DIY Delivery Systems:
Rethinking Self-Sponsorship through Extracurricular Literacy Narratives

Jason Luther   Rowan University

KEYWORDS

literacy sponsors; literacy narratives; self-sponsorship; circulation; affect; delivery; public writing; DIY; zines; self-publishing; queer; extracurriculum; desire

Each year, tens of thousands of self-publishers from all over North America and Europe convene in various gyms, auditoriums, churches, and community centers to promote, exchange, sell, and otherwise share their writing with friends and strangers alike.

These publishing festivals—held in cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, Toronto, London, and Berlin— emphasize different genres of do-it-yourself (DIY) publishing, from zines to letterpressed postcards to handmade books. Often, these publications are also assembled by hand, with writers scamming copies from work; collating them on kitchen tables; and using staplers, thread, rubber bands, or even the fold itself to bind them. Some are painstakingly hand- or typewritten, some include traditional comic panels; others are collaged using a hodgepodge of found or vintage materials; many are scrappy.

Such choices are about more than aesthetics, however, as participants seek to enact an embodied commitment to the longstanding ideals of alternative culture, including creativity, equality, accessibility, diversity, and self-authorization. They are also more than a throwback or homage to the activist print networks of abolitionists, feminists, punks, and queers throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. From personal narratives about sex work to comix to self-care manifestos to lists of resources for activists, the content *and* materiality of DIY publications continue to resist mainstream media while asserting a right to self-definition, solidarity, and radical independence.

In this way, contemporary DIY publishers constitute a significant and underexplored extracurriculum, an alternative site to the formal classroom where self-sponsored writers voluntarily meet in groups at "kitchen tables and rented rooms," as Anne Ruggles Gere famously noted in the title of her 1993 CCCC address. Such writers use various forms of public writing to address the material realities of class and identity politics; whether they reproach homelessness, racism, or corporate farming, extracurricular writers view their

work as "constructed by *desire*, by the aspiration and imaginations of its participants" who are motivated by the ways in which writing has "social and economic consequences, including transformations in personal relationships" (80; emphasis added). In her study of third-space zines from roughly this same period, Adela Licona argues that many queer and of-color zine makers also used these social and economic consequences to build textual spaces for "community education" (143n9); for Licona, the making of zines could lead to a coalitional consciousness, an awareness of the ways in which their publications could "re(en)vision and represent multiply situated, nondominant subjectivities in pursuit of coalition building to address local inequities" (3).

And yet today's extracurricular public sphere is radically different than it once was. Drawing from tools and media that have emerged during the rise of the popular web in the mid-1990s, these publications circulate amongst the hyperabundant "fluff" of the attention economy, as Richard Lanham called it. And while most are handmade and tactile, many are also arranged using proprietary, cloud-based software such as Canva or Adobe InDesign, promoted on Instagram or TikTok, crowdfunded by Kickstarter, and sold using Venmo, PayPal, or mobile credit-capturing, card-swiping devices such as Square, raising questions about the tactics of mediation employed by many contemporary extracurricular writers. Unlike the writers studied by Gere and Licona, the neoliberal sensibilities expressed with these tools and sites produces a version of self-sponsorship that is difficult to separate from an entrepreneurial subjectivity—one that naturalizes competition so much that it has the potential to seep into even the most progressive public-facing writing projects and communities.

I thus begin by reviewing the ways in which the term self-sponsorship has been evoked in our field as a euphemism for agentive literacies. I then suggest we consider its adjacent term—sponsorship—as we consider how literacy narratives function for extracurricular writers, examining the ways some DIY composers articulate their attitudes toward the materials, intermediaries, and circuits they use as they reach the public sphere. To better track this, I apply John Trimbur's

". . . approaching extracurricular writers in terms of delivery systems calls attention to public circuitry, the specific-but-diffuse material structures of writing that play an instrumental role when writers imagine (or "sponsor") themselves as authors, when they inhabit the desire to write for a public."

understanding of circulation, which turns toward the affective and material dimensions of writing, to publishing in a sharing economy, an environment that draws writers into its workings and subsequently produces, shapes, and spreads desire as an ongoing "lamination" (Roozen) in existing circuitry. To explicate this process, I rewind the field's conversation on circulation to Trimbur's original use of

another term, *delivery system*, which can account for the larger "circuits of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption through which writing circulates" while attending to ways in which such circuits build toward affective energies, or the "worldly force" of circulation (194).

While composition scholars have written about various formats and media related to DIY

publishing, from zines (Buchanan; Comstock; Farmer) to comics (Jacobs, Helms, Howes) to art or craft objects (Arellano; Gruwell; Hanzalik and Virgintino; Prins; Shipka), approaching extracurricular writers in terms of delivery systems calls attention to public circuitry, the specific-but-diffuse material structures of writing that play an instrumental role when writers imagine (or "sponsor") themselves as authors, when they inhabit the desire to write for a public. Applying this theory of delivery systems to contemporary DIY publishers, I aim to demonstrate how consequence *and* entrepreneurship can be productively accounted for in literacy narratives of self-publishers. And it is within this framework, I want to suggest, that we examine the work of writing that occurs inside and outside our writing classrooms, as our students enter and exit them, carrying and amending these desires as they become more attuned to different audiences and strive to reach wider publics.

What is "Self-Sponsored" Writing?

Composition scholars have relied on "self-sponsored" as disciplinary shorthand for self-initiated writing, often using the term to contrast differences between authentic, self-generated exigencies and the more traditional, compulsory academic tasks assigned in composition classrooms. Its origins can be traced back to Janet Emig's *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders*, one of the earliest studies of self- and school-sponsored writing. Emig found the latter to be a "limited, and limiting, experience" for students (97) as teachers would all too commonly assign rote five-paragraph themes that "truncate the process of composing" (98). By comparison, contemplative self-sponsored practices such as journaling, led to a more innovative, time-intensive, and ultimately accurate portrait of the writing process. And while most self-sponsored writing was private, Emig found that creative work made it more likely that students would share it with peers, which in turn made it more readily revised, a finding that has held up in subsequent research on self-sponsorship throughout the last 50 years.

Six years after Emig, for instance, Sharon Crowley argued that self-sponsorship led to "real, original, unconventional writing" (168). In 1989, Marilyn Sternglass suggested that it led to sustained—and therefore more meaningful—tasks (173). More recently, scholars involved with the Stanford Study of Writing found that self-sponsorship led to "emotional, immediate, and unconstrained" public and performative writing (Fishman, Lunsford, McGregor, and Otuteye 230), while Paula Rosinski noted that such composing provided "real writing contexts" and "real audiences" (262). Often these views uphold self-sponsorship as liberatory, as a means for redressing the long-standing absence of the extracurriculum in writing studies. When compared to in-school assignments many have argued that self-sponsored writing is "more individually agentive" (Davis, Brock, and McElroy 9) as it is often generated from independent encounters that highlight one's individualism, their desire for self-expression, and a capacity for choice (Yi and Hirvela 97). When self-sponsored writing is public rather than private, it often originates from a specific community or affinity group, where authorship in turn leads to an empowering sense of identity, one that is emergent through writing that is shared at different stages of one's process. This is especially the case for young, cross-cultural, bi-literate, or transnational subjects, where identity formation is linked to language acquisition. Xiqiao Wang, for instance, has suggested that social media platforms such as

WeCat can enhance self-sponsored reading strategies of multilingual international students.

At the same time, while self-sponsorship is often treated as a separate sphere of activity, researchers have been consistently focused on the *fluidity* of these spheres—that is, the extent to which writers can use an impressive array of writing tools, spaces, and intermediaries to bridge the division between worlds (Yi and Hirvela), laminate literacies through transmediation (Roozen), reflect on rhetorical strategies for transfer (Rosinski), or experience disconnects (Wang) as students move between self- and school-sponsored contexts. These studies often conclude by beckoning teachers of writing to better understand students' extracurricular contexts while encouraging more research on how self-sponsored literacies travel across time and space.

Recognizing that writing is learned "horizontally" (that is, across domains), and "vertically" as writers carry certain skills and literacies with them in and out of said domains, Jonathan Alexander, Karen Lunsford, and Carl Whithaus have recently contributed the spatial metaphor of *wayfinding* to literacy learning. Wayfinding is helpful for pivoting away from the dichotomous inside/outside discourse through which self-sponsorship often gets framed. It suggests writers make do through a stitching together of practices learned through formal training and informally in situ. As such, the approaches by which we come to understand these pathways matter. For instance, the authors note how studies of self-sponsorship—"literacy in the wild"—are often guided by ethnographic methodologies whereby writers are navigating and negotiating extracurricular and co-curricular contexts.

Scholars, in other words, have critically explored the varied contexts, economies, and cultures in which these extracurricular literacies exist and the tools or technologies that facilitate the agency of these writers outside of the classroom. Within these conversations it is implied that a constellation of sponsors is afoot, raising the question of who (or what) is rewarded by these literate acts in addition to the writer. This was Deborah Brandt's primary concern when she developed a theory of literacy sponsors for her 1998 *CCC* article, "Sponsors of Literacy," and again in her 2001 award-winning book *Literacy in American Lives*. Because literacy sponsors are "agents . . . who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" ("Sponsors" 166), Brandt's *systemic* understanding of literacy acknowledges agency as it is situated within a sponsoring network. Brandt rejects the possibility that any writing could truly originate within the self since "[t]he concept of the literacy sponsor recognizes the historical fact that access to literacy has *always* required assistance, permission, sanction, or coercion by more powerful others or, at least, contact with existing 'grooves' of communication" (Brandt and Clinton 349; emphasis added). This understanding is important methodologically since "tracing sponsorship through things helps to clarify the multiple interests or agents that are most usually active when reading and writing are taken up" (350). Seen through Brandt's theory, the "self" in self-sponsorship therefore acts as an interpellation of agency through the subjectivity of the writer, an internalization of the feelings of independence and liberation we sometimes expect from literacy learning. Recently Brandt made this point more explicit, speculating that the term self-sponsorship provides an understandably humanitarian response to the harsher economic functions of literacy:

Our favorite form of sponsorship is self-sponsorship and our favorite sponsors are those

selfless teachers and other helpers who have no ostensible ulterior motives except a belief in and love for the goodness of literacy. In this atmosphere, sponsors become conceptualized as heroes and benefactors, plowing open opportunity for grateful learners. Literacy learning is euphemized. And so is literacy teaching. ("Commentary" 331)

Yet, as Ann Lawrence has argued, when literacy and writing scholars draw from Brandt's concept of sponsorship, they tend to bracket the nonhuman intermediaries and institutional systems that were essential to her study. That is, while Brandt made use of both personal testimony *and* social history to delineate a complex argument about the economics of literacy in twentieth century America, Lawrence highlights how typical studies on sponsorship foreground autobiography at the expense of accounting for the broader contexts, historical forces, and material conditions that are always in play. Part of the reason is that such studies draw from the genre of literacy narratives, a genre that "typically concentrates power of influence in human actors to whom intention is ascribed" (308). As a result, literacy sponsors, as they have been approached in writing studies at least, tend to focus on people.

In response, Lawrence proposes scholars consider the *rhetoricity* of literacy narratives; specifically, how a writer's use of the narrative genre participates in a process that "reinvents what matters, rearranges social bonds, and renews experiences and their meanings." Put another way, Lawrence wants us to see how the literacy narrative itself works as another kind of sponsor. Humans function in these narratives, Lawrence notes, as *rhetorical figures* and character types—including as "self-sponsors"—and narratives as episodes or *scenes* as authors (re)invent contexts and editorialize experiences of literacy at particular sites (i.e., their church) or are prompted to present a narrative in a particular context for a specific audience (i.e., for a teacher in a classroom assignment).

As I see it, the methodological directions suggested by Lawrence can provoke literacy scholars to consider the processes and contexts through which such narratives are taken up, including those in the extracurriculum. While others have pointed to the constructed-ness of literacy narratives (including Kara Poe Alexander; Bryson; Kuzawa; and Lindquist and Halbritter) or have constructed their own stories of sponsorship from their home communities (Davis; García; Hunter; and Patterson), here I aim to extend Lawrence's suggestion that future research on literacy narratives consider the "affective force of narrative rhetoric" (306) by suggesting that the tools, materials, and intermediaries writers account for their stories or reflections reveal an essential element in the production of desire, especially within the extracurriculum. Attending to these tools, materials, and intermediaries—what I collectively call the circuitry of delivery systems—productively complicate the term self-sponsorship.

"Zine Philosophy" as Literacy Narrative

Zine makers have defended their choice to self-publish since the invention of the spirit duplicator in the 1920s, often through correspondence, the paratexts of distribution systems (such as APAs), or within the columns of network zines such as *Factsheet Five* (1982–1998), *Zine World* (1996–2012), and *Broken Pencil* (1995–). In its heyday before the web, network zines like these reviewed hundreds

of zines per issue, printing addresses that would put authors in touch with each other. Of these, only the Canadian magazine *Broken Pencil* is still in print, publishing nearly a hundred issues since initially launching in 1995. However, as the web became increasingly popularized and zine makers could more easily establish digital networks, *Factsheet Five* folded and *Broken Pencil* started printing fewer reviews, replacing them with more traditional magazine content such as feature stories and regularized columns.

One of these ongoing columns, "Zine Philosophy," has been reserved for the final page of nearly each issue since 2004, spotlighting nearly 70 different authors who have shared their attitudes about DIY culture, activism, radical politics, and, of course, zine making. And although these philosophies come in a variety of forms—as manifestos, critiques, origin stories, project descriptions—they accumulate to paint a rich portrait of an extracurricular scene of writing. To put this in Lawrence's terms, the Zine Philosophy column functions as a regularized and visible "context of narrative production"—a material situation (i.e., a column in a magazine) that influences how authors memorialize, define, or invent the "narrated contexts" that continue to reflect, solidify, or possibly redirect the zine *scene* (322). Such narrativizing, Lawrence suggests, doesn't merely reflect individualized accounts of literacy learning but *creates scenes of literacy sponsorship*—and what I want to model here is how we might interrogate self-sponsorship when looking closely at the contexts of narrative production in extracurricular spaces like *Broken Pencil*.

Many of the narratives of the columnists in the Zine Philosophy are not that different from our students' own literacy narratives, as they highlight the essential role that human sponsors play in inspiring their own desires to publish in extracurricular writing spaces. For instance, in a 2015 contribution titled "Queer Scribe Worldwide: An International Zine Odyssey," Miyuki Baker begins their narrative citing a primary rhetorical figure: their mother. "In order to explain to you why I'm a zinester and a mixed media artist, I need to tell you about my Japanese immigrant mom (*okasan*). More than anyone else in my life, *okasan* is the artist and maker I am most inspired by." Baker goes on to describe how their *okasan* dressed them in clothing made from scrap materials, made them home-cooked Japanese bentos for school, and used "DIY skills" to transform their modest home into something beautiful, making vegetable gardens as well as drafting tables from "hand-me-downs and discarded items on the street." More than anyone, seeing *okasan's* resourcefulness and creativity primed Baker to draw from and value reusable materials.

And yet, this narrative only begins with their *okasan*. Once Baker travelled to Japan, they began to use various scenes to show how they practiced the art of collage at home; at a summer program for gifted art students, Baker was introduced to zines; and at college they began to use zines as part of their activism for queer and trans people of color (QTPOC). Halfway through this essay, Baker then tells us about the culmination of these experiences: a prestigious Thomas J. Watson Foundation grant—offered to seniors of small liberal arts colleges—to travel around the world for over a year "exploring the implications of being 'visibly' queer in different contexts." Throughout their travels to Turkey, South Korea, Singapore, Netherlands, and eleven other countries, Baker argues that making eight different zines in these places allowed them to look at the "collective experience" of being visibly queer and ultimately argues for the affordances of a mediated mutuality:

As I look back at my art and activism, my passion for queer and trans people of color (QTPOC) communities is obviously personal, but I've realized that making zines allows me to extend the equation beyond myself, and to tell stories of the collective experience. Acknowledging cultural legibility and specificity is one reason why combating homophobia, transphobia, and other phobias universally is such difficult work. However I believe that by being our own documenters, scribes and media makers, we can empower each other. (36)

The link Baker makes here between publishing and the material conditions of QTPOC might recall Gere's arguments about the role of desire in the extracurriculum, especially how the women of the Tenderloin and the Iowa farmers were motivated, in part, by the social and economic consequences of writing (80)—namely, their own poverty. While Baker does not say they are motivated by poverty per se, there is no denying that their identity politics are linked to a DIY ethos communicated by anti-profit, lo-fi, handmade zines. That is, the zine itself—as an embodied act of labor—plays an important role in Baker's cultivation of solidarity.

Sponsorship is useful for analyzing the rhetorical figures and scenes from Baker's narrative that explain their origins and development as an author. It is also useful, as Lawrence suggests, for considering how the narrative itself potentially sponsors other zine makers, who subscribe or read *Broken Pencil* and bear witness to the narratives of the Zine Philosophy column for continued inspiration and justification for their DIY ethos. Yet I want to argue that there is more happening here as well. That is, understanding the unwieldy forces and networks like the zine fests within the extracurriculum of DIY publishing requires an interrogation into the affective energies that also draw authors to certain tools, systems, and spaces, giving them a sense of purpose and agency that writing so often promises.

> *". . . understanding the unwieldy forces and networks like the zine fests within the extracurriculum of DIY publishing requires an interrogation into the affective energies that also draw authors to certain tools, systems, and spaces, giving them a sense of purpose and agency that writing so often promises."*

These changes, I argue, require a re-theorization of the extracurriculum that moves away from self-sponsorship and toward a more complicated understanding of desire and agency, one that is conceptualized as more than love, and comes to terms with sociotechnical and economic systems through which extracurricular or avocational authorship emerges. To better account for the material and affective forces that shape the environments of the extracurriculum, then, we must draw from the more recent conversations and resources that have accumulated in the field; more specifically, and for reasons I outline below, I suggest we revisit the beginning of the turn in the field dubbed *circulation studies*.

Delivering Desire Through Circuitry

In 2000, *CCC* published John Trimbur's "Composition and the Circulation of Writing," an essay that suggests we rethink the scale from which we view writing by considering the larger "circuits of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption through which writing circulates as it takes on cultural value and worldly force" (194). While this definition of the delivery system is closely aligned to another key concept (re)introduced in the essay—circulation—by focusing on *systems* of circulation, Trimbur addresses the tendency in cultural studies and composition at the turn of the century to *isolate or bracket* "privileged moments" in cultural analysis—"the acts of encoding and decoding, writing and reading, production and consumption" that ignore "the systems through which cultural products and media messages circulate or the transformations they thereby undergo" (203). In the extracurriculum, this might mean turning our attention away from analyzing a sponsor or textual artifact and instead considering the available materials and networks that work together with technologies and scenes to put writing in motion. How writers arrange their writing (using a laptop, Google Image search, printer, or found materials with paper/scissors/glue/photocopier), for example, is dependent upon the distribution, exchange, and consumption of the things being circulated—not only who will read it, but how it might get there (as a pdf, an art book on Etsy, or an anonymous copy left on a city bus). More importantly, how and to what effect these circuits— the materials, sites, intermediaries, networks, sponsors, and channels—*coordinate* to create a force become the key goal for conceiving of a delivery system.

We can understand this more clearly by looking again at Baker's essay. Their "obviously personal" desire to make and distribute zines comes partially from a rhetorical figure, *okasan*, who showed them the political and economic importance of thrift; however, it is also fed by the more complex, lasting circuits of the delivery system.

Circuits of production, for example, are afforded by the materiality and historicity of the collage format, which Baker started engaging after an annual family visit to rural Japan. Their drafting table is "piled high with magazines, newspaper, yarn, beads, Japanese stationary and more"—scrap materials that they collected from a surrounding network of material. From these scraps, Baker often made collages of images, quotations, and words and "had amassed half a dozen of these collage/text notebooks" by the time they were introduced to their first zine. The melding of these circuits, in turn, produce new opportunities, as Baker became more involved in the public work of composition once enrolled in a university.

That is, *circuits of distribution* emerge from their introduction to the zine and QTPOC communities at their college. As Baker notes, "It was easy for me to use zines to highlight local queer artists/activists to give them exposure and inspire an international conversation of the queer movement. I was sure that this self-published and low-budget medium would be the most fun and least pretentious way of sharing information."

When sharing with allies and fellow activists, *circuits of exchange* become visibly important. As Baker describes the experience of travelling abroad to 15 countries to explore how artistic expression was affected by one's culture, they made zines and "got the chance to give talks, be interviewed on

radio shows and organize workshops on using zines to connect and build movements." Baker then goes on to bullet several specific encounters, including the time when they traded publications at a zine library in Amsterdam.

Finally, when it comes to making this work more public on the web, Baker turns to the more impersonal and codified *circuits of consumption*, plugging their work via by-line, using language that encourages readers to "check out" their publishing "cabin" online (a playful riff on the term *publishing houses*), Queer Scribe Productions, buying their international zines on Etsy, and following their illustrated blog on WordPress.

Although presented separately above, these circuits of production, exchange, consumption, and distribution are not linear; they work together to coordinate several different identities for Baker, presenting them as "a queer, multi-racial/lingual female mixed-media artist, activist, zinester and healer," as noted in their by-line. The narrative, too, reflects Baker's desire to assemble a complex identity that comes through a variety of circuits: as "a fierce hoarder of notes, sketches, and gum wrappers," who "amassed notebooks," whose "room was plastered with images," and whose "interests in zines, creation and international QTPOC … coalesced."

While I draw from Baker's origin story and journey as a self-publisher because of its fidelity to literacy narratives, it's important to note that all Zine Philosophies invariably amplify these circuits in their writing. Recent issues of *Broken Pencil* help highlight these moments. In Issue 87 (2020), for instance, Kristin Li amplifies *circuits of distribution* in discussing the Montreal-based Prisoner Correspondence Project, which "connects LGBTQ prisoners across Canada and the United States with members of similar communities on the outside" (64) through several programs, including one that circulates a zine library via mail. As Li notes, zines are perfect for contending with the prison system because they're light (reducing postage), cheap (easy to replace if lost or confiscated), and durable (since zines get passed around). In Issue 92 (2021), Helen Yeung amplifies *circuits of exchange* through the decolonial focus of Migrant Zine Collective; based in Aotearoa, the "settler colonial name New Zealand," members of Yeung's collective produce and trade collaborative zines and host conversation circles, workshops, and other events "that engages with people locally, but also reaches out to diasporic groups from around Asia and the world."

An understanding of circulation in this way—as the coordination of circuits or pathways—exists alongside scholars like Jaqueline Preston who understand writing as an assemblage, as a phenomenon that is "in constant flux, pulled from and plugged into others, a multiplicity that converges with others to make new assemblages and morphing as it circulates across contexts" (39). Likewise, delivery systems are an attempt to name the circuits by which this flux operates, but to also grapple with the energies, forces, and regimes that attract writers to certain tools, spaces, and discourses.

However, we need to apply analytical frameworks in such a way that renders the relationship between composition, delivery, and power more explicitly, especially at a time when the labor of politics is inseparable from the update culture of the sharing economy. John Gallagher suggests, for instance, that the ability of authors to revise digital texts in real time based on audience response requires a shift in our understanding of circulation as one focused on content (i.e., a thing that

moves through time and space) to one concerned about "circulatory writing processes" (5). Delivery systems are valuable for understanding such processes—how writing, as it moves through the circuits of delivery systems, "takes on cultural value and worldly force" (Trimbur 194). While Trimbur never explicitly defines what he means by "cultural value" or "worldly force," he suggests that circulation allows us to see how the means of production and labor power are inherent in all "cultural products and media messages" (208).

Desire is this force, and it is often both the cause *and* effect of the circuitry of public writing. For self-publishers, this process is especially complicated as their pursuit to circumvent traditional, conservative gatekeepers and favor user-driven spaces leads to more distributed circuitry. As Timothy Laquintano notes, the erasure of these traditional gatekeepers—a process dubbed *disintermediation*—is a fantasy, as this void is often filled by a host of *new* intermediaries, including sites like Amazon and Wattpad, but also other non-human agents, such as algorithms, terms of service, crowd-sourced book reviews, even the "ideological freight" of the history of the book itself (180–81). While I consider the output and motives of DIY publishers to be significantly different from that of the poker players, romance writers, memoirists, and popular indie authors studied by Laquintano, one important conclusion from his book is that the "shifting systems of mediation" (9) has transformed publishing from a professional activity to a literate practice. Such a shift changes the focus from the object of publishing (i.e., the zine or the book) to what readers and writers do with those objects and what those objects do to them, especially given the systems of mediation that make the activities of publishing accessible and meaningful (14–15).

So, although their desires are different from many of the self-publishers in Laquintano's study, with laptops resting on kitchen tables, DIY publishers are also contending with these shifting systems of mediation that have profoundly affected their extracurricular, literate practices. Baker, Li, and Yeung, for instance, promote their projects on Instagram and other forms of social media. Most DIY publishers engage with *circuits of consumption* by making use of on-demand, micro-capitalist tools like Square and PayPal to allow patrons to purchase their publications on credit or donate to their projects.

> *"A delivery systems framework first suggests we articulate desire as a component of all communication. Far from the sort of pathos we traditionally teach as part of the classical triumvirate of rhetorical appeals, a gesture toward the affective means naming the embodied feelings that come with circulation and trans-mediation—whether that means making a publication from scraps of paper (such as the feeling of empowerment Baker articulates from making zines) or sharing a political sentiment we agree with on TikTok."*

And throughout the pandemic many DIY publishers only shared their work digitally, even holding zine-making workshops using video conferencing tools such as Zoom and Google Meet, and in the case of Quaranzine Fest, held a multi-day all-remote event thanks

to corporate sponsorship from Kickstarter (Luther, "More Than Paper"). Changes such as these, I argue, necessitate a reevaluation of the very terms we use to describe public writing and pedagogies that occur outside our classrooms.

A delivery systems framework, in other words, is essential for understanding the role of commodities in circulatory processes: "the materialization of an underlying and contradictory social process" that pits use value against exchange value, where labor becomes an obvious and necessary feature of the mode of production for capitalist accumulation (207). In rethinking what gets circulated, Trimbur points out that it's not so much where the thing goes as much as what it carries with it in terms of embedded hierarchies—"how the labor power embodied in the commodity form articulates a mode of production and its prevailing social relations" (210). Advances in delivery systems, therefore, do not erase the "materialization of an underlying and contradictory social process" or the commodity form of labor.

Digital tools and environments, however, mask it. And here it is important to note the historic parallel growth of DIY culture, the rise of information technologies, and the adaptive nature of capitalism. Neoliberalism, at its core, is a capitalist mutation that systemically camouflages processes of labor so that commodified forms can more easily "pass transparently and unproblematically through the cycle of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption," as Trimbur suggests (208). In other words, under neoliberalism, capitalism's core contradiction between use value and exchange value is rendered less visible as workers supposedly act out of self-interest through the economic mechanisms supported by (and in some cases created by) the delivery systems of its day. While digital tools offer certain forms of authorial agency, that is, they have done so within a necessarily aggressive entrepreneurial model for cultural production, where consumers themselves are put to work. Thus, as the exploitive conditions for production become erased or renamed as opportunity through entrepreneurship, the desire for an authorial voice becomes imbricated with neoliberal paradigms of "success," producing a seemingly endless desire for more "success" (i.e., more followers). Trimbur's economic sense of circulation, in other words, permits a widened scope that focuses on the historical, economic, and technological aspects of the production of "personal" desire within the extracurriculum.

To understand the importance of this focus, let us return again to Miyuki Baker. Unlike the previous model of sponsorship discussed earlier, this framework reveals a desire for agency that is individualized, competitive, and accessible through free enterprise and self-investment. And while the literate practices of writers like Baker undoubtedly buttress important causes, they also reveal the ways in which their tactics are framed within what Wendy Brown has called a certain neoliberal *rationality*—a social view that "disseminates the *model of the market* to all domains and activities" (31). Gere reminds us that the Latin root of amateur, *amatus,* implies that members of the extracurriculum "write for love" (88); however, the spread of neoliberal rationality into everyday decision-making complicates previous descriptions of the extracurriculum as an unproblematic, celebratory space.

Consider, for example, Baker's Etsy shop, which exists as one of many on a website that serves as a virtual bazaar for handmade crafts. As a publicly-traded company, Etsy has reached a combined sales

of nearly $13.5 billion, with some users subcontracting labor to produce more "handmade" objects. By participating in a craft economy, shoppers experience a simulacrum of user participation—perhaps the most insidious way in which desire spreads. In her article for *Harlot*, "Buy It Yourself: How DIY Got Consumerized," Elizabeth Chamberlain shares a mix of examples where "participating in our purchases makes us feel better about them," examining several fashion blogs from 2013 that, on their face, rejected consumerism. In her analysis, however, Chamberlain indicates how certain "consumerizing pressures"—corporate sponsorship, entrepreneurship, and accessorizing for cultural capital—necessarily diluted the independent potential of these blogs. Applications like Pinterest, she notes, muzzle the broader political bite of grassroots fashion movements by turning them into pragmatic marketing tools, "a new DIY-themed version of consumption." For these reasons, it is not only important to account for the ways in which intermediaries use circuits of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption to commodify writing; we must also account for their desiring effects, which are traceable through affective signification.

In looking for this in the extracurriculum, then, we might ask how writers rehearse and repeat narratives about possibility, participation, and empowerment and under what contexts and conditions. Baker's identity claims as a zinester, independent artist, and activist, for example, are inseparable from the narrative that links their work to independence and social justice, as well as the medium through which such narratives circulate. A key energizing feature of DIY culture is that it puts *possibility*—and its feelings of hope, happiness, liberation, etc. —at the center of its narratives. Often, DIY publishers encourage other amateurs to approach problems or creative projects with the promise that the process (the "do" part of DIY) isn't as difficult as it might seem or that any struggles that are presented along the way will by diminished by a meaningful process and/or final product (the "it"). This perhaps serves to constrain a crisis of amateurism—the anxiety of *not knowing* what you're doing or not being a professional—but it also taps into an empowered subjectivity (the "yourself") created by participatory, affective labor.

In fact, much of DIY's power and popularity is generated by the feeling that comes from making objects; whether they are baby blankets, wool mittens, craft cocktails, innovative smartphone apps, or gutsy publications, DIY can provide one with the suggestion that there is an "alternative to the processes of capitalist valorization," as Michael Hardt has argued (89), by projecting a form of labor that only produces use value—or to borrow from Gere, that performs the cultural work of one's community (90). But as Sara Ahmed emphasizes in her work, affect is produced not by simply making objects, but by circulating them. These narratives, inseparable from their platforms, attract authors and makers to particular circuits of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. The movement of texts through these circuits produces culture, but culture also affects the nature of the circuitry involved. The intersectional approaches of Baker, for example, are both produced and produced by their choices to make multimodal objects, host activist workshops, and sell their work using Etsy. Likewise, tablers at zine fests bring together a variety of circuits and cultures in the interest of creating and sharing independent media. Through these assemblies and assemblages, new possibilities arise, even if many of them are inherently wedded to neoliberal logics and structures.

When coupled with an understanding of delivery systems as embedded within neoliberal

paradigms, studying the narratives and language that they describe help us understand the "cultural value and worldy force" (Trimbur 194) that produces desire, reframing the meaning and nature of the work done in the extracurriculum. Indeed, although authors like Baker publish outside of mainstream culture, such a framework suggests that there is no "extra" space where they are truly free to compose outside of power, a myth that has been suggested by our field's own desire to differentiate between the kind of compulsory writing that happens inside of schools and the liberatory modes accessible "outside" in the world.

Naming the Available Means of Circuitry: Toward the Public Use of Delivery Systems

Writers like Miyuki Baker narrate their use of a range of circuits as they seek to "empower each other," aiming to connect through difference and identity politics; although some of these circuits are necessarily entrepreneurial, their project is not one that seeks profit, but unity, and what they build through their making is remarkable. DIY publishing festivals demonstrate the possibilities that arise from such empowerment, as they use forms of embodied activism in part to confront neoliberalism's erasure of public space. As such, DIY strategies such as those embraced by Baker and these festivals are becoming increasingly necessary for those who aspire to use writing in their pursuit for social justice.

It is also still possible, of course, for extracurricular writers to refuse to engage with particular forms of public circuity altogether. Certainly, DIY publishers and proponents of alternative media have, historically, been keenly aware of the politics of mediation. Still, other groups might choose to not go public, to limit their audiences to more immediate friends, family, or the kinds of print-bound groups that Gere originally highlighted in her work. In *Writing for Love and Money*, for instance, Kate Vieira highlights how transnational family members used literacy technologies such as laptops for cross-border communication; in her study, writing remittances—"the communication hardware, software, writing practices, and literacy knowledge that migrant family members often circulate across borders" (4) serve as loving "circuits of exchange" (52). In a way, such "closed-circuit groups" might be the *most radical* version of the extracurriculum in the era of the attention economy.

At the same time, publicity is a necessary component to social change and so the challenge is being able to maintain a critical consciousness while simultaneously accepting the contradictory assemblage of circuits necessary for participation in the 21st century extracurriculum. Baker, for example, cobbles together both grassroots and institutional circuits in the name of political struggle, including collaging found objects (old newspapers), meeting with queer communities throughout the world (via major airlines), selling publications via publicly traded commercial interfaces (Etsy), and winning elitist, corporate grants (Watson Foundation). Ultimately their narrative links the personal, individualized, accessible circuits of zines—the "most fun and least pretentious way of sharing information"—to a larger, ambitious mission of international political struggle. As Baker argues, the zine "allows me to extend the equation beyond myself, and to tell stories of the collective experience" for QTPOC. Put simply, they use the circuits available to leverage their position—as

activist, entrepreneur, grant writer, and publisher—in the name of solidarity.

It seems to me that this is one important way we might use literacy narratives to "listen to the signals that come through the walls of our classrooms from the world outside" (76) as Gere originally suggested. That is, in attending to the ways students cite certain platforms, tools, and intermediaries in pursuit of literacy outside the classroom, we can develop critical pedagogies for understanding the relationship between desire and circulation and how using a range of circuits might help us build ethical spaces of engagement. More specifically, by reimagining public writing as it occurs through delivery systems, we can begin to do two things. First, we can work with other writers to make desire more visible—noting how particular circuits produce affective and material outcomes, whether intended, incidental, or consequential. Second, we can look at how particular circuits can be politicized to direct, organize, and spread our desire in ways that reach beyond entrepreneurship for its own sake, and build the kind of publics modeled by publishers and activists like Baker and those at DIY publishing festivals—publics that value citizenship, difference, and social justice.

A delivery systems framework first suggests we articulate desire as a component of all communication. Far from the sort of *pathos* we traditionally teach as part of the classical triumvirate of rhetorical appeals, a gesture toward the affective means naming the embodied feelings that come with circulation and trans-mediation—whether that means making a publication from scraps of paper (such as the feeling of empowerment Baker articulates from making zines) or sharing a political sentiment we agree with on TikTok. At a time when public discourse is shaped more by feelings and belief over facts and inquiry, it is especially important to help writers slow down to understand and identify the emotions that contribute to virality. Likewise, we must also recognize the material consequences of different approaches to public advocacy: how multinational corporate circuits might be used to organize the Women's March on Washington, but also feed polluting cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin. Or how the circuits of hashtag activism can confront sexual violence and police brutality, while also opening new spaces for white supremacy, spreading fake news, and bringing us to unprecedented rates of anxiety and depression. Decisions that dictate when we log on or off, disconnect or update, silence or amplify are often affective ones, but they have material consequences.

However, we should do more than expect writers to critique examples or case studies; we should develop opportunities for them to experiment with and experience a variety of circuits and their affordances and limitations, materially, politically, and culturally. By asking writers to build, write, and launch crowdfunding pages for self-initiated texts or to coordinate print festivals and poster sessions provide them with opportunities for such work. These require them to imagine—and in some cases design—both virtual and embodied delivery systems that anticipate encounters with strangers who might respond to their work in unexpected ways. While such a pedagogy is admittedly intense (and thus not for everyone and certainly not every context), these experiences foster a sense of ethos, care, and creativity that is hard to replicate when grades are the only thing at stake. In the classroom, where grades inevitably become an issue, these projects can be assessed through a version of Jody Shipka's "Statement of Goals and Choices" (113), a process-based approach to assessment that asks students to define and track their rhetorical goals through reflective writing tasks. Although

responding to projects in this way is labor intensive, I have found that it makes for engaging work (Luther, "Structuring Reflection").

As compositionists work with writers to research and experience delivery systems in these ways, they inevitably learn that their motivations, imaginations, and desires are often affected by the variety of circuits that give them shape and life, and not something deep within writers themselves. This lesson is especially important in a public sphere whose circuits seem democratic and accessible, but are increasingly based upon logics of competition, self-investment, and entrepreneurship. Rendering that relationship more visible means attending to both the material and affective aspects of rhetoric, the direct and paradoxical aspects of our politics, and the public and private notions of authorship. The larger strategy that DIY culture offers us—whether we study the extracurriculum, literacy, delivery, or rhetoric—is how certain compromises do not necessarily absolve writers from the larger struggle for public voice.

NOTES

[1] While social distancing forced many of these festivals online during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person and hybrid events have started to return in 2023. For more about the pandemic's effects on zine culture specifically, see Luther ("More").

[2] In an early footnote from her book *Zines in Third Space,* Licona tells readers that the zines discussed in her book came primarily from two archival collections spanning the years 1984–1999 (2).

[3] A similar problem exists with the term "do-it-yourself," which serves as an emancipatory declarative for activists, content-creators, and entrepreneurs alike. For more on this see Luther, Prins, and Farmer.

[4] Interestingly, as Ann Lawrence has pointed out, Brandt initially used the term "self-sponsored" in her 1994 CCC article, "Remembering Writing, Remembering Reading," but later replaced it with "self-initiated" when she incorporated the essay into subsequent work (327n15).

[5] Case in point: starting with issue 15 in 1985, Factsheet Five printed a regular column titled "Why Publish?," which featured various zine makers in each issue answering that question. A significant portion of Stephen Duncombe's landmark book *Zines: Notes from Underground*, is based on some of the more notable moments from these columns.

[6] I use the personal gender pronouns they/them/their to refer to Baker throughout this essay, as this reflects Baker's preference in their own writing.

[7] It's worth noting that Brandt considers the role of delivery systems in capitalism in Literacy in American Lives, arguing that "[s]ponsors are delivery systems for the economies of literacy, the means by which these forces present themselves to—and through—individual learners" (19). Sponsors, in other words, are circuits that deliver literacy to people.

[8] A March 2015 New York Times article detailed how Californian Alicia Shaffer, owner of the Etsy shop "Three Bird Nest," employed 25 local seamstresses to make items of clothing, providing her with an income of over $70,000 per month. She did not indicate how much her seamstresses were paid (Tabuchi).

[9] I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out and suggesting the term "closed circuits."

WORKS CITED

Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2014.

Alexander, Jonathan, Karen Lunsford, and Carl Whithaus. "Toward Wayfinding: A Metaphor for Understanding Writing Experiences." *Written Communication*, vol. 37, no. 1, Jan. 2020, pp. 10431.

Alexander, Kara Poe. "Successes, Victims, and Prodigies: 'Master" and 'Little' Cultural Narratives in the Literacy Narrative Genre." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 62, no. 4, 2011, pp. 608–33.

Arellano, Sonia C. "Quilting as a Qualitative, Feminist Research Method: Expanding Understandings of Migrant Deaths." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 41, no. 1, Jan. 2022, pp. 17–30. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, https://doi.org/10.1080/07350198.2021.2002058.

Baker, Miyuki. "Queer Scribe Worldwide: An International Zine Odyssey." *Broken Pencil*, no. 66, 2015, p. 36.

Brandt, Deborah. "Sponsors of Literacy." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 49, no. 2, May 1998, pp. 165–85.

---. *Literacy in American Lives*. Cambridge UP, 2001.

---. "A Commentary on Literacy Narratives as Sponsors of Literacy." *Curriculum Inquiry*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2015, pp. 330–33.

Brandt, Deborah, and Katie Clinton. "Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice." *Journal of Literacy Research*, vol. 34, no. 3, Sept. 2002, pp. 337–56.

Brown, Wendy. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Zone Books, 2015.

Bryson, Krista. "The Literacy Myth in the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives." *Computers and Composition*, vol. 29, no. 3, Sept. 2012, pp. 254–68. *ScienceDirect*, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2012.06.001.

Buchanan, Rebekah J. *Writing a Riot: Riot Grrrl Zines and Feminist Rhetorics*. Peter Lang, Inc. 2018.

Chamberlain, Elizabeth. "Buy-It-Yourself: How DIY Got Consumerized." *Harlot: A Revealing Look at the Arts of Persuasion*, vol. 1, no. 14, Oct. 2015. harlotofthearts.org/issues/issue_14/chamberlain/index.html.

Comstock, Michelle. "Grrrl Zine Networks: Re-Composing Spaces of Authority, Gender, and Culture." *JAC: Journal of Advanced Composition,* vol. 21, no. 2, 2001, pp. 383–409.

Crowley, Sharon. "Components of the Composing Process." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1977, pp. 166–69. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/356106.

Davis, Matthew, Kevin Brock, and Stephen J. McElroy. "Expanding the Available Means of Composing: Three Sites of Inquiry." *enculturation*, vol. 14, 2012, www.enculturation.net/available-means.

Davis, Seth E. "Shade: Literacy Narratives at Black Gay Pride." *Literacy in Composition Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2019, pp. 56–89.

Duncombe, Stephen. *Notes From Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. Verso

Books, 1997.

Emig, Janet A. *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*. NCTE, 1971.

Farmer, Frank. *After the Public Turn: Composition, Counterpublics, and the Citizen Bricoleur*. Utah State UP, 2013.

Fishman, Jenn, Andrea Lunsford, Beth McGregor, and Mark Otuteye. "Performing Writing, Performing Literacy." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 57, no. 2, Dec. 2005, pp. 224–52.

Gallagher, John R. *Update Culture and the Afterlife of Digital Writing*. UP of Colorado, 2020.

García, Romeo. "On the Cusp of Invisibility: Opportunities and Possibilities of Literacy Narratives." *Open Words*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2017.

Gere, Anne Ruggles. "Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition." *College, Composition, and Communication*, vol. 45, no. 1, Feb. 1994, pp. 75–92.

Gruwell, Leigh. *Making Matters: Craft, Ethics, and New Materialist Rhetorics*. Utah State UP, 2022.

Hanzalik, Kate, and Nathalie Virgintino. *Exquisite Corpse: Studio Art-Based Writing Practices in the Academy*. Parlor Press LLC, 2019.

Hardt, Michael. "Affective Labor." *Boundary 2*, 1999, pp. 89–100.

Helms, Jason. *Rhizcomics: Rhetoric, Technology, and New Media Composition*. Sweetland Digital Rhetoric Collaborative, 2017, www.digitalrhetoriccollaborative.org/rhizcomics/index.html.

Howes, Franny. "Composing the Uncollectible." *Composition Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, Spring 2015, pp. 15–17.

Hunter, Max A. *Speech Is My Hammer: Black Male Literacy Narratives in the Age of Hip-Hop*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2022.

Jacobs, Dale. "Marveling at 'The Man Called Nova': Comics as Sponsors of Multimodal Literacy." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 59, no. 2, Dec. 2007, pp. 180–205.

Kuzawa, Deborah. "Queer/Ing Composition, The Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives, and Ways of Knowing." *Re/Orienting Writing Studies: Queer Methods, Queer Projects*, edited by William P. Banks, Matthew Cox, and Caroline Dadas, UP of Colorado, 2019, pp. 150–68.

Lanham, Richard A. *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information*. U of Chicago P, 2006.

Laquintano, Timothy. *Mass Authorship and the Rise of Self-Publishing*. U of Iowa P, 2016.

Lawrence, Ann M. "Literacy Narratives as Sponsors of Literacy: Past Contributions and New Directions for Literacy-Sponsorship Research." *Curriculum Inquiry*, vol. 45, no. 3, May 2015, pp. 304–29.

Li, Kristin. "Zines Across Prison Walls." *Broken Pencil*, no. 87, 2020, p. 64–65.

Licona, Adela C. *Zines in Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetoric*. SUNY Press, 2012.

Lindquist, Julie, and Bump Halbritter. "Documenting and Discovering Learning: Reimagining the Work of the Literacy Narrative." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 70, no. 3, 2019, pp. 413–45.

Luther, Jason. "More Than Paper Islands: The Pandemic Circuitry of Quaranzines—Reflections." *Reflections: A Journal of Community-Engaged Writing and Rhetoric*, vol. 21, no. 1, Feb. 2022, reflectionsjournal.net/2022/02/more-than-paper-islands-the-pandemic-circuitry-of-quaranzines/.

---. "Structuring Reflection." *Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities*, edited by Elizabeth J. Clark. *ajs. hcommons.org*, hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:30873/hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:30873. Accessed 4 Dec. 2023.

Luther, Jason, Kristin Prins, and Frank Farmer. "Making the Scene: The Rhetoric of DIY Composition." *enculturation*, April 2023. www.enculturation.net/diy_compositionhttp://www.enculturation.net/diy_composition.

Patterson, Shelagh Wilson. "Does Every Lesbian Have a Superpower That Makes Them Out and Not Dead by Suicide?: A Poetics against Standardizing Literacy Narratives." *Literacy in Composition Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, Mar. 2022, pp. 1–27, https://licsjournal.org/index.php/LiCS/article/view/220.

Preston, Jacqueline. "Project(ing) Literacy: Writing to Assemble in a Postcomposition FYW Classroom." *College Composition and Communication,* vol. 67, no. 1, 2015, pp. 35–63.

Prins, Kristin. "Crafting New Approaches to Composition." *Composing (Media)= Composing (Embodiment): Bodies, Technologies, Writing, the Teaching of Writing*, edited by Kristin L. Arola and Anne Wysocki, Utah State UP, 2012, pp. 145–61.

Roozen, Kevin. "Comedy Stages, Poets Projects, Sports Columns, and Kinesiology 341: Illuminating the Importance of Basic Writers' Self-Sponsored Literacies." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2012, pp. 99–132.

Rosinski, Paula. "Students' Perceptions of the Transfer of Rhetorical Knowledge between Digital Self-Sponsored Writing and Academic Writing: The Importance of Authentic Contexts and Reflection." *Critical Transitions: Writing and the Question of Transfer*, edited by Chris Anson and Jessie L. Moore, The WAC Clearinghouse, 2016, pp. 247–71.

Shipka, Jody. *Toward a Composition Made Whole*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2011.

Sternglass, Marilyn. "School-Sponsored and Self-Sponsored at the Same Time." *Journal of Advanced Composition*, vol. 9, no. 1-2, 1989.

Tabuchi, Hiroko. "Etsy's Success Gives Rise to Problems of Credibility and Scale." *The New York Times*, 15 Mar. 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/16/business/media/etsys-success-raises-problems-of-credibility-and-scale.html.

Trimbur, John. "Composition and the Circulation of Writing." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 52, no. 2, Dec. 2000, pp. 188–219.

Vieira, Kate. *Writing For Love and Money: How Migration Drives Literacy Learning in Transnational Families*. Oxford UP, 2019.

Wang, Xiqiao. "Tracing Connections and Disconnects: Reading, Writing, and Digital Literacies across Contexts." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 70, no. 4, 2019, pp. 560–89.

Yeung, Helen. "Migrant Zine Collective." *Broken Pencil*, no. 92, 2021, p. 64.

Yi, Youngjoo, and Alan Hirvela. "Technology and 'Self-Sponsored' Writing: A Case Study of a Korean-American Adolescent." *Computers and Composition*, vol. 27, no. 2, June 2010, pp. 94–111.