

Literature

by Silvia Bombardini



Kiosk

Matthew Dooley

Matthew Dooley is a British cartoonist, whose work has appeared in comic anthologies such as *Dirty Rotten Comics*, *Off Life* and *T4L*. Poignant and wry, traced with surrealism, Dooley's own first small press collection, *Meanderings*, was released last year. His four-page account of a tall, small-town milkman who dreams to win

Lancashire's Tallest Milkman competition was awarded in November the 2016 Observer/Jonathan Cape/Comica graphic short story prize. *Colin Turnbull: A Tall Story* is featured alongside tales of disbelieving astronauts and foul-mouthed birds in *The Practical Implications of Immortality*, Dooley's latest collection. A ginger-haired Dooley lookalike, pessimist and indolent, also recurs throughout, musing on the impending apocalypse or browsing the web for inspirational quotes. Now he's working on his first long-form graphic novel, *Flake*, which will be published by Jonathan Cape.

S.B.: I wanted to ask about your background to begin with. I've read that you didn't study art, and until not so long ago had not been drawing since your teenage years – when did you decide to pick up the pencils again? Were there any graphic novels, any author who inspired you? You studied classics at university instead: do you find that your training still influences somehow, either your aesthetic or your technique?

M.D.: I started drawing again in my mid-twenties. I first tried my hand at gag cartoons, but I found that the jokes I wanted to tell were better suited for longer than just a couple of panels each. It was more or less at the same time that I started reading comics again. It was Art Spiegelman's *Maus* that turned me back on to comics, along with many other great artists, creators like Chris Ware, Seth and Tom Gauld. They opened my eyes to the possibilities that comics possess. I really do think that we're only at the start of seeing where comics could go, as a medium. Chris Ware's *Building Stories* is, for me anyway, a terrific example of just this. Extraordinary in its ambition and execution, it is a piece of work hard to imagine being better realised in any other form. As far as my academic background, I don't think it has had an enormous impact on my aesthetic... however, at some point I would love to do a comic about the Pre-Socratics. It would be tremendously fun to try and show Zeno's paradoxes through pictures!

S.B.: You've said in a recent interview that you were still looking for your own style, yet it looks very distinctive to me, from its muted colours to your hairy alter ego. Could you talk me through your creative process: how much of it is done by hand, what digital tools you favour? How long does it take you on average to complete one page?

M.D.: I always start with pencil roughs, these tend to be extremely loose. The final page will be pencilled and then inked on paper. Once that is done, I'll scan it into Photoshop and correct any mistakes. Then I add colour, this is relatively straight forward as my colours tend to just be flat. After it is coloured I add speech bubbles and text, and I will do the text with a graphics tablet. I use a typeface as a guide but prefer to letter it by hand. I find this way I get a consistent spacing and feel whilst maintaining that hand drawn look. The timeframe for one page depends on the level of detail, but I would normally expect to get at least one page done in a day. My style is quiet sparse and simple. This wasn't so much an aesthetic choice but rather a practical one. I don't work especially quickly and too much detail would mean I'd never finish anything! But I do feel like I've found a way of doing things that I'm starting to be comfortable with.

S.B.: I know that you feel more comfortable writing in the first person, and even when it's not you on the page, autobiographical details find their way into the narrative – for example, you mentioned that you set in the tale of the tall milkman in a town like the one where you grew up. I wonder, do life's challenges appear any more bearable once you've put them into comic strips? By which I mean, does it become easier, with practice, to pick up on what's funny in real life?

M.D.: I think that I prefer to write in the first person because I am naturally introspective. That being the case, it's probably inevitable that bits of me end up in my characters. Also my sense of humour is rooted in the

mundane, and since my life is frequently mundane, I do find myself on the lookout for the small things that might become part of a story. My anxieties do find their way into my comics, and drawing humour from them does make them a little more bearable, if only because they become useful. Recently, I have found myself having troubling thoughts about wider and more serious existential threats. This has definitely been reflected in my work. It's a rich, if not terrifying, way for both humour and more careful reflection. What else can you do but laugh at the thought of mankind's capacity to destroy itself through hubris and stupidity?

S.B.: *The Practical Implications of Immortality*, released in May, is a collection of 14 short stories on subjects as varied as bottled insults and weight loss. What would you say that they all have in common, and how did you come up with the title? I hear that you're working on a longer novel now – will you give us a preview of what to expect?

M.D.: The stories are generally downbeat in nature, even dealing with world ending scenarios... the title is from one of the strips, I thought it would be amusing to title the collection after its most grandiose story. Like some of my other strips it takes an idea and then takes it to its absurd extreme. In this case, what would be the practical considerations if you lived till the end of time? Since one of the best current theories about the fate of the universe suggests that it will end with trillions of years of dark cold nothingness, I thought it be funny to put myself in that situation. The longer comic I'm working on at present won't be out for a couple of years yet... it's a daunting task to go from short strips to something much, much longer in one jump, but I'm very excited about it. The story centres around two feuding ice-cream men, but it's also full of lots of digressions and other stories. I'm hoping it will retain some of the feel of my shorter stories, whilst holding together as a longer narrative – so watch this space!

Paul Lawrence

Nestled inside the Pinda Bryars antiquarian bookshop, which sells old maps and prints '*at the sign of the unicorn*' in London's Cecil Court, November Books is a treasure trove of vintage volumes, periodicals, posters and flyers from the golden years of the avant-gardes, fashion and music, popular and counterculture. Since its founder, Paul Lawrence, is usually out on the hunt for the rare tomes his clients trust him to find, November Books is open only by appointment – but its online shop features a comprehensive catalogue of what's on sale, to whet the appetite and lighten the wallets of anyone who happens to be browsing through it. One of Lawrence's latest acquisitions, for instance, is a complete run of *Comme des Garçons's Six* magazine, printed between 1988 and 1991, with contributions by the likes of Saul Leiter, Peter Lindbergh and Salvador Dalí. Yet Paul Lawrence believes that the "*failures*" in his collection may be just as interesting as its gems.

S.B.: I've read that you worked in the antiquarian book trade as a student, and then as a textile designer for Vivienne Westwood for a while. When did the idea for November Books come about, and why is it called so?

P.L.: I was already doing research – in actual facts, the bookshop came around because I was already looking for research materials for the designers I was working with. It was a way of formalising that. November was just the month I started, no big idea there! It was happening for a while but I don't think it was official until maybe 2012.

S.B.: The internet and the printed page are often cast as opponents, and though the e-book market is in decline at last, the sensible practice of buying books online still irks the purists of the medium. But you seem to enjoy instead something of a symbiotic relationship with the web: what role would you say that the internet plays in the trade of rare books today, and for November Books in particular? Have you ever read an e-book?

P.L.: Well the internet helps me find them, it helps me find out about them, and helps other people find me. So it still works very well as a way of finding things and finding people. The internet works very much as a starting point, or a directory – of course you have to know what to look for. It doesn't really make a direct completion though. I'll be honest, I've never read anything online, and I didn't really ever think that online reading would be a problem. In a way if you think of the internet as being competition for books it's actually because instead of reading books you could be watching television, on the internet. That's more of a comparison in terms of how you spend your time. The impact of the internet on books is the same impact that television had on theatre – it's not the same thing. The internet isn't going to reproduce what a book does.

S.B.: Aside from what's on your catalogue, customers also come to you with specific requests. Two years ago you said in an interview that you were researching the Mexican-American lowrider scene in East LA – what are you presently looking into?

P.L.: Good question, let me think, nothing really new. I am researching avant-garde dance and theatre at the moment, and this is a personal interest as well as something that other people would like to see, and late 70s performance art as well. Aside from that it's a wide variety, as in someone asking me to find a very specific book for them, and that's across all kinds of subjects.

S.B.: What are some of the most curious ones that you've ventured over the years, and what were your funniest finds?

P.L.: In the late 60s there were a lot of things which don't really make sense anymore, ideas of the time that never got further. There were lots of avant-garde sex newspapers and magazines, none of them took off, and the ideas that they were trying to push never really took hold. Actually with everything, I find lots of ideas that never became mainstream or came to fruition – what I tend to find are the failures of the past. The deeper you dig, the more obscure you go... every now and again you can find brilliant examples of work, but what you mainly find are flawed ideas, and failures.

S.B.: Among the books on sale now, do you have any favourites?

P.L.: Actually at the moment, it's not officially for sale yet but I have a complete run of *Vanity* magazine, which is a magazine that Anna Piaggi did in the early 80s, and that's pretty impressive, and none's really seen them either. They will go online soon.

S.B.: I really like some of the cinema books you have, such as *A Collection of Stage Fantasy Photos* by Shuji Terayama or Agnès Varda's *La Cote D'Azur*.

P.L.: Ah yes, this is kind of where I'm looking at the moment actually. Because I think cinema is a very rich cultural resource, and it encompasses a lot of different ideas. Of course books about cinema are not films, they're books – but it's quite an interesting crossover.

S.B.: Do you ever get attached to a book and decide to keep it for yourself instead of selling it?

P.L.: Yes, there's some things I bring home, which don't ever go for sale on the shop. I've got lots of *Teen Angels* magazine, which is a lowrider thing. I have a couple of pieces of Shuji Terayama ephemera, from when he was staging theatre in the late 60s and early 70s, and I actually kept some of the Factory's New York material. This was basically when Factory Records had a fairly short-lived New York office, and they worked with the likes of John Baldessari to do the poster and the flyers – I kept some of those too.

Davide Cazzaro

Davide Cazzaro, who hails from Venice and lives in Seoul, has been enamoured with the movies, a cinephile, ever since childhood. In his early twenties he was part of a youth jury at the Venice Film Festival, and he's been working with festivals ever since. With a background in criticism and cinema studies, NANG is Cazzaro's first foray into publishing, though it doesn't look like it: an English-language, ten-issue magazine dedicated to Asian cinema, NANG comes out twice a year, edited in South Korea and printed in Sweden. Among many highlights, in issue one Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit explains how 'screenwriting is like cooking', and in issue two Kidlat Tahimik reflects on the idea of the 'ultimate film'. Now NANG's third issue has gone to the printers, and Cazzaro promises that it's never going to be printed again, ever. Film-lovers among us will do well to keep an eye out for it, I know I will – and for the seven NANG to follow.

S.B.: Let's talk titles first – how did you come up with it, why is NANG called NANG? Would you describe for our readers how the laser-cut design of the masthead mirrors its subject?

D.C.: *Nang* is a Thai word, it dates back to a pre-cinematic tradition, to the shadow puppet theatre. It initially meant the leather, or the skin of the puppets themselves, but with time in Thailand it came to refer to any spectacle which involved light and shadow, and eventually cinema. When cinema was first introduced in Thailand it was called *western nang*, because it came from Europe. And it's interesting that in Thailand the term is still used as a popular nickname for cinema, to this day. I really like how the word travelled through time.

For me design elements are really supposed to become one with the content, with the writing and the imagery – design should never be an embellishment. The laser-cut letters N-A-N-G pay homage both to the origins of the word, in that they are an illusion, and work through light and shadow in a sense, and to the very fact of course that cinema itself is an illusion. So the designers Shin Haeok and Shin Donghyeok came up with the idea to play with it on the masthead, and with the identity of the magazine itself.

S.B.: If we were to draw a comparison between the two, we could say that the printed page is to online media what analogue film stock is to digital filmmaking. In this light, why did you choose to produce a print-only magazine? You've spoken about the opportunities that micropublishing allows – what do you mean with it exactly, and what would you say was the role of the internet in making it possible?

D.C.: I thought of NANG as a print-only magazine because reading on print is a really different experience than reading on a screen. So I liked the reading experience that print can offer, and the tangible factor, and its permanence as well. So much content is always available, always immediately disposable in the online world. What I'm trying to achieve with print is something unique, something high quality that hopefully readers will want to keep and collect. I'm not against digital of course, but I really thought that for this project, and in particular for talking about cinema and reproducing film stills, there was the chance to produce a beautiful object that wants to be a celebration of both cinema culture and print culture at once.

By micropublishing I mean that these days good printers that want to keep up with the times are much more open than in the past to do small projects, small print runs, maybe only one print run, and to work closely with designers and publishers. Micropublishing is also something that one can do independently to an extent. Although NANG depends on the support of readers and sponsors, we are independent in the sense that we're free to choose whatever we want in terms of theme, approach, contributors, and so on. The ultimate aim is to try and publish the best issues we can, rather than pleasing investors or stick to certain criteria. This is of course a challenging road – it wasn't easy at first, and it continues not to be easy, but hopefully it will become easier as we go on.

You pick up on an interesting characteristic of contemporary print magazines, which is that we publishers use an old technology, print, and combine it with new ones – cloud computing to transfer files, social media, internet chats, emails, and so on. Without all of these new technologies publishing independent print magazines today would be almost impossible, because we don't have the budget or staff to afford traditional publishing strategies or marketing channels. It's a very stimulating, but at the same time risky and almost nerve-wracking challenge:

to stand out thanks to the quality of our printed products, and use contemporary means and platforms as creatively as possible at the same time. But I really like this dynamic – of using a very, very old technology in tandem with relatively recent or very recent ones.

S.B.: Aside from its Asian focus, something else that distinguishes NANG from other film journals is the way it eschews reviews or recommendations in favour of more timeless formats and content – such as extracts from screenplays, or personal essays penned by the directors themselves. Would you talk us through the contents of issue one and two? Why did you choose to work with different guest editors each time?

D.C.: When I devised NANG as a project I really thought that it was worth trying to play with the magazine format. I thought it would be a bit boring, or a bit of a missed opportunity to go down the beaten path and shape it like existing cinema magazines. Which doesn't mean that they're necessarily bad, but they are already there, and they serve a different purpose, or they follow certain traditions for a number of reasons and I understand that of course. But I really thought that a new, small, independent magazine had to go in a different direction, and in an interesting way, not just for the sake of it. So the idea of the rotating guest-editors is one of the pillars of the project, just as much as the focus on Asian cinema and the thematic approach.

Issue one and two are extremely different, and issue 3 will also be extremely different. Issue one is an exploration of screenwriting in the Asian world, something that I think is very much underwritten and under-researched. It was edited by Ben Slater, a screenwriter and lecturer himself, based in Singapore. It's a collection of interviews and conversations, sometimes in depth, with screenwriters from different countries, and also excerpts from screenplays, something that is very difficult to come across to. It was a very interesting way to start the journey of the magazine. Then issue two was quite a risky issue, given its topic of *Scars and Death*. It was co-edited by a filmmaker from the Philippines, John Torres, and a critic and scholar from Korea, Yoo Un-Seong. I really liked the opportunity of having a filmmaker on board as well – filmmakers bring on a number of ideas and perspectives that editors may not have. Issue two is made up of mostly personal essays on how cinema represents scars and death, and how you can look at scars and death through cinema. We also had the pleasure to include some wonderful photography. And that's exactly what I was trying to achieve with the magazine, a collection of pages, writings and imagery the likes of which have never been published before – with reference for instance to scars and death in cinema, not only in Asian cinema but in cinema in general. So I stand by the choices we made with issue two, and although its thematic approach is maybe is a bit surprising, it's been well received and I hope it will continue to be well received until it's sold out. What I didn't mention before is that each issue is printed only once and in a limited number of copies, and that too is part of the idea – going back to the idea of print, to the idea that this isn't something that is always available. It's never going to be reprinted. So it's a magazine almost like a demonstration, a strike, or a protest: if you're there you're there, otherwise you missed it.

S.B.: Issue 3, on fiction, is due out later this month. What are we looking forward to?

D.C.: Issue 3 was very fun to make, after a very sombre topic like *Scars and Death*. It was guest-edited by the well-known publisher and filmmaker Amir Muhammad, from Malaysia. For the first time we did an open call, worldwide, asking for original short stories and comics inspired by actual Asian films. It became quite a packed issue, because once we had made a selection from the submissions we received, we collected together the film posters of the films that the authors had chosen. This was quite challenging because film posters are notoriously difficult to gather, to get permission to reproduce, or sometimes even just to find. And we were looking for the original posters from each country, not for the international release. Then we commissioned original illustrations from five different artists, both from Europe and from Asia. They were asked to combine each original poster with the related short story or comics, creating almost a new poster, or a response to both. This combination of short stories, comics, posters, and illustrations, made up I think for quite a unique issue that I hope readers will enjoy. But you will see it soon, it's coming out! It's been printed about ten days ago and will come out at the end of September.

Nick Greenbank

Nick Greenbank, a young graphic designer who lives and works in South London, swears by print. He has recently opened his own design studio, Pavilion, and since 2014 he's been running Kiosk, a publishing project with a focus on artist pamphlets and zines. Having failed to sublimate, as some had expected, into the ether of the blogosphere, Greenbank believes that it's precisely the generational familiarity of contemporary authors with digital tools what facilitates the making and circulation of fanzines today. He curates the irregularly scheduled Kiosk Independent Publishers Fair, and works closely with the artists to design and edit the titles published by Kiosk. All limited editions, Kiosk's publications more than make up in rarity the value they forgo in price, on their online shop, most of them are sold out. My personal favourite still on sale, titled *Not the Onion*, retails for £6 – it features vaguely surrealist juxtapositions, free associations of text and image in riso print format.

S.B.: When blogs were just born, one could have thought them the progeny of zines for the digital age. Yet the success and proliferation of fairs like yours prove that not only physical zines are still going strong, but they may be as popular today as they ever were before. Why do you think that is?

N.G.: The ease of access to both desktop publishing software and the internet since the 90s has seen more and more people able to create and publish their own content, both on and offline. I think this increase in accessibility saw a rise in the number of blogs, but equally a rise in the number of DIY publications that are designed, printed and distributed by individuals or a small group of people.

I think this is due partly to the nature of print and that it can offer a lot of things that digital publications cannot, obviously this works the other way around too. Many people still prefer to sit and read a physically printed book, you can turn the pages, feel the weight of it, the texture of the paper, and it is to me a much more personal experience. e-books obviously lack this, but they have the ability to be stored in large numbers across multiple devices, and can be adjusted to the reader's preference.

But coming back to zines, I believe there has been somewhat a resurgence of interest due to the fact of how they are so easily promoted online, predominantly through social media. We are seeing more of them not only because there are more of them, but because it is much easier to find them.

S.B.: How did the idea for the Kiosk Independent Publishers Fair first come to you, and how did you make it happen? At its latest edition last month, Kiosk's promotional posters featured slogans like '5p copies', 'for the many not the few', and the subversive suggestion to 'use the office toner'. We live in times when almost everything is overpriced – how important is it for Kiosk to keep your publications cheap?

N.G.: The whole ethos behind Kiosk is to work with emerging artists to produce limited edition publications and artworks with the intention of expanding the audiences of their work to individuals who may not have seen it before. The fair is an extension of this idea, in that a curated selection of other independent publishers are invited to exhibit and sell their works to an audience that might otherwise be unaware of their existence.

Kiosk launched in 2014 with a pop-up bookshop, a very early iteration of this idea, which then evolved into the Kiosk Independent Publishers Fair, three of which we hosted in a South London café in 2015. The 2017 edition was much larger and held in a gallery space with over 30 participants from across the UK as well as from Europe and the US.

It is very important to me that the works Kiosk publishes are kept as affordable as possible, in order to make them the most accessible, and it all comes back to the ideology of bringing an artist's work to as many people as we can. As the edition numbers are normally quite small – usually around 50 – unit costs can be quite high and I try to keep them priced as close to the unit costs as possible. This means that we don't end up making a lot of money back per book, but it doesn't matter much to me as Kiosk isn't really about that, it is a labour of love. I want people to realise this too, and the humorous campaign posters were a way of getting this idea across to visitors and ultimately spread the message: "Support Independent Publishing!".

S.B.: A funding principle of zine culture, what makes it so easy to embrace, is that one doesn't need professional training in order to make a zine – clearly though, they do look better when you have it. How long have you been making zines, and how have your studies of typography and experience as a graphic designer influenced the outcome? What's in your view the best font for a zine, if such a thing exists?

N.G.: I've been making zines since I started studying at university in 2010, but looking back to my childhood, I was always making stapled booklets of my drawings and collages as well, so I suppose it's something that has interested me for a long time.

When I started making my first actual zines in uni they were mainly collections of my own photography and some of my friends' photography. But during my second year, I contacted the photographer Ben Rayner on Tumblr to see if he would be interested in me publishing his work in a book, and he was! This was before I started Kiosk and for me it really marked the moment when my interest in independent arts publishing and collaborating with others properly began.

I think my personal graphic design practice has influenced the way I approach making zines a lot, in that I try to consider every aspect of the design and production of a publication as much as possible in such a way that it represents the artist's work as best as it can, that is my ultimate goal. Having said that, running Kiosk alone, with help from my partner Lauren, has also massively influenced the way I work as a designer in terms of organisation, and structuring the firm belief that what I am producing is the best I can make it.

In regards to choice of font when making a zine, I believe this to be completely subjective. As I mentioned earlier, I try to consider every aspect of design, and this includes selecting a typeface that I think would best suit the project and the work of the artist I am working with.

S.B.: Kiosk publishes the rather diverse work of a number of young creatives. Is there something you would say that they all have in common? Among those currently on sale on your online shop, could you describe a few of your favourites?

N.G.: What many of them have in common is that they are emerging artists, fairly young in their careers but massively talented. I reached out to many of them with the offer of publishing their work through Kiosk, and I am always blown away by the positive response. They are all incredibly supportive of the project as much as I am supportive of their work. Through Kiosk I have met many interesting individuals, and some of them I have gotten to know very well!

It's very difficult to choose favourites but among our new releases I love *No Ball Games* by illustrator Maria Midttun, *Soft California* by Soft, and *Same Page* by LA-based photographers TJ Tambellini and Lark Foord, which I designed through my new studio, Pavilion. From past editions however, *The Wind That Remembers* by illustrator Jack Sachs and *Globally Harmonized* by designer Michael Willis are two zines that have proved to be big hits.