

ZERØ DUCATS

nate jordan

interview on D.I.Y publishing

Zerø Ducats: First off, explain how *Monkey Puzzle Magazine & Press* came about.

Nate Jordan: It all got started in 2007 after a nightmarish bout with some bad acid while listening to the Brian Jonestown Massacre. Well, sort of. I realized the direction Naropa University's literary journal, *Bombay Gin*, was taking. In an effort to gain publicity or garner respect in...whatever circle they were trying to impress...*Bombay Gin* stopped publishing its own students and running prose and poetry by Amiri Baraka, Anne Waldman, even transcriptions of talks by William S. Burroughs and other legends. Sure, they'd publish a token student but the whole thing became exclusive. So I figured if they won't publish our students, I will. I knew I was surrounded by all this talent, but talent left undiscovered. Then one day after a workshop, with none other than Anne Waldman, I asked her some question about "getting discovered." She said, "Don't wait to be discovered. Discover yourself." Glue this next to the whole DIY thing from the punk scene and you'll have a pretty good idea how this puzzle came together. Next I needed a concept. My girlfriend at the time came up with the name Monkey Puzzle and a thousand light bulbs exploded in my head. After recruiting works of poetry, prose, photography, and art from friends we knew at school and around the country, *Monkey Puzzle Magazine* was off and swinging from branches. Next thing I knew I had a business license and was laying the foundation for Monkey Puzzle Press and becoming an independent publisher.

ZD: Give us an overview of your publishing process with *Monkey Puzzle Magazine*, from formatting to printing to distribution.

NJ: The first step in all this is getting a call for submissions out there. Hit the streets. Send e-mails. Make phone calls.

When you get all the works in, the editing process begins. As for formatting, I don't decide on a concept until I have all the accepted works together and see what collective shape they're taking. But I don't think *Monkey Puzzle Magazine* has some avante garde design concept - it's pretty straight forward. I let the written and visual works speak for *Monkey Puzzle Magazine*. It's been an auspicious coincidence that each issue has developed its own theme based on works submitted and I think that's helped give the magazine a concept and reputation. So, once formatting is done in whatever way (I started with Microsoft Publisher) then it's off to the printers. I ran everything on my little Hewlett Packard P1000 for a long time and it was an exercise in insanity. I suggest using a printer with a duplexer. Nowadays I take *Monkey Puzzle Magazine* to a professional printer. As for distribution, that's a whole 'nother ball game there. Without thousands of issues ready to go immediately, I don't suggest getting a distributor. Instead, hit the streets. Send e-mails. Make phone calls. It's all about grass-roots marketing, doing the Monkey Puzzle Shuffle. Schedule readings. Schedule parties. Go meet local bookstore owners and managers and see if they'll stock a few issues on the shelves.

ZD: What are your thoughts on the role of countercultural literary movements in relation to "the establishment"?

NJ: Oh man, without countercultural literary movements in our society, we could very well be living in some sort of Nazi state. American countercultural literary movements go all the way back to Ben Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack* and *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine. In more recent times, we can thank *Yugen* and City Lights Booksellers for spawning the Beat Generation and the subsequent cultural revolution it spawned. The important thing about countercultural literary movements is that they must remain active and cyclical. The establishment will coop anything new and repackage it for mass consumption. The underground becomes above ground and then what? You have to go underground to find the roots.

ZD: What advice do you have for aspiring small publishers?

NJ: Jump in and learn to swim. People will tell you how you need a plan, a risk assessment, investment capital, blah-blah-woof-woof. You can plan for five years and never DO

anything. The important thing is to have the desire. If you've got the desire, then all you have to do is go for it. What you need then, is: the right software, decent equipment, and material. An internet entity is invaluable too. What you don't need is some huge business loan, a salaried editor, an office space on the corner of 8th and Madison, whatever. I hear countless horror stories about new publishers getting huge loans and going belly-up their first year. Run things on a shoestring budget – this will force you to think outside the box. Spend time researching grassroots marketing methods. Build friendships – maintain them. Learn, learn, learn. Be prepared to sacrifice...everything. Have patience, but don't procrastinate. And keep the Wild Turkey to a minimum. I like this bit of advice from Hubert Selby Jr., author of *Last Exit to Brooklyn*:

“Being an artist doesn't take much, just everything you've got. Which means, of course, that as the process is giving you life, it is also giving you death. But it's no big deal. They are one and the same and cannot be avoided or denied. So when I totally embrace this process, this life/death, and abandon myself to it, I transcend all this gibberish and hang out with the gods. It seems to me that that is worth the price of admission.”

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