

this zine is by
riotMuffin

don't @ me

January 2025

find it on
archive.org
if u must

DO NOT PAY
for this zine

DO NOT PAY
for this zine

Excuse me?!

WE ALL DESERVE
TO DROP \$100
ON ZINES THEN
HEAD TO THE
VEGAN BURGER
JOINT AS A
LITTLE TREAT

DO! NOT!
PAY! FOR!
THIS ZINE!!

* ACTUAL DODGE *
from 2024 Midwest
Q/T zine fest promo flyer

this is the ethic i intend
to relentlessly antagonize inside

\$15

THE PRICE

OF

ZINES

\$10

IS TOO

DAMN

HIGH!

\$12

\$14

2nd Printing
w/ new intro

\$9

\$16
TOO MUCH LOL

\$13.50

\$10

\$10
not paying that

Intro/Addendum to the 2nd Edition

Or, how this zine got me kicked out of a zine fest

January 2025

The birth of "The Price of Zines is Too Damn High" came last summer upon seeing promotional materials for the Midwest Queer/Trans Zine Fest such as the one on the back cover inviting attendees to "spend \$100 on zines and a vegan burger as a treat." That plus seeing increasingly exorbitantly priced zines around town led me to see the necessity of an intervention.

I began by writing about one exorbitantly priced zine that particularly yanked my chain. I mentioned in detail the topic of the zine in question in order to tie it to my personal experience with that topic. I also noted that between the combination of topic and price, I was able to correctly guess the creator of the zine, which was true.

Later on, I decided to go ahead and apply to table at the Midwest Queer/Trans Zine Fest, and was accepted. After all, nothing about their invite said you *have* to charge exorbitantly, and I also know at these sorts of events that at these sorts of events a lot of people without a lot of money thirst for the type of stuff I make and distro. At the event I gave away a hundred or so copies of this zine for free. On Day 1 I got exclusively positive reviews and lots of thank yous.

It turned out, however that the person who's zine I had seen at the bookstore was also there, and none too pleased. On Day 2 they confronted me and demanded I remove all copies of the zine. I declined their invitation, but I thought we'd had a reasonable conversation, until they stormed off.

Not long afterwards, two of the event organizers barged up to me, telling me I had "15 minutes to leave". Despite the peculiar timing, they never mentioned this zine directly. Instead, they accused me of harassing the fest



This page is mostly typed b/c it's a relevant quote from that \$20 whole-ass-book I got. I would love for u to dwell on it a bit.

In the book, poster artist Josh MacPhee of Just Seeds critiques art exhibitions themed around "protest", in which:

"...a Gordon Parks photograph of Muhammad Ali rubs shoulders with paintings by well-known contemporary artists, which sit next to a wall of political posters created for mass public distribution, which in turn share space with abstract sculptural installations never seen outside of a gallery or museum. Are all these things actually "protest"? Are they protesting comparable things in comparable ways? If "protest" is something worthy of organizing an exhibition [or, ahem, zine fest...] around, one would think there would be some comparable desire to see that protest accomplish something. Yet time and again, institutions (and individual artists and designers) [and zinesters] willfully conflate their self-expression, or the possibility that someone will be inspired by their self-expression, with the organized voice of communities and groups of people in active political struggle."

-- Graphic Liberation: Image Making & Political Movements.

(The book is a buncha interviews by Josh with other social movement graphic artists, and I highly recommend it)

To paraphrase: don't fuckin cosplay struggle for name recognition or to make a buck.

thank you for reading

"BUT HOW DO I PAY
FOR PRINTING? SHIT!"

Glad u asked! Here's some ideas that
u may not have thought of:

PRINTING

steal from ya job

free copy machines
if it looks like u
belong

yr friend's job

pay copy machines
"oops it jammed!"
[or run fast]

Craigslist a home
machine

Scamazon a
home machine

PAPER +
other supplies —

Scamazon again
w/ a new email

Supply store
dumpster

please tell me
yr stealing from werk

Waiting at
doctor's office

any copy machine
when nobody's looking

Stack of paper bags
at self-checkout,
cut to size

back of old posters/
flyers

on instagram (which I do not use). After some back and forth (bewildered on my part and belligerent on theirs) they showed me this post from mastodon, which is not instagram (*who reads mastodon anyway? that's why I use it!!*).

Again, to emphasize, this was a screenshot, on mastodon, and so the only way whomever¹ this person is, or anyone else for that matter, would see it, is if they specifically looked it up in between spending their \$50-200 at said zine fest.

After some further questioning, the angry presumed organizers claimed that this, and i quote, "violat[ed] our safe space policy", ordered me to leave within 15 minutes, and then stormed off. This was with about 4 hours left in the event, so I started to slowly pack up, but so many people wanted to take my zines and talk for the rest of the afternoon, that I didn't actually end up leaving until 4:55 or so. Perhaps thanks to the friends (both old and new) I'd made at the event advocating for me, I never had any more belligerent encounters.

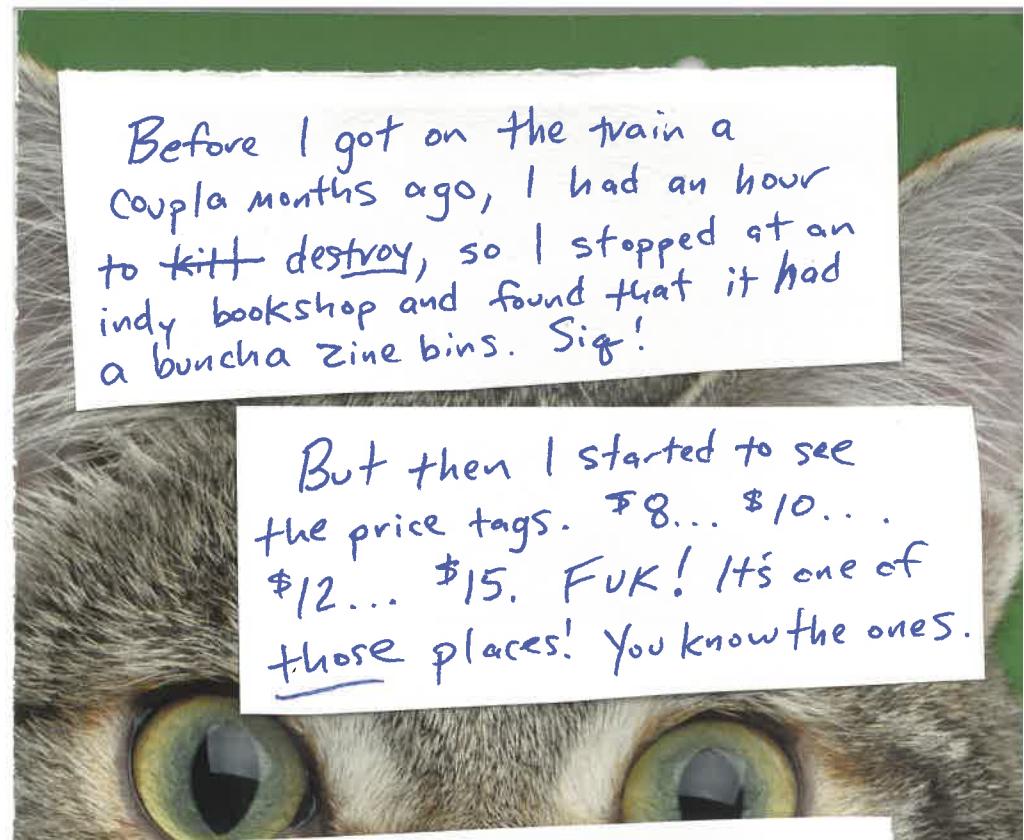
What's more, I made a fuckton of money, a bunch of which I was able to immediately give to an imprisoned comrade's commissary, even tho half my table was free and I asked only \$3-6 for items on the other half. Someone even traded me a thc bev and some gummies!! *Hey haters, did anyone trade YOU a thc bev and some gummies?? No?? Too bad, you could probably use em to chill tf out!!*

Anyway, if you've made it this far: to the zine maker whose zine originally yanked my chain, I apologize. I should not have crafted this story in a way that risked portraying the problem I seek to address within, as your overpriced zine. To you, and to readers, I would like to avow: the problem is not any one person's overpriced zines. The problem is *Lots and Lots of People's Overpriced Zines, taken together—indeed, the entire culture that fosters the price of zines being too damn high.*

To all other readers: perhaps you are reading this at a zine fest. Perhaps even at a zine fest in which the organizers will succeed in kicking me out this time. Or kicking YOU out! If this is the case, take pride and rejoice. Zines want to be cheap or free! §

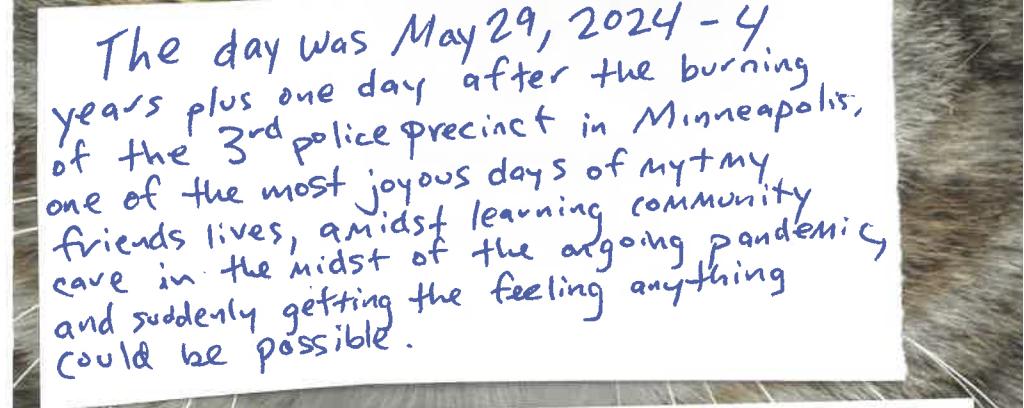
Muffin

¹ Curiosity got the best of me and I later looked this person up, discovering that they are apparently a Well Known (except by me and all my friends) Boutique Zine Person around town. They have a bunch of zines for sale for sliding scales like \$10-50 and \$20-30, but don't worry, if you are a person of color or low income, you can email them to get a free digital copy, but only if you're on government assistance, but don't worry, we won't make you prove it! One of these zines, and I am not at all making this up, is about artists getting priced out of stuff.

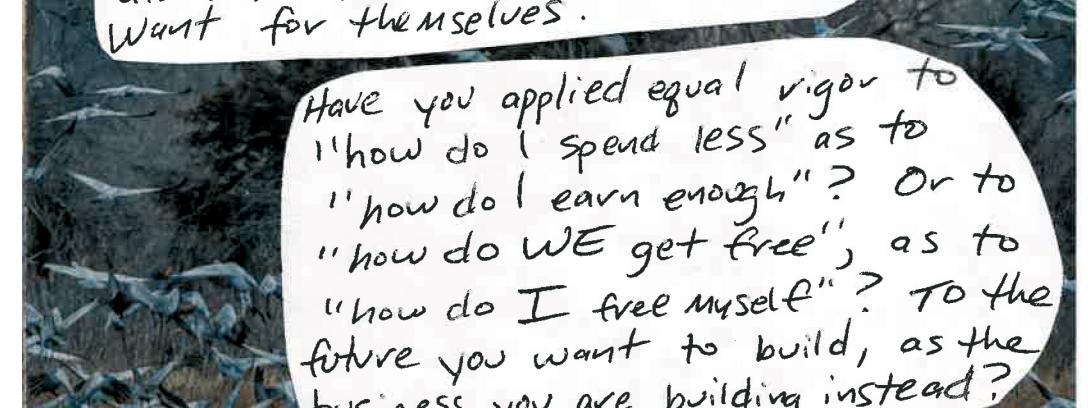


Before I got on the train a couple months ago, I had an hour to kill destroy, so I stopped at an indie bookshop and found that it had a buncha zine bins. Sigh!

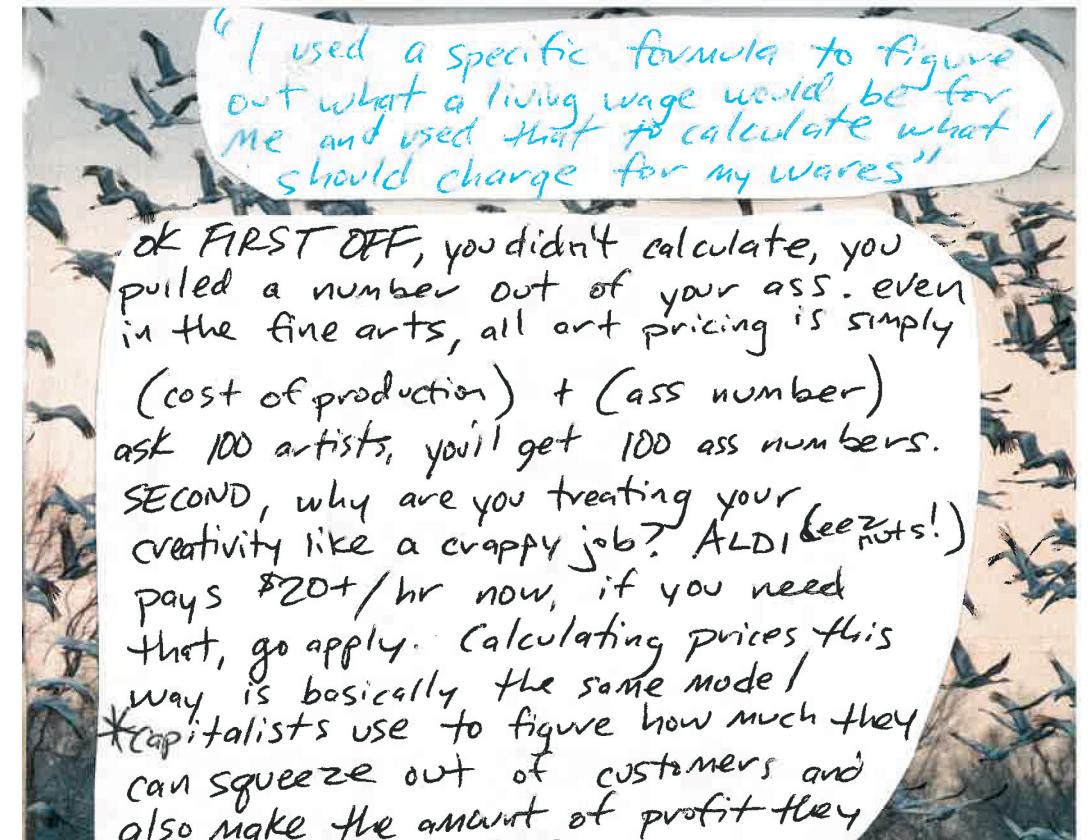
But then I started to see the price tags. \$8... \$10... \$12... \$15. FK! It's one of those places! You know the ones.



The day was May 29, 2024 - 4 years plus one day after the burning of the 3rd police precinct in Minneapolis, one of the most joyous days of my friends' lives, amidst learning community care in the midst of the ongoing pandemic, and suddenly getting the feeling anything could be possible.

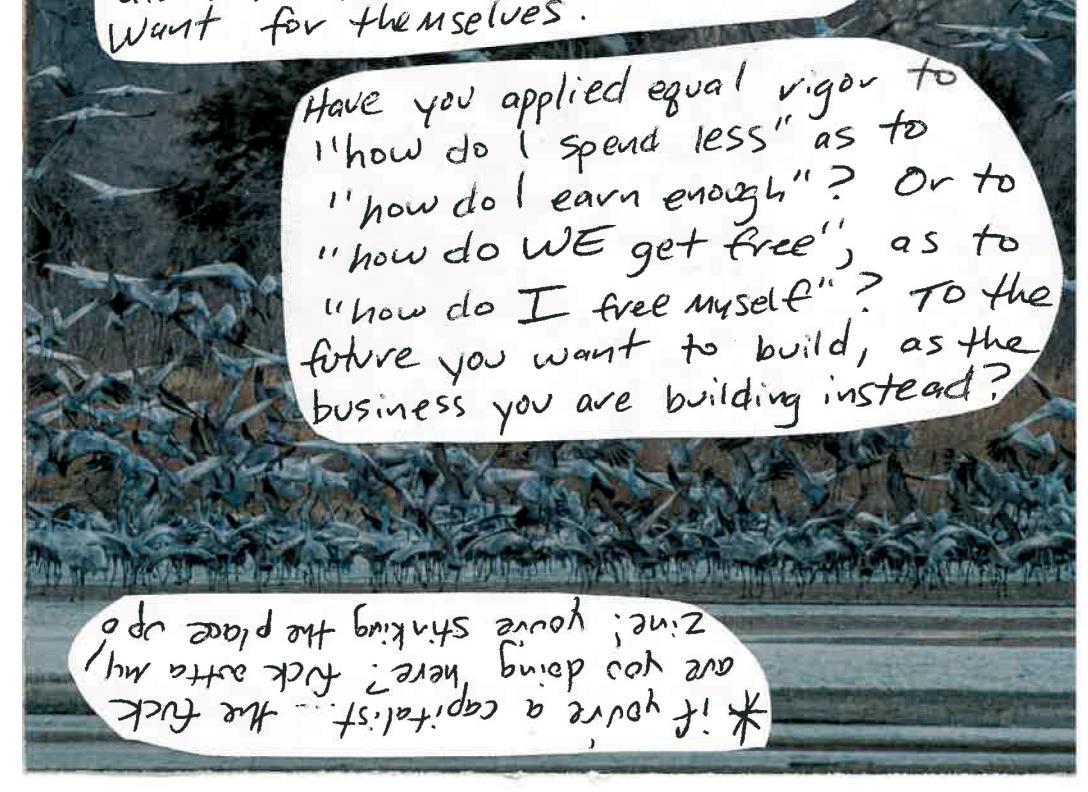


So the next zine I flipped to caught my eye, with a colorful cover about STUFF and the George Floyd Uprising. I flipped to the back to learn more, and there it was... oh no. The price:



"I used a specific formula to figure out what a living wage would be for me and used that to calculate what I should charge for my wares"

OK FIRST OFF, you didn't calculate, you pulled a number out of your ass. even in the fine arts, all art pricing is simply (cost of production) + (ass number) ask 100 artists, you'll get 100 ass numbers. SECOND, why are you treating your creativity like a crappy job? ALDI (beezuts!) pays \$20+/hr now, if you need that, go apply. Calculating prices this way is basically the same mode / Capitalists use to figure how much they can squeeze out of customers and also make the amount of profit they want for themselves.



Have you applied equal vigor to "how do I spend less" as to "how do I earn enough"? Or to "how do WE get free", as to "how do I free myself"? To the future you want to build, as the business you are building instead?

zine; you'd zap off making the place up to 20% here? fuck off and die a capitalistic death f*ck!

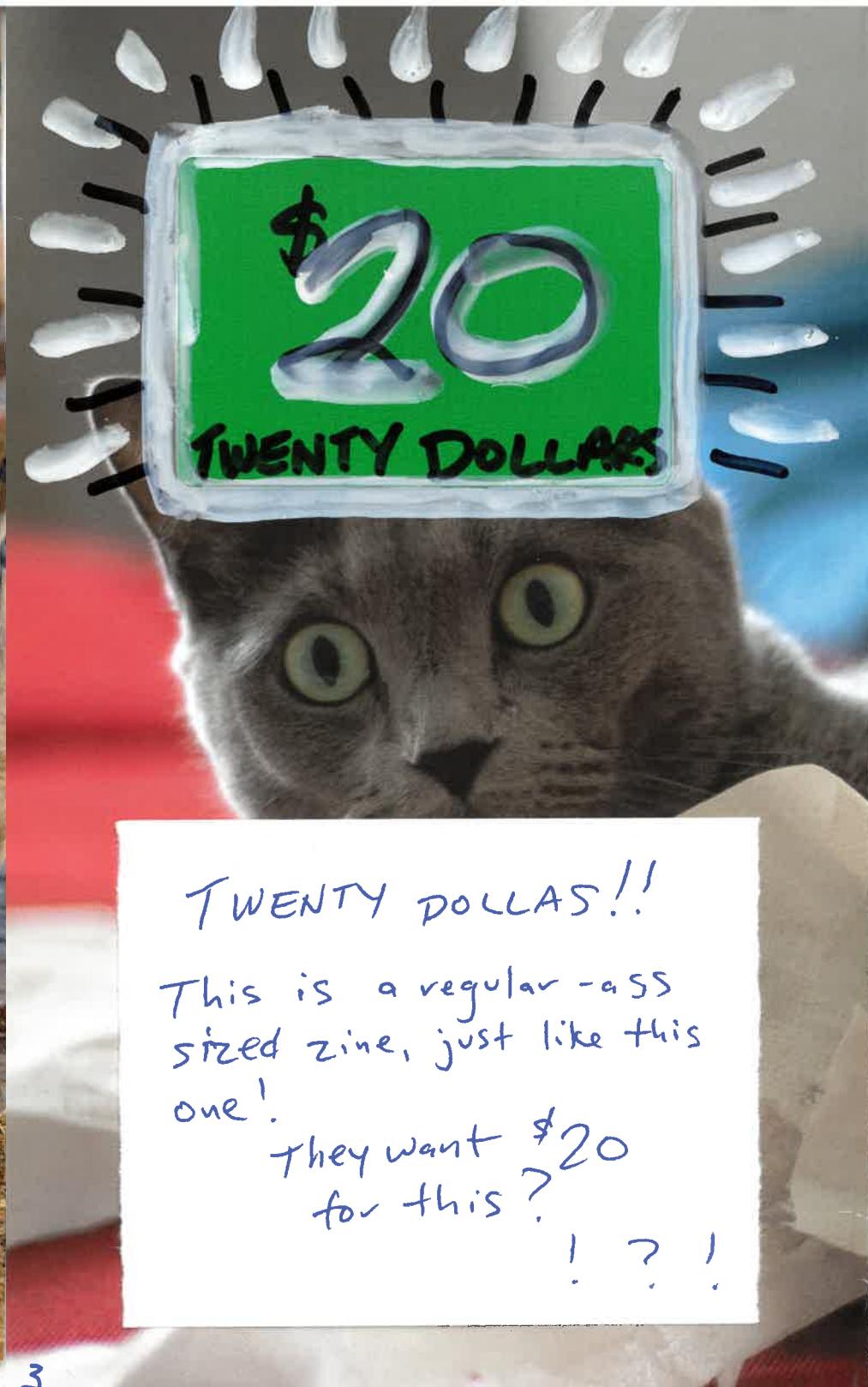
Moar Objections

"(I'll have you know,
this zine is actually
a fundraiser!"

Cool so, you should probably lead with that, and not only bring it up when someone wonders why your zine costs so much. Also, more people will spread the word about your fundraiser, and you will almost surely make more buxx, if you give away lots of copies cheap or free.

"But I do give away some copies cheap or free, people just hatter ask"

You expect anyone to just say "Hey can I have this \$20 thing for free?" Honey, this is not how human psychology works. Every year tens of MILLIONS of people fail to apply for LIFE-SAVING PROGRAMS like food assistance and medical \$ aid bc they "don't want to be a burden" or think they're not poor enough. Make cheap/free the DEFAULT. Then some people will offer MORE b/c it makes them feel good. Offering less, in contrast, makes most people feel bad.



Now, it just so happens that I remembered a previous encounter with some Minneapolis zinesters charging similarly exorbitant prices. "HMM," I said aloud, as I flipped to the first page...

((Y'ALL))

I exclaimed to the whole bookstore,

"I just guessed this zine's author just from the price!"

TO EMPHASIZE THIS AGAIN: THE POINT HERE IS NOT ABOUT THIS PARTICULAR AUTHOR, IT'S ABOUT THE TOTALITY. IN FACT, I'VE SINCE DONE THIS WITH OTHER AUTHORS TOO. FUN GAME! PLAY WITH FRIENDS!

"But inflation has hit the whole economy..."

Zines should not be PART of "the Economy!!"

"Well, don't pay for it if you don't like it!"

DON'T WORRY!
I'M NOT GONNA!

goof-ball

WEEKLY BUDGET

Groceries \$60

Bus fare \$30

Mutual Aid \$15

Zines \$100

Vegan Burger \$25

SOMEONE WHO IS
GOOD AT THE ECONOMY
PLEASE HELP ME
BUDGET THIS!!!

"stop
name-
calling"

NO

Objections

"I need to make a living somehow..."

DON'T DO IT w/
YR MEDIOCRE ZINES!
there are plenty of
us struggling but
getting by without
taking a critical
non-commercial means
of social struggle
and joy and gentri-
fying it into a
premium boutique
enterprise that the
folks who keep the
genre alive can't
even access at events
claiming to cele-
brate it! For
fucks sake!

"But what about the zero -
value phenomenon, which
says people might buy
more of something at a
higher price, b/c lower
priced ones are often shitty?"
It's true there are a lot
of shitty zines.

*SOLUTION: DON'T TABLE
SHITTY ZINES*
and give a reasonable,
sliding scale price if you
MUST, a free-box with
the riff-raff, and give
everything to your friends
for free, ya nerd



Now, let me get it out of the way right now: Yes, artists and writers deserve to be compensated fairly for their creations. My wage labor job is in the arts world. I'm the daughter of an artist who has somehow held together a co-op gallery for decades. I understand this well.



\$20 is reasonable for a good art poster.
\$20 is reasonable for the full 200-page
book I purchased at the same bookshop.
\$20 is NOT reasonable for a 24-page
zine that you printed out at home,
folded over and stapled twice. It's not.

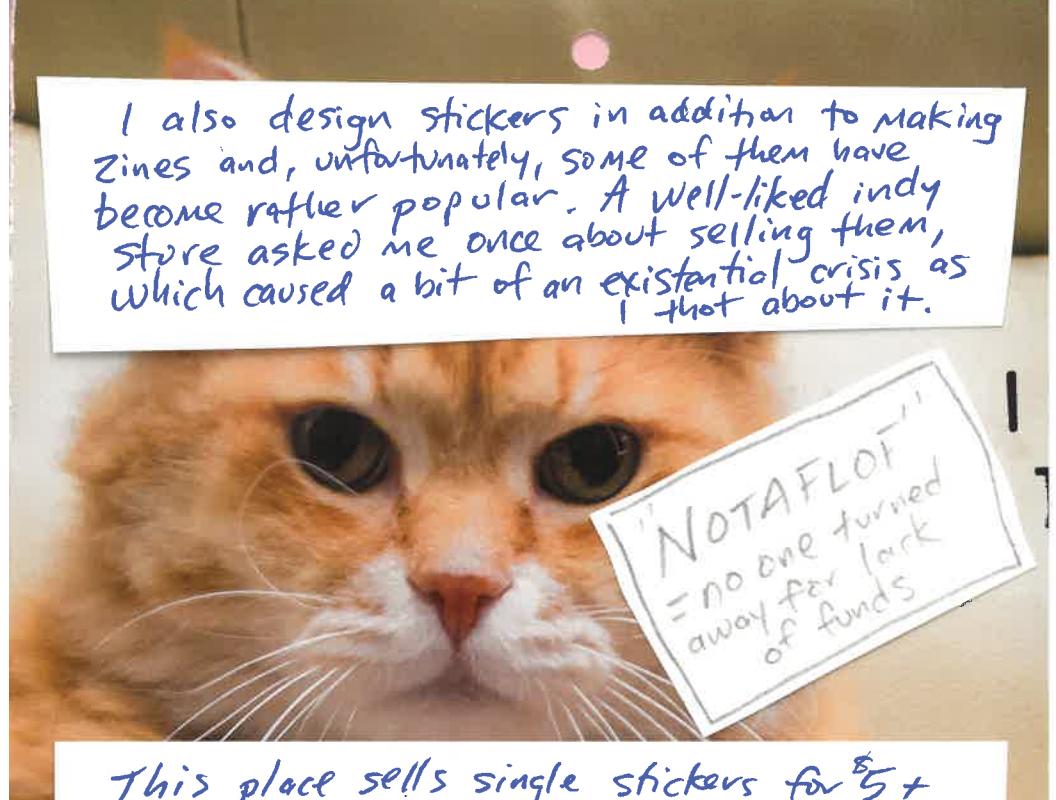
The thing about fair compensation
is it has to be fair on both sides.
That is doubly so regarding zines, a
communication medium born from poor
marginalized queerdos and activists without
access to established media channels and
methods. The whole damn POINT of
zines is that they should be cheap to
make and easy to access. At least, that
was the case before the "boutique zinester"
trend I've been noticing more & more lately.

That "boutique" zine world, thriving at zine festivals, stores, and academic gatherings, is so incredibly different than my experience with zines as a fun noncommercial tool for consciousness raising and organizing (or dis-organizing, shout out to all my anarcha/nihilist/insurrecta pals). We print out relevant zines from other crews, add them to our own, and distro them along with stickers, posters, food, Narcan, and more at mutual aid events, shows, actions, etc. Sometimes there's a donation jar but often not!

In fact, in discussing this with friends & comrades, I've lost track of the number of times people have said: "Wait - some people pay for zines ???!"

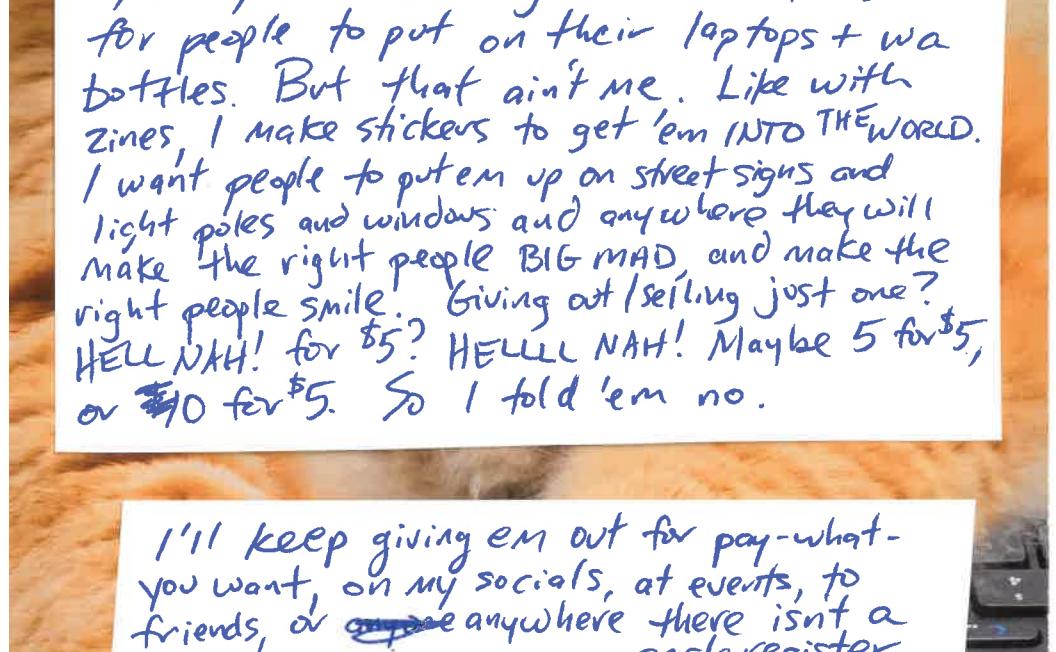
NOW, it happens that I do make personal zines too. And I've sold them! for reasonable prices, NOTAFLOF sliding scale, and I will even accept shitty authcon bullshit in a trade, b/c MY POINT IS TO GET THE GOODS IN PPL's HANDS. I'm not tryna make latte money with my zines - that's what shoplifters for!!

I also design stickers in addition to making zines and, unfortunately, some of them have become rather popular. A well-liked indy store asked me once about selling them, which caused a bit of an existential crisis as I thought about it.



NOTAFLOF
= no one turned away for lack of funds

This place sells single stickers for \$5+ for people to put on their laptops + water bottles. But that ain't me. Like with zines, I make stickers to get 'em INTO THE WORLD. I want people to put em up on street signs and light poles and windows and anywhere they will make the right people BIG MAD, and make the right people smile. Giving out/selling just one? HELL NAH! for \$5? HELLLL NAH! Maybe 5 for \$5, or \$10 for \$5. So I told 'em no.



I'll keep giving em out for pay-what-you want, on my socials, at events, to friends, or ~~elsewhere~~ anywhere there isn't a cash register. Usually I break even, and I am pleased.