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**NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND:
ZINES AND THE POLITICS OF UNDERGROUND CULTURE**

by

STEPHEN ROSS DUNCOMBE

Dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1996

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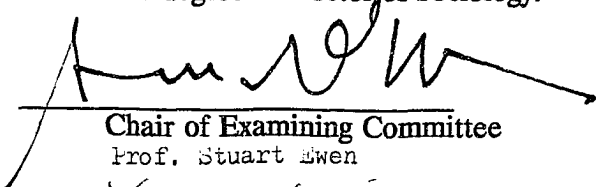
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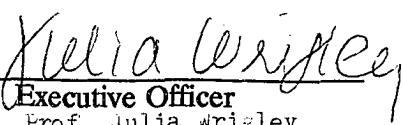
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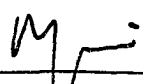
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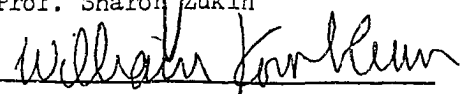
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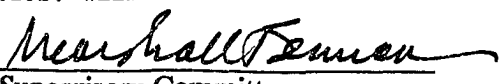
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Abstract

NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND:
ZINES AND THE POLITICS OF UNDERGROUND CULTURE

by

Stephen Ross Duncombe

Advisor: Professor Stuart Ewen

Using *Zines*--noncommercial, nonprofessional, self-published magazines--as a case study, this dissertation explores the possibilities and limitations of the politics of *underground culture*, giving particular attention to the contradictions which arise in the attempt to build a dissenting culture within an advanced capitalist society. Through the analysis of zine content and form, their history, and interviews with writers and readers, this study considers how individuals use zines as a way to identify and counter the *alienation* they encounter as individuals, in society, at their workplace, and as consumers of culture. Also discussed is what happens when the virtual Bohemia zine writers create in opposition to the mainstream is "discovered" by the commercial culture industry, and zine writers, bereft of other options, turn toward purist isolation or "selling out." Finally, drawing upon this case study, the *politics of culture* will be questioned; both its possibilities: creating free spaces for innovative thought and social organization, and providing a stage in a career of political deviance; and its limitations: sublimating political action into cultural expression, and feeding into a political economy which incorporates and thrives off of cultural innovation and dissent.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank all of the zine writers who shared their time, their thoughts, their lives, and their zines with me. The best of what is here is in their words. These generous people are listed by name in the bibliography, but I'd like to give a special thanks to two of them: Mike Gunderloy and Diswashin' Pete, who went far and above the call of duty in helping out a pesky researcher. This research would also not have been possible without the excellent librarians at the New York State Library, who guided me through the 360 cubic feet of zines housed in their Factsheet Five Collection. These individuals, Ms. Billie Aul, Mr. Paul Mercer, and Mr. Jim Corsaro, daily reconfirmed my respect for librarians. My research at the NYSL would also not have been possible without the generosity of Ms. Delores Schmidt, who opened her spare bedroom and her refrigerator to a bleary-eyed, hungry researcher for weeks on end. And none of this would have been possible without my Jacob K. Javits Fellowship from the US Department of Education, Joseph Monticciolo Fellowship for Doctoral Studies in Community and Technology from the City University of New York, or my New York State Library Research Residency.

In making sense of the world of zines and underground culture three colleagues were particularly helpful: Andrew Mattson, Pam Donovan, and L.A. Kauffman, also the crew at *The Baffler* for letting me try out some of these ideas in print there first. In addition, Professor Bob Alford and my fellow students in his Logics of Inquiry seminar helped immensely in my "mapping" of mountains of data and clarifying the questions that I needed to ask. Professors Marshall Berman, Bill Kornblum, Sharon Zukin, and Gilda Zwerman provided very helpful and much needed commentary on the manuscript. And I don't know where I would be without the friendship, advice, and criticism of my man, Professor Stuart Ewen. Finally, none of the research or writing that went into this dissertation would have been possible had it not been for the constant support and understanding of my *companera* Stephanie Basch and the frequent interruptions of my dog, Bakunin.

...wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born
- Matthew Arnold

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Introduction

Yes, you are right, the revolution for the moment has returned to its bed, we have fallen back into a period of evolution, that is to say one of subterranean revolutions, insensible and even often imperceptible.

--Mikhail Bakunin, 1875¹

We live in hard times. For those who believe that people should control the means and substance of their own life and creation, and live within a community of equals where every voice is heard and valued, a glance at the present world offers little solace. War, poverty, bigotry, oppression, and competition have long been with us. But perhaps worse than all of these is the contemporary collapse of the sense of an alternative; the lack of an analysis of exactly what it is that is wrong with the present society and the absence of a vision of what a new one might look like.

In 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels began their *Communist Manifesto* with the hopeful words: "A spectre is haunting Europe--the spectre of communism."² One hundred and fifty years has proved Marx and Engels wrong in this respect, for the spectre which today haunts the entire world is the spirit of capitalism. While it is difficult to remain blind to the destructive physical and material decay this system has wrought, what is harder to see, but felt nonetheless acutely, is the moral and mental malaise it spreads. Although disseminating fast across the globe, it is here in particular, at the seat of a dying empire, that the core of this spectre's internal logic seems to reign unchallenged.

This logic is that of the market. Within this logic everything and anything is reduced to a means to an end, with that end being profit. Ideas, culture, work,

love...life; all take on a meaning not in themselves, but only in their place in the service of the great god Mammon. Capitalism, as Oscar Wilde put it, is a system "that puts a price on everything, but a value on nothing."³

While there is a certain positive liberal "tolerance" that is a byproduct of the market, it is not the kind that comes from an interest in and respect for difference. Instead it is the type of tolerance that comes from the complete evisceration of difference into a commodity standard. And if any person or anything cannot be translated into a commodity value, then in the eyes of the world they, or it, simply disappear.

The great enlightenment revolutions for human dignity that surrounded Marx and Engels in 1848--Liberalism, Socialism, Anarchism--have failed or been perverted. And in the wake of these failures, few new ideas about what is wrong with the present and what societal structures and ideals could be right for the future have come to the fore. And so as the millennium closes it seems that we are stuck between the crowing ideology of the free market and the tawdry reality of real politik capitalism.

Today it is fashionable to dismiss those Enlightenment visions that for centuries motivated people's struggles throughout the world...and with some good reason. It was often the ideal of a Utopia after all that justified murder and oppression in practice, and slavish dogmatic thought and blind obedience in theory and political organization. The juggernaut of Utopia and "historical necessity" rolled over and excluded countless individuals and groups whose vision of a new society did not fit with the plans dictated from on high.

From these and other experiences people learned to shy away from utopian

alternatives. Yet still I think there is a need for some sort of *way of seeing*, a way of thinking, a way of communicating; a way of being that stands on its own, distinct from the present status quo and holding out the possibility of a better way of life.⁴ Yet it is this that seems to have been abandoned with the flight from Utopia.

Having taught culture and politics to all ages, races, and sexes at both public and private universities, both in New York City and its suburbs, I've had the chance to talk to thousands of individuals about what they think about their society, their place within it, and their ideas on the future. Through these discussions I've come to recognize something in a great number of these students: they don't particularly embrace the system as *the answer*. They are too sharp to believe that what's Good for General Motors is Good for America, and they are too sensitive not to feel the psychic toll of meaningless work undertaken solely as a means to the end of profit (and that profit most often not their's). In brief, most don't identify with an abstract ideology of advanced capitalism. But here's the problem: they don't know where else to turn.

In resigned acceptance some become hard-nosed practitioners of a brutal logic they feel they must adopt to survive--repeating the "Fuck you Jack, I'm gonna get mine" mantra over and over as a way to steel out doubt. Some adopt a sort of nonchalant cynicism--walking the walk, talking the talk, but with a stage whisper aside, saying what a joke this whole system is. A few discover radical ideologies, finding words that answer the problems all around, but finding no place--except in discussion and fantasy--where these ideas seem to fit. But most merely retreat, retreating into the personal and private worlds of friends, relations, identities, and cultures that offer a haven in a heartless

world.

I have also spent the past decade talking to and working with young "progressive" activists in the United States. Over and over I've recognized (even in myself) that the driving motivation for action is not some vision of a New Jerusalem, but instead a pragmatic, reactive politics. That is, one acts politically not to usher in a new progressive world, but to stop the advance of the old conservative one. And one acts politically in the last analysis on an existential plane, because not doing so would make one less than human. This existential politics keeps one going through hard times, but in the end it leaves a feeling of weightlessness, after all, just what is it that we're leaving and where exactly are we going?

Like Allen Ginsberg forty years ago, I've seen the best young minds of my (greater) generation destroyed; destroyed looking for meaning in a society which offers little.⁵ But today the descent isn't often into madness, but instead into a resigned and tired acceptance--"that's life," or an unfocussed and inarticulate rage--"Fuck it up y'all" or "No Future." But the moral emptiness yielded by a system that makes everything about life worth living into a means to an end or a product to be sold has left a gaping hole. People, I believe, are genuinely searching for a way of living, seeing, and being that has integrity and coherence, that offers an alternative to the New World Order. With the discrediting of the Enlightenment visions, into this hole has swept alternative ideologies that do offer coherence, meaning and a vision of the future: pre-Enlightenment systems of religious fundamentalism and ethnic separatism, and the dystopian dark side of the Enlightenment: Fascism.

Unless we as a society are to slide into these dark holes, we must conjure up an alternative to the banality and brutality of capitalism, drawing some of the thunder from the religious fundamentalists and far right hatemongers. But, and this is an important but, the old alternatives won't do.

They won't do because both the world they promised and the means to get to that world arose from particular historical periods. From the first named Utopia designed by Thomas Moore in 1516 to speak to the concerns of a dying European feudalism, to the 19th century definitions of Socialism and Anarchism; these visions were created to address worlds different than ours. The old blueprints of the great minds of the past so often trotted out by progressives cannot be blindly slapped down over the changed conditions of today.

In Michael Ondaatje's novel, *In the Skin of the Lion*, a revolutionary asks her lover, "How can I convert you? Her lover replies: "The trouble with ideology...is that it hates the private. You must make it human."⁶ The problem with the old alternatives is that applied blindly as they often are today they don't speak directly to the private worlds of everyday life for most people. It is not that they are wrong, they aren't. To cite but one example, Marx's critique of both the material and human costs of capitalism is more applicable today than ever in world where more people and more experience than ever before dreamed or feared is coming into the fold of capitalism. But these old critiques and plans have become too abstract. The ideologies, left to sterile academic translators and isolated left sectarians, have forgotten how to speak the language of modern humans.

Nor can current "great minds" arrive at new plans sitting in academies pondering new and fashionable theories. Instead what must be done is to follow the example of the best of the old thinkers. That is to simply look around and observe the historical conditions of the time and see what people are already thinking and doing on their own. And then, as objectively as possible, note the criticisms articulated and look for those tendencies and currents which exist and might possibly lead to some sort of social change. All the time taking into account the limitations of these ideas and the obstructions that lie in their path.

The anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, writing to his friend Elisee Reclus in 1875, after the collapse of the 1871 Paris Commune, in the face of waves of oppression by the still intact European governments, and a year before his death, understood that The Revolution had failed. But even in his pessimism there was an optimism. While the great wave of revolution had been stemmed, he held out hope that the spirit of these revolutions might be kept alive--creeping forward incrementally as "subterranean revolutions, insensible and often imperceptible." It is perhaps in these insensible and imperceptible forms that fragments of an idea of an alternative to market capitalism can be discerned, and the limitations to its realization understood. It is one of these--one, for there are many--insensible and to many eyes imperceptible "revolutions" that I will explore in the following pages, looking for discontent with an old world and fragments of a new one.

1. from Mikhail Bakunin to Elisee Reclus, February 15, 1875, cited in James Joll, *The Anarchists*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) p.96.
2. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (NY: Washington Square Press) 1848/1966, p.55.
3. Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, (NY: Porcupine Press, 1948).
4. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (London: Penguin Books, 1972).
5. Allen Ginsberg, *Howl*, (San Francisco: City Lights, 1956).
6. Michael Ondaatje, *In the Skin of a Lion*, (NY: Penguin Books, 1988) p.135.

Zines

Late in the summer of 1995 the Walt Disney Company bought Capital Cities/ABC, creating the world's largest media and entertainment firm and a corporate entity worth an estimated 40 billion dollars. Within a month this mega media deal was joined by the announcement of two others: the purchase of CBS by Westinghouse and the merger of Time Warner and the Turner Broadcasting System, with the latter conglomerate's net worth exceeding that of even the new Disney company.¹ This vast concentration of media wealth and power is not just a recent phenomenon; over the past fifteen years power and control in the media industry has consolidated into fewer and fewer hands. In 1988 Time Inc. and Warner Communications merged to form the 18 billion dollar media enterprise of Time Warner, and Cap Cities/ABC itself was the product of a similar merger in 1986. In the beginning of the 1980s forty-six corporations owned most of the world's media, in 1992 that number was twenty-three. While there are more than 11,000 magazines in the United States, three corporations control more than half the magazine business. Three years ago, media scholar Ben Bagdikian argued that by the end of the 1990s, five to ten multinationals will control a majority of the world's media.² Judging by the speed and scope of recent corporate media mergers, Bagdikian's predictions, once considered alarmist, today appear conservative.

In the shadow of this development, however, another, quite different, media phenomenon has taken root and flourished. These are *Zines*: noncommercial, non-professional, small circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and

distribute themselves.³

In a way these zines are nothing new, for there has always been two histories of media in the United States: One of political domination and commercial control, and another of challenges to these powers. The ideals enshrined in the Constitution were argued in the 18th century pamphlet form long before being formalized in any governing document, and the struggles for popular sovereignty and universal rights were waged in the 19th and early 20th century African American, Women's, and Labor presses. In the 1960s, the Underground Press led the way in questioning the brutality and vacuity of the "American Way of Life" and proposing an alternative. And as the 20th century comes to a close, and politics and culture are increasingly professionalized and power increasingly concentrated, the need for an independent media is more pressing than ever. For as John Dewey argued, contesting this logic of professionalization and concentration in the first decades of this century, modes of communication in which citizens actively and creatively participate are an essential ingredient of a genuine democratic society.⁴

Zines are one of these ingredients. They propose a different paradigm of communication and culture than that suggested by the corporate model. In the face of the rapid centralization of corporate media, they are an example of independent and localized media. At a time when the mass media increasingly represents people *to* one another, zines are a medium of self-representation where relative strangers communicate *with* each other. Against a population carved up into discrete and instrumental target markets, zines constitute a sincere attempt to interact around diverse identities and interests. Within a larger culture where the few create and most consume, the zine world, in which most

readers are also producers, is a model of active and creative cultural *participation*. And, most importantly, at a time when the idea of an "alternative" in public discourse has been marginalized and disenchantment is the norm, zines in their form, content, and organization articulate novel and idealistic ways of seeing, being, and communicating. In brief, zines and the culture of which they are a part constitute a *nonalienating* model of creative life.

However, zines and the culture for which they speak constitute a subculture. They may be nonalienating, but they exist only within and through the larger and quite alienating society, and this dependency has its effects. Like all expressions of alternative culture, zines are as much a reflection of, as reaction against, their times. In their esoteric diversity and subcultural stance, they reflect the fragmentation and isolation of life in today's society. They often address themselves to identities and interests historically defined and brought together by strategies of marketing. The ideas they express can, at times, lapse into established and superficial clichés. At other times, the critical ideas they pronounce are simply reactions against, and thus a mirror opposite of, the status quo. And finally, the alternative models of communication and society zines suggest often stay comfortably confined to the dominions of culture and subculture and away from those of politics and greater society.

This contradiction of staking out a new ground within and through the landscape of the past is unavoidable--it is part of the history of all cultural and political movements. But today, this staking of claims may be more difficult than ever. No longer is there a staid and shocked bourgeoisie to confront with avant garde art and morals, instead there

is a sophisticated marketing machine which gobbles up anything novel and recreates it as product for a niche market. This condition of alternatives being transformed into their opposite is the condition within which all must work as the 20th century draws to a close. This is a given. What is interesting is how individuals, their culture, and their creations react to this condition. One of the major themes of this dissertation will be to explore some of the contradictions and paradoxes that result from the underground culture staking out its political position within the battleground of advanced consumer capitalism.

* * * * *

But what are they? That's the first question I am usually asked when I start to talk about zines. My initial--and probably correct--impulse is to hand over a stack of them and let the person asking the question decide. But that is impossible here, and while uniqueness, crossing boundaries, and metamorphoses over time are defining characteristics of zines, there are still some--albeit loose--commonalities.

History and Background. While the United States has a long history of alternative presses, all of which shape the contours of the modern zine, the zine as a distinct medium is really born in the 1930s. It is then that fans of science fiction, and the clubs these fans founded around their love for this genre, began producing what they called *fanzines* as a way of communicating with one another, sharing science fiction stories and critical commentary. Forty years later, in the mid-1970s, the other defining influence on

modern day zines begins as fans of punk rock music, ignored by and critical of the mainstream music press, started printing punk fanzines about their music and their underground cultural scene.

In the early 1980s these two tributaries, joined by smaller streams of publications created by fans of other cultural genres, disgruntled self-publishers, and the remnants of printed political dissent from the 60s and 70s, were brought together and cross-fertilized through listings and reviews in network zines like *Factsheet Five*. As the "fan" was by and large dropped off "zine," and their number increased exponentially, a real *culture* of zines developed. By the early 1990s the two editors of the early *Factsheet Five*, deciding upon a title for a commercially published version of their zine, could honestly and accurately refer to *The World of Zines*.⁵ Zines were the modern underground press.

Form and Organization. A zine lies somewhere between a personal letter and a magazine. They are usually constructed of sheets of standard 8 1/2" by 11" paper fastened together on the side or corner, or folded over width-wise to form a folio and stapled in the crease. Printed on both sides, zines typically run from ten to forty pages. They are normally duplicated using common black and white Xerox technology and are reproduced on cheap copying paper. Zines can range, however, from color reproductions and card stock covers, to a jumble of smudged copies, mass cultural flotsam and jetsam, and written personal statements stuffed into an envelope.

Zines, as a rule, are homemade; put together by hand using common materials and technology. Consequently they often look the part, with unruly cut and paste layout, barely legible type, and scruffy reproduction. Zines with large circulations, however,

may be printed by a professional on an offset press using newsprint paper. And with the decline in the cost of personal computers and the spread of desk-top publishing capability to the smallest of offices (where computer time can be "liberated"), more and more people have access to equipment to put out professional looking publications.



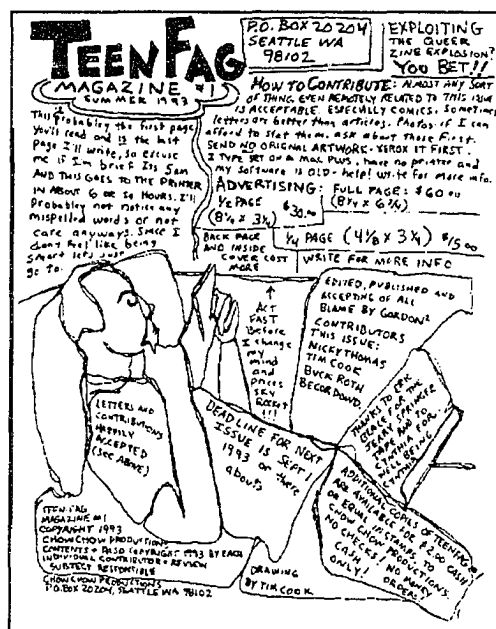
front cover of Absolutely Zippo #27



front cover of Function #8

But there is a limit to this professionalization. "Slick" is an insult in the zine world. Literally it refers to a publication which has a colored glossy, or slick, cover. Unlike offset, which lowers cost at high volume, or desk-top publishing which can speed production time and make a zine easier to read, the only justification for magazine quality slickness is to try to compete with the commercial world on its terms--not something most zine writers are interested in doing. This low-end production value distinguishes the best of zines from the lowliest of magazines. The latter which, even if

terrible looking, aspire to look better, the former, even if accomplished, seek to retain their non-commercial, idiosyncratic appearance. This absence of high-end design standards and the use of accessible and inexpensive technology allows for an easy cross-over from the role of reader to producer--an important part of the zine world's "do-it-yourself" ethic.



hand-done page from Teen Fag #1



desk-top published page from Brat Attack #4

Zines cost anywhere from the price of postage to a couple of dollars, but exchanging zines on a barter system is common and has long been considered part of the ethic of participation among equals. Distribution is primarily person to person via the mail, though zines are also sold in some book and music stores and are traded, sold, or given away at punk rock gigs, science fiction conventions, and the like. They are advertised via word of mouth, through other zine's review sections, and by zines of zines

like *Factsheet Five*, whose purpose is to review and publicize these media.

or mac graphics with a positive message, and into serious articles on how to get a better life. (S-24t/MG) THE POTASSIUM REVIEW #4 (Free from Mark S. Ivanhoe, 6923 South Dr., Richmond, VA 23225-1303): This is Mark's personalzine, tracking his budding career as a writer but also striking off into fields of its own. This issue has the results of his "Inquiry into the Occult", starting with having his mind blown by the ILLUMINATUS! trilogy and going on through skepticism and counter-skepticism. (S-12/MG) PRACTICAL ANARCHY #1 (\$1 (?) from Chuck 0, 622 N. Henry St., Madison, WI 53703): A new publication designed to recommend steps towards anarchy that can be taken in the here and now. It leads off with the idea of recommending anarchist books to your public library. Community-supported agriculture and recommended reading are also part of the package. (S-4t/MG) THE PRAGMATIST Vol. 8 #6 (\$10/yr from PO Box 392, Forest Grove, PA 18922): These people take a utilitarian approach towards promoting Libertarian ideals, showing how our society would be better off as a whole with less government. The War of Drugs is the cover story in this issue, including a fine essay by Richard Riley Conarroe recounting his experience in getting off several juries. (S-16t/MG) THE PRAIRIE RAMBLER #166-167 (\$1.23 from Jerry B., PO Box 505, Claremont, CA 91711-0505): A collection of quotes and reading from all over the place—Red Skelton as likely to appear as Chinese proverbs. Makes for excellent reading when you have limited time, with Jerry's own commentary providing spice. (S-8/MG) THE PRINTER'S DEVIL #11 (\$2.10 from Joe Singer, PO Box 66, Harrison, ID 83833): A zine for those interested in the production end of producing a fanzine or other short-run printing project. Typefaces, design, press	example, their coverage of the great steroid trial focused on Mark McGwire's bizarrely mutated son—and that's just one small bit of the news here. (S-10/MG) PRO WRESTLING TORCH WEEKLY #125-130 (\$5/4 issues from Wade Keller, PO Box 201844, Minneapolis, MN 55420): This one has recently undergone a bit of a facelift and is definitely looking good these days. #128 leads off with the story of George Zahorian, charged with distributing illegal steroids to wrestlers and currently on trial. Later on of course there's the latest match news and gossip. (S-8t/MG) PUN INTENDED Vol.1 #1 (\$2 Sample copy from Gary Hallock, 1124-A Clayton Lane, Austin, TX 78723): A collection of puns to rival O. Henry. In fact, this is put out by and for those people who attend and compete in the O. Henry Pun-Off World Championship. Some are truly brilliant, others just eh, but you can't fault the author's intent. One of my favorites: "Bodybuilders suffer from narcissistic fibrosis." (S-4/CG) PUNK PAIS #18-19 (3 stamps from PO Box 13391 Dept. 18, Berkeley, CA 94704): Pen-pal ads by punks for punks. Everyone who sends for a copy is encouraged to submit their own ad, with a list of favorite bands and a general comment up to 90 words for the next issue. They also list other places that carry penpal ads. Getting bigger all the time. (D-24r/MG) QM #44 (Free from C. Nash, 619 N. Magnolia, Lansing, MI 48912): Though free, a creative contribution of your own would probably be appreciated by the folks behind this small zine of art. #44 is a mix of photos (including a color one on the cover) and short texts clipped from a batch of places, exploring more ordinary Americana. (D-12t/MG) QTS ENTERTAINER #23 (\$2 Sample copy from Connie Watson, 670 Providence St., Woonsocket, RI 02895): Celebrity profiles, human interest, recipes, jokes and handy household hints make up the bulk of this zine. (D-24r/MG)

zine listings in Factsheet Five #44

The life-span of a zine ranges from a single issue "one shot" to volumes spanning years, and their circulation can run from ten issues to ten thousand, with the average being around 250.⁶ Zine publishers tend to keep circulation on a scale which they can exert complete control over their production and distribution process and not lose contact with their readers.

Zines are almost always one person operations. A minority are run by small collectives, and a majority accept input from others, but zines, for the most part are the expression and the product of an *individual*. From coming up with the idea; to writing, drawing, or making decisions on "borrowing" content from other sources; to laying it out and xeroxing it, assembling and stapling; to mailing it out, dropping it by record and

book stores, or bringing it to shows or conventions; the production of zines is done by few hands with little or no formal division of labor.⁷

Enough exceptions exist, however, to break this rule. *Maximumrocknroll*, a long running punk music zine, listed ninety-seven individuals who helped put out their June 1994 issue. True, listing more than half these people as "shitworkers" is something you normally do not see on the mastheads of established magazines, but nevertheless, *Maximumrocknroll* is known for their large, complex and reasonable efficient production organization. However, unlike any commercial publication, large or small, *MRR* is decidedly nonprofit.⁸

To say that zines are not-for-profit is an understatement, most lose money. It's not that they aim to be in the red; most try to break even, and if money is made, that's fine: more money to spend putting out the next issue, or to buy a few beers. One or two zine publishers even manage to eke out a marginal living on what their zine brings in, but as a rule, and with the exception of free zines and records sent in for reviews, zines are not expected to bring material reward.⁹¹⁰

Content. A typical zine--although hard to imagine--might start with a highly personalized editorial, move into a couple of opinionated essays, or "rants," criticizing, describing, extolling something or other, and then conclude with reviews of other zines, bands, books, and so forth. Spread throughout this will be a couple of poems, a story, a couple of reprints from the mass press (some for informational value, others as ironic statements), and a few hand drawn illustrations or comix. This content is either produced by the editor him or herself, solicited from personal friends or zine acquaintances, or less

commonly, gathered through an open call for submissions.¹¹ Material is also "found": pirated from other zines and the mainstream press, sometimes without credit, invariably without permission.



"borrowed" text from Anti-Media #12



media collage in Egg #8

If defining the form of zines is difficult; demarcating their content is an exercise in near futility. They incorporate almost every field of interest: from news on current local music in Philadelphia in *Philly Zine*, to *Show-Me Blowout*, which unearths and reports on long dead garage bands from the 50s and 60s in Missouri; from *Finster* with stories, opinions, photo-collages and reprinted essays on feminism, to the anarchist essays of *instead of A magazine*, to the conservative libertarian rants of *Inverted-A HORN*; from pseudo-scholarly research on juvenile delinquent novels and culture in *Bad Seed*, to the reprinting of 19th century newspaper articles in *Past Deadline*; from the gay safe-sex

Diseased Pariah News, to the soft-core poetry and pornography of *Ash*; from the satirical faux reviews of consumer products in *Meanwhile...*, to a zine devoted to eight-track tape player enthusiasts, *8-Track Mind*; from the unaffected drawings, poems, thoughts, and ideas of a young woman in the *Watley-Browne Review*, to the mental meanderings of the residents of an old age home recorded in *Duplex Planet*; from pictures of bowling pins in different settings in *Eleventh Pin*, to the nonsensical photo/text collages of *balcony of ignorance*, to *Your Name Here*, a zine soliciting a new creator, name, and content for each issue.

Only hinted at here, the breadth of zines is vast and topics range from the sublime to the ridiculous, with a detour through the unfathomable. By looking over the reviews in a number of issues of *Factsheet Five*, however, I've come up with the following broad categorizations:

Fanzines -- These are no doubt the largest and oldest category of zines and one might well argue that all zines are fanzines. Simply, fanzines are publications devoted to discussing the intricacies and nuances of a cultural genre. Within fanzines there are distinct sub-categories:

- **science fiction** -- Beginning in the 1930s, publications by and for science fiction fans were the first zines. Now a minority numerically, SF fanzines still make up a solid core of the zine world.

- **music** -- These are zines focussed on either a particular band or performer, or more commonly a specific genre, most often punk or "alternative" rock. This category makes up the largest genre of zines in the United States today.

- **sports** -- Not that big in the U.S., but very popular in the United Kingdom where football (soccer) zines are an integral part of sporting life. Still, in this country, fans of baseball, wrestling, skateboarding, roller derby, and women's sports all create zines.

- **television and film** -- Zines on entertainment both popular and patently unpopular; here horror and kitsch drama are particularly well represented.

- etc. -- Fans of household items, mass transit systems, board games, and what-have-you, all put out zines--some done seriously and some as satire.

Political Zines -- broken down into two sub-genres:

- **Politics** with a big "P," identified in more or less traditional categories such as: Anarchist, Socialist, Libertarian, Fascist, and "identity" categories like Feminist and Queer.
- **politics** with a small "p," not identifying explicitly with traditional categories, but with political/cultural critique as a major focus of the zine.

Personal Zines -- Or "perzines." These are personal diaries open to the public; shared notes on the day to day life, thoughts and experiences of the writer.

Scene Zines -- News and views on the local music and underground cultural "scene" in the writer's area.

Network Zines -- Like *Factsheet Five*, these zines concentrate on reviewing and publicizing other zines, music, art, computer BBSs, and other underground culture, and serve as nodal point for the Bohemia diaspora.

Fringe Culture Zines -- Zines covering assassination theories and "proof" of secret nefarious undertakings, UFOs and serial killers. The standard fare of supermarket tabloids, but explored in much more depth and with far more intelligence and sometimes humor.

Religious Zines -- Witches, Paganists, Born-Again Christians, as well as "joke" religions like The Church of the SubGenius and Moorish Science, all put out zines for the faithful and wayward.

Vocational Zines -- These are zines which tell the stories of life on the job, whether that job be washing dishes, doing temp work, writing for a newspaper, working as a librarian, or practicing fractal geometry.

Health Zines -- Zines with recipes for healthy food, information about diseases and medicine, advice on coping with AIDS and dealing with death, and other health related issues.

Sex Zines -- Straight, queer, bondage, black leather, stories, pictures...a zine for every sexual proclivity.

Travel Zines -- Very often in the form of "road trip" diaries, these zines are travelogues of bumming around on the cheap.

Comix -- Underground comic books on themes humorous, serious and nonsensical.

Literary Zines -- Zines primarily presenting original short fiction and poetry.

Art Zines -- Print media collages, photographs, drawings, and mail art which create a network of artists and a floating virtual gallery.

The Rest -- A large category.

Zines tend to be hyper-specialized, another trait that seems to differentiate them from mass market magazines. Or not. A quick tour through a well stocked newsstand will convince anyone that today there is a commercial magazine catering to every whim and desire. Of the record 700 new magazines that were created between 1992 and 1993, many of them were targeted toward "special interest" audiences.¹² *Chocolatier*, for example, is a magazine for the chocolate aficionado, but also claims a circulation of 350,000 and a commercial mission.¹³

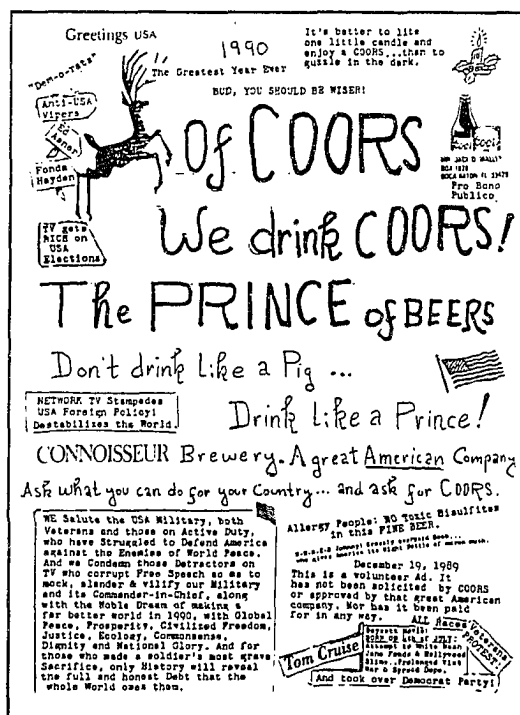
Magazines, however, don't cover a topic unless an interest group is found that is large and wealthy enough to yield a profit, that is, unless there is a "market" for it. Zines, on the other hand, cover esoterica that their producer is interested in--even if no one else is. The majority of zines are specialized, but only to the point that they communicate the range--however wide or narrow--that makes up the personal interests of the publisher.

And as people tend not to be as monolithic as categories, and since zines are as idiosyncratic as their producers, most zines range across a variety of subjects. For example, the second issue of a small zine I published, *Notes from Underground* (I was living in a basement at the time), began with an editorial about the terribly hot summer in New York City, followed by a pirated picture and excerpt from a newspaper about a

UN snafu in Somalia. A letter from a friend in Scotland came after this, then two poems on sex and media and consumerism by another friend, another excerpt from a newspaper reprinted as a joke, a very unfunny comic on war, imperialism and luxury goods drawn by another friend, one more report from overseas (this one from the Netherlands), and sandwiched between all this four more or less political essays, three by myself and one by yet another buddy. When my zine was reviewed by Seth Friedman in *Factsheet Five* he placed it in their "personal zine" section, but commented that it was "Situationist inspired" (certainly news to me). It was also reviewed by Larry-Bob Roberts in his *Queer Zine Explosion*, who didn't pick up on the situationism, but did mention among other things that one of the political essays was on the latest Gay and Lesbian March on Washington.¹⁴ So what was *Notes from Underground*? A perzine, queertzine, poetry, comix, travel, political, "Situationist"? Well, actually all of the above (I do like the Situationists after all), and none of the above: it was simply *my* zine.

The subject matter of zines, unlike more mainstream periodicals, tend not to follow well laid out blueprints or move purposefully in a defined direction. Instead zines meander and change direction, switching back then back again, flowing wherever the publisher's interest takes them. The result is less a defined set of discrete topics covered, and more an amalgam of the diverse interests of those doing the writing. In fact, when Mike Gunderloy, the founding editor of *Factsheet Five*, attempted to make his zine easier to read by ordering zine reviews by category, he says he was flooded by letters in protest.¹⁵ "Yikes! *Factsheet Five* arranged in headings/categories? Urgh!!! When zinedom becomes reduced to 'definitions' it looses its soul," one such letter howls.¹⁶

Voice. Zines have a distinctive voice, a style of writing that weaves together the personal and intimate with the political and general. True, there is variation. A minority of zine authors parrot straight news reporting, writing about topics, albeit often fringe ones like UFOs, obscure punk bands, and the like, in an "objective" manner. Distancing themselves from their subject and audience, the effect is the *New York Times* gone slumming. The polar opposite is the "crank rant," where the emotions of the person writing and the topic being written about are inextricably intertwined. This is the style of the person who feels that the CIA is giving them instructions through their dental fillings, or feels he must fanatically defend a beer company.¹⁷



the Prince of Beers

But the vast majority of zines share a communication style that I call simply

Underground Writing; a form unique to the underground press--both past and present--that lies between the hazy distance of objective reporting and the myopic closeness of the rage-filled rant. It is a style of communication which emphasizes the intimate, yet at the same time, through this personal lens, universal subjects are broached. The writer's perspective roams continuously from the concrete and everyday to the abstract and speculative and back again.

No matter what their topic, zines project a distinct personality. They offer up an idiosyncratic way of seeing the world, not hidden beneath layers of journalistic objectivity nor artistic pretension, but out in the open, right on the surface. Unlike professional journalistic styles, the connection between the teller of the story and the story being told is meant to be seen. This feature, so common to the underground (and pre-19th century) press, yet foreign to most modern periodicals, contributes to another one of the dominant traits of the zine world: the embeddedness of the author in their subject matter.

People. But who are these authors? Since anonymity is part of the magic of zines it is difficult to sketch an accurate demographic portrait of the zine writer and reader.¹⁸ But having read thousands of zine editorials, and having done scores of interviews with zine producers and folks who have been involved in the zine scene for many years, I can make some reasonable guesses.

Zinesters are often already part of a subculture. These can be niche cultures that reside in the eddies of the mainstream like science fiction fandom; or more adversarial cultures, like punk music or anarchist politics, which posit themselves solidly against the

current. The participants are primarily young, between the ages of 15 and 35, and the children of professionals, culturally, if not financially, middle-class. They are generally white and grew up in a relatively privileged position within the dominant culture, but have "careers" of deviance. By this I mean that zines are one part of an ensemble of non-traditional practices. These practices can include downwardly mobile career aspirations, unpopular musical tastes, liberal ideas about sexuality, and a politics more often to the left but sometimes to the right of the status quo. In short, zine writers and readers are what have been called in the past *Bohemians*.

But again, one of the attributes of zines is their diversity and unpredictability. And so this crude portrait of a young, white, middle-class, Bohemian, looks less and less representational the further one delves into the world of zines. Quite a few zine writers grew up within the working-class, and most have since fallen far below middle-class economic standards. There are African-American, Latino, Asian, and zine writers of other ethnicities (both identifying themselves as such and not). And much older writers like 52 year old Terry Ward of *Notes from the Dump*, Don Fitch of *From Sunday to Saturday* who describes his age as "65 going on 17," and Ernest Mann of the *Little Free Press* who is in his late 60s, have been putting out zines for years.¹⁹ In addition, in the past ten years the composition of the zine scene has shifted away from straight (or unspecified sexuality), male dominance and toward a more equitable representation of women, and strong participation by openly queer zine writers.

It is also important to note that since a zine allows for the freedom to assemble any identity or identities that one desires, the one projected by the publisher in their zine

might not match the one society has given that person based on their physical attributes or personal history. To use postmodern cant: Zines allow for the possibility of multiple subject positions.

Identified less by who they are, and more what they believe, perhaps the best description of a zine publisher I've come across is actually a composite portrait written in 1946 of a similar genus: the Little Magazine editor or writer of the early 20th century:

Such a man is stimulated by some form of discontent--whether with the constraints of his world or the negligence of publishers, at any rate something he considers unjust, boring, or ridiculous. He views the world of publishers and popularizers with disdain, sometimes with despair...[and] he generally insists that publication should not depend upon the whimsy of conventional tastes and choices.²⁰

The World of Zines. Because this disdain for the conventional world extends to traditional literary institutions, it is hard to determine how large the universe of zines is. Most zine writers do not send their zines to the Library of Congress to be catalogued, don't bother to get an ISBN number, and don't list themselves in the *Small Press Review* or *The International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses*. Informed sources, however, estimate that there are currently at least 10,000-20,000 different titles circulating, while others have stretched this number up to 50,000.²¹ Although I lean toward the more conservative estimate, even with 10,000 titles, using the standard magazine readership equation estimate of three readers per magazine and 250 issues per zine as a safe mean, the estimate of a *possible* total zine readership, and thus primary contact with some facet of the zine world, is as high as 7,500,000. But as it's improbable that a zine reader reads only one zine, most likely this number is considerably lower.²²

While the exact number of zines and their readership will always remain uncertain, what is known is that zines have become well known enough to be written up as feature stories in almost every major American daily newspaper in the past few years: *The Atlanta Constitution*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, and the *Washington Post* have all run articles on zines. The venerable *Wall Street Journal* put zines on their front page, and even the woefully establishment *New York Times* managed to print a couple of articles on zines--albeit getting the story wrong the first time around.²³ *Time* and *Newsweek* have both run features.²⁴ The mass market girl's magazine *Sassy* carries a zine-of-the-month column, regularly highlighting a different zine; and in a young men's lifestyle magazine like *Details*, no interview with an up-and-coming band is complete until a band member mentions what zine they produce or contribute to, thereby insuring his or her subcultural credibility.²⁵ This demonstration of zines' popularity, as I'll discuss later, plays to mixed reviews within the zine community. While the spread of the zine word is valued, this mainstream discovery of their underground world is feared.

Zines seep up from undergrounds all over the country, from small towns in the middle of Texas to the larger urban centers of the Northeast and West coasts, while others make their way into the US from overseas. A breakdown of the geographical origin of zines that were listed in the Spring 1991 issue of *Factsheet Five* #44--the most complete listing of zines available--turned up the following results: Out of 1301 zines listed and reviewed, 49 states were represented, with South Dakota being the lone exclusion. Of the 1142 US zines listed, California produced the most with 226, New

York the second with 135, and Ohio, Texas, and Washington State churning out 47, 46, and 42 respectively. None of these figures are that astonishing when one takes into account the population of these states. In the 1990 census California was ranked first, New York second, Texas third and Ohio seventh. Washington, a state with a relatively small population, makes up for this with the importance of Seattle and Olympia as cultural centers for music and young people throughout the late 1980s and early 90s.²⁶

Of the 24 foreign countries represented, the major English speaking nations led the pack, ordered by geographical distance from the US. Canada was first with 58 zines, followed by the U.K. with 37 and Australia with 13. Following these, in order, were France, Germany, Finland, the Netherlands, Japan, New Zealand, Sweden, Belgium, Greece, Italy, Spain, Singapore, Poland, Hungary, South Africa, Portugal, Lithuania, Argentina, Brazil, Iceland, and what was then Yugoslavia.

Again, none of this is too surprising: big states, and countries which have large English speaking and/or well educated populations, are well represented. The one eye-opener came when I broke down the states into major urban and suburban/rural categories. Here, contrary to expectations of the urbanity of underground cultures, I found that the majority of zines did not originate from large metropolitan areas. 393 of the zines from the United States originated from the major cities in each state, whereas the remainder--749--did not. This is an almost 2:1 ration in favor of suburban/rural origin over urban.²⁷

When one thinks of underground culture one naturally thinks of big cities, and certainly San Francisco and New York City produce more zines, 63 and 60 respectively,

than any other single locale. But the fact remains that most of these artifacts of underground culture are created outside of traditional urban, bohemian enclaves. This makes sense. It makes sense in terms of the realities of life for 'outsiders' today: gentrification and the allure of the bohemian life for non-bohemians has sent rents and services in urban areas out of reach for many people--particularly those who eschew stable careers and ideals of material success. It also makes sense if one considers the form of zines: they are, after all, a communicative media. They function in many ways as a way of linking together isolated individuals--forming a community linked not by space but by ideas.

Intent. Zines are decidedly *amateur*, and in the end, this more than anything else is what makes a zine a zine. And while this term has taken on pejorative cast in a society that honors professionalism, the roots of amateurism are far more noble: *Amator*, the Latin for Lover. While other publications are produced for money or prestige or public approval, zines are done, as *Factsheet Five*'s founding editor Mike Gunderloy is fond of pointing out, for *love*: love of expression, love of sharing, love of communication.²⁸ And in protest against a culture and society which has little space for such acts of love, zines are also created out of rage.

To Arrive Where We Started

My thumbnail sketch of zines is complete, yet somehow the question of what they are remains unanswered. For zines are more than what they look like, what they contain, or how and why they are made. I suppose I'm back to where I began, wanting to throw

a stack of zines on a table and let the reader decide for him or herself what they are.

For this is how they were introduced to me. Some years back I went on a trip to Boston to visit some old friends playing in a band. There, I planned on hanging out and working as their "roadie," lugging equipment to gigs, setting it up and taking it down. I had played in a couple of punk rock bands in the early 1980s and I suppose part of me wanted to feel again some of the excitement and energy that comes from being in a band. Fortunately, my descent into nostalgia was nipped in the bud; when I got there the band had broken up. I had little to do except walk around the city, sneak into Widener Library, and hang around my friends' apartment. Scattered around their apartment were stacks of zines. Although I had known about zines from my days spent in the punk scene, I had never really given them much time or thought. Now with time a plenty I spent hours going through them.

I was awestruck. Somehow these little smudged pamphlets carried within them the honesty, sincerity, rage, kindness, the beautiful inarticulate articulateness...the uncompromising *life* that I had discovered (and lost) in music, then later radical politics, years ago. There was something so beautiful in some of them they literally made me cry. Against the studied hipness of music and style magazines, the bland no-nothingness of mass newsweeklies, and the posturing of academic journals, here was something completely different. Finally someone, some place was telling the truth about themselves and our society with an honest sincerity, a revealing intimacy, and a healthy fuck you to sanctioned authority--all for no money and no recognition and all to an audience of total strangers.

Later I picked up *Factsheet Five* and sent off for hundreds of zines. As they flowed into my mailbox a whole world that I had known nothing about came alive for me. It was incredibly varied--the zines came in more shapes, styles, subjects, qualities--than imaginable. I found that I liked some more than others, some re-kindled that initial awe I felt and some did not. As I dug deeper I noticed themes and tendencies that upset me. But there was still something remarkable that bound together this new world I had stumbled upon. There was a certain ethic--a way of seeing--they shared. What was amazing to me, coming from years of sterile academic and political debates, was that this way of seeing was not borrowed from a book or carefully cross referenced and cited, but was instead, if you'll forgive the word, *organic*. It was a vernacular radicalism, radicalism from the bottom up. And somewhere amidst all the obvious differences between the zines I was reading I began to discern that a real culture was in formation, an underground world of zines.

To me this is what zines are really about, and why they are so important. Zines are both a cultural artifact of, and a medium of expression for, an underground world staking out its identity in the shadows of commercial culture and through the cracks of capitalism. And while it is impossible here to hand over a stack of zines, I hope to do the next best thing: map out some of the philosophical and political contours, the twists and turns, and the love and rage, that make up this subterranean world.

1. The figure of 40 billion comes from Geraldine Fabrikant, "Walt Disney to Acquire ABC..." *New York Times*, August 1, 1995, p.A1. Mark Landler, also in the *Times*, claims this ammount will be surpassed by the Time-Warner/Turner deal yet gives no specific figures; "Turner to Merge with Time Warner..." September 23, 1995, p.A1.
2. Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, 4th ed., (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992) pp.14,18.
3. This simple definition is taken nearly verbatim from Frederick Wertham's *The World of Fanzines: A Special Form of Communication*, (IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1973), p.33.
4. John Dewey, *The Public and its Probiems*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1927/1985). Dewy was writing in response to Walter Lippmann's influential book *Public Opinion*, in particular rejecting Lippmann's notion that a professional class must take the reins of communication and governance away from the public if society is to function in the complex, modern era.
5. Mike Gunderloy and Cari Goldberg Janice, *The World of Zines* (NY: Penguin Books, 1992).
6. This small circulation is one of the things that distinguishes zines from other periodicals; as a rule zines have small runs of under 1000, magazines of over 10,000. But this isn't always the case. A zine like the *I Hate Brenda Newsletter*, devoted to slagging the actress who plays Brenda in the TV series *Beverly Hills 90210* and put out by the folks of the longstanding zine *Ben is Dead*, has a circulation of over 25,000; while many academic or literary journals are lucky to break 1000.
7. "Freedom," a highschooler who puts out *Orangutan Balls*, led me though the personal connections and range of sources which go into the production of his zine:
 I gather what I want to put in it...from things kids give me, [and] excerpts from books. We...photo-copy speeches or whatever, and things that I collect from other organizations that I feel like printing....The printing I get done free. A friend of mine, his sister works in a law office downtown, and she runs them off when no one's looking.
 "Freedom," personal interview, June 13, 1992, New York City.
8. On the other side of the zine/non-zine line, with sophisticated desktop publishing equipment and a bit of money, individuals can and do put out slick, commercial magazines by themselves. Even before desktop publishing, individual production did not a zine make. It's part of the lore of *Playboy* that its founder Hugh Hefner began his magazine by himself at his kitchen table in a small apartment on the South Side of Chicago. Needless to say *Playboy*, which now has 16 overseas editions, was never conceived of as a zine, but instead a potentially profitable enterprise.
 Jerry Tallmer, "40 Years of Guys and Dolls," *New York Newsday*. June 20, 1994, Pt.2, p. B03.

9. Mike Gunderloy, former editor of *Factsheet Five*, managed to survive through his zine--albeit with 80 hour weeks and mercenary forays into computer consulting; Seth Friedman, the current editor, is doing the same.

10. Most magazines try to deliver a profit, even though some, including substantial ones like the *New Yorker*, operate at a financial loss. As such, it is not the actual profit that is the issue, instead it is the intent of the producer which differentiates. Staying with the example of the *New Yorker*, it was never published to make money in a purely mercenary sense; it was and is a prestige publication. However, when its losses became too great for the parent company to bare, a new editor was brought in to change its content and layout to make it more popular and profitable. This sort of a change is something that would be heresy to most zine writers, who would rather burn at the stake than alter their publication to please anybody but themselves.

11. The criteria for the zine editor's selection of material from others is not too different that what operates in many journals or magazines: nepotism. That is, the editor asks friends or zine acquaintances whom they like and trust to submit material to their zine. The difference between the zine "old boy network" and that of the mainstream publishing industry being that zine networks are made up of people that are kept out or have opted out of the halls of cultural power.

12. David Walters, "'Fast Company' Aims to Attract Executives Eager to Make Changes," *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 28, 1993, p.9.

13. Reon Carter, "The Zine Scene: Armed with Macs and a Point of View, Everyone is a Publisher," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 8, 1993, sec. c, p.1.

14. *Factsheet Five*, #50, December 1993, San Francisco, CA, p.46;
Queer Zine Explosion (with *Holy Titclamps*), #13, 1994. San Francisco, CA, no page.

15. Mike Gunderloy's response, "Letters," *Factsheet Five* #22, 1987 Rensselaer, NY, p.66.

16. Bob McGlynn, in "Letters," *Factsheet Five* #31, 1989, Rensselaer, NY, p.113

17. Jack O. Malley, "Coors Rant," December 19, 1989, Roca Raton, FL. This rant was sent to Mike Gunderloy at *Factsheet Five*, New York State Library, Factsheet Five Collection.

18. In the context of communication via computers see David Myers, "Anonymity is Part of the Magic," *Qualitative Sociology*, 10 (3), Fall 1987, pp.251-266.

19. Don Fitch, personal correspondence, April 22, 1994.

20. Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine in America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. 3-4.

21. Gunderloy and Goldberg Janice; and Seth Friedman in J. Peder Zane, "Now the Magazines of 'Me'," *New York Times*, May 14, 1995, p.E4; respectively.

22. This is a hard estimate to make. Using an industry estimate of three readers per zine may overcount as zines tend not to lie around on waiting room tables as mainstream magazines do. However, this is probably offset by the specialized and "underground" nature of zines which tends to encourage passing them around, unauthorized reproduction, and so forth.

But the largest problems with such an equation is that it assumes that each reads only of the 10,000 zines circulating, when in reality someone who reads zines probably reads many more than one at any given time, thus lowering the estimate of total contact considerably. For example if the average reader reads between 15 to 20 zines, the audience for zines drops to as low as 500,000 to 375,000.

23. Bo Emerson, "Zine Scene," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 1, 1992, sec. G, p.1; Machael Saunders, "Read All About It," *Boston Globe*, November 26, 1993, p.65; Hugh Hart, "The Zine Scene," *Chicago Tribune*, April 7, 1993, sec. 7, p.9; Reon Carter, "The Zine Scene," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 8, 1993, sec. C, p.1; Mark Ehrman, "Behind the Zines" *Los Angeles Times*, March, 7, 1993, sec. E, p.1; Maria La Ganga, "Telling All with Wit and Rage," *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 1994, sec. A p.1; Eric Messinger, "Public Access for the Literate," *New York Times*, November 7, 1993, sec. 9, p.8; J.Peder Zane, "Now the Magazines of 'Me'," *New York Times*, May 14, 1995, sec. E, p.4; Pat Guy, "Wacky Magazines Know No Limits," *USA Today*, August 3, 1992, sec. B, p. 6; Shelia Muto, "Zines of the Times," *Wall Street Journal*, September 1, 1995, p.A1; Kevin McManus, "Desktop Publishers," *Washington Post*, January 29, 1993, sec. WW, p.6.

The first *New York Times* story, for the most part, featured high-end niche (maga)zines with glossy pages and cover prices of \$4.95 and no trade policy--not exactly your archetypal zines.

24. David Gross, "Zine and not Heard," *Time*, September 5, 1994, p.68-9; John Leland, "The Irony and the Ecstasy," *Newsweek*, June 19, 1995, p.71.

25. See for example the Greenday interview in *Details*, September 1994. p. 242

26. A table put together by the new editor of *Factsheet Five*, Seth Friedman, in the winter of 1994 closely mirrors my earlier classification, with the useful addition of listing the number of zines per 1,000,000 inhabitants. Broken down this way Washington State leads with 56 zines per 1,000,000 and California and New York State come in forth and fifth with 39 and 34 respectively. Two areas with low population came in second and third, Washington D.C. produced 50 zines per million people and Rhode Island, 40. These totals are of the zines Friedman has received and reviewed since taking over *Factsheet Five* in 1992.

Factsheet Five #54, Fall/Winter 1994, San Francisco, CA, pp.6-7.

27. Doing this sort of sampling from *Factsheet Five* has its strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are that *Factsheet Five*, up until very recent times, reviewed *every* zine, that was sent to them. Thus the population was self selected and not edited. The weakness stem from the same: those individuals who put out publications that don't feel the need to be reviewed by *Factsheet Five*, or are ignorant of its existence, will not be included in my sample. However, as my study is of the *culture* of zines, and *Factsheet Five* was and may still be the locus of that culture. In addition those who submit to *Factsheet Five* are aware of this culture and have chosen to participate in it. As such, while this sample may not be representative of all zines in the world, it is representative of a self-conscious world of zines. It also happens to be the only such large scale listing of a zine universe available.

28. "For Love, not Money" is how Mike Gunderloy is fond of defining zines.

Personal interview, December 6, 1992, New York City; also in Mike Gunderloy and Cari Goldberg Janice, *The World of Zines* (NY: Penguin, 1992), p.2.

PART II: *ALIENATION*

Alienation

Alienated? Backed into a corner? So what if you didn't ask for this you got it buster and nobody cares about you or your problems it's your fault if you don't fit into the system buddy and stop your bellyachin why dontchya do something quick...

- Beaper in *Bad Newz*¹

I was sitting in a living room in Albany talking with a group of science fiction fans, trying to find out why SF and the fan community is so important to them, and getting nowhere. As the night wore on I learned a lot about the world of SF fandom, and while I was enjoying my conversation with these interesting and intelligent people, I was also frustrated. I was no closer to uncovering the root of their passion for the world of science fiction than I had been at the start of the evening.

Anybody who's done this type of interviewing knows how difficult it can be to get an answer to such a fundamental question. The exchange goes something like this: A fan: "I got into science fiction because a friend introduced me to it." Myself: "But why did you stay with it?." The fan: "Because it interested me." Myself: "What was it that caught and kept your interest," and so on, and so on. The process is like peeling away the layers of an onion, one answer reveals a further question, ad infinitum. That night the process did go on. Towards the end of the evening, as the onion was nearing its core and the beer was running out, we began talking about first experiences with science fiction. It was then that one of the group blurted out: "I started reading science fiction because of their idea of *Aliens*. I was a teenager and I was definitely an Alien."²

The entire group nodded their heads in unanimous agreement.

Alienation. If I were pressed to identify the nucleus of the zine world, the well spring of zine creation, it would be alienation: the profound sense of distance between what you are supposed to be and who you feel you really are, between life as it is and how it ought to be. This is not necessarily a cognitive idea, more often this profound separation is merely felt; a malaise which leaves one feeling cut off from the world, alone, isolated, and strange: like a Martian on Earth. "The zines I get in my mailbox are a...snapshot of alienated America," Jim Romenesco, editor of the zine *Obscure Publications* writes.³ Zines are an expression of people's everyday alienation.

If being a map of society's discontents were all that zines were it would be enough to warrant attention. They would be a medium which personalized the discontent only outlined by anonymous statistics and opinion polls. But zines are something more than a revealing of symptoms of social malaise, they are also a way of dealing with this sense of alienation: a way of working out a tentative cure.

For the individuals who make and read them, zines serve as a medium to think through and articulate what it is exactly that they are alienated from and why this is so. In other words zine function as an *analytical* tool: naming the unnamed, classifying the unclassified. This naming process--as traditional legend for millennia has pointed out--offers a certain degree of control over the forces that do alienate the individual from their social world.

If the first function of zines regarding alienation is analytic, the second is *prophetic*. That is, it outlines a way of seeing and being that promises a way out of the

alienation of everyday life. It does this primarily by articulating a set of values and norms that run counter to that of mainstream society. Society tells them to be instrumental in our lives, zines counsel them to strive for sincerity; the society says work hard to succeed, they say slack off and enjoy life; the society says the system works; they point out how it doesn't.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, zines operate *materially*. By this I mean that zines are the result of an act of cultural creation; an act of creation over which the creator has final say over the form, content, and distribution of the product. While I will not go as far as to argue that the alienation that happens in the act of production in this society is the root from which all other forms of alienation arise, there is no denying that producing things or services over which we have little say or control and buying things that have been prepackaged for us constitute a major portion of every American's life. As such, producing ones own culture, and consuming others' through a network of intimacy and sincerity, offers a haven from the alienating manner in which production and consumption is practiced in the rest of society.

Zines also function *materially* as the conduit between isolated and alienated individuals, allowing them to communicate with one another and share their feelings of alienation. They form the glue of a personalized community or communities within an anonymous mass society. After all, to return to the science fiction group, there is nothing intrinsically alienating in being an Alien, it is being the only Alien on the planet that is so lonely.

To understand the complicated story of zines and the underground culture they

represent we must first lay out what it is that they stand for: a reaction against the alienating features of life as they are experienced in the modern world. In the pages that follow I have broken down the types of alienation expressed and challenged into four categories: Individual, Community, Work, and Consumption. These categories do not include every type of alienation expressed through the pages of zine, nor are they exclusive of one another. However, they provide a necessary and suitable analytic platform on which to base my investigation of the zine world.

1. Beaper, *Bad Newz*, #16, early 1990s, San Francisco, CA, p.1.
2. Billie Aul, in group interview with Debbie Kirsch, Catherine Sullivan, and Tim Smith, January 20, 1994, Albany, New York.
3. quoted in Pat Guy, "Wacky Magazines Know No Limits," *USA Today*, August 3, 1993, p. 6b.

Individual

I just lost the one person in the world that I can actually say I loved, and this is where I've decided to vent my frustrations. I must tell you about my personal life in order to purge myself of some of this depression and loneliness. I don't usually tell anyone about my personal life, keeping it all bottled up inside because it is what it is--personal. But I have decided I can trust you folks out there because, well, I will probably never actually meet any of you.¹

So begins *The Elana Rosa Veiga Torres Newsletter for This World and Beyond* in which the heartbroken Josh Abelon tells his tale of love found and lost, sharing his most intimate of secrets with the most anonymous of strangers. Needless to say, zines are an intensely personal medium.

We live in an increasingly impersonal world, our identity codified into social security numbers, market demographics, and public opinion statistics. Much of this impersonality is a necessary correlate of living in a complex mass society, and it is not all bad. As anybody who has grown up in a small town or close-knit community can attest, the freedom that comes with mass anonymity is liberating; living among strangers you are free to be who you want, what you want, when you want. Zines, in their esoteric range and iconoclastic attitudes are a testament to this social cosmopolitanism.

But, as early urban scholars Robert Park, Louis Wirth, and others of the Chicago School discovered, there is a cost to this freedom: a disconnectedness from other humans, an alienation from the personal and the intimate.² Commercial culture tries to fill this void with its endless cycle of personal drama, intimate talk shows, and celebrity gossip. It does a bad job, however, for through this mass media people are represented to one another, each individual sitting home alone. It makes the distance even larger, the

alienation more tragic. But people create their own culture to construct solutions to the problems that effect them, and zines are one of these efforts.³ They are an attempt by individuals to breach the gulf of mass society by communicating *with* one another, sharing their individuality while at the same time building an--albeit virtual--community.

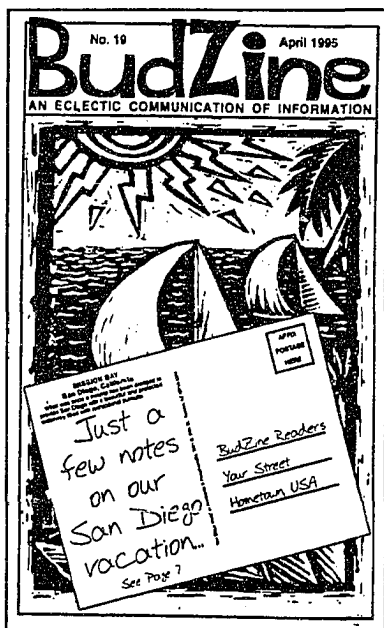
The archetype of the personal character of zines is found in the "perzine," or personal zine. These zines, like Josh Abelon's above, often read like the intimate diaries usually kept safely hidden in the back of a drawer or under a pillow. But unlike most personal diaries, these intimate thoughts, philosophical musings, or merely events of the day retold, are written to be shared with strangers.

Jen Payne, for example, shares *The Latest News* about her life in the shoreline town of Clinton, CT. One issue begin within her reminiscing about working at a coffee shop and the regulars who visit there, another with a trip to New Hampshire, and yet another with her love for photography; the latter including reproductions straight out of a family album: a picture of her cat, her at a prom, a best friend, her and her husband, and so on. The zine itself is a photo album of Jen's life--nothing special, nothing outrageous.

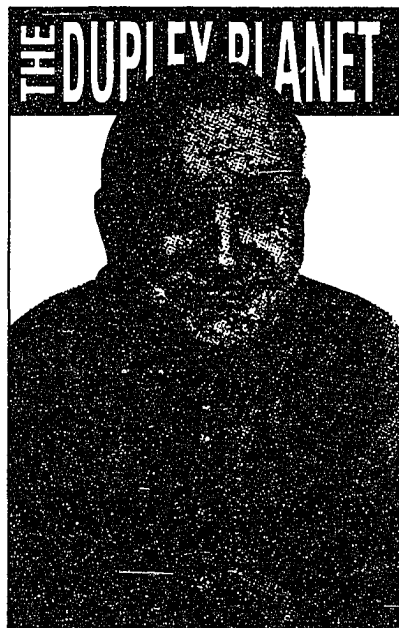
Whereas the rule of thumb regarding the publication of News in the mainstream media is "dog bites man," that is: what is considered "newsworthy" is what is out of the ordinary, what Jen and many other writers of personal zines honor is the opposite: the everyday. "There's much to celebrate in this so-called mundane, everyday life," one of Jen's readers writes in appreciation, and "*TLN* shows it well."⁴

The joys of the everyday, of the everyperson, are celebrated in *Budzine* as well.

From a trip to San Diego to camping in the desert, from his experiences in college to being in the Air Force, from his romance with his future wife to his brief stint as an amateur actor to complaints about taxes and Christmas, *Budzine* is the chronicle of an everyperson, a person like you and me. As an editor of a trade magazine that doesn't allow space for his ideas, *Budzine*'s creator, John "Bud" Banks, understands that "There probably aren't too many publications that would give me space to carry on about whatever seems important." And so Bud creates his own forum, thereby refusing to accept that regular people are not News. "It's not that my thoughts and ideas have any *special* worth," Bud writes, "but neither are they worthless."⁵



front cover of Budzine #19



"Fergie" on the front cover of Duplex Planet #112

Zines chronicle the thoughts and ideas of forgotten, "worthless" people. David Greenberger, hired as an Activities Director at the Duplex nursing home in

Massachusetts, but with little qualifications or idea of what such a director was supposed to do, began just talking to the old and often senile people at the home. Bundling the resident's musings together he put out a newsletter for the home which later turned into *The Duplex Planet*. In his zine, David takes a back seat, letting the old people take center stage. "It's one of the greatest shoe states in the country. Especially ladies shoes."

William "Fergie" Ferguson, tells David and his readers about Massachusetts,

They have ladies shoes that go right up to your knee--and I mean up to your knee. And they didn't used to have much on. And when they'd lace those babies up you could see from here to Winston Churchill, and you know what a tall sonofabitch he was! And they'd fall down and say it was their equilibrium--ha! Equilibrium my ass! Those decks were as slippery as a cake of ice and we went to the South Pole....⁶

David assembles a personal zine for people whom, due to their age and diminished mental abilities, are ignored by our society. Through *The Duplex Planet* these old people have an audience with which to share their odd, but often poignant, thoughts.

In stark contrast to the funny, exciting, glamorous, dangerous, or tragic lives of the personalities that populate the sitcoms and dramas of television and the pages of magazines and newspapers, personal zines chronicle the lives and events of normal people, by standards of the mass media: dull people. Vicki Rosenzweig, begins her inaugural issue of *Quipo* with an account of having soup spilled on her lap at a local Chinese restaurant, continues with a story of swans near her New York City residence, and finishes with her observations on deli counters. By the standards of car chase narratives, this is boring stuff.

But the narratives told are of and by real individuals, and because of this the events chronicled are thickly textured and the person revealed more complex than their

surface counterparts in the mass media. The mass media presents character roles, zines reveal people. Jen, after recalling her days in the coffee shop, gives her views on the National Debt.⁷ In Bud's "The Play's the Thing" issue on his acting experience, he slips in a critique of how the mainstream news frames and interprets events.⁸ And Vicki uses such commonplace observations as "The typical grill [of a deli] is the same: many variations on the hamburger, a BLT, hot dogs," to launch into cultural analysis:

The deli counter is like many other aspects of modern American culture: it gives the appearance of great variety, but mostly offers the same thing in a number of disguises....As with food, real variety is available, but you have to look for it, or make it yourself--it doesn't come prepackaged.⁹

These personal zines are testimony that regular people *think*: about themselves, about their experience, about politics. If this doesn't seem radical--and it shouldn't--watch the television tonight or leaf through *Time* or *Newsweek*. How many "regular" people do you see or hear? Of these, how many are allowed to express their views in a form different and a space larger than a sound bite or a statistical average, or play a role other than victim or freak on a Talk Show? As a Meritocracy, the voices heard in America are of the Best and Brightest: experts, business leaders, and politicians. Perzines are the voice of a Democracy: testimony to the unrepresented everyday, the unheard from everyperson.

By expressing the experiences and thoughts of individuals, perzines are illustrations of *difference*. Not the difference offered in abundance through mass culture: surface appearance, style, sound bite, lifestyle, but a difference of a more profound sort. As Vicki suggests, real difference is not to be found on the fifty plus channels on cable TV but through searching for its expression and creating that expression oneself.

The "difference" zine writers often express is the one deviation rarely tolerated or represented in the mass media--rejection of the "good life" as it is defined in consumerist terms. Dennis Brezina records the simple contemplative life, living close to nature in *America's at our Doorstep*.¹⁰ Terry Ward--a former manager of the town dump--sends out his almost biweekly *Notes from the Dump*, opining on national politics, personal memories, and world news, all from the perspective of a man who has "dropped out" of society.¹¹ Earnest Mann, who like Terry is also an older man who has left society behind, puts out *Little Free Press*, telling of his exploits trapping squirrels in a warehouse and traveling to Mexico to purchase affordable false teeth.¹² And Aaron Cometbus is a punk rocker who chronicles his life on the fringes of America in *Cometbus*.¹³ Zine writers use zines to record their dissent, and to communicate the everyday life of someone trying not to be a part of the dominant system.

Alienation from society can sell in America. The culture industry knows its market, and if enough people feel estranged from the norms and practices of society, it will make room for, and profit from, a *Rebel Without A Cause* that speaks to this malaise. But there is a profound difference between the rebel of the mass culture industry and that of zines. The rebel of the mainstream media is on the outside, howling at the world for its injustice, but invariably wanting to get in, to be accepted, but on his--and invariably it is a him--terms. While there is plenty of howling at injustice done in zines, the strategy of the zine rebel is one of removal; communicating feelings of alienation by alienating themselves from society. And the zine which records this struggle is not used as a medium to broadcast discontent to the dominant society, but a way to confidentially

share personal stories of living on the outside with other disaffected individuals.

As such, Dennis's rural, contemplative life, unfolding day by day in *America's at our Doorstep*, is as "mundane" and "everyday" as Jen Payne's. Dennis relates seeing a deer, the books he read, finding a mouse nest in the oven. And even though Aaron--as he takes reader with him bumming across the country, visiting dusty towns, sleeping on busses, and reporting his impressions of local punk scenes--fits the American ideal of the misunderstood rebel loner; he, himself, is more interested in exploring and communicating the forgotten little features of life outside the public gaze than fighting for a place in its light. "I had an hour to kill before the bus arrived, so I looked around downtown Janesville, where I'd been assured by the locals that there was 'nothing at all'," Aaron writes,

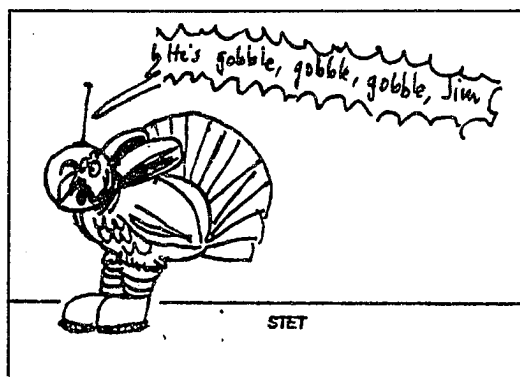
As usual, 'nothing at all' turned out to be pretty cool. I passed a beautiful river, old crackly neon signs, a farmer's market, an old 'Chop Suey' district, and a shopping cart guy with a tiny general store junk stand and a sign that said 'Everything You Need Can Be Bought Here,' Yeah, nothing at all.¹⁴

It is these sort of things--the experiences, ideas--that are "nothing at all" to the dominant society, whether it is because they are too regular, or too far outside what is regular, that zines represent and communicate. Perzines are a way that individuals in a mass society, who in the eyes of the political and media elite are themselves "nothing at all," can assert, if not in the words of Marx's angry revolutionary: "I am nothing and I should be everything," then at least, less egotistically: I am nothing and I should be *something*.¹⁵

Identity

But what is that something? One of the things that zines do for their creators is provide space to define and redefine exactly who they are. In some ways this identity definition seems pretty straight forward: punk rock zines are put out by punk rockers, science fiction fans put out science fiction zines; *Rhode Islanduh* is produced by a homesick Rhode Island native in Olympia Washington, *8-Track Mind*, by fans of the forgotten technical innovation of the 70s: the 8-track cassette.¹⁶ In this way it seems as if zines are just a further extension of the specialization of identity that fills the niche markets of the mass culture industry, or the fragmentary "subject positions" of identity politics. But whereas marketers and ideologues begin and end their definition of identity with discrete categories of external markers, zine writers do something else.

Science Fiction comprises the topic for the longest running genre of fanzines, but a careful look at science fiction zines reveals that the real topic is not just science fiction, but often the person or people writing. Michigan schoolteacher George "Lan" Laskowski, for example, devotes an issue of his *Lan's Lantern* to SF writer Isaac Asimov, including critical pieces on his work and influence, and a chronology of the man's life. But the majority of the essays are personal recollections by fans of what Asimov meant to *them*.¹⁷ Another such zine is *STET*, written by Leah Zeldes Smith, a SF fan who describes her Thanksgiving dinner with the same emphasis as her trip to Holland for WorldCon (the world science fiction conference). Understanding that this is a rather odd combination she concedes that her husband, "complains that there is nothing fannish about recipes. That's true...But it's my fanzine and I can do what I want to."¹⁸



turkey in a space helmet in STET

Science fiction *and* recipes; identity expressed in zines is more complex than the discrete categories favored by market demographers, identity ideologues, or Leah's husband. But this shouldn't be so surprising: "identity" literally means the *collective* aspect of characteristics by which a thing is recognizable;¹⁹ because a zine is *theirs*, it's this fluid and dynamic definition of identity that zines writers express. This concept of hybrid identity comes out in a letter written by Brian Shapiro in response to a review of his zine in *Factsheet Five*. "It was never my intention to "mix" punk and politics in *CANCER* or to make a connection between politics and music," asserts the author,

Animal rights and music and art etc....are all great interests of *mine*. The reason that I publish *CANCER* is to provide an outlet in which I can express those interests....If key chains and sperm interested me, I would probably do a publication on those things.²⁰

Postmodern theory has generated a great deal of discussion on the "death of the subject" and the end of the "bourgeoisie individual" as the once unified self has fragmented in the present post modern era.²¹ The postmodernists are on to something here--they understand the complexity of forces that make up the self, and resist

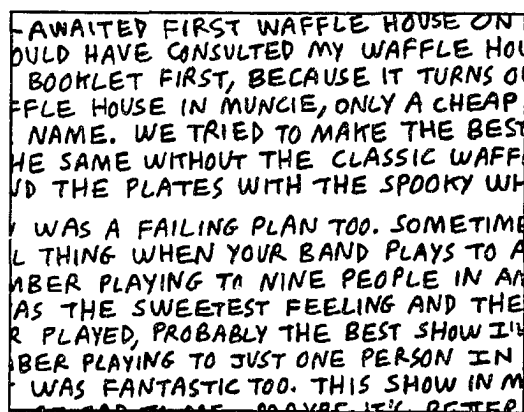
essentializing individuals into solitary identities, be it Worker, 18-25 year old Record Buyer, or Lesbian. But what strikes me as I look at zines, and what seems to allude so many theorists, is that this multi-dimensionality of identity does not signify the death of the subject, nor the end of the individual self. Quite the opposite. Zines, for example, are the effort of individuals to makes sense of and reconstruct an identity from the varied components that make up their lives, The result being a representation of fragments, not isolated, but assembled to make up a whole.

This is nothing new. The idea of a unified subject is more theoretical construction (often projected back on history by contemporary theorists) than reality, and any good historian can attest to the multiple influences and traditions that make up an individual or group's identity at any time.²² What is different today is the range of materials and experiences available with which to construct an identity. And what is unique to zines is that they provide an abstract medium with which to do this assembly, and through which to communicate this identity to others. Because of this once-removed quality of zines, the notion of who you are and what you are is flexible: the zine creator can create a virtual identity.

To begin with, zines, as a material medium, have form; and this form becomes part of the message from the zine creator to his or her audience. The physical form of zines often compliment its personal nature. Being hand made, the hands of the creator are clearly visible in the publication. Aaron Cometbus, for example, carefully hand-letters each of the eighty two pages that make up issue #31 of *Cometbus*.

This intimate quality reinforces Aaron's narrative as he takes the reader on his

journeys across the United States. He ends his zine by sharing with the reader *his* completion of the zine: alone in a room in Richmond VA, writing "midnight to 6:30 am, with a half hour lunch and two smoke breaks," thus bringing the reader into his very process of creation.²³



writing in Cometbus #31

Hand done drawings often illustrate scenes from the life of the zine writer. In *Catbox Room*, Lisa Maslowe, draws vignettes from her life, including her trip back to Los Angeles where she grew up.²⁴

The fact that the drawings are not professional quality does not really matter. It's not that good drawing doesn't exist or isn't appreciated in the zine world, but valued more than technical expertise is the hands-on connection between the zine writer/artist, what they are drawing, and the person reading the zine. The amateurism of the illustration reinforces this intimacy. Instead of emulating the slickness of the commercial mass media, the illustrations in zines are more reminiscent of the doodles and sketches in the margin of a personal letter.

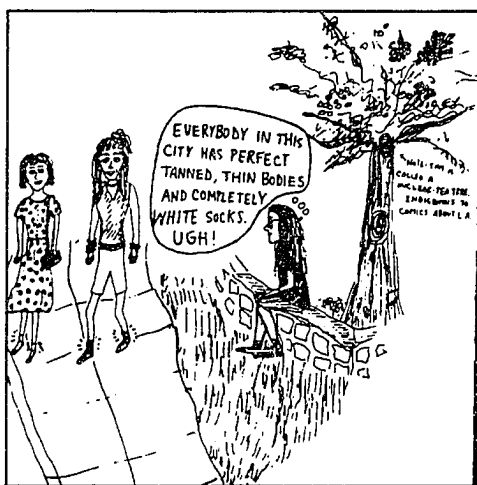


illustration in Catbox Room #1



borrowed voices in Exact Change #3

With the growing availability of desktop publishing and the possibilities for reproduction allowed by the xerox machine, many zines take advantage of typesetting their text and reproducing pictures and illustrations. This doesn't mean that the stamp of the individual is jettisoned, however, only that the materials to communicate their identity can range from hand to electronic reproduction. A zine like *Exact Change* for example, uses almost no original material. Instead it communicates the creator Eldon Potter's ideas and views on everything from food to war, entirely through "material...printed without permission." By cutting and pasting found images, articles and news snippets, Eldon "borrows" voices to create his own.²⁵

Zines also have the added advantage of being able to communicate anonymously. "I have a lot of things to communicate," explains *Pinto's* Sara Lorimer, "and I'm incapable of verbal communication...I'm really shy often. [Zines] are a really nice way of doing it. I can just leave it and I don't have to say it to anybody's face." Because

zines offer a way of communicating that frees the zine writer from face-to-face interaction, zine writers feel free to *create* their identity. In other words, zines allow the writer to transcend who they are and become instead who they would like to be. On the simplest level, zines allow the producer to become identified with their zine as its creator, as opposed to being identified personally with "what our tax form says." For as Sara continues, "I'd rather have people think of me as *Pinto* than that cranky cashier."²⁶

Because one's identity in the zine world is represented by what you create, your identity can be created. John Newberry, editor of *The Raven*, argues that one of the great things about writing for a zine is that it, "allows people to become something else, someone else. If they contribute to the zine, they have the opportunity to assume identities of their own choosing, and not be molded into beings they don't want to be."²⁷

"*To assume identities of their own choosing.*" In the middle of an interview with Kali Amanda Browne, editor of *Watley-Browne Review*, I asked her about her "correspondent" Kandi: the svelte woman who was often drawn lingering at bars, telling stories about her nights out, and ranting about the general unworthiness of the male sex; and who also wrote much of the content of her zine. "Oh, she's me" Kali replied, laughing. And the other contributors?, I asked. "They're all me...different parts of me."²⁸

Kali uses her zine to construct her identity--but she does it by dividing up her identity into different characters. Having talked to Kali numerous times since that first interview, I can assure that she is not schizophrenic. Instead, Kali, who traces her ethnic

roots to Africa, Latin America, Europe, India, and China, understands the complexity of identity and the insufficiency of essentialism. She uses her zine to act upon the motto she includes on the cover of her envelope: "Never make anything simple and efficient when it can be complex and wonderful" by creating for herself a multi-faceted, virtual identity.²⁹

An equally complex and wonderful cast of characters speak through *Sweet Jesus*, a personal zine put together by a group of precocious high school students whose friend has just committed suicide. Interviews, memories, illustrations, and poems from Chaz (found after his death), St. Xeno, Bloody Mary, Nasha, and Mia X. trace the hidden life of their dead friend and in the process reveal their own intertwined life stories. Hoping to be able to interview some of the authors of this haunting zine, I turned to the back of the first issue, where under a list of the writers was the note: "and those characters sprung from the amazingly twisted mind of Franetta L. McMillian." Franetta was all of the characters--and none of them...and none of them were real.³⁰

But in a way they were. Some characters introduced later, like a woman who as a young girl integrated her school, were based directly on Franetta's own experience, while others were based on interviews with real individuals. But talking to me later Franetta pointed out that *all* of them were a part of her: different memories, different experiences, different facets. Like a novelist--which in many ways is what *Sweet Jesus* is in zine form--she creates a densely populated world out of herself.³¹

The ability of zines to project a virtual identity can lead to misunderstandings: there have been numerous reports of deception, often with hurtful results, on another

medium of virtual identity, computer bulletin board systems (BBS).³² But these misunderstandings can have their positive sides as well. Franetta tells the story of talking to a white supremacist skinhead by phone while doing research for a character she was creating for *Sweet Jesus* #3. They got along so well that at the end of the conversation the racist skinhead asked Franetta if she would like to come out West and be part of the survivalist community that he was forming. When Franetta told him that she was African-American, he was silent for a moment, then admitted that he had never really talked at length to anyone black before, and again made his invitation (Franetta declined).³³

Zines as a tool of identity means that zines are self-centered. Jim Corsaro, the director of the division of the New York State Library where the Factsheet Five collection is stored, defines them as "magazines published by someone with a bigger ego than a budget."³⁴ Julie Gerstein of *hell kitty!* concurs, "doing a fanzine is about the most egotistical thing you can do because you're assuming that people want to read what you have to say."³⁵ Cases in point: *Goldstein: A Newsletter About Me. Paul, or Interesting!*, Richard J. Sagall's "compilation of things I find interesting."³⁶ But out of this egoism comes an interesting working out of individual identity.

Zines, as a way to stake out who you are or re-imagine the possibilities of who you might be, chart a path between the two extremes of how "identity" is often discussed in politics, business, and the academy. Popular reporting on zines frequently stresses their single-minded "obsessional" focus on odd subject matter, but this analysis is far too simplistic, for zines slip the bonds of their ostensible topics and center back on the often

varied interests and range of thoughts of the individual creator.³⁷ Also declining to "die as subjects" zine writers assemble and weave together the bits and pieces, ideas and interests, in the process creating their identity and asserting their subjectivity. Neither essentialist nor fragmentary, zines are "the *collective* aspect of characteristics by which a thing is recognizable," that is: they are a way for the zine writer to express the complexity of themselves and share that amalgam with others.

The Political is Personal

The personal emphasis of zines reaches further than perzines; it is a central ethic of *all* zines. Frederic Wertham, studying the mostly science fiction and fantasy zines of the early 1970s, believed that this "intensely personal" quality was a major defining characteristic of zines.³⁸ Wertham is correct. One of the interesting things that zine writers do is to insert the personal into almost any topic, in this way following in the footsteps of personal "little magazines," which the authors of *The Little Magazine in America* argued just under fifty years ago, "may well announce, not so much a policy, as a personality"³⁹ But whereas "little magazines" tended to focus on literary and artistic concerns, the scope of their offspring is much wider. Punk rock, science fiction, religion, sexuality, sports, politics, ufos, Pez dispensers, Mille Bornes games, Bruce Campbell films--all these topics are grist for the zine mill.⁴⁰

As they also are for the commercial press. Within a mass culture where no topic is left untouched for long, but all topics are covered with the bland disinterest of the hired writer and the commercial publisher, the problem is not lack of information, but

an intense depersonalization of it. Culture: ideas, experience, communication...the stuff created by humans, in the hands of the commercial media becomes distant and flat, a commodity to be exchanged for any other commodity. Zines retrace the connection between the people and those things that people create. And they do this by privileging the personal.

"Everyone has there own way of telling a story," writes Joshua, editor of *Notes from the Light House*, "it's the individual's perspective that makes the same ole story somewhat unique in its own way."⁴¹ "Nothing's new or hasn't been said/ It's all been done before" the punk band Dead Boys sang in the late 70s, and for many people raised with inspirational tales of inventors and artistic innovators, it seems that as the 20th century draws to a close there is little *new* that can be created.⁴² In the field of periodicals alone, with 11,000 commercial magazines available, few topics are left undiscovered. But by putting their own "perspective" on an old topic, zine writers can create something new, make something "unique in it's own way."

But the intense personalization of zines goes much deeper than this. At its heart lies a deep distrust of any experience separated from the individual. "In the end, the only Reality in which any of us can believe involves our own personal experiences," writes Elayne Weshsler, of *Inside Joke*, "For example, whose version of consciousness-altering substances are you more likely to believe, the Government with their War on Drugs or a friend who's been smoking pot for years?"⁴³

Seemingly written in response to Elayne's very question is the zine *Pills-a-go-go*, a publication devoted to the exploration of commercial drugs. Jim Hogshire, the

publisher, eager to dispense knowledge on Dextromethorphan Hydrobromide--the "DM" in commercially available cough syrups--experiments on himself, guzzling eight ounces of the syrup himself and recording its effect:

At four o'clock in the morning I woke up suddenly and remembered that I had to go to Kinko's [copy shop] and that I had to shave off about a week's worth of stubble from my face. These ideas were very clear to me. They may seem normal, but the fact was that *I had a reptilian brain*. My whole way of thinking and perceiving had changed....

The world became a binary place of dark and light, on and off, safety and danger. I felt a need, determined it was hunger, and ate almonds until I didn't feel the need anymore. Same thing with water. It was like playing a game....

Jim makes it to Kinko's where a friend tells him that his pupils are of different sizes. He wanders out alone again, later recalling that,

I found being a reptile kind of pleasant. I was content to sit there and monitor my surroundings. I was alert but not anxious. Every now and then I would do a "reality check" to make sure that I wasn't masturbating or strangling someone, because of my vague awareness that more was expected of me than just being a reptile.

The life of a reptile may seem boring to us, but I was never bored when I was a reptile. If something started to hurt me, I took steps to get away from it; if it felt better over there that's where I stayed. Now, twenty-four hours later, I'm beginning to get my neocortex back (I think). Soon, I hope to be human again.⁴⁴

Obviously written to be funny, Jim's piece nevertheless follows a convention of zine writing: reading a subject through a highly personal lens, then sharing that personal experience with others through his zine. While it's probably not hard to find an article on the active component in cough syrup in the commercial media, never would you read a first hand account. But it is this personalization of experience that the zine world values.⁴⁵

Zines are not the first "underground" media to place the writer front and center as the teller of the news. This was a cardinal feature of 18th century pamphlet: little booklets of only a few pages, unbound and without covers, selling for a shilling or two. While Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* is certainly the most well known and influential of these pamphlets--between 100,000-250,000 copies were printed--he was not alone. Bernard Bailyn, in his collection *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776*, estimates the full bibliography of those that have survived from this pre-revolutionary period at over 400.⁴⁶

Zine writers of a historical mind like to equate zines with pamphlets, calling *Common Sense* the "zine heard 'round the world" in the words of zine publisher Gene Mahoney.⁴⁷ And there is some validity to this hereditary claim. After all the pamphlet, in the words of George Orwell, is primarily,

a one-man show. [Where] one has complete freedom of expression, including, if one chooses, the freedom to be scurrilous, abusive, and seditious; or, on the other hand, to be more detailed, serious and "highbrow" than is ever possible in a newspaper or in most kinds of periodicals.⁴⁸

And before the reader thinks that such a comparison between the high and mighty pamphlet and the lowly zine sullies the reputation of the former, they should be aware that many pamphlets *were* scurrilous, abusive, and seditious, and not above, as Bailyn writes, "depicting George Washington as the corrupter of a washerwoman's daughter, [or] John Hancock as both impotent and the stud of 'an illegitimate brood.'" ⁴⁹ The political analysis put forth in pamphlets frequently degenerated into crude conspiracy theories, and many pamphlets were far from "highbrow." Some were quite terribly

written, filled with illogical arguments, poor sentence structure, and painfully bad poetry. They were for the most part, after all, the work of literary amateurs.

As Orwell points out, these early pamphlets were the words and ideas of individuals. Like zines, the literary style they employed underscored this point, being highly intimate and personal. A popular pamphleteer like John Dickinson, for example, wrote a pamphlet as a letter to "to his friend," using the pronoun "I" frequently when making his points.⁵⁰ But the purpose of pamphlets was not to assert the value of the individual writer's ideas and identity in a society that ignored them. John Dickinson might sign a later pamphlet "from a Farmer in Pennsylvania," but this member of the Philadelphia elite was a far cry from a simple yeoman. Instead the purpose of the pamphlet was to rethink, articulate, argue, and persuade others on *political* issues of the day, namely: the issue of democratic representation in the British Parliament, the idea of a constitution and the nature of rights that might be protected in it, and the question of sovereignty: where power should reside within society.⁵¹ In other words, while the language of pamphlets may have been personal, the content and purpose was explicitly Political.

Zines too, are often explicitly political, and it is rare to come across one which doesn't express an opinion of some sort on a political issue. But the type of political analysis in zines is markedly different than that found in 18th century pamphlets. Pamphleteers used a personal voice, but the politics discussed were, for the most part, abstracted from themselves, of interest to the public. American pamphleteers, while personally slandering their opponents, would delineate what the stamp tax, English rule,

or the quartering of the British Army would mean for American *society*. Although uttered with a personal voice, it was a public discourse.

For zines, as with all other topics, politics is primarily a personal discourse. Part of this reflects the ongoing division of "The Public" in contemporary society into "publics": class and race and gender groups, voting blocs and target markets. These publics, in turn, are divisible into their constituent elements: individuals. Politics then, like everything else, becomes about the individual.

Not unrelated is how politics have been popularly defined since the late 60s. One of the prominent ideas to come out of tumult that was the New Left was the idea that the "personal is political," a notion best and most frequently articulated by the Feminist movement. Simply stated the idea went something like this: "politics" not only existed on the level defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: in terms of policy, states, and governments, but also on the plane of personal interaction: on the street and in the bedroom.⁵² With this new definition, what could be considered within the realm of "the political" was significantly expanded.

But zines put a slight twist on the idea that the personal is political: they broach political issues from the State to the bedroom, but with all, they refract these issue through eyes and experience of the individual creating the zine. Not satisfied to merely open up the personal realm to political analysis, *they personalize politics*, forcing even what the *OED* defines as politics open with a personalized analysis. In *Dishwasher*, Dishwashin' Pete surveys class politics through his personal stories of dishwashing throughout the country.⁵³ Patrick Splat explores the issue of discrimination against

homosexuals through stories about "coming out" both to the mainstream and underground world in his zine *Loring Punk*⁵⁴. And Adam Bregman exposes the sham of democracy in an age of money politics by writing about his own campaign for Mayor of Los Angeles in the pages of his zine *Shithappy*. In *Shithappy* Adam backs up his assertion that "democracy is a farce" and that "the worse crimes that politicians commit are legal" not with abstract logic, but with personal, detailed and engaging description of the ins and outs of his own campaign, concluding that, "I always knew that the government was completely corrupt, but after running for mayor I've learned how and why it is corrupt."⁵⁵(Needless-to-say Adam, with a \$70.00 budget earned in part by selling lemonade outside City Hall and 643 votes, lost his bid for Mayor.)

None of the zines mentioned above print reams of statistics on class inequality, prejudice against gay and lesbians, or election funding, instead they tell stories. This isn't to say that zines don't present any information which has not been experienced personally, they do: *Loring Punk* reprints some news clipping on acts of bigotry in his Minneapolis area, but often that information will be presented in such a way to personalize it, keeping it from being just another floating statistic in the information glut.

One way that zine writers do this is through the interview format--a format with strong traditions in music fanzines. For example, after beginning with testimonial about how he had never had personal contact with labor unions until the Emergency Medical Technicians were locked out by management at a hospital down the street, Josh MacPhee in *Fenceclimber* begins a long interview with a leader of the union. They discuss the context of the struggle, what the term "lock out" means, what the EMTs are asking for,

new management strategies in the health care industry and so on. This is straight political analysis of a labor/management struggle, but because it is in an interview format, with give and take between Josh and the union organizer, *Fenceclimber* puts a human face on abstract social forces.⁵⁶

Another way that zines personalize their politics is to position political issues within a stream of other, more intimate matters. Adam of *Shithappy* segues out of his run for Mayor into the story of a painful breakup with his girlfriend; Patrick of *Loring Punk* moves from tales of "coming out" at his workplace to a list of the guys and girls he finds sexy, to a poem written to a dead friend.

This juxtaposition of the political with the personal is mirrored by the juxtaposition of the factual with the testimonial. On one page in *Griselda*, Lisa L. Zungang reprints a "borrowed" fact sheet, part of which includes,

Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is one of the leading cancer killers among women in this country with more than 43,000 deaths each year....

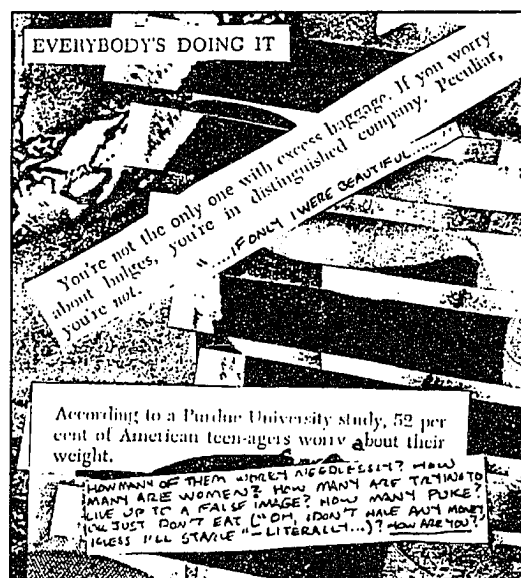
On the facing page, Lisa L. writes a personal note,

To My Potential Girlfriends

Here are some things I want you to think about, as I have thought about them....⁵⁷

This placing of the borrowed "fact" and the "personal" plea side by side also finds its way into the pages of another feminist zine, *Finstert*, where editors KJ, Erin, Rebecca, and Mary add their hand scrawled commentary to each reprinted fact on young women and body weight.⁵⁸ This juxtaposition of abstract fact and personal commentary has become a trademark of the loose group of third wave feminist zines and zine writers that

call themselves Riot Grrrls, but the impetus and the effect is something common to the entire zine world: personalizing politics.



personal commentary in Finster #3

For some politically minded zine writers the personalization of politics is understood as a way to cast off the "preaching" model of persuasion that is all too common in political discourse. "i hate preachers," writes Jason Page in *Cheap Douchebag*, "what i am trying to do is inform and educate people, so they can form their own opinion."⁵⁹ By putting the personal first, the political persuasion is cast in terms of emulation rather than conversion. "Change ourselves so others can change," writes the editor of *Forever and a Day*, giving an example: "If you throw away your television and tell me your reasons then perhaps I will do the same and tell someone my reasons and they will discard theirs."⁶⁰

But there is another factor at work here. The personalization of politics has less

to do with instrumental political strategy than with expressing and communicating a profound feeling of alienation from mainstream politics...or rather, the alienation of these institutions from them. When pamphleteers wrote in the 18th century many were arguing for a Democracy, a system where individual citizens could participate in politics directly. Even those like the Federalists, who argued against such a participatory democracy, did so because they feared it was a real possibility. It no longer is. The republican ideal of a personal attachment to politics remains part of our ideological heritage, but in practice today it is repudiated. Politics has become something "out there," something to leave to the professionals: the politicians, the pollsters, the media pundits, with the public reappearing every four years in a voting booth or as a statistic in an opinion poll. And as a 1995 poll reveals, 89 percent of Americans feel that the people running the country are somewhat or definitely "not like them."⁶¹ The personalization of politics within zines is an attempt for people to redraw connections between themselves and politics; to collapse the distance between the personal self and the political world.

The Politics of Authenticity

Question: What makes a good zine?

Answer: Sara: Originality, Tina: Sincerity, Paul: Honesty

- editors of *Pinto*⁶²

Authenticity is an ideal shot through the entire zine world. It is a quality of expressing everything that mainstream media and society are perceived to lack: Originality, Sincerity, Honesty. "Why Publish?" zine editor Edgar "Bolt" Upright asks rhetorically, "To cut through TV horseshit reality to something better--something more

personal."⁶³ Zine writers search for, and attempt to create, a realm of authenticity within their zines.

As Edgar implies, this ideal of authenticity is deeply rooted in the individual. "Man was born free," Jean-Jaques Rousseau began his 1762 treatise *The Social Contract*, "and everywhere he is in chains."⁶⁴ Authenticity in the zine world gets its inspiration--indirectly--from the 18th century radical individualism of Rousseau, who theorized the ideal of the authentic self: a man untainted by the artifice and oppression of society. An authentic individual, therefore, is one who tries cut through the conventions of manners, norms, and communication and connect to the self.⁶⁵

As I've demonstrated above, this is what zine writers use their zines for: privileging the personal over the general, the experiential over abstraction, the human touch over professionalism. In reaction against the instrumental nature of mass communication and the impersonality of mass society, emphasis is put on the originality, honesty, and sincerity of individual expression. Zines are bursts of raw emotion. Cut and paste is an explosion of design. The "rant" which makes up the editorial style of most zines is spontaneous expression. "With fanzines you're doing it because you're passionate about it," explains Al Quint of *The Suburban Voice*, "And even if the writing isn't at a professional level, sometimes the excitement, the enthusiasm can compensate for it."⁶⁶ I would argue the point stronger than Al; the excitement and the enthusiasm of zines doesn't compensate for lack of professionalism, they are the replacement for it. Rousseau wrote contemptuously that in the cultural word of his day, already "the question is no longer whether a man is honest, but merely whether he has talent"; zine writers, like

Rousseau, ask the opposite: talent is forgiven, as long as the expression is honest.⁶⁷

There is a politics imbedded in this ideal of honest expression. At a panel discussion, David Mandl, a disc jockey at WFMU: a New York area, noncommercial, "alternative" radio station, was asked to describe his station's politics. He began by talking about the broadcast of lectures by Noam Chomsky and other dissident notables, but quickly changed direction, locating the politics of the station somewhere else. Lauding his friend and fellow DJ, Vanilla Bean, Mandl explained that sometimes, "he'll go off on some political tirade, but a lot of the times he won't...but he's just done stuff that's so incredibly exciting and impassioned, so wonderful, that it's blatantly political in an implicit way."⁶⁸

For Mandl, the real politics of WFMU reside less in the content of what is said and more in the form of expression that the saying takes. This freedom to "express"--which Freedom, the young editor of *Orangutan Balls*, told me was the most important aspect of zines--is at the heart of this politics of authenticity.⁶⁹ After describing Tom Paine's *Common Sense* as a zine, Gene Mahoney goes on to write that "Even if you're not out to change the world...self publishing allows you to be yourself and express your real thoughts. Your real feelings."⁷⁰ Saying what ever's on your mind, un beholden to corporate sponsors, puritan censors, or professional standards of argument and design; being yourself and expressing your *real* thoughts and feelings is what is "original, honest, and sincere."

There is a lot of good in this politics. Exploring Rousseau's own politics of authenticity, political theorist Marshall Berman argues that the instrumental nature of

culture: whether it be commercial culture for profit, or high art for prestige, and the specialization in cultural production which stems from a complex division of labor, separates culture from the common life and interests of individuals. What authenticity encourages is a re-drawing of the connections between the self creating and what it is that is being created.⁷¹

But this emphasis on authenticity has its political downside as well. Michael Harrington, a Socialist critic of the 60s counter culture, commented on earlier variants of this form of "authentic" expression, describing both Bob Dylan and the speakers of the SDS as practitioners of,

the stutter style. It assumed that any show of logic or rhetorical style was *prima facie* proof of hypocrisy and dishonesty, the mark of the manipulative. The sincere man was therefore supposed to be confused and half articulate and anguished in his self-revelation.⁷²

What worried Harrington, besides a bit of generational rivalry, was that by privileging "the sincere man," logic and rhetoric--those very things necessary to communicate political abstractions to large audiences--would be sacrificed. Emphasis on sincerity of the communicator over what is being communicated, can also severely delimit the topics that can be discussed. When zine editor Elayne Wechsler writes that "the only Reality in which any of us can believe involves our own personal experiences" then the only way to be original, honest and sincere is to *write about yourself*.

This belief is understandable. Being primarily young people seasoned on post-Vietnam, post-Watergate, post-Actor-as-President mainstream politics, zine creators have little faith in the reality of mainstream politics as it is presented to the public. Confronted with a world of falseness, the only thing they know is real is themselves. But this is a

political problem, for how does one build any sort of effective politics out of separate realities?

This dilemma has plagued anarchist theorists and practitioners for centuries, and of all traditional political philosophies it is anarchism, not the liberalism which has been appended to the name of Rousseau, which appears most often in the pages of zines. A number of zines are explicitly "anarchist zines"; *Assault with Intent to Free, Profane Existence* ("making punk a threat again"), *Anarchy*, and *Instead of a Magazine*, are some of them. But more common is the anarchy circle @ symbol and anarchist thoughts scattered throughout the pages of personal, punk, feminist, queer--just about any--zines.

Some of the influence of anarchism on zines has to do with the prominent role that it has played in the punk scene, which in turn has had a large impact on the zine world. In addition, avowed anarchists like Mike Gunderloy have played an important part in the zine community. More important, however, is the fact that the nascent philosophies which have arisen from the zine world itself resonate with those of anarchism. On the most base level, anarchism is the philosophy of individual dissent and zines are the products of individual dissenters. But the connections run deeper: many of the ideas about an authentic life that manifest themselves in the zine world are also part of the tradition of anarchism.

William Godwin, the 18th century father of anarchist theory and husband of pioneering feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, was himself deeply influenced by Rousseau's notions of individual authenticity. Writing of culture in a hypothetical anarchist Utopia, Godwin asks "Should we have theatrical exhibitions?" He concludes: No, as theatre,

seems to include an absurd and vicious cooperation....Any formal repetition of other men's ideas seems to be a scheme for imprisoning for so long a time the operations of our own mind. It borders in perhaps this respect on a breach of sincerity, which requires that we should give immediate utterance to every useful and valuable idea that occurs to our thoughts.⁷³

Godwin's celebration of immediate individual expression and distrust of cooperation and abstraction is extreme even for anarchists, most of whom, like Emma Goldman, who still defined "individual autonomy" as "the essential principle of anarchism," also saw the need for cooperation and organization.⁷⁴ But Godwin's emphasis on sincerity as defined through the spontaneity of individual thought and action occupies a prominent place in the anarchist pantheon of ideals.

An "Anarchist," Mike Gunderloy defined in *Factsheet Five*, is "One who believes that we would all be better off without government. Most anarchists know what the true anarchist society would look like. They all disagree about it."⁷⁵ Mike's wry humor is on target, for the absolute authentic individualism demanded by Godwin and other anarchists, and the long term organization and solidarity required for political success, are a tough combination. This mismatch perhaps explains the relative failure of anarchism in the face of its ideological competitors: socialism, liberal capitalism, and fascism.

It also explains the primacy of "propaganda by the deed" in anarchist history. This deed, in the late 19th and early 20th often one of terrorist violence, collapsed political strategy and individual expression into a single act. What mattered within the strategy of propaganda by the deed was less political efficacy--often the results were disastrous when not hilarious⁷⁶--and more the purity of the act itself, "the immediate,

apocalyptic value of an act" as historian James Joll puts it.⁷⁷

The politics of authenticity which runs through the zine world also privileges the act as opposed to the result. This is not merely a means-over-ends political strategy, for most zine writers (like practitioners of propaganda by the deed) there is no abstract strategy at all, no means or end: just *the authentic act*. Repulsed by the instrumentality of mainstream society, where everything is a means to an end, the politics of authenticity counsels a rejection of a strategic model of politics in any form. The only politics then that stands the test of authenticity is a highly personal, immediate act of expression, that is: producing a zine. For in producing a zine the individual commits non-violent propaganda by the deed, bearing witness to the existence of an authentic individual and an authentic medium of communication against a world of falseness.

Born Against⁷⁸

The idea that one can construct an authentic individual, an authentic act, an authentic zine, by being true to some sort of essential and primordial self is, of course, absurd. A human may be born free, but at the point of birth they are neither human nor free. Both of these things are contingent on the development of the self, that is: a reflexive awareness that one is human, and free or not. This self is developed in interaction with other individuals and the greater society. "The self has a character which is different from that of the physiological organism proper," social psychologist George Herbert Mead argued at the turn of the century, theorizing that

The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is,

develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process.⁷⁹

In other words, and with no slight to Mead intended, no man is an island. Individuals construct their self, and their ideas of an authentic self, in conversation with others, and through a printed medium this is exactly what zine writers are doing: writing to others about what it means to be an individual and describing by example what an authentic culture might be.

But there is another interlocutor that precedes the community of zines: mass society. Notions of the personal, identity, politics, and authenticity, so important to zinesters, are arrived at in discussion with, or rather in argument against, mass society and culture. As bohemians, they construct who they are and what they do in opposition to the rest of society; in interaction with the mass society they forge a *negative identity*.

This is particularly apparent in punk zines. Punk rock itself was created, to a great degree, in opposition: *against* the staid professionalism and commercialism of "Rock" music in the mid 1970s, *against* the mellow, peace and love vibes of the hippie scene that by the 70s was a style to be bought and sold. Punk was rebellion. In response to *Maximumrocknroll's* effort to channel some of the punk energy into "constructive" radical political engagement, reader Matt writes in:

I respect *MRR* for what it is, but as long as I can remember, punk rock is a totally different thing. It's not positive, it's not intelligent, and it's certainly not political. Punk rock is hate, chaos, nihilism, destruction. Punk rock is being fifteen years old and getting a hair cut your parents hate.⁸⁰

Pure rebellion, pure negation; summed up in nihilistic titles of zines like *The I Hate People Gazette* and *Oh Cool Scene Zine: I Hate Everybody, I Hate Poetry (but that's all*

I can write).⁸¹

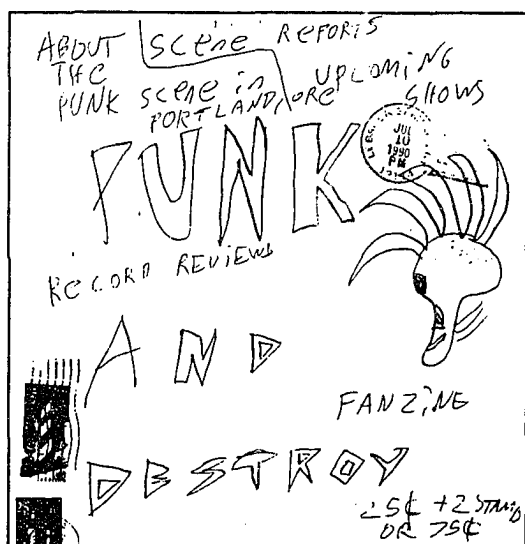
This ideal of the negative is bolstered by how anarchism came to be defined within the punk movement, and as punk was a main tributary into the zine stream, the zine world writ large. Dave Insurgent, lead singer for Reagan Youth, a punk band interviewed in *Maximumrocknroll*, asserts: "It just comes down to showing no authority over other people....Just no authority....Live your life the way you want to live it." The bassist, Al Pike, elaborates: "We don't preach political anarchy, just self anarchy....no one telling you what to do."⁸² While other definitions of anarchism exist in this modern bohemia, it is this ideal of "living your life the way you want to live it," meaning: "no one telling you what to do," which is the most prevalent.

One result of this is that simple practices of the straight publishing world are suspect as a form of "telling you what to do." A zine from Atlanta, fittingly called *Decontrol*, commands the reader to "make up your own number" instead of listing an issue number on their zine, and many zines, including some of the biggest like the old *Factsheet Five* and *Maximumrocknroll*, use page numbers intermittently, if at all.⁸³ But within the zine world itself, traditions begin to form. And because zines are a communicative medium certain protocol--like decipherability--must be followed. Or not. For any order at all may be suspect and something to rebel against. Having been criticized by Mike Gunderloy in a *Factsheet Five* review for putting together a sloppy zine, the publishers of *Sick Teen* respond that,

A punkzine laid out neat and tidy is like a punk show with reserved seating. Complaining about not being able to read them is like asking the band to stop playing so you can hear what lyrics the vocalist is singing....That is not what punk is about. Not tidy layouts, not slow and

carefully enunciated lyrics....A phrase like "a good and tidy punkzine" is self-contradictory. It can be good, it can be tidy, but not both. As you must have noted, *Sick Teen* is considered the ideal among most punkzine editors....⁸⁴

Stretching this anti-ideal of pure expression to its illogical conclusion is *Punk and Destroy* "about the punk scene in Portland, Ore." Hand lettered, smudged and badly reproduced, it is literally unreadable.⁸⁵ Also reveling in disorder, albeit more artfully done, is *Balcony of Ignorance*, whose frontpiece collage defies the reader to make sense of it.⁸⁶ As does the editor of *Frederick's Lament*, who, in addition to sending out his artfully crafted, but non-linear zine, sent me a NASA photo of Saturn, an official memo form filled out with a nonsensical rant, and a card explaining the germination process of lawn grass.⁸⁷ This was not the first nor will it be the last time I've received nonsensical text, images, and mass culture ephemera in the mail as part of a zine. What matters is unfettered, authentic expression, not necessarily making sense.



front cover of *Punk and Destroy* #1



front cover collage of
Balcony of Ignorance #8

This command to stop making sense has an honorable lineage in the cultural underground.

Ah
Eh he
He! hi! hi!
Oh
Hu! Hu! Hu!

Profession of faith by the author,

reads the preface to a book by Dadaist Theophile Dondey who once explained to a sympathetic friend that his writings were nonsensical because, "Like you, I despise society...and especially its excrescence, the social order."⁸⁸ Early in the 20th century, Dadaists responded to the "sense" and the "order" that was World War I, by creating nonsense. Similarly the refusal of some zines to make sense or refuse any order, can be considered a reaction against the order and sense of the enforced normalcy of more recent times. "I think the Reagan Years, paradoxically, were good to zines," Mike Gunderloy explains, as they, "encouraged people to think about being self-sufficient and to look for alternatives....A lot of people discovered they had a voice."⁸⁹

But the voice they found may not be so "self-sufficient." Al Pike's self anarchy of "No one telling you what to do" often becomes doing what someone is telling you not to do, case in point: "Punk rock is...getting a hair cut your parents hate." This is the paradox of negative identity. Nate Wilson, illustrating *who he is* in a comic, tellingly defines "My Own Me" through the distaste others have for him. Without their opposition, he writes "I would know I was just like them."⁹⁰



comic in Scrambled Eggs #1

Setting yourself apart from "them" is a part of this cultural underground. If you identify "they" as the forces of "Just Say No" puritanism, you celebrate substance abuse, as *Sauce* and *Exercise with Alcohol* do.⁹¹ And argue, even if half in jest, that "Drunk driving is a birthright, not a privilege, no matter what some pansy-assed teacher or cop tells you," as *Tussin' Up* counsels.⁹² If "they" are the legalized peddlers of alcohol, tobacco, and gratuitous sex, then you identify yourself as a Straight Edge punk and reject those things.

However, there is a serious liability in this sort of self identification. A negative identity only makes sense if you remain tied to what you are negating. Josh Norek of *Howhywuz*, *Howhyam* concludes his introduction with an explanation that his zine "stem[s] from a perpetual sickness of the sterile and homogeneous lifestyle found in

greater suburbia."⁹³ This begs the questions: What would happen if Josh moved out of the sterile landscape which he loathes? Would he lose the unauthentic world that is so necessary for constructing his opposing authentic one? Would he lose his identity? Would he stop putting out a zine?

People construct their identity, their ideals, and their practices in dialogue with society. Between zine publishers and mass society, this conversation is usually an argument. Zine writers compose themselves and give meaning to what they do by rejecting the dominant system. This is a problem as it leaves them tied to the culture they despise. Mainstream society, after all, is their prime interlocutor. Far from being autonomous, the negation makes them reliant.

Emancipatory narratives are always linked with repressive ones. This is their weakness as well as their strength, for it allows radicals to have a purchase on what they oppose.⁹⁴ However, *if it stays in this stage*, rebellion is not really a rebellion at all, merely a dependent relationship; what sociologist Richard Sennett calls a Bond of Rejection.⁹⁵

There is another problem as well. Negation is important to zine writers in defining what they are not, but it can leave them in the lurch as to their own definition of who they are. As psychoanalyst and social critic Erich Fromm pointed out, "Freedom From" is very different than "Freedom To." The former frees one from the weight of tradition and authority but leaves the individual isolated, powerless, and alienated. The latter is freedom to act in creating anew: new identities, new relationships, new cultures, new politics.⁹⁶ The negative identity of zines fulfills the first condition, but not

necessarily the second.

But zines are more than just vessels of negation, they are themselves creations through which people act on the *freedom to* try out new personalities, ideas, and politics. And as they are a communicative medium, through this medium zine writers and reader open up conversations outside mainstream society and within an alternative community. This network of zines offers the potential as a space for conversation through which individuals can both reflexively construct themselves and their ideals of an authentic world, and build a community of support, without having to identify entirely--either positively or negatively--with mainstream society. In other words: while the authentic self can not be constructed in isolation, the dominant society need not be its only play fellow. While mass society certainly proceeds an alternative community in terms of reflexive identity construction, it doesn't mean that it has the last word.

I'm a Loser, Baby

It takes a special breed of person--someone who doesn't even have a life to begin with--to shun the pleasures of the big city and lock themselves away to toil over something like this. Let's face it folks, all fanzines are put out by total fucking geeks, and *Stuff and Nonsense* is no exception.

- Andrew Johnston in *Stuff and Nonsense*⁹⁷

Freaks, Geeks, Nerds and Losers, that's who zines are made by. "If you had to stereotype a zine editor," says Cari Goldberg Janice, a later co-editor of *Factsheet Five*, "it would be someone who was usually a social misfit, who doesn't 'fit in' in many respects, who might be a loner who does better in a written forum than face to face."⁹⁸ Don Fitch, a long time science fiction fan, sketches a similar portrait of the typical SF

fan and zine writer as, "something of a nerd, rather above average in intelligence and below it in social skills... alienated from his peers and finding in s-f and Fandom a means of escaping some of the unpleasantness and stress of The Real World."⁹⁹¹⁰⁰

That zines become a haven for those "above average in intelligence, and below it in social skills" is not too surprising. The entry price is facility with the written word, but the compensation is anonymous communication. For people who like to write and want to communicate, but find it difficult to do so face-to-face, zines are a perfect solution. "How else could I get up the courage to talk to people at [punk] shows?" asks Mitzi Waltz of *Incoherent*. "'Wnta buy a zine?' isn't much as opening lines go, bit it's the best this congenitally shy gal can do."¹⁰¹

But however true it may be that zine writers are shy, awkward, and lacking social skills, there is more to the loser label than this. Zine writers are self-conscious losers; they wear their loserdom like a badge of honor. Mike Appelstein proudly displays rejection letters from jobs he has applied to as a writer in *Writer's Block*, in *Scatologica*, Jokie Wilson reprints his letter of rejection from Art school, and Doug begins his perzine with his ex-girlfriends accusation: "You've got no money, no friends, you live in a slum, you never do anything interesting and you're too damn fat to have sex. Your life is pathetic." The name of Doug's zine? *Pathetic Life*.¹⁰² Being a loser isn't something to accept quietly and then slink away, it is something to yell from the rooftops and explain to the world.

For those unsure what exactly a loser is or does, John Foster outlines "Three Days in the Life of a Loser" in *Ched*. A snippet:

9:00 PM-10:30PM: Go to local bar. Hang out with drummer for local underground band sensation. Get dissed: bad musical taste, bogus attitude. Protest charge of bogus attitude. Attempt to present a facade of cool. Talk about records so obscure that nobody present has heard of them. Fail to present facade of cool. Convince drummer for local underground pop sensation to leave at the same time so as to avoid appearance of total friendlessness.¹⁰³

The loser, as John unabashedly admits, is himself. It is also assumed to be whomever is on the receiving end of the zine. "You're a geek, C'mon admit it," accuses Aaron Lee in *Blue Persuasion*.

There's no need to be defensive...You don't have to act tough around me, or point the finger at someone else, or make apologies and hem and haw....

You're a geek.

Just like me.

So now that the horrible truth is out, we can stop pretending. And get to know each other. Hi, how are you?¹⁰⁴

Being a loser is so firmly imbedded as an identity in the zine world that Jerry Vile of *Fun* parodies it in his answer to "Why Publish?"

I publish because I was fat and wimpy in high school. Everyone beat me up. Even girls. I had a horrible complexion and my mother made me wear sissy clothes....

I was in good shape after 'Nam. Of course there was no parade for me when I got back. They called me babykiller. My dad had a parade after WWII. He was fond of telling me the reason was because he was a winner, they don't have parades for losers. I floated from town to town, trying to adjust and keep from killing innocent babies.

I couldn't hold a job. I was desperate, suicidal. I turned to crime...A book of matches changed my life. "How About a Career in Publishing?" Thank God for the Acme Institute. It's a good job. I get to work with my hands without getting my fingers dirty. I have a nice car, a beautiful wife, and a set of power tools that every neighbor would kill his mother to use. It is almost like being a God.¹⁰⁵

Jery's humor only works because it takes for granted a knowing audience; an audience that sees themselves and other zine writers as losers--and aren't ashamed. "For losers who strive to lose," the zine *Losers* proudly emblazons across its cover.¹⁰⁶

In a society that rewards winners like ours, how can people be proud to lose? Scholars--most notably philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche--have pointed out that marginalized cultures with little power over their physical circumstances, still retain a powerful weapon: the power over the interpretations which they give to the circumstances and conditions which surround them, and the ideals and character traits which they possess.¹⁰⁷ In the case of zine writers, while there isn't much they can do about being losers in a society that rewards interests they don't share and strengths they don't have, they can redefine the value of being a loser, and make a deficit into a benefit. And this is what happens in the world of zines. Labeled losers by mainstream society, zinesters write to one another, glorifying their loserdom, and in the process making this negative label a positive one, and in this re-naming claim it as their own. By extolling losers as role models zinesters create a new identity, a *Cool Loser* (as the title to a zine attests); an identity born in rejection, but transformed by aspiration.¹⁰⁸ In *Hex* for example, Jane draws a comic of karmic revenge on a boy who thought she was a "dork" in grade school; "I'm still a dork," she writes in the last frame, but now she's "also a punk." The glorification of the loser is the revenge of the nerds¹⁰⁹



revenge of the nerds in Hex #1

In the winter of 1993 a young, unknown folk-punk singer named Beck made it to the top of the charts with his song "Loser" and its chorus: "I'm a loser baby, so why don't you kill me." Beck, in true loser form, declined to headline dates on his first tour as a "star," and at times refused to play his hit song live at gigs, yet in spite of his best intentions, "Loser" became a popular hit.¹¹⁰ Beck struck a chord that had long been resonating within the cultural underground and zine world, but obviously being a Loser resonated outside of bohemia as well.

American society, always unequal, has gotten more so in the past two decades. In terms of wealth, three-quarters of income gains during the 1980s and 100 percent of

increases in wealth went to the top 20 percent of families in the United States, while the wages for most Americans have remained stagnant or have dropped.¹¹¹ The ability of the elite to maintain order in the face of this redistribution of the nation's wealth, and without--for the most part--the use of overt force, has to do with the fact that America, while less and less of a Democracy, *is* a fairly well functioning Meritocracy.

In a Meritocracy people have to compete for their place in society, those with merit move to the top and those who lack it drop to the bottom. It is a fixed class system, but not necessarily with fixed classes. While the elite class tends to be replaced by their children, the possibility exists for a bright young nobody to die a bright old somebody. And this Horatio Alger, rags-to-riches story is a powerful stabilizing influence. Anybody can be a winner, "A Dollar and a Dream" as the New York Lotto slogan goes. But this is no cause for congratulation, because where there are winners there are losers--and lots of them. The winners are celebrated with power, wealth and media representation. The losers--the majority of Americans--are invisible.¹¹²

But they are visible in zines. The prominence of the loser in the pages of the zine is certainly the handiwork of socially awkward individuals, losers in a *personal* sense. But loser ethics also stem from and appeal to those considered losers in a *societal* sense. That is: people who are losers not because they are awkward and shy, but simply because they are denied the wealth, power, and prestige of those few who are the winners in society. "Above average in intelligence and below it in social skills" is how Don Fitch describes science fiction fans. Overlapping this, however, is the membership description of another subculture which has had a major influence on zines: "Punk," explains Legs

McNeil, a high school drop out and co-founder of the first punk zine in 1975, "was what your teachers would call you...We'd been told all our lives we'd never amount to anything."¹¹³

Most people in America will "never amount to anything" as the concept is defined in our society. They won't be the "Best and the Brightest" because what they excel at doesn't fit the elite criteria of merit, because the traditional ladders of education and social services are being dismantled, because they consciously reject the paucity of a life spent in competition, or because they are just regular people, nothing special. But by celebrating the fact that "we'd never amount to anything," the zine world does amount to something. It becomes a place to forge and define an identity. And as they are a medium of communication, zines become the framework of a community. "What's the matter?" ask the editors of *Losers*, "The jockos and beauty queens don't take you seriously? Don't kill yourself. We'll love you and feed you."¹¹⁴ Zines foster a community of "losers" within a society that celebrates winners.

1. Josh Abelon, *The Elana Rosa Veiga Torres Newsletter for This World and Beyond*, V.1, #1, July 7, 1991, Claremont CA. Josh also puts out a music zine: *Cramped*.
2. See for example Robert Park. "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation," and Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," both in Richard Sennett's *Classic Essays in the Culture of Cities*, (NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969). Both Park and With were heavily indebted to the insights of German sociologist Georg Simmel.
3. This definition is strongly influenced by anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz.
4. Letter from David Demming in Jen Payne, *The Latest News*, V.4, #2, Summer 1992, p.4.
5. John Banks, *Budzine*, #1, May 1993, Tucson, AZ, p.3.
6. David B. Greenberger, *The Duplex Planet*, #112, 1991, Saratoga Springs, NY. no page.
7. Jen Payne, "Jen on...The National Debt," *The Latest News*, V.4, #2, Fall 1992, Clinton CT, p.6
8. John "Bud" Banks, "News Casting," *Budzine*, #9, March 1994, Tucson, AZ, p. 5.
9. Vicki Rosenzweig, *Quipo*, #1, 1993, NYC, 1993, no page.
10. Dennis W. Brezina, *America's at our Doorstep*, September/October 1991, V.4, #4, Churchton, MD.
11. Terry Ward, *Notes from the Dump*, Acworth, NH.
12. Ernest Mann, *Little Free Press*, Little Falls, MN.
13. Aaron Cometbus, *Cometbus*, #31, early 1990s, Berkeley, CA.
14. Aaron Cometbus, *Cometbus*, #31, early 1990s, Berkeley, CA, p. 72.
15. Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., Robert C. Tucker, ed. (NY: Norton, 1978), p.63.
16. Heidi Branton, *Rhode Islanduh*, Olympia, WA; *8-Track Mind*, East Detroit, MI.
17. George "Lan" Laskowski, *Lan's Lantern*, #34, 1990, Bloomfield Hills, MI; in the Factsheet Five Collection, New York State Library (FS5-NYSL).
18. Leah Zeldes Smith, *STET*, November 1990, Wheeling, IL, p.25; (FS5-NYSL).
19. definition from the *American Heritage Dictionary*.
20. Brian Shapiro, "Letters," *Factsheet Five*, #22, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p.66.

21. see Frederick Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, #146, (July/August, 1984).
22. See in particular E.P Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, (NY: Vintage, 1966).
23. Aaron Cometbus, *Cometbus*, #31, early 1990s, Berkeley, CA, p.82.
24. Lisa Maslowe, *The Catbox Room*, #1, July 1993, San Francisco, CA, no page.
25. Eldon Potter, *Exact Change*, #3, September 1991, St Paul, MN; (FS5-NYSL).
26. Sara Lorimer, group interview, December 29, 1993, Olympia WA.
27. John Newberry, *Why Publish?*, Mike Gunderloy, ed. (Albany: Pretzel Press, 1989) p. 25; from mechanicals (FS5-NYSL).
28. Kali Amanda Browne, personal interview, June 22, 1992, NYC.
29. This letter, by BVI, appeared in *Factsheet Five*:
 What I want to do is form groups of five people who will correspond with each other and who will not refer to their sex/gender, race, economic status, or sexual orientation for a period of six months. At the end of that time, the group will vote to decide whether or not to reveal their identities in terms of the above categories. The purpose is to try to learn just how profoundly we identify with those categories and to try to determine other levels at which humans can communicate. Interested parties should use gender-ambiguous names or aliases, and inquiries may be sent to...
 "Letters," *Factsheet Five*, #32, 1989, Rensselaer, NY, p.106.
30. Franetta L. McMillian, *Sweet Jesus*, #1, early 1990s, Newark, DE.
31. I don't think that it's any accident that the two people who I discovered "passing" as others in their zines were women and non-white, and are thus acutely aware of the constraints of singular identity.
32. Lindsay Van Gelder, "The Strange Case of the Electronic Lover," *Computerization and Controversy*, Charles Dunlop and Rob Kling, eds. (NY: Academic Press), pp. 365-75.; David Myers, "'Anonymity is Part of the Magic': Individual Manipulation of Computer-Mediated Communication Contexts," *Qualitative Sociology*, 10(3), (Fall 1987) pp.251-66.
33. Ironically, the issue which carried Franetta's character based on the white supremacist was not carried by the local "liberal" bookstore because it was thought to be too racist.

34. Jim Corsaro, "A Micropress in Every Home: The Factsheet Five Collection," paper delivered at the Society of American Archivists Meeting, September 4 1993, New Orleans, LA.
35. Julie Gerstein, cited in Tamara Chuang, "These Publications are Personal," *The Philadelphia Enquirer*, April 30, 1995, sec. CH, p.1.
36. Paul Goldstein, *Goldstein: A Newsletter About Me. Paul*, 1992, Long Island City, NY; Richard J. Sagall, *Interesting!*, premier issue, 1994, Bangor, ME.
37. see for example Shelia Muto, "Zines of the Times: Have an Obsession? Then Why Not Publish Your Own Magazine," *Wall Street Journal*, September 1. 1995, p.A1.
38. Frederick Wertham, *The World of Fanzines*, (IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1973), p.35.
39. Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, Carolyn F Ulrich, *The Little Magazine in America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 193
40. *Optimistic Pezzimist*, *Roulez*, and *Bruce on a Stick* respectively.
41. Joshua, "How to Use a Zine," *Notes from the Lighthouse*, #7, Eureka CA, p.2
42. Stiv Bators, "3rd Generation Nation," 1978, on Dead Boys, *We Have Come For Your Children*, Sire, 1978.
43. Elayne Wechsler, "Why Publish?," *Factsheet Five*, #27, 1988, Rensselaer, NY, p.54.
44. Jim Hogshire, *Pills-a-go-go*, Spring 1993, Seattle WA.
45. The media in America was at one time intensely personal. Newspapers, often written, printed and distributed by the same person, carried the ideas of the individual publisher. James Franklin, Ben's older brother and publisher of the *New England Courant*, for example, used his paper in 1721 to make personal and scurrilous attacks on Cotten Mather and other members of the Boston elite, using the issue of a smallpox epidemic and lambasting the controversial treatment of inoculation which Mather supported. While the word storm (and the epidemic) raged for months, Franklin never considering checking up on the facts of the case: whether inoculation worked. He was not alone. While gaining headway in the sciences, the idea of a fact as something distinct from the editor's personal feelings and ideas was foreign to newspaper publishers of the Colonial era. Biased media and personal attacks are still with us today, but what separates Franklin's day from our own is that in the 18th century both the publisher and his readers understood that what was printed was personal expression, the ideas of the teller.
This distinction between the individual as a topic, and the personal as a mode of address is an important one. One could well argue that the individual as a topic of the mass media is more prevalent than ever. Television dramas focus on the trials and tribulations of the individual. Talk shows and tabloid gossip rags revel in the personal lives of the famous

and their aspirants. Even major political events like the Gulf War or presidential elections get reduced to discussions of the individual character of respective leaders. But what is missing is the personal connection in the telling. Part of this has to do with the professionalization of journalistic writing and the ideal of depersonalized "objective" journalism which began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. And part of it has to do with the very medium of mass communications itself--casting out a message to anonymous millions. The perennial rise of opinionated radio talk show hosts from Father Caughlin to Howard Stern and Rush Limbaugh is the mass media's response to this loss of the personal teller, zines are the underground's reply.

Thomas C. Leonard, *The Power of the Press: The Birth of American Political Reporting*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News*, (NY: Basic Books, 1978).

46. Bernard Bailyn, ed. *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776*, V.I 1750-1765, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1965).

47. Gene Mahoney, publisher of *Good Clean Fun*, in "Why Publish?," *Factsheet Five*, #29, 1989, no page.

48. George Orwell and Reginald Reynolds, eds. *British Pamphleteers VI*, p.15; cited in Bailyn, p 3-4.

49. Bailyn, pp. 15-16

50. John Dickinson, "The Late Regulations Respecting the British Colonies," 1765, Philadelphia; reprinted in Bailyn, p.688.

51. John Dickinson, "Letter from a Farmer in Pennsylvania," 1768, Philadelphia; reprinted in Bailyn.

52. **politics** The science and art of government; the science dealing with the form, organization and administration of a state or part of one, and with the regulation of its relations with other states.

political Of, belonging, or pertaining to the state or body of citizens, its government and policy, esp. in civil or secular affairs.

Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1987.

53. Dishwashin' Pete, *Dishwasher*, Portland, OR.

54. Patrick Splat, *Loring Punk*, #1, 1993, Minneapolis, MN.

55. Adam Bregman, *Shithappy*, #3, 1993(?), LA, CA, p.9.

56. Josh MacPhee, *Fenceclimber*, #2, early 1990s, Oberlin, OH, no page.

57. Lisa L. Zungang, *Griselda*, 1993, Richmond, IN, no page.

58. KJ, Erin, Rebecca, and Mary, *Finster*, #3, 1992, Arcata CA, no page.
59. Jason Page, *Cheap Douchebag*, #16, early 1990s, Hollywood, FL, no page.
60. Editor, *Forever & A Day*, #7, 1993, Seattle, WA, no page.
61. Poll conducted of 1045 registered voters by *U.S. News and World Report* reported in Michael Barone, "The New America," July 10, 1995. p.22.
62. Sara Lorimer, Tina Herschelman, and Paul Schuster of *Pinto*, personal interview, December 29, 1993, Olympia, WA.
63. Edgar "Bolt" Upright, from *Why Publish?*, Mike Gunderloy, ed. Edgar is the publisher of *Tales of the Sinister Harvey*.
64. Jean-Jaques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, (NY: Washington Square Press, 1967), p.7.
65. This authentic self marches through history: reappearing in the 19th century as the young Marx's "species-being," lying at the root of existentialism in the first half of the 20th century, Norman Mailer's "White Negro" beat of the 1950s; the idea of living an authentic life eaves through the Port Huron Statement of the SDS in 1962, and colors the New Left that follows.
66. Al Quint quoted in J.C. Hertz, "Zine Stream: An Undercurrent Magazine Culture Explodes," in *New York Perspectives*, May 6-12, 1993, p.10.
67. cited in Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society*, (NY: Anthem, 1970), p. 26.
68. David Mandl, talk at the Libertarian Book Club, April 17, 1995, New York City.
69. Freedom, personal interview, June 13, 1992, New York City.
70. Gene Mahoney, "Why Publish?," *Factsheet Five*, #30, 1989, Rensselaer, NY, p.95.
71. Berman, p. 26.
72. Michael Harrington, "We Few, We Happy Few, We Happy Bohemians: A Memoir of the Culture Before the Counterculture," 1972; in Cesar and Marigay Grana eds., *On Bohemia: The Code of the Self Exiled*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), p. 781.
73. William Godwin, *An Inquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Volume II, London: 1793, pp. 846-7; cited in James Joll *The Anarchists*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p.19.

Setting the stage for Godwin's passion for original and experiential thought is Gerard Winstanley: "Men must speak their own experienced words, and must not speak thoughts"; cited in Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*, (London: Penguin, 1975), p.369.

74. cited Joll, p.46.

75. Mike Gunderloy, *Factsheet Five*, #15, 1985, Rensselaer, NY, no page.

76. In 1886 Charles Gallo threw a bottle of vitriol from one of the galleries of the Paris stock exchange into the midst of the brokers and their clerks; he followed this up with three random revolver shots which did not hit anybody. At his trial--where he insisted on addressing the judge as Citizen President--he shouted "Long live revolution! Long live anarchism! Death to the bourgeois judiciary! Long live dynamite! Bunch of idiots!"

from Jean Maitron, *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France (1880-1914)* (Paris 1951); cited in Joll.

77. Joll, *The Anarchists*, p.111.

78. Born Against is the name of a punk band whose lead singer puts out the zines *I*, *Yeast Roll* and *Dear Jesus*.

79. George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1934), p.135.

80. Matt, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #85, June 1990, San Francisco, no page.

81. Kevin Person, Jr., *The I Hate People Gazette*, #5, early 1990s, Pennsauken, NJ.; Annon., *Oh Cool Scene Zine*, no address, no date.

82. Interview with Al Pike and Dave Insurgent of Reagan Youth, *Maximumrocknroll*, #4, Jan-Feb, 1983, San Francisco, no page.

83. Crash Rats, *Decontrol*, Duluth GA, no date; (FS5-NYSL).

84. "Letters," *Factsheet Five*, #20, 1986, no page. Incidentally, the cover of this issue of FS5 shows an illustration of a woman in ancient Egyptian dress dumping mainstream magazines in the garbage.

85. David Alvord, *Punk and Destroy*, #1, late 1980s-early 1990s, Beaverton, OR; (FS5-NYSL).

86. Claude Bottom, *Balcony of Ignorance*, #8, Summer 1990, Newmarket, NH.

87. *Frederick's Lament*, 1991, Harvest, AL.
88. cited in Cesar and Marigay Grana eds., *On Bohemia: The Code of the Self Exiled*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), p.7
89. quoted in Jim Hogshire, "You Can Be The Publisher," *Nuvo*, December 26, 1990-January 2, 1991, p.9. Jim Hogshire is the publisher of the zine *Pills-a-go-go*.
90. Nate Wilson, *Scrambled Eggs*, #1, 1993, Albany, NY, no page.
91. Zak Sally and Mike Haeg, *Sauce*, 1993, Oakland, CA; Bruce Clifton, *Exercise with Alcohol*, 1994, Portland, OR.
92. cited in Jim Hogshire, "You Can Be The Publisher," *Nuvo*, December 26, 1990-January 2, 1991, p.8.
93. Josh Norek, *Howhywuz*, *Howhyam*, 1992, Albany, NY area, p.1.
94. Terry Eagleton, seminar October 17-19, 1991, New York Marxist School, NYC.
95. Richard Sennett, *Authority*, (NY: Norton, 1980). In particular see pp.15-49.
96. Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, (NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1941), p.270
97. Andrew Johnston, "I'm a Nerd," *Stuff and Nonsense*, #2, 1993, NYC, no page.
98. quoted in J.C. Hertz, p. 10
99. Don Fitch, personal letter, April 22, 1994.
"A gallery of grotesques," is how Damon Knight once described The Futurians, an early and famed science fiction club of which he was a member.
The Futurians, (NY: John Day, 1977), p.149.
100. Describing parties he used to throw for zine publishers at his house in upstate New York, Cari's co-editor and FS5 founder Mike Gunderloy, highlights their odd dynamic: people would come, talk to one another for a bit, then invariable retreat alone to corners, walls, nooks and crannies and start reading each other's zines.
Mike Gunderloy, personal interview, December 6, 1992, New York City.
101. Mitzi Waltz, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, #23, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, no page.
102. Mike Appelstein, *Writer's Block*, #8, Late 1991/Early 1992, Spotswood, NJ.; Jekie X. Wilson, *The Olecatronical Scatologica Chronicle*, July 1991, Tucson, AZ.; Pathetic Doug, *Pathetic Life*, #11, April 1995, San Francisco, CA.

103. John Foster, "Three Days in the Life of a Loser," *Ched*, #2, October 28, 1993, Portland, OR, no page.
104. Aaron Lee, "Your Reflection," *Blue Persuasion*, #4, 1994, Lexington, KY, pp. 58-9
105. Jery Vile, *Why Publish?*, Mike Gunderloy, ed.; (FS5-NYSL).
106. *Losers*, #2, Polk, LA, no date; (FS5-NYSL).
107. Writing in 1887, Nietzsche attempted to trace the genealogy of Western morality. Its genesis, he argued, was in Judaism, and its character stemmed from the fact that Jews were slaves. Held in bondage, the Jews inverted their wretched state by creating a moral order in which powerlessness, introspection, and other traits of servitude are virtues. By doing this they remade themselves as the virtuous (and symbolically victorious), and cast their powerful enemies as wicked (and morally vanquished). This morality became the basis for Christian ethics, as early Christians, themselves oppressed, gathered around the figure of Christ: the crucified and powerless son of God the all powerful.
Nietzsche despised these *slave ethics*, as he called them, for being "reactive," that is: not created *tabula rasa* but in reaction against dominant ethics. While his ideal of a pure ethics, like that of an authentic primordial self, is flawed, his insight into how a deficit can be turned on its head and made an advantage is brilliant. (For as much as he loathed slave morality he acknowledged that it was the foundation of all that was beautiful and intelligent in the West.)
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, (NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1887/1956).
108. Wendy and Monica, *Cool Loser*, #2, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA, no date; (FS5-NYSL).
109. Jane, *Hex*, #1, 1993, Olympia, WA, p.49
110. Beck, "Loser," 1993; Talk of the Town, "Beck is Beck," *The New Yorker*, April 18, 1994, p. 36; David Sprague, "'Loser' Has Made Beck a Real Winner," *New York Newsday*, March 7, 1994, p.47.
111. Editorial, *New York Times*, April 18, 1995, p. A24. The data comes from a study done by Edward N. Wolff for The Twentieth Century Fund.
112. For an interesting discussion of the problems of the American meritocracy, see Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites, and the Betrayal of Democracy*, (NY: Norton, 1995).
113. quoted in Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming*, (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 131. McNeil co-founded *Punk*
114. The Raven, *Losers*, #2, no date, Polk, LA, inside cover; (FS5-NYSL).

Community

Let's all be alienated together in a newspaper

- John Klima, editor of *Day and Age*¹

Zines are an intensely personal medium, but as a medium their primary function is communication. As such, zines are as much about the communities that arise out of their circulation as they are artifacts of individual expression.

The issue of community is nothing new in American political discourse, discussion of the myriad threats to community are commonplace. Still, in recent years the issue of community has moved front and center in national political debate. Community, the consensus goes, is in danger. Some ascribe its eclipse to the influx of immigrants and "outsiders," or the breakdown of traditional values that once honored community. Others lay the blame on geographic mobility which undermines place based community, an unstable economy which discourages work based communities, a political ideology which idealizes the individual and nuclear family unit and celebrates private property, or the erosion of truly public spaces in which strangers can interact.² All these theories have credence, but is community really disappearing?

In a sense Yes, and it has been for a while. One of the corollaries of the growth of a mass society like our own is the replacement of face to face *primary* relations with indirect *secondary* exchanges.³ Community, what sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies called *Gemeinschaft*, is cemented by primary relations and the institutions where these interactions take place. Mass society, or *Gesellschaft*, cannot afford the luxury of such intimacy. The very complexity of such a society necessitates a nation of laws,

procedures, and bureaucracies as opposed to a circle of personal interaction. As such, mores are replaced by laws, authority moves from the family to the state, education is displaced into schools, and so on. In this process of society building, however, a dehumanization of interaction takes place. Relations between people become relations between positions and things, this, as Max Weber pointed out, being the very essence of a rational, bureaucratic society.⁴ As Tonnies distinguishes the two: "*Gemeinschaft* (community) should be understood as a living organism, *Gesellschaft* (society) as a mechanical aggregate and artifact."⁵

Threatened with the loss of the intimate and "living" primary relations due to the increase in secondary, "mechanical" exchanges, people react back--using the resources they have available to fashion solutions to the problems they identify. One recent result has been the resurrection of community...but one detached from society: ethnic, gender, or sexual identity enclaves turning inward toward their commonality; or "gated communities" of the rich building walls to keep the rest of society out. In this sense communities, communities *against* society, are reappearing.

But other forms of community are forming as well: communities which honor humanized, primary interaction, while adapting to the realities of a mobile and dynamic society; communities which celebrate affinity yet don't wall off strangers. The world of zines is one such attempt to create a community, or, more accurately, a network of communities. For it is through zines that writers and readers strive to construct community within mass society.

Connection

I publish for myself and my friends--even those I haven't met yet.

- Dave Walbridge, publisher of *1 Bit Shoe*⁶

When talking to zine writers there are two words I hear over and over again: *control* and *connection*. Control over what, how, and when they produce, and connection to the people they produce for and receive zines from. While I will discuss the issue of control in the next chapter, the issue of connection speaks to the heart of the zine world as a community.

"I love writing to people," explains *Slug and Lettuce*'s Christine Boarts. "I used to pick up *Maximumrocknroll* and go through their listings from cover to cover and write to everyone there." But the communication sought isn't merely one way, the key is interaction with others; Chris writes to get a reply. She continues: "Some days I pick up my mail and it's like...I love it...I go home and read through it all and it's the greatest feeling....just that feeling of being connected with all those people."⁷ Written correspondence has a long tradition within this country, particularly amongst political or cultural outcasts, but this still does not explain why one wants to feel connected to strangers.

Part of the motivation is loneliness, pure and simple. A regular feature of *The Bloated Tick* is the "Letter Beggars Department," where publisher Paul Dion prints the names and addresses of people "begging" for personal letters.⁸ But loneliness is never pure and simple. The loneliness that creates "letter beggars" comes from someplace.

That "someplace" is a general society that fetishizes the individual and the personal as an abstraction, yet can make primary relationships with any person outside

the immediate family difficult. "After relocating here...twelve years ago, and having a child over ten years ago, my social life has withered and nearly died," writes Robert DuPree in *Notes from Earth*, explaining why he is starting a zine.

My professional friends...are usually working on their own projects, often at night, and socializing is both erratic and difficult. I've been *very* fulfilled by marriage and fatherhood...but still....it gets lonely.

Not depressingly, unnervingly, or psychotically lonely...not Travis Bickle lonely, but...lonely.⁹

That "someplace" is also "no place" as it is for Chris, who writes in *Punk Pals* that he is "Bored senseless! Anyone willing to write to a 17 year old in hicksville U.S.A., then please do so."¹⁰ And that "someplace" is an all too real place, in the case of Richard Stazenski, an Arizona prison. "I'm pleading HELP!!," Richard writes in *Maximumrocknroll*,

I need letters from punx everywhere. I need to keep in touch with what "reality" I know....My family has written me off as a mistake and my friends are living their own lives....So lately all I've gotten is stuff saying "I should find God and then go join the Marines."

So, if anyone wants to write letters to a depressed "hardcore convict" (pun intended, sarcasm meant) that's stuck in a world where racism, hate and ignorance run amok--I will write back! Also, if anyone wants art for 'zines--I do nothing but draw--I've got a whole year left before I go to the parole board.¹¹

Richard's poignant plea highlights a distinctive feature of this loneliness. The personal deprivation described above is not absolute, but *relative*. Richard, for example, stuck inside a state pen is not alone: privacy is in short supply in prison. Nor is he not receiving letters: his parents and old friends may have abandoned him, but the evangelical Christians have found him. Instead, what Richard is deprived of is the

"reality" that he knew--his interest in punk rock, his anti-racist, anti-hate, anti-ignorance values. Richard is surrounded by people, but none who understand him.

"The people I hang around with couldn't care less of what I have to say--about direct action, world events, vivisection, etc.," complains Tin-Ear, the publisher of *The Happy Thresher*, "but by publishing my own zine I reach people that do care."¹² This ideal of putting out a zine as a way of "meeting people who have a vision similar to mine," as zine publisher Feral Faun reiterates, is a key aspect of zines.¹³ The loneliness that zine publishers are overcoming doesn't arise from isolation as much as it does from their own alienation.



discarding communities in Bunyon

This has been a function of zines since their beginnings in science fiction. SF zine publisher Don Fitch explains: "For many of us Fandom was like a family in many ways, and better, because we shared significant literary and intellectual backgrounds, which most of us didn't do in the case of our 'real' families."¹⁴ As a surrogate family, zines provide the sort of primary bonds that real families do, but as the old saying goes: you can't choose your family, but you can pick your friends. Zines allow writers and readers to select communities of choice rather than those born of circumstance. For example, in a comic in *Bunyon*, Jay McLaughlin, illustrates her severing ties with her old world.¹⁵

Distanced from communities of circumstance, the zine writer and reader is free to enter into a new community. "Whenever I get mail with some bizarre title in the return address, my wife says [it's] 'something from that club you're in.'" *Pah's* Mark Morelli writes, describing how zines opened his eyes to

just how many people--diverse and weird and vulgar and solipsistic and brilliant and funny and indulgent and angry and inventive and so on--are out there still placing their faith in the written word....and though I've never met any of them personally, I share the correspondence of their zines, which we all giddily delight in calling a club of our own.¹⁶

A Club of Our Own

Communities need institutions. A community is "a collection of people occupying a more or less clearly defined area," according to Robert Park, but, as he elaborates, "a community is more than that, it is a collection of institutions."¹⁷ A club needs a clubhouse. And when a community is *not* defined geographically, as the zine community is not, these institutions take on increased importance. Zines are both the medium of expression as well as the institutional body that facilitates the sort of sustained primary

connections that are necessary for a viable community.

Every zine is a community institution as each draws links between itself and other zines. Most print reviews of other zines and information on how to get them, and many zines include extensive "letters" columns, sometimes spreading letters throughout their zine, drawing no sharp distinction between these and other content.¹⁸ Letters and reviews, and the importance that zines give to them, ensure that zines are not only the expression of an individual publisher, but a conduit for other's expressions as well.¹⁹

This notion of a zine as a community institution--a club house--is conspicuous in zines like Bonnie Jo's *Letter Parade*, which as her title suggests, has an impressive letters section. The issue covering the month of February 1990 includes news from:

- ND, from Pullayup, Washington, on bad weather in the Northwest.
- JS, California: real experience of the earthquake, and the media overplaying the event for ratings.
- SL, Berkeley, California: Graduation (after 8 years) from college, and first-hand news about the earthquake.
- Susanna Campbell, a slightly eccentric personal discourse and history on lifesavers--the candy and flotation device.
- Comix by Pagan Kenedy, on her loony southern, Confederate ancestors (with a mild attack on Yankees)
- Cousin Mimi: all her friends moving to CA, news on one year old son, and a garden report.
- LY, Madison, WI: Graduating from college and the grim prospects of taking a job within a system that you don't like.
- LSR, Sandstone, MN: A federal prisoner with news of his job as a clerk/typist, regulations in prison, and inhumane treatment.

The overall effect of *Letter Parade* is a perzine multiplied. Reading it is like

stepping into a small, unpretentious community. But Bonnie Jo's zine constitutes a community in another way. Of the ten printed pages which make up her February issue, only four are written by Bonnie Jo herself. Of the remaining six, two are composed of the letters synopsized above, an essay by R.A. Bairnes on remembering Christmas as a child fills two more, and the last couple are made up from reproduced clippings of odd world events compiled by C.J. Magson. (The latter including an account of a man stopped by police for "walking oddly" and found to have twenty-one homing pigeons stuffed into his clothes.)

Although zines tend to be one person shows, having multiple contributors to a zine is not unusual. But *Letter Parade* is different: contributions are not edited by Bonnie Jo to *fit into* her zine, they are reproduced and bound together to *make up* her zine. Each component, with different type face, different styles, different lay out, different author, stands on its own. Bonnie Jo isn't an editor of her creation, she is an organizer of a virtual community.²⁰

This form wasn't invented by Bonnie Jo, it is derivative of an APA, a zine "jointly written by the subscribers, each of whom prints up his own part and gets copies of everyone else's in return," as defined in the pages of *Factsheet Five*.²¹ APA is short for Amateur Press Association, and while the form makes up only a minority of zines in the zine world today, it has strong historical roots.

APAs began in the United States in the first decades of the 19th century as both a creation of and a reaction to the beginnings of the mass circulation Penny Press. The new economy of mass media expanded the notion of a "literate public," but also ceded

many voices to the sidelines. In the new mass production world where one product was sold to hundreds of thousands of individuals, the creative powers of most individuals were not needed. Put in a different way, within the Weltanschauung of the new mass culture industry, many people's ideas and creativity were simply *unimportant*.

But these unimportant people still wrote and still created, refusing to be merely a "market," passively consuming the culture prepared for them. Beginning as early as 1812, "amateur papers" (in sharp distinction to the new "professional press") were being printed, in the beginning by children, but as time went by, more and more by adults. Using both toy presses and printing equipment scavenged from the professional press, amateur journalism grew by leaps and bounds in the post Civil War period. An 1875 directory listed over 500 writers and editors and almost as many publications.²² These publications plagiarized popular authors, published corny prose, and reproduced engravings. As with zines today, these amateur presses printed pretty much anything their publisher felt like expressing.

Michelle Rau, writing the only history of zines I've found, begins her history with these amateur presses. Although I prefer to set the date back and throw my net wider, I think Rau has a valid point. For it is at this time that the notion of a press as something quite distinct from both a commercial mass press, a radical political one, and high art dilettantism enshrined in "little magazines" is born. Perhaps more importantly, also born at this time were organizations built by these amateur press writers that functioned as networks of distribution and communication. In 1876, NAPA or the National Amateur Press Association was formed, superseding a number of regional associations and giving

a national coherence to this growing form (as well as spawning groups like the Ladies Amateur Press Association and a "Negro APA"). It was in the NAPA that the tradition of individuals sending their writings to a central mailer, who then collated and redistributed them, was first codified, and the name APA came to stand not only for the organization that produced the zine but the zine itself.²³

The model of APAs was picked up by science fiction fans in this century as a perfect medium to bind together fans scattered geographically who communicated better in print than in person. By sustaining a continuing conversation, an APA builds a community of its own. Writers stop sending in completely autonomous contributions and no longer address their responses solely to the editor/organizer, but instead start writing contextually and in response to one another.²⁴ The effect is similar to the newsgroups on a computer BBS, but long before personal computers and the Internet this practice of communication and the virtual community that it produces was taking place in the zine world.

While APAs take the letters section of most zines and extend it to its logical extreme: a zine of all letters; other zines expand the reviews section: creating a zine entirely made of reviews. Science fiction fans call these Data Zines, but a more recent and popular term--and a more accurate one--is network zines.

Ashley Parker Owens regularly puts out *Global Mail*--"to help as many people connect as possible"--and lists a dizzying number of individuals seeking letters, zines looking for contributors, mail art shows looking for entries, and listings for exchanges.²⁵ "Send me belly button fuzz, dolls, and images of Madonna, and I'll send

you something special" Patty M. writes in. Another: "Send a postcard describing your day; a mini-journal, an odd event, where you went and who you talked to, get a day in my life in return. Paul Anonymous."²⁶ *Face*, a self-described "networker" zine, lists eight pages of zine reviews, calls for submissions to zines and mail art shows, and concludes with a page of names and addresses with no other explanation than the word "contacts."²⁷ But of all the network zines, *Factsheet Five* is the most prominent. Begun by Mike Gunderloy in May of 1982 as a one page mimeograph listing six zines with a run of fifty issues, it still continues today. Two editors and fifty-six issues later, it averages over 140 pages, reviews over 1400 zines, and has a print run of over 15,000.

Early on Mike saw the potential of *Factsheet Five* to cross fertilize the different strains of underground publishing happening in the early 1980s. "I realized that there were people publishing everywhere who didn't know each other," Mike explains, and "It was incredibly obvious to me that we were all doing the same thing...[so] the one thing that I consciously did at the start was to try to get out of [that] insular community."²⁸ And it seemed as if the people in these insular communities of science fiction, punk rock, anarchism, poetry, and so on desired to cross over as well. In the earlier years of *Factsheet Five*, zine listings were not categorized by genre. Asked at one point by a reader why he didn't do this as it would make his zine easier to read, Mike responded that "every time I suggest doing such a thing the readers get all upset and write me nasty letters."²⁹ Part of the objection, Mike goes on to state, had to do with the distrust of *any* order. But part had to do that people were enjoying the crossover that the lack of genre categories encouraged. "I always vow to only skim through, reading titles to detect

something in my interest area," writes in Janet Fox, "But invariably I eventually read almost all the reviews...if somebody has reached a new level of consciousness raising hogs in Idaho, I certainly want to know it."³⁰

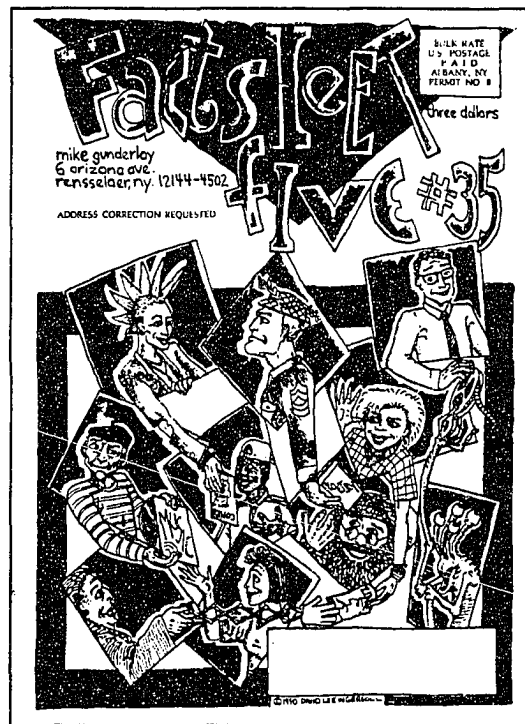
With the help of cross pollinating institutions like *Factsheet Five*, zines began to slip their roots as fanzines of their host cultures and take their position under a wider umbrella as zines qua zines. To zine writers and readers it seemed as if "a true subculture is forming, one that crosses a number of boundaries," as described by William Peschel in a personal letter to Mike, "Christians, gays, artists, occultists, bowlers, historians, prisoners, diarists. I can't think of a place where one can be exposed to a wider range of thought."³¹ "It's a global network out there," *The Sweet Ride*'s Mookie Xenia concurs, "and I want to be part of it, expand my horizons and let my written scenarios warp or delight people..."³²

This conglomeration of disparate publications and publishers developed certain traits indicative of a community: a shared lingo that appears in a glossary for the first time in the thirteenth issue of *Factsheet Five*; a zine, Jim Romanesko's *Obscure*, that gives community news on the zine world and refers to a novel species known as "notable zinesters";³³ and even a philanthropist: Tim Yohannan, editor of *Maximumrocknroll*, who distributes the entire yearly profit of his zine amongst other zine writers and individuals undertaking similar projects.

But the type of community being produced and discussed in the world of zines has novel characteristics. In fact, the word "community" as a term is used rarely, if ever, among zine writers, instead the favored term is "Network." This ideal of a networked

community is visualized in the cover illustration for *Factsheet Five* #35³⁴

A punk with spiked hair, soldier in uniform, businessman with a tie, a older beatnik, a young black man, a trendy teenage girl, a bearded hippie, a straight looking young woman, and older gypsy woman, and a four eyed space alien, all pictured in their separate frames, but all passing zines, comix, poetry, music, and film to one another and between these frames. This visualization of individuals each in their own frame is revealing. If we tend to think of community traditionally as forging bonds of commonality, strengthened through shared tradition; what a zine network proposes is something different: a community of people linked via bonds of difference, each sharing their originality. "Reading ALL the reviews helps me see where our differences lie," writes Luke McGuff in a letter to *Factsheet Five*.³⁵



the network in Factsheet Five #35

This model is the very essence of a libertarian community: each individual free to be who they want and free to cultivate their own interests, while at the same time sharing in each other's differences. It allows people the intimacy and primary connections of a close community that they don't find in a mass society, but with none of the stifling of difference that usually comes hand in hand. This community has long been the dream of Anarchists, resonates with the virtual community of the Internet, and describes the ideal of the place that is bohemia.

The Scene

The Scene is a loose confederation of publications, bands, shows, distribution networks, radio stations, cafes, and book stores. It's the people who create and staff the above and share a distaste for the dominant mass, consumer society. The Scene is one of the denser constellations that make up the larger network of the zine world. The Scene, by any other name, is bohemia.

The word bohemia conjures up images of Paris cafes, cold water New York City walk ups, and San Francisco poetry readings. Certainly bohemia still exists in these locales and zines help to weave the scene together in these places, but more common than a New York or San Francisco "scene zine" are ones like that written by Eric, who publishes to "rave on and on about the scene back home": The Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania;³⁶ or "scene reports" from Huntsville, Alabama.³⁷ These are bohemias in backwater towns and suburbs scattered throughout the United States.

Bohemia today is first and foremost not *a* Bohemia--it is many and they are

widely dispersed. As C. Carr coins it, it is a *Bohemian Diaspora*, and "for the first time in 150 years, bohemia can't be pinpointed on the map."³⁸ The reasons for this dispersal are complex. One reason is that bohemia followed in the shadow of mainstream society--spreading out of the cities and into the suburbs. But it is also linked to more recent phenomenon: gentrification and a superheated culture market.

While the Beats of the 50s and the Counterculturists of the 60s benefitted from the cheap urban quarters left in the wake of the middle-class white flight to the suburbs, bohemians of the following decades were priced out of established bohemian locales by the return of the middle class. Young professionals, sometimes veterans of the 60s counter-culture themselves, wanted the excitement and cultural vivacity that living in bohemian neighborhoods offered, and had good paying jobs to ensure that they could live where they wanted.

Priced out of traditional bohemias, new bohemians moved elsewhere...and were soon followed by yuppies, the process repeating itself, ad infinitum. This gentrification cycle was so common in the 1980s that the president of the art school I attended heralded this practice as one in which "The presence of the arts and artists can work in mysterious ways as an economic force." In an annual report to the New York State bureaucracy, he outlined this "mysterious...force," arguing that,

Despite the stereotype of the starving artist, the artist as tenant improves the real estate market. It was the artist who generated the increasing valuation of property in Greenwich Village, and then, after being priced out of that area, did the same in Soho. As artists are forced out of Soho by rents they can no longer afford, they settle [elsewhere]...in every case stimulating the renewal of decayed areas.

As college reporter David Tomere pointed out in the title of his expose, artists were

being promoted as the "Shock Troops of Gentrification."³⁹

Add into this equation the superheated high art market of the 1980s and the ever growing importance of the cultural industry to the American economy--by now its second largest export--and the result was disastrous. Immediately after inception, cultural innovations were thrown under the spotlight, feted and dined in Soho or Wall Street, then bought up and moved out...or discarded as unworthy. The impact of these two forces on the cultural world that traditionally populates bohemia was severe: instant stardom or displacement, either way the result was exodus. For the old Bohemia and the healthy discontent and creativity it fostered this was lethal. "Dissent cannot happen in a vacuum," argues Carr, "Nor can social or aesthetic movements grow in one. Community is the fabric that sustains experiment, stimulating that leap into the void and maybe even cushioning a fall."⁴⁰

For some critics this disappearance of physical locale is irreplaceable. Russell Jacoby, bemoaning the death of the public intellectual, writes that,

Fragile urban habitats of busy streets, cheap eateries, reasonable rents, and decent environs nourish bohemias.... When this delicate environment is injured or transformed, the "surplus" intellectuals do not disappear, but disperse; they spread out across the country. The difference is critical: a hundred artists, poets, and writers with families and friends in ten city blocks means one thing; scattered across ten states or ten university towns, they mean something else.⁴¹

And for Jacoby that something else is the death of bohemia.

But bohemia has been declared dead and buried too many times for anyone to take such pronouncements too seriously. And it is not completely true that geographical bohemias don't exist anymore. The Mission in San Francisco, the Lower East Side of

Manhattan, and across the river, the unfortunate Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which gets heralded as the "New Bohemia" every couple of years in the Real Estate section of the *Times*. Seattle, Olympia, Austin, Minneapolis, Chapel Hill, all these locales possess bohemian scenes. But the fact remains that there is no longer Paris; no longer one, unified and coherent, geographical Bohemia.

Marigay Grana, in the preface to her and her husband's monumental anthology of writings, *On Bohemia*, writes that,

In reviewing the literature for this anthology we were able to come up with only two characteristics of bohemianism which appear to hold constant over the century-and-a-half of its recognized existence: (1) an attitude of dissent from the prevailing values of middle-class society--artistic, political, utilitarian, sexual--usually expressed in life-style and through a medium of the arts; and (2) a cafe.⁴²

In this new bohemia diaspora the latter condition of place no longer plays the important part it once did. When cafes are renamed coffee bars, and a nationwide chain--Starbucks--is profiled in *The Wall Street Journal* as one of the fastest growing and most profitable businesses of the year, the cafe as a locus of Bohemia is in its death throes.⁴³ One hundred and fifty years of geographical bohemia may indeed be coming to an end. And perhaps it is only natural. The world in which we live is an increasingly mobile one and becoming increasingly decentralized across space. Besides, there was always something odd and contradictory about nailing a name synonymous with Gypsies and vagabonds to a place.

If the latter condition of place no longer holds, the former characteristics--those of bohemian ideas, practice and creativity--live on. They live on through non-spatial networks. Webs of communication that can offer the community and support and feeling

of de-isolation that are so important for dissent and creativity. One of these networks, these virtual spaces where bohemia still exists, is the network of zines.

Asked to characterize her *Slug & Lettuce*, Christine Boarts uses rare instrumental terms, describing it as, "providing space for communication and networking within underground music and political scenes."⁴⁴ In other words *Slug & Lettuce* is a virtual coffee house. In issue #29 Chris is the hostess who first greets scenesters with "Some Thoughts," a long personal editorial about living in New York City and feeling like "a faceless body in a crowd." Zine and records are reviewed, and photos of punk shows are reprinted as the entertainment. Back pages are given over to coffee house philosophers who opine on subjects from information on AIDS to the imprisonment of Native American activist Leonard Peltier to addressing the ever present question of "what is punk?" And free classified ads line the walls: "Oi, Everyone. Interested in Philippine stuff? Send me your stuff list and I'll send you mine..."; or "I'm a poor little punk girl in search of someone to share thoughts with....I'm chemfree, I hate homophobics, conformity, bimbos, and many other things." Places to stay, places to play shows, zines looking for contributors, bands looking for members, home made T-shirts for sale, *Slug & Lettuce* makes space for it all.⁴⁵

The idea of zines holding a scene together is not new. In the SF scene, "for almost forty years Fanzines were the net, the cement which kept fandom together as an entity," writes Don Fitch.⁴⁶ And in many ways The Scene, in terms of community structure, is a lot closer to the non-geographical community of science fiction fandom than to traditional spatial Bohemia. With the coffee houses owned by Starbucks and

traditional bohemian neighborhoods populated by middle class professionals, zines like *Slug & Lettuce* offer an invaluable service, acting as a cafe, community center, and club house that facilitates primary interactions among these bohemians, providing the "cement" that binds The Scene together, in the process creating a virtual bohemia.



*the virtual coffehouse of Slug & Lettuce
#18*

By providing this service zines can actually help to create the Scene. As Claude Bessey, editor of *Slash*, an early Los Angeles based punk zine, explains: "we were pretending there was an LA scene when there was no scene whatsoever. The magazine was it.... Then all these disaffected loonies started focussing on the mag and decided 'We can be it, too.'" Within a few months there was a self-conscious LA punk scene.⁴⁷

But if zines like *Slug & Lettuce*, *Slash*, *Flipside*, *Maximumrocknroll*, and many

others bind the Scene together by providing virtual coffee houses, other zines do it by providing tour guides to the bohemia diaspora. An almost ubiquitous feature of punk zines is the Band Tour Diary in which the zine writer, either as a member of a band, or friend and roadie, takes the reader on tour with the band: riding in vans, playing at clubs, eating bad food, crashing on couches.

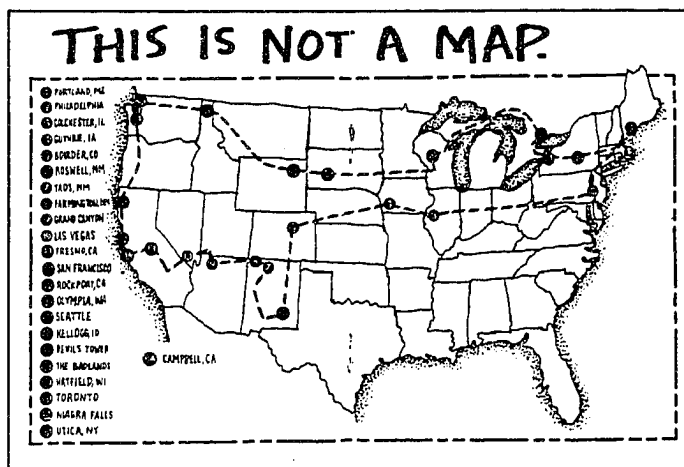
Baltimore, MD
March 4, 1993

Spent last night here at Brooks' house, marinating in my own uselessness. Spent the night before that in a parking lot of a Louisville Taco Bell, sleeping in the loft of my van, after having arrived many hours too late for our show with Agent Orange. I am eating reheated pasta and drinking some old Fresca...a coca-cola beverage, making me guilty in global corporate fascism...

a member of the band Born Against chronicles in his zine *I, Yeast Roll*.⁴⁸⁴⁹

A slight variation on the tour diary theme is the "Road Trip" where much the same thing is chronicled, sans the band. Jennifer in *Gogglebox*, takes her reader with her as she bums rides from New York City to San Francisco.⁵⁰ The editor of *Po* produces a map of his road trip.⁵¹ And in January 1993 issue of *Crash*, after chronicling their own roadtrip, the writers invite readers to "Join the Crash Network!" a network of people looking for places to crash and others offering up their floor to be crashed on.⁵²

One way to understand this regular feature of the Scene is as a modern extension of the great American directive: Go West Young Man! Following in the footsteps of Jack Kerouac and Thelma and Louise, bohemians hit the road. "Freedom from school, freedom from [boyfriend] Brian, freedom to live for nothing except my own desires and curiosities," writes Jenn of *Gogglebox*, about to head out on her roadtrip.⁵³ Shaking the dust from your heels, beholden only to circumstance, is a deeply American dream.



bohemia's map in Po #14

But sharing it with other readers in personal and intimate detail is something else. And what is shared is telling. Rarely, if ever, are the Grand Canyon, Disney World, the Washington Monument, or other sanctified sites on the tourist trail mentioned. Instead the landmarks are the people the zine writers meet, the clubs where the bands play, the underground book stores they visit, in brief, the people and landmarks of The Scene. The tour diaries and roadtrips in zines bring to life the landscape of a dispersed Bohemia. And through the narrative of their own travel these bohemians draw connections between these scattered sites. The zine travelogue constructs a map of the underground. This underground is not a tight, formalized, and coherent social grouping with firm boundaries; instead it is a non-geographical sprawl which must be mapped out. Zine project publications as *Book Your Own Fuckin' Life: Do-It-Yourself Resource Guide* list, state by state, the zines, cafes, radio stations, alternative clubs, and so forth that make up this underground diaspora, road trips and tour diaries weave it together and bring it to life.⁵⁴

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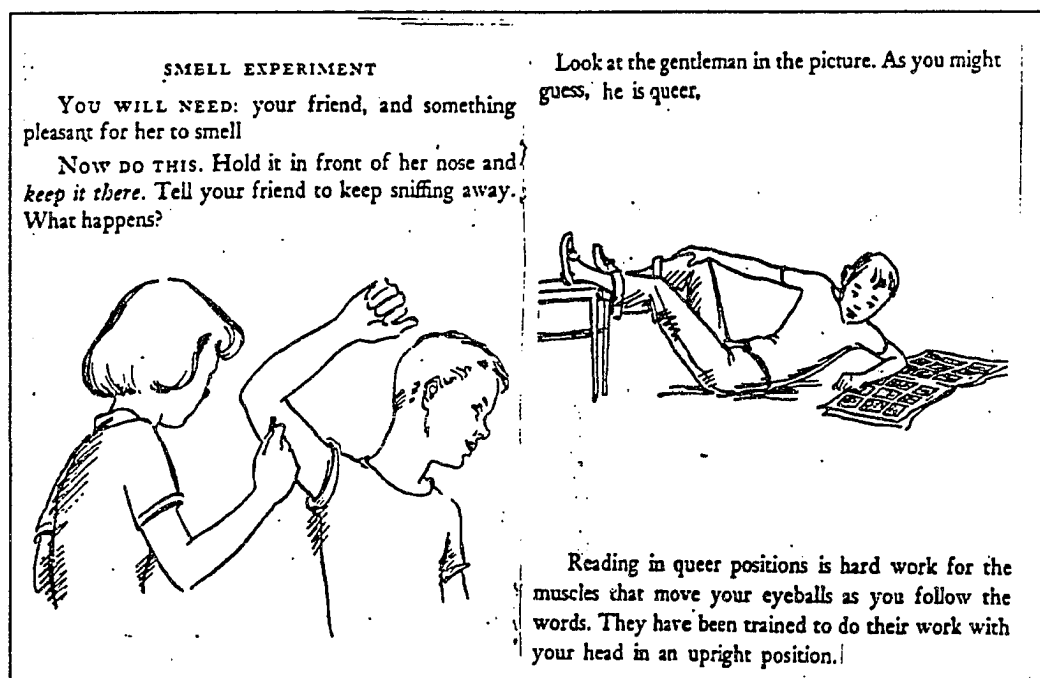
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Hardcore / power cr

page from a guide to the underground, *Book Your Own Fuckin' Life #3*

But even with the impressive list of institutions and connections listed in guides like *Book Your Own Fuckin' Life*, modern Bohemia is materially underdeveloped. Due to the geographic dispersion which limits a concentration of resources, and a speculative urban real estate economy which curtails investment, there simply is not an abundance of material structures of bohemia--self-consciously underground coffeehouses, bookstores, clubs--scattered throughout the country. And those that exist are in constant danger of being "discovered" by non-bohemians: gobbled up and ruined by a rapacious consumer culture industry and a consuming public with an ever present eye for the new thrill. Because of this infrastructural deprivation of bohemia, zines have another function: the road trips and tour diaries map out the bohemia that can be found within the everyday. The narratives give keys to decipher a world that lies below the straight world, in front

of "normal" society's eyes but invisible to their gaze. Zines are a shadow map of America.

Within the shadow map ordinary things are invested with different meanings. In *Pool Dust's* road trip, abandoned pools and storm drain culvert become transitory skateboard parks; in band diaries, Veteran of Foreign Wars halls become punk clubs; and in countless zine tales, Kinko's is a potential free printing press if you can figure out how to scam.⁵⁵ Laundromats are transformed into cafes for impromptu poetry readings, and mundane items like a children's science experiment book from the 1950s takes on a different meaning when recontextualized through different eyes and repackaged in a zine.⁵⁶⁵⁷



shadows of innocence in You Own a Wonderful Machine, Your Body

"There is poetry everywhere" Rob Treinen writes in *Cramped and Wet*, explaining why he reprints letters found on the ground and in garbage cans.⁵⁸ While Marc Arsenault describes his *Andy's Chair*: "The journal of things missed was the whole idea...Things forgotten."⁵⁹ And, as recounted in Aaron Cometbus's story of killing time in Janesville, Wisconsin in the previous chapter, forgotten back streets in mean industrial towns become special merely because they are forgotten. What is "nothing at all" to the straight world is made into something. As *William Wants a Doll's* Arielle Greenberg elliptically, yet accurately defines it: "The Scene is a network of things that people who don't The Scene wouldn't necessarily know are cool."⁶⁰

In addition to reinvesting the everyday with shadow values, out of the ordinary events and places are often highlighted and joyfully recounted as testament to the depth and breadth of the weirdness in America that lurks just below the patina of normality. Adam Bregman, Los Angeles Mayoral aspirant and editor of *Shithappy*, tells tales of his travels with The Cacophony Society as they tour The Great Western Gun Show, visit booths that sell Nazi arm bands next to little toy bunnies, and play the game "Guess Who's a Serial Killer," while watching the crowd (about the time the Oklahoma City bomber was also making his gun show rounds). On another field trip, Adam & Co. have lunch at the LA Police Training Academy under their brass knuckle collection.⁶¹

The shadow map is the property of a people who possess very little materially. What they do possess, however, is the ability to give things they don't own *new meanings*. As Dick Hebdige and others in the early days of the CCCS in Birmingham argued, this "semantic rearrangement of components of the objective world" gives the

materially impoverished material with which to fashion their subcultures.⁶² Stuck with the moniker "Loser," zine writers transform it into an accolade, and dispersed geographically without the resources to build their own physical spaces, they chart out a world of bohemianism, overlaying the straight world with one of their own. While these new bohemians do not command vast material resources, what they do have is a vast communication network and thus the ability to build, combine, and spread this bohemian shadow map of America. Combined with the network of people and institutions that do exist, and virtual community centers like *Slug & Lettuce*, the bohemian diaspora holds together. The Scene, ironically, may not be a place, but it is a community.

No Rules

The next time I hear someone define "A REAL PUNK," I'm gonna shit rabbit turds and hop down a fucking hole!

- Wolfboy, in a letter in *Maximumrocknroll*⁶³

Bohemia is the home of the libertine, at the same time Bohemia, like all communities, has rules. Most often these rules are those of definition: What is bohemian? and What is not bohemian? "The foreigner fails to understand that the laws of Bohemia are not the same as his native country, and so he believes that Bohemians are of necessity unconventional," wrote Edwin Irwin in 1906, "when the fact is that the Bohemian is merely living in accordance with the laws of his own country."⁶⁴

The virtual "country" of The Scene has laws as well. And as was the case with institutions, these laws may be more important to this modern Bohemia than they were to the old ones. As The Scene is dispersed across space, rules and traditions are the only

thing that can draw boundaries between bohemian and straight worlds. Living within a modern consumer society that celebrates lifestyle choice and stylistic difference, it is also more difficult to mark yourself as a cultural rebel than in Irwin's Victorian day; strict criteria of bohemian inclusion and exclusion helps. But there is a conflict. For as much as they need these conventions to exist and hold together, those who make up the Scene, true to their bohemian lineage, honor above all, individuality, originality, and freedom.

Zines, as I've argued, are expression of a fierce individuality; privileging the personal experience over all. But they are also the communicative glue that holds The Scene together, and as such they become an institution of laws, mores, maps, and traditions--of what it is to be part of The Scene. Zines communicate the tension that arises from there contradictory role, as well as offer a forum where this deeper conflict between the individual and the community is fought out. As being "Punk" is one of the prime identities of The Scene, nowhere is this conflict between individual expression and community allegiance argued more vehemently than around the definition of what actually is "Punk." And no where has this argument taken place with more heat--and sometimes light--than in the letter pages of *Maximumrocknroll*.

Started in 1982 by Tim Yohannan as a way to bring together and politicize a then burgeoning punk music scene, *Maximumrocknroll* is an institution of The Scene. Not everybody likes it. Tim and *MRR* are slagged often for being too political (or PC), for being too authoritarian, for trying to dominate The Scene, or simply for being too big. But these criticisms highlight *MRR*'s success: it has, more than any other institution, helped to define--and continually redefine--what is "punk." This definition takes place

in editorials by Tim and columns by other regular writers and in scene reports and articles sent in by readers, but the war of definition primarily happens in a forum that exists independent from Tim's editorial line: *MRR*'s extensive letters section.⁶⁵ For just under fifteen years, and just shy of one hundred and fifty issues, punks have been slugging it out in the trenches of *MRR*'s letters column, setting up and tearing down the rules of being punk.

One of the flash points for debating the rules of the subculture is whether the markers of this particular bohemian identity are external or internal. That is: is punk what you are on the inside to yourself, or outside to the world? "I come from a very small town of maybe 1000 people," writes Planet Boy of North Dakota in a 1983 issue of *MRR*, "I try to make the people around here realize that Punk is not dead....I had my ear pierced 3 times and [put] color in my hair."

The prime directive of punk is individuality. This is what straight society lacks, and this is what being a punk expresses. If upstanding members of straight society dress conventionally, then as an individual you dress in an opposite way. Like Planet Boy, you dye your hair and pierce your ear (remember, this is North Dakota in 1983). But as a punk you're also part of a community. "I hope someone at Max RNR is reading this," Planet Boy continues, "I wrote this...to let you know that there are punks in N.D...at least one anyway (That'll change!)."⁶⁶

In the next issue someone from this "community," John Hurt, another reader, responds:

I can identify with what [Planet Boy] is saying, but I also think he needs to re-examine some of his ideas about punk....He boasted that he's had his

ear pierced three times and has colored his hair....I think [that's] trendy. Punk is thinking for yourself, and *being* yourself....Perhaps you don't realize it, but you are acting just like the phony society jerks you're supposed to be against.⁶⁷

For John, dressing like a punk is a betrayal of punk: it is a symbol of conformity to a group ideal--just like that of phonies "you're supposed to be against." But in giving his opinion, John is also defining an ideal of what it is to be punk. A contradiction pointed out in the next issue of *MRR* when another reader, Mike Impastato, joins the fray:

Who the fuck does John think he is? Some divine god who gets to call someone trendy for dyeing their hair and piercing their ears. Personally I think it takes a lot of guts to look that wild and take all the shit people have to give, and not bowing to peer pressure to look "right." I think Planet Boy is being himself...⁶⁸

Mike takes us back to Planet Boy's argument: dressing punk "is being himself," as it is not bowing to "peer pressure." But in doing this publicly, Mike too is defining punk, implicitly arguing a standard for the community. Reading through hundreds upon hundreds of letters, I've seen the same argument countless times. Read enough of them and you begin to realize that the debate about how one dresses, how one thinks, is it punk?, is really a debate about something else: the conflict between rebellious individualism and group identity.

Punks are in a predicament: being a punk means you define yourself against society as an individual, but it also means that you define yourself as being part of a group, adhering to community standards. But this, as the earlier discussion of Anarchism illustrated, is a rough mix. "What the fuck is going on?" asks Carlos Fernandez,

Here I am, new to the scene...hoping to be accepted without having to compromise my individuality, and what do I see? A flood of self-righteous, overbearing assholes pushing their views on me....I thought I

could be a punk without having to follow anyone's idea of punk.⁶⁹

But what sort of a community can you have if everybody has to have their own idea of that community? Answer: an unstable one.

This inherent instability perhaps explains another regular feature in *MRR* and other punk zines: The Golden Age of Punk. Two years ago, three years ago...pick any time in the past two decades and just a few years ago The Scene was different. Invariably it was better. For some the Golden Age was an era of unbridled individuality. "I think it's time somebody speaks up. I can't believe what's happening with the idea of punk," Steve Stepe writes in,

Punk started out as an idea for us to break out of the mold we've been placed in. A way to do what you want; a right to be yourself and not what someone else wants you to be...

But...

Now the complete opposite has happened. Instead of falling into the confines of "normal" people, punks are trapped into being punks. At the next show you go to, look around. Everybody looks the same....They all think the same.⁷⁰

For other letter writers what's gone is the opposite, whereas Steve remembers the days of true individuality, Javi writes in reminiscing on the former unity of the scene. "Fuck this Peace Punx vs. Nazi Skins deal. When is this shit gonna stop?...Make the scene what it used to be....let's get it together brothers and sisters."⁷¹ John Jankowski writes in another plea for past harmony: "Dear *MRR*, I'm writing to you because I'm afraid punk is dying fast....Punks today just seem thoughtless and uncaring and unfriendly."⁷² This "what's happened to the Scene?" complaint is such a standard feature in punk zines, that *Flipside*, a longstanding Southern California punk zine with an

support like catching someone as they dive blind off a stage can exist in the same scene where spitting on the performer--and vice versa--was considered de rigueur, and how a letter written by a punk to his community can conclude with the deeply contradictory "Individuals all have something in common--THEIR INDIVIDUALITY!!! UNITE, FUCKHEADS."⁷⁴ Or why month after month punks slag each other brutally in the pages of *MRR*, *Flipside*, and countless other zines, yet month after month they keep writing back.

I want to fight and kiss you; pull you in and push you away.⁷⁵ The conflict between the value of absolute individualism and the need for community support is extreme in the case of The Scene. It is one of the things that keeps it dynamic, keeps it from growing old, but it is also debilitating, a morass that leads Victim Joe to conclude, in all earnestness, that "anyone who calls themselves a punk is definitely not one."⁷⁶

The tension in the punk scene between the individual and community, between freedom and rules, is an extreme microcosm of the tension that exists within all of the networked communities of the zine scene. Zines are profoundly personal expressions, yet as a media of participatory communication depend upon and help create community. This is a contradiction which is never resolved. If community never goes further the pages of a punk zine or the floor of a club this matters little. But if a community is to be the basis for collective action or the model for a new society, it matters a great deal.

Revolution Grrrl Style Now!

You don't need to be a punk.
 You don't need our permission.
 There are no rules.
 No leader.
 Every girl is a Riot Grrrl.

- Riot Grrrl, D.C.⁷⁷

In a 1983 issue of *Maximumrocknroll*, a group of women published the results of a informal poll surveying the feelings of women in the punk scene. The replies from different women revealed a deep discontent with the place of women in the Scene:

When I flip through these American punk zines, all I see are pictures after pictures of what looks like the same guy with an almost-shaved head, leaping and grimacing with a microphone and no shirt...God, it gets boring! Just once, I'd like to see a photo of a girl playing a guitar and really working at it.

...There are so few girls into hardcore here and they are totally into their boyfriends more than anything. I'm TIRED of living through someone else!

But the women also identified a solution:

How about a women's caucus of punk music?

I feel that if women want to be more involved, do it! Write for a fanzine, start a fanzine, set up gigs...

There are no easy answers, but I do know that women should be there for each other and talk, and most important listen. If we don't help ourselves, who will?⁷⁸

Less than a decade later, in Olympia, WA, *Riot Grrrl* was founded. Bringing together the radical critique of patriarchy and desire for female community of past feminist movements, and the in-your-face, rebellious individualism of punk rock, Riot Grrrl was a network of young women linked by zines and bands, and their anger,

dedicated to "putting the punk back into feminism and feminism into punk."⁷⁹

But while punk and feminism were their influences, "Riot Grrrl is about *not* being the girlfriend of the band and *not* being the daughter of the feminist," as Emma explains in *Riot Grrrl* #5.⁸⁰ "We're tired of being written out--out of history, out of the 'scene,' out of our bodies," write the editors of *Riot Grrrl* #3, "for this reason we have created our zine and scene."⁸¹ For young feminist punk rockers, Riot Grrrl was founded as a space of their own.

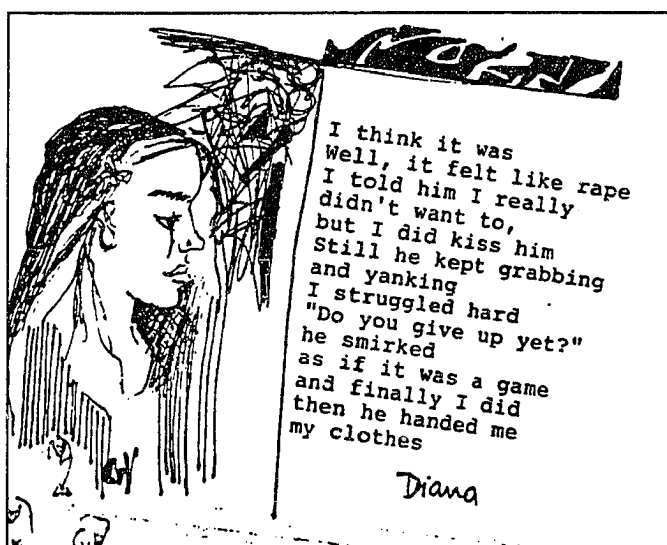


riot grrrl revolution sticker

"Founded" is perhaps not the best term, for while there are (or were) Riot Grrrl chapters in a number of cities and hundreds of zines produced by women who identify themselves as Riot Grrrls, Riot Grrrl had no founding convention, has no structure, and has little formal organization outside of local meetings and zine exchanges. "There is no particular agenda or pledge or motto," states Ne Tantillo in *Riot Grrrl* #6 1/2, "There is no singular allegiance to any one's thought. There is no structure to follow, only what

you build yourself."⁸²

What these women build is a forum for self expression, "a MEDIUM for grrrls to say what's on their minds."⁸³ And what's on their minds is the personal effect of growing up as a girl in a man's world. Included in almost every Riot Grrrl zine is at least one--and usually many--poem, rant, experiential scream about having been sexually abused often by a male friend or relative, Diana's from *Riot Grrrl #5* is typical.⁸⁴



date rape testimonial in Riot Grrrl #5

Sexual abuse is an all too common problem for young women and one of the most damaging effects of such abuse, particularly if it occurs at the hand of a relative or friend, is the shame that girls feel that it is somehow their fault, and the social mores that suggest that because they often know the abuser that it isn't *really* abuse. Sharing their stories of abuse with comrades and pointing their fingers at the accused, these young women relieve some of the shame and overcomes some of the isolation that often accompanies such an experience.



arguing image in Riot Grrrl, Huh?

Another common issue addressed is self-image. In a study commissioned by the American Association of University Women, girls in elementary school, when asked how often they felt "happy the way they were," responded "always" 60 percent of the time; by high school the number dropped to 29 percent, leading the researchers to conclude that "girls emerge from adolescence with a poor self-image, relatively low expectations from life and much less confidence in themselves than boys."⁸⁵ Raised in a society which devalues the worth of women, bombarded with idealized mass media images of what a girl "should" look like, and solicited by lipstick, mascara, perfume, deodorant,

and weight loss advertisements whose purpose is to convince a girl that she is--sans product--incomplete, it's no surprise that girls develop a low self image of themselves. In angry response, Riot Grrrl zines offer a forum to talk back to the demands of the media and men, about how a woman ought to look, or how a woman ought to be.⁸⁶ In answer to the implicit question Why Riot Grrrl? *Bikini Kill's* Kathleen Hanna, et al. answer: "BECAUSE we are angry at a society that tells us Girl=Dumb, Girl=Bad, Girl=Weak."⁸⁷

Riot Grrrl zines, like all zines, are "continually re-rehearsed self-definition[s]."⁸⁸ They are a way to reject definitions given by the dominant society and replace them with one's own, a means of "taking over the means of production in order to create our own meanings," as one Riot Grrrl statement puts it.⁸⁹ This partially explains another archetypal feature of these zines: the manifesto explaining what Riot Grrrl is and what it means. No Riot Grrrl zine is complete without one, or as likely, a dozen. A flier handed out by members of Riot Grrrl NYC at a show explaining "Who--What--Why" lists sixteen individual quotes in answer to this question.

These multiple statements are not rooted in indecisiveness, but in a philosophy. "We want the definition of Riot Grrrl to be whatever anyone who wants to use the term wants it to be," Lisa Wildman of Riot Grrrl NYC explains, "we feel that over-organization would cost us the individuality we spend too much of the time fighting the rest of the world for."⁹⁰ And so it is not unusual to see in *Riot Grrrl Newsletter One* a defining manifesto prefaced with the title: "RIOT GRRRL (to me)."

As Lisa explains, this individualization is a product of rebellion against dominant

definitions of what it is to be a girl. Working hard to free from themselves from one definition, Riot Grrrls are understandably reluctant to adopt another. Their second hand experience with the codification of the feminist movement of the early 70s into set "feminist" roles, makes them doubly suspicious of group definitions. But this distinctive feature of what has come to be called 3rd Wave feminism has other roots as well: in punk rock identity and in zine tradition. Far from being just the medium of expression, these cultural heritages have shaped these young feminist's message.

Women's music zines predate Riot Grrrl. For example, in the early 1980s Lori Twersky began *Bitch*, "The Women's Rock Newsletter with Bite." Like Riot Grrrl's use of the word "girl"--and The Scene's use of "loser"--Lori appropriates an insult "bitch" as a positive identity.⁹¹ And although self-conscious manifestos of identity would wait for others and until later, Lori uses her essays on women in music to outline the contours of a rock-n-roll feminism. Distancing herself from both demeaning patriarchal identifications on the one hand and puritanical feminist definitions on the other, Lori promotes a rebellious, individual identity: "Hey, no one can copy my style....That's the stock Rock woman attitude."⁹²

Zines are an intensely personal medium. Riot Grrrl zines are no exception. "RIOT GRRRL (to me)" is surrounded by rants on date rape (to me), demeaning images (to me), sexual inequality (to me). The authors and contributors go out of their way to stress that what follows is only their point of view. As in all zines, the politics in Riot Grrrl are personalized. Lists of women's resource groups, herbal remedies, and statistics on sexual abuse can be found in Riot Grrrl zines, but these are dwarfed by personal

testimonials. And this is integral part of the Riot Grrrl (anti)line. "I encourage girls everywhere to set forth their own revolutionary agendas *from their own place in the world*" writes one of the founding mothers of Riot Grrrl, Kathleen Hanna, in her *Bikini Kill #2*, for--as she counsels in words strikingly similar to *Inside Joke*'s Elayne Weshsler from last chapter--Riot Grrrls should "embrace subjectivity as the only reality there is." ⁹³

The context in which Kathleen states this is important. It is at the end of a discussion of what she sees as a danger in Riot Grrrl. "Have you noticed," she writes, "that there is this weird phenomenon that happens to do with naming something and having it turn into something else..." Riot Grrrl, a repository of individual voices, is becoming a community of shared ideas, and Kathleen is aware of the problems this will cause. "It is too easy for our doctrines to turn into dogma and RGSN recitations rather than meaningful interactions," and thus "new standards arise when the whole thing was to shatter the old and replace it with action." ⁹⁴

Others share Kathleen's concern. "The whole idea of Riot Grrrl in the beginning was that you sat around and told your *own* story," Arielle Greenberg explains, elaborating that now it seems as if Riot Grrrl has turned into,

a few different formulas and you have to follow them: You do drawings of women, you do a little ranting about some guy who harassed you at one point in your life. And once you've seen them enough it seems like...they're just regurgitating material that someone else told them. And that doesn't seem to real to me. ⁹⁵

What both Kathleen and Arielle are pointing to are the problems with the necessary "routinization" of community; the move from innovation to tradition, from the individual

experience to shared realities.

Like the punk scene, Riot Grrrls are more than just individuals, they are a community. And group function is stressed even more in Riot Grrrls than in the punk scene. "RIOT GIRL (to me)" Dawn describes paradoxically, is "GRRRLS getting together and standing up for their rights and empowering each other, knowing we are not alone."⁹⁶ Grrrl community is underscored in reaction against the competition that women often feel towards one another in dominant society. In the face of this division, Riot Grrrl solidarity is the answer: "Riot Grrrl Loving Riot Grrrl" reads the back cover of *Riot Grrrl Olympia*.⁹⁷

Solidarity is also important because Riot Grrrls see themselves as a political force. As it was for their feminist sisters in the 1970s, the "consciousness raising" of personal testimonials is not meant solely as an end itself. "Riot Grrrl is," writes Ne, "a river of ideas and perspectives flowing through our minds; a tributary with a swift current rippling over and around obstacles, poring into an ocean, not to become part of the tide, but to change the tide."⁹⁸ The question is: How does one change the tide while not becoming a common, communal counter-tide yourself?

What Riot Grrrls, like punks, and zinesters writ large are trying to do is construct a new model of community. No Leaders, No Rules, No Permission Asked. The new community will be based not in common understandings, but in shared communication. The new community will not be based in traditions or laws, but in recreating the community anew with each act of communication between individuals. This model is an exciting one, offering both liberty and connection at the same time; it also may not

work outside of the virtual realm. For it is not a model of community; it is a model of communication.

"This is our revolution--it's right here in these pages..."⁹⁹ proclaim the editors of *Riot Grrrl #8*. And this spells the limitation of Riot Grrrl as a political force. It is very hard to translate the individual expression and personal subjectivity that is the trademark of Riot Grrrl communication into a lasting political movement. Riot Grrrl politics, like all zine politics, are based in the existential act of creative rebellion, "create[ing] revolution in our lives every single day by envisioning and creating alternatives to the christian capitalist way of doing things," *Bikini Kill #2* reads.¹⁰⁰ But with so much emphasis on individual expression and creativity, zines are less a means to an end than the ends in themselves: the revolution itself.

This isn't to say that young women discerning their common oppression through reading zines, and gaining confidence in their own voices by producing one, don't go out and get involved in political movements. They can and they do. But if these women take their motto Revolution Grrrl Style Now! seriously, then *Riot Grrrl* is only a stage--albeit a necessary one--in a longer political process.

What Riot Grrrl does is breath new life into feminism. By mixing the politics of feminism with the culture of punk rock, it takes the ideas of feminism past and translates them into a modern language. By producing zines and networking amongst each other, Riot Grrrls become producers instead of merely consumers, creating their own spaces rather than living within the confines of those made for them. The question becomes, however, how does one transpose this isolated communicative subcultural space onto a

mass society? Or perhaps more appropriate, does one want to?

Community in a Mass Society

"This country is so spread out," twenty-one year old Arielle Greenberg says, "people my age...feel very separate and kind of floating and adrift...I feel like that myself." Arielle puts out her zine *William Wants a Doll* because she loves writing and because she has thoughts and feelings and experiences she wants to share. She also does it because, as she explains,

It's so nice to...look forward to your mail and know that you're going to hear from three to four people who you've never heard from before and they're genuinely interested in what you have to say...it's a community. I feel really supported.¹⁰¹

Zines offer support for individuals alienated from mass society, creating a space for the personalized primary ties that are necessary for a sense of connection. Zines form community.

"Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all dispositions are forever forming associations." ¹⁰² So wrote Alexis de Tocqueville, impressed by this distinctive feature of America as he traveled through the country in the early 19th century. Voluntary associations, he pointed out, are constituted to govern towns, build churches, give parties, promote morals, discuss ideas...for seemingly everything. He believed that Americans formed these alliance so readily because democracy renders the individual citizen independent, and thus, in his opinion, weak. Only by coming together in association do individuals have presence. Tocqueville also understood associations as a force which mitigated the individualistic tendencies of American society. Coming

together in purposeful unions, citizens were no longer isolated individuals.

However, Tocqueville also observed another result of these voluntary associations. The multiplicity of associations could turn people's attention inward toward the business of the group and away from more general concerns, the result being a dizzying array of associations with few shared meanings and little interest in greater social change. To quote Tocqueville: "civil associations...far from directing public attention to public affairs, serve to turn men's minds away therefrom..."¹⁰³ Focussed in on the immediate businesses of their own individual group, association members could forget that they were also citizens of a larger society.

The world of zines share the characteristics--both positive and negative--of these free associations.¹⁰⁴ There is no doubt that zines foster community, but because zine writers privilege personal experience and subjective realities over broader, public concerns, the tendency is for this community to fragment into micro-communities as each group turns inward to concentrate on what is "real for them."

For many individuals, being able to define what is real for them is critical as the feel that their reality isn't represented in the rest of society. Queer punk rockers, for example, who feel unrepresented in both the predominantly straight punk zines, and the liberal assimilationist gay and lesbian press, use zines like *Homocore* and *J.D.s* as a virtual meeting place for other queer punks around the country to counter their isolation and define and communicate who they are.¹⁰⁵ "Dear Homocore," a reader writes in, "I am a seventeen year old gay punk. Life in Missoula sux. Thank god for Homocore..."¹⁰⁶ In an issue that carried fifty-one letters, totaling almost a third of the

zine, letter after letter reads the same.

Gay punks aren't the only ones that want a place for their own voice. *Skinned Alive* is a zine for racist skinheads who feel their idea that rock-n-roll is an Aryan invention is an underrepresented viewpoint; while the zine *Color Blind* is put out by skinheads who vehemently denounce racism--another "reality" rarely mentioned in the straight media.¹⁰⁷ These endless divisions and subdivisions are such a part of the zine and underground scenes that a joker writes into *MRR*:

You know how there are a lot of fights and stuff between Skins into Straight Edge, Skins into Skating, and Skins into Surfing. Well--they just got another group to fight with: SKINS INTO SOAPS!

We believe that Soap Operas rule! We are pretty much united against non-soap Skins, but we have a lot of fights among ourselves...like which channel's Soaps rule.¹⁰⁸¹⁰⁹

Ideally the individuals which make up the network of micro-communities of the zine world communicate to one another, sharing their differences, speaking across voids. And there is plenty of evidence that this does happen, but as there is also a tendency for the network to allow for movement in the opposite direction: hunkering down in your micro-community, surrounded by only your own realities. For every zine reader like Janet Fox cited above, who "eventually read[s] almost all the reviews," in *Factsheet Five*, there are also individuals like Ann Wilder who writes that when selecting zines to network with, she "scan[s] the whole review section--looking for keywords--political, gay, sf, punk, whatever--to decide whether or not to read the review..."¹¹⁰ While Ann's keywords suggest an impressive breadth of interest, her comments point to a problem in the zine world: there's no necessity to integrate.

In the virtual world of zines, creators and readers can pick and choose who to call on and whom to entertain. This means you can visit and be visited by people who have interests and experience far outside your own. But it can also mean that you can limit interaction to people *just like you*. In a mass society this is a luxury available only to the very rich sequestered in their gated communities. In the zine world, as with other virtual communities like computer BBSs, this dubious privilege has been democratized. The result, as Lewis Lapham writes, is that it is increasingly possible for "The commonwealth of meaning [to] divide into remote worlds of our own invention....We need never see or talk to anybody with whom we don't agree, and we can constitute ourselves as our own governments in perpetually virtuous exile."¹¹

This is the battle in the new virtual communities. Armed with the tools of communication, one can construct a wide network of connected voices, differing in timbre and substance, yet sharing in a love of communication; forging primary bonds with strangers that seem impossible in mass society. Or, if one chooses, it is possible to never meet, never speak, and never understand those whom you don't want to, spending your days living in a virtual ghetto.

1. John Klima, personal interview, December 30, 1993, Seattle, WA.
2. Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, (NY: Basic, 1992); Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*, (NY: Basic, 1987); Ray Oldenberg, *The Great Good Place*, (NY: Paragon House, 1989).
3. Robert E. Park, "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation," in *The City*, Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1925).
4. Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," in *From Max Weber*, H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 196-244.
5. Ferdinand Tonnies, *Community and Association*, 1887; cited in *Modern Sociology: Introductory Readings*, 2nd ed., Peter Worsley, ed. (NY: Penguin, 1978), p. 410.
6. Dave Walbridge, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, #37, 1990, Rensselaer, NY, no page.
7. Christine Boarts, personal interview, July 12 1993, New York City.
8. Paul W. Dion, *The NEW Bloated Tick*, V. 5, #7, 1991, South Grafton, MA, no page.
9. Robert DuPree, *Notes from Earth*, V. 1, #1, Summer 1993, Vancouver, WA, p. 3.
10. Chris from Redmond OR, *Punk Pals*, Robert Brown, ed. March 1990, Berkeley, CA, p.3; (FS5-NYSL).
11. Richard Stazenski, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #60, May 1988, San Francisco, no page.
12. Tin-Ear, "Why Publish?," *Factsheet Five*, #31, 1989, Rensselaer, NY, p.99.
13. Feral Faun, *Why Publish?*, Mike Gunderloy, ed. Albany: Pretzel Press, 1989 p.6, from mechanicals (FS5-NYSL). Feral puts out *Beyond the Fringe* and *Chaotic Endeavors*.
14. Don Fitch, personal correspondence, April 22, 1994.
 Science Fiction fandom still operates in this capacity. As ethnographer Camille Bacon-Smith records in an interview with Judy Segal, part of the Welcommittee of SF cons: "...people write to the Welcommittee saying "Help, I'm all alone out here and nobody understands me, and I read Trek and my parents think I'm strange and my husband doesn't know what's going on, and the ladies at the laundromat think I'm weird." So they write to us and say "I'm all alone," and I write back and say, "No, you're not."
 Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*, (Philadelphia: Univ. of Penn., 1992), p.83.

15. Jay McLaughlin, *Bunyon*, October 1993, Vancouver BC, no page,
16. Mark Morelli, personal correspondence, 1993(?)
17. Robert Park, "The Romantic Temper," in *The City*, p. 115.
18. Letters to the Editor are, of course, not exclusive to zines, but their importance is. *The New York Times*, receives 1.500 letters a week and runs 60, *Time* gets in the same and runs 35. Even opinion magazines run an extreme minority of the letters they receive: *The Nation*, 5 of 100, *National Review*, 10 of 150. Zines, with the luxury of small circulation, usually run all they receive. Even large circulation zines attempt to honor this. Issue #23 of *Maximumrocknroll* (March 1985) listed 37 letters, most of them 7-10 paragraphs long.
The author of the *Times* article where the mainstream numbers are cited goes on to give some of the cardinal rules, including keep it short and always refer to a specific article. Needless to say this puts the writer in a subordinate position vis-a-vis the publisher.
J. Peder Zane, "A Rivalry in Rabble Rousing as Letter Writers Keep Count," *New York Times*, June 19, 1995, p. D5.
19. Frederic Wertham, in his study of fanzines almost two and a half decades past drew special attention to both the letters to the editor, "one of the most important and distinctive components of fanzines"; and zine reviews, "One of their outstanding features."
The World of Fanzines, (IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1973), pp. 97 and 112, respectively.
20. Bonnie Jo, *Letter Parade*, February 1990, Comstock, MI.
21. Mike Gunderloy, *Factsheet Five*, #13, 1984, Rensselaer, NY, p.2.
22. John T. Nixon *The History of the National Amateur Press Association*, Crowley, LA: by the author, The Mirror Print, 1900, p.5; cited in Michelle Rau, "From APA to Zines," unpublished manuscript, 1991.
23. Michelle Rau, "From APA to Zines: Toward a History of Fanzine Publishing," unpublished manuscript, 1991, p.3.
24. For example, *Ministry of Cognizance*, an APA which sets rules for form (minimum of two pages, one inch margins, twenty five copies sent to organizer with \$5.00 for mailing) but none for content, had already set up a number of contextualized dialogues among its contributors by its fourth issue.
Rodney E. Griffith, Oed, *Ministry of Cognizance*, #'s 1-4, December 1988-May 1989, Columbia Station, OH; (FS5-NYSL).
25. Ashley Parker Owens, e-mail correspondence, June 4, 1994.
26. Ashley Parker Owens, *Global Mail*, #8, May-August 1994, Chicago, IL, p.4

27. Mark Corroto, *Face: Tools for a Network*, #6, 1993, Youngstown, OH.
28. Mike Gunderloy, personal interview, December 6, 1992, New York City.
29. Mike Gunderloy, *Factsheet Five*, #22, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p.66.
30. Janet Fox, "Letters," *Factsheet Five*, #23, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p.67.
31. letter from William Peschel to Mike Gunderloy, June 5 1991, "Misc. Correspondence" folder, correspondence box, (FS5-NYSL).
32. Mookie Xenia, "Why Publish?," *Factsheet Five*, #28, 1988, Rensselaer, NY, p.65.
33. Jim Romenesko, *Obscure*, #24, 1993 (?), Milwaukee, WI, front cover.
34. Drawing by David Lee Ingersoll, *Factsheet Five*, #35, Rensselaer, NY, 1990.
35. Luke McGuff, "letters," *Factsheet Five*, #22, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p.66.
36. Eric, "Why Publish?," *Factsheet Five*, #22, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p.47.
37. Dommie Sharp and Greg Skalka, "The South," *Maximumrocknroll*, #6, May-June, 1983, San Francisco, CA, no page.
38. C. Carr, "Bohemia Diaspora," *The Village Voice*, February 4, 1992, p.27.
39. President Sheldon Grebstein, SUNY Purchase, "Institutional Overview and Program Plans, 1987-88," cited by David Tomere, "Shock Troops of Gentrification," *The Load*, October 15, 1986, p.5.
40. C. Carr, "Bohemia Diaspora," *The Village Voice*, February 4, 1992.
41. Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*, (NY: Basic Books, 1987), p.28.
42. Cesar and Marigay Grana, eds. *On Bohemia: The Code of the Self Exiled*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), p.xv.
43. Starbucks Coffee Company, with its chain of coffee bars, saw its net income increase 71% in 1992 to 4.1 million dollars. Charles McCoy, "Entrepreneur Smells Aroma of Success in Coffee Bars," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 8, 1993, sec. B, p.2.
44. Chris Boarts, personal interview, July 12, 1993, New York City.
45. Chris Boarts, *Slug & Lettuce*, #29, February/March 1993, New York City.
46. Don Fitch, personal letter, April 22, 1994.

47. Claude Bessey, quoted in Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming*, (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 437,
48. S. McPheeters, *I, Yeast Roll*, #78, October, 1993, Richmond, VA, p.8.
49. The tour diary is such a part of punk zine tradition that the editor of *Minions of Evil* writes a five page "Generic Band Tour Diary" poking fun at the genre.
Anonymous, *Minions of Evil*, 1992(?), Middletown, CT.
50. Jennifer, *Gogglebox*, #4, Winter 1995, New York City.
51. Mono, *Po*, #14, 1993, Portsmouth, NH.
52. Miles Poindexter and John Labovitz, *Crash*, 1993, San Francisco, CA.
53. Jennifer, *Gogglebox*, #4, Winter 1995, New York City, p.28.
54. *Book Your Own Fuckin' Life #1*, Maximumrocknroll and Profane Existence, 1992; *Book Your Own Fuckin' Life #2*, Maximumrocknroll and Underdog Records, 1993; *Book Your Own Fuckin' Life #3*, Maximumrocknroll and Rocco Publishing, 1994.
55. Jack Patten, *Pool Dust*, #20, 1993, Seattle, WA.; Aaron, *Cometbus*, #31, Spring 1994, Berkeley, CA, p.28.
56. Adam Bregman, *Shithappy*, #3, 1993 (?), LA, CA. p.15.
57. Michael Dixon, *You Own a Wonderful Machine, Your Body*, 1992, Chicago, IL, no page.
58. Rob Treinen, *Cramped and Wet*, "completely disjointed issue," no date, Sioux City, IA, pp.19-20.
59. Marc Arsenault, telephone interview, December 12, 1993.
60. Arielle Greenberg, personal interview, August 25, 1993, New York City.
61. Adam Bregman, *Shithappy*, #3, 1993(?), LA, CA, pp. 12-13. The Cacophony Society is also mentioned in "Tales from The Zone," *Iron Feather Journal*, #11, 1991, Boulder CO.
62. Dick Hebdige, "The Meaning of Mod," in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in post-war Britain*, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds. (London: Unwin Hyman, 1976), p. 93.
63. Wolfboy, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #23, 1985, San Francisco, CA, no page.
64. Edwin P. Irwin, "In Quest of Bohemia," 1906, in Grana, p. 314.

65. Issue #23 (March 1985) listed thirty-seven letters, #63 (August 1988), thirty-two letters, and even though the number has slipped recently, in #120 (May 1993) to 21, and #129 (February 1994) to 18, most of the letters are still 7-10 paragraphs long.
66. Planet Boy, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #5, March-April, 1983, San Francisco, no page.
67. John Hurt, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, May-June, 1983, San Francisco, no page.
68. Mike Impastato, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #7, July-August, 1983, San Francisco, no page.
69. Carlos Fernandez, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #85, June 1990, San Francisco, no page.
70. Steve Stepe, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #7, July-August, 1983, San Francisco, no page.
71. Javi (John Souvadjji), "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #23, March 1985, San Francisco, no page.
72. John Jankowski, "letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #7, July-August, 1983, San Francisco, no page.
73. Illustration by Lee, *Flipside*, #44, 1984, Whittier, CA.
74. Thomas Pluck, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #88, September 1990, no page.
75. A lyric from Pete Townsend's song "Rough Boys." Townsend is well aware of this conflict between individuality and community in youth subculture, writing astute lyrics describing it in the case of the British Mods in The Who's rock opera *Quadraphenia*: "Why Should I care/If I have to cut my hair/ To be in with the out crowd."
76. Viktim Joe, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #62, July 1988, San Francisco, no page.
77. cited in Lisa K. Wildman, "Where the Boys Aren't: Riot Grrrl NYC," *SUNY Purchase Free Press*, March 4, 1994, p.7.
78. All responses anonymous, "Annihilate Sex Roles, Survey for Women--Poll Results," compiled by Ruth S., Erikka, Lynn, and Anna. *Maximumrocknroll*, #7, July-August 1983, San Francisco, no page.
79. Liberty, "What Riot Grrrl Means To Me," *Riot Grrrl* #5, March 1993, New York City, no page.

80. Emma, "What Riot Grrrl Means To Me," *Riot Grrrl* #5, March 1993, New York City, no page, emphasis mine.
81. Jen Devosb et al., *Riot Grrrl* #3, May 1992, Amherst, MA, no page.
82. Ne Tantillo, *Riot Grrrl*, # 6 1/2, December 1991, Arlington, VA, p.3.
83. Ne Tantillo, *Riot Grrrl*, # 6 1/2, December 1991, Arlington, VA, p. 8.
84. Diana, *Riot Grrrl* #5, March 1993, New York City, no page,
85. Suzanne Daley, "Little Girls Lose Their Self-Esteem On Way To Adolescence, Study Finds," *New York Times*, January 9, 1991.
86. *Riot Girl, Huh?*, 1991 (?), Olympia WA, no page.
87. Kathleen Hanna, et al. "Riot Grrrl is...", *Bikini Kill*, #2, Washington D.C., no page. Kathleen Hanna, in addition to being one of the founding mothers of Riot Grrrl is the lead singer for a punk band, also named *Bikini Kill*.
88. Joanne Gottlieb and Gaye Wald, "Smells Like Teen Spirit," in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture*, Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose, eds. (NY: Routledge, 1994), p.253.
89. Kathleen Hanna, et al. "Riot Grrrl is...", *Bikini Kill*, #2, Washington D.C., no page.
90. Lisa K. Wildman, "Where the Boys Aren't: Riot Grrrl NYC," *SUNY Purchase Free Press*, March 4, 1994, p.7.
91. Why the title *Bitch*? Lori's asked, "Because an aggressive man is 'assertive'--a woman is a pushy bitch...A man who bites back is 'courageous'--a woman is a 'vicious bitch.' You know what? BEING A BITCH IS A BITCHIN' FANTASTIC THING."
Lori Twersky, *Bitch*, #4, 1985, Campbell, CA, p.12; (FS5-NYSL).
92. Lori Twersky, "Smashing Cindarella's Slippers, part one," *Bitch*, #19, 1988, Campbell, CA, p.27; (FS5-NYSL).
93. Kathleen Hanna, "OO69," *Bikini Kill*, #2, 1992 (?), Washington D.C., no page.
94. Kathleen Hanna, "OO69," *Bikini Kill*, #2, 1992 (?), Washington D.C., no page.
95. Arielle Greenberg, telephone interview, March 28, 1994.
96. Dawn, *Riot Grrrl Newsletter One*, 1991 (?), Newbury Park, CA, no page.
97. R.F., *Riot Grrrl, Huh?*, 1991(?), Olympia, WA.

98. Ne Tantillo, *Riot Grrrl*, # 6 1/2, December 1991, Arlington, VA, p.3.
99. "Riot Grrrl Intro," *Riot Grrrl*, #8, 1992(?), Washington D.C., no page.
100. "Riot Grrrl is," *Bikini Kill*, #2, 1991 (?), Washington, D.C., no page.
101. Arielle Greenberg, personal interview, August 25, 1993, New York City,
102. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, George Lawrence, trans., J.P. Meyer, ed., (NY: Harper and Row, 1988), p.513.
103. Tocqueville, p.523.
104. Tocqueville felt that *both* these attributes were positive ones. The former for the same reasons as I, and the later because distraction from public affairs led to an implicit support of the status quo, and as such was a politically stabilizing force.
105. Tom Jennings, *Homocore*, issues # 1-7, September 1988-February 1991, San Francisco, CA; Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones, *J.D.s*, #8, 1991, Toronto, Ontario; (FS5-NYSL).
106. Steve Ackert, "Letters," *Homocore*, #7, Winter/Spring 1991, San Francisco, CA, no page; (FS5-NYSL).
107. *Skinny Alive*, #1, 1987, Murrieta, CA; *Colorblind*, #1, 1989(?), Chicago, IL; (FS5-NYSL).
108. Ivory-Snow Dial, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #5, March-April 1983, San Francisco, CA, no page.
109. It is not only diverse punk and punk related "realities" that are communicated through zines: *Radio Free Thulcandra*, is an APA "edited and published for Christian Fandom, an international denominational fellowship of Christians and Science Fiction Fandom interested in the courteous and accurate representation of Christian viewpoints in the fannish community...." While *The Wiccan Voice* is "Dedicated to the enlightenment of all subjects pertaining to the Metaphysical Sciences, Wicca and the Occult."
Marty Helgesen, *Radio Free Thulcandra*, #23, November 1990; Malverne, NY, inside cover; Marjorie Talarico, *The Wiccan Voice*, #1, Nov/Dec 1987, Oceanside CA. p.1; (FS5-NYSL).
110. Ann Wilder, "Letters," *Factsheet Five*, #22, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p.65.
111. Lewis H. Lapham, "Seen But Not Heard," *Harper's*, July 1995, p.31.

Work

I've got a problem with work. I HATE IT!....Yet millions of people, including me, participate in the 9 to 5 death march each and every day. Ants carrying crumbs into a life long deathhouse so that a measly 1 to 2% of the rich fuckers in the world have all the good things in life. Why do we do it?

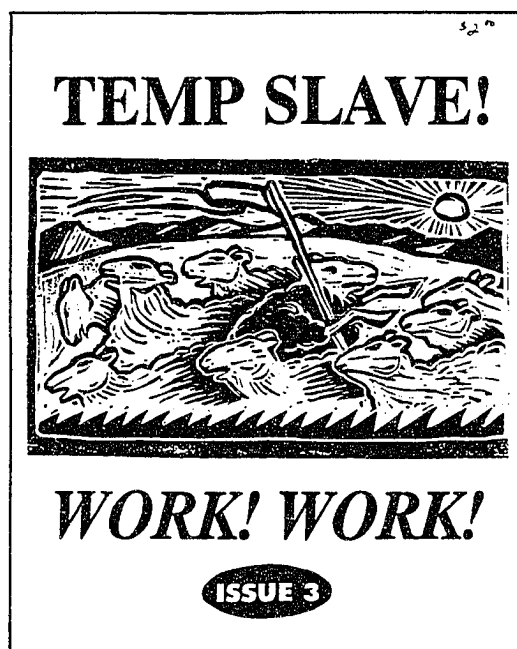
- Keffo¹

That Keffo has a problem with work is not surprising, probably most of us do. What is surprising is how much time and effort he expends writing about it. For fifty pages he rants about the nature of work: exposing the parasitical practices of the insurance industry he works for, ridiculing the servility of his fellow workers and the stupidity of his bosses, reprinting "doctored" public relations booklets and advertisements, documenting his day of doing absolutely nothing in the mailroom, and advocating sabotage and union organization.

Keffo is not the only zine writer who makes work, or rather hatred of a particular kind of work, a primary topic of concern. After producing his one shot zine directed at the insurance company he worked for, Keffo went on to edit *Temp Slave*, a zine devoted to temporary workers and the jobs they hate. Pete, whose goal is to wash dishes--and write about it--in all 50 states of the union, puts out *Dishwasher*; and from Los Angeles comes a zine entitled simply *Work*.² While most zines don't focus exclusively on the world of work, discussions and critiques of labor for money, in some form or another, find their way into many.

Again, it's not shocking that the topic of work would find a place in the zine world. It is, after all, a primary activity in most people's life. And unlike sleeping,

drinking, eating and leisure activities, it is one of the major components in life about which the individual has little or no control. Stated simply: most people work for somebody else, producing or serving something over which they have little say, and doing it in a way in that gives them little satisfaction.



front cover of Temp Slave #3

Karl Marx identified these standard features of the capitalist labor process in the mid 19th century, but far from having disappeared in the stretch of time between Marx's era and our own, the degree of control that most employees have over their jobs has declined.³ The last vestiges of pre-industrial work traditions have withered or been eradicated, and organized labor in the US has by and large followed the post-war AFL-CIO strategy of exchanging workplace control for higher wages, or today, any wages at all. Zine writers, being primarily young people, have had their work experience defined

by this reality, as well as the more recent changes brought on by the economic restructuring that began in the 1970s.⁴

In an effort to compete on a global scale, corporations over the past two decades have successfully fought to create what they call a "flexible" environment. In terms of production this means the breaking up of large factories and sub-contracting component parts all over the world; for consumption: the abandonment of a stable mass market and the aggressive identification of specialty and niche markets; and for labor this euphemism of "flexibility" translates out as an increase in part-time, temporary, and non-union work. At the same time, a great deal of economic activity has moved from industrial production to cultural/information/financial services production and a service industry, both fields where this sort of "flexibility" is more and more a given condition.

As a result of these changes, US corporations have effectively restructured their production, consumption, and labor operations, and have regained competitive strength--but this has come at a social price, particularly for young people. The traditional industrial work force--high school educated, blue collar working classes--has been made "redundant" as the new information and service jobs frequently demand the cultural capital of a middle class upbringing and a college education. At the same time these new jobs no longer hold the promise of income, stability, and autonomy that was once the luxury of the middle class. The outcome has been a decimation of the job opportunities for the traditional working class (particularly the non-white working class) and a "proletarianization" of jobs open to the new middle class. Young people today, in both income as well as job conditions, face the reality of downward mobility and decreased

aspirations.

Throughout the 1980s mention of this dramatic shift was conspicuously absent from the mass media. Why? In part because the people making decisions regarding the content of the commercial culture of the United States were rarely effected by these changes. Culture and information was an expanding sector of the market place, and magazine articles, movies, and television shows reflected this optimism by focussing on comfortable and satisfied urban professionals. Shows like *L.A. Law* and *The Cosby Show*, in turn, were popular with the broader public for a simple reason: people turn to entertainment to escape from problems of the everyday world, not to be reminded of them. And with a few exceptions, commercial culture readily supplied this escape from the increasingly grim portrait of the domestic economy.

Faced with a media blackout of the actual nature of the work they do, zine writers fill this void with stories of their own experiences. Take for example, Nate Wilson's rendition of his own life in his zine of comix, *Scrambled Eggs*, working as a plumber's helper, or Jasper Albeeny's dim view of his job in a video store in *The Incredible Flaming Mechanism*.⁵

By writing in zines, writers present "the real story" of their work. In *The Olecatronical Scatologica Chronicle*, Jokie Wilson, (no relation to Nate) exposes the banality and degradation of his work as a convenience store clerk, writing down a list of "101 Annoying Things That Convenience Store Customers Do or Types of Annoying Customers." These annoyances range from customers who "take out their daily aggression on me because they know that they can," to those that "think what a cool job

this must be since we get to 'drink free sodas all day long'," to those who "take convenience stores seriously."⁶



work blues in The Incredible Flaming Mechanism #4

What's interesting about representations of work life in zines is that Nate and Jasper's simple and direct depiction of their jobs and the work they do is relatively rare. More common are tales that don't dwell on the actual work being performed, but on the hypocrisy of having to do what often seems to be meaningless and demeaning work *and not having that work recognized as being meaningless and demeaning*. Where at one time working organizations rallied to preserve the "Dignity of Labor," in the new, deskilled,

service economy, zine writers understand that there is nothing left to preserve. It is in this context that one can make sense of Jokie's comment that one of the most annoying things that a customer can do is to take his work place "seriously." This contradiction between work as it is: an exploitative relationship which pits the boss against the worker against the consumer, and how it is supposed to be according to the American middle class mythos: a meaningful vocation, is what supplies the main dynamic driving the discussion of work in zines. According to *The Economic Report of the President*,

1994, the Service Industry--excluding trade and finance--now makes up more than 30 percent of the economy, and more relevant here, comprises more than 60 percent of new job growth in 1993. Since 1983 service sector employment has accounted for 52 percent of job growth, and Retail Trade (sales) accounts for an additional 21 percent.⁷ In other words, a total of 73 percent of the new jobs created since 1983 have been in the service or sales industry, two industries known for low union membership, high job insecurity, and importantly, jobs which put a premium the "Managed Heart": a public presentation and internalization of work commitment and satisfaction.⁸

"I work in a bulk goods discount warehouse store called Pace," writes Joseph Gervasi, editor of *Philly Zine* and *No Longer a Fanzine* about a job on the lower levels of the credit industry:

My job is to work at the Club Cars booth, where I try to get innocent consumers to sign up and receive info about buying a "new or used car cheaper" through Pace. While this is a simple job, it's boring, hurts my back and can be somewhat stressful, as I'm pressed to get people to sign up by being fake-nice.⁹

Never mind the fact that Joseph is selling something intangible: information about a car

selling scheme, what bothers him and many other zine writers is that they are supposed to be cheerful and enthusiastic--"fake-nice"--about the whole process.

The *Report of the President* goes on to chronicle how "The Personal Supply Industry" i.e. temporary workers, made up 20 percent of payroll job growth in 1993. While between 1990-93 part-time employment increased at a rate of almost four times that of full-time jobs.¹⁰ The conditions of temporary work in particular underscores the contradictions between commitment asked of the employee and the lack of commitment offered up by the employer.

Keffo, writing in *Temp Slave*, describes a temp job where he was sent an advance letter detailing his task putting up shelves. The note ended with these words:

THANK YOU for accepting this important assignment! We appreciate your willingness to take part in this project. The next time you walk through the paint department of this store you will realize how nice it looks and that your help made it this way!

At the job site Keffo meets the other workers,

At starting time, a huge group...gathered around their bosses and listened to their orders for the day. Suddenly, one of the bosses began yelling "OK what's No.1?" The workers screamed back their answer, "CUSTOMER SERVICE."...I couldn't believe this kind of feel good crap went on.¹¹

The day turned out well for Keffo as the boss never showed up and he and the other Temps got to go home with pay. But what holds the reader's attention is not this limited victory, but Keffo's description and ridicule of the management's bid to get their workers to passionately care about what is basically scut work. Factories have always been adorned with posters of happy workers and motivational phrases, but the insincerity of this is more apparent today than ever. At the same time that companies--through

downsizing, eradication of benefits, and use of part-time labor--are making it quite evident that they don't care about workers, they are also pushing propaganda about control circles and worker participation, and demanding that the worker give their moral commitment to the work. It is this disjuncture between the actual workings of these businesses and the image that is foisted on the employees and the public that enrages zine writers.

Trevor Rigler, another writer in *Temp Slave*, tells his story about working for a Texas biomedical firm assembling 200 medical kits an hour, each of which sells for a hundred dollars, and then being paid only five dollars an hour. But it is not this simple exploitation that raises his ire, instead, in his essay entitled "Double Dose O' Bullshit," Trevor concentrates on the owner of the company, a man who,

was in his early forties and had been a hippie of sorts. True to the form of his generation, he dumped what little principles he had developed in that warped, thoroughly revised and sanitized time capsule known as "the 60's" in favor of a more commodity based existence....Here was a man who adamantly boycotted grapes in support of migrant workers while exploiting the shit out of his own workers; a man whose deep feelings for the environment caused him to buy only "environmentally sound" products while living in a subdivision that was dumping a variety of pollutants into a natural spring that had once been used by Native Americans.¹²

Unlike industrial exposes in history past--Upton Sinclair's disclosure of the horrid working conditions in Chicago's stockyards and packing houses at the turn of the century, for example--zines speak less of the actual conditions of the work place and more about the hypocritical social and economic relationships that surround their work, Why?

The answer to this goes back to a concept discussed previously: the bohemian

ideal of an *authentic* life. Hypocrisy dominates discussions of work because it is here zine that writers face a direct challenge to their ideal of living "true to their self." Nearly every day in the workplace they are confronted with a contradiction. On the one hand they are raised within an ideology that infuses them with the ideal of work; not as a simple job that demands physical and mental exertion, but as a meaningful vocation that requires moral commitment, that is: a job which is part of the self.¹³ This ideal is met head on in reality by the fact that most work in our society is done for someone else, in a way dictated by someone else, and for the benefit of someone else. The disjuncture between these two definitions of work: the former being self-affirming labor, the latter: shit work, prompts zine writers to first try to identify the source of this dissonance in the social relations which make up their work experience, and then to devise ways to fight it and reassert a life of authenticity.

Keffo puts it well: "Most people are confused about the meaning of work and life, frequently assuming that both are the same. How wrong they are."¹⁴

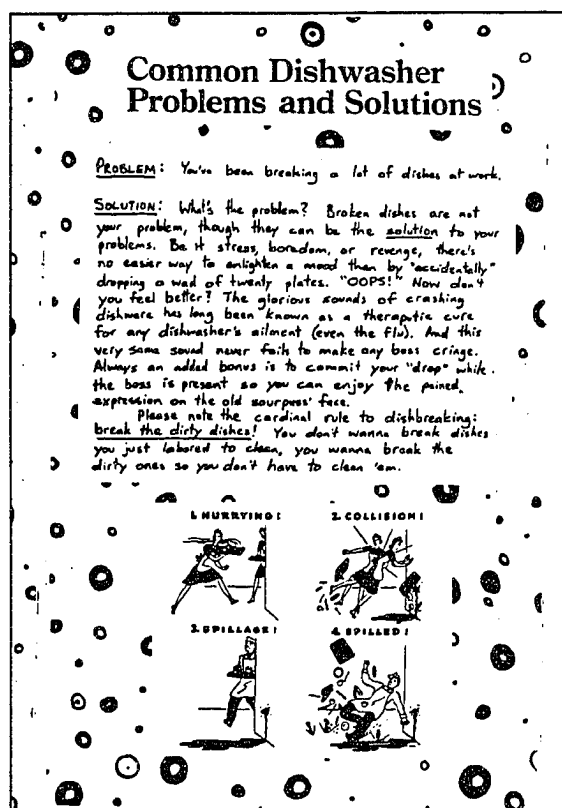
Sabotage

The Sabot Times is a zine produced by, in their own words, "a band of renegade reporters and photographers dedicated to sabotaging Journalism from within." In the editorial of their first issue they explain that they are,

tired of being fucked over by small-minded, vicious editors and publishers whose only pleasure in life is making journalists squirm in fear and sweat for their lousy jobs, which are ruled by these unbreakable commandments: Do it cheap, do it quick and don't offend and advertisers. We say it's time to fight back. We're going to show you how.¹⁵

The editor--calling herself Lois Lane--and her compatriots go on to tell tales of fabricating quotes, getting paid by sources for favorable stories, and writing sloppy stories that are full of known errors. Besides their goal of expending as little effort as possible for the editors, their justification for these decidedly unprofessional acts is that mainstream newspapers do this anyway; but whereas the newspapers do it hypocritically, they want to be "honest" about their deception. And maybe, they write, *Sabot Times* will offer "a way for the average newspaper reader to find out what's *really* going on down at the local paper."¹⁶

Sabotage, an age old tradition whose name comes from the practice of throwing wooden clogs--sabots--into industrial machinery and thereby shutting down the works. Almost half the zine tales of work I've cited so far end with some exhortation to sabotage. After telling another work story, Trevor writes that "Of course, I stole from both firms with impunity," Keffo says that he purposely scarred up some shelves on the way out of work at the warehouse, and Joe Gervasi ends his work tale with this epitaph: "I've worked here too long...The urge to hit the road rages hard in me now....For now, though, it pays my bills and keeps me alive. I'll just have to amuse myself with...THEFT, DESTRUCTION, DAMAGE." Within the underground culture workplace sabotage has an important place, and the lore of its practice and defence of its goals fill the pages of zines. Amidst numerous dishwashing stories, Dishwashin' Pete writes a column in his zine on "Common Dishwasher Problems and Solutions." The problem? You've been breaking a lot of dishes at work. The solution: What's the problem?¹⁷



breakin' dishes with Pete in Dishwasher #9

Besides the intrinsic joy that one gets from harming the very thing that harms you, sabotage and theft have a constructive side. Not only can you strike back at the place you work for, but you can also "redistribute" some of the goodies every workplace has to offer. Brendan writes of working the graveyard shift selling coffee at the Phoenix Airport. She calls it a "very neat job situation" as, "The inventory at this place is pretty loose and easy to adjust, so I give a lot of stuff way for free." Only half tongue-in-cheek Brendan applauds,

this opportunity to carry out direct redistribution of wealth. The company I work for charges customers too much (remember airport prices?) and doesn't pay its employees enough (trust me), and this way both inequities are resolved, since people just "pay" me whatever they feel like paying, and my income is supplemented.

In addition to screwing her employers and helping out herself, her sabotage gives Brendan a way to work on something that *she* feels is important: creating her "own free underground cafe, right under the nose of the mega-corporation that employs me!"¹⁸

Tales of sabotage and theft are not just represented *in* zines, but often *by* them. Stealing the material and "borrowing" the technology necessary to produce zines is considered part and parcel of making zines. Joe, of *JOEnews* brags that his zine, "didn't cost me a dime. I totally ripped off my employers, which is a big, big, part of it. I did it on my office copy machine. I used their postage meter. I used their PO box."¹⁹ And when I asked Missy Lavalee, editor of *Bushwacker*, *Gaybee*, and *Kittums* how she puts out her zine, she responded matter-of-factly that "my roommate...works the night shift at Kinko's. She's been copying for people for free for years. In some ways I would say that she keeps the Bay Area zine scene going."²⁰

Stealing from the workplace is nothing new. Anyone who has worked in a factory or office can testify to the amazing amount of pilfering that goes on. Nor is it a very fruitful strategy to hurt the corporate world. They simply pass on the cost to the consumer--the very same worker in a different role. Trevor Rigler, after bragging of his thieving ability, admits that,

no amount of petty thievery would settle the glaring imbalance between my wages and the profits of the companies. I mean how many sharpie pens, X-acto knives and rolls of tape does one need, anyway. When the boss is jetting off to the Bahamas while you're sitting down to beans and rice for the fourth time in a week, pilfering seems about as effective as trying to put out a three-alarm fire by pissing on it.²¹

While Trevor is certainly correct, I would argue that the "effectiveness" of theft and sabotage in a purely instrumental fashion is besides the point. Unlike the Luddites

of England who destroyed textile machinery in England in the early 19th century, these saboteurs don't hope to restore a recent tradition of non-alienated or "authentic" labor, at least not within the workplace. While the ideal of non-alienated work is carried over into the cultural realm--something I'll discuss below--it's all but been given up for lost at the 9-to-5 job. Instead, sabotage is about psychic rather than physical victories. With no memories of preindustrial labor patterns to sustain them and little in the way of alternative models of labor organization to guide them, these individuals have little hope of taking control of the production process in their workplace, never mind society at large. But if the system is too big and too entrenched to conquer, zine writers can at least make sure the system doesn't conquer them. The surest way to do this is to distance themselves from the work, the company, and the boss, if not physically, then mentally and morally. Sabotage is a way to stake out their identity as *other*, as not part of the system.

"Fuck Shit Up" is a column written by Doug Brunell in *No Longer a Fanzine* in which he outlines strategies for "people that don't want to be bothered at work" by their bosses:

First off, you want your boss of your back. Obviously you can't tell him that, so you have to make him NOT want to talk to you. It's easier than it sounds....If he's walking towards you, mutter under your breath..."Fuck God," "Fuck kids," or even "Kill me." You have to say such things with an extremely tense look on your face; the "I-am-ready-to-snap" look. If he asks what is wrong, which he probably won't, just make an innocent face and reply, "Why would anything be wrong? It's a great day."²²

As hilarious as it is ingenious, within Doug's strategy there is a kernel of a greater philosophy. The idea is to turn the alienation that you feel around, that is: *You fight*

alienation by alienating others. It's a philosophy common in any workplace, but here its roots are not necessarily in shop floor culture but in the punk inflected underground culture which Doug is a part. As Dick Hebdige has pointed out, the punk underground not only reflected the problems of society in the mid to late 1970s, but called additional attention to them by *dramatizing* them.²³ Doug's strategy is to project the personality of the ultimate alienated individual: the sociopath.

Part of this method of resistance to work is simple and direct: fuck with the bosses head as he usually fucks with yours. In one issue of *Dishwasher*, Pete gives a day by day, blow by blow account of a dishwashing job at a ski resort in Montana:

Day 22--Pat, one of the managers is a goof...he's been giving me a nice guy/tough guy treatment--as if he's trying to pull off the good cop/bad cop routine all by himself. One minute he's love and kisses and the next he's Mr. Hard Ass. Today I stayed one step ahead of him. When he'd be nice, I'd be sulky. When he'd be mean, I'd be cheery. He was very confused.²⁴

This small victory of Pete's was reinforced by his rampant pilfering of food and beer and then quitting a week before the Ski season ended with hopes that the manager will have to wash dishes in the under staffed kitchen. But this reverse alienation tactic is not limited to bosses only. Co-workers and customers are also targets. Pete goes on to caricature some of his mean or overly sycophantic co-workers and make fun of bothersome customers, and Doug writes that the tactics outlined above work equally well with fellow employees who are trying to be inappropriately friendly. The projection of reverse alienation is often generalized to society at large.

This generalization of hostility carries over into other forms of sabotage as well. It is not a far, nor illogical leap, from promoting workplace sabotage to consumer-place

sabotage. So it's no surprise to find a pro-shoplifting poster making this connection in an earlier issue of Joe Gervasi's *Philly Zine/No Longer a Fanzine*.²⁵



shopping advice in Philly Zine #11

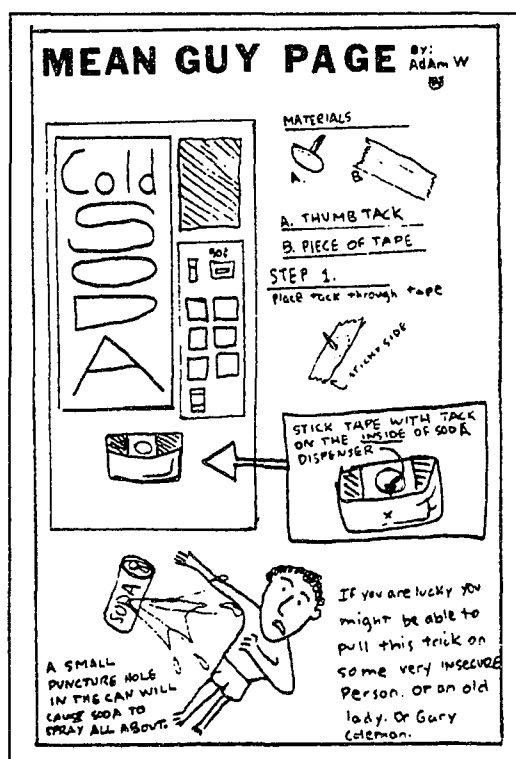
This celebration of stealing is mirrored in countless zines. In a section entitled "Scams" in *Gaybee*, the editors give advice on how to reuse postage stamps, steal toilet paper from public restrooms, scam hi-grade coffee at low grade prices, and so on.²⁶ Again, the point behind these acts is not so much that the people doing the thieving need the products: toilet paper and stamps are not exactly high cost items, nor does it inflict real damage on the system. What is important is what the act of sabotage and thieving symbolizes: refusing to become part of the cycle of "responsible" work and consumption.

As before, however, this outside world gets generalized very easily. Included in *Gaybee*'s list of scams is stealing fund-raising gumball machines left unguarded in

parking lots, leaving one to wonder how the charity causes which the gumball machines support could possibly be construed as "the enemy." This is particularly odd in the case of *Gaybee*, which is otherwise devoted to combatting homophobic bigotry and expressing a caring and compassionate outlook on the world, and whose co-editor, Missy Lavalee, is an intelligent and politically astute woman, who devotes her time and energy to a number of cooperatively run enterprises.

But this moral paradox has less to do with Missy as an individual than it does the underground culture of which she is a part; a culture where the philosophy of sabotage against all is commonplace. *Pranks!* is a collection of "devious deeds and mischievous mirth" issued by Re/Search Publications. While nearly all the pranks chronicled in this underground journal are amusing, and a good number of them are targeted against the smug and rich, there is no moral judgement made between pranks which harm the powerful and those which target ordinary and therefore powerless "normal" people.²⁷ A similar amorality shows up in the zine *Egg*, which includes an illustration of a cruel prank that can be played with a tack and a soda machine, joking that "if you are lucky you might be able to pull this trick on some very insecure person, or an old lady..."²⁸ It's important to make allowances for a gallows humor sensibility here, but not completely and not always. Another zine, *Crank*, solicits poetry by pretending to be a poetry journal then reprints the poems in order to make fun of them.²⁹ Morally akin to tripping cripples, ridiculing bad poets is just too easy to be very amusing. Instead it reveals the cost of the strategy of fighting alienation by embodying it. Projecting alienation may reveal what lies beneath the patina of "normal" work and other relations

within society, but it does this only by furthering social alienation.



mean guy pranks in Egg #8

The political liabilities of self-alienation are further exemplified in the zine *Black Leather Times*, where the editor Amelia G. gives an articulate defense of anti-social behavior, writing that, "My fond memories of the years from 1989 to 1991 involve making scenes in public places. I remember the loud, joyous proclamations of our freakdom, our otherness, our willingness to be different. So what if we horrified the neighbors; we exalted in one another."³⁰

"Proclamations of our freakdom, our otherness"; working under conditions that smack of hypocrisy, living in an environment where they don't fit in, feeling like aliens, is it any surprise that those that make up the underground take this alienation, turn

it into an attribute, and project it outward? Like the editors of *Sabot Times* assert, they're not doing anything that isn't part of society anyway; what they are doing is simply drawing attention to the alienation that already exists. Sabotage and alienation--A Bad Attitude--becomes a lived performance. These modern saboteurs make their life into a theater that forefronts the alienation that straight society would like to ignore.

While this inversion and refutation is understandable, and within the paucity of political options today, admirable, it does have its real problems, for it divides the world up into us against the rest; a Hobbesian war of each against all. This posture of the sociopath is taken to its logical conclusion by *Answer Me!* editors Jim and Debbie Goad who put together a zine full of rage and anger at normal society, as well as occasional adoration for serial killers. For the Goads the line is not drawn between bohemian freakdom and the rest of the straight world, but right at their front door. About their many readers Jim is blunt: "We don't really like them."³¹ Ironically, even while zines regularly ridicule the narrow mindedness of "politically correctness" and the puritan essentialism of "identity" politics they end up reproducing a very similar--and politically debilitating--world view: the few of us against the all of them.

This reproduction of alienation is also problematic for another reason. Amelia, in the essay cited above, goes on to write that "We had fun at the expense of others because we had nothing of our own to spend." With this Amelia reveals a deficit of the entire underground culture. By counseling sabotage *against* and projecting alienation *from*, they allow their identity to be defined by the workplace and society they hate. Again, it is the problem of negative identity, again, with all its contradictions. Searching

after an authenticity lacking in the dominant society, their identity is linked--albeit in opposition--to the outside world, the very repository of inauthenticity. Such a strategy also depends on the rather naive belief that someone, somewhere will notice, care, and call for a change. But a change to what? Embodying social alienation leaves one without ideas or guides of what nonalienating relationships might be like. Perhaps it is *because* the underground is all too often locked into having fun at the expense of others that it has nothing of its own to spend.

Slack

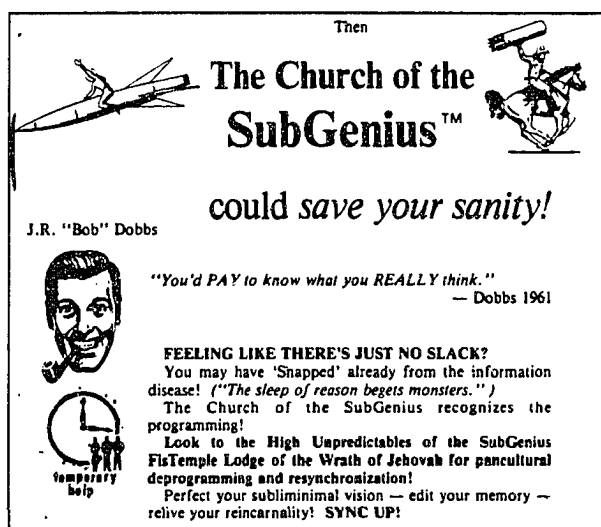
Purposely, early on in my life, I saw my dad chase that pot of gold, you know, at the end of the rainbow. It took him seventy years of his life until he could retire, when he could stop working [and] get to sit around. And I just figured I'm not going to waste the next fifty years of my life when I can sit around right now.

- Dishwashin' Pete³²

"REPENT! Quit your JOB! SLACK OFF!" SubGenius Pamphlet #1 commands on its first page.³³ The popularization of "slack" as a lifestyle and "slacker" as a role aspiration within the modern underground has its roots in this tongue-in-cheek religion/conspiracy started in the early 1980s. The goal of the elect of the SubGenius is to attain slack. What this beatific state actually is--as with all religions--is somewhat hazy, but the path is clear: devotion to the pipe smoking figurehead Bob, a path charted outside of the evil suburban, normal, and "pink" lifestyle, and most important to our discussion here, a life of perpetual leisure...of perfect slack.

The slack ideal was further popularized a decade later through an independent film by Richard Linklater, appropriately named *Slacker*. Shot in a deadpan cinema verite

style, Linklater chronicles a day in the life of a group of people "on the fringes of any meaningful participation" in Austin, Texas. Best exemplified by one character's summation of his last few months as composed of changing the name of his band to "The Ultimate Losers" and boasting that he's been sleeping a lot, the film chronicles a lifestyle of slack, drifting from one character to another, picking up snippets of conversations, weaving together a world of people rebelling against the work ethic. Released in the Summer of 1991, Linklater's low budget, independent production became a surprise hit. Even before Linklater's film, however, the contours of slack were being charted in the pages of zines.



*the gospel according to the SubGenius Pamphlet
#1*

Slacking off has always been a time honored tradition of those kept on the bottom of society. Historian Lawrence Levine has written about how African-American laborers sung out their feelings about work with lyrics like "Dere ain't no use in my workin' so hard," and "When you think I'm workin', I ain't doin a thing," crating a counter-ideal

to the Protestant work ethic and the moral spirit of capitalism. These people had good reason to slack off. As the lines to another song went: "If you work all the week/An' work all the time/White man sho to bring/Nigger out behin."³⁴ The rejection of the ethic of hard work and determination makes sense if you know that it will make no difference anyhow, but why would zinesters raised within the middle class adopt the ideal of slack?

Part of the answer is tradition. Being on permanent vacation within a society that stresses work has always appealed to the cultural underground. The famed 19th century French bohemian Theophile Gautier stated once that "It appears to me that the most fitting occupation for a civilized man is to do nothing..."³⁵ And within the more politicized underground, Karl Marx's own son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, wrote a spirited defense of slack entitled *The Right to be Lazy* in the 1880s, arguing that, "the proletariat must trample under foot the prejudices of Christian ethics, economic ethics and free-thought ethics. It must return to its natural instincts, it must proclaim the Rights of Laziness."³⁶ Bohemians, Villagers, Beats, Hippies--almost every modern underground has celebrated leisure.

But why today? Perhaps because zine writers understand all too well the vicissitudes of the modern economy. With mainstream economists predicting that the average person will change jobs five or six times throughout their lifetime, and the *New York Times* reporting that even in high tech industry "shedding jobs" is part of permanent corporate strategy, the idea of cultivating the knowledge and skills necessary for a "stable" career makes little sense.³⁷³⁸ "My advice to the youth of America," writes

Stacy Estep, editor of *Box of 64*, "is this: focus instead on your *unmarketable* skills. Don't suppress them in favor of memorizing historical dates or mathematical formulas; revel in them! Cultivate them!"³⁹

In the post WWII era, a stable and meaningful career has been considered a birthright for the white, middle class. In the past few decades, however, the availability and quality of jobs has declined.⁴⁰ The two sectors of growth employment over the past decade and a half are service and sales, and management and professions. The former provide dead-end jobs, while the latter demand long hours, commitment to the corporate world, and are fiercely competitive--yet still offer little security.⁴¹ Faced with this choice, it's no shock that many young people simply opt out and join Bohemia. In the words of Linklater, *Slackers's* director, the underground is made up of people "rejecting society before society rejects you."⁴²

Not discounting this rather economically determinist explanation for slackers, it's not a sufficient explanation. People don't merely react to the environment which surrounds them, instead they invest their decisions with meaning. And it is this meaning which makes up the ethics and politics of underground culture that is articulated and communicated within zines. What zines offer up to their readers is a philosophy of laziness as a positive attribute. As we saw with the moniker of "loser," the zine world is adept at adopting insults as compliments. Turning the tables on definitions of who and what you are and making a negative into positive is a subcultures' way of taking the sting out of being limited in possibilities and labeled as such.⁴³ Faced with diminished career opportunities, labeled as apathetic by the mainstream press, this underground has made

apathy and a lack of career options something to celebrate.

In rebellion against a culture that glorifies the work ethic with silly football coach aphorisms like "Winners don't quit and quitter's don't win," then offers up meaningless work with an unsure future, zine writers celebrate quitting. The *Quitter Quarterly*, edited by Shelly Ross and Evan Harris, gives advice to the prospective quitter, not only to quit things yourself but to feel good about it and revel in it by,

Tell[ing] everyone you know that you have quit. Because of the stigma attached to quitting, many quitters deny themselves the pride and gratification of quitting....Send reminders, call [friends] to discuss the circumstances of your quitting, invite people to your house and dwell on whatever you quit.

If you yourself have difficulty quitting, they counsel, then, "Encourage someone else to quit" as "Even vicarious quitting is better than no quitting at all."⁴⁴

Sooner or later circumstance force one back to work, but the goal is to get a job in which quitting, not showing up, or goofing off won't take much of an effort. "I always like a job without responsibility and such," Dishwashin' Pete explains when I ask why he only washes dishes, "And I don't mind if other people think it's lowly. Because then I can have the job without responsibilities and they won't mind if I walk off the job."⁴⁵

Jean Baudrillard, marxist turned postmodernist, has theorized this strategy of quitting, this philosophy of zero responsibility. He argues that withdrawal from economic, social, and political production makes sense as an--albeit partially unconscious--strategy of resistance in our (post)modern world. At earlier points in history people struggled to become subjects of history, demanding what was denied to them: the right to act upon the world. As he writes: "To a system whose argument is oppression

and repression, the strategic response is to demand the liberation rights of the subject." Baudrillard points out, however, that this sort of simple repression is no longer the dominant logic of control in the West today. Instead, he argues, "the present argument of the system is to maximize speech, to maximize the production of meaning, of participation. And so the strategic resistance is the refusal of meaning and the refusal of speech..."⁴⁶

In other words, strategies of social control have changed. Whereas once suppression of information and political activity was the design of the ruling powers, now a veritable flood of information drowns the citizen, and exhortations to "get involved" in your community or be part of the workplace "quality circle" bombard them. Yet still citizens know they have no real power. How do you rebel against this injustice? When they won't let you participate in society, you fight for that right. When they force you to engage, you slip into slack. For Baudrillard, revolution--the fight for the right to be a subject of history--is a resistant strategy of the past, dead and buried. Today's resistance, he believes, can be found in "devolution."⁴⁷

In a single move Baudrillard takes what has traditionally been considered revolutionary deficits: apathy, passivity, ironic detachment, and turned them on their head--making these traits attributes instead of faults. And he may be right. In the developed world, with its sophisticated security apparatus and its democratic patina, violent revolution as a tactic for over-arching social change is no longer viable, while the simple withdrawal of consent may be an effective tactic.⁴⁸

But he's not totally right, for while he is correct in laying out the shifts in the

arguments of the system, a look at slackers, the "vanguard" of this strategy of disengagement, reveals that far from refusing to be subjects, they are trying to reassert their subjecthood in a society which treats everybody like objects. First, and on a very simple level, *Slackers*, by calling themselves this--representing themselves and articulating a belief system--are self-defining subjects. This is complicated because this assertion of subjecthood takes place through a negation of what is seen as the bogus subjecthood of the participating worker, citizen, what-have-you, but it is still an assertion of subjecthood. As with the polyglot identity discussed earlier, zines create a space within which to identify, work through, and communicate these new forms of subjectivity.

Second, what slackers--and perhaps the larger, apathetic society as well--are rebelling from is not participation per se, but social, economic, and political participation as it is offered by the powers that be. Is it any wonder that people refuse to vote when politicians respond to the interests of PACs instead of citizens? Is it a mystery that workers look askance at "employee participation" if they are hired as temporary workers? What Baudrillard sees as a fatalistic rejection of subjecthood period, should be reconsidered as a rejection of false subjecthood, leaving the possibility of an assertion of "authentic" subjectivity wide open. For slackers are not just dropping out, but are also turning on and tuning in to the possibilities of another culture and society. As one of the characters in the film *Slacker* states: "Withdrawing in disgust is not the same as apathy."

The underground politics of dropping out finds an advocate in Mickey Z., creator

of *Flaming Crescent* zine and *The Reality Manifesto*. In the latter pamphlet he concludes that,

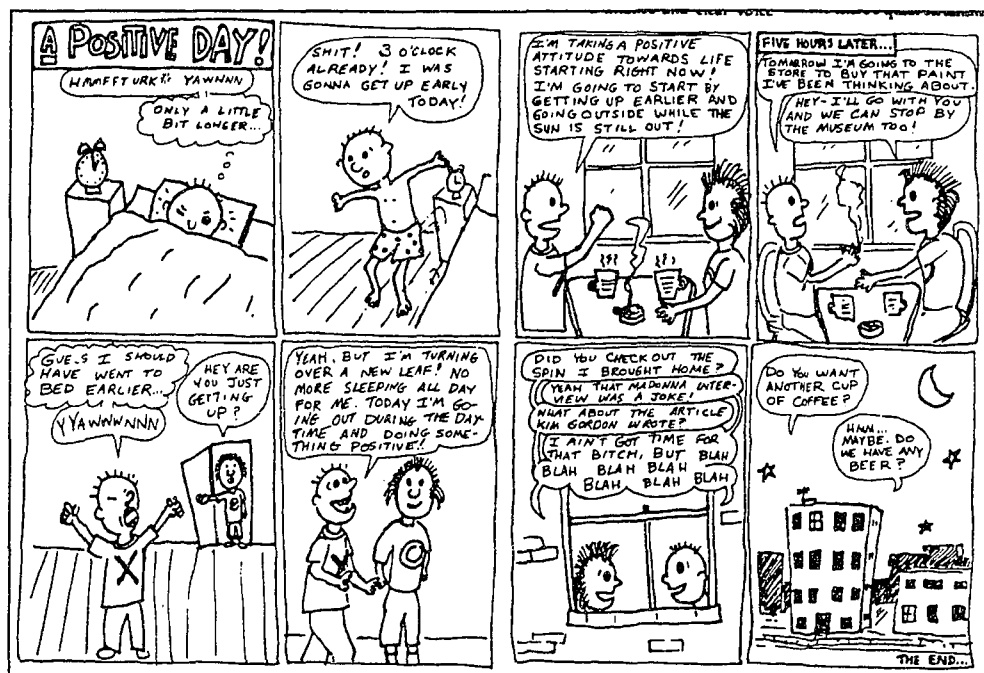
There is only one course of action if we are not part of the economic ruling class: *Play the "game" just enough to get by, stop wasting energy in futile efforts to change the world, and set up your own little world in your own time and space in which you can experience the revolutionary pleasure of thinking for yourself.*⁴⁹

At first read Mickey's rant is simply a self-centered justification for retreating from politics and society. While there is some truth to this interpretation--which I will discuss later--Mickey himself refutes it, claiming that slack is a conscious political act and stance; "A passionate indifference," he calls it. And there may be some truth here too, for as these last few lines of his manifesto suggest, *withdrawal* from the greater world is accompanied by *engagement* in something else: setting up "your own little world."

These little worlds offer a place, as Mickey writes, "in which you can experience the revolutionary pleasure of thinking for yourself." Again, what starts out in negation can lead to revitalization. Slacking offers time and mental space to rethink what matters in work, in leisure, in life. Missy Lavalee wrote me about her anti-career trajectory:

I finished high school and dabbled in college for three and a half years. I decided to drop out and move to San Francisco....I have a lot of reasons for this, but the main one is that I think [college] prepares you for the rat race, then you get out of college, jump into the rat race, and end up losing....I am trying to reject the lifestyle that is expected of this generation, to go to school and be successful. I am trying to change my definitions of successful.⁵⁰

For Missy, this new definition of success includes putting out her own zines and working with others in Blacklist Mailorder, a cooperative, networking organization which distributes underground zines and records world-wide.



finding nothingness in Teen Fag #2

On a more intimate plain, slacking is about rediscovering experiences that are lost in the speed of modern life. A short essay in *Exformation* asks "where is this modern youth hero?" The writer finds her in "Super Slacker," a person who has "a full time occupation of making those pauses in the action of everyday life seem longer and more meaningful."⁵¹ While sometimes these "pauses" are full of nothing, as a comic printed in *Teen Fag* makes clear, they can also make time for beautiful respites from a high speed society: a present day Walden Pond.⁵² Dishwashin' Pete tells me that his lifestyle leaves time to meander.

I took a walk around town today and I did all kinds of stuff. Like I made my way into this abandoned building and found all this neat stuff, and was watching these turtles swim around and got into some pretty cool stores and talked to some people...and saw all this stuff.⁵³

As a "super slacker" Pete is the modern day *flâneur* hero of the 19th century French poet

and bohemian Charles Baudelaire, aimlessly wandering and taking in "stuff."

Pete and others then put this "stuff" into their writing. Mentioned before, Aaron Cometbus tells of his exploits bumming across the country in *Cometbus #31*, Jennifer Payne--while not a slacker--reveals her relatively quiet life in Connecticut in *The Latest News*, and in *America's at our Doorstep*, Dennis Brezina gives a day by day account of living close to nature in Maryland. Joshua Baker tells of living in a shack in California for months in *Notes from the Lighthouse* and Terry Ward at last count has sent out more than two hundred *Notes from the Dump* from New Hampshire sharing his permanent retired status. These zines serve as models of The Good Life that counter the bourgeois utopias of material success and boundless consumption served up in the mass media.

However, politically speaking, there are limitations of these isolated ghettos. Like Walden Pond, they are the privilege of the better off. As Henry David Thoreau relied upon the kindness of his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson for the property on which his "isolated" cabin stood, and had food delivered to him regularly by friends, slackers depend upon the affluent society they reject for a backdrop of sustenance. Over the phone, Dishwashin' Pete told me about his early decision to distance himself from the norms of a career and stability:

Even when I was in college I was with all those kind of career chasing...people that were saying, "Oh, I'm going to be an accountant, I'm going to be a lawyer." I remember being 17 years old and being asked that, and I was saying that "I'm going to come sleep on your floor." And seriously, I'm here right now with a guy I went to college with, sleeping on his floor.⁵⁴

As long as the rest of the world isn't made up of slackers, slacking is made easier. This is not in any way to discount the importance of Pete deciding to reject the life of "career

chasing" that he found empty. I only want to point out the fact that such a decision to sleep on other's floors and wash dishes for a living is possible because of the material success of those chasing careers that eat out and allow him to sleep on their floor. This doesn't mean slacking is a scam, merely that it embodies a contradiction: like so many other features of the underground this resistant strategy depends on the very society it resists.

Writing in 1939, George S. Snyderman and William Josephs write a brutal but accurate criticism of the freedom of the bohemian who depends upon the dominant society:

In short, the bohemian aims at practical anarchy....[and] finds that in a law abiding group a furtive anarchism is possible. He believes that he has set up a novel improvement on the social mechanism, that he has demonstrated the practicability of individualism as a form of society. As a matter of fact he has merely nullified for himself the necessity of accepting responsibilities upon whose recognition by others, however, he continues to rely on for his privileges.⁵⁵

As the SubGenius Foundation gleefully admits, "Slack is like freedom, but unlike freedom it brings no responsibility."⁵⁶

Another problem also needs to be acknowledged: celebration of leisure is not opposition to the dominant system. While the ideologues and practitioners of early and middle capitalism extolled the virtues of hard work, sacrifice and vocation, since the 1930s, in the overdeveloped world at least, consumption has been recognized as capitalism's driving force. And consumption takes place primarily in the realm of leisure. Far from being in direct opposition to advanced capitalism, slack, as the leisure time necessary to consume goods, or as a reward for the sacrifice of a life spent in toil, is an

integral part of it. As Dishwashin' Pete declares in the quote that opened this section, he is merely taking a shortcut to what his non-bohemian father always desired.

However, by taking a detour around work directly to leisure, slackers are demanding something that it is within the economic possibilities of capitalism to provide yet because of political reasons it does not. As economist Juliet Schor points out in her book *The Overworked American*, Americans are working harder and getting less than at any time in the post WWII era: "In 1990 one-fourth of all full time workers spent forty-nine or more hours on the job each week. Of these almost half were at work sixty hours or more."⁵⁷ This figure is in turn increased by those that work double jobs or those, often women, who work at a job and at home. Ironically, the other labor statistic that has risen in the past half century is worker productivity; the amount an US employee produces in a given time is now double what it was in 1948. This means that as a society we could live at 1948 standards--not bad ones at that--working four hours a day, or six months a year, or every other year. This is possible, except for the fact that those who make decisions of this sort in our society have a decidedly different future in mind.⁵⁸

The efficiency of capitalist production and advanced technologically have ended natural scarcity. The scarcity that exists today is not the result of not enough to go around, but of unequal distribution of what there is already, in other words: it's artificial. It is well within our technological capacity to provide leisure and material comfort to the world population with very little work expended. In a way, through their personal example, this is what Slackers are asking for.

But they are asking for something else as well. Slacking is not about doing no

work and waiting for a Buick in the carport and a pop-up toaster in the kitchen. (A condition which if extended to the entire population of the world would have dire ecological consequences.) It is also a philosophy which promotes doing more with less; finding enjoyment less in Nintendo and Disneyland and more in contemplating turtles swimming, exploring old buildings, talking to others, and creating one's own culture. "All understand the value of useful things, but how many perceive the value of uselessness?" Not surprisingly, the words of Chinese Taoist philosophers Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu make their way into the pages of zines.⁵⁹

There is, however, an important exception to the slack ethic of zero work in the zine world, for the zines which carry these articulate arguments against work are products of labor themselves. In conversation, I pressed Pete on his dislike for work and responsibility. I brought up the fact that *Dishwasher* is lovingly created and designed and must have taken an immense amount of both labor and care to create. He immediately outlined the difference between two types of work: the former, work for money and for someone else, was taxing, boring, degrading, and to be avoided at all costs. The latter, making zines, was work too, but "it's fun and it's for myself, and it's not for the buck."⁶⁰ As Pete points out that there is another ideal of work operating in the zine world. In a word: non-alienating labor.

For Love, Not Money

What do you do?
 I find things out,
 You don't make any money
 out of your work?
 No, I don't work in the way
 that people usually
 understand the expression.

-- C. Nash, *Queer Magnolia*⁶¹

For most people, for most of the time, the work they do and the identity they derive from that work resonates with what a young Karl Marx in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 called estranged or alienated labor. Simply put: this is work in which one is "alienated" from what they produce, how they produce it, what is done with the fruit of their labors and, consequently, from the connections their work engenders between themselves and their fellow citizens.⁶² But in identifying the traits of alienated labor, Marx implicitly held out the possibility of its opposite: non-alienated labor (which, with Friedrich Engels's help, he later made more explicit). While time has proved Marx mistaken in other things, his one hundred and fifty year old ideal of non-alienated labor may not be ready for the ash heap of history just yet. The reality of work in a capitalist society may be dispiriting, but people are not as easily dispirited. Between the cracks of the system new--and very old--ideas and ideals of what work *should be* emerge. Zines are a medium through which to express these new ideals, but more importantly, they are actual *embodiments* of a type of work and creation that runs counter to the norm within our capitalist society.

Zines, as *Factsheet Five* founder Mike Gunderloy is fond of saying, are produced

for "love not money." This hardly seems like a radical or even important ideal, but its implications are grand. Zines take as a given an ideal of creation that rejects the dominant justification for production and creation in our society. As such, they and the network which they are a part, implicitly embody a critique of the driving force of our society: the pecuniary and narrowly instrumental nature of nearly all work and creation.

A cynic could argue that creating zines for love, not money is the simple result of producing a product that others won't pay for. "Why Publish?" zine editor Carl Bettis rhetorically asks, "To become rich and famous. There are still a few bugs in the system."⁶³ Carl's irony, however, is explicit, and the issue is not necessarily money. There are zine purists who believe that any exchange of zines for money is something to be frowned upon, just as we will see later that there are attempts to cash in on the whole zine phenomenon. But for most zine writers money is besides the point: if you make it fine, if you lose it, it's to be expected.

The oft repeated statement about a separation between money and love is really a stand in for another argument: the type of work that is done for money vs. the type of work done for love. For at the crux of the zine ethic is a definition of creation and work that is truly fulfilling: work in which you have complete control over what you are creating, how you are doing it, and whom you are doing it for, that is, *authentic* work. As with other characteristics of the zine world, this ideal of a non-alienating creation is not born through immaculate conception. It has its roots in reaction against the everyday experiences within the present society, and in specific, in opposition to the common-day experience of work.

To understand the importance of zines as an antidote to the work-a-day world one need look no further than their subject matter. Popular music, science fiction, and other leisure pursuits which make up the bulk of zines' subject matter have traditionally been those very "spaces" in society where a person could escape from work and create their own world. As rock critic Simon Frith has pointed out, one of the things that makes popular music so attractive--particularly to young people--it that it is the musician who represents a life free from work, a person whose work is their play, an individual in short, who "did it their way."⁶⁴ As popular music has become integrally tied to big business this may be more fantasy than reality, still, the ideal of popular music as respite from alienating work has a strong hold.⁶⁵

But this inverse relationship between straight work and zine work is more explicit than the choice of topics covered; zines as a strike against alienating work is asserted openly by zinesters like *Pinto* editors Sara Lorimer, Paul Schuster, and Tina Herschelman:

Sara: You know I'd never thought about doing a zine until I started working at that god awful record store. There's gotta be some sort of connection there; between that being such a stifling place and needing an outlet for creativity

Tina: It's Dave [their boss] [laughing]

Paul: Yeah, maybe it's a reaction to the shitty working environment we were all subjected to....When that issue comes out and you go pick it up, its totally thrilling. You know that we did something that was hard, but...you get the end result.

Tina continues in this vein,

When I stand at the cash register [at the record store] I'm just getting money. I don't see any connection to...making this album, or whatever. But with *Pinto* I see [even the drudgery of soliciting ads] as connected to printing [contributor] John Smith's photographs--which is really beautiful.⁶⁶

For the editors of *Pinto*, work on the zine, even the unpleasant work, is different than the work that each do for a living. It's different because it is creative, because they can see a connection between process and product, and because the result is theirs.

Creating a zine can define work--and the sense of time that accompanies work--in a markedly different way than is common in daily labor. "When I'm working at my paying job," Tad Hirsch writes, "I am always aware of time, usually in terms of 'time left,' e.g. 'twenty minutes left to lunch,' or 'three hours left before I can go home.'" In contrast, when I'm working in the distro [his distribution service], or on my zine, the hours race by without my notice."⁶⁷ Michelle Rau, zine historian and creator of the feminist comix zine *Lana's World* echoes Tad's words, commenting again on the kind of euphoria that accompanies working on your own zine:

A kind of madness descends on me....I'll work for six hours straight doing layout at home, then laser print and pasteup [my zine] all day at work, my hands shaking....Driven. I can't sleep, can't eat, can't think about anything else except the moment when the last page is collated and stapled and it lies there in my hand, and I say, I'm published.⁶⁸

For both Tad and Michelle, work on zines is marked out in more natural--albeit feverish--rhythm than the hours and minutes that have become standards as markers in capitalist production, even in this era of so-called flexibility. Whereas time spent working for a living is strictly delineated in a manner in which control and account can be kept of the

production process, the meaning of time devoted to working on a zine is centered around the product itself.⁶⁹

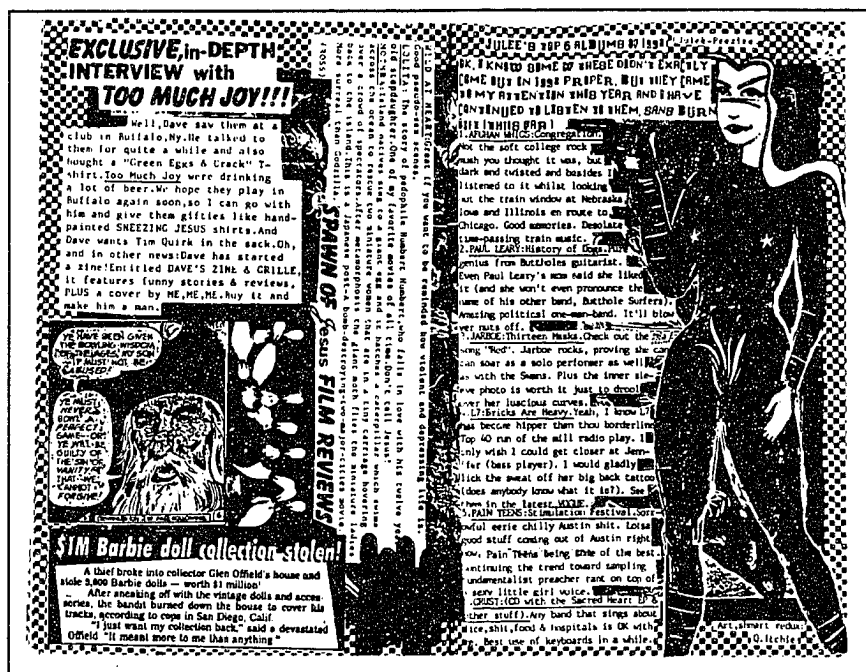
Unlike most work, working on a zine is *fun*. "[I]t's fun as hell," writes Louis Lane about putting out *Sabot Times*; and in reply to "Why Publish?" J.C. Coleman of *Life on Planet Earth* explains simply: "Because it's fun." "Fun" is an answer I've heard many times from zine writers justifying why they do what they do, and as an answer it is meaningless by itself--even J.C. himself acknowledges it's "very cliché." But the reasons J.C. gives for why "it's fun" reveal a bit more complexity in his answer and hint at the locus of the pleasure one gets from producing a zine: "The only restrictions are those I put on myself," writes J.C., "That's what makes it fun, the freedom to just do it."⁷⁰

That zines are a place in which the creator has only their own restrictions to heed is key in understanding what they offer their makers. This desire for control is a natural reaction to a world in which zinesters feel there is all too much control, but not of their own making. In his study of mostly science fiction and fantasy zines in the early 1970s, Frederick Wertham noted this, arguing that this freedom from exterior constraints and controls was "no mere formal matter; [but] goes to the heart of what fanzines are."⁷¹ This issue of control touches the very aesthetics of zines. As discussed in an earlier chapter, part of the zine aesthetic privileges the personal touch: Aaron Cometbus lovingly hand writing each page *Cometbus* or the cover of *Hardcry*, hand-colored by Steven "Hardcory" Cervantes's four year old son.⁷² The result is a style which illustrates the physical touch of the individual creator and connects the reader to the writer on an

intimate level.

Most publishers don't hand letter their zines, using typewriters, word processors, and computers instead. But even here, emphasis is placed on humanizing this technological form. Arielle Greenberg, editor of *William Wants a Doll*, told me of her struggle to use desktop publishing equipment in a way that didn't dehumanize her zine.⁷³ And the editor of *Slut Utopia*, Lizzard Amazon, writes in her second issue: "OK OK...it is not so hard to use pagemaker and i've got access so here is a slightly (slightly...) less scuzzy looking zine than #1. But I am still going to write all over this thing in pen at the last minute."⁷⁴ Which is exactly what she does.

While the personal touch is an effort to define the zine as something that comes from an individual and bares their stamp, that is, a visual demonstration of the creator's control, zines are also a way to distance oneself from the formality--the control--that marks most commercial press and commercial and high art. The cut and paste aesthetic first popularized in punk zines lends itself well to xerox production and reproduction, and constitutes a move away from the slickness and overproduction--the aesthetics of control--that characterize so much of commercial creative production. Zines editors, like Queen Itchie of *Sneezing Jesus*, use cut and paste to scramble the control of seamless commercial design, then assert their own control by reassembling fragments into their own creation.⁷⁵



cut and paste aesthetics in Sneezing Jesus #8

Zines aesthetics not only reflect who the individual creator is, but also delineates what the zine is not. "The scruffier the better," as Michael Carr, one of the creators of *Ben is Dead*, argues in describing what makes a zine look like a zine. He continues: "...photocopied ones particularly appeal to readers, because they have a more homespun or real feel to them...they look as if no corporation, big business or advertisers had anything to do with them..."⁷⁶ In other words, the zines look they are controlled by no one other than their producer.

The issue of control crosses over into the production and distribution process of zines as well. Scott Cunningham, a co-editor of *World War III*, once worked for a "mega-corporate" commercial publishing concern housed in a tall vertical building whose floors were divided into different divisions: art, editorial, advertising, business, and

distribution. In all the time he worked there he never spoke to anyone in the different departments, though they were all worked on the same projects. He juxtaposes this fragmented organizational model to the lack of hierarchy and division of labor at *WWIII*, where "the same person doing a major piece is pasting down the page numbers" and he, himself, is closely involved in every facet, large and small, of creating and putting out the comic.⁷⁷

Dan Werle, the sole editor of *Manumission*, defines this involvement as "one of the greater aspects" of putting out his zine, in that, "I can control who gets copies, where it goes, how much it costs." "Why is that so important?" he rhetorically asks, and answers:

I think it's...a means of empowerment, a means of keeping things small and personal and personable and more intimate. The people who distribute my zine I can call and talk to them, and I talk directly to them instead of having to go through a long chain of never ending bourgeoisie [laughs].

The small circulation run of zines keep them intimate. While most publishers would like to have their zine read by as many people as possible, they're concerned about the loss of control this increase in size might bring.⁷⁸ Dan worries that if his zine got too big it would lead to "compromises." "Who would be the distributor?" he asks, "Would it be required to have a bar code attached? Would the wholesale price vary much from the retail price? Who else would be making money off this project? Who else would be putting the work into the project?"⁷⁹⁸⁰

Wielding complete control is one of the joys of being a zine editor, but it is often a solitary endeavor. As Robert W. Howington of *Experiment in Words* puts it, "I'm the man, the bottom line. Me. Only me....what goes on inside its pages is mine, and only

mine." He continues, accenting the disjunctures between his everyday life and his life as a zine editor:

I work full-time as a government clerk, doing a god awful paperwork meaningless job, day after insane day. Yet, writers from all over the world, writers with exquisite resumes, degrees...send me their work....I wallow in this. I live two lives. I have the best of one world.⁸¹

Robert is being more than a touch facetious, but reading his words I'm reminded of a scene from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground* in which the underground man savors a memory of his job as a lowly government clerk where he once made an arrogant officer with swaggering walk and banging sword come back to him again and again to get a simple form stamped. In his wretched state this was his mean victory: the power of the powerless.⁸²

The point this story makes is important in understanding the politics of underground culture. Being alienated from one's work and finding an outlet for that alienation in publishing a zine doesn't necessarily mean overcoming the alienation and isolation in our society. It can also result--as we saw in the discussion of sabotage, or in Dostoyevsky's anti-hero--in passing it along. *Beer Frame's* Paul Lukas, talks about editing his zine, using words by now familiar:

I want control over the whole fucking thing myself. Beerframe is about all these things but it's...obviously mainly about me. Which is really arrogant and everything, but...there's a kick that comes from that.⁸³

In his other life Paul is an editor for a book publishing company. There he works with others, but not necessarily cooperatively; at his job he is told what to work on and when to work on it. As this situation is far from ideal, he revels in the individual control he has while working on his zine.

This common zine ideal of control over work defined in individualistic terms raises serious problems for traditional radical notions of political and economic solidarity, but where it comes from can be understood: it is the result of a contradiction inherent within our economic system. The conditions of production in our economy are most often communal. We cooperate with others in the act of producing whatever it is to be produced, and counts on others in order for that production to succeed. We are interdependent. The relations of production, on the other hand, undermine this cooperation. Power over who determines what and how something is produced and who profits from it is far from communal: someone else decides and someone else profits. In Paul's case, he depends on authors to write what he edits, someone to solicit this material, and the staff of his office to manage the environment he works in, but in the end it is someone else--removed from this process--that makes the final decisions and the final profits.

For Marx, who first outlined these contradictions, the solution was to bring the relations of production in line with the conditions of production. If worker's cooperation was how things got produced, then the decisions about work, and the profits from it, should be arrived at and divided cooperatively. Socialized ownership was the historically logical outcome of what was already socialized production. Needless to say, things haven't quite worked out this way. Yet the basic contradiction of capitalism that Marx outlined remains.

The underground culture--like bohemia throughout time--responds to this contradiction in a different way than that hoped for by Marx. In rebelling against the

relations of production that make their work an alienating experience, they also rebel against the conditions of production, thus rebelling against communal and interdependent relations. The result is a celebration of individualization--the total control of the individual. This is not always the case: Scott Cunningham's *WWIII* is edited and produced by a self-consciously political collective and many zines, like *Pinto*, are put out by small groups, but still the vast majority of zines are one person shows.

However, this *does not* mean that the sort of pleasure that one gains in controlling the product of their labors is entirely solipsistic. The fact that zines are a communicative medium ensures interaction between individuals. The "networking" function of the underground and the commitment that individual zine producers have to engage in this underground mitigate against a debilitating personal isolationism. This individualization is also not necessarily a bad thing. It might very well be that this sort of individual creation and production, linked together through a vast network of other individual producers, is a model for a new sort of micro-coalition community and politics that allow both individual autonomy at the same time it encourages communal exchange (all the problems with this "network" outlined in previous chapters notwithstanding).

There are also zine responses to work that I have neglected. Keffo of *Temp Slave* is actively involved in unionizing temp workers through a new incarnation of the International Workers of the World, and Dishwashin' Pete mentions in an offhand way that he was elected as his union shop steward while working washing dishes in a canning plant in Alaska. Pete even goes as far as to--only half jesting--call for revolution in response to being offered a Head Dishwasher position.



revolution dishwasher style in
Dishwasher #10

I've turned my attention elsewhere, not because these older ideals of class solidarity are invalid, but because they are not nearly as widespread as the ideas catalogued above, and, perhaps more importantly, I am especially interested in the ideas particular to this underground culture. These new ideas and forces of radicalism will not replace older ideas--Baudrillard's analysis aside--but compliment them; offering new ways of seeing and doing things which resonate with modern conditions and experiences: organic radicalism in the vernacular.

For even with all their contradictions and all their limitations, zines are still powerful testimonies of an underground culture's unwillingness to accept the definitions of work that reign supreme in our society. They are testaments of a radically different

way to define and act upon the productive and creative urge that runs through all humans; a definition that backs up C. Nash when he states simply that "No, I don't work in the way that people usually understand the expression." And most importantly, zines are not just idle preaching, but the fruits of a practice. At a time when many are resigned to bitter acceptance of things as they, an unrepentant idealism bubbles up through the cracks, finding its voice in the words of those like Steven "Hardcory" Cervantes, editor of *Hardcry*, who writes in his premier issue's editorial:

Yo, Hardcory here, just to let you know that this is a first time publication; it's not the most professional thing in the world but when you do it to do it; well to me that's all that matters...⁸⁴

1. Keffo, *Welcome to the World of Insurance*, early 1990s, Bethlehem, PA, p.1.
2. Keffo, *Temp Slave*, early 1990s to present, Madison, WI; Dishwashin' Pete, *Dishwasher*, early 1990s to present, Portland, OR; *Work*, 1994, LA, CA.
3. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 1844, in *Early Writings*, (NY: Vintage, 1975), pp.332-44.
4. In 1974 Harry Braverman commented upon this "de-skilling" of the work force in *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism* (NY: Monthly Review Press). For a discussion of this process in the present era, David Harvey's *The Condition of Post Modernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989) is an excellent guide.
5. Nate Wilson, *Scrambled Eggs: Comix and Short Stories*, #1, 1992 (reprint), Albany, NY, no page; Jasper Albeeny, *The Incredible Flaming Mechanism*, #4, September 1994, San Antonio, TX, no page.
6. Jokie X. Wilson, *The Olecatronical Scatologica Chronicle*, 1991, Tucson, AZ, no page.
7. *Economic Report of the President, 1994*, (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1994).
8. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
9. Joseph A. Gervasi, *No Longer a Fanzine*, #3, 1993, Blackwood, NJ, no page.
10. *Economic Report of the President, 1994*, (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1994).
11. Keffo, *Temp Slave*, #4, 1994, Madison, WI, p.22
12. Trevor Rigler, "Double Dose O' Bullshit," *Temp Slave*, #4, 1994, Madison, WI, p.3.
Trevor also tells of working for a "progressive" firm which publicized its policy of being "gay and lesbian friendly" and ran TV commercials extolling the virtues of this "worker owned business"...while he was paid \$4.50 an hour and given no benefits.
13. This ideology stems from a long held American ideal of the self-sufficient yeoman or mechanic, and is further reinforced by both the ideals of the zine world *and* new management strategies designed to make the employee feel as if they are part of a team--witness Keffo's experience with the chanting workers.
14. Keffo, *Welcome to the World of Insurance*, p.1, early 1990s, Bethlehem, PA.
15. *Sabot Times*, #1, April 1992, Seattle, WA, p.1
16. H. Johnson, "Payback Time," *The Sabot Times*, #1, April 1992, Seattle, WA, p.2

17. Pete, *Dishwasher*, #9, early 1990s, Arcata, CA, no page.
18. Brendan, "Brendan's Free Cafe," *Temp Slave*, #4, 1994, Madison, WI, p.6.
19. cited in J.C. Herz, "Zine Scream," *New York Perspectives*, #170, May 6-12, 1993, p.11.
20. Missy Lavalee, personal correspondence, January 19, 1993.
21. Trevor Rigler, "Double Dose O' Bullshit," *Temp Slave*, #4, 1994, Madison, WI, p.3.
22. Doug Brunell, "Fuck Shit Up #2," *No Longer a Fanzine*, #3, 1993, Blackwood, NJ, no page.
23. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 87.
24. Pete, *Dishwasher*, #11, 1994, Portland, OR, no page.
25. *No Longer A Fanzine #1/Philly Zine #11*, Summer 1992, Blackwood, NJ, p.34.
26. Missy Lavalee and Joe, "Scams," *Gaybee*, early 1990s, Portland ME.
27. *Pranks!*, (San Francisco: Re/Search, 1987).
28. Adam W., "Mean Guy Page," Phil Franklin, ed. *Egg*, #8, Summer 1989, Summer 1989, Boston, MA, no page. Again this amorality in pranks is odd as Phil Franklin, the editor, is a very kind individual.
29. Jeff Koyen, "Poetry Slam! CRANK STYLE," *Crank*, #4, 1995, New York City.
30. Amelia G. "Making Scenes in Public Places," *Black Leather Times*, V.3, #4, Gaithersburg, MD, centerfold.
31. cited in Devon Jackson's "Serial Killers and the People Who Love Them," *The Village Voice*, March 22, 1994, p. 31. As to the popularity of this extreme alienation, the Goad's *Answer Me* was recorded as the best selling zine at a popular underground bookstore in Chicago, Qvimby's Qveer Store in early 1995 (Qvimby's Qveer Store *Megamagadoggylogtwo*, Chicagi, IL, 1995).
32. Dishwashin' Pete, telephone interview, March 30, 1994.
33. SubGenius Foundation Inc., *SubGenius Pamphlet #1*, Dallas. Texas, 1981.
34. Lawrence Levine, "The New Negro and the Realities of Black Culture," *The Unpredictable Past*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.104.

35. Theophile Gautier, "The Glory of the Senses," 1836, in Grana, eds. *On Bohemia*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1990), p. 263.

36. Paul Lafargue, *The Right to be Lazy*, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1883/1989), p. 41.

37. *Economic Report of the President, 1994*, Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1994.

38. James Sterngold, "Facing the Next Recession Without Fear," *New York Times*, May 9, 1995, sec.D, p.1. The title of the article marks either a high point in the ironic sensibilities of the *Times's* headline writer, or the depths of their barbarism.

39. Stacy Estep, "The Theory of Unmarketable Talents," *Box of 64*, #1, Atlanta, GA: May 1994, p.3

40. Compared to others in American society, job outlook for the middle class, white bohemian is not that bad; for young, poor African-American men, for instance, unemployment rates top 40 percent. But rebellious ideas don't only germinate at the point of absolute deprivation. Social movement theorists have long pointed out that it is *relative deprivation* that often gives rise to dissent. This is something they call the Gets/Wants gap. Simply stated it means that it is when rising expectations, "wants," are met with falling possibilities, that is: "gets," that rebellious ideas and ideals ferment.

41. *Economic Report of the President, 1994*, (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1994).

42. Richard Linklater, *Slacker*, (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 17.

43. Simon Frith, commenting on the young and working-class British Skinheads, points out that their dress: cropped hair, blue jeans, sturdy boots; and their mannerisms: dumb surliness and a clumsy gait, constitutes a caricature of the bourgeois image of the proletariat. And in a class discussion I led at the college where I teach, a number of African-American students suggested that the baggy, oversize pants of the current hip-hop style--which they themselves wear--have their roots in the clothes that one wears into shops when 'boosting' or shoplifting. Their logic went as follows: since young blacks get followed anytime they went into a store because shop keepers thought they were going to steal, they might as well dress like they were going to steal.

Simon Frith, *Sound Effects*, (New York: Pantheon, 1981), p.219.

44. Shelly Ross, "On Quitting," *Quitter Quarterly*, #1, 1994, Brooklyn, NY, cited in *Harper's Magazine*, June 1994, p. 28.

45. Dishwashin' Pete, telephone interview, March 30, 1994.

46. Jean Baudrillard, "The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media," *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, Mark Poster, ed. (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1988), p. 219.

47. Baudrillard, p. 215.

48. "If you don't want bombs, don't pay for them," the editor of *Alligator Grundy* writes, "...The Pentagon gets more revenue from middle class peace marchers than from all the poets living on welfare. The way to break the back of the arms business is to quit your job, give up your Mercedes and your Laser Printer..." J.R. Molloy's suggestion that peace marchers own Mercedes may be foolish, but his overall point is valid: the liberal democratic state is threatened as much by private withdrawal of financial and moral support as public petition of anger.

J.R. Molloy, *Alligator Grundy Captions Wonder*, V. 1, #1, Shingletown, CA, 1991. p. 8.

49. Mickey Z., *The Reality Manifesto: A Look at Pseudo-Life in the Post-Modern Age*, Baltimore: Apathy Press Poets, 1993, no page, emphasis in original.

50. Missy Lavalee, personal correspondence, January 19, 1993.

51. *Exformation*, #1, Brooklyn, NY: 1993(?), no page.

52. Gordon Gordon, *Teen Fag*, #2, Seattle, WA: Fall, 1992, no page.

53. Dishwashin' Pete, telephone interview, March 30, 1994.

54. Dishwashin' Pete, telephone interview, March 30, 1994.

55. George S. Snyderman and William Josephs, "Bohemia: The Underworld of Art," 1939, in Grana, p.91

56. The SubGenius Foundation, *The Book of the Subgenius*, (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p.64

57. Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American* (NY: Basic Books, 1991) p.30; cited in Michael D. Yates, *Longer Hours, Fewer Jobs*, (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1994), p.36.

58. Schor, p.2; cited in Yates, p.122.

59. The quote is from Chuang Tzu, cited in Kerry Wendell Thornley, "Conspiracy Corner," *Factsheet Five*, #23, 1987, Rensselaer, NY. See also Clayton Kennedy's *A Fistful of Zen*, 1990, San Carlos, CA, who quotes Lao Tzu in between punk fiction and record reviews.

60. Dishwashin' Pete, interview, March 30, 1994.

61. C. Nash, "Text," *Queer Magnolia*, #40, Lansing, MI, late 80s/early 90s, no page.

62. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," 1844, *Early Writings*, (NY: Vintage, 1974), pp. 332-44

63. Carl Bettis, editor of *The Slapdash Hackery Factory*, in "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, #23, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p.59.
64. Frith, p. 77; "My Way" was one of Frank Sinatra's big hits, later (sardonically) covered by former Sex Pistol Sid Vicious.
65. For example, Pavement, a band popular in the underground, sings a song on their latest album ridiculing popular music as business, bitterly spitting out the word "career" as an epithet.
Pavement, "Cut Your Hair," *Crooked Rain Crooked Rain*, Matador Records, 1994.
66. Tina Herschelman, Sara Lorimer, and Paul Schuster, group interview, December 29, 1993, Olympia, WA.
67. Tad Hirsch, e-mail correspondence, September 18, 1984.
68. Michelle Rau, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, #38, 1990, Rensselaer, NY, p.95.
69. see also E.P. Thompson's classic essay "Time, Work Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," reprinted in *Customs in Common*, NY: Free Press, 1991, pp. 352-403, for a history and further discussion of the shift in time as related to work under capitalism.
70. J.C. Coleman, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, #27, 1988, Rensselaer, NY, p. 54.
71. Frederick Wertham, *The World of Fanzines*, (IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1973), p.71.
72. Aaron Cometbus, *Cometbus*, #31, early 1990s, Berkeley, CA; Steven "Hardcore" Cervantes, *Hardcry...A Network Zine*, #1, Whittier, CA, 1990; (FS5-NYSL).
73. Arielle Greenberg, interview, August 25, 1993.
74. Lizzard Amazon, *Slut Utopia*, #2, early 1990s, San Jose, CA, inside cover.
75. Queen Itchie, *Sneezing Jesus*, #8, early 1990s, Sherburne, NY, no page.
76. Michael Carr, quoted in Reon Carter's "The Zine Scene," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 8, 1993, sec. C, p.1.
77. Scott Cunningham, telephone interview, May 24, 1995.
78. This discussion of size and control resonates with issues brought up by economist E.F Schumacher who argued for human scale production in the early 1970s in his book *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, (NY: Harper and Row, 1973).
79. Dan Werle, telephone interview, December 15, 1992.

80. Another zine editor, Missy Lavalee fears that a growth in size might bring pressure for a change in the sort of personal form that she values in her zine form. As she writes, If becoming a mass publication meant just the ability to get my zine out to more people at maybe a lower cost, then I would have no problem with that. If it meant being slick and glossy and entirely done on computer, I would be hesitant. I like zines that are nicely laid out, but still have a bit of personality, that look like they were done by human hands, not entirely programmed

Missy also worries about changes in content:

...If becoming a mass publication meant pandering to certain groups of people (i.e. compromising my ideals, radical opinions, so as not to offend people), begging for advertising, or writing boring pretentious stuff so as to make big bucks, then I'd rather rot in hell.

Missy Lavalee, personal correspondence, January 19, 1993.

81. Robert W. Howington, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, #39, 1990, Renseelaer, NY, p.100.

82. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground/The Double*, (NY: Penguin, 1864/1972).

83. Paul Lukas, telephone interview, February 13, 1994.

84. Steven "Hardcory" Cervantes, *Hardcry...A Network Zine*, #1, Whittier, CA, 1990, inside cover; (FS5-NYSL).

Consumption

Doing something like a zine, as small as it may be, is very much a refutation....It's refuting the whole pathetic, sit down and be entertained type of environment....This is saying: No, I'm taking things into my own hands, I'm not gonna allow someone else to bombard me. I'm going to be the entertainer of myself.

- Dan Werle, editor of *Manumission*¹

In a society built around consumption--the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the culture we enjoy--the ideal that one should be "the entertainer of myself" is inherently radical; it is also a sentiment not uncommon in the zine world. But perhaps this isn't so astounding, for if zines are the expression of an underground culture which marks its identity in opposition to the overground world, today the ubiquity of mass consumption characterizes mainstream society as distinctly as any other trait. In the overdeveloped world at least, the great driving force of capitalism has shifted from production in what William Blake once described as "dark, Satanic mills," to consumption in bright and shiny shopping malls. As consumer spending represents two-thirds of the nation's economic activity, and consumerism is synonymous with the American Way of Life, any critique of our society must also include a critique of consumerism, and any vision of a new world must include a new vision of how culture and products will be produced and consumed.²

Yet there is something about the critique of and resistance to consumption that fails to command respect. Unlike challenges to the quantity and quality of work which have a long and noble history imbedded in working class struggle, the critique of consumption seems a privilege of the privileged. With so much of the world desperate

to become part of the consuming public, the idea of criticizing consumerism or voluntarily doing without consumer products seems absurd. But we live in a strange world today, where in America at least, poverty does not mean being locked out of the consumer dream. People may not be able to afford decent housing, education, or health care; but the latest sneakers, video games, and soft drinks are within the reach of all but the poorest of citizens. Consumption has been democratized.

In America, this democratization of consumerism began in the early to mid-19th century as the corollary to the Industrial Revolution. As late as 1906, future president Woodrow Wilson remarked that "nothing has spread socialistic feeling in this country more than the automobile; to the countryman they are a picture of arrogance of wealth, with all its independence and carelessness."³ But by the 1920s sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd, studying life in *Middletown* (Muncie, Indiana), found quite the opposite. Far from representing an "arrogance of wealth" that gave rise to "socialistic feeling" among the have-nots, the automobile, like other consumer goods, were becoming symbols of "independence" available to the expanding middle classes. The automobile--thanks to Henry Ford's systems of mass production--had become an important part of working class life. Consumerism was becoming part of the way Americans defined themselves and their aspirations.⁴

Accompanying the rise in mass consumption of products was the democratized consumption of culture. With relatively more time and money at hand, an increasingly sharp distinction drawn between work and leisure, and a dynamic economic system ready to produce products to fulfill any perceived desire (even if that desire needed a little

assistance), more and more Americans were purchasing their pleasure. Nickelodeons, Movie Palaces, dime novels, amusement parks, World's Fairs--ordinary people were learning to consume culture. As with mass production, the creation of mass consumption was a mixed blessing. Whole new worlds of products and entertainments designed to make life more varied and enjoyable opened up. Closed, provincial cultural worlds were blown apart. And the people that had been producing the wealth of society were finally able to share some of the fruits it had to offer.

But something was also lost. Losing ground was an older model of production and consumption, a cultural model in which, in the words of Dan Werle above, people were "entertainers of themselves"; a *participatory* model of culture. Before consumption was democratized, the vast majority of people essentially produced what they used, or traded with other producers directly. Just as the horizons of such a world were tightly circumscribed, the ties between individuals and the material or cultural creations they enjoyed were strongly forged. In brief: people were *connected* to what they consumed--either directly in that they themselves produced it, or communally in that they had direct knowledge of whom did produce it. With the rise of mass consumption these ties were strained. People were, and are, less and less connected to what it is they consume.

People make sense of their world and construct identities for themselves out of the materials--both physical and cultural--that surround them. In addition to enjoying the products and entertainment that we consume, these things become an integral part of who we are. In our age of mass consumption, more and more of this stuff is produced not *by* us but *for* us; not necessarily produced according to the logic of community tradition or

individual inspiration, but according to the pecuniary rationale of the market. The result is an historical separation between us, as individuals, and the entertainment and products we use, enjoy, and derive meaning from.

In brief, we are *alienated* from what we consume. This is the key to understanding the zine world's take on consumerism, for what they are protesting is this alienation. And what they are trying to do--consciously and not--is to reforge the links between individuals and the world they consume.

Talking Back

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries consumer culture had come to dominate the landscape, yet older models of culture, those in which individuals participated in "entertaining themselves," did not completely die off. And it is in the interstices between these two worlds of culture that the first publication to be called a "fanzine" is born.

In the first few decades of this century, commercial magazines focussing on consumer interest in products, leisure activities, and entertainment began appearing at the newsstand. These publications, with their subjects ranging from model railroading to Hollywood gossip, were forerunners of current "niche" magazines and laid the groundwork for the specialized themes of a number of zines to come. One of these themes was Science Fiction. Around 1909 a young immigrant from Luxembourg, Hugo Gernsback, started a magazine for amateur radio aficionados called *Modern Electronics*. Three years later he began publishing stories in his magazine which he called "scientific fiction." These stories, which would later be called Science Fiction, were so popular that

in 1926 Gernsback put out a magazine entitled *Amazing Stories*, the first pulp science fiction magazine.⁵

Gernsback also did something else: he published his reader's letters. In this "Discussions" section as it was called, readers wrote in and argued and debated the scientific principles upon which the stories were based and the veracity of the stories themselves. Most importantly, Gernsback printed the letter writers' names and addresses as well. Supplied with these, writers and readers began to bypass *Amazing Stories* and write to one another directly. As experienced SF fan and fanzine writer Don Fitch explains it,

When the s-f magazine editors realized that they could get a few pages of free material by publishing letters from readers--and included addresses--the enthusiastic readers started writing to one another, and (very quickly) publishing things for circulation to other "fans."⁶

By the late 20s, the first science fiction fan organization, the Science Correspondence Club, was founded, and in 1930 they published what is acknowledged by many as the first fanzine, *The Comet*.⁷ Although there are other literary progenitors, many of which I've discussed in previous chapters, it is these early science fiction fanzines that form the most direct link to zines today.

This brief history of science fiction fanzines highlights a theme that runs through modern zines today: writers use zines to make *demands* upon consumer culture. Whereas the consumer relationship is supposed to be one of relative passivity, that is: you pay your money, you get your product, you go home and follow the directions for its use; zine writers often force an interaction between them and the mute commodity. For example, SF fans, instead of accepting what historian Daniel Boorstin has labeled the

"one-way window" character of commercial mass media (it speaks, you listen), insisted on talking back to the stories being written in a new mass magazine market.⁸ These fans then pushed one step further and began talking to themselves about the stories they had read in the commercial press. And then another step: producing their own publications.

This demand put on consumer culture is an integral component of zines writ large. Moving from the oldest genre of SF to the largest today, music, demonstrates the continuity of this line. What the writers putting out music zines are doing by writing record reviews, interviewing their favorite bands, and commenting on their local music scene is taking a product that is bought and sold as a mere commodity in the marketplace, and forcing a human and personal relationship on it--lessening the distance between themselves and what it is they consume.

Dumpster Dive is typical of the music genre. In his zine, John Bomb Colletti interviews a number of bands on subjects ranging from recent gigs to whether the band have ever found anything of value in a garbage dumpster. John then follows this with highly personalized record reviews, in which a band, The Wretched Ones, are commended as "veterans of the D.I.Y. punk way. I love these guys. We could drink and watch channel 39 all night."⁹

But the distance between The Wretched Ones and the author of their review is not that great to begin with. They are artists in an obscure, underground band; he is the editor of an obscure, underground zine. They probably could sit down and "drink and watch channel 39 all night." The divide, however, between the audience or consumer and what they are purchasing is usually far greater and other bridges have to be constructed.

One material that zine writers use to construct these bridges is humor.

Humor is subversive. Historians and anthropologists have described how carnivals, skits, and jokes are used by those on the bottom of society to "get back"--if only for a day and only symbolically--at those who usually wield power over them; laughter is used to flatten social hierarchies and humor employed to collapse the distance between groups.¹⁰ In a similar vein, zine writers use laughter and humor to assert control over a culture that speaks to them but is impossibly distant at the same time. Some of this humor is relatively good natured. *Judy!* for example, is a zine devoted to hot-shot feminist academic Judith Butler put out by a group of young scholars in Iowa City. Through gently mocking sexual fantasies about Butler, gossip on the personal exploits of star academics, and quizzes like: "Are you a theory-fetishizing biscuit head?," the authors effectively deflate celebrity academics and in doing so abate--if only symbolically--the gulf between their lowly graduate student status and the elite world of the tenured superstar.¹¹

With more of a bite is *The I Hate Brenda Newsletter*, a zine put out by the long-time zine publishers of *Ben is Dead*. The focuss here is on Shannen Doherty, the actress who played Brenda in *Beverly Hills 90210*, television's popular drama of rich kids in sunny California. As a young Republican and by all accounts a rather unpleasant person, Doherty is spared little: gossip and rumors are dished out in the zine with glee and malice, and a "Shannen Snitch Line" is advertised inviting a steady supply of new dirt.¹² Much in the same way that more traditional gossip magazines allow their readers to experience vicariously the human tragedy and thus "normality" of the stars, both *Judy!*

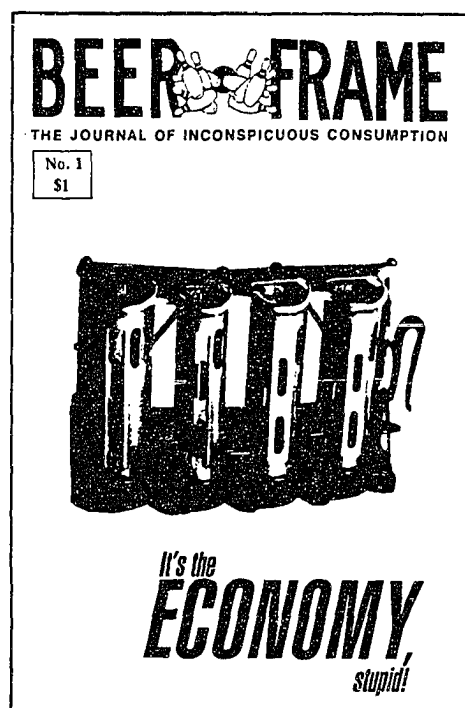
and *I Hate Brenda* serve to reverse the "one-way" communication route of modern culture: the fans (or enemies) talk back.



bonds of hate in the I Hate Brenda
Newsletter

This ideal of talking back to culture and making it speak your vocabulary isn't limited to just culture. *Meanwhile...* doesn't review bands, nor academics or TV stars, instead it reviews consumer products like the "Super Snacker, triangle making pastry iron as seen on TV" and the "Giant, new 20 oz. coffee at Dunkin Donuts." Tongue-in-cheek, writers Don and Steve Steinberg write personalized critiques of these bottom crawlers of the world of commodities.¹³ As does *Beer Frame's* Paul Lukas. In his first issue Paul reviews such unsung commodities as the Victor Mouse Trap, The Real-Fur Mouse cat toy, Salamida's Original State Fair Spiedie Sauce Marinade, and the Brannok Device (the

contraption used to measure your foot at the shoe store). In his examinations Paul often calls up the company that produces the product to ask them about it. Sometimes the response is pure public relations fluff and good for a laugh, but sometimes Paul's investigations pay off in a story of who and what was behind the invention and sale of a certain product. For example, did you know that Spiedies (a sort of marinated shishkebob, by the way) is a local delicacy of Binghamton, New York? That there is a Spiediefest there? That the "acknowledged king" of the spiedie is Sharkey's? Neither did I.¹⁴



front cover of Beer Frame #1

Nor did I really want to. There's no doubt that part of the appeal of Paul's zine lies in the fact that he, like Don and Steve, is poking fun at the attention this society lavishes on consumer goods by examining those product that *nobody* usually thinks to

give a second glance. But there is another dynamic operating as well. Paul is personalizing the world of commodities that surrounds us. "When I look at anything I think: who made it? who designed it?," he explains, "If it's a slick contemporary product [I think] how many board meetings did they have to determine what it would look like and what it would be called. I try to sort of extrapolate backwards."¹⁵

Products have identities. In earlier times and in different settings it is the connection between the producer and their product, and the use of that product, which gives it character and value. If Jane is known as a good carpenter, then the table she produces--Jane's table--is desirable. When John takes the table home it then takes on the added value that he uses it for, e.g. a good table to put books on that Jane built. But we don't live in such a world anymore, and as mass production has separated the individual from what it is they create, that creation's essential identity disappears.

Only to be rebuilt by Madison Avenue. Creating an image for a product is a necessary component of selling in a modern competitive market economy. The real--and, under capitalism, often grim and disappointing--history of the commodity disappears and is replaced with a more appealing fantasy: "Pontiac builds Excitement."¹⁶ The result of this replacement of real history of production with an idealized Madison Avenue image of a product is that, in the words of Marx, "definite social relation[s] between men themselves...assumes here..the fantastic form of a relation among things."¹⁷ In other words, what even under conditions of mass production, is still a *human* creation becomes instead a thing: a disembodied product or a glamorous image. As a thing, commodities become distant, magical, and mystical and therefore outside the control of individuals.

This "thingification," or what Marx called "fetishism," is a way of seeing the world that then becomes generalized. All creations of humans: from products and culture to politics and society, are remote and outside the control of humankind. The politics which stem from this are inherently conservative: things can't be changed so you might as well get used to it.

By "extrapolating backwards" in *Beer Frame*, Paul digs up the "real" history of the products that surround us. In doing this he begins the process of "de-fetishization": starting with a thing, and inserting it within a process--of germination, design, production and use. The fact that he uncovers this process in admittedly banal products underscores this point, as it is these very taken-for-granted and overlooked products which make up our consumer culture that no one stops to think about. In a different manner, but with the same effect of the fan/enemy writers of *Dumpster Dive*, *Judy!*, and *I Hate Brenda*, Paul is decreasing the distance between the artifacts of a commercial culture and the individuals that use it. He is "talking back" to commercial culture--reforging the links between people and what it is that they consume.¹⁸

Re-Fetishization

While most of the negotiation that happens between the zine writer and the consumer culture moves in the direction of re-connecting and humanizing that culture, this isn't always the case. In *Fan Mail*, a fanzine devoted to the lead singer of the pop group Blondie, Debbie Harry, the writers re-fetishize the object of their passion. In their zine they obsess over the minutia of Harry's life: Because she once wrote that she flew

over Tusunka, Siberia and saw where the great meteor landed in 1908, it is the occasion for a detailed description and history of the meteor impact. A conversation with a man met in a bar who was a casual friend of Harry's parents is reprinted in its entirety. Following this is a transcript of a telephone conversation between the fanzine writer, Brian, and Harry's father:

Brian: ...I don't know, this is really weird...talking to her Dad! Ha ha! (he also has a big laugh, and I go on) It's really weird! (He's still laughing) I'm glad you're, I hope you have time to talk...

Richard: Yeah, we just ah, we just got home and we got the...We're working on getting the gift shop open, we're, ah, getting ready to clean things up...¹⁹

And so on for four tightly spaced pages with every "um" and "ah" recorded verbatim.

While it's easy to laugh at such slavish devotion, it is still evidence of the need to forge a human link between the individual and the culture they consume. But whereas most zines creators use zines to connect, *Fan Mail* makes Debbie Harry untouchable. Far from being someone with whom you could drink beer and watch channel 39 with, the editor turns her into a goddess: a thing. And because the editors have no critique of the commercial culture industry which places such a distance between themselves and Harry, they use commercial culture as a model for their zine. Following commercial convention, their need to connect get translated into the desire to covet and to own. *Fan Mail* is the publication of the "Debbie Harry Collector's Society" and within the pages of the zine, Debbie Harry memorabilia is advertised for sale.

This "re-fetishization" is not uncommon in the sector of the zine world devoted to fandom of commercial media and culture. While the zines put out by science fiction

media fans are often militantly anti-consumerist, the world of fandom which surrounds them is a profitable business. Magazines like *World of Fandom* offer up a range of products to fit every fan need, and *Star Trek*, a slick commercial magazine devoted to the science fiction series of the same name, demonstrate that fandom is financially lucrative. It is the genius of capitalism to market the desire to escape the conditions that are the natural outcome of a consumer culture market. But while commercial fandom exploits alienation, most fanzines try to bridge it. In fact, the whole phenomenon of "fans" and "fanzines" can best be understood as the repeated attempt to close the gap between audience and entertainment, consumer and product, that consumer capitalism accentuates. But without an explicit understanding that it is the entire *system* of consumer capitalism that is at the root of the separation or alienation they are continually trying to overcome, the sort of bridging functions that zines provide will remain at best a coping mechanism, at worst a re-fetishization, and in all cases, a continually frustrated strategy that inevitably does nothing to identify or cure the problem.

Burning Bridges

If subsequent generations are to avoid the ridiculous mistakes of the past,
the first step involves ridding the commodity culture from our lives.²⁰

- Trevor Rigler, *Temp Slave*

Mediation, however, is not the only type of relationship zine writers cultivate with consumer culture. While some implicitly question the alienation between individuals and the artifacts of consumer culture by trying to bridge the gap on a personal level, others explicitly critique the system, trying to blow up the bridges between themselves and the

consumer world. Unlike the more oblique criticism of people carefully rewriting their relationships with the commodity culture, these writers negotiate their relationship with a sledgehammer.

Jane, the editor of *Hex*, writes about Lakefair, or what she calls "an abominable nightmare which takes place each July at the edge of a toxic man-made hole" in Olympia, Washington. In other words: a Carnival. Where others might see the heartbeat of traditional America, Jane sees it as having,

nothing to offer anyone, except profits for the greedy schmucks who rake in huge wads of cash as they rip off the oblivious, willing thousands. Lakefair is meaningless, it is an opportunity for the brain-dead to pretend they are having fun, to spend their money, to show their children what being American is all about.

But even while Jane rants that this Fair is "meaningless," she goes on to argue that it does have a meaning. Far from being a carnival of subversion, Jane argues Lakefair reinforces the dominant system. It is, she argues,

representative of a quintessential evil of this country. It seems to represent, as do malls...the whole mainstream, corrupt notion of wasteful, superficial, meaningless activity and entertainment, posing as something worthwhile and stimulating. It is nonsense, crap.²¹

What is interesting about Jane's jeremiad is where she locates her critique. For like the zine condemnation of workplace hypocrisy, what is "evil" about Lakefair is that it is phony, "nonsense, crap." What enrages Jane and others in the underground is not so much that commercial culture exists, but that it is "posing as something worthwhile and stimulating."

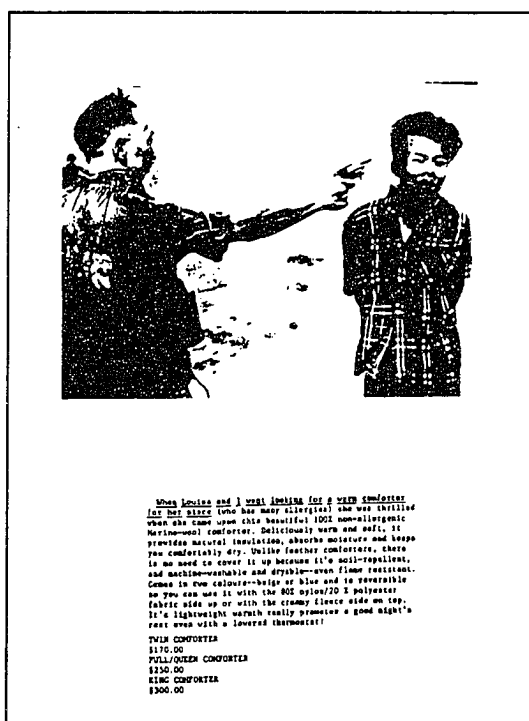
The critique of consumer culture as a stand in for something more worthwhile--something more authentic--is picked up and amplified by other zine writers. Speaking of

how "expression" is construed in mainstream society, "Freedom" of *Orangutan Balls* argues, "I don't think they express what they truly feel; I think they are all suppressed. Money, of course, takes care of that... 'Here, you feel like expressing, go buy clothes with a hundred dollars, go to Bergdorf Goodman and buy pearls.'"²²

Like Jane, Freedom believes that authentic expression is somehow "suppressed" and then sublimated away from meaningful activity and into commodity purchase. They are not alone. Social historians like Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen argue persuasively that the spread of consumer privilege from the elite to the common person has been one of the great stabilizing forces of modern capitalist society, effectively "Channeling Desire" away from democratic political and economic aspirations into the consumer realm.²³ Simply put, the ability of modern capitalism to include the public within its consumer dream, has allowed the continuance of a system which systematically denies access to the centers of political and economic power. When "expression" is defined as buying pearls from Bergdorf Goodman instead of marching in the streets or setting up consumer and producer cooperatives, the elite can sleep easily at night. Popular expression, far from leading away from the system, leads directly back into their pocketbooks.²⁴

One of the seductive pleasures of commodity culture is the ability to surround yourself with enough stuff so that nagging questions about the nature of real freedom, real choice, and the social cost of defining these things in purely consumerist ways, disappear. Turn on the climate control, pop a video into the VCR, "Calgon take me away." Anti-consumerist zine writers, however, use their zines to point out that the fruits of consumption also alienate individuals from the tawdry realities underlying the

bright and shiny shell of consumerism. "Insulate, insulate, insulate" was the secret of Tom Wolfe's Wall Street yuppie to live amongst poverty and strife of New York City in *Bonfire of the Vanities*; consuming is the key "in this world where middle class comfort can buy you a blind eye to suffering," as the angry editor of *Minions of Evil*, himself a product of such middle class comfort, rages.²⁵



drawing connections in ARTichoke #1

Just as Paul Lukas tried to reconnect the lines between the products of everyday and who actually produced them, other zine writers are trying to reconnect the lines between consumer culture as a whole and the social conditions it both constructs and cloaks. Making this world of suffering reappear and tracing the lines from deprivation and brutality in other parts of the world to banal consumer satisfaction in the United

States is what Simon Taylor attempts to do in the "I Am Free" issue of *ARTichoke*. By juxtaposing pictures of starvation and political horror with banal descriptions of consumer goods, Simon opens his reader's eyes to how freedom in this society is often contingent on horrible unfreedom in others. In one collage, the execution of a prisoner in Vietnam illustrates a story lifted from a catalog of shopping for a "100% non-allergenic Marino-wool comforter" that promises "a good night's rest even with a lowered thermostat."²⁶

The solution to the alienation consumer culture engenders is resolved by some zine writers by alienating themselves from consumerism itself; not just criticizing it, but trying--at least symbolically--to destroy it.²⁷ In an essay in *Another Pair of Shoes*, J. recalls listening to The Wall Street Journal Report on the radio and explains that all they talk about is consumerism. Having divined the secret of our economy he offers this advice: "I have a proposition to make. Let's help the economy...lets help the economy along on its way down the toilet. DON'T BUY THEIR SHIT! Make' em feel the pinch. Better yet, make 'em feel a good strong kick in the ass." J. tries to practices what he preaches. "If anybody tells you to buy American," he writes, "tell them: 'Fuck that, I buy second hand'." He then advises others to "Buy your food from a co-op, buy your clothes from a thrift store, buy your music from a not-for-profit label."²⁸ Distancing themselves from the American Dream of unlimited consumption is something a lot of people in the zine world strive to do; "Living a lot lower impact" is what zine writer and distributor Marc Arsenault calls it.²⁹

As the title of his zine suggests, the editor of *Kill Your Television*, has his own strategy for alienating himself from the consumer culture. Issue #4 begins, in true zine

style, with a personal confessional:

I had been watching for a long time....I went to sleep with the TV on, ate in front of it....finally something way back in my spirit said "NO, I won't take this anymore. This is killing me, and it's either me or IT"...and so I killed my TV. It wasn't near as hard as you think....I unplugged the thing, got out my toolbox and took it all apart making free and ready use of my wire nippers. I learned a lot about it that way but anyway you kill your TV is fine.³⁰

For the editor of *Kill Your Television*, like for all zine writers that take on mass consumption, the destruction of alienating consumption is also the birth of something new. The editor literally describes how he used the experience of disassembling the TV to learn how it was made. And as the rest of the zine makes clear, this experience started him on a journey of self-study: reading about television, finding watchdog and advocacy groups like F.A.I.R. and Center for a New Television, and polishing his critique. Most importantly, it started a process of extracting himself from an passive relationship with consumer culture products and engaging in a participatory ideal of culture. In other words and in more concrete terms, out of his rage at and alienation from consumer culture he produced his own culture: a zine.

D.I.Y.

There is something that just doesn't match about being a consumer in the zine world. Plenty of people are, otherwise things couldn't stay afloat. But it always seems to me that the next step for most people with any gumption, when they realized how easy it was, was to go out and do it.

- Mike Gunderloy, founding editor, *Factsheet Five*³¹

The idea of just going out and doing it, or as it is popularly expressed in the underground, the Do-It-Yourself ethic, occupies a position front and center in the world

of zines. The phrase shows up in zine titles like *D.I.Y: a how-to guide for publishing a high school zine*; it appears in articles: "Bookmaking DIY with Missy" or "Silkscreening, a DIY Approach"; and it creeps into the standard parlance of zine writing: a small label will be called a DIY label, or a project will be described as DIY.³² The idea and ideal of doing-it-yourself is at once a critique of the dominant mode of passive consumer culture and also something far more important: the active creation of a non-alienating culture, one in which direct connections are forged and barriers blurred between producers and consumers.

The ideal is an old one in the zine world. Alongside making demands on commercial culture, science fiction fans created their own culture. As Don Fitch explains in his zine *From Sunday to Saturday*, essential to understanding both the SF fanzines of the past and their children of today is something he calls their "participatory" nature.

"Most of the best zines," he writes,

are not like a symphony concert or soap-box oration, where you only listen, and applaud...when it's over--they're like more like a Band, or a good conversation, where a big part of the enjoyment comes from getting out there on the floor and Doing Things.³³

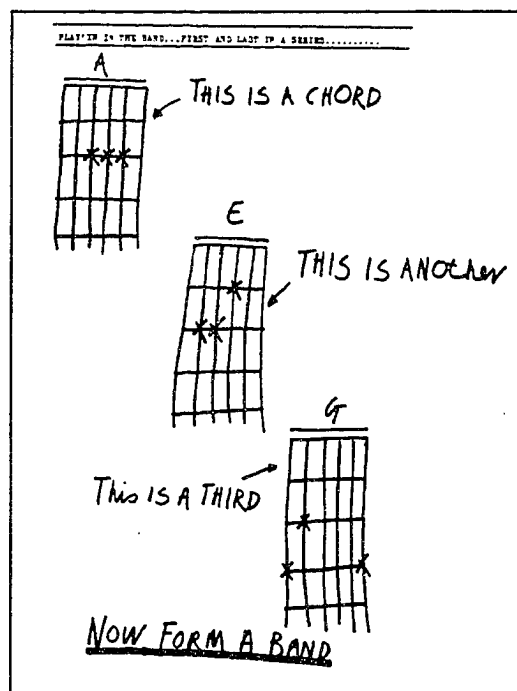
While the participatory notion of "Doing Things" by creating your own publication dates back to the beginning of science fiction fan culture, and the moniker "DIY" was popularized by the consumer hardware industry,³⁴ the term as it is commonly used today in the zine world, originated within science fiction's twin feeder into the world of zines: Punk Rock.

Beginning in the mid 1970s as a reaction to the professionalization of "Rock" music, punk rock took music back to its R&B, hillbilly, thoroughly unrespectable, roots.

Songs were loud and fast and short: pure blasts of adrenalin with little pretense to studied musicianship. Punk music was an attempt to get as far away as possible from the mellow, professionalized, and thus compromised, musical culture of the 60s. Part of its ideal was to decrease the distance that had been created between performers and audience; Kill Rock Stars, learn three chords and you're a band.³⁵

The first punk fanzine, appropriately named *Punk*, came out in New York City late December of 1975 or early January of '76. The first issue of *Punk* included features on the punk band the Ramones, pre-punker Lou Reed, a fictitious interview with Sluggo from the *Nancy* comic strip, several comic strips, and tellingly, a sardonic "do-it-yourself" 60s protest song. *Punk* sold 3000 issues locally and eventually 25,000 worldwide, and stayed afloat for three years. It was soon followed by others: *Sniffin' Glue* came out in Britain seven months later, and *Ripped and Torn* followed four months after that. Soon the punk fanzine was a fixture at every show and in every "hip" record store, and joined the zine ranks of science fiction and SF derivative fanzines.³⁶

Part of the mission of these early punk fanzines, besides spreading news about and interviews with punk bands, was to convince their readers to go out and do-it-themselves. Illustrating this, an early English zine, *Sideburns*, printed a drawing of three guitar chords and the commandment: Now Form A Band.³⁷



punk rock d.i.y. in Sideburns

This ideal that anybody can do it was important to how punks were defining themselves in these new zines. Peter Crowley in an editorial of *Punk* #3, in 1976, writes that

The key word--to me anyway--in the punk definition was "a beginner, an inexperienced hand." Punk rock: any kid can pick up a guitar and become a rock 'n' roll star, despite or because of his lack of ability, talent, intelligence, limitations and/or potential.³⁸

This celebration of the amateur carried over from the making of the music to the making of a zine. The same issue of *Punk* cited above, carries an interview of punk musician Richard Hell. The interview starts off well but soon degenerates due to the intoxication of the interviewer and co-founder of *Punk*, Leggs McNeil. It ends with Leggs leaving to vomit and Richard Hell completing the interview himself.³⁹ Like the zines discussed above, this interview eradicates the distance between entertainer and entertained. But it

also does something else: it makes it obvious that *anybody* can do a better job than Leggs (if not more humorous). In this vein Mark G. of *Sniffin' Glue* gave his readers the advice, "All you kids out there who read "SG" don't be satisfied with what we write. Go out and start your own fanzines."⁴⁰

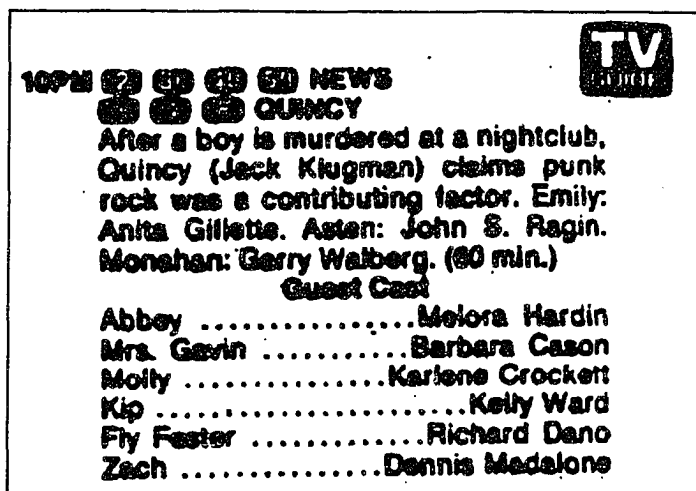
Which is exactly what punk rockers did. Today music--particularly punk music--is the largest genre of zines. And even writers whose zine covers topics other than music often got their first experience through the world of punk rock. As someone who put out a punk zine in Kansas City for five years, Bryan Hutcheson argues that, "A lot of people who are putting out zines right now grew up in the whole punk thing, in the do-it-yourself, put-out-your-own records, the grassroots thing....And now they're in their 20s, and that's just the kind of next thing to do."⁴¹ The link between punk and zines is so strong that when asked why he published, Kid Smiley, the editor of *Cramped and Wet*, replied simply: "It's punk," confident that this cryptic utterance is self-explanatory.⁴²

The idea of Do-it-Yourself arose out of necessity within the punk movement. While punk rock became a major movement in England, in the 1970s the American music and magazine industry was just not interested. With their eyes on the safe money stars of the late 60s and early 70s, and the new dance music, disco, punk didn't seem much of a paying proposition. So if you were a punk musician and you wanted to play an audience; you rented the local VFW hall; if you wanted to put a record out; you financed it yourself; and if you wanted to talk about your music since nobody else was, you had to put out a zine. For a music and cultural scene whose first hits included such songs as Richard Hell's "Blank Generation," zines were an effort to fill in this "blank."

Throughout the 70s and 80s a whole generation was by and large ignored by the commercial culture industry. In retrospect, considering what has been done with "Generation X," it was a great luxury, but at the time it was a problem. As I have argued before, people make sense of who they are through the culture that surrounds them. The cultural hegemony of the Baby Boomer generation--the locus of which had moved from the counterculture to the mainstream culture industry--insured that everything in the world-according-to-mass-culture would reference back to *their* experiences, or *their* generation. The fact that this generation also composed the largest demographic in terms of purchasing power guaranteed their consistent representation.

Coming of age in the post 60s era--punk rocker or not--was to come of age in a cultural world both suffocating: "we've done it all before and better in the 60s," and a vacuum: a blank generation. Zines and other forms of underground culture became the space where members of the post 60s generation--or any generation revolted by or left out of the mainstream retelling of the 60s--could work on defining who they were and what they believed in. In brief: you did-it-yourself because no one else was out there doing it.

Or when they did it they got it wrong; doing-it-yourself was also a reaction against how the mass media was doing you.⁴³ The law and order TV drama *Quincy* "punk rock episode" is infamous in punk history.⁴⁴⁴⁵ In one of the first mass media representations--albeit fictional--of what was then the burgeoning California Hardcore scene, punks are portrayed as buffoonish, violent thugs and their music as something that, in the words of Quincy, "literally cried out for murder."



punk rock in TV Guide

In a 1983 issue of *Maximumrocknroll*, *Quincy*'s negative portrayal of punks is the topic of heated discussion. In one particularly articulate essay, Tim Tonooka outlines the plot and details of the show, then vents his anger at the one sided and wrongful portrayal of punks and what he sees as its consequences:

The show goes on to a predictable TV story ending, with the [punk] girl reunited with her mother for "a fresh new start." But what we have to deal with is the way that punks are portrayed to the general public....as insecure, confused young kids caught up in a movement that is completely nihilistic, with no hope or positive way of dealing with the world.

Going on the offensive, Tim uses the pages of *MRR* to re-define punk in a positive light, pointing out good things about punks that never get mentioned in the mass media. "To us, the distortion is obvious. Nobody ever gets trampled on the floor at a punk show." In the place of punk's nihilistic portrait, Tim paints one of punks helping each other up when they fall slam dancing, catching each other when they stage dive, and playing a benefit for senior citizens in Minneapolis.⁴⁶⁴⁷

Stretching back to at least the NAACP's fight against D.W. Griffith's racist

classic *Birth of a Nation* in 1915, the demand for fair representation in the mass media has been part of the fight for equality and dignity for many groups. These struggles have been important for it is often through the media that people develop their impressions of others, particularly those with whom they have little personal contact, and it is partly on the basis of these impressions that people act and are acted upon in the world. In recent years, much of the debate around ethnic, gender, class, and sexual inequality in the United States has focused on criticizing how disempowered groups have been imagined, portrayed, and often stereotyped by the mass media.

But the traditional demand for accurate representation *by* the mass media *of* those doing the demanding is naive. With this demand, one image is merely traded for another, this one perhaps a little kinder, a little gentler, but because control resides outside the hands of those being portrayed, the image remains fundamentally alien. As the mass media is a commercial one this alienation is multiplied, for the range of possible imagery is reduced to that which will appeal and sell. And at the end of the line the alienation is complete: transformed into a mass media commodity, one buys their own image back. As these representations are often how we know one another in a mass society, the consequence of alienation from one's own image is alienation from one another; social relations become mere relations between (mis)representations.

There has, however, always been another model of resistance to misrepresentation in the media: doing-it-yourself. In 1827, two African American freemen, Samuel Cornish and John B. Russworm, read verbal attacks against their race in the *New York Enquirer*. After letters they wrote to the editor protesting this defamation went unpublished, they

started their own newspaper. Beginning with the words "We wish to plead our own cause. Too long others have spoken for us. Too long the publick has been deceived by misrepresentation...", *Freedom's Journal* began. And like many alternative papers then and now, soon folded, closing one year later. But Cornish and Russworm had paved the way for others: Women, Radicals, Immigrants, to plead their own cause.⁴⁸⁴⁹

Zines are full of complaints of distortion by the mass media and pleas for "fair representation" of queers, punks, women, Generation X, soccer fans, et al., but zine writers, building on the traditions of the alternative press also *do* something. Echoing the words and deeds of Cornish and Russworm--"We wish to plead our own cause"--they do so: creating their own expression and manufacturing their own identity through the pages of a zine.⁵⁰ Zines, as physical expressions of their creators, transform representation into *presentation*. The first of "6 reasons [why] RG Press is important," listed in a *Riot Grrrl Press Catalogue* is "Self Representation," because "We need to make ourselves visible without using the mainstream media..." as their representation in that media "co-opted and trivialized a movement..."⁵¹ In representing themselves, zine creators like the Riot Grrrls strip away the layers of separation between themselves and how they are symbolized through a medium. Instead of buying back their alien image from the consumer culture, zine writers produce their own. Zines are do-it-yourself representation.

One of the things that has greatly facilitated do-it-yourself representation is the ease of actually putting out a zine. In *Freedom's Journal's* day, putting out a paper was a costly and laborious proposition (both Cornish and Russworm represented the elite of African-American society). With the rapid spread of xerox machines and an aesthetic

sense which eschews slickness, the decision to create, not buy back, your identity, has been democratized. "Anybody can xerox," writes zine editor Patrick Clark, "It used to be said that freedom of the press is for people who own presses; xerox makes that everyone."⁵² As Edward Dean of *Band Age* argues, "In these high-tech times, the question isn't why publish, rather it's why not?"⁵³

Between the Lines publisher, Erik Kosberg explains that he, "had seen other publications and thought 'Hey, I can do that, it looks easy.' So I did. I found out that I could indeed publish a magazine, but I was wrong on the second part--it's a lot more work than I ever imagined."⁵⁴ True, putting out zines is a lot of work, but the tools and skills necessary are freely available in the a country like the United States, and by not hiding the fact that common material and ability are what goes into the making of a zine, each one is testimony to their reader that they, too, can do-it-themselves. "I think zines are about action," explains *William Wants a Doll's* Arielle Greenberg, "And hopefully if people read my zine they'll feel inspired to do one."⁵⁵

This notion of *emulation*--turning your readers into writers--occupies a central point in the zine world. It is helped along by the fact that most zines don't copyright their material. As in the early days of newspapers and magazines in this country, material is expected to be shared and reprinted, "borrowed." While a number of zines--and increasingly more--are explicitly copyrighted, an almost equal number are explicitly anti-copyrighted.⁵⁶ In *Shithappy*, Adam Bregman prints "Anti-Copyright. Feel free to copy and distribute."⁵⁷ The editor of *Fugitive Pope* offers a selective copyright, with a bit of humor. The inside front cover reads "(C) Raleigh Clayton Muns. All Rights

Reserved," then follows with this advice:

Actually if you're cool, you can gamble that my relatives, the hoighty-toity Washington D.C. lawyers won't be set on your scrawny butts so gamble and reproduce anything you want....However, major publishing concerns can suck my International Standard Serial Number.⁵⁸

Most zines, however, ignore the issue of "intellectual property" entirely. With neither a copyright nor anti-copyright on their zine, they challenge the dominant trend toward proprietary informational rights, borrowing freely, rarely crediting mainstream sources and usually crediting underground ones.⁵⁹⁶⁰

Zines creators also help facilitate emulation by providing information on how to put out a zine. Mike Gunderloy put out a simple how-to publishing guide, and the pages of his *Factsheet Five* regularly ran columns giving advice on printing, mailing, and so on. Continuing this practice up to the present, *Factsheet Five's* new editor, Seth Friedman, has issued the *Zine Publishers's Resource Guide*, providing information on zine friendly print shops, book stores, and distributors. This is in addition to *Factsheet Five's* primary function: connecting writers and readers, building the foundation for a network of producer/consumers.

As well as implicitly encouraging their "competition" by running reviews of other do-it-yourself projects--zines, records, video--in the back pages, zine writers will often make a plea for emulation in their lead editorial. "I hope you like this little rag and start yr own. I don't think there could be too many fanzines," signs Jane of *Hex*⁶¹. And one of the oddest appeals for emulation comes in the form of the zine *Your Name Here*, where the editor asks for a different editor to do "whatever it is that you want" for each issue, effectively reinventing the zine each issue by turning his readers into creators.⁶²

Emulation--as readers become writers and writers become readers--breaks down a fundamental component of the logic of consumer capitalism: a division between producers and consumers; a division reinforced by the professionalization of cultural creation. Arguing that zines don't live by these rules, Missy Lavalee writes that,

People outside the underground culture are very much caught up in a mode of thinking that for others to find something you write/draw/create/do to be interesting, it has to be very traditionally and professionally done. Or that you have to be "special" to create anything of interest to others.⁶³

Those inside the underground culture, however, reject these restrictions. "In the spirit of the do-it-yourself ethic that exists in the hardcore (hc) scene, I wanted to start a fanzine" explains Melanie Maria Liwanag Aguila in her *Femzine* editorial,

A few of my reservations about doing this project was my lack of experience in writing/editing and the amount of knowledge I had. But does a fanzine have any real restrictions or set guidelines? Does a fanzine editor have to have a prestigious background in writing/editing? I would have to say "no" to both questions.⁶⁴

This freedom from the "specialness" or the "professionalism" that is supposed to accompany any creation of culture in our society is liberatory: it breaks down barriers between producer and consumer, entertainer and audience--it asserts the possibility of a participatory and democratic culture. "I refuse to say that what I am doing doesn't fit in this world," argues *Artichoke* editor and former *Factsheet Five* contributor Karin Falcone, "That my journalism doesn't fit in this world because it's sloppy...and 'real' people get paid for their work, and 'real' artists don't just put out rough drafts."⁶⁵

Interestingly enough, the non-professional character of zines can also be liberatory for the "special" and "professional" creator. "When I got to Yale," *WWIII*'s Scott

Cunningham explains,

I started realizing how complicated art can be... You have this abundance of information, and you become overeducated... too self-conscious.... boxed in.... When I came out I couldn't do anything: "No, No, that's too much like... No, No, I remember that problem was solved in 1968."

Out of school, Scott drifted into the self-publishing scene where,

suddenly... I see these kids that don't know anything, they're just putting stuff down and throwing pages together, and it was just so refreshing to see someone who knows *nothing* going out and doing it.

Trained as an artist in an elite institution Scott found that his education, far from training him to create great art, crippled him: erecting barriers between him and his creation and him and his audience. Zine creation, with no formal creative criteria and an anarchic disdain for rules, flatten those walls. Self-publishing, Scott describes, "allowed me to just sort of numb my mind to a lot of that intellectual thing and just get down to communicating."⁶⁶

Without prerequisites, authorizations, or specialized training, innovative creativity can flourish. This doesn't, however, necessarily result in "the best which has been thought and said." Often far from it. But that is not the only purpose of culture--even for Matthew Arnold, whose description of culture this is. Arnold's definition is often trundled out in defense of formalized criteria of "good" culture, but what is invariably neglected is the next sentence in *Culture and Anarchy*, where Arnold writes that the purpose of the "best which has been thought and said" is to promote a "stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits."⁶⁷ While the do-it-yourself amateurism of the cultural underground assures that the vast majority of zines may not

correspond to the qualities demanded in the former half of Arnold's definition, zines do far better than either the commercial cultural world or the academy in fulfilling the latter condition. In terms of their literary and artistic merits, zines can honestly be quite awful. They can also be sublime. Yet even in the worst of cases, the very act of putting out a zine, doing-culture-yourself, generates "a stream of fresh and free thought" over stock consumerist "notions and habits" of one's passive relation to culture and commodities.

The Politics of Form

In 1937, the brilliant and tragic critic Walter Benjamin asked a simple question: What is radical culture? In his essay "The Author as Producer" he came up with an interesting answer: It's *not* the radical content of culture which makes it radical. The most radically political themes expressed through culture can support the most conservative of political systems. As he noted, "the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate astonishing quantities of revolutionary themes, indeed, can propagate them without calling its own existence...seriously into question."⁶⁸

This ability for "revolutionary themes" to be incorporated into the system holds true in our time as well. Take television for example: While the majority of television programs are predictably slavish to the order that is, there are shows that are critical of the status quo: *The Simpsons*, *Rosanne*, *The X Files*, and *TV Nation*, to name the most prominent. But the fact that at the time of this writing all four of these shows could be found on the Fox Network, owned by the conservative media mogul Rupert Murdoch, suggests that the powers-that-be don't stay awake at night fearing the subversive effect

of this "radical" culture.

Illustrating this point in his own times, Benjamin described a show of photographs of poor people exhibited in Germany between the wars. These photographs, he wrote, which aspire to raise the viewer's consciousness, instead *render poverty aesthetic*, thus reifying it--making it something contemplative and outside of political struggle. As such, suffering becomes an object for visual contemplation, not political work. Today, the work of an accomplished "political" artist like Adrian Piper does not prompt the audience to organize against racism, but merely provokes an admiration of the artist's skill in revealing the nuances of oppression. Similarly the effect of watching *The X Files* is merely confirming suspicions: Yes, conspiratorial forces do undermine our democracy, but knowing about it is simply "cool...cool like us" as the Fox billboard campaign goes.⁶⁹⁷⁰

One might easily give up hope here, sighing that the culture of capitalism can neutralize all dissenting voices. But Benjamin was not so pessimistic. The problem, he insisted, is that the wrong question is being asked of radical culture "Rather than ask," he wrote, "'What is the *attitude* of a work to the relations of production of its time?' I should like to ask 'What is its *position* within them?'"⁷¹ For Benjamin, the progressive potential of a work lies not in its critical view *of* the oppressive relations of production under capitalism, but the place of the creator and their work *within* these relations--those of culture included.

Applying Benjamin's analysis to the case of zines, it is exactly their position within the conditions of the production of culture which constitutes an essential

component of their politics. In an increasingly professionalized culture world, zine producers are decidedly amateur. In producing cheap, multiple copy objects, they operate against the fetishistic archiving and exhibiting of the high art world and the for-profit spirit of the commercial one. And by their practice of eroding the lines between producer and consumer--most consumers are also producers--they challenge the active creator/passive spectator dichotomy that characterizes our culture and society.

For Benjamin, genuine radical culture is that which can "transcend the specialization in the process of production" which characterizes Bourgeois culture and society. "This apparatus," he continues later, "is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers--that is, readers or spectators into collaborators."⁷² This radical cultural practice of turning "spectators into collaborators" today, while absent from both high art and commercial culture (except insofar as the audience becomes collaborators in a society of spectacle), is at the heart of the zine ethic. This is not to say that the content of zines: whether it be anti-capitalist polemics or just plain individual expression is not important, but what Benjamin has usefully theorized is the centrality of the medium, and the mode in which this medium is employed, for the politics of culture.

The aesthetic form that the medium takes on is a great part of the political message of zines. Commercial media (and much high art) is professional: slick, polished, seamless. The purpose of a good piece of commercial media is to draw the viewer in: make you, the viewer, forget your world--for 20 seconds, for two hours--and become part of theirs. Escape.

Zines, whether due to conscious design: using jagged cut and paste lay out, sledge

hammer ranting editorials, bizarre subject matter; or merely as the sloppy and scruffy side effect of being amateur and handmade, don't allow the reader to be sucked in. Instead of relaxing and slipping into the medium, zines push their reader away. Zines are dissonant, their juxtapositions in design and strong feelings in content are unsettling and often burst with tension. Instead of offering a conflict free escape to a tumultuous world, they hold up a mirror. As opposed to the happy fantasy world of mass culture, the purpose of many zines is to piss the reader off, to have them work to make sense of the bizarre world of the writer, to, in the closing plea of *Cheap Douchebag's* lead editorial: "Read, React."⁷³

This, of course, was the idea behind Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theater that Benjamin so much admired. Horrified by the fact that his audience might "lose" themselves in one of his political plays and thus find political catharsis in *his* play, as opposed to in *their* life, Brecht set out to create a theater that alienated the audience from what it is they were viewing. What he wanted to stimulate was thought and action, not escape.⁷⁴ Following up on Brecht's ideas, anarchist theorist and zine show host on alternative radio, Peter Lanborn Wilson (a.k.a. Hakim Bey), argues that in terms of alternative media "the clunkier, the better," and offers the advice that "Instead of measuring our success in terms of whether we can *entrance* someone [with our alternative message], maybe we should measure our success by how we can knock people out of a trance."⁷⁵ Zines do this, knocking people out the trance of the passive consumer.

But it gets trickier here. For while consumer culture sucks you in at the same time it pushes you away, for you can only enter in on their terms--as a consumer. The

big budgets and professional training necessary to emulate their aesthetic insure that you will stay on your side of the line. Zines, on the other hand, while pushing you away welcome you back in--on your terms as you make the switch from consumer to producer. Whereas the seamlessness of commercial culture and the technical virtuosity of high art, encourages the viewer/consumer to stand back and utter in awe, "Wow. That's amazing. How did they do that?"; zines--with all of their seams showing--encourage the opposite response, to come close, and say: "I see how they did that. That's not too hard. Anybody can do that." Commercial culture welcomes you into a relationship where you are alienated from any sort of reciprocal creativity; zines alienate you in order to welcome you back in as an equal. As *Holy Titclamp*'s Larry Bob Roberts nicely sums up: "The message of a zine is 'do your own zine.' The message of a glossy magazine is, 'buy this magazine and don't think for yourself.'" ⁷⁶

In certain ways what I arguing here is best summed up in Marshall McLuhan's oft cited phrase "The Medium is the Message." But as Larry-Bob suggests, it goes further than this, because intrinsic in the medium of zines is a model of participatory cultural production and organization. That is: zines are not just a message, they articulate and encourage a practice. This importance of the *form* of political, or in our case, cultural organization is emphasized by contemporary scholars of post 60s political formations. One of the best of these scholars, Alberto Melucci, argues that "The new organizational form of contemporary movements is not just 'instrumental' for their goals. It is a goal in itself...the form of the movement is the message, a symbolic challenge to the dominant patterns." As with Melucci's New Social Movements, the cultural form of

zines and the DIY mode of cultural creation become an assertion of a different model of culture than that of consumer capitalism. Melucci continues, writing that through their experience *doing* NSM politics, "People are offered the possibility of another experience of time, space, interpersonal relations....A different way of naming the world suddenly reverses the dominant codes."⁷⁷

The dominant codes of culture in the United States are based on a consumerist model. This is a model which intrinsically separates the individual from the products and culture which they enjoy and divides the world into producers and consumers. The world of zines, by trying to rechart the lines between people and commodities, by criticizing the whole system of consumer capitalism, and finally through setting up their own model of creation--DIY--and communicating through a medium which challenges the taken-for-granted social relations of producer and consumer within advanced capitalism, begins the practice of "renaming" the world. And, crucial to this practice and all cultural creation and consumption, they have a great deal of fun doing this.

Fun

That's why I publish. To change the world. It may not work but it sure is fun trying.

- Erick Rudnick, editor of *Aftershock*⁷⁸

One of the more disturbing intellectual trends in recent years has been the uncritical equation of consumption with pleasure. This argument, often from the mouths of self-styled cultural "radicals," is rolled out as a defense against any argument that attempts to define consumption in a negative light.

To be fair this sort of "cultural populism," as critic John Clarke terms it, has a valid genesis point.⁷⁹ For years elite criticism of nickelodeons, beer gardens, amusement parks, and so on were veiled attacks on the morals of working people who enjoyed these leisure pursuits, and were often employed as explanations for their poverty. These criticisms were also used as the base for Puritan and elitist assaults on the whole notion of pleasure--a tactic of policing the desires of the non-elite.

This assault on popular pleasure was later joined by critics from the other side of the political spectrum: marxists, primarily those identified with the Frankfurt School. Critics like Theodor Adorno, who brilliantly exposed the paucity of consumer culture, also clumsily included in his critique such popular culture forms like Jazz music and endowed the consumer mentality with ubiquitous reach and totalizing ideological power.⁸⁰ The result was often an undifferentiated attack on popular amusements as ideological pollution. The problem with this critique is that it reduces people to what sociologist Harold Garfinkel called "cultural dopes": social actors without complex, adaptable, and playful agency; it assumes that people can't differentiate between an advertising jingle and Louis Armstrong.⁸¹ Additionally, with its concentration on omnipresent domination it may inadvertently counsel, as such academic cultural populists like Andrew Ross have pointed out, that any struggle against the governing culture is futile.⁸²

However, whatever good and rational reasons once lay at the base of the defense of popular leisure in the face of its attackers, the argument has become a liability. Today, all too often in the academic discourse surrounding culture, any critique of consumerism

is assailed as an elitist--right or left--attack on pleasure. This trend is doubly disturbing. For it not only accepts a basic premise of consumer capitalism that pleasure is to be found only within consumption of products made available by the system, but it also limits the subjectivity of most people looking for pleasure to only the consumer realm.⁸³ In brief, these "radical" cultural populists are mouthpieces for the ideology of the status quo: celebrating the act of consumption as the only viable path to pleasure.⁸⁴

Zine writers and editors suggest another way: they critique consumption and the morality of consumer society, but they do not critique pleasure, instead they redefine it. They find immense amount of pleasure in the practice of criticizing the consumer culture and producing--and consuming--their own. How else can you describe the ecstasy of Timothy Paxton, editor of *Video Voice* when he gushes, "...but with all this stress and agony that comes from publishing there is that blissful orgasm when you hold that first xerox-warm copy in your hands. Damn, that's a nice feeling!"⁸⁵ Faced with a world where all the sanctioned paths to pleasure lead to shopping malls and cineplexes, or to activities only to be undertaken when properly outfitted in the newest, purchasable "gear," members of the zine world like *Manumission*'s Dan Werle assert in bold protest that "I'm going to be the entertainer of myself."

Conclusion to Part II

To understand the politics and purpose of zines is to understand a cultural dialectic. Zines are born out of dissatisfaction with the dominant society. They are the fruits of their creator's discontent with the nature of personal interaction and communication, the eclipse of community by mass society, and the separation of people like themselves from the process of cultural creation and consumption. Zines are their attempt to fill in the gaps between the quality of these things as they've experienced them in the dominant society and their ideals of what they could and should be like. As an attempt to overcome alienation, underground culture is the antithesis of the mainstream.

Because of this, zines and underground culture are also tied to the dominant society. For it is in reaction against the ways and means of this system that zinesters give form to their own ideals and creations, and these often bare evidence of their dialectical birth. For example, the fierce individuality and desire for do-it-yourself self-sufficiency of the zine world resonate with traditional American ideology. Yet these very same ideals today are also routinely undermined in the day-to-day practices of American society. The underground draws upon both the dominant society's ideals--and the betrayal of those ideals--as they make their own culture. Understandable in the face of such betrayal, much of zine culture is shot through with a negative identity: I am what they are not, We do what they don't. Bohemians bound to what they hate.

But the dialectic does not stop here, for even though they are bound to the

mainstream in negation, through their tearing down the walls of alienation zinesters construct something: zines. These zines provide a medium which allow their creators to name and analyze, and ridicule and rant against, the features of the dominant society they reject. Zines are also prophetic, as they outline new possibilities for ways of seeing the world and living life that run counter to dominant norms. And finally the act of producing and exchanging zines are lived examples of a different way of ordering cultural creation and communication. Zine culture may start in critique but that is not its end, for out of negation is born a new creation: underground culture.

Nor, however, does the cultural dialectic stop even here. For one of the strengths of the dominant capitalist society is its flexibility--its ability to adapt and adopt. Its weakness, as zine writers point out, is its continual alienation of the population it depends upon. Empowered by the former and crippled by the latter, capitalism is forever reacting back to its own reactions, forever looking for a novel face for its culture and its products. As the 1980s drew to a close it found a new mask: its own discontents, the underground culture.

1. Dan Werle, telephone interview, December 15, 1993
2. The figure of consumption as two-thirds of the nation's economic activity comes from an AP brief on a 1995 report issued by the Commerce Department. "Report Says American Incomes Rose in June," *New York Times*, August 1, 1995, p.D8.
3. cited in Mark Sullivan's *Our Times: The War Begins, 1909-1914*, v.4, (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), p.44
4. Robert S. and Helen Merrel Lynd, *Middletown*, (NY: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929).
The Lynds also discovered that the appeal of these new consumer items transcended their material use; commodities had begun to assert an almost mystical hold over people's lives. One working class woman asserted emphatically that, "I'll go without food before I'll see us give up the car," to which the Lynds comment that "several [families] who were out of work were apparently making precisely this adjustment." (p.256).
5. Damon Knight, *The Futurians*, (NY: John Day, 1977).
6. Don Fitch, personal correspondence, April 22, 1994.
7. Michelle Rau, "From APA to Zines: Toward a History of Fanzine Publishing," unpublished manuscript, 1991, p.4; Frederick Wertham, *The World of Fanzines: A Special Form of Communication*, (IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1973), pp. 38-40. Rau qualifies her support of *The Comet* as writing that it is the "first fan magazine printed by a club," Wertham, states unequivocally that it is the first. I tend to hedge my bets by siding with Rau.
8. Daniel Boorstin, "TV's Impact on Society," *Life*, Sept. 10, 1971.
9. John Bomb Colletti, *Dumpster Dive*, #7, Norwalk CT, 1993(?)
10. "Carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and performers" writes Mikhail Bakhtin, a literary scholar of the carnival of the European Middle Ages.
Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabalais and his World*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Books, 1984), p.7.
11. *Judy!*, vol.1, #1, Spring 1993, Iowa City, IA, no page. Judith Butler, by all accounts, does not see the good humor behind *Judy!*
12. *The I Hate Brenda Newsletter*, 1993, Hollywood, CA.
13. Don and Steve Steinberg, "Reviews," *Meanwhile...*, premiere issue, Spring 1991, Philadelphia, PA, pp.3,4,8.
14. Paul Lukas, *Beer Frame*, #1, 1994(?), Brooklyn, NY.

15. Paul Lukas, telephone interview, February 13, 1994.

16. Automobiles, for example, aren't promoted as hunks of steel, rubber, and glass built by a distant and anonymous mass of workers in Detroit. Instead, "Pontiac builds excitement," and featured prominently in an advertisement is a product that looks fast, sexy, and "exciting"; the very thing lacking in most people's lives. Even when workers do appear on commercials, like the recent Saturn ads which show "regular" designers, assembly workers, and showroom salespeople, it is the *image* of a hard working, efficiently organized work force that is being sold, whether this picture corresponds to reality or not.

17. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, (NY: Vintage, 1865/1977), p.165

18. The idea of an active engagement with the culture that surrounds you is nothing new. When "the culture" was the Judeo-Christian Bible, Thomas Paine used it to launch his attack on the rights of Kings in *Common Sense*, while other pamphleteers used scripture to counsel restraint and allegiance. Biblical passages justifying slave ownership and extolling the virtues of obedience were fashioned into sermons by slave-owning whites and the preachers they employed; and in turn, the story of Exodus was reshaped by African-American slaves into spirituals which assured eventual freedom.

Today the dominant culture is commercial, but in many ways what zine writers are doing is same thing that people have done for millennia: using the dominant culture and reforging their own relationship to it, and thus to the world. One of the most interesting examples of this is given by Camille Bacon-Smith in her fine ethnography of the predominantly female community of media fandom in the United States (*Enterprising Women*, Philadelphia: Univ of Penn, 1992). Launched from within the tradition of science fiction fandom in this country, media fans use their interest in dramatic television shows: *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *The Professionals*, *Blake 7*, *Dr. Who*, and by far the most popular of all, *Star Trek*, as the defining element of their community; a community which comes together through a regular series of conventions and communicates through zines.

What is particularly fascinating about this community is what these women fans do with this mass media material. Through home-edited music videos, poems and stories, they literally re-create the narratives of these shows. Moving away from the purely action-event, present-time orientation of the original shows, the women redraw the boundaries of the characters' worlds. They give them histories, families, emotions, and relationships; lives never circumscribed within the original shows. In fact, a sub-genre known as "slash" stories (so named for the virgule (/) between character's initials e.g. *K/S* for Kirk Spock slash) go as far to detail the homosexual relationships between primary male characters of these shows. These stories, once circulated through fanzines, become the basis for more stories. The result being that whole alternate universes of *Star Trek*, for example, have been created that draw as much on fan lore as they do on the original show.

As Bacon-Smith points out, these stories--often communicated through zines--provide a common narrative, a comfortable frame for these women fans to express and share pain and fantasy with one another. These stories, I would also argue, offer a way for these

women to become active participants in the dominant commercial culture that surrounds them. In this way this process is no different than that which has existed for centuries.

But there is a difference and it is a crucial one. No matter how much re-reading or re-negotiating that goes on the fact remains that the root text for this genre of modern fanzine is *not* the type of organically produced, distilled over centuries, repository of complex wisdom that the Bible, the Koran, the Bagavad-Gita or any great religious text is. As a *Star Trek* fan myself, it hurts to say this, but the fact of the matter is that *Star Trek* is simply a television series: primarily created by one man, produced for a couple of years, and broadcast through a medium whose primary interest is pecuniary. No matter how brilliant, or campy, or malleable *Star Trek* may be, something is lost when the root material for individual and group expression, aspiration, and identity shifts from texts embedded in lived history and forged over generations to those whose genesis is a culture industry that produces disposable entertainment *for* people according to what they're willing to pay for. When this root material becomes the 1970s cop buddy show *Starsky and Hutch*, I shudder.

I applaud the efforts of zine writers to renegotiate their relationship with consumer culture, to "de-alienate" themselves from it, and do so in a creative manner. And I readily connect this to the age old process of the cultural appropriation of a master discourse. But the negotiation between consumer culture and its fans is forever lopsided. While it is true that fans' ideas were incorporated into later *Star Trek* movies (a very rare occurrence) it is also true that the outline for writers of *Star Trek* episodes explicitly forbid certain fan innovations that might be unacceptable to a mass, read: profitable, audience--sexual relations between male members of the crew for instance. And in the end it is Hollywood that is making the *Star Trek* television and movies, and it is Hollywood that profits from any of the fans' innovations that they do incorporate.

The point I'm trying to make is this: by extolling, modifying, or criticizing consumer culture zine writers are tied to the limitations and constraints of commercial culture--even as they are testing its boundaries. Commercial culture is not popular culture. It may be popular, but its popularity is a means to an end: that of being a profitable commodity. Because of this, fans are continually betrayed and the process of re-connection and de-alienation must be continually undertaken, ad infinitum.

19. Barry Kramer, ed. *Fan Mail*, April 1991, Mechanicsburg, PA, p.5; (FS5-NYSL).

20. Trevor Rigler, "Double Dose O' Bullshit," *Temp Slave*, #4, Madison, WI, 1994.

21. Jane, "Lakefair," *Hex*, #1, September 1993, Olympia, WA, pp.43-44.

22. Freedom, personal interview, June 13, 1994, New York City.

23. Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen, *Channels of Desire*, (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1982).

24. "Glasnost is not a Banana," was the slogan of the East German anti-Stalinist Left in the months between the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification of Germany. Liberty, they tried to warn their fellow citizens, had to be defined in terms larger than merely access to the

consumer goods of the West. Their pleas fell on deaf ears, and the East Germans voted to trade in their revolution for the freedom to consume.

25. *Minions of Evil*, 1994(?), no place, no page
26. Simon Taylor, *ARTichoke*, "i am free" issue, #1, College Park, MD, 1985, no page.
27. Zine reader and self-publisher Ed Hamilton promotes a similar line, writing
 Just as the old unionists sought control over the means of production (because it was the most important form of organization) so now we should be more concerned with seizing the means of consumption. Let's make the mega-malls the battleground, pollute them with our unsightly appearance, create scenes and disturbances that will drive out profitable paying customers."
 Ed Hamilton, personal correspondence, 1994.
28. J. "Don't Buy Their Shit," *Another Pair of Shoes*, #8 Minneapolis, MN, 1992, no page.
29. Marc Arsenault, phone interview, December 14, 1993. Marc began *Wow Cool* distribution, and used to edit *Andy's Chair*.
30. *Kill Your Television*, July 1994, #4, Oberlin, OH, p.1.
31. Mike Gunderloy, personal interview, December 6, 1992, New York City.
32. Missy Lavalee, *Gaybee*, #2 & 3 respectively, early 1990s, Portland, ME.
33. Don Fitch, *From Sunday to Saturday*, 93:77-8, 1993, Covina, Ca.
34. *Do-It-Yourself Retailing* is still the name of the association magazine put out by the National Retail Hardware Association.
35. Kill Rock Stars is the name of an independent record label from Olympia, Washington.
36. Tricia Henry, *Break All Rules! Punk Rock and the Making of a Style*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989); Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond*, (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1992).
37. *Sideburns*, December 1976, illustrated in Savage, p 280-81.
 Twelve years later, San Francisco's *Homocore* reprinted a similar diagram and instructions on how to tune a guitar. Tom Jennings, *Homocore*, #5, December 1989, San Francisco, CA.
38. cited in Henry, p.108.
39. cited in Henry, pp. 101-2.

40. Mark G., *Sniffin' Glue*, #5, cited in Savage, p 279.
41. Bryan Hutcheson, quoted in J. C. Hertz, "Zine Stream: An Undercurrent Magazine Culture Explodes" in *New York Perspectives*, May 6-12 1993, p.10-11.
42. *Why Publish?* Mike Gunderloy, ed. (Albany: Pretzel Press, 1989), p 46; from *mechanicals* (FS5-NYSL).
43. For example, in an interview in an early issue of the punk zine *Flipside*, the seminal hardcore punk band Black Flag lambastes their corporate record company MCA for refusing to distribute their latest album because it was "anti-parent." Next to this *Flipside* prints the lyrics to Black Flag's song that begin, "They distort what we say/Rise above, we're gonna rise above."
Flipside, #28, 1982, Whittier, CA, no page. The song is "Rise Above."
44. *TV Guide*, reprinted from *Maximumrocknroll*, #4, January-February, 1983, San Francisco, CA, no page.
45. Thanks to punk historian Dewar MacLeod for drawing my attention to this event. In his 1994 unpublished manuscript "Undercover Cops in Blue Mohawks: The Media and Hardcore Punk Rock," MacLeod argues that it was partly in reaction against their mainstream representation that punks of the early Southern California scene, began to chart out their own identity.
46. Tim Tonooka, "Guns Don't Kill People, Songs Do," *Maximumrocknroll*, #4, January-February 1983, San Francisco, CA, no page. All quotes above, including the one from *Quincy*, are from this article.
47. In the same issue of *MRR* cited above a reader Dave writes,
 I flipped through **TV Guide** and an advertisement caught my eye.
 There was a stupid picture of this chick "punking-out man" with leopard skin clothes, wrap-around glasses, party coloring in her hair...need I say more?
The next day at practice we were talking about the episode of tonight's "Quincy", yes, you guessed it, those terrible, fucked up punkrockers. PUNK IS ON TV MORE THAN I SEE IT LIVE THESE DAYS!!
The media is eating it up....Next on Channel 4: The Serena Dank [LA TV's punk interpreter] Talk Show, this week's guests: meet the nice guys in BLACK FLAG, learn the newest stage dives, and meet Darby Crash and Sid Vicious. FUCKING STUPID TV.
 Dave's letter is eerily prescient. While the first half of his letter chronicles the injustices done to the image of punks by fictional representation; the second half is an accurate projection of what will happen a decade later: when the media discovers "real" punk rockers and puts them in the limelight. For Dave, this prospect is equally grim, for he knows that as soon as the real thing *is* portrayed on the mass media, it will still be suspect. It will be suspect because punks don't control the medium of their own representation.

48. *Freedom's Journal*, V. 1, #1, March 16, 1927, p.1

49. African Americans were not the only ones denied representation in the new mass media, as immigration swelled in the latter half of the 19th century, foreign language papers sprung up to fulfill the needs of these new populations. Between 1884 and 1920, immigrants started a total of 3,444 new publications, most of which, like *Freedom's Journal*, did not last long.

In addition to populations not addressed by the new mass presses, there were ideas neglected as well. Ideas, either coming over seas from the old country or home grown here, that posed a radical challenge to industrial capitalism. Newspapers like the Jewish Socialist Yiddish language *Workman's Paper* (*Die Arbeiter Zeitung*) were printed in the late 19th century. And papers like the *Industrial Worker*, the Wobblies' paper which proudly proclaimed that, "The Working Class and the Employing Class Have Nothing in Common"; and *The Masses*, a periodical that combined radical reporting, analysis, and art; as well as many others, came out in the early 20th. All throughout this era, and up until the first World War when many of these papers were shut down by the government for opposing the war, radical papers that questioned the capitalist order flourished. Joseph R. Conlin argues that in 1912 there were 323 Socialist periodicals in the United States, including five dailies in English and eight in foreign languages, 262 English weeklies and 36 non-English, and ten monthlies printed in English and two in foreign languages.

The American Radical Press, 1860-1960; cited in David Armstrong, *A Trumpet to Arms: Alternative Media in America*, (Boston: South End Press, 1981), p. 37.

50. In Britain, where football zines rival or exceed all other types, critics have pointed out that "Fanzines were born because football clubs, treat their fans as if they were idiots." As football became a major business in the past two decades, the fans began to resent decisions made about the sport that had less to do with their and their teams concerns and more with the money that could be made off their spectatorship. Fanzines became an outlet for a discussions that the more orthodox sporting press didn't address, issues such as who did the sport really exist for: the fans or the owners?

Nick Hornby, "Kick up the Grass," *New Statesman and Society*, August 13, 1993, p.15. See also David Jary, John Horne and Tom Bucke, "Football 'Fanzines' and Football Culture: a case of successful 'cultural contestation'," *The Sociological Review*, V.39, #3, (August 1991), pp. 581-597.

51. *Riot Grrrl Press: September-November Catalog*, 1994(?), Washington D.C., no page.

52. Patrick Clark, personal correspondence, March 31, 1994. Patrick puts out a zine called *Interference on the Brain Screen*.

53. Edward Dean, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, #23, 1987.

54. Erik Kosberg, *Why Publish?* Mike Gunderloy, ed. (FS5-NYSL).

55. Arielle Greenberg, personal interview, August 25, 1993, New York City.

56. A good rule of thumb is the higher the cover price, the slicker the design, the better the chance the zine is copyrighted.

57. Adam Bregman, *Shit Happy*, #3, early 1990s, Los Angeles, CA, inside cover.

58. Raleigh Clayton Muns, *Fugitive Pope*, V.2, #3, May 1991, Los Angeles, CA, inside front cover.

59. For some zines violating copyrights becomes their *raison d'être*. *Copyright Violation*, for instance is composed almost entirely of reprinted advertisements and mass press material 'doctored' by the editor--who then, in turn, copyrights his publication, in what I can only surmise is a joke. *Leisure*, a zine with outlets both in Britain and the U.S. put out a call for an Anticopyright network; a sort of free archive and distribution service of street posters and such, that not only aren't copyrighted themselves, but in their subject matter address the whole notion of property rights in a consumer society.

David Sokal, *Copyright Violation*, 1981, Seattle WA; *Leisure*, no date, no number, Wales, U.K.; (FS5-NYSL).

60. Browsing through a box of correspondence in the *Factsheet Five* Collection at the New York State Library I came across an exchange of letters that had been sent to Mike Gunderloy which illuminate this aspect of control. The letters debated the issue of copyright on zines and their contents. It seems the editors of *Blue Ryder*, a sort of compilation zine of essays printed previously in other zines, had reprinted an essay from *Fishwrap* without permission.

"What are you guys doing?," *Fishwrap's* editor begins, ".... *Fishwrap* is copyrighted. It is that way for a reason. The people I publish like to have control over where their work appears."

"CONGRATULATIONS! You're the first person to bitch..." replies *Blue Ryder*, they continue:

We never 'ask permission' to reprint....[an] important thing is to understand the nature of [our] magazine. What it's like is copying a bunch of pieces out of magazines and passing it around. It's networking.

61. Jane, *Hex*, #1, September, 1993, Olympia, WA, p.2

62. Graham Fenderson Trieval, *Your Name Here*, early 1990s, Lionville, PA, front cover.

63. Missy Lavalee, personal correspondence, January 19, 1993.

64. *Femzine*, #1, Melanie Maria Liwanag Aguila, ed. late 1980s, Toronto, Ont. p.5; (FS5-NYSL).

65. Karin Falcone, personal interview, May 28, 1993, Albany, NY.

66. Scott Cunningham, personal interview, September 1, 1993, New York City.

67. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p.7.
68. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in *Art After Modernism*, Brian Wallis and Marcia Tucker, eds. (NY: New Museum, 1984), p. 303.
69. Fox Billboard Campaign, Summer/Fall 1995.
70. In a similar vein Peter Lanborn Wilson (a.k.a. Hakim Bey), anarchist theorist, and host of a zine show on a NYC alternative radio station, explains that,
The media can really absorb everything, Everything. There's a market for everything. And when there's an infinite number of channels you can have an infinite number of markets. So there is a market for Rebellion...And there's a channel for the most far-out and apparently subversive science fiction. Just as long as all you are doing is watching television, you are no bloody different than anybody else watching television, whether it is Baywatch or...neat conspiracy buff Science Fiction. It's not the content it is the structure....So why not have an Anarchist channel? It would be a great way to keep the Anarchists home glued to the tube.
Talk at the Libertarian Book Club, April 17, 1995, NYC.
71. Benjamin, p.298
72. Benjamin, pp. 304 and 306, respectively.
73. Jason Page, *Cheap Douchebag*, #16, Hollywood, FL, p.2.
74. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theater*, ed and trans John Willett, (NY: Hill and Wang, 1964).
75. Peter Lanborn Wilson, talk at the Libertarian Book Club, April 17, 1995, NYC.
76. Larry-Bob Roberts, "Larry-Bob's Guide to Selling Out," *Holy Titclamps*, reprinted in Qvimby's Qveer Store's *Megamegadoggylogtwo*, 1995, Chicago, IL. p.5.
77. Alberto Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements,' *Social Research*, V 52. N.4 (Winter 1985) p.801.
78. Eric Rudnick, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, #39, 1990, Rensselaer, NY, p.100.
79. John Clarke, "Pessimism versus Populism: The Problematic Politics of Popular Culture" in *For Fun and Profit*, Richard Butsch ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990) pp.28-44.

80. Theodor Adorno, "On The Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression in Listening," (1938) in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, eds. (NY: Continuum, 1982) pp.270-299.
81. Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1967.
82. Andrew Ross, "Hacking Away at the Counter Culture," in *Technoculture*, Constance Penly and Andrew Ross, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). John Clarke also makes this point in "Pessimism versus Populism" but shares my concern that such a critique can move too easily into a celebration of the status quo.
83. For this insight I'm indebted to Stuart Ewen.
84. Even Henry Louis Gates Jr., usually a model of critical insight, accepts this formula, writing that postmodernism "at its most clear-sighted, [it] recognizes that commodity aesthetics is the only kind there is." Commodity aesthetics as the only kind there is? This is clear-sighted?
Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Multiculturalist," *The Voice Literary Supplement*, October, 1991.
85. Timothy Paxton, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, #23, 1988, Rensselaer, NY, p.52.

PART III: *COMPLICATIONS*

Discovery

Elle Magazine just wrote to me to send them a copy because they were doing this article on fanzines. And that's weird, I mean why is *Elle Magazine* writing to me?

- Christine Boarts, editor of *Slug and Lettuce*¹

Grunge, anger, cultural dislocation, a secret yearning to belong: They add up to a daunting cultural anthropology that marketers have to confront if they want to reach twentysomethings. But it's worth it. Busters do buy stuff...

- *Business Week*²

It was bound to happen. In the last year of the 1980s and the first few of the 90s, a lost generation was found. Over the span of a few years the generation of young people born in the 60s and 70s were dragged from anonymity and thrown under the klieg lights. Beginning in the major newsweeklies and soon spreading to television "news magazines" and "special reports," the mainstream media scrambled over one another trying to figure out just what this generation was about: angry, cynical, media savvy, lazy, apathetic; and what to call it: Generation X, Busters, Twentysomethings, MTV generation, 13th Gen...whatever. Tellingly, both *Business Week* and *Advertising Age* ran cover stories on this generation, advising their profit minded readers how to woo this 46 million strong, 18-29 year old group, in the process endowing them with their most important demographic tag: A neglected, 125 billion dollar "market."³

Simultaneously, the American music industry, facing stagnating sales in both rap and mainstream rock music, discovered "grunge": post-punk garage rock. In 1991,

Nirvana, a talented yet unknown band from the Seattle, WA scene, rode to the top of the charts with their second album *Nevermind* and brought the underground music scene on to MTV, into corporate music board rooms, and across America. More than twenty years after its inception, mainstream America had discovered punk rock.

In the late 1980s *Factsheet Five*'s Mike Gunderloy was explaining how the "sea of alternatives" evidenced in the pages and networks of zines was "generally invisible to the 'mainstream'."⁴ By 1989 he had "come to the conclusion that fanzines are the pit bulls of 1989," having recently "talk[ed] to reporters from PENTHOUSE, the Cincinnati ENQUIRER, the Cleveland PLAIN DEALER, the Orlando SENTINEL, and the San Jose MERCURY NEWS, all of whom seemed to think that self-publishing was suddenly big news."⁵

As both the underground press of a generation and the voice of what came to be called "alternative" (to mainstream) music, zines became a *de rigueur* element in any reporting on this new generation. *CNN* devoted a special section on the zine threat to formerly-hip-now-staid *Rolling Stone* as part of their "war of the generations" special report.⁶ Zines, however, began to warrant feature stories themselves. Branching out from the more provincial media outlets mentioned by Mike (where reporting was often sensitive and accurate as the reporters were sometimes moonlighting zine writers themselves), the media heavies like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Time*, and *Newsweek* began to run features, which, judging by the inaccuracies, were written by writers who had never read a zine before.⁷ In these latter stories the reporting borders on the breathless as zines are extolled as authentic artifacts of "the real underground,"

as they were for *Time*. The coverage is often condescending as well: for *USA Today* zines are "wacky," for the *New York Times* "quirky," something endearing but not to be taken too seriously, something to be commented upon in the "Styles," "Ideas and Trends," or "Diversions" section.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, from *In These Times* to *The New Republic*, from *Artforum* to *American Journalism Review* to *Chronicle of Higher Education*, from the small *New York Perspectives* to the gargantuan *Times*, zines were news.¹⁰ The mainstream media had discovered the modern underground press.

This discovery was not limited to the voyeuristic thrill of uncovering an exotic culture, for also discovered was the value of adopting and adapting the distinctive characteristics of "the real underground" for the mainstream society. The culture of the losers was being embraced by the winners. However, as the dominant culture borrowed aspects of the underground and made them their own, the meaning of these things changed. Far from a condemnation of the dominant culture, its discontents became part of its celebration.

Disgust with consumerism and a landscape of homogenous shopping malls gives rise to an "anti-mall" built in Orange County, CA. Complete with old couches, rusted oil drums, and half demolished walls, this punk apocalypse is also stocked with chain stores like Tower Records and Urban Outfitters.¹¹ Dissatisfaction with work makes its way into a program guide for an "alternative" music venue in the form of an advertisement for cranberry flavored vodka which boasts that its red color is a mark that the product is not "pale and spiritually void (like your boss)."¹²

When Anheuser-Busch, the largest beer producer in America, sells their Bud Dry

as "the alternative beer" over a picture of a greasy haired grunge rocker, and proudly sponsors "the world's largest alternative rock concert," the term "alternative" has already lost any connection to its original meaning as an alternative to the dominant culture.¹³ "Alternative is used as a marketing term," Steve Albini, famed underground musician and recording engineer, matter-of-factly points out, "it doesn't distinguish a band from the mainstream music industry."¹⁴ This transformation from critique into marketing category was so complete by 1993 that a music reporter writing in *New York Newsday* could use the oxymoron "commercial alternative music" without a trace of irony.¹⁵

Being a loser sells Converse sneakers on MTV's late night *Alternative Nation*. "There's a growing strength in our collective ugliness," intones a voice over grainy black and white shots of bohemians in an urban setting, "It's frightening to some people, but we refuse to accept the standard television definition of what beauty is. We don't want to live in beer commercial.... The point is not to be beautiful, the point is to be yourself." Which, of course, you can only do by buying a mass produced sneaker.¹⁶ MTV relies heavily on the Gen X demographic and has therefore honed its skill at riding the wave of underground youth culture. In addition to *Alternative Nation*, a video show featuring "alternative" bands hosted by an "alternative" young Republican, MTV has devised programs like *The Real World* which, like a perzine, chronicles the everyday life of everyday young people. And in the summer of 1995, they introduced *Road Rules*: the road trip...MTV style.

"Do-it-Yourself" is the call in the slick young men's fashion and culture magazine *Details*, as they give out advice on how to "rough up your clothes real good" in order

to effect the grunge look. By simply applying an electric sander to a \$350 jacket, steel wool to \$95 boots, and scissors to a \$137 suede vest you can do-it-yourself: "making brand new clothes look like you've been in them for years."¹⁷ And *Slacker* is the name of the newspaper put out by Third Millennium, an very non-slacker collection of ambitious, self-promoting, self-described political "Gen Xers" whose founding convention was held at the Kennedy estate and whose political program highlights the bold idea of reducing the deficit.¹⁸

This adaption, or cooptation, of underground cultural markers extends to zines themselves. A television subsidiary of Time-Warner contacted Mike Gunderloy with an interest in doing a "reality based tv show" centered around zines.¹⁹ Although Mike thought the idea ridiculous and nothing came of it, it was not the last interest that Time-Warner had in zines. Tipped off by a friend that employees at Warner Records produced a "zine" themselves, I called up their "Alternative Marketing" division and asked them to send a few copies. Within twenty-four hours I held in my hands *Dirt*. It looked like any other zine: comix, record reviews, hand drawings. *Dirt* is an unexceptional, if slightly too earnest, zine--except for the fact that it's bankrolled entirely by Time-Warner, one of the largest media conglomerates in the world.²⁰

While *Dirt* is produced primarily for internal consumption to boost employee moral and productivity, zines have also been adopted by non-zinesters as advertising for an external audience. The New Museum in New York City and the Wight Gallery in Los Angeles produced what they called a "zine," replete with zine style, scruffy, lay out, as the program guide for their show on "Bad Girl" artists.²¹ *Slant* is the name of an

oversize zine-like publication given away free at Urban Outfitters, a "hip" clothing and style chain outlet located in among other places, the Orange County anti-mall. Paying zine writers for their art and words, and printing a "Punk Rock" issue, *Slant* carries almost no advertising for the parent company--only the back page is given over to a cut and paste, grungy ad for Urban Outfitters.²² Like *Dirt* and *Bad Girls*, *Slant* is not so much selling a singular product as trying to identify itself with the whole life-world of the underground.



d.i.y Time-Warner with Dirt #52

This alternative life-world is coveted by advertisers, commercial designers, and corporate image consultants because they understand that what the mainstream culture lacks is authenticity. Based primarily on an instrumental market relationship with people, it is forever alienating its very audience, its consumer base, its citizenry. Underground culture offers the antidote--home-grown, do-it-yourself authenticity--primary, immediate

connections between individuals and their lives, passions, and desires. This is the cultural dialectic: Underground culture is born out of people's dissatisfaction with the dominant culture. The dominant culture, in turn, reincorporates aspects of its discontents. Ideas, styles, mediums of the underground provide new material to renew and refresh the dominant culture; keeping it dynamic, close to the people, filling in its own deficits.

"Discovering" underground culture solved a real problem for marketers: how to reach young consumers. There's a number of ways to convince someone to buy a product. One, you convince them that it will fulfill a real need they already have: "You need a drink? We make a good beverage." The problem with this pitch is that a lot of companies make good beverages and if they all waited until people actually *needed* a beverage, most would be out of business.

Two, you convince someone that they will be a part of your lifestyle if they drink this beverage. Promise, for example, that if they drink Pepsi that they will be part of a Pepsi Generation, and then throw in a couple of superstars--Michael Jackson or Madonna will do--for company. This strategy is flawed too, for this is a generation, according to *Business Week*, of "savvy--and cynical--consumers," who "feel alienated from the mainstream culture which ignored them," as *Advertising Age* further explains.²³ To such savvy and cynical consumers, the "Pepsi Generation" is all too obvious as a marketing team fabrication; it has no ring of "authenticity," and it doesn't build the proper emotive bond that self-identification does. What if they don't want to be part of your generation?

Three, you convince someone that your product *is already part* of their lifestyle, or a lifestyle that is created by people close to them. According to market researcher

Judith Langer, what works best for this hard to reach generation is "Advertising that is funny and hip and says, 'Hey, we know'".²⁴ And what "we know" is their "funny and hip" culture. So you produce a cola and name it something suitably cool and blase, like, "OK Cola." Then you hire someone who is a part of the underground scene to do the design of the can--the talented and respected comic book artist Dan Clowes is a good choice. Finally, you pitch this product as The Scene's cola. If the consumer is part of the scene, the cola confirms it. If he or she is not, than the product offers a key into an already existing community. A great plan. Too bad the Coca-Cola Company has already carried it out.

"Discovering" underground culture also meant discovering a farm league for the corporate culture industry. Styles and products germinate underground, have time to dig in their roots, and then, when beginning to flower, are plucked by big business. As media critic Herb Schiller explains,

In allowing small-scale and relatively independent activity to continue to exist in cultural work, the big cultural firms insure a constant supply of talent and creativity that otherwise might be ignored or even suffocated in their own bureaucratized, symbol-making factories. The "independents" are continually tapped to replenish exhausted creative energies in the cultural conglomerates.²⁵

For years, while the mainstream music business was ignoring them, musicians in the punk and alternative music scene started up "indie" record labels--DIY labels that were "independent" from the commercial music business. When this music scene was discovered, major music labels moved in and bought out bands that were successful on the indie labels, signing them and their future profits to their corporate roster. Nirvana, for example, left the indie Sub Pop for David Geffen's major label. "Vultures," is what

Gerard Cosloy, co-manager of Matador Records a (former) indie label called them, "They're eager to step in and take the lead away from the indies...And when major labels start taking bands away, there's nothing left to support the indie network."²⁶ But the culture industry recognizes profitable underground-grown "executive" talent as well. Cosloy, who began his underground career putting out the zine *Conflict* in 1979, signed a joint agreement in 1993 with recording giant Atlantic Records to use his Matador label as a conduit for alternative talent onto the corporate label, joking that "the Atlantic deal means...we sold out."²⁷

"Buy this 24-Year-Old and get all his friends absolutely free" runs the copy of a MTV ad aimed at corporate advertisers. The young man pictured with combat boots, jeans, bracelets and unkempt hair, nonchalantly lounging in an old chair is an "opinion leader" they assure their business audience, who "knows a lot. More than just what CDs to buy and what movies to see. He knows what car to drive and what credit cards to use."²⁸ But to get at that 24-year-old you need an opening. And as the late 1980s turned into the early 1990s, zines and the underground culture they represent became that entry.

In the Service of Capital

In 1990, under the *New York Times* headline, "A New Understated Kind of Power," Robert L. Dilenschneider, president and CEO of the public relations giant Hill and Knowlton, advised business leaders to "make change an ally," particularly if you "help interpret it for your people." For this its necessary to keep abreast of "emerging trends," and to do this Dilenschneider claims he reads the "alternative press."²⁹

Underground culture represents dissent and dissent is change. While critics of the dominant system often point to its stultifying morality as its distinguishing characteristic, they would do well to remember what Dilenschneider has to say: Capital may need order, but it also needs change. Old fashioned ideas stand in the way of adaption to new labor processes and attraction to new products. Although born in rebellion against the instrumentality of the market, the iconoclastic libertarianism of underground culture--of Bohemia--can fit well with the needs of capitalism. As *Baffler* editor Tom Frank writes,

over the years the rebel has naturally become the central image of his culture of consumption, symbolizing endless, directionless change, an eternal restlessness with "the establishment"--or, more correctly, with the stuff "the establishment" convinced him to buy last year.³⁰

The bohemian--stripped of all criticism of capitalism--is the model capitalist citizen.

This was understood sixty years ago by critic Malcolm Cowley, who pointed out in his memoirs of bohemian literary life in New York of the 1920s that, "It happened that many of the Greenwich Village ideas proved useful" for what was then a relatively new consumer economy:

Thus, *self-expression* and *paganism* encouraged a demand for all sorts of products--modern furniture, beach pajamas, cosmetics, colored bathrooms with toilet paper to match. *Living for the moment* meant buying an automobile, radio or house, using it now and paying for it tomorrow. *Female equality* was capable of doubling the consumption of products--cigarettes, for example--that had formerly been used by men alone....Everything fitted into the business picture.³¹

While Cowley may be overstating his case, there is a great deal of truth to his assertion that bohemians were a sort of "trade missionaries," as he later calls them, and that the business world was conscious of this fact. In 1929 public relations impresario Edward Bernays convinced "liberated" women to light up "torches of freedom," that is:

cigarettes, at an Easter Day parade as part of a campaign to broaden the market for Lucky Strike cigarettes.³²

"Greenwich Village Ideas," helped along by advertisements in the growing national mass media, spread across the country and the world, ensuring the victory of bohemian values over those of Queen Victoria's. But something happened to these ideals along the way: as they reached the market, cultural rebellion turned into "fashion" and "lifestyle" and merely products to be bought and sold. The Village's ideals were spreading but its soul was dying; "If...the Village was dying," as Cowley wrote, "it was dying of success."³³

This cycle of cultural rebellion, discovery, and corruption repeats itself. The heir apparent to the Villagers, the Beats of the 1950s, consciously disengaged themselves from American post-war affluence, taking vows of voluntary poverty and later retreating into the anti-materialism of Zen. But while the Beats might have been fleeing from America's success, straight America saw something in them which it had lost, a freedom that had disappeared while hunkered down in the kitchen or stuck on the freeway.³⁴ Fleeing from "success" the Beats became a success themselves, and by 1959 were being used as living mannequins to feature "Beat but Neat" styles in *Life Magazine*.³⁵

Following the Beats was the counter-culture of the 1960s, its political wing coming out of the Civil Rights, Free Speech, and anti-Vietnam War movements, the Students for a Democratic Society, Black Panthers, and other groups; and its cultural wing from rock-n-roll, stimulated by a healthy influx of drugs and non-Western religions. The radicals and the hippies, often in conflict but powerfully strong when together, made

up the new underground. Integral to this counter-culture was its printed voice: one of the greatest flowerings of printed dissent in this country's history so far, the Underground Press.

Every book on the underground press pinpoints its genesis at a different point, many with the beginning of the *L.A. Free Press* in 1964, but I prefer to start it with Paul Krassner's *The Realist*, first published in 1958. It was Krassner who took the independent left perspectives of I.F. Stone's *Weekly*, the personal subjectivity of the New Journalism style of Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, and Tom Wolfe, and the pop culture insanity of *Mad* magazine to create a truly novel cultural form.³⁶ It was a model which spread quickly, transforming itself to fit its editors' passions and its audience's desires. Underground papers like the New York *East Village Other* concentrated on the burgeoning counter-cultural "scene," while the *Rat* down the street focused on radical politics. The Chicago *Seed* lifted dynamic graphic styles from television, color magazines, and LSD hallucinations to make psychedelic multicolored newspapers where type didn't line up in rows but twisted and turned down the page. *The Black Panther* spoke to militant blacks, *El Malcriado* to Chicanos, *Off Our Backs* to women, *The Gay Liberator* to queers, *Vietnam GI* to soldiers, *Green Revolution* to those concerned with the environment, and so on, seemingly ad infinitum.

By the late 60s and early 70s there were literally thousands of underground papers with a combined readership of over 9,000,000. Millions of individuals reared with the 50s mantra of "freedom" and "the good life" were discovering that traditional American freedoms were based on other peoples' servitude and that the American materialistic good

life was a shallow one. They were redefining "freedom" and the "good life" in their own very personal language and spreading this word via the underground press. But, like so many other cultural experiments before it, it was not to last long.

Beginning in the early 70s the underground press collapsed. It collapsed because of state repression: pressure was applied on print shops not to print "un-American" papers, and editors were harassed legally, often on obscenity charges.³⁷ It collapsed because the political movements providing the *raison d'être* for many of the papers disintegrated or fragmented or digressed into infantile radicalism. It collapsed because the editors, like the movement leaders, simply burned out when they realized the revolution wasn't around the corner. And finally, and most devastatingly, the underground press collapsed as the counter-culture became a viable product, and the presses either sold out to the dominant culture themselves or were eclipsed by those willing to do so.³⁸

"But The Man can't bust our music" ran the ad copy over a photograph of a group of young demonstrators in a cell. "And the man can't stop you from listening. Especially if your armed with these." But "The Man" had little interest in stopping "our music," because by 1968 Columbia Records was already selling it with ads like this in the pages of the underground press.³⁹

In addition to rock music, sexual liberation had also been a major component of the counter-cultural "good life," and sex classifieds had always paid underground press bills, but as the 60s gave way to the 70s, sex became the only subject matter for some papers. By 1971, staff from *The Rat* and *The East Village Other* had gone on to *Screw*,

and *Kiss* and *Pleasure* respectively.⁴⁰

For others the good life was simply the groovy neighborhoods, shops, cafes, and clothing stores that once catered to the counter-culture. Staffers from the famous underground *Berkeley Barb* started the "alternative" *Berkeley Monthly*, helping to bury the *Barb* as advertisers moved from the unpredictable underground press to its more polished consumer cousin.⁴¹ By 1980 Bruce Bruggman, the editor-publisher of the alternative weekly *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, saw his paper's job as one of transforming societal anger into commodity purchase. As he put it at the National Association of Newsweeklies Conference, the purpose of the lifestyles focus of the new alternative papers is to say to readers: "Yes, there are problems, and here are ways to deal with them, to keep on enjoying life in hardtimes."⁴² As the counter-cultural cry of "how you live is political" turned to "what you buy is political," the immediate decedents of the great Underground Press became nothing more than shopping guides to an alternative lifestyle.⁴³⁴⁴

Crushed, fragmented, and bought up, this underground, like those before it, was over. For some the lesson learned was one of the cooptive power of capitalism. As mainstream America was becoming more liberal--in image and word if not deed--to distinguish oneself one had to become more extreme. To stay one step ahead of Madison Avenue, hippies devised more and more outlandish styles, or gave it up and went back to the land. And to stay ahead of the Liberal Establishment, radicals hallucinated theories of the possibility of armed revolution in the United States.⁴⁵ The message of both hippies and radicals was clear: Stay hidden, underground, deep within your subcultural

ghetto...stay pure.

But for others the lesson was in marketing: new ideas for new products are to be found less in designer's studios and more often out on the street. In the argot of the day, this lesson was one in "selling out." Both lessons--staying pure or selling out--would not be lost on the underground to come, but also, as is often the case, not exactly learned from either.

1. Chris Boarts, personal interview, July 12, 1993, New York City.
2. Laura Zinn et al., "Move Over, Boomers: The Busters Are Here--And They're Angry," *Business Week*, December 14, 1992, cover story, p. 78.
3. Laura Zinn et al., "Move Over, Boomers: The Busters Are Here--And They're Angry," *Business Week*, December 14, 1992, pp. 74-82; Scott Donaton, "The Media Wakes Up to Generation X," *Advertising Age*, February 1, 1993. pp. 16-17.
4. Mike Gunderloy, *Why Publish?*, Albany: Pretzel Press, 1989, from mechanicals, Factsheet Five Collection, New York State Library, p.53.
5. Mike Gunderloy, *Factsheet Five*, #30, 1989, Rensselaer, NY, p.11.
6. CNN, "Boom or Bust," rebroadcast July 2, 1994.
7. Eric Messinger, "Public Access for the Literate," November 7, 1993, Styles p.8 and J. Peder Zane. "Now The Magazine of Me," *New York Times*, May 14, 1995, E.4; Peat O'Neil, "The Art is in the Mail," *Washington Post*, September 5, 1989, C5; David Gross "Zine But Not Heard" *Time*, September 5, 1994, pp.68-9; John Leland, "The Irony and the Ecstasy," *Newsweek*, June 19, 1995, p.71.
The most common errors were in listing periodicals as zines that were not zines, and shortening the history of zines to the past decade.
8. David Gross, "Zine, But Not Heard," *Time*, September 5, 1994, pp 68-9.
9. Pat Guy, "Wacky Magazines Know No Limits," *USA Today*, August 3, 1992, B6; J. Peder Zane, "Now, the Magazine of 'Me'," *New York Times*, May 14, 1995, 4E. Of the two articles the *Times* ran featuring zines the first, November 7, 1993, ran in "Styles," the second, cited above, ran under "Ideas and Trends." The *Washington Post* article cited in the previous note was in the "Diversions" section,
10. Mickey Z. "Do-It Yourself Mags," *In These Times*, February 19-25, 1992, pp.18-19; Alex Heard, "Art to Die For," *The New Republic*, February 21, 1994, pp.20-24; Lawrence Chua, "Press," *Artforum*, October 1992, p.9; Jim Romanesko, "The Zine Explosion," *American Journalism Review*, April 1993, pp.39-43; Christopher Shea, "The Zine Scene," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 3 1993, A37; J. C. Hertz, "Zine Stream," *New York Perspectives*, May 7, 1993, pp. 10-11; Eric Messinger, "Public Access for the Literate," November 7, 1993, Styles p.8 and J. Peder Zane. "Now The Magazine of Me," *New York Times*, May 14, 1995, E.4.

Chris Dodge of Minneapolis, MN has probably the most complete bibliography of zine related articles to date.

11. Stephen Drucker, "The Anti-Mall," *New York Times Magazine*, October 9, 1994, pp. 60-1.
12. The ad is for Finlandia Vodka, taken from a program guide for The Knitting Factory in New York City, *Notes*, January and February 1995.
13. ad for Bud Dry in *Rolling Stone*, June 2, 1994
14. Interview with Steve Albini, *Under the Volcano*, #20, 1994, Nesconset, NY, p. 8.
15. "Talkin 'Bout Their Generation," *Newsday*, July 11, 1993.
16. Ad for Converse on MTV, May 28, 1993.
17. "Damage Control" in the do-it-yourself section of *Details*, July 1993. pp. 55-6.
18. *Slacker*, newspaper of "Third Millennium," 1993.
19. Mike Gunderloy, personal interview, December 6, 1992, New York City.
20. *Dirt*, #50-56, 1994(?), c/o Warner Bros, Burbank, New York City, Atlanta, Seattle, and Edina, MN.
21. *Bad Girls*, The New Museum and Wight Gallery, New York City and Los Angeles, 1994.
22. *Slant*, #3, 1995, Philadelphia, PA.
23. Laura Zinn et al., "Move Over, Boomers: The Busters Are Here--And They're Angry," *Business Week*, December 14, 1992. p.75; Scott Donaton, "The Media Wakes Up To Generation X," *Advertising Age*, February 1, 1993, p.17.
24. cited in Laura Zinn et al., "Move Over, Boomers: The Busters Are Here--And They're Angry," *Business Week*, December 14, 1992. p.78.
25. Herbert I. Schiller, *Culture, Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression*, (NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), p.42.
26. David Browne, "The Independents See Vultures Circling Overhead," *New York Times*, October 27, 1991, sec.2, p.26.
27. Abigail Goldman, "New York Rocker Underground Music Maven Gerard Cosloy, And His Big Time Deal With Atlantic Records," *New York Newsday*, May 26, 1993, sec.2, p.56. Danny Goldberg, senior vice-president of Atlantic Records, refers to Cosloy as having the potential to be "one of the most important executives in the music business."

28. Ad for MTV in *New York Times*, Business Section, July 15, 1993.
29. Robert L. Dilenschneider, "Forum: A New Understated Kind of Power," *New York Times*, June 3, 1990, sec.3, p.13.
30. Tom Frank, "Alternative to What?" *The Baffler*, #5, 1993, p.12.
31. Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s*, NY: Penguin, 1934/1976, p.62.
32. Edward Bernays, *Biography of an Idea*, (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1965), pp. 377-394.
33. Cowley, p.65.
34. That the Beats were attractive to straight America is not surprising. They, like all bohemians, embodied a counter American Dream to that of a pop-up toaster in the kitchen and a Buick in the car park. "So much about 'lighten' out" for the frontier," C. Carr describes, "the road not taken, where you could've would've done your own thing, free from the yoke of work and family. This quest for breathing space was always less about art than about capitalism, an escape from the rat race and the cultural cookie cutter." C. Carr, "Bohemia Diaspora" the Village Voice, February 4 1992, p. 28.
The Beats were also attractive because business had discovered a bulging post-war youth market, and if the kid wasn't digging Davy Crocket hats and penny loafers than maybe black sweaters and tights would sell.
35. "Beat but Neat" styles were displayed in a double page fashion spread of Beats lounging on a trolley in Venice Beach modeling "what the fashion world calls beat-knits, loose sweaters that are the respectable versions of those Beats live in."
"Real Gone Garb for Fall, Beat but Neat," *Life*, August 3, 1959.
36. This personal-political style was expressed best by the printing of the "The Parts Left Out of the Kennedy Book," as a "missing segment" which relates Jackie's account of Lyndon Johnson's act of necrophilia with the head of J.F.K's corpse on the plane home from Dallas.
Krassner published *The Realist* from 1958-1974 then started it up again in 1985 and is still running it today. In 1989 he and Mike Gunderloy struck up a correspondence. In one letter Krassner referred to *Factsheet Five* as "a sort of central clearing house for the new underground"
Personal correspondence, February 22, 1989; (FS5-NYSL).
37. A memo sent out on November 5, 1968 by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, ordered all local offices to "immediately constitute a detailed survey concerning New Left-type publications being printed and circulated in your territories on a regular basis." The surveys were to include description of the publication, name and location of printers, circulation, funding, names of editorial staff, "foreign ramifications," and so on. Soon after systematic police pressure on the Underground Press began.

Cited in David Armstrong, *A Trumpet to Arms: Alternative Media in America*, (Boston: South End Press, 1981), p.137.

38. Armstrong; and Lawrence Leamer, *The Paper Revolutionaries: The Rise of the Underground Press*, (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1972). See also Robert J. Glessing, *The Underground Press in America*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1970); and Michael L. Johnson, *The New Journalism*, (Wichita, KS: University of Kansas, 1970).

39. cited in Edward P. Morgan, *The 60s Experience: Hard Lessons about Modern America*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), endnote #115, p.323.

40. Johnson.

41. Armstrong

42. Speech at the 1980 National Association of Alternative Newsweeklies (NAAN) Conference, cited in Armstrong, p.362.

43. These "lifestyle" newspapers have carried on to today--sometimes jettisoning all pretense of being underground sometimes not. The one local to my Lower East Side, New York City neighborhood *Downtown*, with its motto "Counterculture for the 90s," printed an editorial condemning "white civilization and its religion of materialism" the same week that they came out with a supplement called the *E.V. Shopper*, which began by publicizing a controversial event sponsored by the local business improvement group tied to gentrification.

James Rosenbrink, "Super-Capitalism/Collective Communism, New Boss Same as Old Boss," *Downtown*, #319, May 12, 1993, p.15.

44. This transformation inevitably led to a change in editorial stance, particularly regarding a critical stance towards the mainstream society. *Rolling Stone*, which once spoke to the rock counter-culture, in order to please its new advertisers began to speak to another audience with another voice. In the words of the general manager in an article in the *Wall Street Journal* in 1981: "We had to deliver a more-high quality reader. The only way to deliver a different kind of reader is to change editorial."

Wall Street Journal, June 4, 1981, p.14, cited in Ben Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, 4th ed., (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p.110.

45. For a wonderful analysis of the relationship between the New Left and the media see Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

Purity and Danger

I don't know why your office felt compelled to send a letter to us, but I can guess that one of two things is happening

#1 You are completely unaware of the nature of the D.I.Y. (do it yourself) punk/hardcore thing. It hates your company and all that it stands for. If you do obtain a tape from any of the bands therein, the odds are high that many of the songs would be about how you suck, MTV sucks, corporate exploitation of underground culture sucks, etc.

or #2 You are completely aware that many bands want to "make it big"....Sony Music Entertainment Inc. is looking for artists to flesh out their "alternative" roster. You're offering stardom in the guise of "getting your message to a larger audience" and "better distribution." You think you'll get someone to bite.

If situation #1 applies, I almost feel sorry for you. The fact that this D.I.Y. guide exists is proof positive that you are not needed....

If your reasoning followed #2, welcome; you have probably made a wise advertising decision. You will probably get plenty of "punk/HC" bands who want to be next year's "alternative" heroes....

Fuck you very much.

- reply to a Sony A&R (talent) scout from
the editors of *Book Your Own Fuckin' Life*.¹

Underground culture, and the zines that speak for it, is the product of an attempt to create an authentic, non-alienating culture. But, like all bohemias before it, this culture is produced within a larger alienated and alienating society. Between this alternative culture and the mainstream society lines are continually drawn: our world and theirs, integrity and selling out, purity and danger.

This division is not merely the product of immature paranoia. At the root of underground culture is its separation from the dominant society--its very existence stems from this negation. And, as the letter from the editors of *Book Your Own Fuckin' Life*

illustrates, these dividing lines are also based on a realistic assessment of the threat posed by living within a commercialized society in which all culture, especially rebellious culture, is gobbled up, turned on its head and used as an affirmation of the very thing it was opposed to. These are people who have heard the Beatles "Revolution" sell Nike shoes and Gill Scott Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" used as an intro for the cop show *New York Undercover*, they know of zines funded by corporations. They listened and learned: raise the drawbridge, barricade yourself within, keep yelling: No. Adopt a will-toward-smallness in the hopes that you will not be too insignificant a morsel for the rapacious jaws of marketing to devour. Keep yourself safe, keep yourself pure.

But they also understand the costs of purity. The stifling ghettoization that ensures that the messages and critiques of the underground stay within the narrow confines of a homogeneous elect. The rules of purity that become as constraining as any rules of the outside. The inability to live a total life, always being split between the work you do for money and the creation you do for pleasure. The provincialism of bohemia.

For much of the early life of zines this conflict was muted. After all, to whom could you sell out too? Who was interested in an obscure culture that celebrated losers? But with the mainstream discovery and celebration of its cultural dissenters the divide between purity and danger is pushed to the fore.

Ironically, even as this conflict threatens to tear the cultural world of zines apart it also holds it together. For as anthropologist Mary Douglas points out, the ideas of "purity and danger" function in many societies as an organizing principle, instilling order

in an otherwise chaotic world. Because the world of zines values individualism so highly and disdains rules so profoundly, this sort of division offers a locus point around which the zine community can hold itself. But whereas Douglas argues that these divisions are often arbitrary, I would argue that in the case of the world of zines they are not. The conflict between purity and danger is a natural outgrowth of the contradiction of attempting to create an alternative community within a society that seems to thrive off of its discontents.² There are no firm guides for navigating the divide, so instead zinesters devise strategies for survival.

Reluctant Subjects

As I was slyly switching the Kinko's counter with my personal one, I was surrounded by a bunch of Ravers. "No way, *Cometbus*! I read about that in *Details* magazine," they said...."It wasn't my fault," I grumbled.

- Aaron, *Cometbus*³

Most zine writers are less than thrilled that their culture and craft has been "discovered" by the mainstream media. This is not too astonishing, after all it is in reaction against the negative qualities of the mainstream media that zine culture was created. *Temp Slave*'s Keffo reprints a letter he sent to *Time* magazine in response to their feature on zines, arguing that as much as he was interested in the subject matter of their article, "TIME failed to mention the best reason for zine publishing. Simply put, TIME and all the other major media sources are boring and irrelevant. The 'American Century' is over and so is TIME"⁴ While Keffo's prognosis may be a bit premature his point is clear: Zines are the antithesis of the major media.

As mentioned previously, there is also great distrust in the zine world for how the

major media will represent them when they do come a knockin'. After being left numerous messages from a *New York Times* reporter, Doug, editor of *Pathetic Life*, ruminates in his zine as to why he won't return the call. "A little publicity would be nice," he admits,

If I had a few hundred subscribers I wouldn't have to hand out fliers [advertising stores on the street]....But I have my doubts about the entire field of big-time journalism. I've been reading the daily papers for as long as I can remember...and one thing I've always noticed is that when a particular article concerns something I know about, it always includes an error or two.

Besides disliking the *Times* as "an especially scummy newspaper," Doug fears that "if I cooperated 100%, sent back issues and answered every question, the article would still spell my name wrong, forget to mention the zine's address, and no doubt misinterpret my psychosis." Besides, he concludes, they'll never run the article.⁵ Doug was wrong about the *Times* not running the article, and they included his zine even without an interview, but he was right about other aspects: They didn't print his address and reduced the multidimensional personality which comes out in his perzine into a caricature of a lonely--yet "quirky"--fat slob.⁶

"I was made to look like a lonely, punk cartoon from the suburbs," complains *No Longer a Fanzine* publisher Joe Gervasi about his portrayal in a *Details* magazine article, even though "neither my 'zine nor what I told [the reporter] should have had him believing this."⁷ Zine writers contacted by the commercial media were finding out that the media was not really interested in them, but creating a package of what they thought they represented. For example, *CNN* used zines to illustrate a "war" going on between generations, even though none of the zine writers interviewed on air said anything to this

effect.⁸

Blue Persuasion's Aaron Lee tells of a local Kentucky TV News crew coming to visit him for a "Human Interest" story as "apparently, the guy with the Biggest Ball of String in Lexington was out of town." Poking around a local magazine store looking at zines, the reporter only perked up after coming across *Teenage Gang Debs*. "'You mean it's a *whole magazine* about the *Brady Bunch*?' she gasped. You'd think she just found the cure for cancer....I made a mental note to cancel my subscription." When the reporter finally gets around to seeing Aaron's *Blue Persuasion*, "the first thing she flipped to was good ol' Jerry Butler, with his dick in a turkey carcass." "A week later," Aaron reports, "the piece of shit aired with any glimpse of yours truly edited out. Which allowed for two minutes of *Teenage Gang Debs* coverage, and two minutes of [the proprietor of the magazine store] gushing 'zines are cool'." ⁹ Apparently "cool" people are interested in the Brady Bunch, not in pictures of human/animal copulation.

Faced with this selective representation some zine writers simply decide not to cooperate with mainstream media at all. "EVERY DAY THERE'S SOME FUCKING MAINSTREAM MAGAZINE, PAPER OR TV SHOW THAT I HEAR IS COVERING RIOT GRRRL," screams Ananda in *Riot Grrrl* #8, and all of them, she says, invariably show "us as this item, this quaint new marketable 'discovery' of a fashion or music trend." ¹⁰ "USA TODAY said we like to 'sport leg hair'...[in] MELODY MAKER we'll look like were only about punk music. [In] NEWSWEEK...we're only about looking weird and...worship[ing] Madonna and SASSY Magazine." What angers Ananda the most is that "riot grrrl is about destroying boundaries...but these mags make us look like

were one 'thing'." This codification is opposed to what she sees as the conversation and debate about definitions that takes place in the exchange of zines. Her advice: "Feel free to say NO if someone from the media makes an "offer" to you. But if you do go along with it, please only represent yourself."¹¹ This media blackout became "official" policy for Riot Grrrls.

While some in the zine world decide its destructive to talk to a mainstream media which they don't respect, and which doesn't respect them, others, in the zine tradition of sabotage, feed them misinformation. *Dishwasher's Dishwashin'* Pete, who has repeatedly declined interviews with the mainstream media, was contacted by the Late Night with David Letterman show in the Summer of 1995 to appear as a guest. He agreed. Knowing, however, that nobody at the show had ever seen him, he had them fly out a friend from California to New York to impersonate him. In an amusing evening, I sat with Pete and a bunch of other zine writers watching the faux Pete interviewed by Letterman about his desire to wash dishes in all 50 states (and nearly light the TV host on fire with a demonstration of his burning hand trick).¹²

In a better known episode, Megan Jasper, a sales rep at Seattle's Caroline Records fed a *New York Times* reporter bogus lingo for a "Grunge Lexicon" that accompanied their feature story on the success of grunge music and style. Amazingly, the *Times* reporter actually believed that phrases like "Swingin' on the Flippity-Flop" (i.e. hanging out) and terms like "Cob Nobbler" (i.e. loser) were authentic subcultural "code."¹³¹⁴

The real joke however may be on the underground. For as Tom Frank editor of

the journal primarily responsible for spreading the news of the grunge hoax pointed out, it really didn't matter if the lingo was authentic or not.¹⁵ The *Times* got what they wanted: A story on the newest hip trend, the voice of the new generation.¹⁶

Because zines are so small and "underground," and because the mainstream media is so powerful and its reach immense, it doesn't matter whether the underground talks to the mainstream media or not, whether they try to level with them or feed them lies. The mass media will print or broadcast what they like, and to millions of people across the country, their spin on the underground and their take on zines will be the only representation available. "I have a lot of problems with media infiltration of 'underground culture'," writes zine editor Missy Lavalee, "because the media distorts it terribly, but then people see the media version, adapt it themselves, and then the underground culture ends up being exactly how the media portrayed it."¹⁷ Missy is very perceptive, for I bet you that somewhere in America, a young, alienated kid, looking for a culture to call his or her own, is asking another if they plan on "swingin' on the flippity-flop" tonight.

Irony

For a culture that puts a high value on authenticity, zine writers use irony as a rhetorical device with puzzling frequency. The punk zine *No Longer a Fanzine*, for example, prints a comic by Kyle Baker, "God Bless Alternative Rock,"¹⁸ that praises "...the idea of featuring bands of long-haired white guys with no shirts and big muscles! It's so alternative"; while the biggest hits of the seminal American political punk band,

the Dead Kennedys, were songs like "California uber Alles," promoting the hippie fascism and "Kill the Poor," in which they recommend the Neutron bomb as a way to kill poor people while leaving property intact.¹⁹



ironic celebration in No Longer a Fanzine #3

Authenticity, as I've argued earlier, is an ideal of the underground to be "true" to the "real" self. Zines, therefore, are best when they are *honest*, *original*, and *sincere*, when the writing, to use Lionel Trilling's definition, demonstrates "a congruence between avowal and actual feeling."²⁰ Yet again and again, in the pages of zines, in the lyrics of punk rock or alternative music, irony creeps in.

Irony is the opposite of authenticity. Where the ideal of the latter is to chart as short and straight a path between what one actually thinks and what one expresses; irony succeeds when it does the opposite: when expression is the antithesis of what one really feels. Kyle despises the mainstreaming of "alternative rock," the Dead Kennedys side with the poor against the rich; yet their expression says the opposite. What explains this? Unlike an affirmative assertion, irony depends entirely on context and a knowing audience for its meaning. Outside of its original setting and translated for an outside audience, it makes no sense. Within the cultural underground, it's another pragmatic response to a culture which eats up any positive statement, strips it of its original meaning and context, and reproduces and disseminates it as an affirmation for their own message of consumption. No key is needed to unlock and disseminate an "authentic" message to a mass audience--the link between message and intent is clear. But a cultural combination is needed to liberate the meaning of irony; try, for example, selling Nikes with the Dead Kennedy's *Kill the Poor*.²¹ Irony is a way of keeping the vultures off their culture.

It also provides a perch for zine writers to stand on and do their own picking. Using the dominant culture's language and symbols but altering the meaning allows for a certain amount of control over that language and those symbols. A secret laugh at ole massa without him knowing. As Mikhail Bakhtin writes, "The satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery."²² Irony allows the zine writer to dominate, if only in laughter, the dominant culture.

In addition, irony demands an active engagement with its audience, and this fits

well within zine culture's ideals of an active engagement with culture.²³ And as it takes at least two--with a shared meaning system--to make effective irony, this form of humor reinforces community. Irony also sets up boundaries. Trilling argues that this "disconnection between the speaker and his interlocutor" is one of the primary features of irony.²⁴ I agree, but only to a point. For while irony functions to disconnect the underground from the dominant society, it also functions to *connect* those in the underground to one another. There are those who are "in the know" and "get it," and those who aren't and don't; boundaries of exclusion and boundaries of inclusion. In a virtual community like the zine world where there are no explicit rules nor strong bonds holding it together, irony, or more accurately, the shared meaning system upon which irony depends, acts as a sort of glue adhering together an otherwise fracturous group of individuals.

But it also reinforces the ghettoization of the underground; for not only are the marketing creeps locked out, but as the irony gets thicker and thicker and the references more and more obscure, so is anybody new. "You're either on the bus, or you're off the bus" as Tom Wolfe wrote about an earlier tribe of bohemians, and if you're off the bus--not understanding the mores and codes of subcultural meaning--its very hard to find a way to get on in the first place.²⁵

There is also another price paid for the irony that holds this community together. Irony is *negative*. I don't mean this in a touchy-feely sense of "bad vibes" and all that, but in the sense that it can only work as negation of an already existing culture to which it uses as a reference point. This relationship is complex, but the problem is still simple:

irony relinquishes the underground's role and its zine voice to that of a parasite. While criticizing the dominant culture obliquely through irony, the underground reaffirms their dependency on it.

Irony is partly the outcome of the unequal, yet close, relationship that the underground has with the overground. It is a mostly unconscious strategy on the part of the former to hammer out a culture which is resistant to cooptation and to forge a shared meaning system which reinforces community. Irony creates a new language, or rather new meaning for an old language; but I sometimes fear that it also keeps the underground always living in an a dominant world that they can see through--with ironic vision--but never escape.

But irony, for all its dependent qualities, is not cynicism. Cynicism is a repetition of what is, "a capitulation to things as they are" as cultural critic Brian Fawcett puts it. While irony "reserves a part of the imagination for the kind of world we might have--or, more accurately, could and should have."²⁶ What fuels ironic negation is the desperate attempt to hold on, in the face of all odds, to a vision of unsullied affirmation.

Originality

Locust. A small white cardboard box, painted black inside, with a large (3") dead locust glued to the inside cover and a cassette tape glued to the bottom.

- "zine" included in the Factsheet Five Collection at the New York State Library²⁷

Originality is highly prized in the zine world, and first entering this world one is struck by the breadth of topics and interests. As part of the libertarian belief that each

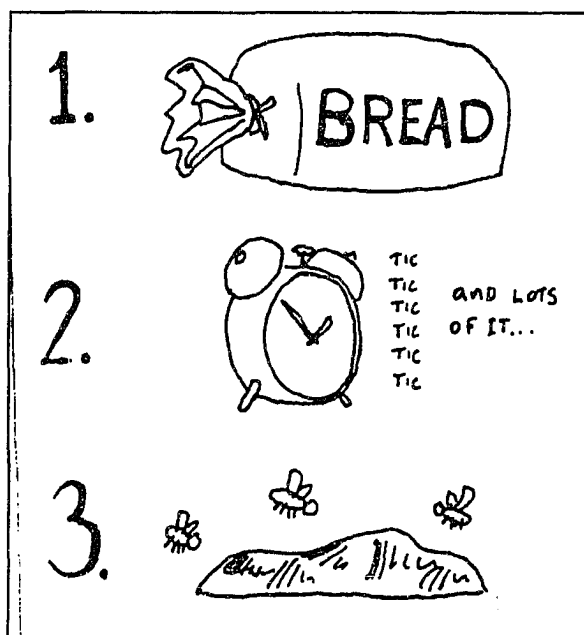
individual is special, the ideal that each individual's creation is original naturally follows. Creation becomes testament to a person's uniqueness. The "modern ideal of authenticity," writes philosopher Charles Taylor, resides in the belief that "being true to myself is being true to my own originality, and that is something that only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am defining it."²⁸

This is one of the wonderful traits of zines. Freed from having to address either a mass audience or profitable niche market, zine writers explore and express their individuality. Brett Sonnenschein creates *Roulez*, "the newsletter for and about the serious Miles Bornes player," expressing his love and devotion to the game and his eagerness to trade and share it with nonplaying zine writers.²⁹ *Murtaugh* is a zine which brings together the unlikely pair of punk rock and baseball. Why? Because these are the things that interest its editor Spike Vrusho.³⁰ Or meet the Renaissance editor of *Gamma-Ray Universe* who explains that "this zine is about thinking in new ways...Music is one of the avenues that leads me to this goal, scientific research is another."³¹ In each case the originality of the zine is a byproduct of the originality of the author, and their zine illustrates their desire to be "true to their self" in their creation.

But how to explain *Poor Doggie*, a zine made up of stories of pet dogs and their demise? It turns out that the author was at one time a pet cemetery employee, but I don't really believe that this--albeit very original--zine is an expression of the editor's authentic self. Something else is going on here. Like the shock value of punk rock, *Poor Doggie* is the product of an attempt to create something, anything which has not already been manufactured by the commercial culture industry and, moreover, will be difficult for

them to coopt.³² As Aaron of *Blue Persuasion* found out, it takes very little for the mass media to understand and use a zine which celebrates nostalgia for pop culture like *Teen Age Gang Debs* does; it's more difficult for them to assimilate a picture of a man having intercourse with a turkey carcass, or stories of dead dogs.

It's also hard to assimilate things which barely make sense or don't seem to matter. It's a stretch to imagine anyone coopting a list of "What's in the bag?" a feature in *Exformation* which lists pennies, flies, wadded up tissue, and other refuse left in a bag.³³ Or *Feh*, odd comix illustrating stories with neither rhyme nor reason.³⁴ Or, for all that matter, an article in *Hell Bound* on "How to turn your bread into fertile dirt" by simply leaving it sealed in a bag for a month.³⁵



making dirt in Hell Bound #7

Part of this bizarre zine content is pure Dadaist nonsensical fun: *Feh* comix, in the words of their creator Sam Andreeff are "not supposed to make any sense," but part

is also the zine writer's desire to invent something "new" in an age where everything seems to have been done, bought up, and sold out already; "Been There, Done That," as the ad copy to a recent soda commercial runs.³⁶ As I've discussed earlier, one of the ways this is done is by personalizing topics, but another way is to strive towards the novel. And completely novel, I must admit, is *Eleventh Pin*, a zine which consists solely of pictures of a solitary bowling pin in different settings.³⁷ Or Donald Busky simply making up his own national and international news in his zine, *The Weird News*.³⁸



a singular pin in Eleventh Pin #2

In the editorial of the first issue of *Beer Frame* Paul Lucas justifies picking items like mouse traps and foot measuring devices to write about, explaining that, "If you're searching for another recitation of how cool it is to read *Hate*, listen to Pavement, or drink on Ludlow Street, please look elsewhere--*the whole world knows about that stuff*

already."³⁹ *Hate* is an underground comic which has become popular with a wide audience, Pavement is a band once in the "obscurity-is-next-to-godliness" club that has suffered the same, and Ludlow Street is a street of "cool" bars in the Lower East Side now frequented by New York University fratboys.⁴⁰ As all these things have been "discovered," Paul writes about admittedly banal things that no one has ever given much thought to, arguing that he "wasn't interested in doing just another version of something that had already been done before."⁴¹

Even zines themselves are suspect as they've become too well known. Paul, like other zine writers I've talked to recently, is shying away from calling *Beer Frame* a zine. Just because it's a "zine," Paul explains "You'll get the people who think it's really great. Like 'Oh, Wow. It's really groovy that you do this. I think it's really amazing'....They don't even care whether it's good or bad...and I don't want that sort of unconditional approval."⁴²

As the underground is discovered, virgin ground needs to be unearthed. Driven by both the internal logic of the zine world which values originality as an expression of authenticity, and the external forces of a commercial culture continually discovering and assimilating facets of the underground, the stakes are continually raised. In the free-wheeling, image swapping, postmodern information economy, it is genuinely difficult to set anything apart as novel for long. But the attempt is continually undertaken. In New York City, some young squatter punks, or "crusties" as they're called, tattoo their faces--forever drawing distinction between them and the bourgeoisie. And in zines like *Murder Can Be Fun*, *Answer Me!*, and *Dead Star: for John Wayne Gacy*, mass murderers are

celebrated as the penultimate uncooptables, pure evil as the only purity left.⁴³

In the continual striving for originality, meaning is sometimes a casualty. While I find *Beer Frame*'s hidden histories of everyday objects fascinating, and really enjoy the humor that went into pictures of bowling pins in *Eleventh Pin*, it is hard to get excited about *Big Fish: Special Hat Size Issue*, a zine comprised of handwritten "hat sizes of some of the major poets in America."⁴⁴ Such zines fetishize originality, divorcing the choice of subject matter from an authentic expression of an original individual, making it into the manifestation of a hollow concept: originality for originality's sake. This hollow originality is a common enough occurrence in the underground publishing world to warrant a comic by Shannon Wheeler poking fun at it, drawing an "original" comic of drawing an original comic.⁴⁵



an original comic in Reactor #6

The stress on always being original, understandable as it may be, can lead to a valuation of "The New" at the cost of the significance of this novelty. Charles Taylor, while arguing for the necessity of originality, also argues for what he calls "horizons of significance," that is, a critical discernment of worth.⁴⁶ This is an important criteria, for even though the zine tendency to strive toward the original originates in reaction *against* commercial culture's colonization, zine writers can easily end up replicate the very same consumerist logic: in with the new and out with the old, a celebration of this year's model without any horizons of significance. When this happens originality becomes banality.

In addition, the constant raising of stakes to set off a world undiscovered, unsullied, and pure, results in closing down the expanse of community. I'm reminded of John Foster's "Three Days in the Life of a Loser" cited earlier, where he writes of his "attempt to present a facade of cool" by "talk[ing] about records so obscure that nobody present has heard of them."⁴⁷ Following the ultimate illogic of underground originality, the price of being truly cool is to risk talking to yourself about nothing.

The Ghetto

I publish to share my thoughts and those of other people who write for *Dreamshore*, not to create a better world but to help us go inside our heads and shut the door...

- Jan Byron, editor of *Dreamshore*⁴⁸

The rejection of mainstream media and culture which is such an integral part of zines and underground cultural leads naturally toward a separation between "us" and "them." With no impending threat these lines can remain blurry. However, when "they"

discover "our" culture and endanger the ideals and control built up over decades, the tendency of the underground is to adopt a siege mentality: keep the barbarians at the gates while we retreat further into a bohemian ghetto. Irony and the search for the ever more novel and esoteric compliment this process.

This is nothing new. While many ghettos are imposed from the outside: Jews in Europe, African-Americans in the United States, self-ghettoization has always been part of dissenting voluntary community building. "To judge by the surviving church books," historian Christopher Hill writes in his study of radical Puritans, "excommunication was one of the principle activities of the early sects."⁴⁹ Ghettoization does two things: it builds walls to repel those outside the community and it cements the bonds of those within. But, as Hill points out, these walls must be continually patrolled. Since the zine world is a non-geographic community, the walls are virtual ones fashioned from words. And the weapon used to repel the invaders and keep the faithful in line is the accusation of "selling out."

"It has recently come to our attention that the supposedly D.I.Y. band, The Libido Boyz, have 'sold out,' signing to a major record label," write in Brixton Kent and Michael Wood to *MRR* about a band from their local Mankato, MN scene. In a culture that valued individuality, one would think that whatever the band in question did or didn't do would be their own business. But this isn't the case. By signing to a major label, the Libido Boyz did not engage in a private act but a betrayal of community. "It makes us sick," Brixton and Mike continue, "They have 'marketed' their 'products' through the blood, sweat, and tears of others involved in the punk rock or 'alternative'

way of life." And thus, the authors go on to argue, they should be excommunicated.⁵⁰

They should be shunned because they represent the opposite of what the underground that supported them and gave them an identity is supposed to stand for. Reporting on a couple of shows by the band Green Day--the most recent band with punk roots to make it to superstardom--Joseph Gervasi writes in his zine that while he enjoyed the music he couldn't really enjoy the show because of what Green Day represents. "When a band signs to a major label their integrity goes out the door and they might as well be wearing suits and ties when they perform," Joe argues, "because no band can be a threat or true alternative when they're just puppets for greedy corporate scumbags."⁵¹

In the age of "commercial alternative music" accusations of "selling out" are a matter of course when discussing punk music, but the term has also begun to surface in the pages of zines with reference to zines themselves. "I think a common event in the next few years will be 'selling out' in the zine world similar to that which has happened with alternative music," *Holy Titclamps*'s Larry Roberts begins his sardonically entitled essay "Larry-Bob's Guide to Selling Out."⁵² Some zine publishers write of seeing this already, as insiders start to peddle their wares to an outside market or outsiders start up zines themselves. "I think a whole lot of people within and without the 'zine scene' have a misunderstanding of what the whole zine movement should be," says Missy Lavalee, "which I believe entails the ethics of D.I.Y....and not seeing writing as your opportunity to get rich and famous." Already, Missy sees outsiders who either don't understand or don't respect zine "ethics" producing zines, something which disturbs her. "I see a lot of people compiling a bunch of totally self-absorbed irrelevant facts and stories about

themselves, using quick slick computer layout, xeroxing it, then selling it for a ridiculous price." Missy and her friends have even come up with a separate word to differentiate these imposter zines from real zines. We, she writes, "call these publications 'zines' (pronounced 'zynes' with the long i sound)."⁵³

While it is easy to point out that zines have *always* been compilations of self-absorbed facts and stories about the publisher, Missy and Larry-Bob are noticing a real phenomenon. As zines have been "discovered" as part of the greater discovery of underground culture, their popularity has spread as well. This very popularity--the success--of the message and medium of this virtual underground is perceived, and perhaps rightfully so in light of the history of bohemia, as a real threat. This leads some in the zine world into a seeming paradox: celebrating obscurity.

Fugazi is a band that can never be accused of selling out. They put out cheap recordings on their own label, they play free and reduced admission shows, and their concerts are never restricted by age. Still, after seeing Fugazi play a free show in Berkeley, CA, Bob, writing in *Second Guess*, has his complaints: "The whole thing was really too big....They're a great band and they're doing everything right...but something is lost after that many people are into them."⁵⁴ Like the search for the ever more obscure, any hint of popularity or accessibility is suspect. In a way this is understandable: In our consumer society, popularity is equated with mass sales which is equated with form and content dictated by a financial bottom line which results in corporate profits. Therefore, if you're against bland media and corporate profiteering, popularity is bad. But this distrust of all popularity is destructive as it limits the scope

and range of truly alternative culture. The irony of this is understood by *Slug and Lettuce's* Christine Boarts as she explains that faced with the option of moving to a bigger label or quitting, bands "that just cease to be are the ones that get more respect, because they don't compromise or they don't sell out."⁵⁵ As critic Leslie Fiedler once commented: Death is the only airtight Bohemia.⁵⁶

In insignificance there is a certain freedom.⁵⁷ Describing the early punk scene in California, Claude Bessey, the editor of *Slash*, explains that "The media totally ignored it...That's when it got good actually. We decided that it was our party, nobody was interested, so let's go wild."⁵⁸ Being ignored by the media and the culture industry was part of what stimulated people to create zines, remaining ignored is often the only way to keep control over the independent culture that is created. But this self-ghettoization is problematic if part of the ideal of an alternative culture is to promote your alternative message, to spread your critique to where it may do some good.

"I've been hearing a lot of talk lately about people hating the DEAD KENNEDYS," writes Patrick Spencer in *Maximumrocknroll*, "A lot of punks feel that [lead singer] Jello and company are a bunch of "fat rock gods," just because they are starting to catch on and a lot of people are liking them. I think this is great. What good does it do if only punks listen to punk?"⁵⁹ Indeed, What good is it if only those "in the know" get the message?

It does do some good: It reiterates a belief system and reinforces group solidarity. As Scott Cunningham maintains in the face of criticism that he and his co-editors are "preaching to the converted" through the unrelentingly partisan *World War III*,

The converted need something to read too...You've got to keep them converted, keep them busy, and give them new stuff to read and think about....I mean they don't say like "You're a Catholic, now go." They bring 'em back every week. They give them a wafer, the wine, the whole thing. So we've got to do that too.⁶⁰

Scott has a real point, but so does Patrick. There's a real tension between the need to turn inward to reassure the faithful and the need to communicate out in order to proselytize the unbelievers. Some zinesters worry that the former without the latter is incomplete, pointing out that words of radical dissent ring false when they only reach those who already agree. "At first I thought something was being done, I was wrong," writes a frustrated Steve Steppe,

Anti-Reagan, nuclear war, and racism songs are all cheap, safe protest songs....Almost every punk agrees with that stuff. Why don't you play those songs for people who don't agree?...When was the last time you heard a middle-aged man say, "Boy M.D.C. [Millions of Dead Cops] were right, those darn cops really are bad?" All these songs do is give us something to talk about at shows.⁶¹

In order for "something to be done" about Reagan, war, and racism, Steve realizes that underground culture, and the message it carries, has to break out of its ghetto. Speaking of zines in particular, Christine Boarts concurs, "To make sense to anybody, to have any importance and bearing and influence; in order to change anything we have to be able to communicate to people outside of our own circle." But, as Chris also astutely notes, "it's not just a matter of distributing it on a mass scale. It's a problem of explaining it, getting people to understand where we are coming from." In other words, the problems of proselytization is not merely a logistical one of quantity, but a political issue of quality. And translating this qualitative ethic of the zine world to a wider audience she argues is "the hardest thing."⁶²

Factsheet Five vs. Factsheet Five

As Chris points out, the task of spreading the underground gospel is not an easy one. Situated within a greater capitalist society that sets the rules of engagement, how does one open up to new converts without crossing over the into the logic of the mass culture that you originally rebelled against? I'm not interested here in setting up an arbitrary line, deigning some zine writers pure, and condemning others as sell outs--too much of that happens already within the pages of zines. What I am interested in doing is exploring the possibilities and dangers that arise when an underground culture tries to break free of its ghetto. In this, the nearly decade and a half story of the *uber zine* of zines, *Factsheet Five*, is instructive.

Early in the 1980s zines were floating through the mailrooms of the United States, connecting individuals here to individuals there, each mini-network centered around a discrete interest: science fiction, fantasy stories, mail art, anarchism, or punk rock. Relatively insulated from one another, there was little common culture, and one could not honestly talk of a "world of zines." Then, in May of 1982, Mike Gunderloy published his first issue of *Factsheet Five*, swiping its name from a science fiction story and devoting his zine to reviewing other zines and facilitating contact between publishers.⁶³

There had been review zines before. First published in the mid 1970s, *The Whole Fanzine Catalogue* by 1981 was listing over 150 zines from nine countries, and included features that were to become standard in *Factsheet Five*: a glossary of "insider" terms, trade policy, changes of address, etc. But *The Whole Fanzine Catalogue*, like other

review zines of the time, catered only to its small niche. Published by the Metro Detroit Science Fiction Society, *The Whole Fanzine Catalog*, while borrowing its name from the eclectic *Whole Earth Catalog*, focussed exclusively on other science fiction fanzines.⁶⁴

Factsheet Five was different, it reviewed zines covering any and all interests, no matter how obscure. In fact, one of Gunderloy's policies was to review everything that was sent to him--no matter how arcane, obscure, or offensive. Issue #1 was printed on one 8 1/2" X 11" double sided page, mimeographed and so blurry that you can barely read it. It listed six publications ranging from farcical conspiracy theory: *Church of the SubGenius*, to anarchism: *Church of the Anarchist Avatar (The Gospel According to Fred the Pelican)*, to an all-purpose poetry/zine review/punk zine. It also listed three computer BBSs and one ESP experiment.

From this rather bizarre collection of reviews scrunched onto one piece of paper, *Factsheet Five* was born. By offering free trades with every zine it listed, it grew rapidly in size and scope. By issue #44 in the Summer of 1991, over 10,000 issues were distributed, listing 1259 zine reviews, 95 poetry reviews, and 366 audio reviews. In 1990, Cari Goldberg Janice had joined Gunderloy as the zine world grew and their work mushroomed--but it eventually proved too much for both of them and after 80 hour work weeks and starvation wages they quit for reasons of "mental sanity" after #44.

After an ill-fated false start under an incompetent publisher, zine writer R. Seth Friedman--creator of the zine *Food for Thought*--took up the project and moved it from Rensselaer, NY to San Francisco, CA. As the new editor, Friedman has been successful in keeping *Factsheet Five* afloat, vibrant, and even expanding. 144 pages long with 1,466

zines reviewed, issue #56 of *Factsheet Five* came out in the Summer of 1995. But more than merely location changed when *Factsheet Five* moved from one coast to another, the zine changed as well. *Factsheet Five* has been shaped by the opening up of the zine world in recent years, and as it is still the dominant institution of zinedom, it, in turn, has helped shape the direction zines have taken.

Like most zines, *Factsheet Five* began as the creation of one individual, and the mark of that person is stamped clearly on its form and course. Acting as community center organizer for an eclectic press, Mike Gunderloy was well suited. While attending high school in California he worked on an underground paper, for a brief time later he edited the fanzine of the Los Angeles Science Fiction Fantasy Society fanzine, he was an early computer aficionado, and he is an anarchist.

Mike tells two versions of the genesis tale of *Factsheet Five*. The first is that it was started almost by accident. As Mike remembers it, he had just moved East and was writing to old friends about odd stuff that he had found or had found him through the mail. "Finally one day I said this is stupid, I've written the same thing five times to five different people, I'll publish it, it would be simple, it would be easier...that was *Factsheet Five* #1." "The stupidest thing I ever did" is how he described it as it grew to over 10,000 issues. The second version, which being a seasoned and cynical anarchist Mike is a bit more reluctant to tell, begins with him admitting that his zine was, "an act of political idealism as much as anything at the time." In other words, *Factsheet Five* was a political project.⁶⁵

Intimately understanding the insularity of both science fiction and anarchist micro-

worlds, Mike also understood their claustrophobic limitations. "The one thing I consciously did at the start was to try to get out of [those] insular communities, " he says, "I realized that there were people publishing everywhere who didn't know about each other. [But] it was incredibly obvious to me that we were all doing the same thing." Mike hoped that in getting people to recognize their similarities, something with some kind of a political character might result. "By connecting up the various people who were exercising their First Amendment rights on a small, non-profit scale," there was the prospect, "that they could learn from each other and this might help generate a larger alternative community."

One of the similarities that Mike noticed and tried to promote was a nascent sort of politics. "The politics...were to encourage people to get off their butts and do something," as he puts it. He elaborates, talking about the different communities that he was trying to bring together in *Factsheet Five* and the sense of politics they shared:

There were the political people, the emerging gay press, the feminist press, some of the alternative spiritual press. [But] gradually I began to conceptualize this much wider, finding [that] a community of people doing comics, and the literary people, and even wrestling fans have something you can't distinguish in their minds as political consciousness, but certainly the very act of taking over the entertainment portion of their life and dictating here's how it is and here's how it should be is inherently opposed to being fed your stuff by the mass media.

Differentiating between "here's how it is and here's how it should be"; it is this critical vision--even if initially only applied to an esoteric leisure pursuit, the Mike hoped to cultivate and bring together in *Factsheet Five*; to help make, as he says, "a somewhat larger voice instead of a hundred scattered voices."

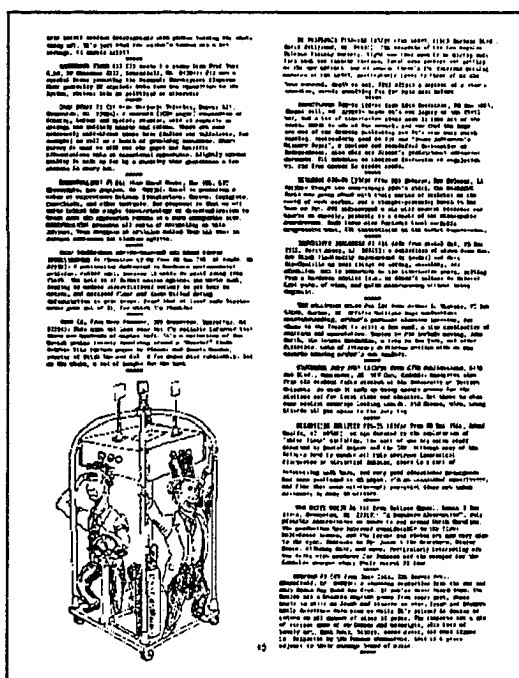
He tried to do this through cross pollination--getting people *who were already*

producing zines to talk to one another and send each other what they were working on.

The key to the character of the early *Factsheet Five* is understanding it was made for internal consumption, as a resource for a community, or rather communities, already in formation. While the zine was not arcane--Mike went out of his way to explain how to get publications, zine argot, and even the mystical codes on the mailing labels--reading it you definitely got the sense that you were *inside* of something. Filled with reviews, often not divided by genre and originally not even ordered alphabetically, illustrated with amateur drawings, listing "community services" like changes of addresses and warnings of zine deadbeats, sprinkled with essays on topics ranging from movies to the history of alternative press to the regularly featured "Conspiracy Corner," and printed on cheap newsprint with a dull paper cover, *Factsheet Five* was like the sacred text to a hidden world; a "sort of central clearing house for the new underground," as Paul Krassner of *The Realist* fame described it.⁶⁶



the "old" FS5, Factsheet Five #44



listings page in Factsheet Five #24

"The old *Factsheet Five* felt like Alice's rabbit hole; this whole other world," zine writer Arielle Greenberg describes.⁶⁷ *Factsheet Five* was a container for the world of zines, but with its personal touch and competent yet less-than-professional lay out, and Mike's policy of trading with other zines, the old *Factsheet Five* was part of the world it reviewed: It was a zine.

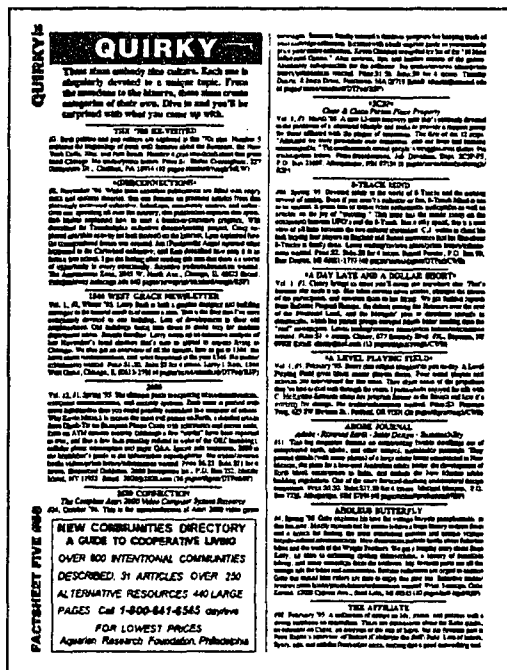
The new *Factsheet Five* is not. Unlike Mike, when Seth began *Factsheet Five* he inherited a full-blown project, with full-blown financial difficulties aggravated by its interim publisher. In order to stay afloat financially Seth took some radical steps: he cut Mike's free prisoner's subscription policy, renegotiated some previous subscription rates, and most drastically he announced that he would no longer trade *Factsheet Five* for other zines; *Factsheet Five* was no longer part of the zine barter cycle.⁶⁸

In addition, Seth jettisoned all non-zine reviews. While keeping the community service features of changed addresses and cheap classifieds, the letters section was cut. And in issue #53, in October of 1994, the tradition of zine egalitarianism in *Factsheet Five* came to an end: Seth announced that due to the volume sent to him he would no longer be reviewing every zine sent in, instead he would pick and choose which zines were to be reviewed.⁶⁹ The underground world was being pruned. It was being pruned for two reasons. Seth and his collaborators were concentrating on zines exclusively, and later, only certain zines, in a pragmatic effort to effectively cope with the increase in popularity and production of the underground culture. But the new *Factsheet Five* was being groomed for another reason as well: outside consumption. *Factsheet Five* was now a commercial project.

The new *Factsheet Five* looked different from the start. While still made of newsprint inside, it was wrapped in a glossy cover, multi-colored by #56. It was laid out with a trained graphic eye with the goal of making it easy to read. The zines--as well as advertisers--were listed alphabetically in an index in back, and the reviews were categorized by genres--Quirky, Punk, Grrrlz, Personal, Fringe--each introduced by a short explanatory definition for the zine neophyte. Beginning with issue #55, these explanations were expanded to include "What's a Zine?...Sounds like 'zeen'," and "What's Factsheet Five?"⁷⁰

Whereas the old *Factsheet Five* reminds one of the secret rites of a closed and ancient order, the new one is an open book. It does not presuppose any knowledge of zines on the part of the reader, and is packaged to be sold in a chain store of a local shopping mall. Mike's zine broke down the insular sub-worlds of independent publishing in an effort to combine them into a larger underground community; Seth's magazine sells the underground to the masses.

But Seth has always seen his role, and the role of *Factsheet Five*, as different than Mike's and the old *FS5*. "It was [Mike's] goal," he explains, "to have this kind of interaction between people, my goal is slightly different. My goal is to get *Factsheet Five* on the newsstands, and to get people reading zines." In other words, Seth's direction lies in expanding out instead of cultivating in. In explaining his decisions to include an index and genre categorization, Seth acknowledges that some of the cross-pollination function of the old *Factsheet Five* suffered as readers were no longer forced to browse through unfamiliar territory, but he also believes he has succeeded in making it more "user friendly" to outside readers⁷¹



listings in the "new" FS5, Factsheet Five #56 *front cover, Factsheet Five #54*

Seth's choice of the phrase "user friendly" is telling, for what he is interested in is *access*: He wants to get the word out about zines to people who have never heard of them before, breaking down the ghetto walls of an internally focussed bohemia and democratizing the elite world of those-in-the-know. His method for doing this is to circumvent the cultural networks of the underground and make use of the broad avenues of the commercial culture industry.

Seth understands that in a world dominated by capital, if you want to get your magazine in a newsstand where some kid who is not already part of the Scene will read it, you have to collaborate with the powers that be. Calling himself a Capitalist Anarchist, he says that "I think I still associate myself with the political ideals of Mike Gunderloy in terms of Anarchy, but for me *Factsheet Five* is more of a capitalist

venture." Seth distinguishes himself from other anarchists by saying he has "an awareness of money." This awareness means that Seth knows that unless he wraps *Factsheet Five* in a very anti-zine "slick" cover it will not be carried in chain book stores, that unless he removes his zine from the world of zine trading it will not survive financially, and unless he sends out press packs to the mainstream media promoting "the zine revolution" he won't get new readers. So he does all of these.

And his strategy has worked. The current print run of *Factsheet Five* is over 16,000 issues (12,000 guaranteed circulation) with sales increasing at the rate of 800 per issue. And it is carried in nation wide book chains including Tower Books, B. Dalton's, and Barnes & Noble.⁷² Seth *has* improved *Factsheet Five's* access--more people read it, more people send in their zines to be reviewed, and more geographically out-of-the-way places carry it.

But this is not the "access" as it is commonly thought of in the zine world. Instead of access into cultural *production*, it is access into cultural *consumption*. The model that Seth likes to refer to in describing his *Factsheet Five* is not a zine but a "consumer guide," or "consumer catalog." And as his advertisement rate card makes clear in bold headlines that read: "Factsheet Five Readers Are Intelligent, Factsheet Five Readers Seek Out The Unique, Factsheet Five Sells Products"; what the new *Factsheet Five* also sells is the underground.⁷³

Seth succeeded in both keeping *Factsheet Five* afloat and introducing it to new audiences but he did this by adapting the rules of mainstream media and culture. The result is mixed: As a consumer catalog which opens up the world of zines to people who

had never seen a zine before it is a success, as representing a culture born in opposition to the mainstream consumer culture it is an abomination.

While my sympathies lie with Mike's ideal of *Factsheet Five* rather than Seth's, my interest here is neither to praise nor bury. Mike is not the puritan saint of anti-commercial zinedom. After quitting *Factsheet Five*, he and Cari Goldberg Janice produced a rather shoddy book version of *Factsheet Five* for Penguin Books, a division of the multinational Pearson Conglomerate with interests in, among other things, "international banking, oil services, fine china, and book publishing" as Pearson's PR counsel proudly informed me. Mike's reasons for this, he says, were purely mercenary: They gave him and Cari a hefty advance. Nor is Seth the snake in the zine garden. He took on a monumental project and has made it work where others had failed. Rather than a tale of good and evil, the transformation of *Factsheet Five* from zine to magazine, or rather, catalog, underscores the difficulties of trying to break out of a subcultural ghetto into a larger society dominated by capital.

Opening Up or Selling Out?

He's the one/ He likes all our pretty songs/ And he likes to sing along/
And he likes to shoot his gun/ But he don't know what it means...

- Kurt Cobain, singer/songwriter of Nirvana, 1991⁷⁴

"I'm sure you've heard the debate about is it really a good thing that Nirvana has done what they've done," says Dan Werle, editor of *Manumission*, referring to the fact that the band has signed to a major label.

First with the skeptical analysis: It's horrible, it's disgusting, they're just corporate whores, and they've got no purpose whatsoever now. But

perhaps someone--I grew up in the middle of Iowa--is watching a Nirvana video...and they see someone wearing a Bad Brains t-shirt and then look at Bad Brains and say...What were Bad Brains all about? And they look back at '79...and the whole other list of bands that came out of that. Then it seems that maybe it's not so bad.⁷⁵

This is the conundrum facing the underground: Is it preferable to celebrate the spreading of the words and deeds of the underground--to proselytize the good news--even if the message is disseminated via the commercial culture industry? Or is it better for the integrity of the underground and its message to stay small and pure and avoid the "selling out" which inevitably happens when one works with the dominant commercial culture?

For some zine producers the choice is clear. Mike Gunderloy told me of die-hard science fiction zine purists, who years before the discovery and marketing of zine culture, refused to have anything to do with *Factsheet Five* because in addition to trading, Mike also made it available at newsstands for a cover price--a betrayal of the pure trade ethic. Others use their zines and zine experience as a stepping stone to launch themselves or their zines into the commercial media world. *Option*, a glossy music magazine with a circulation of around 24,000, began as *OP*, a fanzine from Olympia, WA.⁷⁶ Paul Lukas has turned *Beer Frame* into a local newspaper column which has been picked up for syndication and a soon to be released book.⁷⁷ *Factsheet Five* ran a series of article in a recent issue on how to sell your writing and zine commercially under the barely ironic collective headline: "How To Sell Out!"⁷⁸ And Seth Friedman says that in the future he could see himself working for "viable, mainstream" magazines like *Sassy*.⁷⁹

For others, the choice is one of means and ends. Roxxie, who has transformed her lesbian sports zine *Girljock* into a glossy magazine replete with an Absolut vodka

advertisement on the back of one issue, talked to me about one of the reasons she has pushed to expand her zines reach.⁸⁰ "I suppose it's my wish that teenage girls will have more options for themselves as they're growing up," she explains, "And so if you're, say, a very isolated teenager somewhere in the midwest, hopefully there might be a place where you might be able to...run into something like *Girljock*." Being a lesbian teenager is tough any place, but stuck in a provincial area where you have no peers or role models, it can be devastating. As Roxxie points out, "the suicide rate for lesbian and gay teens is alarmingly high...[as is] the chance that they'll be drug addicts or alcoholics." A publication like *Girljock* "normalizes" lesbians that like sports, it tells young lesbians that they're not sick and not alone, as did *Homocore* for gay punk rockers. But unlike gay punks, who because of their interest in punk are hooked into the zine world and can come across an ad for *Homocore* in *Maximumrocknroll*, teenage lesbian jocks are not necessarily "in the know." For them, it may be what's at the B. Dalton's in the local mall, or nothing. By printing on multicolor slick paper and with a production run of 10,000 financed by corporate advertising, *Girljock* was accepted by two national distributors. And perhaps, in a mall out there someplace, a teenage girl-jock is realizing for the first time that she is not a freak.⁸¹

Like it or not most people's access to culture and media is limited to mainstream channels. When underground culture is discovered, these channels pipe the exotic world of Bohemia out to the masses. But as Dan points out above the stream is not entirely one way. The mass media can also serve as reverse conduits back into alternative culture. A couple years back I received a letter from a young woman, Kate Wolfe, requesting my

zine. Replying to a question I sent along with my zine, she explained how she had found out about it. "I guess I'm a newcomer to the whole zine scene," she writes, "I was reading *Sassy* magazine one day and every month they have something called 'Zine of the Month'....Then I heard about *Factsheet Five* which was filled with zillions of zany zines. I must have sent away for 200 of them"--including mine. Through a decidedly commercial teen magazine, Kate had discovered the world of zines.⁸²⁸³

However, even without going slick or appearing in *Sassy*, commercial access to zines is spreading. The Tower Records and Book chain, under the guidance of zine enthusiast Doug Biggert, sells more than five hundred different zines through their fifteen bookstores and seventy-five of their record outlets. While Biggert argues that the profit that Tower makes on zines is minimal compared to that gleaned from more commercial products, he still says "We've already sold over a million dollars worth of zines...and sales are always increasing."⁸⁴ Dwarfing the few underground book stores, and not bound by the conservatism of the few remaining independents, Tower Books in New York City has by far the widest selection of zines in the city.

All of this bodes well for the expansion of the world of zines, but it has its costs as well. Part of the power of the self-published press was its very obscurity, and the culture that arose out of that. "It's nice to have wide distribution," Kevin Pyle, another one of the editors of *World War III* explains,

But I remember back when I was going to school in Kansas in 1986 and there was *nothing*. But then one person had seen *WWIII* and so we'd send off, or we'd get *Factsheet Five*. There was a certain network...a whole community involved in a world that is not being sold to you by big corporations. I think [this] has certain advantages to it. You become a part of something...[it] has an air of conspiracy.⁸⁵

What Kevin illustrates is the importance of the context in which the message of underground culture is received. The meaning of zines has always been imbedded in the lived experience of alternative culture. "In order to find out about them, you have to become part of the culture," one zine writer comments, "which is what makes them different than anything."⁸⁶ In discovering zines through personal connections, trading a zine in a network, you "become part of something...a conspiracy." But in buying a zine at Tower Books the alternative message of zines as part of a community who "entertain themselves" is entirely lost. You are simply part of the consuming public.⁸⁷

Context of reception is particularly important in the case of zines where, as I have argued before, their politics reside less in what they say and more in what they are: repositories of non-alienated creation and media of non-alienating communication. Mike Gunderloy and Cari Goldberg Janice's commercially produced *The World of Zines* begins with the encouraging advice: "Everyone can be a producer! That's the underlying message of the zine world."⁸⁸ But the very form through which they communicate this message argues against this. Professionally produced, bankrolled by a multinational corporation, distributed and sold in commercial book stores, the message of *The World of Zines* is clear: Everybody can *not* be a producer.

This danger is inherent in any underground creation utilizing the ways and means of the commercial culture industry. Recently I was sent "The *Curio* Manifesto," a prospectus for a publication "part glossy, part zine....[that] will combine the traditional magazine format with the best of the zine world for a nationwide audience." Regardless of the creator's--no doubt good--intentions, she misses the point of zines entirely. "The

best of the zine world" has always resided in the form of zines and the context of their distribution. Even if it does contain the words and artwork of zinesters, selling a slick magazine, with a 50,000 issue circulation and a "corporate soul to foot our print bill," undermines the entire purpose of and meaning behind zines.⁸⁹⁹⁰

As the underground is discovered, paths toward wider distribution and contact are opened up to alternative cultural creators. Whether for reasons of personal gain or public concern, zine writers and other underground creators use these paths. And while the message contained within the content of zines is spread farther and wider than ever before, the radical participatory cultural message of zines is simultaneously muted.

The popularity of zines concerns many zine writers, the issue surfacing in the increasing use of the term "sell out" tossed across the pages of zines, and the denial of the charge of "selling out" in others.⁹¹ While this response is sometimes merely an elitist defense of the pure, bohemian ghetto, it's not always that simple. Rather, given the manner in which the opening up of the zine world takes place, it is a viable concern that in the process of popularization the real message of zines, as an alternative to the mainstream cultural world, will get lost. A nation of people reading zines is great, but not if they don't know what they mean.

By Fire or Ice

Teenage angst has paid off well/Now I'm bored and old
- Kurt Cobain, 1993⁹²

On April 7th, 1994 Kurt Cobain, twenty-seven years old and at the height of his career, stuck a shotgun under his chin and blew his head off. "I told him not to join that

stupid club," his mother was quoted saying after his death, referring to the pantheon of rock stars who had killed themselves: Elvis Presley, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison. But Kurt hadn't joined "that" club. Those rock stars had killed themselves more or less accidentally, enjoying the fruits of their fame. The lead singer for Nirvana killed himself on purpose because of his fame, despising his popularity and his status as a rock star.⁹³ In his suicide note, he wrote that he no longer enjoyed playing, that "sometimes I feel as if I should have a punch-in time clock before I walk out on stage," and that "the worst crime I can think of would be to pull people off by faking it and pretending as if I'm having a hundred percent fun." "So remember," Kurt ended his note, borrowing a line from original grunge rocker Neil Young singing about former Sex Pistol Johnny Rotten, "it's better to burn out than to fade away."⁹⁴ It's better to die pure than to live corrupted.

"Kurt didn't commit suicide," Scott Munroe writes in *Chairs Missing*, "he was murdered. Murdered by a corporate music industry unwilling to treat musicians as people and not 'product'."⁹⁵ Kurt Cobain was suffering from a heroin addiction, a rocky relationship, and the sensitive rage that made his songs so hauntingly beautiful, but Scott was right: it was Kurt's discomfort with the demands of the corporate music industry and his fear that he was "faking it" that fills his suicide note. But what also killed him was the underground culture from which he came: A culture that divided the world into polar opposites: our world and theirs, integrity and selling out, purity and danger. Caught between demands of the commercial music industry for popularity and the underground call for authenticity, Kurt killed himself, entering the only airtight bohemia.

Playing out both a tradition of bohemian elitism, as well as pragmatically responding to culture industry which feeds off innovation and dissent, the underground has learned to worship purity and obscurity. This is part of its romance, but it is also as well its tragic flaw. For this will-toward-smallness also wills the culture toward insignificance, and through attrition, decimation. And after all, what's the point of an alternative culture if it can't hold enough people to function as an alternative?

Dissatisfied with the constraints of this self-ghettoization, others attempt to break out. Whether they believe that the message of the underground is too important to be sequestered, or because they want to peddle their creations outside the small world of the underground, people look for outlets. But the only coherent cultural/political apparatus that has the sort of reach necessary to spread the news to those outside the underground networks is the corporate culture industry. Bereft of other options, it's here that people turn. This course too leads to dragons. The culture industry is interested in selling product and in retaining a population whose relationship to culture is through consumption. This imperative is in direct violation of the prime directive of the underground: do-it-yourself. The result is that underground culture is sold as style. Stripped of its meaning the bohemia is an empty husk; a concept is marketed rather than a culture experienced.

Stunted in the darkness or burned up in the light, while there is no clear path between death by ice or fire there are explorations. One of which is to create independent distribution services which can mediate between the zine producers, zine readers, and at times, large commercial outlets. Blacklist Mailorder, a project of *Maximumrocknroll*, is

a volunteer run mailorder operation that distributes both music and zines with a minimal mark up price.⁹⁶ *Riot Grrrl Press* reproduces, lists, and circulates *Riot Grrrl* and other women-centered zines.⁹⁷ *Wow Cool*, started by zine writers Mark Arsenault and Josh Petrin, distributes zines, comix, books--printed matter of the underground.⁹⁸ These services and many others began as a way to address the problems that distributing through the mainstream culture networks posed.

While these subcultural institutions help extend the scope of zines and underground culture without resorting to mainstream collaboration, they are not without problems. The prospective reader or listener still has to be "in the know" to even find out these services exist. Once found they can open up a wide world that allows bypassing commercial outlets, but first that world has to be discovered. In addition, distribution services, whatever their intent, eradicate the networking aspect that is so important to the zine world. As Marc of *Wow Cool* readily concedes: "I really do think the best way to get zines is either through the mail from the individual or from the person who actually does it." Running *Wow Cool*, Marc sees that the personal aspect of zine culture is a casualty. "We must have gotten a couple hundred orders for *Cometbus #30*," after it had been reviewed in *Sassy*, "and except for the occasional 'Oh, I love Aaron,' and then the four or five people who actually wrote letters, most of them were: 'Send me a *Cometbus #30*. Here's my dollar-fifty' and not interested in the interaction part."⁹⁹

The casualty of personal exchange has partly to do with a matter of size. As I discussed earlier in terms of zine production, increase in size limits the sort of control over process and personal touch that a zine producer can have. As they've been featured

in the mainstream media, even zine purists like Dishwashin' Pete and Aaron Cometbus have begun trading only selectively. Losing money trading two-hundred and fifty zines is one thing, but the percentage on five thousand is another. The decline in trading in the zine world, however, is more widespread than this explanation accounts for. Even after castigating any and all panels that broached the politics of zine commercialization, Chip Rowe, reporting in *Factsheet Five* on the 1994 Chicago Underground Press Conference, admits to being saddened by what he sees as the death of a zine tradition. "I notice lately that more and more of the listings in *Factsheet Five* have "no trade" listed. Are zine editors, including myself, guilty of losing sight of what it was all about in the first place?"¹⁰⁰

Perhaps. As the zine world has grown and rubbed shoulders with the mainstream, some of the practices of the latter have rubbed off. As zinesters set up institutions that spread the underground, they also invariably end up contributing to the status quo relationship of separation between cultural production and consumption.¹⁰¹ "Remember the main purpose of this is to promote dialogue and help girls have access to each other's voices," May and Erika write in the front of *Riot Grrrl Press* catalog, "it would truly bum me out if this turned into a commodification of 'girl zines' where if you have the cash you have access."¹⁰² These women worry about this because they know this will happen; their catalog, while expanding access, will also increase distance.

Likewise, subcultural entrepreneurs, while helping the "alternative culture invest in itself," as Scott Cunningham puts it, are faced with the inevitable intrusion of the bottom line on a living culture. Wow Cool's Marc Arsenault ruefully understands the

ethical conflict of acting as middleman for the underground: "This private moment on paper, but I'm supposed to make a buck off of it."¹⁰³ But what can Bohemia do? It seems that any attempt to give the underground secure footing results in its betrayal.

This is why anarchist theorist and zinester Hakim Bey (aka Peter Lanborn Wilson) counsels the opposite, rejecting any prospect of underground stability. He concludes that frontal confrontation with mainstream society, a "Spook capable of smothering every spark in an ectoplasm of information, a society of capitulation ruled by the image of the Cop and the absorbent eye of the TV screen," is useless.¹⁰⁴ The power of the modern corporate culture state can soak up anything that it confronts, transforming discontents into affirmations. The solution then is to *disappear*--a hit-and-run Bohemia, creating an arena of liberation that as soon as it is discovered dissolves only to be built again. This is the strategy of the T.A.Z. or Temporary Autonomous Zone.

Confronted with the modern spectres of capitalist cooptation and "revolutionary" police states, celebrating temporality seems to make sense. "My revolution starts today," writes the editor of *Forever and a Day*, "My revolution started yesterday, and the day before and the day before that. I will begin the whole thing over again tomorrow." Given that the underground "revolution" has now become "an advertising campaign," the editor writes that "I will find it necessary to revolt against the revolution."¹⁰⁵

Permanent revolution; an old line of Leon Trotsky's. But "rebellion" is the term that Bey prefers, and it's more accurate. For the T.A.Z. is, as he recognizes, a "counsel of despair."¹⁰⁶ As a strategy for survival it deeds permanent victory to the opposition, reveling in its own frailty and impermanence. Given the history of bohemia this appears

practical advice, but it's also lethal. Like an individual who upon losing their memory has no sense of self, a community without continuity ceases to function as a community at all. This may be why zine writer Mickey Z, after a very T.A.Z. like rant in his *Reality Manifesto*, concludes that "Individual liberation is all we can hope for and that is what you must challenge yourself to pursue."¹⁰⁷

The underground strategies of building up underground institutions of dissemination, or conversely, celebrating the continual destruction of such institutions, are both honest attempts to chart a course between bohemian isolation and capitulation to the mainstream. But they are both problematic. This isn't due to any lack of will or intelligence on the part of their supporters, but because they are attempting to patch over conflicts inherent within the project of creating an alternative culture that rebels against, but resides within, the belly of the beast.

In discussions about Kurt Cobain after his death I've heard people ask why, if he was tortured over having "sold out," didn't he just give away his millions to help finance alternative institutions? Or why didn't he just go off and live on an island if he didn't want to pretend to enjoy playing to a mass audience? I think he didn't because the underground culture which he was imbedded in doesn't have a viable vocabulary for considering such options. Within the ideological parameters of the underground there was no way for him to reconcile his commercial popularity with his commitment to an alternative vision of how culture and society should be. What I've outlined above are beginnings of building solutions, but only beginnings and ones fraught with difficulty at that. By and large, the underground culture's identity is tethered to the two poles of

purity and danger, with both placed firmly in the dominant society. It is a conflict which gives this culture its rage and passion, and ironically, gave Kurt Cobain's music the same.

Falling Out of Favor

The underground culture is not the only one with contradictions; the culture of capitalism is also riven in two. On the one hand it celebrates change and novelty, breaking down old barriers to make way for new products as the promiscuity of the commodity demands a libertarian culture. On the other, if profits are to be made and inequality to be enforced, there must be order. And order requires a culturally conservative milieu.

While the mainstream media was fawning over quirky zines like Brady Bunch fanzine *Teen Age Gang Debs*, the state of Florida was busy prosecuting twenty-four year old Mike Diana on three counts of publishing and distributing obscene material: his comix zine *Boiled Angel*. Admittedly *Boiled Angel*, is a far cry from the American values celebrated in the Brady Bunch, but with a circulation of three hundred, the charges against it and Mike were not about stopping a porno czar profiting from exploitation, but about policing what is and what is not acceptable cultural expression.

The punishment meted out was severe. Convicted of all three counts in a trial where zine and comix writers testified for the defence, Mike was sentenced in February 1994 to three years probation, and ordered to pay a \$3000 fine, \$50 a month in probation fees, and a \$1200 court mandated psychiatric examination. He has to attend and pay for

a journalism class ("so I can become a serious journalist" Mike laughs), do eight hours a week of community service, and keep his full-time job as a convenience store clerk. During his three years of probation, Mike can have no contact with minors, nor is he allowed to draw anything that might be considered obscene--even for his own enjoyment. And to enforce this last restriction, a probation officer can enter Mike's apartment at any time to check on what he is drawing. With a lawyer paid for by the Comic Book Defense Fund, Mike is appealing the decision.¹⁰⁸ But the message is clear: not everybody outside the underground thinks zines are wonderful, and this message is being reinforced. Almost exactly one year after Mike's trial and on the other side of the country, the owner and manager of an independent bookstore in Bellingham, WA were arrested and charged with "felony distribution of lewd material for profit." The item in question was the latest issue of Jim and Debbie Goad's zine *Answer Me!*¹⁰⁹



public enemy: Boiled Angel #5

But as much as conspiratorial minded zine writers may fear (and secretly desire) the spectre of jack-booted thugs snatching away their zines, it won't be repression that forces zines out of the light and back underground...it will be disinterest.¹¹⁰ "Why is our voice suddenly being heard?" *Emit's Mole* asks himself, then answers, "Big corporations take notice when social climates change because they can market an attitude or a movement and convert it into a trend." The problem for the culture industry is that something is inevitably lost in translation. As Mole continues, "They take culture and sell it back to us in a glossy package, neglecting content but pushing style until it fizzles out as nothing more than a passing fad."¹¹¹ At that point it's time for the culture vultures to move on.

The mining of the underground is so normalized now that the editors of *Dirt*, the Time-Warner financed zine, ran a page that parades their compromised corporate status: "We know damn well what we're doing by printing this faux fanzine. How dumb do you think we are. Hell. We got paid to do this."¹¹² The selling of the underground is so complete that *Time* magazine printed a--quite decent--feature story on the phenomenon, pointing out that "In its infinite pliancy, capitalism proved itself well suited to absorb whatever it was in hip that might fascinate consumers, while discarding the uncomfortable parts."¹¹³ *Time's* doppelganger, *Emit*, pointed it out a year earlier, but said it no better. Meanwhile MTV ran a short clip on "Selling Out"; demonstrating that even the discussion of selling out had sold out.¹¹⁴ And the Coca-Cola Company's OK Cola, after a brief test marketing, was shelved. Perhaps disappointed that the underground is not as pure and authentic as it once was, perhaps merely in search of

something new, the culture industry has moved on.

Already the *New York Times* celebrates the return of "normal" rock stars, who perform with "no displays of angst, no cryptic lyrics, no resentment of a growing audience"; professional musicians who "represent the return of the well-adjusted and congenial to the rock world."¹¹⁵ Alienation, rebellion, underground culture, and zines are last week's story.

But as long as "normal" is defined in terms of successful adjustment to a culture and a society which is profoundly alienating, there will be angst. And as long as the mainstream of culture is created, packaged and sold as merely a product for profit, there will be underground culture. And there will be continue to be zines, that in both content and form, debate received notions about what culture is and what it could be. "If the 'zine world' disappeared tomorrow it wouldn't really effect me," says Dishwashin' Pete, "I'll still be doing what I'm doing."¹¹⁶ And so will untold numbers of others who existed before the discovery of the underground, and will continue long after.

1. Exchange of letters reprinted in Maximumrocknroll and Underdog Records' *Book Your Own Fuckin' Life: Do-It-Yourself Resource Guide*, #2, 1993, Chicago IL, back cover.
2. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (London: Ark, 1966).
3. Aaron, *Cometbus*, #31, Spring 1994, San Francisco CA, p.56.
4. Keffo, *Temp Slave*, #4, 1995(?), Madison, WI, p.9.
5. Doug, *Pathetic Life*, April 1995, #11, San Francisco, CA, p.1
6. J. Peder Zane, "Now, the Magazines of 'Me'," *New York Times*, May 14, 1995, E4.
7. Joseph A. Gervasi, "Introduction," *No Longer a Fanzine*, #4, 1994, Blackwood, NJ, no page.
8. CNN, "Boom or Bust," rebroadcast of July 2, 1995.
9. Aaron Lee, "Aaron to the Media: Shove It!" *Blue Persuasion*, #4, 1994, Lexington, KY, p.3.
10. Indeed, the media coverage of Riot Grrrls was so pervasive that at New York City's alternative space ABC No Rio, under a prominently displayed Riot Grrrls sticker, some joker penned in: "as seen in Rolling Stone Magazine." NYC, 1993.
11. Ananda, *Riot Grrrl* #8, 1992(?), Washington D.C., no page.
12. Late Night with David Letterman, CBS, June 27, 1995.
13. Rick Marin, "Grunge: A Success Story," *New York Times*, November 15, 1992, sec.9, p.1.
14. In another media scam pulled by zinesters, Lalo Lopez and Estaban Zul, editors of the Chicano zine *Pocho*, appeared live in a debate at the height of the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 campaign impersonating leaders of the bogus group "Hispanics for Wilson," rambling on about the fact that there was too much unhealthy Mexican food in the U.S. and calling for the deportation of Linda Rondstadt.
Ed Morales, "Pocho Man," *Village Voice*, November 15, 1994. p.51.
15. Tom Frank in *The Baffler*, #4, 1992, Chicago, IL.
16. "Cultural Jamming" is what critic Mark Dery calls this underground sabotage that feeds off a media that "accepts photo ops and buzz words as meaningful discourse." Ironically, or perhaps tellingly, Dery's best writing on the practice of "cultural jamming" appeared in the "Styles" pages of the paper of record--media sabotage as a new style.

- Mark Dery, "The Merry Pranksters and the Art of the Hoax," *New York Times*, December 23, 1990, H1.
17. Missy Lavalee, personal correspondence, January 19, 1993.
 18. Kyle Baker, *No Longer a Fanzine*, #3, 1993, Blackwood, NJ, no page.
 19. Dead Kennedys, *Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables*, I.R.S. Records 1981.
 20. Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p.2.
 21. Actually, given the political direction this country is moving in, it may be possible...but with no irony intended.
 22. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1936/1984).
 23. I'd like to thank David Tomere for this insight.
 24. Trilling, p.120.
 25. The bohemian tribe was Ken Kesey's "Merry Pranksters"; the book is Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, (NY: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1968).
 26. Brian Fawcett, *The Public Eye: An Investigation Into the Disappearance of the World*, (NY: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990).
 27. Vortext Publications, *Locust*, no date, Seattle, WA; (FS5-NYSL).
 28. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.29.
 29. Brett Sonnenschein, *Roulez*, V.1, #2, Summer 1993, Jersey City, NJ. Brett traded *Roulez* for a copy of one of my zines through *Factsheet Five*.
 30. Spike Vrusho, *Murtaugh*, #10, 1993(?), Brooklyn, NY.
 31. *Gamma-Ray Universe*, #00-1, 1994(?), Ithaca, NY, no page.
 32. *Poor Doggie*, no date, Cambridge, MA; (FS5-NYSL).
 33. T.L., "What's in the Bag?" *Exformation*, #2, 1994, Brooklyn, NY, p.14.
 34. Sam Andreeff, *Feh*, 1990s, Toronto, Ontario.
 35. Jennifer Beard, et al., *Hell Bound*, #7, June 17, 1993, Olympia, WA, p.40.

36. *Feh*, Toronto, Ontario; Sam Andreeff, personal correspondence, March 11, 1994.
37. Cyclone Publications, *Eleventh Pin*, #2, 1991, Dayton, OH.
38. Donald F. Busky, *The Weird News*, #12, Winter 1992, Philadelphia, PA.
39. Paul Lukas, *Beer Frame*, #1, 1994(?), Brooklyn, NY, p.2.
40. "Obscurity-is-next-to-godliness" is a term used to describe Pavement by David Sprague, in "Pavement's Meandering Path to Mainstream Listeners," *Long Island Newsday*, sec.2, p.49.
41. Paul Lukas, telephone interview, February 13, 1994.
42. Paul Lukas, personal interview, February 13, 1994.
43. Jim and Debbie Goad, *Answer Me!*, LA, CA, early 1990s; Johnny Marr, *Murder Can Be Fun*, San Francisco, CA, late 1980s; Future Tense Publishing, *Dead Star: for John Wayne Gacy*, #4, Portland, OR, 1994.
44. Sparrow, "letters," *Factsheet Five*, #32, 1989, Rensselaer, NY, p.102.
45. Shannon Wheeler, *Reactor*, #6, 1993, Chicago, IL, p.44. Shannon has also done comix for *Factsheet Five*.
46. Taylor, pp.35-37.
47. John Foster, "Three Days in the Life of a Loser," *Ched*, #2, October 28, 1993, Portland OR, no page.
48. Jan Byron, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, #23, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p.59.
49. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*, (London: Penguin, 1975), p.378.
50. Brixton Kent and Michael Wood, "letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #99, August 1991, San Francisco, no page.
51. Joseph A. Gervasi, "Me vs. Green Day," *No Longer a Fanzine* #3, 1993, Blackwood, NJ, no page.
52. Larry Roberts, "Larry-Bob's Guide to Selling Out," reprinted from *Holy Titclamps* in Qvimby's Qveer Store's *Megamegadoggylogtwo*, 1995, Chicago, IL, p.5.
53. Missy Lavalee, personal correspondence, January 19, 1993.
54. Bob, *Second Guess*, #7, Summer 1993, Reno, NV, p.16.

55. Chris Boarts, personal interview, July 12, 1993, New York City.

56. Cited in Cesar Grana, "The Ideological Significance of Bohemian Life," in Cesar and Marigay Grana, *On Bohemia: The Code of the Self-Exiled*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), p.9.

In a similar vein, Grana also describes the "Suicide Club" formed at the Sorbonne in 1846 by young bohemians "to show the bourgeoisie that nothing could be nobler than self-destruction." (p.9)

57. As Virginia Woolf wrote in her *Orlando*:

Over the obscure man is poured the merciful suffusion of darkness. None knows where he goes or comes. He may seek the truth and speak it; he alone is free; he alone is truthful; he alone is at peace.

Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, (New York: Signet Classics, 1928/1960), p.67.

58. Cited in Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming*, (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p.439.

59. Patrick Spencer, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #23, 1985 San Francisco, CA, no page.

60. Scott Cunningham, personal interview, September 1, 1993, New York City.

61. Steve Step, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #7, July/August 1983, San Francisco, CA, no page.

62. Chris Boarts, personal interview, July 12, 1993, New York City.

63. With hesitation I put forth a "great man" theory of history, but there really is a "great man" in this story. And apparently I'm not the only one who thinks his way. In the April 1990 copy of the zine *Funhouse Mirror* #7, the inside back cover displays a large picture of Mike in his office surrounded by stacks of zines. Over the top of this picture runs the words: "This Issue is Dedicated to God." Although elating Gunderloy to a deity is done a bit tongue-in-cheek, the message of respect is sincere.

64. *Whole Fanzine Catalogue*, 18/19, March 1981, Brian Earl Brown ed. (FS5-NYSL). As the name suggests--lifted from *The Whole Earth Catalog*--this notion of the "network" zine was not something exclusive to science fiction fandom.

65. Mike Gunderloy, personal interview, December 6, 1992, New York City. Unless otherwise noted all quotes from Mike are from this source.

66. Paul Krassner, personal correspondence to Mike Gunderloy, February 22, 1989; (FS5-NYSL).

67. Arielle Greenberg, personal interview, August 25, 1995, New York City.

68. R. Seth Friedman, "Editorial," *Factsheet Five*, #46, 1993, San Francisco, CA, pp.2-3.

69. R. Seth Friedman, "Editorial," *Factsheet Five*, #53, October 1994, San Francisco, CA, p.3.
70. *Factsheet Five*, #56, June 1995; #55, March 1995, San Francisco, CA, p.3
71. R. Seth Friedman, telephone interview, September 21, 1993. Unless otherwise noted all following quotes from Seth are from this source.
72. R. Seth Friedman, form letter accompanying rate card, June 1995.
73. *Factsheet Five* Rate Card, January 1995.
74. Nirvana, "In Bloom," *Nevermind*, 1991, Geffen Records.
75. Dan Werle, telephone interview, December 15, 1993.
Kurt Cobain himself made very much the same point in an interview in *Rolling Stone*, when the interviewer pointed out the fact that many of his new fans were the very same people who beat him up in high school. "Hopefully they'll like our music," Kurt says, "and listen to something else that's in the same vein....Hopefully they'll be exposed to the underground by reading interviews with us. Knowing that we do come from a punk rock world, maybe they'll look into that and change their ways a bit."
Michael Azerrad, *Rolling Stone*, "Nirvana," April 16, 1992, p.97.
76. Pat Guy, "These Mags Began as Zines," *USA Today*, August 3, 1992, B6.
77. Paul Lukas, telephone interview, February 13, 1994, and subsequent follow-up conversations.
78. Amelia G. "A Place for Pus: How to Submit Work That Gets Printed"; Steve O'Keefe, "Shut Up and Write"; Seth Maxwell Malice, "Buy This Ad," *Factsheet Five*, #54, December 1994, San Francisco, CA, pp. 114-17.
79. R. Seth Friedman, telephone interview, September 21, 1993.
80. *Girljock*, #10, 1993, San Francisco, CA.
81. Roxxie, telephone interview, June 23, 1994.
82. Kate Wolfe, personal correspondence, November 1993.
83. With a similar tale, *William Wants a Doll* publisher Arielle Greenberg describes getting a letter from a thirteen-year-old girl who read about her zine in *Sassy* or some other commercial magazine and wrote that "she really didn't know what zines were and that she doesn't have a lot of friends and she's not popular and would I please send her my zine." Arielle wrote back, sending her a zine, and writing that "the people who aren't popular in school are the interesting people and those people who are popular now end up being boring

investment bankers." In a few weeks the young girl replied, writing that she had never really heard things put that way, and that she had shown Arielle's zine to another girl and now they are planning to start their own. This Arielle refers to as her "success story."

Arielle Greenberg, telephone interview, March 28, 1994.

84. cited in Jeremy Mindich, "Soapbox Samurai," *Details*, August 1993, p.99; also telephone interview with Doug Biggert, October 4, 1993.

85. Kevin Pyle, panel discussion with editors of *WWIII*, October 6, 1993, Exit Art, New York City.

86. Arielle Greenberg, personal interview, August 25 1993.

87. This is a point made by novelist and critic Umberto Eco, that the message sent is not necessarily the message received, and the context of reception matters as much if not more than the content being sent. While Eco is referring specifically to the possibility of radical reception of reactionary messages, his point holds if we reverse the equation: radical messages can be lost in conservative contexts.

Umberto Eco, "Towards a Semiological Guerilla Warfare," in *Travels in Hyperreality*, (NY: Harcourt Brace Javonovitch, 1983), pp.135-144.

88. Mike Gunderloy and Cari Goldberg Janice, *The World of Zines*, (NY: Penguin, 1992), p.3.

89. M. Teresa Lawrence, "The *Curio* Manifesto," received August 15, 1995. *Curio's* mailing list comes from *Factsheet Five*.

90. In a similar vein: When Kurt Cobain and his band appear on the cover of *Rolling Stone* with a shirt that reads: "Corporate Magazines Still Suck," What speaks louder? The message emblazoned across Kurt's chest, or the fact that the "alternative" band Nirvana has been captured by the mainstream music magazine *Rolling Stone*? *Rolling Stone*, April 16, 1992, front cover.

In an analogous "protest," the lead singer of the "alternative" band Offspring, performed at the 1994 BillBoard Music Awards wearing a t-shirt that read: "Corporate Rock Kills Bands Dead." Broadcast December 7, 1994.

91. "Don't worry, we haven't *sold out*" begins Seth Friedman's editorial in *Factsheet Five*, #55, March 1995, San Francisco, CA, p.3.

92. Nirvana, "Serve the Servants," *In Utero*, Geffen Records, 1993.

93. This point was made by my friend L.A. Kauffman.

94. cited in "A Cry In the Dark," *Rolling Stone*, June 2, 1994, p. 40.

95. Scott Munroe, *Chairs Missing*, April 1994, Stratford, CT, no page.

96. listed in *Maximumrocknroll*, #63, August 1988, San Francisco, no page.
97. *Riot Grrrl Press*, September-November, 1994(?), Washington D.C.
98. *Wow Cool*, Winter 1994 Catalog, Berkeley, CA.
99. Marc Arsenault, telephone interview, December 14, 1993.
100. Chip Rowe, "Chicago Fun Times," *Factsheet Five*, #53, October 1994, San Francisco, p.126.
101. Scott Cunningham, personal interview, September 1, 1993, New York City.
102. May and Erika, *Riot Grrrl Press Catalogue*, July, (1993?), Arlington, VA, no page.
103. Marc Arsenault, telephone interview, December 14, 1993.
104. Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.*, (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1985), pp.100-101; also Peter Lanborn Wilson, talk at the Libertarian Book Club, April 17, 1995.
105. Annon. *Forever and a Day*, #7, 1993(?), Seattle, WA, no page.
106. Bey, p.100.
107. Mickey Z, *The Reality Manifesto*, (Baltimore: Apathy Press Poets, 1983), no page.
108. Mike Diana, telephone interview, May 13, 1994.
109. Jeff Koyen, "Arrest Me!" *Crank*, #4, 1995, New York City. The issue of *Answer Me!* dealt, in usual Goad fashion, with the issue of rape.
110. In fact the publicity generated by Mike Diana's case got a underground comix publisher interested in producing a full comic book of Mike's drawings, issued as *Superfly*. It has also made his name familiar to everyone in the zine world, and first amendment activist outside. Similarly, the legal repression of *Answer Me!* has only helped keep the zine in *Factsheet Five*'s top ten zines (listed in issue #56, June 1995), and the number one selling zine in Chicago's Qvimby Qveer Store (reported in catalog #2, 1995).
111. Mole, "Whine & Cheez," *Emit*, #1, November-December, 1993, North Vancouver, B.C., p.12.
112. *Dirt*, #51, 1994(?), no page.
113. Richard Lacayo, "Is Anyone Hip?" *Time*, August 8, 1994, p.52.

114. The interview clip was with Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails. Predictably, the interview was edited in such a way as to juxtapose the elitist underground vs. the populist free market. No mention was made of profit or corporate control.

115. Neil Strauss, "They're Normal. And Rock Stars?" review of Hootie and the Blowfish, *New York Times*, June 22 1995, C13.

116. Dishwashin' Pete, personal interview, June 21, 1995, New York City.

The Politics of Underground Culture

I have mixed feelings about the importance of underground culture. For years it had been my primary culture, providing my entertainment and forging my identity. Growing up I too felt like an alien, confused that things weren't as they should or could be in society, and feeling very alone and powerless in my confusion. In underground culture I found a community, and a way to understand and act out my discontent.

I put out a zine myself, actually a few different zines. I started my first one--*Notes from Underground*--as part of my research, using it to experience what it was like to publish and trade. But it soon became more than that. In contrast to most of the writing I was doing at the time, my zine allowed me to express my thoughts on the world around me without worrying about academic style, journal submission form, proper citations and all the other stifling aspects of scholarly writing. It was also a break from my more political writing, as my zine became a space in which to experiment with political questions rather than formulate programmatic answers. My zine freed up my imagination and allowed me to write about what I truly thought, in a style I enjoyed. I suppose I could have done this in a private journal, but it is much more satisfying to be able to share these musings with someone and get their ideas and comments back.

And that is what happened, for after sending out my zine and seeing it reviewed in *Factsheet Five*, my post office box was suddenly full. I traded zines, swapped life stories, argued politics...made friends with people I had never met. I became part of a virtual world. I was hooked. I kept my zines going in part because they were useful to my research, but they had also become something more: a vital part of my own expression. And in a world where we aren't allowed to do much that is truly our own,

they became a vital part of my life.

But today zines and underground culture are not enough, at least not for me, not now. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of totalitarian states haven't led to peace, prosperity, and freedom, but exploded instead into ethnic and religious barbarism, or, as evidenced by the recent partnership between right wing capitalist Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation and the communist *China People's Daily*, solidified into previously unimaginable combinations of corporate and political control.¹ On the domestic front, the logic of the market reigns supreme in spheres from entertainment to education to the environment, while the traditional mediator, the State, has busied itself with hastening the redistribution of wealth from the many to the few, and turned its attention toward policing desire and policing the poor. And over the past decade and a half, here in the US at least, progressive ideals and organizations are in retreat and the vibrant social movements are those of the right.

During the same period, however, underground or "alternative" culture has grown impressively, resonating deeply with disaffected young people. But creating an alternative underground world--no matter how novel and supportive it is, and putting out a "radical" zine--no matter how irreverent, expressive, and fun, seems an incomplete, and woefully inadequate, response in the face of all this disaster. There has to be something more.

Culture is one of the spaces where radically different ways of seeing, thinking, and being can be experimented with and developed. Zines do this. But without a connection between cultural imagination and political implementation this means little. If underground culture is to have any political importance, and any significance for me,

it must make this leap.

But besides my personal convictions, there is another reason to be concerned with the politics of zine culture: it asks for it. The vast majority of them profess views explicitly or implicitly critical of and adversarial toward mainstream society and mass culture. To interrogate this underground culture as to its possible political impact is merely take zines seriously at their word.

To those who object to a political investigation of zines on the grounds that it's *just culture*, I argue back that culture is never just culture--and this is doubly true for an alternative media like zines. Culture is one of the places where people get their ideas about how things are and how they should be, and any discussion of these limitations and possibilities is deeply political as it questions the present and imagines the future. It is because of this fact that much of the theoretical discussion on culture and society has been concerned with political questions of ideology and social control. Namely, the role culture plays in forming and solidifying the rule of the dominant power in society or, conversely, acting as a language and space for subjugated groups to challenge that rule. In the past century, a great deal of this debate has stemmed from the dialectical analysis of Karl Marx.²

In a famous phrase Marx--with Engels--proclaimed that, "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas."³ By this they meant that the dominant culture of every age supports the vision of the ruling class. This ruling culture does not, however, simply take the form of crude propaganda consciously conjured up by the powers-that-be to bamboozle the masses. For Marx, *Culture*: artistic creation, was an

expression of *culture*: material life or lived experience.⁴ Because the ruling class controls both the means of mental as well as material production, the Culture produced in a society tends to represent this class's distinctive way of seeing the world which. This way of seeing, in turn, flowing from their experience, or culture.

Writing on the rising European business class and their art, art critic John Berger illustrates these lines between Culture and culture. The day's work of the Bourgeoisie encompassed their business relations as individuals to other individuals within a competitive market and included their interaction with things--goods and land--as something privately owned. This experience gave rise to its abstraction and representation: the ideal of individualism and private property and its artistic rendering in the modern novel and realistic oil portraits and landscapes, both of which forefronted individuals and material things. In short, Western Culture of the early capitalist era made abstract--at times crudely, at others imaginatively--what was experienced and valued in the everyday lived world of the Bourgeoisie.⁵

Well and good, but Marx's genius lay in his dialectical thinking, and he also argued that every power contains contradictions which breed its opposition. For example, the conditions necessary for capitalist domination--creation of a working class, universal education, technological advances, urbanization, and so forth--create the actors and tools (the grave diggers and spades) leading to the eventual overthrow of that order.⁶ Following this logic into the realm of culture, the lived experience of those *not* benefiting from capitalism would naturally give rise to a way of representing this dissatisfaction: a Culture of discontent. Marx himself never followed this path he cut as

he was more concerned with mapping out the economic engine of the system, but later marxists did.

Antonio Gramsci, theoretician, newspaper editor, and leader of what was to become the Italian Communist Party, was a marxist deeply concerned with the role that culture played in political power and resistance. Dying in one of Mussolini's prisons in the late 1920s and 30s, Gramsci realized that the revolutionary time table and plan offered up by Marx and Engels was askew. The popular revolutions that were taking place in the industrialized countries of the West and East seemed to be of the fascist variety, not communist, and the capitalist countries seemed to enjoy a fair amount of support from the very population they oppressed.

To explain this disconcerting trend, Gramsci proposed that one of the reasons that the oppressed populations were not rebelling--or were, but in the "wrong" direction--was because the capitalist classes and the fascist cliques had successfully attained cultural *hegemony*. In other words: the very ways of seeing and understanding the world that pervaded the population's everyday political and "nonpolitical" life were ones in which the logic of the status quo was reinforced and reproduced. Thus the very "common sense" of society served to support ruling ideas. For Gramsci, the marxist political project of changing material relations of capitalism had to be joined, and in some ways prefaced, by an attack on the culture of capitalism.

Like Marx, Gramsci believed that culture arose from lived experience, and that Cultural expression and cultural life were inextricably linked. As such there were two resources from which to draw upon for an attack on ruling ideas. One was *residual*

cultures, pre-capitalist cultures based in the everyday communal peasant life that had survived up to the present day. The other was *emergent cultures*, cultures that sprung up from the cracks of capitalism, forged out of the lived experience of and dissatisfaction with the status quo. Both residual and emergent cultures were not something to be embraced wholeheartedly and uncritically for Gramsci, as they were shot through with contradictions. The residual culture of the peasantry put value both on cooperation *and* intolerance of outsiders and new ideas. And as a culture that criticized the hypocrisy of liberal capitalism *and* promoted blind obedience to the state and war, Fascism was certainly "emergent." Nevertheless, Gramsci realized, it was in these cultures that the seeds of resistance to the ruling hegemony were being born.⁷

Zines and underground culture are such seeds of resistance, for they are a modern day counter-hegemonic culture. Their participants' discontent is not so much an abstraction as it is experiential, the product of everyday dissatisfaction with a mass culture they know intimately. The emphasis in zines on the personal and the authentic, the non-alienating and the act of creation, underscore this. In reaction against the society of which they are a part, and drawing upon older--residual--models of participatory culture, these bohemians have produced their own ideals and representations. Like those of Gramsci's time and place, this counter-hegemonic culture is shot through with contradictions, but within it also is the potential for political resistance.

This last emphasis on potential is crucial, for it is quite popular in academia these days to point to any cultural manifestation--no matter how ridiculous--as evidence of counter-hegemonic culture and leave it at that, expecting The Revolution to somehow

follow. Often using Gramsci's name to support their own assertions, these scholars rarely acknowledge his other provisos. For Gramsci, counter-hegemonic culture was not sufficient in upon itself, but had to be linked to a political program and political organization and result in real changes in the physical structure of the economic system.⁸

Historian Eric Hobsbawm makes the useful distinction between *political* and *pre-political* movements. The former have the organization, ideology, and will to effect political change, the latter, like the bandits and religious fanatics he studies, are "people who have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world"; but they are groups that have revolutionary potential.⁹ They also have something that more formal, "political" groups lack: a closeness and connection to lived experience. Zines and underground culture are decidedly pre-political, the important question at this point is what leads them toward or away from political engagement.

A Nonchalant Revolution Of Sorts

It is important to remember that zines and underground culture constitute a subculture; a culture both distinct from, yet living in the shadow of, the dominant one. This is their political strength, as well as their weakness. It is a strength, because as anthropologists George Marcus and Michael Fischer point out, any "foreign" culture takes on a political function when juxtaposed with the dominant society. This critical analytic function the authors call *defamiliarization*, and it is something they claim anthropology has implicitly always done. In charting out the belief systems and social

structure of a foreign system, and pointing out and demonstrating their validity, the cultural investigator implies a model for comparison to his or her dominant home society. A famous example of this is Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, wherein the author, through the description of the healthy sexual socialization process of Samoan society, points an accusatory finger at the sexual socialization process of Western society.¹⁰ As Marcus and Fischer argue, "ethnography as cultural criticism locates alternatives by unearthing these multiple possibilities as they exist in reality."¹¹

What holds true for ethnography also stands for zines. For what are zines if not reports from an underground culture and chronicles of the different realities of each and every author? As Thornton Kines writes regarding the zines laid out in *Factsheet Five*, "Everything reviewed is a new planet, a new city, a new neighborhood. In short, a direct challenge to anyone who loves to explore, discover, share thoughts and experiences--and peep through windows."¹² Reading each zine is delving into the author's idiosyncratic world, and taken as a whole the underground culture maps out an unfamiliar and multiform universe. Knowing it you identify possibility. This "defamiliarization" process which results from knowledge of "multiple possibilities" undermines the most powerful hegemonic tool that societies have at their disposal: justifying the current order as "natural."

Zines and the underground culture do something else as well: They create a "free" space in which to experiment with possibility. With their direct lineage to science fiction this is no real surprise, for what SF has always allowed is an imaginary place to construct utopian visions of what could be or dystopian warnings of what might be. The

gap between this and imagining real political change can be slight. The Futurians, an early SF fan club which produced many famous authors and editors, shared its first meeting space--and a number of its members--with the Flatbush Young Communist League and published their first fanzine on the mimeograph machine used to put out the young communist *Flatbush YC Yell*, and science fiction has always attracted political writers like the socialist H.G. Wells and libertarian Robert Heinlein.¹³ What zines and underground culture writ large offer is a safe space to test out new ideas and to imagine a different way of ordering things: a place for prophesy.

Scott Cunningham, one of the editors of the deeply political comix *World War III* and a curator of an early zine show, once told me a curious story. We were talking about the political function of zines when all of a sudden he began to tell me about growing up as a kid and reading Superman comics. There was a problem with Superman, Scott explained, he was too wholesome and too powerful, he'd never marry or have an emotional life and he'd never be in any real physical danger. This left Superman's writers and readers in a bind as there just wasn't much they could do with him. So the writers came up with something called "Imaginary Tales," stories in which, as Scott describes them, "It was like: What if Superman married Lois Lane? What if Superman was in an accident and lost half of his powers? It gave them a chance..."¹⁴

At the time I remember being sort of annoyed with Scott for going off the subject, but I later realized he hadn't at all, he *was* talking about the political functions of zines. Zines are "Imaginary Tales" which allow their writers and readers to slip from the constraining bonds of what is and imagine "what if?" Like Superman's powers, the

dominant society is totalizing, zines offer a way to get outside of it by imagining an alternate universe--it gives them a chance.

In some cases this is explicit: *Designing New Civilizations* is an APA through which the participants "are 'designing' new civilizations--societies that are many more times more intelligent, enlightened, loving and peaceful than the present civilization."¹⁵ But more often these imaginary worlds are implicit: experimenting with new identities, political vocabularies, and emotions that are not readily accepted in the dominant society.

There is real political potential in these imaginary worlds. Such potential was harnessed by the fascist National Front in Britain who recruited young Skinheads and produced a zine espousing their views, and also by the British Socialist Workers Party who, in reaction against the NF and a series of racist attacks, produced their own zine, *Temporary Hoarding*, and began a series of successful Rock Against Racism concerts linking black Rastas with white Punks. To the late David Widgery, one of RAR's main organizers, the imaginary world produced within a cultural setting was powerful politics. At RAR, he writes, people "saw something else, a glimpse of a different sort of society, a moment of inspiration that will last a lifetime. For a while we managed to create in our noisy, messy, unconventional way, an emotional alternative..."¹⁶

The fact that this alternative was noisy, messy, unconventional, and emotional is important, for it was a sign that politics were speaking the language of its constituents. The power of imaginary worlds of underground culture come from their organic roots, as it is a culture produced *by* people, not merely *for* people. This is what makes it hot property for marketers who understand the value of veracity, and it's something that

politicos could stand to learn as well. "If socialism," Widgery continues later, "is transmitted in a deliberately doleful, pre-electronic idiom. If its emotional appeal is to working-class sacrifice and middle class guilt, and if its dominant medium is the ill-printed word and the drab public procession, it will simply bounce off people..."¹⁷ In order for radical analysis or a utopian imagination to stick to people it must speak in the tongue of people's experiences, not in the priest's latin of Academia or the slogans of sectarianism. Zines at their best do this, articulating a radical imagination in the vernacular.

But they do something else as well, for the world of zines is not entirely imaginary, it is built, and in the building of this culture political lessons are learned. Initially ignored by the mainstream culture, zine writers have created vast networks of independent communication in order to share the ideas and thoughts that they feel are not being expressed elsewhere. These networks make up a distinct material infrastructure of communication that utilizes the technology of mass commercial society--computers, copy machines, mail system--but subverts their use towards its own cummunitarian, non-profit ends. The network also lends itself to an ideal of social organization. One of the reasons that Anarchism is so prevalent as a philosophy in the underground world is that it is a close abstraction of the network: Voluntary, non-hierarchical, omnidirectional communication flows, with each citizen a creator/consumer.

Within such a self-sustained network the political lesson is one of doing-it-yourself, a refusal to be passive. "In closing," writes Joseph Gervasi in *No Longer a Fanzine*, "let me encourage all of you, whether you like this 'zine or not, to do your

own. Doing a 'zine, putting on a show, playing in a band, and just saying what you think is a radical act in itself these days."¹⁸ "A publication like this," begins the poetry zine *Short Fuse*, "using commonly available tools, is within your grasp to make. Don't seek to be legitimated by corporate capitalism, academia, or any other authoritarian system."¹⁹ Antonio Gramsci once argued that, "All men are intellectuals...but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals"; zines and underground culture provide the medium for all people to be intellectuals--cultural creators--and this itself is a radical act.²⁰ It's radical because the first politics must always be that of people, as Mike Gunderloy described above, "get[ing] off their butts and do[ing] something."²¹

Yet in some ways the ideal of do-it-yourself is a far from radical proposition.²² The idea of not allowing your creativity to be stymied by any "authoritarian system" is the essence of American individualism. The far from dissident business section of the *New York Times* recently ran a piece entitled "The Do-it-Yourself Employer" with profiles on "DIY" accountants, real estate brokers, and public relations agents. The reporter concludes, correctly, that "being one's own boss is part of the American Dream."²³ Zine creators, as primarily the sons and daughters of the American middle class, are trained to be individuals. Schooled in the ideology of self-sufficiency, they enter the world prepared to make *their* mark *on* the world. However, America is a far different place than the idyllic land of independent yeoman that Thomas Jefferson once imagined. Most Americans work for someone else, or if they are "lucky" they employ others and become a dependent cog in a larger system, in either case showing up the American Dream to be just that: a dream.

What zines offer--if only symbolically at this point--is a way for these individuals trained in the ideology of the American dream of individual creativity to act upon it. American individualism as an ideology is conservative as it justifies concentration of wealth and a lack of concern for others. Individualism as a practice, however, can be deeply subversive. Particularly the variant that has developed in the zine world. Here, doing-it-yourself entails helping others to do-it-themselves--if for no other reason than you have someone to trade your zine with. The result is that competitive individualism is replaced by an ideal of cooperative individualism. Doing-it-yourself while living within a consumer culture means negating the lines that have been drawn between those who create and those who consume. The act of doing-it-yourself, and the zine that is a product of this act, are embodiments of a radical alternative to consumer capitalism.

Because the cultural world of zines is built in explicit opposition to the dominant culture, doing-it-yourself is often cast by its practitioners as a conscious act against the status quo. To "Question Authority. That's why I publish," writes Chris O'Brien of *Mindless Confusion*.²⁴ And just sitting down to do his zine, says *Manumission*'s Dan Werle, is

a means of me giving the bird to the television, giving the bird to others that are perhaps interested in controlling me...For that hour a night, or that twenty-five to thirty hours I put into each issue of the zine, that's my time and this is my sort of nonchalant revolution of sorts, as silly as that sounds.²⁵

It does sound a bit silly calling an hour an evening putting together a zine "revolutionary" (nonchalant or not), but the step one takes in creating an adversarial culture is one closer to the step toward political involvement.

Out on a late night shift on New York's Times Square with Street Watch, a watchdog group that monitors police treatment of the homeless, I turned to my new partner and asked him how he got involved in all of this. "Listening to the Clash," Roy SanFilippo matter-of-factly explained. Growing up in Orlando, FL and feeling like a social "outcast," Roy had gotten into the local punk rock scene. Once part of this scene, he began thinking about the words to the music he was listening to, lyrics like the Clash's "I'm so bored with the USA." This, Roy says, got him thinking about what he wasn't learning in school and led him to Howard Zinn's *People's History of the United States*. From there Roy started working in a local branch of the liberal Amnesty International, then later at the more radical El Salvadoran solidarity group CISPES. Today, he is a full-time activist working on a number of political issues and is part of the collective that runs Black Out Books, an anarchist book and zine store in New York City. For Roy the progression from cultural rebellion to political action was natural, as "punk prepared me to be a political outcast, since I was already a social one."²⁶

The "stepping stone" theory is a mainstay of the study of deviance. As sociologist Howard Becker argues, deviant individuals travel through stages of escalating involvement in what he calls a "deviant career."²⁷ In the case of drug abuse, a person begins with socially sanctified drugs like tobacco and alcohol, moves to soft drugs like marijuana, then on to "harder stuff": cocaine and heroin. For most sociologists (though not Becker) deviance is something to be avoided, a virus to be controlled; the tacit assumption being that society is healthy and deviance is evidence of maladjustment. But if one believes that society is ill, then a deviant career is something to be celebrated and

the stages cultivated. Politicos are not born, they are made; people become political through a socialization process. As Roy's case illustrates, there is such thing as a deviant political career and underground culture can be a stage in it.²⁸

First and foremost zines and underground culture are a tool for consciousness raising. *Riot Grrrl* zines, for example, provide the means for young women to share their experiences of living in a sexist society, and through this exchange learn that they are not alone. In the process they re-name their experience, transforming it from the difficulties of an individual to a social and political problem; a necessary step in any politicization process. Through these zines they also learn that women can and have done things. Lists of women's groups and books appear frequently in the pages of *Riot Grrrl*, and the zines themselves are evidence that a woman's place is not as a receiver but as a creator. Lastly, the Riot Grrrl network offers a point of communication and solidarity. Their zines and music shows are used as a collective forum to define the very nature, history, and identity of their community...and of their enemies: patriarchal society, the mass media, and so on.

But zines also function to raise consciousness for individuals who do not belong to any set group. Reading the range of opinions and lifestyles, the probing search for authenticity, and the depth of the rage against society in zines, encourages the reader to think about who they are and what they believe in. Such testimony from regular people can also lend them the courage to stand up and profess their own opinions, and then, perhaps, to act upon them. In a poignant moment in our conversation, Dan Werle, the nonchalant revolutionary of *Manumission*, told me why he started writing and where it

has taken him:

The sad reality of it is that I'm still trying to get over a lot of my upbringing. I didn't have a crazy, messed up upbringing, just very conservative. I grew up in the affluent suburbs...in a very conservative town. And I'm still trying to get it through my skull that activism is okay, that it's not a bad thing.

This is sort of my little step forward in that direction...It's very sad to think that it really took me a long time to sit down and get myself together to do this because I was so scared of coming forth and offering my voice....to actually come out and say something and have to defend my words or support my arguments.

But this is hopefully going to be a means toward a greater end, as well as an end in itself...I hope to use the fanzine as a step towards catapulting me into a larger arena...to read something about Peru because I want to write about it and then become active in changing US policy toward Peru, or helping Peruvians. Or becoming an AIDS activist. I'd love to have the guts to become an AIDS activist, and I think that this is sort of my little step to say: "Yes, I can do it."²⁹

The last I last heard from Dan was a postcard from Kentucky. He had moved to Nashville to enter nursing school and become an AIDS nurse.

Dan isn't the only one to make the move from the world of underground culture to the larger arena of the non-underground world. Distressed by the dearth of critical information about US involvement and interests in the mid-East during the Gulf War, Gregg Ruggiero and Stu Suhulka used their experience publishing their zine, *Open Magazine*, to print and distribute a lecture by famed dissident scholar Noam Chomsky on "U.S. Gulf Policy." This was the start of an excellent series of pamphlets on political events and issues including abortion rights, NAFTA and GATT, propaganda and the mass media, and the rebellion in Southern Mexico, spreading the words of radical scholars, as well as revolutionaries like Subcommandante Marcos of the Zapatistas.³⁰

Another "career" is that of *Ex-Maximumrocknroll* columnist Jane Guskin, who went on from her zine writing days to work in Nicaragua (and write about it in *MRR*), organize a collectively run cultural space--ABC No Rio--and a food co-op in New York City, help put out a weekly news update on Latin America, and produce *Time to Organize*, a zine "to encourage people to organize."³¹³²

Since zine culture emphasizes action ("It's useless to complain about the oppressive nature of Mass Culture unless you are actively trying to create an Alternative Culture" writes *Mind Theatre's* Glenn Grant), it's common to see zine writers doing things and exploring new avenues.³³ "That's what it's about now: figuring out what other things can be done," Christine Boarts argues, "We've got the records, we've got the fanzines...so now what's the next thing?"³⁴ Having their consciousness raised and their confidence bolstered within the world of underground culture, the step out to engage with issues on a grander political plane is smaller than before.

I know this well because my own politicization came through immersion in a subculture. Like Roy, it was in a local punk rock "scene" that I found the ideas, the medium, and the support to take the inarticulate rage that I felt at society's injustices and emptiness, and give it a name, a shape, and a voice. It was through this subculture that I connected with a tradition of dissent. But importantly, this was a tradition that spoke a language I could understand and that made sense to me being who I was and where I was. It was radicalism in the vernacular.

But I also hung out in this "underground" long enough to know its limitations and contradictions. One of the members of the punk band I was in took his rebellion against

the hypocrisy of the status quo, flirted with fascism, and later became a small-town cop. The inchoate rage of radical culture works as a stepping stone to the right as well as the left.³⁵ And often the underground is not a stepping stone at all but an island--a permanent home for some, a weekend vacation spot for others--on which to escape from the real world. The other member of my band sequestered his rebellion to the world of culture, and in his "other life" worked for the system, later training for a career in the State Department. For as much as there are facets of underground culture that move individuals towards a political engagement in the larger world, there are equal forces that move them away.

Haven in a Heartless World³⁶

Zines, as part of an adversarial subculture, have a political problem. Politics require solidarity, planning, and a vision...and what unifies the underground is *a negation of what is*. The only defining image of the underground is a camera obscura reflection of the dominant culture; its identity is an anti-identity. Negation is an asset in rebelling, but it becomes a liability in building. Slacking is a fine rebellion against the go-go, best and brightest, yuppie 80s, but hinders the hard work necessary to construct a new future. The Swiftian irony of the Dead Kennedys' "Kill the Poor" makes for hilarious and biting commentary on our society's "pragmatic" policies towards the unfortunate, but their dystopian vision gives no clues to what might replace such policies.³⁷ Reiterating distinctions of Erich Fromm's, the underground is clear on what it wants *freedom from*, but is often inarticulate in defining the substance of a *freedom to*.

What it lacks, for the most part, are the type of autonomous "positive" narratives encompassed in the Enlightenment utopias of liberalism, socialism, and anarchism, or even anti-Enlightenment utopias such as fascism.

I regularly ask the zine writers I interview their vision of an ideal society. Almost to a person, they respond in negative terms. In the ideal future there won't be war, poverty, or environmental degradation, no censorship or stultifying mass media, no racism, sexism, or homophobia.³⁸ But what there will be, other than a vague ideal of people respecting one another, is left unimagined and unsaid. The emphasis on negative freedom is in part a reflection of how freedom is defined in the dominant world: the libertarian freedoms like those in our Bill of Rights. But it is also a reaction against the real limits the dominant society places on these ideals. As a realm relatively free from commercial and political restriction, zines allow their creators to experience nearly unbridled freedom--a freedom that many writers and readers would like to see replicated in society at large. However, as 19th century critic Matthew Arnold once wrote: "Freedom...is a very good horse to ride, but to ride somewhere."³⁹ The underground culture is so desperate to ride away from mass society that *away* becomes its only direction.

In this escape the underground pits "us" against "them," its identity being contingent upon this distinction. Sometimes "they" are clearly defined structures of political, economic, and cultural power, but "they" can also include the vast majority of everyday people. Blind to the hypocrisy around them, hostile to new ideas and lifestyles, and buying into mass culture, The Public are idiots. Bohemians worked long and hard,

shedding the values and appearance of their upbringing and forging new ones in replacement, why should they turn around and embrace the very things and people they've left? Think again of *Black Leather Times*' Amelia G's pride in "loud, joyous proclamations of our freakdom, our otherness, our willingness to be different"; and her glee in mass rejection: "So what if we horrified the neighbors; we exalted in one another."⁴⁰ The problem is this: In order to effect political change when you have no power you need your neighbors.

This is not to argue that a radical politics has to uncritically accept people as they are. No, the point of all dissenting politics is to work toward changing how most people understand their world. But building an identity around separateness or otherness limits the capability and, more importantly, the desire to work with others. As the sectarian politics of the late 60s and 70s and the identity politics of the 80s have sadly proved, celebrating otherness may be useful as identity self-therapy, but its relatively useless as political strategy. What political critic V.S. Pritchett sardonically wrote of the relationship between bohemia and politics one hundred and fifty years past holds all too true today: "If socialism does owe something to Bohemia, what Bohemia really did to artists and writers in the long run was, of course, to isolate them from society."

It's an understandable yet sad fact that in our age of consumer capitalism "the public be damned" is more likely to be a rallying cry for the underground than for the captains of industry. The latter need the public, the former do not. Raymond Williams, echoing John Dewey before him, concludes that the strongest weapon in the arsenal of democracy is communication, not as it is but as it should be: with multiple origins, open

channels, and a goal not to dominate, but "to achieve reception and response."⁴¹ Zines succeed admirably in these goals. *However*, the community of free communication and participation that Dewey and Williams argue for is "a common culture," open to all and for all. This is where the promise of zines falls short. Partly reflecting the fragmentation in other spheres of society; partly out of the fear of getting "too big" and thus losing intimacy, authenticity, and control; and partly as a willed result of the underground's negative identity, zine culture is *small* culture.⁴² And as such it abandons the only large-scale, coherent "common culture" today to consumer capitalism.

"The scene was directly political" explains Exene, former singer for the celebrated punk band X, talking about the early punk scene in Los Angeles, "it was so political it didn't even know it was political. It was political like Rosa Parks, who didn't feel like getting up because her feet hurt, not because she was trying to start a civil-rights movement. It was a very honest and visceral reaction to things."⁴³ Exene's story is a nice one, a tale of the dignity of a lone individual of political innocence...it's almost a shame that it's not true. Rosa Parks had been the secretary of the Montgomery NAACP, her refusal to get up--no matter how tired her feet were--was an instrumental act undertaken precisely to start a black bus boycott, and she acted knowing very well that the organizational muscle of black churches and civil rights groups was behind her. Exene's retelling of the Rosa Parks story betrays a profound suspicion of instrumental politics and an equally profound naivete as to how political change occurs.⁴⁴ But these beliefs are not Exene's alone, they are the common property of the underground, part

of the politics of authenticity.

This ideal of a politics that is "honest and visceral" arises from a justifiable disgust with the hypocrisy of traditional politics in which ideology and policy are separated from people's lives. From this disgust comes a distrust of any politics that is detached from the individual experience. This is part of the "personalized politics" of the zine world that I've discussed before, a politics which privileges the personal and the intimate over the public and the abstract--politics with a little "p" instead of a big one.⁴⁵

The result is an underground politics circumscribed by personal connection. The editors of *Ben is Dead* undertake a laudable campaign to fight sleazy music club practices in their home scene of Los Angeles, dabble in anti-censorship politics as they relate to the communications industry, but politically don't go much further.⁴⁶ Zine writer Missy Lavalee, though active in a food co-op and the Blacklist Mail Order collective, focuses her politics even more narrowly, stating that "I gave up already on trying to change the world, so now I focus on trying to change my own life for the better." For Missy this doesn't mean becoming a self-involved yuppie, as changing her life for the better is "being myself, being honest, working communally and cooperatively with others, helping people when I can," yet it is still a retreat into a highly personal realm. "Maybe if everyone tried to live their life this way it would be a better existence for everyone," Missy muses, but then admits, "I don't really see the outside world taking on any of these ideals on a massive scale."⁴⁷ Ashley Parker Owens takes up the refrain, as she is also "not sure of change...on a grand scale, but for the individual I think that expansion and change is most possible." These changes Ashley calls "Little

Rebellions...big things happening inside that no one else can see."⁴⁸

Before becoming too cynical about political change that no one can see, it's important to remember that zines and underground culture are about communication: spreading the word and deed of people who have changed. Ashley, for example, is a tireless networker, setting up projects like *Global Mail* precisely so people can witness and learn from each other's Little Rebellions. She also successfully reaches outside of the cultural underground to include others, notably prisoners, in her network. Still, the politics of authenticity, with its demand that the political and personal have no separation, severely limits the scope of engagement. How can you understand NAFTA or GATT, Structural Inequality, Capitalism, or institutionalized racism and sexism, without abstractions? The privileging of a politics of "honest and visceral reaction" may stave off hypocrisy, but it also focuses political discourse on the consequences of political injustice, and does little in identifying and grappling with underlying causes.

These politics shape an entire perspective on political strategy. Take for example, "Talkin' Civil Disobedience with Corrine & Bee," an interview in the punk/feminist *Femzine*. Although some groups: Innu Rights Now, Earth First, and their issues, are mentioned, the interview is not really about politics, nor is it a how-to on civil disobedience. Instead it's a discussion on the *experience* of doing CD. For Corrine and Bee, CD is a political act in itself, and its efficacy or the cause that it serves is of less importance. "Civil Disobedience is so empowering," Corrine concludes, "because you can see part of the effect you are making immediately. You are physically saying, 'No, I don't agree. This is wrong and it cannot go on any longer.'"⁴⁹ For Corrine the value

of CD lies not in its "effect" in terms of a long term strategy to bring about political goals, but in itself as an act of non-compliance, an act of authenticity to one's own beliefs, Propaganda by the Deed.⁵⁰

Within the politics of authenticity, political organizations are suspect as well. Their demand for structure and solidarity and strategy necessarily limit personal connection, individuality, and authentic action. Instead, a politics "so political it didn't even know it was political" is the underground ideal. An underground theorist like Hakim Bey might argue that a political body which refuses to name itself, stand still, and coalesce into a self-conscious body has the best chance of surviving a battle with the powers-that-be. Perhaps he is right, but it also has no chance of winning, for it has no demands, no strategy, and finally, no power.

Responding to a disgruntled, politically minded reader complaining that *Maximumrocknroll* devotes too much time to subcultural issues and should concentrate on raising money to give to radical organizations, editor Tim Yohannan--usually criticized of excess political instrumentality himself--justifies the practices of the zine and its subsidiary projects like Blacklist Mail Order and the music space Gilman, by arguing, that "It's the projects themselves--self-governing, independent, and anti-commercial in nature--that are a political statement. It's politics by example."⁵¹ This "politics by example" is probably the most important aspect of the politics of the underground. In our age of political cynicism, zines and other underground projects bear witness to alternative ways of seeing, thinking, and doing. And since zines in particular are a medium of communication, these political examples are spread around. "The more we share, the

more likely we are to understand each other and get along. At least that's my hope," writes John "Bud" Banks of *Budzine*, echoing a faith I've heard from zine writers many times before.⁵² Bud's faith is not entirely misplaced. Within an alternative communication system where there is a conversation among equals, the more people share the more they potentially will understand each other. If what they have to share are self-governing, independent and anti-commercial projects, then these radical ideas will spread. At least that's the hope.

But there are problems with this ideal, for it conflates a model of communication with a model of politics, and politics at the macro level is not about communication, but contestation. In a society rooted in inequality like our own, for example, there is irreconcilable conflict. Liberal fantasies aside, this conflict is not the result of those with power not "understanding" the majority of people who don't. Read the *Wall Street Journal*, *Advertising Age*, or *Business Week*; the powerful *are* trying to understand the needs and desires of the majority of citizens, and it is part of their job to keep understanding--recall Hill and Knowlton's Dilenschneider scouring the alternative press for "new trends." But this doesn't mean that they understand in order to give away their power, quite the opposite. What products will people buy? What will make them work harder? What political policies will they accept? Those with power make it their business to understand those without in order to keep and build upon what they have.

The politics of authenticity may be quite effective as a means of communicating and demonstrating dissension, but sooner or later any dissenting politics has to confront conflict that can't be resolved through understanding. Rosa Parks knew this and relied

not only upon her act of personal courage to appeal to the conscience of a nation, but a self-conscious political movement with the power to force concessions. The underground rejection of political instrumentality and abstraction is understandable, but a politics that dare not speak its name can never make the leap from personal communication to real political effect.

But perhaps that's not its aim. Mike, of *7 Aardvarks for Alice*, spits out his accusation:

You sit there in your stinking little rooms thinking dire thoughts about your life that's so tough, and the society that represses, about your contemporaries with no clue, about your dead-end, mundane nine-to-five job, about your parents who never understood you anyway, and a government that encourages it all, and you get angry. You listen to avant garde music and read the fringes of mainstream literature. You dress differently and hate those who persecute you for doing so....Sometimes you write down these thoughts and mail them to others who basically think the same things. Then you call it the underground. Then you're dangerous, a true rebel....Bullshit.

As the rest of his essay makes clear, the anger that drives Mike's rant stems from disappointment. He's frustrated that the rebellion expressed through zines and in underground culture is contained at the level of communication. In other words: it's just talk. "You have no real power," he continues, "all you have are a lot of other rejects like yourselves saying either 'Yeah, Yeah, what he said!' or 'No, that's wrong, listen to what I have to say!' You still can't change one damn thing."⁵³ Mike is angry because he wants political change and he, like other zine writers I've read and talked to, feels let down by the impotence of his own culture.

Considering the radical potential of zines, Mike's rage is justifiable. But sometimes--in my darker moments--I think that zines and underground culture are not

supposed to change anything. Maybe for all their ranting and raving about subverting this and overthrowing that, zines are merely a form of political *catharsis*, and underground culture is meant only to be a rebellious haven in a heartless world. As I've argued above, one of the attributes of a cultural space like the underground is that it allows its participants to engage in critique of mass society and to construct alternative models of creation, communication, and community. But what happens if all this sound and fury stays safely within the confines of the cultural world? What then does it signify?

This question troubled Bertolt Brecht who as a playwright understood the immense potential of culture in capturing the hearts and minds of people, yet as a radical feared that political culture, instead of politicizing people, would act as a sort of pressure release valve for dissatisfaction. He was concerned that people would mentally and emotionally resolve their political anxieties through culture, when the real resolution of these problems could only take place confronting power in the political realm.

Other students of culture and subcultures share Brecht's worries. In particular, John Clarke of the CCCS in Birmingham, describes how white working class youth in post-war Britain, their traditional community threatened by domestic unemployment and foreign immigration, attempt a "magical recovery of community" through their skinhead subculture. Needless to say, nothing the skinheads did: dress in regimented costume, exaggerate their machismo, or beat up immigrants and hippies, did anything to bring back the stable and homogenous working class community their parents enjoyed. (The recruitment of skinheads by the fascist National Front would come later.)⁵⁴

Similarly, what zines offer is a *magical resolution* of the problems of capitalist

society and mass culture.⁵⁵ Within the underground culture, the alienation that marks the rest of society is challenged, denounced, battled, and vanquished. But since all of this happens on a purely cultural plane, it has little real effect on the causes of alienation in the greater society. In fact, one could argue that underground culture sublimates anger which otherwise may have been expressed in political action.⁵⁶ In this light consider again zine writer Mickey Z.'s advice to "stop wasting energy in futile efforts to change the world, and set up your own little world in your own time and space in which you can experience the revolutionary pleasure of thinking for yourself."⁵⁷

There's no doubt, as Joe Gervasi states above, that "doing a zine...is a radical act," but when it becomes the beginning and end of action it may no longer be so radical. "ACTION IS EVERYTHING!....Be an ACTION GIRL (or boy)!", writes Sarah in *Action Girl Newsletter*, a review of primarily feminist and queer zines. But she then defines "action" in purely cultural creation terms: write for or begin a zine, put on a show, start a label.⁵⁸ The selection of zines she reviews makes it clear that Sarah is interested in politics, but the radical action she proposes is cultural communication, not political action. As Tim Yohannan concedes, his efforts to propagate radical political ideology and critique through *Maximumrocknroll* have met with limited success, while the self-sustaining cultural network he has helped cultivate has bloomed.⁵⁹

The political problem is this: Radical culture that isn't embedded in a radical politics poses little threat to the powers-that-be. Quite the contrary, contemporary capitalism *needs* cultural innovation in order to open new markets, keep from stagnating, invest old merchandise with new meanings, and so on. Far from being a challenge to the

powers-that-be, innovations in culture are the fuel of a consumer economy.⁶⁰ The position of the bohemian vis a vis the dominant society brings to mind Theodor Adorno's snide (but perceptive) remark about the jazz enthusiast: "He pictures himself as the individualist who whistles at the world. But what he whistles is its melody."⁶¹

As such, as long as the politics of underground culture remain the politics of Culture--a sort of *virtual politics*--I have little hope it can effect meaningful social change, the very change that it cries out for through its articulated critiques and very form.⁶² Individuals can and will be radicalized through underground culture, but they will have to make the step to political action themselves. Tragically, the world of radical politics they might step into--movements, groups, parties--are in desperate need of the innovative ideas that the underground culture has in spades.

The political faults of underground culture, however are not entirely their own. Although underground culture is created in reaction against the main currents of society, it also shaped and guided by them. The fact of the matter is that there is no coherent political *public* that zines can speak to or for. The individual esotericism of zines reflects the fragmentation of society, their unremitting critique of work and consumption arises from the reality that capitalism is the only game in town, and the rise and successes of radical culture has taken place against the backdrop of the collapse of radical political movements--at least on the left. When underground culture has been more politically efficacious, as the Underground Press of the 1960s was, it was because the culture spoke to and for a vibrant political body: the New Left. Similarly the political "successes" of underground culture in England in the early 1980s had more to do with their relationship

with political organizations like the National Front and the Socialist Worker's Party, than anything intrinsic to the zines or cultural expressions themselves.

In an age where it is fashionable in academic circles to celebrate "conscious resistance to the soap opera text," as a "site of social struggle," it is important to consider again the original intention of the early students of cultural resistance: Gramsci, Hobsbawm, and Stuart Hall, et al. at the CCCS.⁶³ They were interested in cultural politics not as an end in itself, but in its promise for setting the stage for political formations. In the last analysis, politics of underground culture, like all "counter-hegemonic cultures" and "pre-political" formations offer a *necessary but not sufficient* condition for social change. I don't see this as a pessimistic conclusion, just an honest one. Culture may be one of the spaces where the struggle over ways of seeing, thinking, and being takes place, but it is not where this struggle ends.⁶⁴

V.I. Lenin once said that the reason that the Russian Revolution was initially so successful was that Russia had no universal culture--the foundation of meanings, norms, and values upon which politics are built. He went on to say that this is also why the revolution would be so hard to sustain.⁶⁵ One could argue the opposite of the modern underground culture. The reason it has been so vibrant and expansive in a time when radical politics were in retreat was that it had no real politics. In its safe haven it could lambast the powers that be, tilt at windmills, conjure up new ways of seeing, being, and doing, but never had to confront power. But, like Lenin's dialectic, the reason why this underground culture can never be sustained or expanded intact outside its own ghetto walls is also because it has no politics. It has no effective way to repel the co-optation

by parasitic marketers, to reach out to the unconverted, to mediate between the annihilation of purity and the danger of selling out, and finally no way to combat the political and economic machine that is the cause of the alienation they protest. By looking for cultural and individual solutions to what are essentially structural and societal problems, and locked into the contradiction of being wed to the society they hate, bohemians inevitably fail. And when "stubborn historical facts disperse all intoxicating effects of self deception," this cultural utopia inevitably ends "in a miserable fit of the blues."⁶⁶

The final irony is that if the underground were to win, and through political struggle vanquish the evils of the mainstream, it would die. For what gives bohemia its love and rage and creativity is its uneasy embrace with the enemy.

1. *Financial Times*, June 14, 1995, p.1, reported on *EduPage*.
2. This is a rather odd source as Marx devoted notoriously little time on the subject of culture. But it isn't so much Marx's insights on culture that were so valued, rather it was his investigation of the dialectics of capitalism and its discontents.
3. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, C.J. Arthur, ed., (NY: International Publishers, 1846/1970), p.64.
4. for a good discussion of this issue see Stuart Hall, "Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect,' pp.315-347
5. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (London: Penguin, 1972), chapter 5.
6. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Samuel Moore, trans., (NY: Washington Square Press, 1848/1964).
7. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, trans and eds. (NY: International Publishers, 1929-35/1971). Also useful is Raymond Williams's discussion of hegemony in his article, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory" *New Left Review*, #82, (1973) pp. 3-16.
8. While it is easy to pick on the worst of these "culture as resistance" studies, it is more instructive to look at one of the best: James C. Scott's *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University, 1985). Scott, doing his field work in a peasant village in Malaysia recounts how peasants resist class inequality by gossiping about the rich. Scott admits that the result of this *resistance* is minimal, but seeks to shift the emphasis from the instrumental to the expressive. That is: resistance lies in *intent*, and not even self-consciously political intent at that. (p.290)
 Implicitly both celebrating and tossing aside Hobsbawm's notion of the pre-political, Scott wishes to recognize as political acts which are not organized as such. He uses as his example the mass desertions of Russian soldiers in the summer of 1917, arguing that this was largely responsible for the Revolution (p.293) It's a telling example because it is historically wrong. Desertions may have stopped the war, but without the radical oppositional political parties ready to give direction and provide organization--rightly or wrongly--to mass discontent there would have been no Revolution, and most likely the deserters who "spontaneously" seized land would have been slaughtered by the Whites and the Western Armies. (Instead of waiting to be slaughtered by Stalin.)
 While rightfully recognizing the breadth of political resistance, Scott ends up confusing what one does to get by in adverse conditions: grumble or desert; and active resistance. In brief he conflates *survival* with *resistance*.
9. E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), p.2.
10. Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, (NY: Dell, 1928/1968).

11. George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). p. 116
12. Thornton Kines, "Why Read?" *Factsheet Five*, #44, 1991, Rensselaer, NY, p.89.
13. Damon Knight, *The Futurians*, (NY: John Day, 1977), pp.8-9.
14. Scott Cunningham, personal interview, September 1, 1993, New York City.
15. *Designing New Civilizations*, v.7, #4, April 1991, Encino, CA, p.141. Subjects include: overall design, interpersonal relationships in the new civ, health, economy, supraconsciousness. village/community level design, food, housing and 'jobs', language/symbols/myth/education, spirituality, fundamental nature of living organisms, societal assumptions, value systems, etc. (pp.140-1) (FS5-NYSL)
16. David Widgery, *Beating Time: Riot'n'Race'n'Rock'n'Roll*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1986), p.9.
17. Widgery, p.184.
Jesse Lemisch makes much the same argument regarding the approach of the American left in "I Dreamed I Saw MTV Last Night," *The Nation*, October 18, 1986.
18. Joseph A. Gervasi, "Introduction," *No Longer a Fanzine*, #3, Summer 1993, Blackwood, NJ, no page.
19. Annon. *Short Fuse*, #58, 1994, Santa Barbara, CA, front cover.
20. Gramsci, p.8.
21. Mike Gunderloy, personal interview, December 6, 1992, New York City. Previously cited in the chapter "Purity and Danger."
22. The ubiquity of the Do-it-Yourself philosophy in the zine world--and the fact that the tag doesn't always denote an underground--is parodied (I think) in *Mongrel* with a reprint of and article extolling "Do It Yourself" *natural cleansers*.
Mongrel, #1, early 1990s, New York City, no page.
23. Mary Rowland, "The Do-It-Yourself Employer," *New York Times*, January 22, 1995, sec.F, p.15.
24. Chris O'Brien, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, #36, 1990, Rensselaer, NY, p.94.
25. Dan Werle, telephone interview, December 15, 1992.
26. Roy SanFilippo, personal interview, April 16, 1994, New York City.

27. Howard Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, (NY: Free Press, 1963).

28. There is also a "career" which leads up to zines. A revealing life history is laid out by Mitzi Waltz of *Incoherent*:

When I was in the first grade I entered the world of self-publishing with a hand-painted and illustrated booklet on the neighborhood mutts....'Round about the age of eight my father gave me my very own "home printing press"....I made my own newspaper....

In junior high I wrote bad poetry and worse romantic socialist political manifestos...In high school I did a one-shot underground newspaper... printed by the folks at The Subversive Scholastic up in Columbus, Ohio... Somewhere in there I discovered punk rock and...ended up taking pictures of 'fridge dives for *Mutual Oblivion* zine in Albuquerque, then doing *Drool Beat* back in my home town, and, for the past couple of years, bringing out *Incoherent House* -- now called *Incoherent*.

In Mitzi's case, her "career" begins with 1] early ease with writing, then 2] literate father gives her printing set, 3] early "socialist" counter-hegemonic ideals, 4] underground school press, 5] radical printers in Ohio, 6] punk rock, a non-literate, but rebellious cultural form 7] contributor to punk zine, and 8] publishing her own zines.

Mitzi Waltz, "Why Publish?," *Factsheet Five*, #23, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p.58.

29. Dan Werle, telephone interview, December 15, 1992.

30. Greg Ruggiero and Stuart Suhulka, telephone interview, October 13, 1993.

31. Jane Guskin, *Time to Organize*, #1, 1994, Elmhurst, NY, no page; also personal interview, February 4, 1993, New York City.

32. Would these people have been politically radicalized even without the stepping stone of zines? Who knows. In my research I have come across people who have been radicalized through the underground...and plenty of people that haven't. While one can note the stepping stone process, its pure conjecture to try to determine "who would have even without..."

33. Glenn Grant, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, #24, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p.50

34. Chris Boarts, personal interview, July 12, 1993, New York City.

35. Consider this from a fascist zine called *Third Way*, the "Voice of the Rising Generation":

The goal of Third Way is: 1) to create an independent media for White nationalists; 2) to educate young Whites through a counter-culture which is opposed to the sick society of the present system; and 3) to allow young nationalists a chance to "let off steam"; to voice their opinions and feelings openly in a sympathetic environment.

....What sets us apart, as Revolutionary Nationalists...is that we are a cultural as well as a political movement."

Third Way, V.2, #1, early 1990s, Windsor, Ontario, p.2; (FS5-NYSL).

36. The phrase is critic Christopher Lasch's. It is an adaption of Marx's reference to religion as the "heart of a heartless world."

37. As an interesting side note, after a case was brought against the band by the FBI for interstate obscenity trafficking, they broke up and the lead singer Jello Biafra now tours the country doing "spoken word" shows. The content of Biafra's rants have moved away from irony and into straight political analysis and critique, and even toward proposing political organization and utopian solutions. Consequently, however, Biafra's message has lost a lot of its punch.

38. In a similar vein, Tad Davies, organizer of the APA RSVP, writes about making a trip to Cuba in 1993 in defiance of the US travel ban. But his reasons for the journey are not to support the dying revolutionary experiment in Cuba, but in "reaction to the US government saying he couldn't go."

RSVP Cuba Bonus, November 1993, Manhattan Beach, CA, no page.

39. from *Friendship's Garland*, cited in Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*, (NY: Columbia University Press, 1958), p.117.

40. Amelia G., "Making Scenes in Public Places," *Black Leather Times*, V.3, #4, 1992(?), Gaithersburg, MD, no page. Previously cited in the sabotage section of the chapter on work.

41. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1750-1950*, (NY: Columbia University Press, 1958), p.316; see also John Dewey *The Public and its Problems*.

42. The term "Small Culture" was suggested to me by L.A. Kauffman.

43. Exene, quoted in an interview with Jeff Spurrier, "California Screaming," *Details*, December 1994, p. 126.

44. Exene's understanding of Rosa Parks's actions also attests to the effective public relations effort of the Civil Rights movement.

45. For a great debate between the politics with a small "p" and Politics with a big "P" in the punk world see the interview of Ian MacKaye of Minor Threat (now Fugazi) and Dave Dictor of MDC, by Vic Bondi of Articles of Faith, in *Maximumrocknroll*, #8, September 1983, San Francisco, CA, no page.

46. *Ben is Dead No Pay-To-Play Booklet*, 1989; *Ben is Dead*, #12, April 1991, Los Angeles, CA.

47. Missy Lavalee, personal letter, January 19, 1993.

48. Ashley Parker Owens, e-mail interview, June 4, 1994.

49. *Femzine*, #1, Melanie Maria Liwanag Aguila, ed., Toronto, Ontario, no date, p.32; (FS5-NYSL).

50. This emphasis is something noted by Barbara Epstein in her study of post-60s social movements. In her discussion of the Livermore Action Group, a coalition dedicated to shutting down a notoriously unsafe nuclear power facility in California, Epstein writes about the political contradictions of the "direct action" of blockading the gates through mass civil disobedience. As direct action, the blockade was ineffective as it didn't effect the plant's functioning. But as an act to build publicity it could be quite effective. But to talk about the fact that the CD would be used as a necessarily abstract means to an end would have called into the whole idea of "direct action" into question. So it wasn't, and the proper publicity arrangements were never made. What mattered more than political efficacy was the authenticity of the dissident act.

Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s*, (Berkeley: Univ of California, 1991), pp. 127-8.

51. Exchange between Dino Hyssen and Tim Yohannan, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, #59, April 1988, San Francisco, CA, no page.

52. John "Bud" Banks, personal letter, January 14, 1994.

Zine writer Blair Buscareno, echos Bud's words, writing, "The more we know about one another, the better chance we have of understanding each other. The better out understanding of the way we all think, the better our chances for improving the world."

"Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, #44, 1991, Rensselaer, NY, p.96.

53. Santa Mike the Golden Yahoo, *7 Aardvarks for Alice*, #2, 1992, Portsmouth, NH, no page.

54. John Clarke, "The Skinheads and the Magical Recovery of Community," *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds. (London: Unwin Hyman, 1976), pp.99-102.

55. The term "Magical Resolution" is Phil Cohen's from "Sub-cultural Conflict and Working Class Community," *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, #2, CCCS, Birmingham, Spring, 1972.

56. This notion of culture as a "magical resolution" of political tension is exactly what led Matthew Arnold to embrace it. For it was culture, he thought, that could offer a common beacon that would rise above the class politics that were wracking his native England in the 19th century. (*Culture and Anarchy*, 1869). Marx too saw this potential in the guise of religion, and for that reason he despised it.

57. Mickey Z. *The Reality Manifesto: A Look at Pseudo-Life in the Post-Modern Age*, Baltimore: Apathy Press Poets, 1993, no page. Originally cited in the chapter on "Work."

58. Sarah, *Action Girl Newsletter*, #7, 1994, Staten Island, NY, no page.

59. Tim Yohannan, telephone interview, May 14, 1994.

60. Terry Eagleton, "Why Marxism?" seminar at the New York Marxist School, Fall, 1991; David Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Limited, 1989).

61. Theodor Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression in Listening," 1938, in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, (NY: Continuum, 1982), p.293.

62. Pam Donovan drew my attention to how cultural politics constitute a virtual politics.

63. see Ellen Seiter, et al. "Don't Treat Us Like We're Stupid and Naive," in *Remote Control*, Seiter, et al., (NY: Routledge, 1989), pp.237 and 244 respectively. These two sentiments are linked in the article's concluding paragraph.

64. As Stuart Hall argues:

Popular culture is one of the sites where [the] struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged....It is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture--already fully formed--might be simply 'expressed.' But it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why 'popular culture' matters. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don't give a damn about it.

Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular," *People's History and Socialist Theory*, Raphael Samuel, ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 239

65. The story is Terry Eagleton's, Seminar on Marxism and Aesthetics, New York Marxist School, October 17-19, 1993.

66. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto" in the *Marx/Engels Reader*, Robert C. Tucker, ed., (NY: Norton, 1848/1972), p. 493. Marx and Engels are referring specifically to what they call "Petty-Bourgeois" socialism, a socialism of individuals whose hearts are in the right place if not their understanding of political and economic forces.

PART III: *CONCLUSION*

Conclusion

Where there is no vision, the people perish

- Prov.29:18

Religion "is the opium of the people," Marx once wrote.¹ It's often understood that by this he meant that religion dopes the people, sapping them of their revolutionary potential. But his metaphor is a complex one and, as Marx himself understood, leaves other possibilities open. What opium does, and what it was commonly used for in Marx's own time, is kill pain. What religion does, in the hands and words of the powerful, is to smooth over the pain and conflict of the real world for the everyday person; promising eternal salvation in Heaven as a salve to soothe the wounds of a brutal and empty life here on earth. Opium also stupefies. Under the influence of the drug, the opium addict does nothing but vegetate in his or her own private den.

But opium does something else as well: it helps one dream. Freed from everyday cares and the mental and physical shackles of the real world, opium allows its user to imagine new ideas and new realities: Coleridge creating a Kubla Kahn from an opium induced dream, Baudelaire repainting the modern world stoned on hash. It's no surprise that religion, in addition to being used to lull the masses into submission, has also been used by the very same people as an utopian vision and revolutionary cudgel: Gerard Winstanley rewriting the story of Genesis to justify the communist aims of the radicals of the English Revolution, Thomas Paine attacking the rights of Kings in the name of biblical truth, Liberation Theology and Revolution in Latin America, Father Aristide in Haiti. "Keep Hope Alive" as the Reverend Jesse Jackson is fond of saying; keep hope

alive, an important task in the dark times today.

Zines and underground culture are also such an opiate. They arise out of the pain and dissatisfaction of individuals, and they are ointment for the alienation created by the dominant society. As Marx argued of religion, underground culture is "at one and the same time the *expression* of real suffering and a protest against [it]."² Where society disconnects individuals, zines reconnect, what mass culture separates, zines integrate. In the world of underground culture the evils of a capitalist society are overcome. But perhaps only in that world, for zines also allow an escape: a haven in a heartless world. As such they often lead only behind the walls of a sequestered ghetto.

But zines, with all their limitations and contradictions, offer up something very important to the people who create and enjoy them: a dream. In the shadows of the dominant culture, zines and underground culture constitute a *free space*. A space within which to imagine and experiment with new and idealistic ways of thinking, communicating, and being. Underground ideals like an authentic and non-instrumental life provide--albeit in inchoate form--a challenge to modern society. And underground culture creates a space in which to experiment with novel forms of social production and organization. Practices like non-alienated cultural production and the non-spatial community of "the network," are perhaps indicators of the directions in which a future society could go, or utopian ideals after which to strive. And unlike political meetings and academic conferences, but a lot like opiates, participation in the zine underground is *pleasurable*. Asked why he publishes, *Aftershock's* Eric Rudnick explains, "To change the world. It may not work but it sure is fun trying."³

Such a dream is essential today, for the function of dominant hegemony is not necessarily to make people love the system, but to deny them any alternative.⁴ Zines, in their content, organization, and form constitute an alternative dream as to how human relations, creation, and consumption should be organized. Their strength is not in what they say they will do, but in what they actually are. They are politics by example; in religious parlance, they *bare witness* to a rejection of the old and a creation of the new. When *Dishwasher's* Pete refused to show up on Letterman, when he won't sell his zines in chain book stores, when he consciously rejects the American Dream of success, and then writes about all of this, he is an example that not everybody, not everything, in this society is ruled by the logic of the market. As ineffectual as this may be on a macro political level, on a micro level it demonstrates to whomever will listen that there is resistance. Pete and his zine, like all bohemian culture, is a voice yelling "No, I'm against it," but also a creation that says; "Yes, this is what I'm for."

Poet Eduardo Galeano writes of utopia:

She's on the horizon....I go two steps, she moves two steps away. I walk ten steps and the horizon runs ten steps ahead. No matter how much I walk, I'll never reach her. What good is utopia? That's what: it's good for walking.⁵

There needs to be something, an ideal of how things could be, if people are to summon up the courage to break out of the security, the routines, the meanings and limits of the here and now. But I'll let you in on a secret: Utopia is unobtainable and its realization a lie...though a necessary one. This lie allows people to go forward, to imagine something different, even when the evidence of the present denies all alternatives.⁶ Utopia is good for walking.

Zines too are good for walking. In a way they are a lie as well, for they promise a dream of non-alienation which they can't deliver outside of their own subcultural confines. But they are a lie which gives direction and sustenance, solidarity and a sense of accomplishment. Against a world dragging you back, they keep you moving forward. "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born," they keep hope alive.

So what to make of zines and underground culture? They aren't The Revolution. But they are one of Bakunin's "subterranean revolutions, insensible and even often imperceptible," and in this subterrane smolders a radical hope. As zine writer and distribution organizer Tad Hirsch argues,

At their core, zines are about expression and communication. In a society where neither are encouraged, creating and publishing a zine represents a revolutionary act. The long hours spent writing, drawing, doing layouts, etc, are hours not devoted to television, consumerism, or any of the socially prescribed ways of killing time. The act of attempting to distribute that zine represent the desire to reach someone, to share ideas, and to get feedback. In other words, it is the first step in establishing authentic human interaction, as opposed to making small talk in a bar, or at the checkout line. While zines can be self-important, pretentious, and, well, dull, they can also be thought-provoking, emotionally fulfilling, and response-generating. They can lead to a community of creative, intelligent people in open discussion, without the intervention of commercialism or any real institutionalism.

This rant is probably a bit pretentious, a bit self-important, a bit boorish, and kind of silly. I apologize: its almost 4 in the morning and I'm not at my best.⁷

I agree with Tad on all but one account: his rant *is* the hope and promise and humility of the politics of zines at their best.

* * * * *

What is the future of zines? One word: computers. Zines on the Internet are the

likely successor to paper, and for a couple of years their numbers have been slowly growing. The theme of the Summer 1995 issue of *Factsheet Five* is electronic zines, with articles on how to put zines on-line and an essay arguing for a "new definition for zines," while six pages of e-zine reviews are already listed.⁸ For now the technology needed to produce e-zines limits their quality and access to their production. The e-zines that I've seen, being just text across a screen, are visually unexciting, and seem to be produced by the homogenous 18-35 year old, male crowd that rules the Internet.⁹ But as the price of computers, scanners, and Internet access drops, this will change. More likely to eclipse zines, however, are the much more graphically and structurally interesting World Wide Web Sites. On the WWW, each site can be networked with other sites--opening the potential for reviews and letters that take you instantly to that author's site. Networker extraordinaire Ashley Parker Owens, for example, has already made her *Global Mail* zine into a home page on the Web.¹⁰

This is exciting territory, but I doubt this new computer medium will supplant the paper zine entirely. After all, the telegraph, telephone, radio, and television never did away with the underground presses. There is something about the materiality of a zine--you can feel it, stick it in your pocket, read it in the park, give it away at a show--that I myself would be reluctant to give up.¹¹ It also doesn't really matter. For no matter what their medium of transmission, as long as there is a mass culture there will be micro communiques, as long as there is the instrumentality of the market there will be communication based on love and rage, and as long as there is subterranean revolutions there will be notes from the underground.

1. Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction," 1843-4, *Early Writings*, (NY: Vintage Books, 1975), p.244.
2. Marx, p.244.
3. Eric Rudnick, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, #39, 1990, Rensselaer, NY, p.100.
4. This was an insight offered by the late Ralph Milliband, "For and Against Utopia," lecture at the New York Marxist School, April 7, 1994, NYC.
5. Eduardo Galeano, *Walking Words*, (NY: Norton, 1995); reproduced in *The Nation*, June 12, 1995, p.829.
6. In this way the lie of Utopia is like George Sorrel's myth of a General Strike, or Nietzsche's "creative forgetting."
7. Tad Hirsch, e-mail correspondence, September 18, 1994.
8. *Factsheet Five*, #56, Summer 1995, San Francisco, CA.
9. According to *Investor's Business Daily* a recent survey recorded that users of the Internet are 67 percent male, more than half are between the ages of 18 and 34, and have a median income that falls between the \$50,000-75,000 range.
September 28, 1995, p.A8, cited on *Edupage*.
10. <http://www.well.com/user/soapbox/eglob95.html>
11. The very possibilities for unlimited access that the Internet opens up also may be a detriment. One of the attributes of the relatively closed underground culture was that its initiation rites demanded a degree of commitment and knowledge. An Internet based zine network may make communication too easy and the deviant socialization process of the underground might be lost. In the weeks following Dishwashin' Pete's prank on Letterman, I was surprised to find a good number people leaving messages on the Usenet (Internet wide) zine newsgroup, alt.zines, who were genuinely confused about why Pete had pulled such a prank, and disappointed that he had. That such an act against the commercial mass media needed explanation or justification, demonstrates how disconnected these individuals are from the underground world.

Methodology

Yikes! *Factsheet Five* arranged in headings/categories? Urgh!!! When Zinedom becomes reduced to "definitions" it loses its soul...

- Bob McGlynn in a letter to the editor after
Factsheet Five briefly introduced categories

"The disciplining of undisciplined subjects," is what friend and anthropologist Ara Wilson calls my job of trying to make sense of the world of zines. It's a problem shared by all who attempt to write on popular culture, and though Wilson was teasing what she warned of is serious. The question of how to understand and classify the incredibly idiosyncratic and diverse world of zines, without crushing the life out of them by reducing them into sterile categories, has been a concern of mine since the beginning of this project.

Should I break them up historically, in chronological order? Should I divide them by genre? SF zines here, punk there, and political over here. By form? Ragged and smudged ones to the left, desktop published to the right. Perhaps I should divide them up by different methods of theoretical analysis applied: marxist, freudian, feminist, postmodern? All of these classificatory schemes and more I considered. But somehow none of them got at what I was noticing: the commonalities in this diverse field. And none of these schemes illuminated what I was interested in: the politics that they embodied. So I looked for another way of making sense of zines.

But first I had to do the research. I began my project by simply reading all the zines I could get my hands on. Scouring the reviews in *Factsheet Five*, I wrote to

publishers asking them to send me their zines. From the review columns in the zines that I received, I sent away for even more. I also started to frequent local record stores, independent book shops like See Hear and Printed Matter in New York City, and even large book chains like Tower Books--purchasing zines at each location. As people found out that I was working on this project they began to give me zines that they worked on, or ones that were favorites of theirs. Through this rather haphazard process, I ended up with a personal archive of over 500 zines, a thoroughly eclectic collection, but also a decidedly non-random sample.

In an effort to expand my reading pool as well as bring in a more historical and random element to my zine sample, I visited the zine collection held in the New York State Library in the state capital of Albany. When Mike Gunderloy, who lived near Albany, gave up his tenure as editor of *Factsheet Five* he donated his entire collection of zines and zine related material to the Manuscripts and Special Collections section of the State Library. With the help of their excellent librarians, particularly Ms. Billie Aul and Mr. Paul Mercer, and during my term as Library Resident there, I plowed through as much of the 360 cubic feet of the collection as I possibly could. Spending weeks straight at the library, reading thousands of zines, the contours of this phenomenon became discernable.

I read editorials, band interviews, fiction, and poetry; I looked at lay out and illustrations; I took notice of the voice the author was using and the persona they were projecting; I paid attention to the subjects covered and those ignored, and the political beliefs articulated or not; and I also noted where the zines originated, how much they

cost, how many pages they were, the quality of their reproduction, how many issues had been produced, and other more material aspects. For over two years I literally waded through a sea of zines.

In addition to tens of thousands of zines and Mike's personal correspondence (which also provided worthwhile data), the collection at the New York State Library includes the complete run of the early *Factsheet Five*, from #1 in 1982 to #44 in 1991. These proved invaluable as they allowed me to both trace changes in zine topics over time, as well as chart the growth of the world of zines. Particularly helpful were two columns that ran quasi-regularly in *Factsheet Five*. One was the "Letters" column which lent insight into the interests and concerns of this growing world as zine publishers and fans wrote in with grievances, praises, and general information. The other, a feature entitled "Why Publish?," was a gold mine. Within this column, and in a later expanded collection published by Mike, almost one hundred and seventy-five zine writers wrote in to answer the simple question stated in the column's title. It was here, reading these, that I began to get a clear idea of both the variations and the commonalities that prompted individuals to become creators in a society that emphasizes cultural consumption.

As a way of tracking down more information about why individuals published what they did, as well as more background information about publisher's personal history, interests, and political ideals, I began a series of what was to become forty-one interviews with a total of forty-seven individuals, with both "big names" in the zine world and more anonymous independent zine creators and readers. Three-quarters of

these interviews were done either face to face--with zine writers from New York and the Pacific Northwest, or, with those scattered around the country--by telephone. These interviews averaged about an hour. The rest were done either by letter or e-mail.

I also put out a zine myself. Doing this allowed me to experience first hand the process of zine creation and distribution. It also gave me something to trade for other zines and a common ground on which to build rapport with others in the zine world. And, as I've argued above, the world of zines is one of participation and two-way communication. Ethically I felt I had to contribute back to this culture in exchange for all that it had given me.

One standard research methodology which I did not employ was a survey. I have nothing against surveys per se and have used them effectively in other research settings, but I felt that in this instance they would be inappropriate. With the exception of broad demographic data, most of the information I was interested in was subjective; I was not only interested in answers to my questions, but how individuals would frame their own questions and concerns about the zine scene. Also, and more importantly, I soon discovered that one of the primary ethical norms of the zine world was personal contact and sincerity. Zines, in part, were started as a rebellion *against* the sort of anonymous, mass administered, fill-in-the-blank, public opinion culture that is so much a part of our society today. Handing out a survey which represents exactly the sort of impersonality and coldly instrumental communication they disdain did not promise very satisfactory results.

This does not mean that I had no basis of comparison between the information

gathered in the interviews. For all of my interviews I had a basic script [see appendix A] the questions of which ranged from asking for subjective definitions of zines and the zine world, to asking for a detailed account of their production process, to more personal demographic information. This script created a common frame so that I could do meaningful comparisons between interviews. But as with all in-depth interviews, this script was only a starting point; each interview unfolded with its own logic. And since I was interested in the subjective understandings and meaning structures of people I was interviewing, I let each interview flow where it might and observed the paths it took. To a point. When things got too far off the track--too undisciplined--I would return to my script, returning to the basic question underlying most of my others: *But why publish?*

From these interviews I learned that people had many different motivations for getting involved with zines, although many of these reasons had their roots in a similar place: a dissatisfaction with culture and creation as it defined within the mainstream society and a drive to creatively combat some of the alienation they experienced. From these in-depth interviews I also began to understand that publishing zines was often not an isolated act in a person's life, instead it was one--albeit sometimes the most important--example of an array of "deviant" ideas, acts, lifestyles, and political beliefs that compose a totality. This was not always the case as sometimes a zine was just a zine: a nonconforming leisure pursuit in an otherwise conformist life, but for a surprising amount of people zines were part of a "deviant career," and most zine publishers considered themselves and what they did as part of a larger "underground culture."

In order to get outside of the myopia that can easily happen when emerged deep

within the personal life stories of active participants in any culture, I stepped back and reviewed literature. Not surprisingly for an "underground" culture there has been almost no scholarly work written on zines, and of the little that has--with exceptions--most of it of negligible value. Like too much academic writing on popular culture, more time is spent on the author's elegant theories and too little on actually examining the texts, talking to the creators, and putting the material within a larger context.

Journalists have done a better job with zines. A number of articles on zines have been written in large daily newspapers as well as commercial and non-commercial magazines. In this age of full text retrieval databases, I covered a range of periodicals in a relatively short time that normally would of taken months. In these I was looking for two things. One, primary information that would add to my understanding of zines and their creators. And two, how the mainstream media itself was making sense of zines and underground culture. In further pursuit of the latter perspective, I also scoured the national and local Business Press, taking note of the value this world attached to underground press, music, and culture.

My outside reading, however, was not limited solely to the subject of zines. Throughout this research period and over the many years leading up to this project I had been reading widely; reading on cultural history and theory, social movements, political economy, literary theory, cultural studies, anthropology, and in my home discipline of sociology. All of these histories, case studies, and theories were in my head when I went into the field. And these, as well as my own personal experiences in subcultures and political movements, formed the nascent frames through which I made sense of zines and

underground culture. I took copious notes and had a good idea of my overall interest in this phenomenon, but I avoided jumping into classificatory schemes too soon. For a while at least I wanted the sea of zines to wash over me in order to notice the natural currents that might be there. But eventually the time came for the disciplining of undisciplined subjects.

The first step I took in this direction was to code all of my notes with *Keywords*. I arrived at these keywords slowly. As I was doing my research--reading the zines, talking to the creators, plowing through old issues of *Factsheet Five*--certain concepts seemed to occur over and over again. These notions I attempted to boil down into words. These markers ranged from over-arching concepts like *Politics*: political issues defined within a traditional framework, and *politics*: discussions of the politics of everyday experience; to expressions of ones relationship to the mainstream world, such as *alienation*: feelings of estrangement, and *purity*: a view of the outside world as contaminant, a danger. The keywords also encompassed fairly specific answers to the question Why Publish?, cataloguing responses like *control*: publishing as an act of control over creativity, *connection*: publishing as a way of connecting to other individuals, and *identity*: zines as an expression of an individual uniqueness and importance. In addition, I used words that I felt captured a zine ethic, such as *DIY*: the philosophy of do-it-yourself, *authenticity*: an almost indescribable essence of non-instrumentality and sincerity, and *scene*: the creation of community within mass society. I was also interested in concepts that captured the place of zines within the producer's life, and characteristics of that life, these included words such as *d-career*: zines as a stepping stone in a career

of deviance, its opposite: *s-career*: zines as a training ground for a life in the mainstream, and *p-career*: zines as part of a politicization process on the part of the individual. And finally I used keywords that simply characterized important phenomenon within the world of zines, like *Factsheet Five*: discussions of the history, meaning, and importance of this institution, *women*: examples of and discussions on the importance of zines for women, and *organization*: nascent organizations beginning within the zine world. By the end of my coding I had come up with approximately seventy keywords.

Reading over the keywords above it is obvious that as much as I would like to believe that these concepts arose from the material "organically," they did not. Each of these words bears the stamp of my overall political and intellectual concerns. In the post-Foucaultian intellectual world this is recognized as a given in any research project. To the best of my ability, however, I attempted to let the material speak to me, and then having come up with a keyword, let it test itself. I came up with many keywords that simply went by the wayside, for as I went on with my research I realized that some did not fit the material and discarded them. Other words came to me mid-way into my coding, explaining and categorizing a recurrent theme that had previously been clumsily grouped under another term or, hazy and amorphous, not classified at all.

I tried to look at the keywords as a map. Where they were useful in describing the contours of the material I kept them, where they were not I let them go. By coming up with a great number of keywords and using them as a mapping exercise I found could stay close to the material. While the keywords certainly were abstractions, they constituted relatively small leaps from the empirical to the theoretical. In other words,

by using a great number of disposable keywords I had less investment in making the material *fit* already worked out and developed arguments than I otherwise would have had I gone in armed with specific topics and chapter headings.¹

These keywords also allowed me to organize my material efficiently. All my notes, paragraph by paragraph, were coded with an appropriate word, or more likely, words, and saved in my computer. With the help of a sophisticated database software package, I would type in a keyword and immediately all files that included this word would scroll up on the screen. Then, as I selected each file, the paragraph or paragraphs that included the keyword would appear in their entirety. This system kept me from literally getting lost in the ocean of data I had collected over a number of years.

The next stage was to take all of these keywords and the issues and concepts they represented and begin to combine them together in meaningful links. In the end these strings of concepts were my chapters. To tell the truth some of the chapters surprised me. While I knew fairly early on that I would cover the discovery of the world of zines by the commercial culture and the overall politics of underground culture, the chapter headings on the Individual, Community, Work, and Consumption, as well as the overall theme of alienation in this section, were more or less "forced" upon me by the material.

As I had done with the keywords, with these chapters I made a conscious effort to move back and forth between the theoretical frames and the empirical data, asking questions with each move: Does this theoretical frame really help explain the data I am presenting? And conversely, Does the empirical material really support the theoretical points I am putting forth? This back and forth process is not a science--although the

inductive/deductive procedure is a part of all sciences--but rather a dialectical art, a balancing act. It is a very careful performance in which the researcher tries to keep a balance between the particular material reality of the empirical data and the more general and abstract theories with which will explain that data in a way that makes the research relevant to the larger world.²

What would the subjects themselves say about their disciplining at my hands? As the letter to the editor that I began this chapter with suggests, *any* classification is an anathema to some zine creators. And there is no doubt that as careful as I was in being sensitive to the "natural" classifications within the world of zines, the final categorizations are my own. And these classifications and the theoretical frames which I have used to explore and explain this phenomenon bare the heavy mark of my philosophical and political concerns; biases which I have been quite open about throughout this thesis. As much as I may have been tempted at times to merely throw a stack of zines on a table and let the reader decide for themselves what they are all about, I also realize that besides being impossible, such an act is an abdication of the responsibility and job of the researcher. And simply reporting the topics of zines and the words of zine writers themselves, with no attempt at analyzing them, is the same. I have laid out some of my ideas to those active in the zine world and for the most part the responses have been positive. However, in the last analysis, the validity of how I have disciplined this undisciplined world and the cogence of the way in which I have described and made sense of the politics of zines and underground culture is for the reader him or herself to decide.

1. This strategy of *mapping* as a stage in a research project was suggested to me by Bob Alford and is discussed at greater length in his upcoming book *Crafting Social Science*.
2. Again, the help of Bob Alford and my colleagues in his Logics of Inquiry seminar at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York was invaluable in helping me keep my balance over these twin bottomless pits of the empirical and the theoretical.

Appendix A

- How Would You Describe _____?
- How Would You Describe Zines?
- Production and Distribution of _____ --lead me through it
 - * # people involved: writing, photos ?
 - * criteria for editing? all writing yourself, friends, open submission
 - * # circulated, how often ?
 - * Appropriated materials and services?

- How Long Have You Been Doing This?
- What Got You Started Writing/Publishing?

- Big Question: Why Do You Do It?

_____ Specifics pertaining to individual Zine:

(written in for each separate interview)

- Who Are You Writing To? Are You Reaching Them?
- What is Success?
- Would you Like to Become a Mass Publication?
- How Much Contact Do You Have With Other Writers?, NETWORK??
- Is it a "Movement"?
 - What Kind?, What For?, What Against?
- If Political: What is your vision of a better world?
- Do You Read/Watch Straight Media? Does it Influence Your Stuff?
- Are You Active In Other Arenas -- Music, Video, Art, Computers, Politics?
- What Do You Do To Make a Living?
- Ideal Job?
 - desire to be a straight writer?

_____ - Important Things About Zines that I Left Out?

DEMOGRAPHICS: Age?
 Education?
 Parent's Jobs?

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Dead Kennedys, *Fresh Fruit For Rotting Vegetables*, I.R.S. Records, 1981.

Nirvana, *Nevermind*, Geffen Records, 1991.

Nirvana, *In Utero*, Geffen Records, 1993.

Pavement, *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain*, Matador Records, 1994.

The Who, *Quadrophenia*, MCA Records, 1973.

Zines

note: zines marked **FS5-NYSL** are from the Factsheet Five Collection, Manuscripts and Special Collections, New York State Library.

7 Aardvarks for Alice, Santa Mike, #2, 1992, Portsmouth, NH.

8-Track Mind, Gordon Van Gelder, Spring 1992, Warren, MI.

Action Girl Newsletter, Sarah, #7, 1994, Staten Island, NY.

Alligator Grundy Captions Wonder, R.J. Molloy, v.1, #1, 1991, Shingletown, CA.

America's at our Doorstep, Dennis W. Brezini, v.IV #s 4-5, 1991-92, Churchton, MD.

Another Pair of Shoes, J., #8, 1992, Minneapolis, MN.

Answer Me!, Jim and Debbie Goad, early-mid 1990s, LA, CA.

Ash, David R. Wyder, #8, Summer 1991, Pasaic, NJ.

ARTichoke, Simon Taylor, #1, 1985, College Park, MD.

Artichoke, Karin Falcone, early 1990s, Albany, NY.

Bad Newz, Bob Z., #16, early 1990s, SF, CA.

- Bad Seed*, Kicks Magazine. #s 1-5, 1984-88, NYC.
- balcony of ignorance*, Claude Bottom, #8, Summer 1990, Newmarket, NH.
- Beer Frame*, Paul Lukas, #1, 1994?, Brooklyn, NY.
- Ben is Dead*, Darby, et al., #12, April 1991, LA, CA (FS5-NYSL).
- Bikini Kill*, Kathleen Hannah, #2, Washington, D.C.
- Bitch*, Lori Twersky, #s 4-19, 1985-88, Campbell, CA, (FS5-NYSL).
- Boiled Angel*, Mike Diana, #5, 1990, Largo, FL (FS5-NYSL).
- Book Your Own Fuckin' Life*, Maximumrocknroll and Profane Existence, Underdog Records, and Rocco Publishing, #s 1-3, 1992-94.
- Box of 64*, Stacy Estep, #1, May 1994, Atlanta, GA.
- Black Leather Times*, Amelia G., v.3, #2, early 1990s, Githersberg, MD.
- The NEW Bloated Tick*, Paul W. Dion, v.5, #7, 1991, South Grafton, MA.
- Blue Persuasion*, Aaron Lee, #4, 1994, Lexington, KY.
- Bunyon*, Robert Dayton, #4, October 1993, Vancouver, BC.
- Budzine*, John "Bud" Banks, #s 1-21, May 1993-August 1995. Tucson, AZ.
- The Catbox Room*, Lisa Maslowe, #1, July 1993, SF, CA.
- Chair's Missing*, Scott Munroe, April 1994, Stratford, CT.
- Cheap Douchebag*, Jason Page, #16, early 1990s, Hollywood, FL.
- Ched*, Anne Marie DiStefano and Adam Moore, #2, October 28, 1993, Portland, OR.
- Cool Loser*, Wendy and Monica, #2, no date, Rancho Palos Verdos, CA (FS5-NYSL).
- Colorblind*, Kristin, Corky, and Mike, ARA/Syndicate, #1, 1989, Chicago, IL (FS5-NYSL).

- Cometbus*, Aaron, #31, early 1990s, Berkeley, CA.
- Copyright Violation*, David Sokal, 1981, Seattle, WA.
- Cramped and Wet*, Rob Treinen, no date, Sioux City, IA, (FS5-NYSL).
- Crank*, Jeff Koyen, #4, 1995, NYC.
- Crash*, Miles Poindexter and John Labovitz, 1993, SF, CA.
- Dead Star*, Future Tense Publishing, John Wayne Gacy issue, #4, 1994, Portland, OR.
- Decontrol*, Crash Rats, no date, Duluth, GA.
- Designing New Civilizations*, v.7, #4, April 1991, Encino, CA (FS5-NYSL)
- Dirt*, Time-Warner Inc., #s 50-56, 1994, The World.
- Dumpster Dive*, John Bomb Coletti, #7, 1993?, Norwalk, CT.
- Duplex Planet*, David B. Greenberger, #112, 1991, Saratoga Springs, NY.
- Dishwasher*, Pete, #s1-18, early 1990s-1995, Portland, OR.
- Diseased Pariah News*, Forge of God Press, #3, 1991, SF, CA.
- Egg*, Phil Franklin, #8, Summer 1989, Boston, MA.
- The Elana Rosa Veiga Torres Newsletter for this World and Beyond*, Josh Abelon, v.1, #1, July 7, 1991, Claremont, CA.
- Eleventh Pin*, Cyclone Productions, #2, 1991, Dayton, OH.
- Emit*, Mole, #1, November-December, 1993, North Vancouver, B.C.
- Exact Change*, Eldon Potter, #3, September 1991, St. Paul, MN.
- Exercise with Alcohol*, Bruce Clifton, 1994, Portland, OR.
- Exformation*, anon., #s 1 & 2, 1993-94, Brooklyn, NY.
- Face: Tools for a Network*, Mark Corroto, #6, 1993, Youngstown, OH.

Factsheet Five, Mike Gunderloy, (later joined by Cari Goldberg Janice), #s 1-44, 1982-91, Rennselaer, NY (FS5-NYSL).

Factsheet Five, Hudson Luce, #45, 1991, Atlanta, GA.

Factsheet Five, R. Seth Friedman, #s 46-57, 1992-95, SF, CA.

Fanmail, Barry Kramer, April 1991, Mechanicsburg, PA (FS5-NYSL).

Feh, Sam Andreeff, assorted, early-mid 1990s, Toronto, Ont.

Femzine, Melanie Maria Aguila, #1, late 1980s, Toronto, Ont. (FS5-NYSL).

Fenceclimber, Josh MacPhee, #2, early 1990s, Oberlin, OH.

Finster, KJ, Erin, Rebecca and Mary, #3, 1992, Arcata, CA.

A Fistful of Zen, Clayton Kennedy, 1990, San Carlos, CA (FS5-NYSL).

Flipside, Al and Hud, #s 28,44, 1982,1984, Whittier, CA.

Forever and a Day, anon. #7, 1993, Seattle, WA.

Fractal Report, Reeves Telecommunications Labs, #25, February 1993, Cornwall, UK.

Frederick's Lament, Pollination Press, 1991, Harvest, AL.

From Sunday to Saturday, Don Fitch, v.93, #s77-8, 1993, Covina, CA.

Fugitive Pope, Raleigh Clayton Muns, v.2, #3, May 1991, LA, CA (FS5-NYSL).

Function, Dawn, #8, 1993?, Seattle, WA.

Gamma-Ray Universe, anon., #00-1, 1994?, Ithica, NY.

Gaybee, Missy Lavalee and Joe, #s 2,3, early 1990s, Portland, ME.

Global Mail, Ashley Parker Owens, #8, May-August 1994, Chicago, IL.

Gogglebox, Jennifer, #4, Winter 1995, NYC.

Goldstein: A Newsletter About Me. Paul, Paul Goldstein, 1992, Long Island City, NY.

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- Hardcry*, Steven "Hardcory" Cervantes, #1, 1990, Whittier, CA (FS5-NYSL).
- Hell Bound*, Jennifer Beard, et al., #7, June 17, 1993, Olympia, WA.
- Hex*, Jane, #1, 1993, Olympia, WA.
- Holy Titclamps*, Larry-Bob Roberts, 1995, SF, CA.
- Homocore*, Tom Jennings, #s 1-7, September 1988-February 1991, SF, CA (FS5-NYSL).
- Howhywuz, Howhyam*, Josh Norek, 1992, Albany, NY area.
- I, Yeast Roll*, S. McPheeters, #78, October, 1993, Richmond, VA.
- The I Hate Brenda Newsletter*, the folks at Ben is Dead, 1993, Hollywood, CA.
- The I Hate People Gazette*, Kevin Person, Jr., #5, early 1990s, Pennsauken, NJ.
- The Incredible Flaming Mechanism*, Jasper Albeeny, #4, September 1994, San Antonio, TX.
- instead of A-magazine*, v.11, #53-54, Spring 1992, Willimantic, CT.
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- Inverted-A HORN*, Amnon and Aya Katz, #5, December 28, 1991, Houston, TX.
- J.D.s*, Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones, #8, 1991, Toronto, Ont. (FS5-NYSL).
- Judy!*, Ingrid Sischy, v.1, #1, Spring 1993, Iowa City, IA.
- Kill Your Television*, anon. #4, July 1994, Oberlin, OH.
- Lan's Lantern*, George "Lan" Laskowski, #34, 1990, Bloomfield Hills, MI, (FS5-NYSL).
- The Latest News*, Jen Payne, v.4, #2, Summer 1992, Clinton, CT.
- Leisure*, anon., no date, no number, Wales, U.K. (FS5-NYSL).
- Letter Parade*, Bonnie Jo, February 1990, Comstock, MI (FS5-NYSL).

- Little Free Press*, Ernest Mann, #90, Minneapolis, MN.
- Locust*, Vortex Publications, no date, Seattle, WA, (FS5-NYSL).
- Loring Punk*, Patrick Splat, #1, 1993, Minneapolis, MN.
- Losers*, Raven, #2, no date, Polk, LA (FS5-NYSL).
- Maximumrocknroll*, Tim Yohannan, #s 1-129, 1982-94, SF, CA (FS5-NYSL).
- Meanwhile...*, Don and Steve Steinberg, Premiere Issue, Spring 1991, Philadelphia, PA.
- Megamegadoggylogtwo*, Qvimby's Qveer Store, 1995, Chicago, IL.
- Minions of Evil*, anon., 1992?, Middletown, CT.
- Ministry of Cognizance*, Rodney E. Griffith, Oed, #s 1-4, December 1988-May 1989, Columbia Station, OH (FS5-NYSL).
- Mongrel*, Richie Narvaez, #1, early 1990s, Brooklyn, NY.
- Murder Can Be Fun*, Johnny Marr, #s 1-7, late 1980s, SF, CA.
- Murtaugh*, Spike Vrusho, #10, 1993?, Brooklyn, NY.
- No Longer a Fanzine*, Joseph A. Gervasi, #s 1,3,4, 1992-94, Blackwood, NJ.
- Notes from the Dump*, Terry Ward, #s 216 and still counting, early-mid 1990s, Acworth, NH.
- Notes from the Earth*, Robert DuPree, v.1, #1, Summer 1993, Vancouver, WA.
- Notes from the Lighthouse*, Joshua, #7, early 1990s, Eureka, CA.
- Notes from Underground*, Stephen Duncombe, #2, 1993, NYC.
- Obscure*, Jim Romenesko, #24, 1993?, Milwaukee, WI.
- Oh Cool Scene Zine*, anon., no date, no address (FS5-NYSL).
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- Orangutan Balls*, Freedom (Right Nut), #s 1-5, 1991-92, Staten Island, NY.

- Past Deadline*, R.B. Hudson, v.1, #3, Summer 1991, Troy, NY.
- Pathetic Life*, Pathetic Doug, #11, April 1995, SF, CA.
- Philly Zine*, Joseph A. Gervasi, #11, Summer 1992, Blackwood, NJ.
- Pills-a-go-go*, Jim Hogshire, Spring 1993, Seattle, WA.
- Pinto*, Tina Herschelman, Sara Lorimer, and Paul Schuster, #4, 1993, Olympia, WA.
- Po*, M. Wolstat, #14, 1993, Portsmouth, NH.
- Pool Dust*, Jack Patten, #20, 1993, Seattle, WA.
- Poor Doggie*, anon., no date, Cambridge, MA, (FS5-NYSL).
- Punk and Destroy*, David Alford, #1, late 1980s-early 90s, Beaverton, OR (FS5-NYSL).
- Punk Pals*, Robert Brown, March 1990, Berkeley, CA (FS5-NYSL).
- Queer Magnolia*, C. Nash, #40, late 1980s-early 90s, Lansing, MI, (FS5-NYSL).
- Queer Zine Explosion*, Larry-Bob Roberts, #13, 1994, SF, CA.
- Quipo*, Vicki Rosenzweig, #1, 1993, NYC.
- Quitter Quarterly*, Shelly Ross, #1, 1995, Brooklyn, NY.
- Radio Free Thulcandra*, Marty Helgesen, #23, November 1990, Malverne, NY, (FS5-NYSL).
- Reactor*, David J. Prince, #6, 1993, Chicago, IL.
- Reality Manifesto*, Mickey Z., 1993, Apathy Press: Baltimore, MD.
- Rhode Islanduh*, Heidi Branton, Olympia, WA.
- Riot Grrrl*, Jen Devosb et al., #3, May 1992, Amherst, MA.
- Riot Grrrl*, Ananada, #5, March 1993, NYC.
- Riot Grrrl*, Ne Tantillo, #6 1/2, December 1991, Arlington, VA.

- Riot Grrrl*, anon., #8, 1992?, Washington, D.C.
- Riot Grrrl, Huh?*, Allison, 1991?, Olympia, Wa.
- Riot Grrrl Newsletter One*, Dawn, 1991?, Newburry Park, CA.
- Riot Grrrl Press*, May and Erika, July 1993?, Arlington, VA; Mary, September-November, 1994?, Washington D.C.
- Roller Sports Report*, Fred Argoff, #s 35-9, 1993, Brooklyn, NY.
- Roulez*, Brett Sonnenschein, v.1, #2, Summer 1993, Jersey City, NJ.
- RSVP*, Tad Davies, November 1993, Manhattan Beach, CA.
- Sabot Times*, Louis Lane, #1, April 1992, Seattle, WA.
- Sauce*, Zak Sally and Mike Haeg, 1993, Oakland, CA.
- Scrambled Eggs*, Nate Wilson, #1, 1993, Albany, NY.
- Second Guess*, Bob, #7, Summer 1993, Reno, NV.
- Shithappy*, Adam Bregman, #3, 1993(?), LA, CA.
- Short Fuse*, anon., #58, 1994, Santa Barbara, CA.
- Show-me Blowout!*, Bebop Dickerson, #2, 1988, Columbia, MO.
- Skinned Alive*, Concerning Heretix, #1, 1987, Murrieta, CA. (FS5-NYSL).
- Sneezing Jesus*, Queen Itchie, #8, early 1990s, Sherburne, NY.
- Slug & Lettuce*, Christine Boarts, #s 18-29, early 1990s, NYC.
- Slut Utopia*, Lizzard Amazon, #8, early 1990s, San Jose, CA.
- STET*, Leah Zeldes Smith, November 1990, Wheeling, IL, (FS5-NYSL).
- Stuff and Nonsense*, Andrew Johnston, #2, 1993, NYC.
- SubGenius Pamphlet #1*, "Bob" Dobbs, 1981, Dallas, TX.
- Sweet Jesus*, Franetta L. McMillian, #s 1-4, early 1990s, Newark, DE.

- Teen Fag*, Gordon Gordon, #2, Fall 1992, Seattle, WA.
- Temp Slave*, Keffo, #s 1-4, early 1990s to 1995, Madison, WI.
- Time to Organize*, Jane Guskin, #1, 1994, Elmhurst, NY.
- Under the Volcano*, Richard Black, #20, 1994, Nesconset, NY.
- Watch the Closing Doors*, Fred Argoff, v.1, #s 1-6, 1991, Brooklyn, NY.
- Watley-Browne Review*, Kali Amanda Browne, #1, Brooklyn, NY.
- The Weird News*, Donald F. Busky, #12, Winter 1992, Philadelphia, PA.
- Welcome to the World of Insurance*, Keffo, early 1990s, Bethlehem, PA.
- Whole Fanzine Catalogue*, Brian Earl Brown, #18/19, March 1981 (FS5-NYSL).
- The Wiccan Voice*, Marjorie Talarico, #1, November/December 1987, Oceanside, CA, (FS5-NYSL).
- William Wants a Doll*, Arielle Greenberg, #s 2 & 3, 1993, New Hyde Park, NY.
- Work*, Jean Railla, #2, 1994, LA, CA.
- Writer's Block*, Mike Appelstein, #8, late 1991/early 1992, Spotswood, NJ.
- You Own A Wonderful Machine, Your Body*, Michael Dixon, 1992, Chicago, IL.
- Your Name Here*, Graham Fenderson Trieval, early 1990s, Lionville, PA.

Interviews

- Sam Andreeff, personal correspondence, March 11, 1994; *Feh*.
- Fred Argoff, personal interview, March, 15, 1993, Brooklyn, NY; *Watch the Closing Doors*, *Roller Sports Report*, and *Brooklyn*.
- Marc Arsenault, telephone interview, December 12, 1993; *Andy's Chair* and *Wow Cool* Distribution.
- Billie Aul, Debbie Hirsch, Catherine Sullivan, and Tim Smith, group interview, January 20, 1994, Albany, NY; science fiction fans.

- John "Bud" Banks, personal correspondence, January 14, 1994; *Budzine*.
- Doug Biggert, telephone interview, October 4, 1993; zine buyer for nation-wide Tower Record and Book Chain.
- Christine Boarts, personal interview, July 12, 1993, NYC; *Slug & Lettuce*.
- Kali Amanda Browne, personal interview, June 22, 1992, NYC; *Watley-Browne Review*.
- Patrick Clark, personal correspondence, March 31, 1994; *Interference on the Brain Screen*.
- Scott Cunningham, personal interview, September 1, 1993; *World War III*, curator of the Samizdat Show in Brooklyn, NY.
- Mike Diana, telephone interview, May 13, 1994; *Boiled Angel*.
- Karin Falcone, personal interview, May 28, 1993, Albany, NY; *Artichoke*.
- Don Fitch, personal correspondence, April 22, 1994; *From Sunday to Saturday*.
- Stuart Frankel, personal interview, June 6, 1992, NYC; *Penumbra*.
- Freedom, personal interview, June 13, 1992, NYC; *Orangutan Balls*.
- R. Seth Friedman, telephone interview, September 21, 1993; *Factsheet Five*.
- Arielle Greenberg, personal interview, August 25, 1993, NYC, follow up telephone interview, March 28, 1994; *William Wants a Doll*.
- Mike Gunderloy, personal interview, December 6, 1992, NYC; and follow ups; *Factsheet Five*.
- Jane Guskin, personal interview, February 4, 1993; former *Maximumrocknroll* columnist, current political activist.
- Ed Hamilton, personal correspondence, 1994; self-publisher and zine reader.
- Tina Herschelman, Sara Lorimer, and Paul Schuster, group interview, December 29, 1993, Olympia, WA; *Pinto*.
- Tad Hirsch, e-mail correspondence, September 18, 1994; *What?* Distribution.

John Klima, personal interview, December 30, 1993, Seattle, WA; *Day and Age*.

Missy Lavalee, personal correspondence, January 19, 1993; *Gaybee*, *Kittums*.

Paul Lucas, telephone interview, February 13, 1994; *Beer Frame*.

Ian Lynam, personal interview, May, 29, 1993, Albany, NY; *Pansy*.

Franetta McMillian, telephone interview, November 11, 1993; *Sweet Jesus*.

Mark Morelli, personal correspondence, 1993; zine reader.

Ashley Parker Owens, e-mail correspondence, June 4, 1994; *Global Mail* and *ARG*.

Jason Page, telephone interview, October 30, 1993; *Cheap Douchebag*

Stephen Perkins, telephone interview, November 4, 1993; runs *Subspace* and curator of zine shows in Iowa City.

Dishwashin' Pete, telephone interview, March 30, 1994; follow up personal interview, June 21, 1995, NYC; *Dishwasher*.

Roxxie, telephone interview, June 23, 1994; *Girljock*.

Gregg Ruggiero and Stu Suhulka, telephone interview, October 13, 1993; *Open Magazine* and *Open Magazine Pamphlet Series*.

Roy SanFilippo, personal interview, April 16, 1994, NYC; political activist.

Max Schuman, personal interview, September 4, 1993, NYC; general manager of Printed Matter art book store and gallery in NYC.

Simon Taylor, personal interview, September 6, 1993, NYC; *ARTichoke*.

Terry Ward, telephone interview, December, 12, 1993; *Notes from the Dump*

Dan Werle, telephone interview, December 15, 1992; *Manumission*.

Kate Wolfe, personal correspondence, November 1993; zine reader.

Tim Yohannan, telephone interview, May 14, 1994; *Maximumrocknroll*.