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# Zine Ecologies: Creative Environmentalisms and Literary Activisms

Laura Smith , Catherine Cartwright , Georgina Brennan-Lister, Emily Brooks, Ffion Collins, Sophie Colson, Eleanor Cook, and Ciara Munnery

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Writers, artists, activists, and others are finding creative ways to engage with, and disrupt and unsettle, commentaries on the climate emergency. In this article, we argue that the do-it-yourself ethic and aesthetic of zines (small-circulation, self-published magazines) and zine-making offers a creative and empowering approach to environmental storytelling, and that zines do different kinds of “work” around positioning, narrating, and responding to ecological problems. Through the idea of zine ecologies, we examine the entanglements between zines and zineing, environmentalism, environmental politics, literature, art, activism and protest, and more. The idea of zine ecologies has a dual existence in this article. We use this idea both as the provocation for a minizine that accompanies this article, but also to scaffold discussion of the quiet politics and activism of student zine projects responding to, for example, an environmental writer, a piece of activist writing, or an environmental issue or scenario. **Key Words:** art activism, creative methods, environmentalism, literary activism, zines.


We began work on this article by making a minizine. This article’s title, “Zine Ecologies,” was the provocation for coproducing a minizine that would allow us to think creatively with, to, through, and out the other side of entanglements between zines and zineing, environmentalism, environmental politics, literature, art, activism and protest, and more. **Zine**, *n.* \ˈzēn\, a small-circulation, self-published magazine or pamphlet composed of original and reused texts, images, and found objects. **Ecology**, *n.* ecol-o-gy\i-ˈkă-lə-jē, e-\, the study of the relationships between organisms and habitats. *Zine ecologies*, or *the ecology of zines*, are ecosystems of letters, words, art, photography, and other materials, all interconnected and entangled. They provide a short, beautiful, maybe countercultural, hopefully disruptive or disquieting commentary on the environment and climate emergency. Our individual and collective responses are compiled in our *Why Zine Ecologies?* minizine (GEO3147 Zine Collective 2022a, and included as an [Appendix](#) to this article). This was the first work we did collaboratively, coming together as a small group of human geography academics, doctoral researchers, and undergraduate students. A sociable online zine-making session led by Cartwright set the tone for the rest of the writing process, and gave us the space to question, consider, play with, and reflect on what we understand the work of zine ecologies to be—and do. Each of us has two pages in the minizine. The minizine reveals some of the prework, the journeys in thinking, talking, and planning, behind this article. We invite you to download, print, fold, cut, and read the minizine alongside reading this article (or watch the zine via GEO3147 Zine Collective 2022b). With no clearly distinguishable front or back cover, just turn a page!

In July 2022, the first issue in Snyder and Sherman’s (2022) five-part firefighter thriller graphic novel, *Dark Spaces: Wildfire*, was released. The story follows a crew of women from an inmate

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

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firefighting program as they attempt a heist on a California mansion during a wildfire. The Arroyo Fire of the graphic novel echoes the Arroyo Grande wildfire in Sutton County, California, that started on 11 June 2020. Writers, artists, activists, and others are finding creative ways to engage with, and disrupt and unsettle, commentaries on the climate emergency: speculative fiction, climate fiction or “cli-fi,” comics and graphic novels, children’s literature, essays, poetry, and zines.

In this article, we use zines (pronounced “zeens”) and zine-making as a way of thinking collaboratively and creatively with students about ways to navigate and negotiate the climate emergency—and work through questions of climate anxiety and grief (Head 2016; Ray 2020). Students were recruited as collaborators on this article from an undergraduate geography class at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> This generation of students is the generation of youth climate activist Greta Thunberg, and her Skolstrejk för klimatet (School Strike for Climate), of Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil, and more (Halstead et al. 2021). There is a growing genre of activist writing by and featuring youth climate activists (e.g., Thunberg 2019, 2022; Craig 2021; Maddrell 2021), and about the youth climate movement (Van Der Voo 2020; Klein and Steffoff 2021; Della Volpe 2022; Goldman 2022). We argue that zines can make a critical contribution to discourses of ecological activism and literary activism—zines are a participatory action research tool (cf. French and Curd 2022; see also Pain 2003, 2004), and the do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic and aesthetic can empower zine-makers or zinesters (here, students) to interject their voices, experiences, and encounters into—and disrupt—difficult conversations on environmental problems.

Our analysis approaches the *zine-as-product*, rather than the *zine-as-process*—examining the “work” that zines can do as critical-creative spaces of environmental storytelling (on zines as critical pedagogy, see, e.g., Congdon and Blandy 2005; Bagelman and Bagelman 2016; Velasco, Faria, and Walenta 2020). We borrow from Peterle’s (2021) “comics as doings” idea, with their assemblages of narrative, story, and art, “recognising that they act, move, affect, and intervene in the world. Comics create connections and relationships and activate practices that have effects beyond the comics’ frame, outside the page, and in the material world” (4). In an eight-page, A5-size zine (A2 folds down to A5),<sup>2</sup> students can creatively respond to, for example, an environmental writer, a piece of activist writing, or an environmental issue or scenario (see Guzzetti and Gamboa 2004; Piepmeier 2009; and Duncombe [1997] 2017 for further commentary on zineing practices among young people). The zine, common in creative geographies, offers much potency for disrupted agency, because zines “intersect with the political economies of the academy in ways that shape who gets to make knowledge, how, and in what ways” (Hawkins 2019, 968; cf. von Benzon et al. 2021).

This article begins by unpacking the entanglements of zines and zineing, environmentalism, story, and storytelling. We discuss the place (and politics) of story—and storytelling—in environmentalism, and argue that zines offer a different approach to, and do different kinds of work around, environmental storytelling. We also consider how the materiality of zines about the environment also powerfully contributes to this politics of storytelling. The article then turns to examine the place of art in and of literary activism. Discussion brings together ideas across geographies of creativity and art activism, before pausing at three examples of collaborative and individual artist zine projects that have in various ways narrated two defining environmental issues of the moment—the global COVID-19 pandemic, and the environment and climate emergency.

Next, the article returns to our *Why Zine Ecologies?* minizine (GEO3147 Zine Collective 2022a, 2022b, see also Appendix), and also introduces six of the student zine projects, reflecting on the important environmental stories they tell (and why, how), and how these zines are crafting and mobilizing critical-creative environmentalisms and literary activisms. In the final section of the article, we reflect on the lingering quiet politics or “afterlives” (Radway 2011) of this small ensemble of environmental zines.

## ZINEING AND ENVIRONMENTAL STORYTELLING

*What work can zines do in storying environmentalisms? How does the zine put environmentalisms to work?*

Amidst international declarations of an environment and climate emergency, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Black Lives Matter movement, and with dismantlings of colonial, misogynistic, and racist histories in and of Western conservation politics, environmental writers and activists are not without stories to narrate. But what stories to tell, whose, how, why, where, when, and by whom?

The place (and politics) of story—and storytelling—in environmentalism lies in helping people make sense of ecological problems. As Cronon (1992) argued, narrative is “our best and most compelling tool for searching out meaning in a conflicted and contradictory world” (1374). Story is a space for making, remaking, and unmaking ideas, configurations, interventions, and performances about the environment (see Cronon 1992; Cameron 2012; de Leeuw et al. 2017; and McKittrick 2021 on geographies of story and narrative). Storytelling can build collaborative constituencies, as “a good story makes us *care* about its subject” (Cronon 1992, 1374, and on affect, storytelling, and environmental narrative, see, e.g., Berberich, Campbell, and Hudson 2016; Weik von Mossner 2017), storytelling, and environmental narrative (see, e.g., Berberich, Campbell, and Hudson 2016; Weik von Mossner 2017)—by storying, for example, climate knowledge (D. M. Harris 2020, 2021), Indigenous and decolonial environmental knowledges (Wright et al. 2012), and political ecology and environmental justice (Houston 2013; Houston and Vasudevan 2018; L. M. Harris 2022). It is “storying (for) change” (Cameron 2012). Haraway (2016) used the analogy of a “hot compost pile,” of humus and compost, to think with the entanglements, imbroglios, collaborations of multispecies storytelling—that is, “compost writing.” For Haraway (2016), “It matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories” (35). Telling stories unpacks how environmental ideas and issues are understood, valued, contested, and politicized (Cronon 1992), and offers a way forward for addressing realities, navigating crises, and making meaning.

Zines offer a creative approach to environmental storytelling, and do different kinds of “work” around positioning and narrating ecological problems (on the poetics and politics of literary environmental activism, see, e.g., Lindholdt 1996; Buell 2001; Ammons 2010; Zapf 2016). Zines are “an empowering tool of reclaiming existing stories and telling new ones” (Bagelman and Bagelman 2016, 374), individually and collectively, characterized by their unmediated and independent voices, and are often a platform for marginalized communities (Duncombe [1997] 2017; Wreck [2005] 2020), in this instance, student voices, stories, and histories. Zines are a space for social action, “an act of civil disobedience; a tool for inspiring other forms of activism” (Guzzetti and Gamboa 2004, 411). Zines are self-published, often free or cheap, and produced in

small print runs often via photocopier, then folded and cut, glued, stapled, or stitched, making it a distinctly democratic and accessible medium.

Zines can be reactionary—there can be an immediacy and responsiveness in their engagement with, and commentary on, issues such as environmental legislation and regulation, or environmental disasters, or with environmental and social justice issues overlooked or downplayed in political hierarchies, mainstream publications, and the media. The literary (and art) activism of zineing contributes to an “arts of living on a damaged planet” (after Tsing et al. 2017).

The materiality or “felt value” (Piepmeier 2008; Watson and Bennett 2021), in and of zines about the environment are integral parts of the narrative form—and are part of the quiet politics, or quiet activism, of the zine’s message. Ingold (2010) called this the “textility” of making—where the materials have agency in the creative process. In one of the class zine projects, dried red lentils represent the red-rock desert of the American West (Culley 2021). Many of the lentils have come unstuck, though, and have settled within the pages of other zines, producing new zine ecologies (both literal and metaphorical) with/in surrounding zines, in much the same way that dust from Utah’s canyons might settle—and travel—on clothing, footwear, vehicles, and animals. A Little Trees car air freshener is included in another zine about Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Carson [1962] 2000), and the synthetic pesticide DDT (Cole 2021). Its quiet politics is unacknowledged in the zine, but it might be read as a playful and subversive statement about lingering chemical atmospheres. Almost a year after the zine was completed, the storage box—and the other student zines—still carried the artificial scent.

## ART IN/OF LITERARY ACTIVISM

Artists, like writers (and researchers), are often activists (Duncombe and Lambert 2021). They use art forms that multiply—such as photocopying, printmaking (e.g., lino/wood cut printing and screen printing)—to make art with a purpose, to campaign, to show solidarity, and to affect social change. These are not fine art objects, singular and valuable; rather, they are meant to travel, to reach out, to connect, and to grow revolutionary thinking. To examine the “art” in and of environmentalism, activism, and zineing, we draw attention to three art zines that provoke thinking and dialogue about pressing contemporary environmental and social justice issues.

The Quarantine Public Library (QPL), a collection of free, downloadable minizines, was launched in May 2020 during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic by Katie Garth and Tracy Honn as a way to connect a community of artists and art lovers. The QPL includes the minizine, *Q&A About Pipelines* by Melis (2021). Melis’s (2021) minizine specifically addresses the environmental impact of pipelines, and in its small, A7 folded format provides information and a call to action. Melis’s (2021) minizine links to the Indigenous-led campaign against a new pipeline crossing treaty lands in Minnesota. On this small A7-size (A4 folds down to A7) minizine, Melis (2021) used black ink drawing and handwritten text to draw attention to the harms of pipelines, asking the reader, “What do pipelines do? What harm do pipelines cause? Why else should I care? What can we do?” She urged the reader to find out more, reaching out to the commons that agitate against exploitative land practices, and offered a list of actions and links to donate, divest, advocate, present (campaign film), protest, and mail this minizine to decision-makers and leaders. Working similarly but as a collective is the Balinese punk fan group, Denpasar Kolektif, who make zines to share knowledge within their community, particularly

about environmental concerns such as the reclamation of Bali's Benoa Bay for tourism purposes over conservation concerns (Anggawi 2022).

Creating zines together with communities is becoming a part of creative research methodologies, because it offers an accessible and visual means for both connecting with research participants, and for engaging the public with its findings. The Covid Realities project (Covid Realities 2022a), a collaboration between the Universities of York and Birmingham, and national charity, Child Poverty Action Group, records and shares the experiences of life through the COVID-19 pandemic for more than 100 parents and carers, and uses zines as a space to creatively explore challenges and stresses experienced by research participants. The role of the artist in collaboration with research is significant—bringing her community facilitation skills and zine-making practice, artist Jean McEwan guided and supported remote zine-making sessions with parents and carers to create the *Covid Realities* zine (Covid Realities 2022b). In this zine, the parents' and carers' powerful words and collaged images show their everyday realities of COVID-19 struggling with poverty and isolation. This form of collaborative participatory dissemination creates “communicative bridges between individuals that might not otherwise interact” (Valli 2021, 27). The *Covid Realities* zine (Covid Realities 2022b) is a platform for otherwise unheard-from communities, as well as a stark narration for those who need to hear it, “multiplying the possibilities for the interpretation of empirical data and expressions through diversified channels” (Valli 2021, 27).

Sarah Nicholls is a printmaker and author of the “Brain Washing from Phone Towers” informational pamphlets (Nicholls 2022). The pamphlets are printed by hand in editions of 250, using letterpress for the text and relief print making (lino or wood) for the images. Many of them are about Brooklyn, New York, where Nicholls lives, and link her locality to climate emergency issues and questions. Each pamphlet takes a month to produce—Nicholls wants to create a private reading space and experience, where the reader feels the emboss of the letterpress-printed sentences and relief-printed images. *Tell the Bees* (Nicholls 2016) invites the reader to understand more about bees and their connection to our lives over centuries, and urges us to withstand the “isolationist rhetoric” and see our linked survival. As Nicholls (2016) noted, “Bees know better. [...] Their lives are driven by a common purpose, the survival of the colony. [...] Isolation is a fiction.”

These examples offer ways that zines contain and create agency, platform marginalized voices, and seek to affect change. The ecologies of these art-activist zines story the effects of the climate emergency, exploitation of the land for oil, and inequitable pandemic hardship. Each, with its particular voices and printed forms, and “textility” (Ingold 2010), seeks to connect to and affect the reader in embodied ways, to invigorate latencies for action and change. There is a rich zine ecology of artist, researcher, and activist-made zines, of multiple diverse voices claiming and creating their own platform for literary activism—a commons in zine-making.

## ASSEMBLING ZINESCAPES TO TROUBLE ENVIRONMENTALISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS

The writing of this article prompted the making of a minizine. Our rationale for cocreating an accompanying minizine (see GEO3147 Zine Collective 2022a) was twofold: First, the student zine projects featured here were produced as part of the GEO3147 Literature, Environment, Activism module assessment, placing students in an asymmetrical power relationship with the

module team. Second, the students' zines were based on reading and research about topics that students were sometimes distanced from, whereas often zines are made by activists about their lived experience. Our minizine was very deliberately a creatively collective project, with collective making replacing (and challenging) the *do-it-yourself* ethos of zineing (cf. Valli's 2021 collective zine-making as an approach to participatory dissemination in Bushwick, New York). We met together for an online zine-making session in August 2022, a communal space to cut, arrange, stick, paint, or draw alongside each other—a creatively reflective pause before launching into the writing. As well as communality, the online space offered a privacy in our making as this was below the sight of the webcam and gave choices over how much to reveal to each other of our pages—creating a sense of safety to make freely without (perceived) judgement (Bayles and Orland 1993). This making space was also outside the classroom setting, minimizing hierarchies, enabling us to become a community of coauthors thinking through ideas.

A cross-generational collaboration, our minizine is conceived as a circle, a grouping of placards, giving a sense of a gathering protest. As the GEO3147 Zine Collective, we each contributed two pages to create a sixteen-page reversible minizine. The template of a figure holding a placard (created by Cartwright), onto which we drew, painted, and collaged, provides a structure for free individual responses to zine ecologies (see Figure 1). The zine is reversible, meaning it can be folded either way, inviting the reader to join the circle of emotive voices calling for action. Our pages remain unattributed, and except for the two of us who assembled the minizine, the other members only know which two pages are theirs. It could be that the resulting pages are more emotional, more personal than they might have been (Bayles and Orland 1993). The pages are a riot of bold color and bold emotion. With no prompt other than to reflect on the idea of zine ecologies—borrowing from the “exquisite corpse” motif—several themes are repeated across the minizine pages: Silence. Action. Change. Hope. Reflect. A summons to “Read, Listen, Feel, Act.” “Don't ignore this. We have one chance.”

Group zine-making in participatory research creates a democratized space of flattened hierarchies where academic researchers make alongside members of the community with whom they are working. The potential for disrupted agency is increased when zine-making is supported by skilled artist-facilitators who know when to minimize the “how to,” yet remain available with tips and suggestions. It is these artist-facilitators whose artistic practice feeds into the materials created and collected together for collage, in a way that both encourages individual expression and offers possibilities for the collective identity of the group-made zine. Alongside the accessible nature of zine-making (and collage), it is important to recognize where expertise in creative practice has its place, and be mindful, as Hawkins (2019) asserted, that “we neither fetishise the amateur nor forget the value of skill” (974).

The six student zines examined in this article—*Did You Know, Mum?* (Brennan-Lister 2021), *Revealing the Roots of Ecocriticism ... and Planting Sweetgrass in Its Place* (Brooks 2021), *Chico Mendes: Dying to Defend Indigenous Rainforests* (Collins 2021), *The Daisy: A Cautionary Tale* (Colson 2021), *Jackie French and the Wombat Combat* (Cook 2021), and *Robin Wall Kimmerer and Learning from the Leeks* (Munnery 2021)—provide a critical intervention into the work zines can do in storying environmentalisms (a short film of all six student zines is available via GEO3147 Zine Collective 2022c). Each zine tells of a rabbit hole journey through the entanglements of “literature,” “environment,” and “activism” (the core themes of the class) in very different ways. The zines critically engage with and reflect on questions of Indigenous and decolonial environmentalisms; cli-fi; children's environmental literatures; the



FIGURE 1 *Why Zine Ecologies?* minizine (GEO3147 Zine Collective 2022a).



assassination of environmental activists; bushfire and wildfire; gardens, gardening, and lawn cultures; and plastic pollution. The zines were made in late fall 2021 (as COVID-19 lockdown and social distancing restrictions continued to ease, also coinciding with COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland). In the discussion that follows, students share the intersections of stories, activisms, and materialities in their zines.

## Of Bushfires and Wombats

The *wombat combat*. This is more than a titular rhyme. It is a call to action, and the activist anthem of the zine, *Jackie French and the Wombat Combat* (Cook 2021). Present amidst protests about former Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison's government's response—or lack thereof—to the bushfires in 2020, exacerbated by climate change, was one small, fictional wombat. An image of this wombat featured on the placard of a protester (Global News 2020, 00.18), adopted as a mascot of climate activism. It is this image that became the linchpin of this creative intervention, and that introduced Cook to the work of Australian children's author Jackie French (see Figure 2).

This zine is a provocation on, and a response to, two books by French—*Diary of a Wombat* (French 2003) and *The Fire Wombat* (French 2020). It was the front cover of the former book that appeared on the protester's placard, although the latter book was written in response to the bushfires. The bushfire climate protests provide the context to the early pages of the zine, but this is expanded to examine the quiet politics of French's charity and education work. A portion of the proceeds from sales of *The Fire Wombat* (French 2020) support the Wombat Protection Society. The zine narrates the entanglements and politicizations of wombats, wildfires, and children's literature in climate change narratives, and the closing pages of the zine transition to reflect on the work of children's environmental literature in storying hope (as reflected in the reverse panel of the expanded zine; cf. Piepmeier 2008). The zine is ultimately an optimistic tale, and encourages curiosity and action, with the back cover of the zine dousing the wildfire flames that earlier raged on the front cover.

The composition of the zine has a gloriously intentional lack of intention. It is constructed as a cut-and-paste amalgamation of things, bits-and-bobs, paint, paper, and glue. Through collaging pamphlets and junk mail to layering tissue paper and paint, the zine is—and remains—an open curation. Although there are some definitive designs within the pages of the zine—images from the two books, a red-to-green color palette to show the bushfires, extracts from academic journal articles—there is also a messiness and ephemerality to the work that invites change. The “compost” of the zine (after Haraway 2016) is complex, mediated, and everyday. With each read of the zine, small foam pieces detach, tissue paper crinkles, and the writing continues to fade, to become something new. In this sense, the zine shall never be complete, and will be a different experience and encounter for each reader.

## Protesting Plastics

The zine *Did You Know, Mum?* (Brennan-Lister 2021) is an impassioned call for action against plastic pollution, inviting readers to empathize with, and reflect on, their own positionality on the plastic crisis. It tells the present-day story of our plastics crisis from a speculative future where

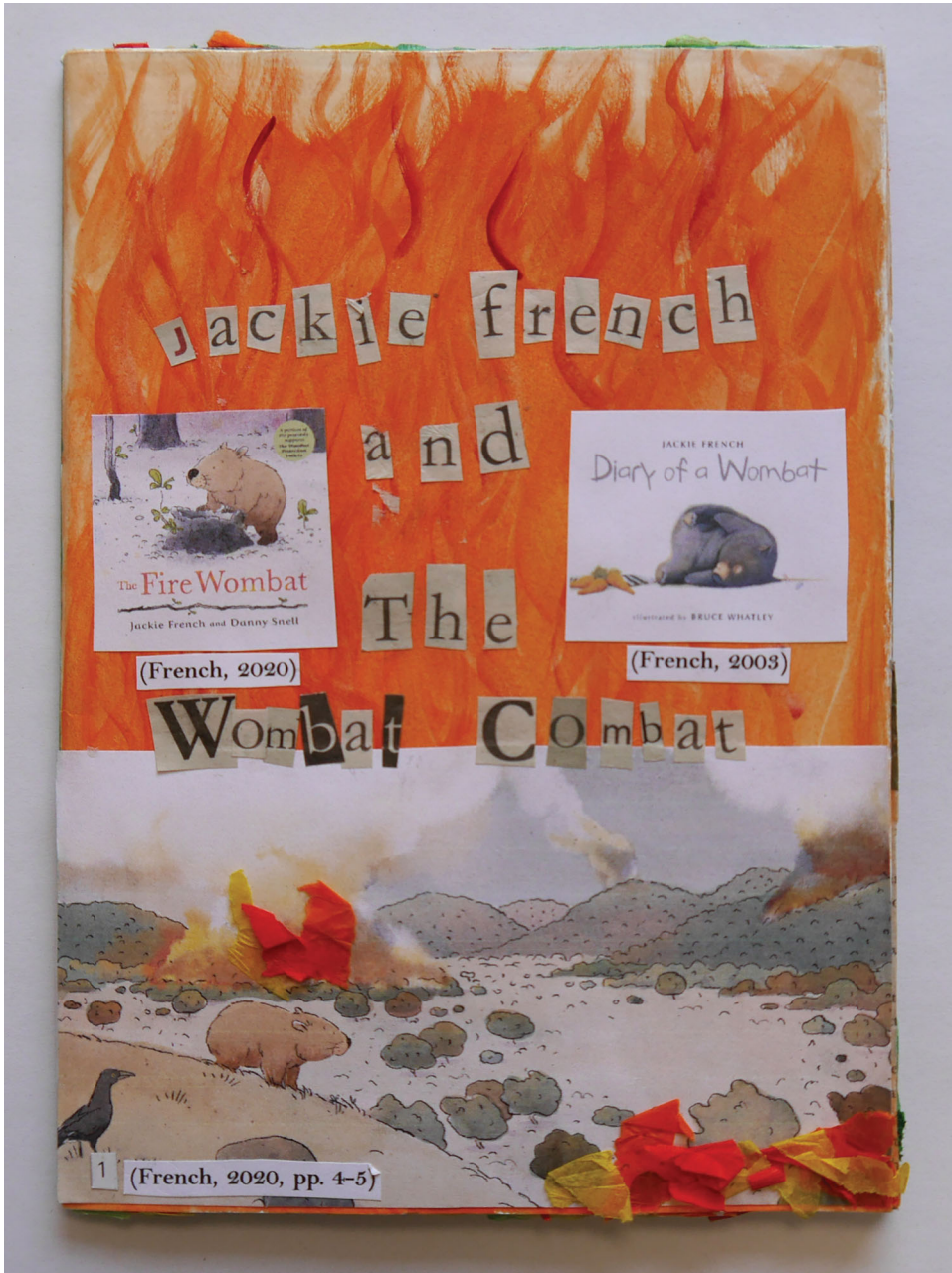


FIGURE 2 Jackie French and the Wombat Combat (Cook 2021, 1).

the plastics crisis has been ignored. Taking the form of a reflective conversation between a mother and her unborn child, it questions the morality of bringing a child into such an environmentally uncertain world. The zine is made entirely of plastics collected by Brennan-Lister over two weeks, repurposing plastic ephemera that would have normally been thrown away or recycled (Figure 3). These fragments of useless scraps clutter the pages of the zine, and both mirror and immerse the reader into the areas of the planet where our plastics end up.

The zine is a provocation on Hill's (2021) cli-fi short story "Plasticized," which features in Dell and Eschrich's (2021) *Everything Change Volume III: An Anthology of Climate Fiction*. "Plasticized" follows the story of Rachel, a woman navigating pregnancy in a future where plastic has taken hold of every aspect of life, including her womb. Rachel grapples with the fear of her child experiencing life in an extremely environmentally damaged world, and is even afraid that her child might be stillborn due to her plastic-infected womb. Much like Rachel (and increasing numbers of women), Brennan-Lister also questions the morality of bringing a child into such an environmentally uncertain world. Full of emotion, the zine is personal, intimate, and poignant, expressing Brennan-Lister's guilt in contributing to plastic pollution, and the guilt they feel in imagining a potential child's plastic-filled future.

On each page the quote, "Did you know, Mum?," is continued with a question relating to plastic pollution, which is answered with facts and images, portraying the current narrative that, as a society, we know what our plastic pollution is doing to the environment—and to us. It also



FIGURE 3 *Did You Know, Mum?* (Brennan-Lister 2021, 2–3).

reflects a conversation with the future generation, who we will have to answer to regarding our lack of action taken regarding the crisis.

### Assassination in the Rainforest

The zine *Chico Mendes: Dying to Defend Indigenous Rainforests* (Collins 2021) follows the life of Amazonian rubber tapper and rural rights activist Chico Mendes (1944–1988), and the struggles he faced as an Indigenous land defender, alongside the destruction of the rainforest. The zine explores themes of rainforest conservation, social injustice faced by Indigenous land defenders, and the shocking murders of environmental activists (Figure 4).

Collins’s (2021) zine is fascinated by Mendes’s harmonious yet cogent style of protest—the peaceful *empates* movement used to defend the rainforest demonstrates an unconventional, creative form of political participation. These *empates* practices have become an iconic symbol of the rubber tapper identity and their fight for justice (Wood 2021), inspiring cultural and environmental movements internationally that refrain from violence. These ideas are reflected in the zine through the creation of the silhouette of a figure shaped by quotes describing Mendes’s

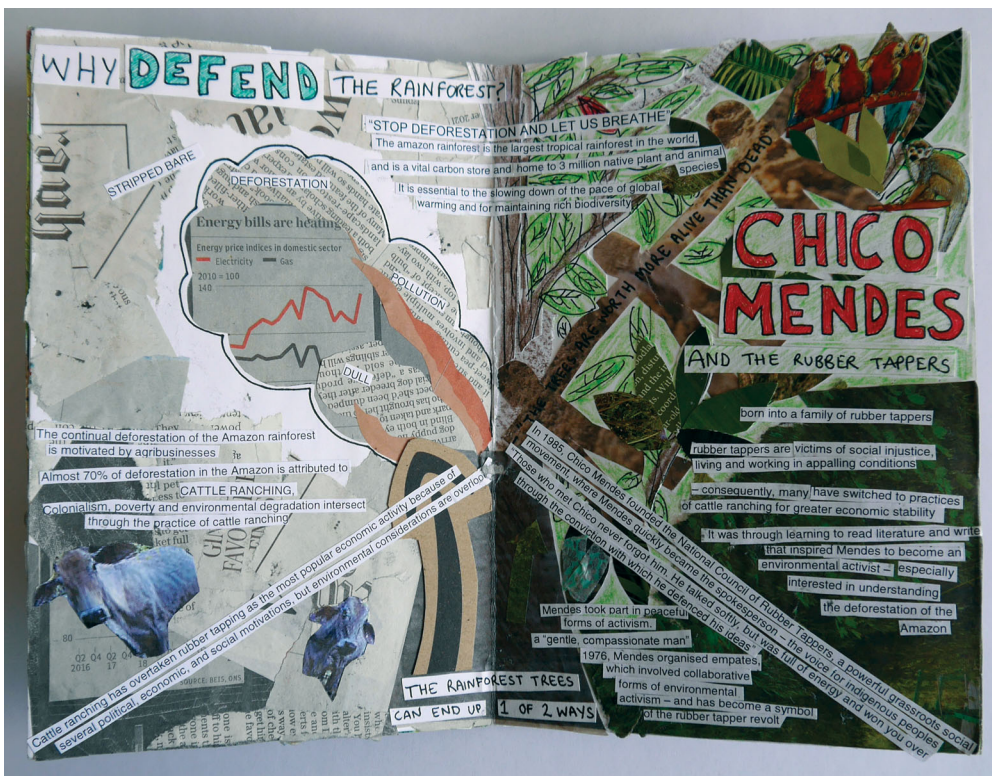


FIGURE 4 *Chico Mendes: Dying to Defend Indigenous Rainforests* (Collins 2021, 2–3).

gentle protest style. The anonymous figure possesses the traits of Mendes, but does not reveal his identity, to demonstrate how his legacies exist in material and nonmaterial ways.

However, alongside these gentle forms of activism, the zine also powerfully confronts the violence of the assassination of environmental activists. Indigenous communities have suffered more than 30 percent of the total assassinations of environmental land defenders in history (McVeigh 2022). One page in the zine is devoted to news headlines about environmental activist assassinations, and the careful layering and overlapping of headlines works to consolidate the magnitude of the issue. The “felt value” (Watson and Bennett 2021) of this layering of headlines is sobering, reinforcing the number and frequency of these attacks.

Often, discourses of rainforest conservation center the protection of wildlife species threatened by deforestation and other industrial practices (Tindall and Robinson 2017), whereas the disruptions caused to Indigenous communities are downplayed or overlooked. The zine is shaped by wider political dialogue on, and moral and ethical questions bound up in, conservation politics. The zine focuses on Mendes’s activism as he fought for a solution that supported both preservation and conservation practices—the preservation of the rainforest and economic development. For Mendes, rainforest conservation also secured a future for Indigenous communities in areas threatened by land clearance. The zine reflects the intersection of activism for rainforest protection and social justice.

### The Environmental Optimism of Leeks

The zine *Robin Wall Kimmerer and Learning from the Leeks* (Munnery 2021) draws on the work of Robin Wall Kimmerer, starting with her identity as a scientist and writer and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. Indigenous knowledges have often been excluded from environmentalist discourse, only gaining attention and value in geography following the postmodern turn for their “importance in global cultural diversity and human futures” (Frantz and Howitt 2012, 728). This zine provides a space to linger with, and explore, some of the Indigenous environmental principles communicated by Kimmerer.

The zine begins with leeks. Drawing on the object of the leek, and the different perspectives this reveals about our relationship to plants, Munnery’s (2021) zine uses supermarket junk mail to illustrate how plastic-wrapped leeks can be seen as warnings for unsustainable consumption practices and disrespect for nature (Kimmerer 2013, 2021). What Kimmerer (2013) termed “the honorable harvest” is highlighted as a solution for this need to listen to nature—to the leeks—to care for them appropriately (Figure 5).

The zine further explores the role of writing as a medium for these principles to flow beyond Indigenous practices and audiences. On page 6 of the zine, an illustration of a tree is composed of magazine cuttings of National Trust board candidate manifestos. The fragments of text describe the will of individuals to protect nature—for its natural beauty, and for their families, and future generations. Kimmerer’s (2013, 2021) ideas and values are threaded through, and recast in, this entanglement.

Kimmerer is one of the environmental writers featured in Penguin’s twenty-volume “Green Ideas” series, released in 2021. The series brings together “the ideas that have changed the way we think and talk about the living Earth” (Penguin 2021). The zine ends by focusing on the importance of communicating Kimmerer’s (2013, 2021) perspective, to provide hope for a



FIGURE 5 Robin Wall Kimmerer and Learning from the Leeks (Munnery 2021, 4–5).

sustainable future. The assemblage of optimistic text cuttings on the final page acts as a reminder of “a fairer, saner, greener world” (Penguin 2021) that is needed. The zine tells of the need to learn from nature, and that we should listen to multiple and marginalized voices, including Indigenous, nonhuman, and more, to achieve this.

### An Allegory on Garden/ing

*The Daisy: A Cautionary Tale* (Colson 2021), inspired by Hans Christian Andersen’s 1838 short story, “The Daisy” (in Andersen 2011), discusses the place of ecological cautionary tales in children’s literature. The short story tells of a small daisy that is cut as part of a square of lawn to line the cage of a captured lark. By the following morning, both flower and bird die from dehydration and neglect. The zine is a personal response to the parable of “The Daisy” (Andersen 2011).

The zine is organized so that each page represents the events of “The Daisy,” but also reflects on the politics of gardens, gardening, and lawn cultures. Each page of the zine is a collage of magazine clippings from the National Trust guidebook, gardening magazines, a box of Bloom & Wild flowers, photocopies of “The Daisy” (Andersen 2011), floral prints, and ribbon, together



FIGURE 6 *The Daisy: A Cautionary Tale* (Colson 2021, 4–5).

with sketches of a lark and a triptych of watercolor paintings by Colson, depicting a hand slowly dropping a picked daisy (see Figure 6). The color palette is a tribute to a Victorian fairytale aesthetic. The final page is inspired by the context of the Industrial Revolution, alongside contemporary climate change issues. The reverse of the zine re-creates an illustration of “The Daisy” in Andersen (2011).

Children’s environmental literature is a growing genre in environmental communication that introduces younger audiences to environmental and sustainable sensibilities, as well as to some of the most urgent contemporary environmental problems (see, e.g., Heneghan 2017). A critical-creative study of the nineteenth-century parable of “The Daisy” (Andersen 2011) considers the environmental morals and lessons found in fairytales, and how they overlap with contemporary concerns. As with much children’s environmental literature, “The Daisy” (Andersen 2011) uses nonhuman (although anthropomorphized) protagonists to address difficult questions of environmental ethics, morality, and values. This zine demonstrates how fiction that asks you to *think* is just as important as fiction that asks you to *act*. Moreover, the sociality of fairytales is reflected and refracted in the sociality of zines, as stories are passed from reader to reader, and shared, discussed, and interpreted.

## Whose Ecocriticism?

As expressed by Bagelman and Bagelman (2016), zines represent an upcoming form of literature that challenges the idea that modern literature favors a retreat into critical abstractionism over striving for activist social change. For Bagelman and Bagelman (2016), activism relies not only on the advocacy of making heard the voices of those silenced in the present, but also those of history that have been repressed. Following this idea, the zine *Revealing the Roots of Ecocriticism ... and Planting Sweetgrass in Its Place* (Brooks 2021) focuses on the “shadow” narrative of ecocriticism—specifically, on the retrieval of Indigenous ecocritical narratives that have been repressed by Western ecocritical literature. In recent decades, ecocriticism has skyrocketed as a literary genre. There are two key issues with ecocriticism, however, despite its rubric of activism—first, that ecocriticism originates from a canon that privileges Western ideals of nature, environment, and society, and second, that ecocriticism is founded on colonial exploitation and continues to harm Indigenous communities.

To tell both the dominant and repressed narratives of ecocriticism’s history, this zine is composed of two halves (Figure 7). Read from cover to cover, the first half of the zine (pages 1, 3, 5, and 7) presents the mainstream narrative of ecocritical history—beginning with the genre’s



FIGURE 7 *Revealing the Roots of Ecocriticism ... and Planting Sweetgrass in Its Place* (Brooks 2021, 1, 8).



origins in Romanticist nature writing, followed by its popularization during the countercultural movement in the 1950s and 1960s, to contemporary forms of ecocriticism that confront themes of climate change and science-as-solution. Yet, to capture how the genre is entangled with colonial exploitation, a contrasting narrative is placed upside down. The “flip side” of the zine (pages 8, 6, 4, and 2), allows the reader to work through an alternative view of history alongside the mainstream narrative, confronting how constructs of “wilderness,” popularizations of the hippie movement, and the conceptual closure of climate change solutions to exclusively Western “official knowledges” continue to propagate the genocide, appropriation, and exclusion of Indigenous knowledges and communities (Buell 2005).

The “flip side” of the zine purposefully references key Indigenous environmental works, to act as a medium for the empowerment of Indigenous authors. This reflects the need to create space for Indigenous worldviews in Western academia, rather than speaking for such communities, and continuing or reproducing cycles of appropriation. This section of the zine also uses Indigenous place names, alongside bold colors and textures, to prompt the reader into questioning how the very act of consuming knowledge is tainted by colonial legacies. The zine has a two-fold purpose—to achieve representation for histories of the past left untold, and to heed warning toward the reproduction of such injustices in the future if ecocriticism as a genre is not decolonized.

## THE LINGERING GENTLE ANARCHIES OF ENVIRONMENTAL ZINES

The particular challenge of student zines lies in the “afterlife” (after Radway 2011) of the zines. As Radway (2011) argued, “zines ought to be thought of not simply as texts to be read but also as acts to be engaged and passed on” (142). But what happens when a zine cannot travel, and cannot multiply (when it has been made, e.g., for a class assessment)? We recognize that the zine “evolved to challenge the art world status quo” (Hawkins 2019, 971), but in this academic context the zines are impotent. We held a zine exhibition on campus to celebrate and showcase the student zine projects, and compiled a Twitter/X thread of all the zines (Smith 2022), and students are finding ways to continue the correspondences with environmentalism, environmental politics, literature, art, activism and protest begun within the pages of their zines—to live out their zines. As we demonstrate, zine ecologies have an archeology to them—in the classroom, in the exhibition space, and beyond—that invites excavation and exploration. As single-copy zines, however, they can also hold onto, and powerfully play to, materiality and textility in their storytelling, that might otherwise be lost or flattened by photocopying for distribution. *What have, and what can, these zines accomplish?*

For students, exposure to zines and zine culture reveals quiet (or gentle) modes of environmental activism—a stark contrast to the radical, anarchic activisms of protests, marches, and rallies. Zines offer a creative form of activism, and have the power to effect change—not just in and for the zinester crafting the zine, but for readers. There is a feedback loop of sorts at play here, a “composting” (after Haraway 2016), as students affect, and are affected by, the journey/s their zines take, as works-in-progress, and as finished zines, and in reflecting on their responsibilities as students, writer-activists, and global citizens. Zines become a catalyst for wider critical thinking. Words, pictures, drawings, and songs help us understand the ideas of other activists, by acting as an opening into the creative mind of the artist. Through this, zines—and zinesters—can

disrupt, shock, entertain, and inspire the next generation of activists, and create opportunities for new forms of activism to participate in.

Yet our GEO3147 Zine Collective (2022a) minizine follows a different trajectory. It vibrates against the individualism (and inwardness) of zineing's DIY ethos, to offer a space in which to consider and reflect on collective making-as-activism, and the work of storying shared, cross-generational environmental concerns and climate anxieties. It was also crafted to be printed and photocopied—and has been shared with the most recent cohort of GEO3147 students as part of the zine project assessment brief.

In interrogating the idea of zine ecologies, and through various zineing activities, we reclaimed creativity and inventiveness, which is often obscured in assessments and academic practice. We also disrupted the often strived-for Anglocentric enlightenment construct of objectivity, instead opting for a playful learning process. There were no mistakes, for there was no *right* way to zine. Students adopted their own learning approaches—visual, audio, kinesthetic, and the more encouraged in university life, written—to incorporate individuality into their creations. This freedom to express ideas without pressure or expectation allows for deeper analysis, without concern for aesthetics, which has led to a confidence and freedom to continue these explorations post-zine. Zines not only offer up the opportunity to politicize research that goes against the status quo, but to also practice doing research differently. As in *Revealing the Roots of Ecocriticism ... and Planting Sweetgrass in Its Place* (Brooks 2021), the zine is a space where silenced or muted environmental (and social) injustices can be amplified. The ghosts of colonial pasts are never lost, but “eek out” (Rice 2011, 257) in the shadows of contemporary society. Indigenous ecocriticism histories need to be told.

Crafting zines about the environment empowers zinesters to creatively engage with environmental problems at various scales. It is the emotionality in Kimmerer's (2013, 2021) attention to leeks in “The Honorable Harvest” chapter that Munnery (2021) addressed in their zine. Prior to reading Kimmerer's work, Munnery had not previously considered “asking permission” (as Kimmerer 2013, 183) from a plant. For Munnery (2021), leeks became a central motif inside and outside the zine. Leeks are the focus of the zine, but they also prompted Munnery to think about how they engage with the plants they consume. Leeks became part of the weekly supermarket shop, a stamp of a cut leek decorates pages throughout the zine, and there is careful attention to representing and distinguishing wild leeks from the leeks found in UK supermarkets. Included as the back cover of *Robin Wall Kimmerer and Learning from the Leeks* (Munnery 2021) is a recipe for leek soup, which quietly invites readers to consider their own encounters with plants, and their wider relationship to nature.

We end with another vignette, on the many more lives of *Did You Know, Mum?* (Brennan-Lister 2021). The concerns explored in the zine—the ubiquity of plastics—have stayed with Brennan-Lister. They are there when we touch the plastic packaging on food, or when we see plastics littering the beach. Plastic is everywhere. Unavoidable. Inescapable. Unavoidable, too, is the topic of children and motherhood. It features in conversations between Brennan-Lister and their partner, and with friends, and in political discourse on women's reproductive rights and abortion access in the United States, following the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* by the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2022.

*We DIYed our perception of perfection into messy excellence, and that will be an everlasting effect.*

## CONCLUSION

This article mobilizes the idea of zine ecologies to examine the work that zines can do in storytelling environmentalisms, and how zines can put environmentalisms to work, during the climate emergency. Zine ecologies is a provocation on the entanglements between zines and zineing, environmentalism, story and storytelling, and politics and activism. The zine ecologies idea, though, also recasts the work or quiet politics of the materialities of zines addressing environmental issues. The composition of zines—the materials used for collage, for example—becomes part of, and extends, the narrative. So environmental zines might be understood as ecosystems of literature and art, a symbiosis of the textual and the visual to narrate environmental change.

The idea of zine ecologies is unpacked via analysis of six student zine projects. The student zines offer critical-creative interventions in children's environmental literature, cli-fi, Indigenous and decolonial environmentalisms, bushfires, gardens and gardening, plastics, and the assassination of environmental activists. The zine ecologies idea is further explored through a minizine created to accompany this article. Across the six student zines and a cross-generational collaborative minizine project, we argue that the accessible and democratic medium of zines, with its DIY ethic and aesthetic, offers opportunities to disrupt and dismantle correspondences with, and dialogue on, conservation politics, and environmental (and social) in/justice.

## NOTES

1. The zine projects featured in this article were produced by students as part of GEO3147, Literature, Environment, Activism, a final-year optional module for undergraduate geography students at the University of Exeter, UK, that ran for the first time in 2021–2022. The module syllabus is available at <http://geography.exeter.ac.uk/currentstudents/modules/description/index.php?moduleCode=GEO3147&ay=2021/2>. The six student coauthors on this article achieved some of the highest grades on the module in its first year, and the focus of their zine projects, when collected together in conversation, reveals many interesting collisions of environmental and climate stories, activism, and materialities.
2. In this article, we refer to both zines and minizines—the difference lies in the original paper size. All the zines featured throughout this article began as a single sheet of paper. All the student zine projects began as an A2 sheet of paper that folds down to an eight-page, A5-size zine, and our minizine began as an A4 sheet that folds down to an eight-page, A7-size zine.

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APPENDIX

