colour and duotones rather than CMYK spoofing. Sometimes simplicity is efficacy.

CONVENTIONAL PRINTING: LOCAL PRINT SHOP

Zines that did not require risograph printing were sent off to be conventionally printed at Trent's campus print shop. This was by far the most convenient and the cheapest option (a commercial shop, like Staples, would have significantly raised our costs). A downside of this choice, however, was that we ran the risk of competing with the back-to-school printing rush at the end of the summer.

As there were many different zines to be printed, and many copies of these zines, there had to be two orders made so as to not overwhelm the print shop. The logistics of hauling the printed goods were also somewhat tricky, involving borrowed trolleys and a few cab rides.

Overall, this process worked out well enough considering a tight turnaround period, though a couple of printing errors occurred. Though two errors were caught directly after printing and were corrected by the print shop, one was not caught until after mailing.

TIPS AND POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Budget more time than you think you need!
- Have a process for quality control (perhaps a check sheet for the printer of each print run of a zine?).
- Don't let participants use CMYK colour separations for risograph printing. This many pages, with novice hands, leads to bad outcomes. Instead, set a cap (2 or 3) on ink colours.
- Chat with your print shop early in the process to vet your planned timeline against their seasonal rhythms, and to potentially secure a bulk discount.
- Consider the pros and cons of increasing the size of your mailings. We found that there were several people who learned about the conference late, but very much wanted to get their hands on print copies of the zines. An open mailing list wasn't fea-

sible for us, as we had to print and coordinate mail over the course of several weeks, and without any costs on the part of participants. This might look different for you if you set up a paid pre-registration option in advance or work with a print-on-demand website (perhaps something like lulu.com?). This will require the advanced consent of your participants, however, as it implies a very different mode for the public circulation (and—though extremely hypothetical here—profit) for their work.

MAILING

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

After you've printed your lovely zines, you'll need to find a way to get them into distant hands, on time. It's important that participants receive their conference packages long before conference day so they can read through all the materials.

To help with this step, it's best to break mailing down into a list of tasks, minimizing room for error and making it easier to delegate time and tasks between multiple people. A basic list of tasks might include:

- securing supplies,
- organizing materials,
- assembling the packages,
- preparing the packages for mailing, and
- mailing the packages.

Just like every other step in conference planning and preparation, make sure to budget a lot of time for this process, as it's better to plan for too much time than be in a rush.



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WHAT WE DID

Our mailing process ended up being more time consuming than anticipated. There were some setbacks caused by human error on the ends of both organizers and participants, which caused some shifted deadlines and delayed packages.

Acquiring and packing our mail supplies was relatively easy. We purchased large bubble envelopes and set out the finished zines in piles around an office. We then worked conveyor belt style, moving from pile to pile, to assemble complete packages. Two workers were about to complete our 34-zine, 80-person run in about two hours.

We used a Google form to solicit participants' mailing addresses, which we then copied and printed to address stickers and affixed to our envelopes. This saved us some time and prevented copying errors, though this was not a perfect solution. Some participants entered the wrong address in the form. Others entered addresses that were not legible to the international postal routing system, requiring clerks to make inferred, and at times incorrect, adjustments. A total of 4 packages of the 80 sent ended up lost or redirected back to us.

Posting our packages took far longer than expected: 5 some hours, as postal clerks had to measure and weigh all of our envelopes individually, manually enter all the mailing information again into their computer systems, and—for international mail—inventories contents for customs declarations. We were not very popular in the post office that day. We generally chose the cheapest option, without tracking, to lower our costs and logistical worries, though we paid for tracking when participants flagged concerns about their domestic postal service (ex: in Mexico).

TIPS AND POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

- As our postal clerks kindly pointed out over the course of our minor mail saga, the hand-off with large quantities of mail is much easier if one pre-prints and pays for mail labels before coming into the post office. With Canada Post, we could have regis-

tered as a small business and done this in advance, and with a considerable postal discount to boot.

- Instead of asking participants to write in their addresses, consider asking them to look up and copy their address from your post office's address verification website (<https://www.canadapost-postescanada.ca/ac/>). This will prevent user/clerk errors.
- Try to get an envelope that will close to a standard size (rather than a flap that folds to variable sizes) so post office workers don't have to measure every single one.
- As always, budget more time than you think you need, both for assembly and drop off.

DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Although the whole point of the conference is to challenge the centrality of screens in remote exchanges, there are still many good reasons to provide a digital version of your proceedings. This allows for a wider audience than your printing and shipping budgets may contemplate, opens up asynchronous access for onlookers who might have found your conference after the fact, and lowers the stakes of late or lost mail. It can also provide a durable reference for future citations, with page numbers and a URL that tracks across the whole of the conference offerings.

Moreover, digital distribution also allows for additional accessibility—especially for readers who are Blind, low-vision, or ESL. One way you can do this is to offer a plain-text version of the zines that is screen-reader friendly and includes image descriptions. Alternatively, alt and OCR texts can be encoded in PDF versions of your zine files.

WHAT WE DID

Digital distribution for us included free, online access to the conference proceedings, uploaded as a PDF with scans of all the zines, as well as a plain-text, screen-reader

friendly copy. Both of these documents are housed on our conference website and remain available for download post-conference.

We initially planned on sewing together a combination of digital files and scanned documents, to better preserve some of the interesting print artifacts in our corpus. We thought that we would then use alt-text to make a single, all purpose, visually wonderfully and highly accessible PDF. We did not, therefore, ask participants to submit their final zines with a plain text copy included. This plan, however, presumed more of Adobe Acrobat than it was ultimately able to deliver.

It turned out that the final PDF of all the zines was quite long (approx. 520 pages), large, included a fair bit of handwritten and collaged text, and was quite heterogeneously laid out. As such, we concluded that there were more opportunities for OCR text to glitch, and more alt text than we wanted to manually insert. As a result, we shifted to producing a parallel text document in Word with a transcription of all the zines and with image descriptions. The main PDF was left as a mix of screen-reader-recognizable and illegible formats, with an indexed table of contents.

Text transcription was not only more time consuming than anticipated but created some apprehension when it came time to incorporate image descriptions. The writing of image descriptions was not an easy process, as many of the zines had collages, hand-drawn sketches, or detailed charts and graphs. Furthermore, it was up to us, the transcribers, to interpret the images as we saw them, which was perhaps not as the zine-maker intended.

We ended by uploading a compressed version of our PDF to <https://hcommons.org>, a repository for humanistic scholarship. H-Commons automatically creates DOI numbers for its deposits, which aids in future citation and adds legitimacy to the conference. A downside to this, however, is that there is a 100 MB limit. We had to repeatedly compress our file using Acrobat to get under that limit, and even so had to liaise with a friendly H-Commons staff member to get the file uploaded. The result isn't

crisp and picture perfect, but it's very readable and fits well within our lab/research group's low-carbon computing ethos.

The same file, plus our screen-reader friendly version, were also uploaded to a dedicated page on our research group's website. We also published a few errata here, for both in-print and digital versions of the zines.

TIPS AND POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Work out your accessibility plans at the start of the conference. It's smart to ask participants to submit a plain-text version of their zine, including image descriptions.
- When tackling the workflow of a large scanning/transcription/digitization operation, it's smart to have one designated person leading and directing the effort. Using a tracking spreadsheet and organized folder system will also help with steady progress.
- Budget extra time for uploading your proceedings into any sort of central repository. Also, don't hesitate to be in contact with the staff who maintain the repository, who will probably have some extra tricks up their sleeves.

ONLINE EXCHANGES

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

A coordinated mail exchange is great for getting ideas out. But how to coordinate reflections, responses, and questions between participants? 1:1 correspondence between participants is certainly a possibility, and may be directed and solicited by a particular zine maker (though polls, prompts, pre-addressed postcards, etc.). However, it's also helpful for the conference organizers to coordinate a further, and collective, form of exchange to increase the ease and quantity of feedback participants receive.

Twitter conferences are one format that fits the ethos of a mail exchange fairly well. As the name suggests, a Twitter conference is an online event that takes place on Twitter, a microblogging platform. Held over a set period of time, this digital format eliminates the environmental and financial burdens of attending a traditional, in-person conference. Twitter is not the only possible platform to use, but it is relatively well known, free to use, and invites unplanned public participation, both synchronously and asynchronously.

Hashtags are the calling card of microblogging conferences. A hashtag is a string of characters without spaces that precede a pound sign (#). This allows for posts to be grouped together and displayed when the hashtag is searched. A good hashtag is memorable, not too long, and not already used by different publics for different purposes. To improve screen-reader legibility, a hashtag with multiple words in it should be spelled with each word capitalized (#LikeThisForExample).

Organizers can also coordinate conference participation by using a central account where threads will be posted at a designated time. Having pre-planned questions and images helps to make posting on conference day quicker and smoother, which allows for more time to be spent engaging with participants and moderating discussions. Account handles (i.e. account names) for all participants can also be collected and distributed to participants in advance. It's also a good idea to distribute a rough protocol guide about the sorts of questions and responses that might be appropriate in the conference, and suggestions for what to do in case of online harassment.

Though there are many practical reasons to choose a Twitter-based conference, it's important to note that the success of such conferences is dependent on participants knowing how to navigate the platform. If they are unfamiliar with how to search hashtags, reply to posts, or connect with other accounts, they will miss content and connections, and conference engagement will be down. One way to mediate this is to have how-to guides on hand for participants who are unfamiliar with Twitter, and to make it known that they can reach out to organizers for assistance if necessary. It's also the case that, given the platform's acquisition and increasingly poor technical

and content moderation performance under Elon Musk, that its popularity and perceived neutrality may change. Mastodon, federated and open source microblogging software, may provide a future alternative (though not without a few extra technical steps for both organizers and participants).

WHAT WE DID

We held a 1 day, 7 hour, drop-in, semi-asynchronous Twitter conference.

Instead of creating a new Twitter account to house the conference, the Low-Carbon Methods Group's account (@LowCarbonMethod) was used to house the conference. This made sense for our conference as it is an account with an established audience, which helped with overall reach. We chose the hashtag #DIYMethods as it included the keywords of the conference name, and was not heavily used.

The conference day, format, and guidelines were circulated in advance, as well as in a short introductory zine at the beginning of our proceedings. It described basic Twitter etiquette, requested that participants used image-descriptions in their tweets, and provided a rudimentary plan in case any participants encountered online harassment (block the account, report the incident to the moderators, and move on).

Two organizers acted as moderators during the conference. This involved posting 7 threads (1 per hour starting at 9 am ET) with pre-written questions, and then engaging with the responses. These questions were crafted to make reference to multiple zine submissions around common sub-themes, ensuring that all zines would be engaged with. Author handles were also included in the questions, alerting them to their turn in the spotlight, as well as all the replies that followed. Participants were invited to drop in whenever convenient on the conference day. This, plus the staggered question threads, were designed to make it easier to participate across different time-zones and work/life commitments. Having multiple moderators was helpful, as the durational strain of running a 7 hour Twitter conference was considerable.

We found that about 2/3rds of the conference authors participated in the Twitter event. Those that did not either strongly preferred to not engage with social media, had prior commitments on the conference day, or made an unsuccessful attempt to parse the platform for the first time. In addition to our authors, we also had about 10 non-authors join in on the hashtag.

We received only moderate engagement with the central posts offered from our account. Beyond these, several participants also made their own threads, coordinated via the #DIYMethods hashtag, describing favorite zines, their process in making their own zines, and reflections on the conference format. Moderation work also included engaging with, and often retweeting, these participant threads and comments.

Although the #DIYMethods hashtag was largely unused prior to the conference, we saw a spike in its use by marketers in the weeks preceding our conference day. It seems possible that our use of the hashtag made it discursively valuable to these accounts, in a feat of somewhat misguided, metrics-led marketing. This might impact the ease of belated engagement with the Twitter Conference in the months after, though this isn't a primary concern.

Twitter was by no means the only means of exchange available to participants. Several zines solicited their reader to write back to the creator (via post or email), to vote in a poll, or to complete a set of participatory prompts and exercises that modelled the method under examination. These were a highly rewarding part of the reading experience of the conference, and likely delivered more high-value feedback to the authors than what we achieved on Twitter. We suspect that, in future, more could be done to explicitly coach authors through designing their own preferred form of readerly feedback, with excellent results for all. These modes of engagement, however, are more time consuming than dropping in on a Twitter thread, and so it seems likely that a conference that more heavily emphasizes these modes of research exchange will need to be smaller in size.

TIPS AND POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Consider adding a year to the hashtag to allow for future conference tweets to be grouped together (i.e. #DIYMethods23) and to make the hashtag less attractive to bots and marketers
- Offer explicit assistance with your platform via a guide on your website or a dedicated zine in the proceedings
- Be mindful of the time commitment of conference participation, especially around the use of new platforms and their learning curves
- Consider Twitter alternatives. Mastodon offers a similar microblogging set up with hashtags and threads, though setting up accounts requires joining dedicated servers. Organizers might consider setting up their own for the conference, though this would present a significant time commitment. Lower-tech alternatives, like online document editors such as Etherpad or Mural, might provide a lower barrier to entry and a useful distance from social media, if your audience skews in that direction.

BUDGET BREAKDOWN

Though your budget will vary depending on the size of your conference, we have broken down our costs as an example of what you might expect.

Paper (in-house) \$245

Includes white letter-sized and legal sheets (1200 pages), as well as cardstock (500 pages) for the covers, for use in our riso print studio

Printing (print shop) \$7,088

All work done by our campus print shop. 21 zines @ 80 copies each

Postage \$2,672

Shipping fees for eighty 1 kg packages to various national and international destinations, paying regular, non-business rates

Wages \$2,500

Includes the hours paid to research assistants (@ approximately \$25/hour) involved in the lead up to the conference

Office supplies/miscellaneous \$320

Includes all other supplies and fees not listed prior, such as mailers and envelopes, taxi/travel, and a first aid kit (safety first!)

Total \$12,825

CONCLUSIONS

DIY Methods was a rewarding experience for us. We appreciated the diversity in the subject matter of the zines that were produced, which speaks to the interest in experimental methods and alternative ways of conferencing across disciplines. It was encouraging to see the interest and enthusiasm that participants brought to the endeavour, and to know that there was value to the connections we made along the way.

As organizing a conference by mail of this calibre was a new endeavour for us, collecting participant feedback was a necessary and final step to bring the conference to a full close. This was mostly positive: participants shared appreciation for the conference and feedback during the selection process. These comments were also very affectively-charged, especially around the culmination of the event, when the zines were received. It's clear that the exchange meant something to participants beyond the usual conference goers' experience.

While we welcomed positive feedback, we were also interested in hearing about what participants thought could be improved. Most of the comments we received here related to Twitter, ranging from participants not feeling well versed enough in the platform to fully participate, to pointing to Twitter's fast-paced nature as being detrimental to deeper discussions. This feedback also speaks to the usefulness of zines in both embodying research in a creative, accessible way, as well as the power that both conferences and zines hold in creating embodied connections through research. In future iterations of our conference we will explore other modes of facilitating remote dialog between participants, leaning more into the strengths already evident in our format.

Through the 34 zines circulated through DIY Methods, zine-makers shared a variety of research topics including reflections on climate and social justice issues, field guides on listening and site exploration practices, and engaging observations and guides to data collection through games, play, hospitality, and art. These academic zines are an example of what researchers and scholars can do when they consider and work with experimental practices and step outside of the publishing formats that are

standardized in academic spaces. Through the zine medium researchers are allotted more space for creativity. They can break free from strict, standardized publishing formats, and can choose fonts, materials, colours, and other special quirks that they feel embodies their research into a physical form. This embodiment adds to the experience of both research-creation for the zine-maker, as well as the experience that readers have.

Community and networking are integral to both conferences and zine culture, and it was interesting to see how this played out in a zine-based, conference-by-mail setting. One of the interesting outcomes of our conference was being able to see zine networking and the “gift economy” in action. As it’s common for zine-makers to gift or trade their zines, or to ask for a minimal fee if selling them (often just enough to cover postage, printing, or material costs), zines stray from hierarchal and capitalist systems of production and distribution and are instead created and distributed in a system built on “generosity and pleasure”—a gift economy. Though not at the forefront of our minds in the conference planning process, we were in essence facilitating a large-scale zine exchange ring. As our conference was remote and most interactions between organizers and participants occurred online, the circulation of zines turned these distanced, loosely formed connections into tangible ones created through embodied research. The result of this is, sentimentally, research being shared and received as a gift.

Zine-based conferences-by-mail offer a new pathway to creating and presenting scholarly work through a low-tech, low-carbon, high-fidelity, and screen-free alternative to in-person gatherings. Our experience with DIY Methods speaks to what can happen when access and climate consciousness are put to the forefront in conferencing, as well as what can happen when researchers and scholarship are brought together through non-traditional, creative means. Overall, we believe that these directions offer generative possibilities for research exchange and social care that are worth exploring. We hope to see your own experiments in future.

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Akbari, Rona. "How to Make a Zine." *The Creative Independent*, 19 Nov. 2018, thecreativeindependent.com/guides/how-to-make-a-zine/.

Introductory. A very brief introduction to zine making, including idea formation, creative direction, and distribution.

Biel, Joe, et al. *Make a Zine!: When Words and Graphics Collide*. Bloomington, Ind: Microcosm Publishing, 2008.

Intermediate. DIY guide to zine-making, which is good for beginners and beyond. While it includes introductory information, it also covers advanced topics such as licensing and sustainability.

Broken Pencil Magazine: <https://brokenpencil.com/>

A website dedicated to zines and indie arts. While the entire website itself is a valuable resource, these pages are particularly useful:

<https://brokenpencil.com/zine-and-indie-culture-libraries/>

Global directory of zine libraries

<https://brokenpencil.com/zine-festivals-and-small-press-fairs/>

Global list of zine festivals, fairs, and related events

<https://brokenpencil.com/category/gettingstarted/>

Introduction to the basics of zine making

Mark, Todd and Esther Pearl Watson. *Whatcha Mean, What's a Zine?: The Art of Making Zines and Mini-Comics*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006.

Introductory. A resource that is good for beginners, as it centers easy to follow tips and tricks for zine making.

Wreck, Alex. *Stolen Sharpie Revolution*. Portland: Lunchroom Publishing, 2020.

Intermediate. Offers information good for beginners, but also guides on trading, promotion, distribution, and more.

ZINE CULTURE AND THEORY

Duncombe, Stephen. *Notes from the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Underground Culture*. Bloomington, Ind: Microcosm Publishing, 2008.

Explores the history and theory of zines, primarily the role of zines in both communicating and creating culture..

Piepmeyer, Alison. *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.

An exploration of how feminism is communicated through “girl zines”. Of note, this Piepmeyer touches on materiality and zines, primarily the connections that are initiated between zine creators and readers by materiality.

Spencer, Amy. *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture*. London: Marion Boyars, 2015.

An overall look at the history of DIY media, with a large portion dedicated to print media and zines. Spencer notably focusses on DIY ethic and culture, including but not exclusive to zines and zine culture.

RESEARCH-CREATION, AND CREATIVE RESEARCH EXCHANGE

Jungnickel, Kat, ed. *Transmissions: Critical Tactics for Making and Communicating Research*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2020.

A volume of chapters describing diverse and experimental efforts at research dissemination, and reflections on the links between dissemination and method.

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Pasek, Anne. "Low-Carbon Research: Building a Greener and More Inclusive Academy." *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* 6 (January 8, 2020): 34-38. <https://doi.org/10.17351/ests2020.363>.

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