# NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND:

zines

and the politics of
alternative culture

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Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture

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ONE
ZINES

But what are they? That's the first question I'm usually asked when I start to talk about zines. My initial, and probably correct, impulse is to hand over a stack of zines and let the person asking the question decide, 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 to hang out and work 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 and part of a subcultural scene. 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, piled precariously on the coffee table, buried under old pizza boxes, forgotten in the cracks of the sofa, were scruffy, homemade little pamphlets. Little publications filled with rantings of high weirdness and exploding with chaotic design. *Zines*. Although I knew about zines from my days spent in the punk scene, I had never really given them much time or thought. Now, with plenty of time, I spent hours going through them.

I was awestruck. Somehow these little smudged pamphlets carried within them the honesty, kindness, anger, the beautiful inarticulate articulateness, the uncompromising *life* that I had discovered (and lost) in music, then

later radical politics, years ago. Against the studied hipness of music and style magazines, the pabulum of mass newsweeklies, and the posturing of academic journals, here was something completely different.

In zines, everyday oddballs were speaking plainly about themselves and our society with an honest sincerity, a revealing intimacy, and a healthy "fuck you" to sanctioned authority – for no money and no recognition, writing for an audience of like-minded misfits. Later I picked up a thick journal crammed with zine reviews called *Factsheet Five*, leafed through their listings, and sent off for hundreds of zines. I discovered tens of thousands more at the zine archive housed in the New York State Library. I even began to publish my own zine and traded mine for others. As I dug through mountains of these piquant publications, a whole world that I had known nothing about opened up to me. It was incredibly varied: zines came in more shapes, styles, subjects, and qualities than one would imagine. But there was something remarkable that bound together this new world I had stumbled upon: a radically democratic and participatory ideal of what culture and society might be... *ought* to be.

In an era marked by the rapid centralization of corporate media, zines are independent and localized, coming out of cities, suburbs and small towns across the US, assembled on kitchen tables. They celebrate the everyperson in a world of celebrity. Losers in a society that rewards the best and the brightest. Rejecting the corporate dream of an atomized population broken down into discrete and instrumental target markets, zine writers form networks and forge communities around diverse identities and interests. Employed within the grim new economy of service, temporary, and "flexible" work, they redefine work, setting out their creative labor done on zines as a protest against the drudgery of working for another's profit.

Defining themselves against a society predicated on consumption, zinesters privilege the ethic of DIY, do-it-yourself: make your own culture and stop consuming that which is made for you. Refusing to believe the pundits and politicians who assure us that the laws of the market are synonymous with the laws of nature, the zine community is busy creating a culture whose value isn't calculated as profit and loss on ruled ledger pages, but is assembled in the margins, using criteria like control, connection, and authenticity.

I came to realize that, considered in their totality, zines weren't the capricious ramblings of isolated cranks (though some certainly were), but the

variegated voices of a subterranean world staking out its identity through the cracks of capitalism and in the shadows of the mass media.

Zines are speaking to and for an underground culture. And while other groups of individuals come together around the shared creation of their own culture, what distinguishes zinesters from garden-variety hobbyists is their political self-consciousness. Many zinesters consider what they do an alternative to and strike against commercial culture and consumer capitalism. They write about this openly in their zines. What was amazing to me, coming from years of sterile academic and political debates on the Left, in which culture was often in the past dismissed as irrelevant to the "real struggle," was that zines seemed to form a true culture of resistance. Their way of seeing and doing was not borrowed from a book, nor was it carefully cross-referenced and cited; rather it was, if you'll forgive the word, organic. It was a vernacular radicalism, an indigenous strain of utopian thought.

I began my study of zines in earnest near the end of the 12-year conservative drive of the Reagan/Bush era. Against this juggernaut, the radical political opposition, in which I was an active participant, acted out a tragedy seemingly unchanged for decades. One variant went as follows: Leaders organize a "mass" demonstration. We march. We chant. Fringe groups hawk their ridiculous papers. Speakers are paraded onto the dais to tell us what we already know. We hope the mainstream media puts us on the news for five seconds. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. Nothing seems to change. Certainly there were lively and successful models of demonstration and organization, like those of ACT UP in its heyday or the WTO protest. But these stand out against the relative failure of the rest. The social movements of the decade that spoke the language and captured the imagination of the public were those not of the Left, but of the Right.

In zines I saw the seeds of a different possibility: a novel form of communication and creation that burst with an angry idealism; a medium that spoke for a marginal, yet vibrant culture, that along with others, might invest the tired script of progressive politics with meaning and excitement for a new generation. Perhaps most important, zines were a success story. Throughout the 1980s while the Left was left behind, crumbling and attracting few new converts, zines and underground culture grew by leaps and bounds, resonating deeply with disaffected young people. As a punk rocker, Left politico, and scholar of culture, I was intrigued by their success. Perhaps, I thought to myself, zines were the crack in the seemingly impenetrable wall of the system; a culture spawning the

next wave of meaningful resistance.

And so I decided to make the politics of zines and underground culture the focus of my study. By politics in this case I mean simply what zine writers articulate, either explicitly, or as is often the case implicitly as being the problems of the present cultural, economic, and political system; what they imagine and create as possible solutions to these problems; and what strategies and chances they have for actualizing these ideals on both a small and a large scale.

As I spent more time with zines and zine writers, immersed in this underground world, I realized there was a minor flaw in my theory/ fantasy of underground culture as vanguard of world revolution. Witnessing this incredible explosion of radical cultural dissent, I couldn't help but notice that as all this radicalism was happening underground. The world above was moving in the opposite direction. The election of a president who "felt our pain" notwithstanding, politics were becoming more conservative and power was becoming more concentrated. More disturbing was that zines and underground culture didn't seem to be any sort of threat to this aboveground world. Quite the opposite: "alternative" culture was being celebrated in the mainstream media and used to create new styles and profits for the commercial culture industry. The history of all rebellious cultural and political movements is the history of the unavoidable contradiction of staking out new ground within and through the landscape of the past. But today this laying of claims may be harder than ever. No longer is there a staid bourgeoisie to confront with avant-garde art or a square America to shock with countercultural values; instead there is a sophisticated marketing machine which gobbles up anything novel and recreates it as product for a niche market. When the *New York Times* gushes over zines, when punk

ABSOLUTELY ZIPPO'S SUBURBAN ESCAPE

feminist Riot Grrrls are profiled in *Newsweek*, when "alternative" rock gets its own show on MTV, and when the so-called Generation X becomes an identifiable and lucrative market in the eyes of the editors of *Business Week* and *Advertising Age*, rebelling through culture becomes exceedingly problematic. The underground is discovered and cannibalized almost before it exists. Alternative culture was discovered not just by the entertainment industry but by the academy as well, particularly by radical scholars, much like myself, looking for the latest historical agent to hang their political hopes, or blame their failures, upon. In the academic world, however, there has been a lot of sloppy thinking about the relationship between culture and politics. Critics have invested capitalist ideology with a totalizing power and reach, arguing that all cultural expressions are inevitably expressions of the logic of the status quo. Or more recently, they do the opposite and make the most outrageous liberatory political claims for the most banal of cultural acts. My purpose here is not to extol or dismiss for scholarship or social change gains from neither, but to *understand* the politics of zines and underground culture.

FUNCTION ZINE

The powers that be do not sustain their legitimacy by convincing people that the current system is The Answer. That fiction would be too difficult to sustain in the face of so much evidence to the contrary. What they must do, and what they have done very effectively, is convince the mass of people that *there is no alternative*. What I want to argue in the following pages is that zines and underground culture offer up an alternative, a way of understanding and acting in the world that operates with different rules and upon different values than those of consumer capitalism. It is an alternative fraught with contradictions and limitations ...but also possibilities. We can learn from both.

But what are they? Try again: zines are noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators pro-

duce, publish, and distribute by themselves. While shaped by the long history of alternative presses in the United States, zines as a distinct medium were born in the 1930s. It was then that fans of science fiction, often through the clubs they founded, began producing what they called "fanzines" as a way of sharing science fiction stories and critical commentary, and of communicating with one another. Forty years later, in the mid-1970s, the other defining influence on modern-day zines began as fans of punk rock music, ignored by and critical of the mainstream music press, started printing fanzines about their music and 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 sixties and seventies, were brought together and crossfertilized 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 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*.[1]

GENESIS: SCIENCE FICTION FANZINES, *SNIDE*, 1940

When I think of the typical citizen of this world, I see in my mind Christine Boarts, the 35-year-old editor of *Slug & Lettuce*. Dressed in black from head to foot, hair multi-hued dreadlocks, rings lining her ears and nose, tattoos circling her wrist and gracing her shoulder, she still thinks of herself as shy and quiet, the weird girl who sat at the back of the class in high school, in a town where "there was nothing goin' down at all." But, as the Velvet Underground song

THE SECOND WAVE OF PUNK, 1976

goes, "you know, her life was saved by rock & roll."[2]

It was in the small punk scene in the central Pennsylvania college town where Chris grew up that she found a community (outside her liberal family) where "it was okay that I wasn't like everyone," and it was through her zine that she forged connections to the larger underground scene which gave her the "inspiration and direction" to chart a course for herself outside the mainstream. Surviving on a shoestring, she has just put out her eightieth issue of *S&L*, fitting it in someplace between organizing punk shows, shooting photos of live bands, crisscrossing the country in a van, and developing photos as her primary job. Living on the outskirts of a society that equates success with material acquisition, status, and stability, Chris is poor, marginalized, and perfectly happy.[3] Most zinesters are young and the children of professionals, culturally if not financially middle-class. White and raised in a relatively privileged position within the dominant culture, they have since embarked on "careers" of deviance that have moved them to the edges of this society; embracing downwardly mobile career aspirations, unpopular musical and literary tastes, transgressive ideas about sexuality, unorthodox artistic sensibilities, and a politics resolutely outside the status quo (more often to the left, but sometimes to the right). Like Chris, they're simply "not interested" in the "big game" that is the straight world. In short, zine writers and readers, although they'd be horrified to be tagged with such a pat term, are what used to be called bohemians.

It is white, middle-class culture, and its discontents, that informs zines and underground culture. But since one of the attributes of zines is their diversity and unpredictability, the portrait of a young, white, formerly middle-class bohemian looks less and less representative the further one delves into the world of zines. Not all zinesters are young: much older writers like Los Angeles Science Fiction (SF) fan Don Fitch, who describes his age as "76 going on 17," put out zines like *From Sunday to Saturday*. Some zinesters, like Freedom, a Staten Island highschooler who publishes *Orangutan Balls*, are working-class. And Franetta McMillian, an African-American woman from Delaware, publishes *Sweet Jesus*, while two Los Angeles Chicanos, Lalo Lopez and Estaban Zul, put out *Pocho* "Kickin' Butt for La Raza" *Magazine*.[4]

Zine publishers are identified less by who they are, then, and more by what they believe; the best description of one 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 twentieth 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.[5]

"The whimsy of conventional tastes and choices" certainly plays little part in the subjects picked by these writers, whose zines span almost every field, from the sublime to the ridiculous, making a detour through the unfathomable. But one thing gives coherence to this eclecticism: zinesters' fascination with the margins. These may be the margins of literature or music, explored through a science fiction fanzine like *STET* or the punk rock *Philly Zine*. Or perhaps the perimeter of politics surveyed through the anarchist essays of *instead of A magazine*, the conservative libertarian rants of *Inverted-A HORN*, or *Finster's* feminist-infused stories, opinions, and photo-collages.

In the gay safe-sex *Diseased Pariah News* the borders of "acceptable" sexuality are scouted, as they are in the soft-core poetry and pornography of *Ash* and the harder-core *Black Leather Times*. Numerous zines obsessively catalog the ephemera of the past: *Show-Me Blowout* unearths long-dead Missouri garage bands from the fifties and sixties; *8-Track Mind* is devoted to eight-track tape trivia; *Bad Seed* researches JD, juvenile delinquency, pulp novels and lurid teen exploitation films; and *Past Deadline* reprints nineteenth century newspaper articles. Other writers, turning their attention to the ephemera of the present, celebrate the edges of modern consumer culture through satirical reviews of banal products in zines such as *Meanwhile* and *Beer Frame*. The unaffected drawings, poems, and ideas of a young woman in the *Watley-Browne Review*, and the mental meanderings of the residents of an old age home recorded in *Duplex Planet*, chart the boundaries of artistic expression. And even the margins of sense itself are stretched: by an entire zine of pictures of bowling pins in different settings in *Eleventh Pin*; by the nonsensical photo/text collages of *balcony of ignorance*; or by *Your Name Here*, a zine soliciting a new creator, name, and content for each issue. This hyperspecialization of zines – science fiction, punk rock, eight-track tapes, defunct Missouri garage bands – is a bit misleading, for unlike mainstream "niche market" periodicals, zines don't follow well-laid plans for market penetration or move purposefully in a defined direction courting profitable demographics. 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. 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.[6] "Yikes! *Factsheet Five* arranged in headings/categories? Urgh!!! When zinedom becomes reduced to 'definitions' it loses its soul," one such letter howls.[7]

A typical zine (although "typical" is a problematic term in this context) might start with a highly personalized editorial, then move into a couple of opinionated essays or rants criticizing, describing, or extolling something or other, and then conclude with reviews of other zines, bands, books, and so forth. Spread throughout this would be poems, a story, reprints from the mass press (some for informational value, others as ironic commentary), and a few hand-drawn illustrations or comix. The editor would produce the content him or herself, solicit it from personal friends or zine acquaintances, or, less commonly, gather it through an open call for submissions.[8] Material is also "borrowed": pirated from other zines and the mainstream press, sometimes without credit, often without permission.

The form of the zine lies somewhere between a personal letter and a magazine. Printed on a standard copy machine, folded widthwise to form a folio and stapled in the crease, zines typically run from ten to forty pages. They can, however, run over one hundred pages as *Maximumrocknroll* does, and range from color reproductions and card stock covers, like those of *Fish Taco,* to what was once sent to me by the editor of *Frederick's Lament*: a seemingly random jumble of smudged copies, mass cultural flotsam and jetsam, and written personal statements stuffed into an envelope.

As zines are put together by hand using common materials and technology (do-it-yourself is the prime directive of the zine world) they consequently look the part, with unruly cut-and-paste layout, barely legible type, and uneven reproduction. There are, however, zines with large circulations, like Chris's *Slug & Lettuce,* that are printed professionally on newsprint (at over 1,000 copies this becomes vastly cheaper). The decline in the cost of personal computers and the spread of desktop publishing capability to the smallest of offices (where zinester

employees can "liberate" computer time) have given more and more people access to equipment to put out professional-looking publications.

Zines cost anywhere from nothing to the price of postage to about five dollars, but swapping zines through a barter system is common and 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 traded, sold, or given away at punk rock gigs, conventions, activist conferences, and the like. They are advertised via word of mouth, through other zines' review sections, and through zines like *Zine World* and *Broken Pencil*.

The lifespan of a zine ranges from single-issue "one-shots" to volumes spanning years, with their circulation running from eight copies to *Cometbus*' twelve thousand. But I would estimate two hundred and fifty as the average circulation, as publishers strive for a scale that allows them to have complete control over production and distribution, while maintaining personal contact with their readers.[9] In line with this ideal of publishing intimacy, 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. Enough exceptions exist, however, to break this rule. *Maximumrocknroll,* the long-running punk zine, lists about ninety individuals who helped put out a given issue. True, more than

a## ZINE TAXONOMY

The breadth of zines is vast and any effort to classify and codify them immediately reveals shortcomings. But by looking over the reviews in a number of old issues of *Factsheet Five*, I've come up with the following broad categorizations:

• Fanzines. These are no doubt the largest and oldest category of zines; 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 subcategories:

• Science fiction: Beginning in the 1930s, publications by and for SF fans were the first zines. Now a minority numerically, SF fanzines still make up a solid segment of the zine world.

• Music zines: focused on either a particular band or performer or, more commonly, a specific genre, most often punk or "alternative" rock. This category once made up the largest genre of zines in the United States in the mid 1990s.

• Sports: These are not that big in the United States, but very popular in the UK where football (soccer) zines are an integral part of sporting life. Still, in the USA, fans of baseball, wrestling, skateboarding, roller derby, and women's sports all create zines.

• Television and film zines: focused on entertainment both popular and patently unpopular; 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, some as satire.

•Political zines: These may be broken down into two subgenres:

• Politics with a big *P*. These may be subdivided again according to more or less traditional categories such as: Anarchist, Socialist, Libertarian, Fascist, and "identity" categories such as Feminist and Queer.

• politics with a small *p*. These do not identify explicitly with traditional categories, but with political/cultural critique as a major focus of the zine.

•Personal zines, or perzines: personal diaries open to the public; shared notes on the day-to-day life, thoughts and experiences of the writer.

•Scene zines: These contain news and views on the local music and underground cultural "scene" in the writer's area.

•Network zines: like *Zine World* and *Broken Pencil*, concentrate on reviewing and publicizing other zines, music, art, computer and other underground culture. They serve as nodal points for the bohemian diaspora.

•Fringe culture zines: cover assassination theories and "proof " of secret nefarious undertakings, UFOs, and serial killers. They deal with the standard fare of supermarket tabloids, but explored in much more depth and with far more intelligence and sometimes humor.

•Religious zines: Witches, paganists, and 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: tell the stories of life on the job, whether that job be washing dishes, doing temp work, writing for a newspaper, substitute

half these people are listed as "shitworkers," a category of contributors you normally do not see credited on the mastheads of established magazines, but nevertheless, *Maximumrocknroll* is known for its large, complex, and reasonably efficient production organization. Unlike almost any commercial publication, however, large or small, *MRR* is decidedly non-profit.

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, it is more money to spend putting out the next issue. And, again, there are exceptions. Mike Gunderloy, former editor of *Factsheet Five*, managed to survive by publishing his zine, albeit with eighty-hour work weeks and mercenary forays into computer consulting. R. Seth Friedman, the following editor, was doing the same. 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. In fact the very idea of profiting from a zine is anathema to the underground, bringing with it charges of "selling out."[10]

What zines are expected to provide is an outlet for unfettered expression and a connection to a larger underground world of publishers doing the same. But since virtually no zine writers send their zines to the Library of Congress to be catalogued, get an ISSN, or list themselves in the *Small Press Review* or *The International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses*, it is difficult to determine

exactly how large this world is. Such informed sources as Mike Gunderloy estimate that there are currently at least 10,000–20,000 different zine titles circulating, while others such as Seth Friedman have stretched this number up to 50,000 during zines' peak in 1997.[11] I lean toward the more conservative estimate, but even with 10,000 titles, using the standard magazine readership estimate of three readers per magazine and 250 copies 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 because most zine makers are also zine readers, as part of a whole subculture, and tend to read numerous zines, the real number is certainly lower, most likely in the 500,000-750,000 range.

When one thinks of underground culture, one's mind naturally turns to big cities, the traditional loci of bohemia, and certainly writers living in Portland, San Francisco, and New York City produce more zines than any other single locale. But it is more out-of-the-way places like Harvest, Alabama; Freehold, New Jersey; Morganville, Kansas; and Monrovia, California, that, taken together, outstrip the major metropolises as the germination points of zines.[12] Examining the zines reviewed in an issue of *Zine Guide* or *Factsheet Five* – which held the most complete listing of zines available – I found an almost two-to-one ratio in favor of small-city/suburban/rural origin over large urban

teaching, working as a librarian, or practicing fractal geometry.

•Health zines: these contain recipes for healthy food, information about diseases and medicine, experiences of living/coping with mental health issues, advice on coping with AIDS and dealing with death, and other health-related issues.

•Sex zines: deal with straight, queer, bondage, black leather stories, pictures – a zine for probably 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: these are underground comic books on themes humorous, serious, and nonsensical.

•Literary zines: showcase original short fiction and poetry.

•Art zines: contain print media collages, photographs, drawings, and mail art which create a network of artists and a floating virtual gallery.

•The Rest: a large unsortable category.

Index

FROM ACNE-RELATED SUICIDE TO
JULIA CHILD IN *COMETBUS*

areas. Out of 1,142 zines listed from the USA, 749 originated from outside the major cities in each state.[13] Though surprising, this disparity makes sense: Gentrification and the allure of the bohemian life for non-bohemians have sent rents and services in urban areas out of reach for many people, particularly those who eschew stable careers and ideals of material success. Most people who publish are young and often still live in the suburbs with their parents. As traditional garrets give way to gentrified lofts and smoky cafés are superseded by the Starbucks coffee chain, creative misfits scattered across the country use the culture of zines to share, define and hold together a "culture" of discontent: a virtual bohemia.

But what are they? If pushed to come up with a single defining attribute I would have to say this: zines are decidedly *amateur*. While this term has taken on a pejorative cast in a society that honors professionalism and the value of the dollar, the roots of amateurism are far more noble: *amator,* Latin for *lover.* While other media 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. And in protest against a culture and society that offers little reward for such acts of love, zines are also created out of *rage*.
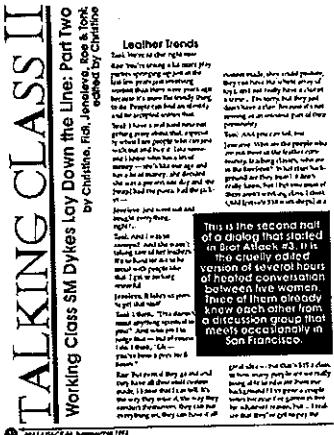
Zines are not the only cultural expression of love and rage lurking underground today. Though drawing from a different population – primarily urban, primarily black – and forged out

of the distinct crucible of racism and poverty, the hip-hop subculture, through the voice of rap music, addresses issues familiar to the zine underground: "representing" yourself and community, staying true or selling out, and the search for a voice in a society that just doesn't listen. Nor are zinesters the first people painstakingly to construct an alternative culture only to find it gobbled up by the very interests it ostensibly opposes. This is the history of bohemia since the mid-nineteenth century.

Zines are the most recent entry in a long line of media for the misbegotten, a tradition stretching back to Thomas Paine and other radical pamphleteers, up through the underground press of the 1960s, and on towards the Internet. The fact that they are not the only underground culture, and that their trajectory is not entirely unique, in my opinion makes this study not less useful, but more so. Although the world of zines operates on the margins of society, its concerns are common to all: how to count as an individual; how to build a supportive community; how to have a meaningful life; how to create something that is yours.

Some readers will no doubt be disappointed – while others, I'm sure, will be thrilled – that in the pages that follow I engage more with the world of zines and less with the words of academics. I did not make this choice because there isn't good scholarship out there – there is. Nor is it out of ignorance of the studies that have been done and the theories presented – you will find them mentioned in my endnotes. But too often the citation of learned authorities is equated with rigorous theoretical analysis. Sometimes it becomes its replacement. Wary of this trap, I privilege the actual material and its interpretation. Focusing my efforts on describing and explaining the phenomenon I'm studying, I then draw the larger theory out of this description and explanation. Some might also find the struc-
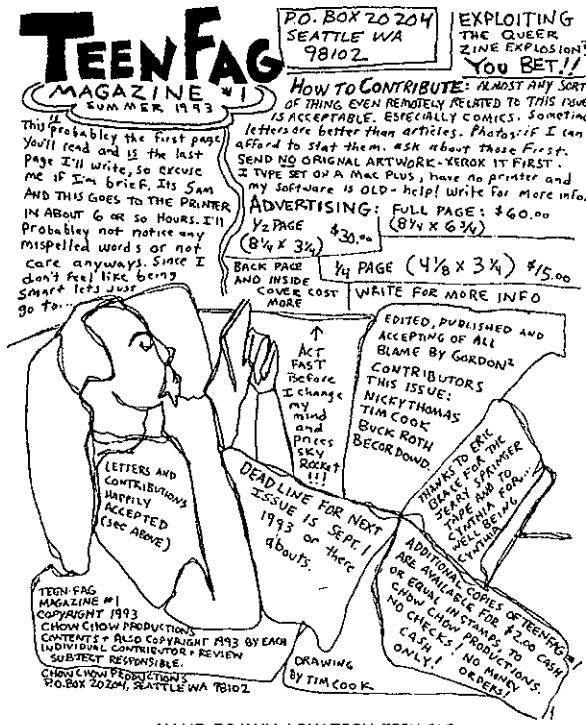
USING TECHNOLOGY: DESK-TOP
PUBLISHED PAGE IN *BRAT ATTACK*

ture of this book unorthodox and perhaps unsettling. I struggled mightily with how to organize this seemingly disorganized subject matter, how to discipline undisciplined subjects.[14] In the end I decided to structure the book around major themes in the zine world, with these broken up by subthematic "vignettes." I think it works in balancing out the unfolding and chaotic dynamism of the contemporary zine world with the structure necessary to make sense of it. I also think it accurately describes what binds the world of zines together: ideals, actions, and reactions. Finally, it mirrors the structure of zines themselves: at first glance a bit fragmentary, but coming together inevitably to reveal a world, provide an analysis, and make a point.

Still others will be disappointed that I've written a book on zines at all. Isn't this just another exploitation of zines, "selling out" the underground to the above-ground world? Perhaps. But alternative culture has already been discovered – the more important question is who will represent it and how. The ways in which I explore and explain the world of zines certainly bear the mark of my theoretical interests and political concerns, but I'm of the world I write and my concern for the underground runs deeper than its status as this (or last) season's cultural exotica. More important, I'm a conscientious observer and a careful listener. And I believe that what zinesters have to say and what zines represent are too important to stay sequestered within the walls of a subcultural ghetto.

HAND-DRAWN, LOW-TECH *TEEN FAG*

In dealing with such an idiosyncratic subject matter as zines, there exists a distinct temptation just to hand over a stack of them and let readers decide for themselves what they are. But that's impossible here and, in light of the purpose of this book, not even desirable. In recent years, I've poured over thousands upon thousands of zines and interviewed scores of zine writers and readers. I've published zines myself and been part of the underground cultural scene. I've read what there is to read and kept a watchful eye on the times in which we live. In the pages that follow, I'll apply this experience to act as a guide, mapping out the philosophical and political contours, the twists and turns, the love and rage, that make up this strange subterranean world.

of 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 Chuck0, 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 repair, sources for supplies, layout and all sorts of news are here. They also print letters from a bunch of readers with knowledge to share. (S-20t/MG)

PRINTER'S INK Vol[print]. 7 #1 (On request from Thomson-Shore, PO Box 305, Dexter, MI 48130-0305): A newsletter for customers of Thomson-Shore, a fairly large short-run book printer. There's always something of interest here, with this issue talking about the impact of desktop publishing on the trade and revealing more good news about soy-based inks. (S-4t/MG)

PRISONERS' LEGAL NEWS Vol. 2 #6-7 (Donation from PO Box 1684, Lake Worth, FL 33460): A collection of news stories from behind the prison

TWO
IDENTITY

LOSERS

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[1]

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 former 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."[2] Don Fitch, a longtime 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 SF and fandom a means of escaping some of the unpleasantness and stress of the Real World."[3]

That zines are a haven for misfits is not too surprising. 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: the entry price is facility with the written word, and the compensation is anonymous communication.

"How else could I get up the courage to talk to people at [punk] shows?" asks Mitzi Waltz of *Incoherent*. "'Wanta buy a zine?' isn't much as opening lines go, but it's the best this congenitally shy gal can do."[4]

Zine writers may be shy, awkward, and lacking social skills, but 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*. And in *The Olecatronical Scatologica Chronicle*, Jokie Wilson reprints his letter of rejection from art school. Doug Holland begins his zine with his ex-girlfriend's 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*.[5]

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

9:00 PM–10:30 PM: 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.[6]

The loser, as John unabashedly admits, is himself. It is also assumed to be whoever 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?[7]

Being a loser is so firmly embedded as an identity in the zine world that Jery Vile of *Fun* parodies it in a regular column in the old *Factsheet Five* entitled, "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.[8]

Jery's humor only works because it takes for granted the knowing audience of *Factsheet Five*, an audience of people who see 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.[9] In the zine world, being a loser isn't something to accept quietly before slinking away. It is something to yell from the rooftops and explain to the world.

Marginalized people with little power over their status in the world still retain a powerful weapon: the interpretations they give to the circumstances and conditions that surround them, and the ideals and character traits they possess. Such is the case with 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 turn a deficit into an asset. Labeled losers by mainstream society, zinesters write to one another, glorifying their loserdom, and in the process making this negative label a positive one. By extolling losers as role models, zinesters create a new identity, a *Cool Loser* (as the title to one zine attests), and claim it proudly as their own.[10] 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

REVENGE OF THE NERDS IN *HEX*

writes in the last frame, but now she's "also a punk."[11] The glorification of the loser is the revenge of the nerds. US society, always unequal, has gotten more so in recent years. 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 wages for most Americans remained stagnant or dropped.[12] The ability of the elite to maintain order in the face of this redistribution of the nation's wealth, and largely without the use of overt force, has to do with the fact that the US, while not much of a democracy, *is* a reasonably functional meritocracy. In a meritocracy, people have to compete for their place in society, and those with merit move to the top while those who lack it drop to the bottom. A meritocracy is a fixed-class system, but not necessarily with fixed classes. While the members of the elite tend to be replaced by their children, the possibility exists for a bright young nobody to die a bright old somebody. 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 also losers, and lots of them. The winners are celebrated with power, wealth and media representation. The losers, the majority of Americans, are invisible.[13]

Zines make them visible. 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: people who are losers not because they are awkward and shy, but simply because they are denied or reject 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 zinesters. Overlapping this trait, however, is the membership description of another subculture that has had a major influence on zines. "Punk," explains Legs McNeil, a high-school dropout and co-founder in 1976 of the first punk zine, "was what your teachers would call you.... We'd been told all our lives we'd never amount to anything."[14]

Most people in the US will "never amount to anything." 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 where losers who have found their way into the underground can have a voice, a home, and others to talk to. As individuals, zinesters may be losers in the game of American meritocracy, but together they give the word "loser" a new meaning, changing it from insult to accolade, and transforming personal failure into an indictment of the alienating aspects of our society.

EVERYPERSON

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.[15]

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. "Perzines," or personal zines, like Josh's read like the intimate diaries usually kept safely hidden in the back of a drawer or under a pillow. Personal revelation outweighs rhetoric, and polished literary style takes a back seat to honesty. Unlike most personal diaries, however, these intimate thoughts, philosophical musings, or merely events of the day retold are written for an outside audience.

What makes perzine writers unique, however, is not the fact that they share the intimacies of their lives, that's also what famous authors of published memoirs do, but the fact that most zinesters lack the connections and credentials to be published, yet they do it anyway. They don't wait for anyone's approval: not the approval of editors imposing standards of content and style, nor that of publishers imposing fiscal or advertising-related constraints. In other words, perzines are created by people who have not been "authorized" to do this kind of writing: losers.
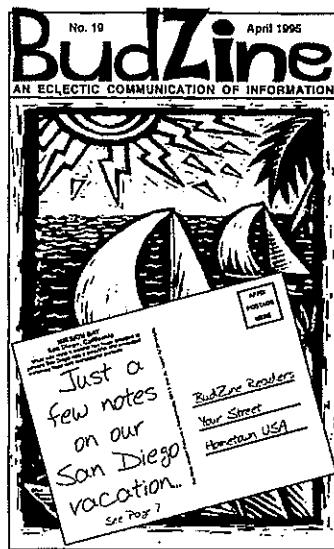
Jen Payne, for example, shares *The Latest News* about her quiet life in a shoreline town in Connecticut. One issue begins with her reminiscing about working at a coffee shop and the regulars who visited there, another with a trip to New Hampshire, and still another with her love for photography (the latter in-

cludes photos straight out of a family album: Jen at the prom, Jen and her husband, Jen's cat). The zine itself is a scrapbook of Jen's life, nothing special, nothing outrageous. Whereas the rule of thumb regarding the publication of news in the mainstream media is "man bites dog", that is, what is considered newsworthy is what is out of the ordinary, what Jen and many other writers of perzines 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."[16]

    BudZine is another celebration of the everyday of an everyperson: complaints about Christmas fill one issue, taxes another. As the editor of a trade magazine that doesn't allow space for his ideas, John "Bud" Banks understands that "[t]here probably aren't too many publications that would give me space to carry on about whatever seems important." And so he creates his own forum, thereby refusing to accept that the lives of regular people are not news. "It's not that my thoughts and ideas have any *special* worth," Bud writes, "but neither are they worth*less*."[17]

    Through *The Duplex Planet*, David Greenberger chronicles the thoughts and ideas of forgotten and "worthless" people: the elderly. Hired as activities director of the Duplex nursing home in Massachusetts, with few qualifications and scarcely any idea of what such a director was supposed to do, David started asking the residents questions. Amazed by the life, humor and just plain oddness encapsulated in the responses he received, he bundled their musings together as a newsletter for the home, then later made it into a zine, of which he has published over 180 issues. "It's one of the greatest shoe states in the country. Especially ladies shoes," William "Fergie" Fergusen tells David and his readers about Massachusetts in one issue.

> *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 Win-*

BUD'S WORLD IN BUDZINE

ston 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....[18]

The hilarity of such offbeat rumination accounts for the popularity of *The Duplex Planet*, and there's an initial temptation to dismiss David's zine as a carnival freakshow that allows his young audience a laugh at the kooky old folks. But the ultimate effect of *The Duplex Planet* on the reader is the opposite. Through his ruminations Fergie and the other residents of the Duplex nursing home come alive as genuine people, and their ideas develop a logic, albeit an insane one. Reading their words it's impossible to ignore the fact that, whether or not they're off their rocker, they have something to say, and they want to be heard. "I am a tard. So what?" shouts punk rocker Aaron Rat in his zine *Tard Nation*, angrily questioning assumptions about who gets to be heard and who has the right to publish and share their ideas. "I was born with Down's Syndrome," he explains. "You might think it's funny but it's not. I have it better than most people with Down's. I can still write and talk and do most things that normal people can do." And like "normal" people who do perzines, Aaron insists that what he has to say is important, even if he feels, probably correctly, that most people think it isn't. "So fuck you if you don't like it! I'm doing this zine for tards everywhere. I can still be proud of what I do."[19]

In stark contrast to the funny, exciting, glamorous, dangerous, or tragic lives of the personalities who populate the sitcoms and dramas of television and the pages of magazines and newspapers, perzines chronicle the lives and events of normal (or normally abnormal) people – by the standards of the mass media, dull people. Vicki Rosenzweig, for instance, begins her inaugural issue of *Quipo* with a tale of spilling soup on her lap at a local Chinese restaurant, continues with a description of swans near her home, and finishes with her thoughts on deli counters. By the standards of car chase narratives, this is boring stuff.[20] But the narratives told in these zines are of and by real individuals, and the events chronicled and personalities revealed are far more textured than their scripted and handled counterparts in the mass media. Jen, after recalling her days in the coffee shop, gives her views on the national debt.[21] In his "The Play's the Thing" issue on his acting experience, Bud slips in a critique of how mainstream news frames and interprets events.[22]

And Vicki uses her commonplace observation of delis – "The typical grill

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.*[23]

These personal zines are testimony that regular people think about themselves, about their experience, about politics, and about their role as creators and consumers of culture. 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 have their views expressed in a form different from a statistical average or in a space larger than a soundbite, or play a role other than victim or freak on a talk show?

As is to be expected in a meritocracy, the voices heard in the United States are those of the best and brightest: experts, business leaders, politicians, and celebrities. 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 – difference of style, of soundbite, of lifestyle – but a distinction far more profound. As Vicki suggests, real difference is not to be found on the fifty-plus channels on cable TV, but through searching for its expression in out-of-the-way places and through creating that expression oneself.

The "difference" zine writers frequently 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 his simple life, living close to nature, in *America's at Our Doorstep*.[24] Terry Ward – a former manager of his local town dump, sends out his almost biweekly *Notes from the Dump*, sharing personal memories and opining on national politics from the perspective of a man who has "dropped out" of society.[25] Ernest Mann, another 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.[26]

Fred Woodworth has been publishing *The Match* since at least the 1960s – on his own letterpress machine in a tiny Tucson print shop where he hand sets type and images for every page of every copy of his zine. As of 2008, he is still

quite active – but you can't pay by check or email him!

Dwelling Portably takes it a step further, and just as the name implies, it is a collection of reader tips and anecdotes for people living off the grid in cities or rural areas. It has been edited by different people for nearly thirty years. And in *Cometbus*, punk rocker Aaron shares his adventurous life traveling the fringes of the US.[27]

Alienation can sell in the US. The culture industry knows its market, and if enough people feel estranged from 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 represented by the mass culture industry and the rebel who speaks through zines. The rebel of 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 (invariably this rebel is male) own terms. While plenty of howling at injustice is done in zines too, the strategy of the zine rebel is one of removal: of communicating feelings of alienation by alienating herself from society. And the zine that records this struggle is not used as a medium to broadcast discontent to the dominant society, but as a way to share personal stories of living on the outside quietly 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 reads, finding a mouse nest in the oven. And even though punk rocker Aaron – as he takes the reader with him bumming across the country, visiting decrepit towns, sleeping on buses, and reporting his impressions of local punk scenes – fits the American ideal of the misunderstood rebel loner, he is more interested in exploring and communicating the forgotten little features of life outside the public gaze than in fighting for a place in its light. "I had an hour to kill before the bus arrived, so I looked around downtown Janesville [Wisconsin], 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.[28]

It is these sorts of things, the experiences, the ideas – which are "nothing at all" to the dominant society, whether because they are too regular, or too far outside what is regular, that zines represent and communicate. Perzines are a

means by which individuals who in the eyes of the political and media elite are themselves "nothing at all" can assert, if not as Karl Marx's angry revolutionary would have it: "I am nothing and I should be everything," then at least, less egotistically: I am nothing and I should be *something*.[29]

THE POLITICAL IS PERSONAL

Emphasis on the personal is not limited to perzines; it is a central ethic of all zines. In the first serious survey of science fiction and fantasy fanzines, psychologist Fredric Wertham (of *Seduction of the Innocent* infamy) highlighted as a defining characteristic their "intensely personal" quality.[30] What Wertham argued back in 1973, is equally true today: Zine writers insert the personal into almost any topic – punk rock, science fiction, religion, sexuality, sports, UFOs, even the exploration of pharmaceutical drugs.

In an issue of *Pills-a-go-go*, Jim Hogshire, eager to dispense knowledge on dextromethorphan hydrobromide (the "DM" in commercially available cough syrups), experiments on himself, guzzling eight ounces of the medicine 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 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 copyshop where a friend tells him that his pupils are of different sizes. He wanders out alone again, later recalling:

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.[31]

Obviously written to be funny, Jim's piece nevertheless follows a convention of zine writing: viewing a topic through a highly subjective lens, then sharing

those personal insights, experiences and feelings with others, making it clear that the teller is as important as what is being told. Zines are not the first underground media to personalize the news. This was a cardinal feature of the eighteenth-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 best-known and most influential of these pamphlets (between 100,000 and 250,000 copies were printed) it was not alone. Bernard Bailyn, in his collection *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750–1776*, estimates the full number of those that have survived from this pre-Revolutionary period at over 400.[32]

Zine writers of a historical mind, like Gene Mahoney, liken zines to pamphlets, calling *Common Sense* the "zine heard 'round the world."[33]

And there is some validity to this hereditary claim as, in the words of George Orwell, the pamphlet 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.[34]

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, as Bailyn writes, not above "depicting George Washington as the corrupter of a washerwoman's daughter, [or] John Hancock as both impotent and the stud of an illegitimate brood."[35] The political analysis put forth in pamphlets frequently degenerated into crude conspiracy theories, and many pamphlets were far from "highbrow." Some were terribly written, filled with illogical arguments, poor sentence structure, and painfully bad poetry. After all, like zines, they were for the most part the work of literary amateurs.

As Orwell points out, these early pamphlets were the words and ideas of individuals. Again, like zines, the intimate literary style they employed underscored this point. The popular pamphleteer John Dickinson, for example, wrote a pamphlet as a letter "to his friend," using the pronoun "I" frequently when making his points.[36] The aim of the pamphlet, however, was not to tender the purely personal musings of its author. Its function lay in offering a medium through which to analyze, articulate, argue for, and persuade others on political issues of the day. While the language of pamphlets may have been personal, the content

and purpose were explicitly political.[37]

Zines, too, are often explicitly political, and it is rare to come across one that 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 eighteenth-century pamphlets. Pamphleteers used a personal voice, but, for the most part, the politics discussed were abstracted from themselves, of interest to the public. While personally slandering their opponents, American pamphleteers 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, theirs was a public discourse. For zines, politics, like all other topics, is primarily a personal discourse. Part of this bent reflects how politics have been popularly defined since the late sixties. One of the prominent ideas that came out of the 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 existed not only 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.[38] With this new definition, what could be considered within the realm of "the political" was significantly expanded.

Zines put a slight twist on the idea that the personal is political. They broach political issues from the state to the bedroom, but they refract all these issues through the eyes and experience of the individual creating the zine. Not satisfied merely to open up the personal realm to political analysis, *they personalize politics*, forcing open even what the *OED* defines as politics with a personalized analysis. In *Dishwasher*, Pete Jordan surveys class politics through his own stories of dishwashing throughout the United States.[39] Patrick Splat explores the issue of discrimination against homosexuals through stories about "coming out" to both the mainstream and underground world in his zine *Loring Punk*.[40] And Adam Bregman exposes the sham of democracy in an age of money politics by writing about his own campaign to be elected mayor of Los Angeles, financed by selling lemonade outside City Hall, in the pages of his zine *Shithappy*. Adam backs up his assertion that "democracy is a farce" and that "the worst crimes that politicians commit are legal" not with abstract logic, but with personal, detailed and engaging description of the ins and outs of his campaign. "I always

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 to a list of the guys and girls he finds sexy. This juxtaposition of the political with the personal is mirrored by the combination of the factual with the testimonial. In the feminist zine *Finster,* editors KJ, Erin, Rebecca, and Mary add their hand-scrawled commentaries to each reprinted fact on young women and body weight.[43]

By some politically-minded zine writers, the personalization of politics is understood as a way to cast off the "preaching" model of persuasion they feel is 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."[44] Putting the personal first casts political persuasion in terms of emulation rather than conversion. The message isn't: You should do this. Instead it's: Look what I've done. "Change ourselves so others can change," writes the editor of *Forever & a Day*, giving an example: "If you throw

PURE EXPRESSION: CHAOS COLLAGE IN *EGG*

knew that the government was completely corrupt," he concludes, "but after running for mayor I've learned how and why it is corrupt."[41] (Needless to say, Adam lost, though he did get 643 votes.)

None of the zines mentioned above print reams of statistics on class inequality, prejudice against gays and lesbians, or election funding. Instead, they tell stories. It's not that zines don't present any information that has not been experienced personally. They do: *Loring Punk*, for example, reprints some news clippings on acts of bigotry in the Minneapolis area. But often that information is presented in a way that keeps it from being just another floating statistic in a sea of information, a way that makes some sort of personal connection between the zinester and "the facts."

One way that zine writers do this is through interviews. This format has strong traditions in music fanzines, and in the punkzine *Fenceclimber,* Josh MacPhee uses an interview to introduce the subject of class conflict. After beginning with personal testimony about how he never had any contact with labor unions until the emergency medical technicians, EMTs, were locked out at a hospital down the street, Josh, through a give-and-take discussion with the union's leader, lays out the context of the union's struggle: what the term "lockout" 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 introduced as a discussion between two people, *Fenceclimber* puts a human face on what are often presented as abstract social forces and political actors.[42]

Another way that

PRIVILEGING THE PERSONAL IN *FINSTER*

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."[45] In this way, making politics personal is a way of giving away authority, saying to your reader that, unlike the claims that politicians and professional journalists make, this isn't "the truth," it's just what I think.

At the same time, stressing the personal is a way of seizing authority. It's a way for zinesters to assert that they have the right to think and write about the stuff they are passionate about – whether it be cough syrup or class politics. The same stuff may have been written about a thousand times by skilled journalists and well-educated experts, but as Joshua, the editor of *Notes from the Lighthouse*, writes, "everyone has their own way of telling a story. it's the individual's perspective that makes the same ole story somewhat unique in its own way."[46] Personalization is the mark of individuals who don't have a voice that matters in public discussions about culture and politics saying: Yes, I do matter, this is what I believe, *this idea is mine*.

The personalization of politics is one way in which zinesters confront the distance between themselves and a mainstream political world in which they effectively have no say. When pamphleteers wrote in the eighteenth century, some were arguing for a hands-on democracy: a political system in which individual citizens could participate directly, and one that seemed within their power to create.

Even those who argued against such a participatory democracy, like James Madison, 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 it is repudiated. Politics for most people has become something "out there," something to leave to the professionals: the politicians, pollsters, and media pundits. As a 1995 poll reveals, 89 percent of Americans feel that the people running the country are somewhat or definitely "not like them," though perhaps this is how George W. Bush got elected.[47] The "public" only appears every four years, when a fraction of it is sighted in a voting booth. The personalization of politics within zines is an attempt by people to redraw connections between everyday "losers" like themselves and the politics that affect them, to collapse the distance between the personal self and the political world.

But the same impulse can widen the gap as well. Zinesters are primarily

young people seasoned on post-9/11, post-Vietnam, post-Watergate, post-actor-as president mainstream politics. As such, they have little faith in the "reality" of politics as it is presented to the public. Confronted with a world of stage-managed falseness, the only thing they are sure is real is themselves.

When Elayne Wechsler, editor of *Inside Joke*, writes that "[i]n the end, the only Reality in which any of us can believe involves our own personal experiences,"[48] the move toward the personal circles in on itself, closing out the world of people and politics.[49]

THE POLITICS OF AUTHENTICITY

Why Publish? To cut through TV horseshit reality to something better – something more personal.[50]   - Edgar "Bolt" Upright, editor of Tales of the Sinister Harvey

Politicians speak of the people then do the bidding of big business. Corporations befoul the planet then claim to be environmentally-friendly. Service workers smile when they don't mean it. Successful artists create what will sell. The ends of profit turn nearly everything into merely a means for getting there. It is a world of spin, promotion, public relations, and pseudo-events. *TV horseshit reality*.

To cut through it all, zinesters look to "the only Reality in which any of us can believe." That is, themselves. But to connect to this self, everything that stands in the way must be jettisoned. "Man was born free," Jean-Jacques Rousseau began his 1762 treatise *The Social Contract*, "and everywhere he is in chains." Following the Rousseauian creed, zinesters believe that authenticity can be found only in a person unshackled by the contrivances of society. An authentic individual, therefore, is one who cuts through the conventions of manners, norms, and communication and connects to his or her "real" self.[51] More than anything else, this search to live without artifice, without hypocrisy, defines the politics of underground culture. Zines are bursts of raw emotion. Their cut-and-paste look is a graphic explosion unbeholden to rules of design. The "rant" editorial that opens each zine is the spontaneous disgorge of whatever the editor has on his or her mind. "i think i should say what i want here," Christina begins her *Girl Fiend*, "and not what others expect me to say or what I hope will be of interest. this is my zine, right?"[52] *Right*. "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."[53]

I would argue the point more strongly than Al. The excitement and enthusiasm of zines don't compensate for lack of professionalism, they are the replacement for it. Professionalism – with its attendant training, formulaic styles, and relationship to the market – gets in the way of what Freedom, the young co-editor of *Orangutan Balls*, told me was the most important aspect of zines: the freedom to just "express."[54] After describing Tom Paine's *Common Sense* as a zine, Gene Mahoney goes on to write, "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."[55]

Saying whatever's on your mind, unbeholden to corporate sponsors, puritan censors, or professional standards of argument and design, being yourself and expressing your real thoughts and real feelings – these are what zinesters consider authentic.[56]

This celebration of the pure freedom to express helps explain the fact that traditional publishing practices are sometimes absent from zines. Instead of listing an issue number, a zine from Atlanta, fittingly called *Decontrol*, commands the reader to "make up your own number"; many zines, including some of the biggest, like the old *Factsheet Five* and *Maximumrocknroll*, use page numbers only intermittently, if at all.[57] But within the zine world itself, traditions begin to form. And because zines are meant to be read, certain protocols – like decipherability – must be followed. Or not. Having been criticized in a *Factsheet Five* review for putting together a sloppy zine, the publishers of *Sick Teen* responded thus:

> *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.[58]*

Equally reveling in disorder is 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.[59] 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.

Stretching this ideal of pure expression to its extreme is *Punk and De-*

stroy, a zine "about the punk scene in Portland, Ore." Hand-lettered, smudged and badly reproduced, it is literally unreadable.[60] What matters is unfettered, authentic expression, not necessarily making sense.

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

Thus reads the preface to a book by Dadaist Théophile 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."[61] Early in the twentieth century, Dadaists responded to the "sense" and "order" that was World War One by creating nonsense. Similarly, the refusal of some zines to make sense or have any order can be considered a reaction against the order and sense of more recent times, in particular the tendency for expression and identity to be packaged as a nice, neat product. But such nonsense is also the – perhaps illogical – conclusion to the ideal of pure expression. By eschewing standards of language and logic, the zine creator refuses to bend individual expression to any socially sanctified order. That this nonsense communicates nothing (except its own expressiveness) to the reader of the zine matters little, for the fact that no one except the creator can understand it means that something absolutely authentic has been created.

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."[62] Mike's wry humor is on target, for it is exactly this predicament of honoring absolute individual thought and action while at the same time building a political movement that has plagued anarchist theorists and practitioners for centuries. Of all the traditional political philosophies it is anarchism that turns up most often in the pages of zines.

Anarchy, Assault with Intent to Free, Free Society, Instead of a Magazine and *Profane Existence* ("making punk a threat again") are all explicitly anarchist zines. But more common is the anarchy A symbol and anarchist ideology scattered throughout the pages of personal, punk, feminist, queer – just about any zines.

Anarchism in the zine community has its roots. Anarchy has always played a starring role in punk rock and thus punk zines, and prominent zinesters

like Aragorn, editor of *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* and *Factsheet Five* founder Mike Gunderloy have been active in the anarchist movement. More significant, however, are the homologies between the nascent philosophies of the zine scene and those of anarchism. On the most basic level, anarchism is the philosophy of individual dissent within the context of volunteer communities, and zines are the products of individual dissenters who have set up volunteer networks of communication with one another. But the connections run even deeper: the underground ideal of authenticity is part of the tradition of anarchism as well. William Godwin, the eighteenth-century father of anarchist theory, was himself deeply concerned with authenticity and creativity. Writing of culture in a hypothetical anarchist utopia, Godwin asks, "Should we have theatrical exhibitions?" He concludes no, as theater

> *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.*[63]

Godwin's celebration of immediate individual expression and distrust of cooperation and abstraction are extreme even for anarchists, most of whom value spontaneity and liberty *as well as* solidarity and organization. Nonetheless, 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, and in the politics of underground culture. Michael Harrington, a socialist critic of the counterculture of the 1960s, commented on later political variants of this form of "authentic" expression, describing both Bob Dylan and members of the Students for a Democratic Society 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.*[64]

What worried Harrington, besides a bit of generational rivalry, was that by privileging "the sincere man," logic and rhetoric – the rules of argument and patterns of persuasion necessary to communicate political abstractions to large audiences and thus to further social movements, would be sacrificed. What mattered to the sincere man was not whether he was getting his message across to others, but whether he was truly expressing what he thought and felt. In other
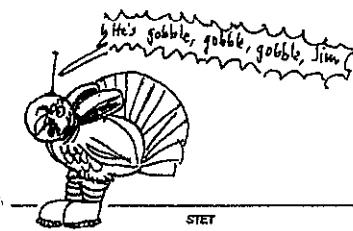
words, what was important was the expressivity of the act, not the effectiveness of the result. What Harrington was criticizing has a long history in cultural and political undergrounds, represented in its most extreme form by anarchist practitioners of "propaganda of the deed" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Propaganda of the deed collapsed political strategy and individual expression into a single act, frequently one of terrorist violence (giving rise to the popular caricature of the bomb-throwing anarchist). The results of these acts were usually disastrous, when not ludicrous, but the political impact of destroying property or killing a particularly odious capitalist or statesman was never really the point.[65] The deed was a means for individuals to express their dissent without compromising their individuality or spontaneity. What mattered within this odd strategy was less political efficacy and more the purity of the deed itself, "the immediate, apocalyptic value of an act," as historian James Joll puts it.[66]

Most zine writers do not revel in complete chaos, nor are they given to throwing bombs, but they do share this emphasis on the act over the result. This is not merely a means-over-ends political strategy; for most zine writers (like practitioners of propaganda of the deed) there is no abstract strategy at all, no means and no end: just the authentic act. Alienated from mainstream political institutions, and wary of any constraint on their individuality, most zine writers reject a strategic model of politics and communication entirely in the search for a more "authentic" formula. The only thing that stands this test of authenticity is a highly personal act of expression: making a zine. For in producing a zine, the individual commits nonviolent propaganda of the deed, creating an authentic medium of communication, expressing the thoughts and feelings of an authentic individual.

MANUFACTURED SELVES

What is an authentic individual? Zinesters argue for a world without any artifice, where they can express what they *really* feel and who they *really* are, but what is this "self" they are trying to be true to? Rousseau believed in a quasi-mystical "natural man," a "noble savage" later corrupted by civilization. Authenticity, for him and many other Enlightenment thinkers, meant somehow recon-

SPACE TURKEY IN *STET*

necting to this pre-social, pre-historic identity.

Zinesters aren't interested in anything of the sort. They may not want to adopt values and identities fashioned by the mainstream world, but they are not trying to resurrect some sort of pristine identity that only exists outside the web of social construction. In fact, through their zines, they are engaged in the opposite: manufacturing themselves.

No one is born a punk rocker or science fiction fan. Individuals form these identities for themselves out of the experiences and values of the subcultures of which they are a part. They listen to bands and cut their hair, or read science fiction and go to conventions – and put out zines. In this process they define who they are. Through his zine a suburban middleclass kid becomes a gritty punk rocker, while a librarian recreates herself as a starship captain. Zines – like computer-mediated communication and other such media – allow people, if only for a short time, to escape the identity they are born into and circumscribed by and to become someone else. Zine writers use their zines as a means to assemble the different bits and pieces of their lives and interests into a formula that they believe represents *who they really are.*

For Leah Zeldes Smith, the editor of *STET*, even categories like "science fiction fan" don't fully describe who she is. So in her zine, she tells of 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."[67] Equally reluctant to be pegged to any identity not of his own choosing is Brian Shapiro, who complains about a review of his zine in *Factsheet Five* that attempted to stick it in a category. "It was never my intention to 'mix' punk and politics in *CANCER* or to make a connection between politics and music," the author stresses.

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.[68]

I experienced at first hand a similar struggle to avoid being categorized. The second issue of a small zine I published, *Notes from Underground,* included a mix of personal essays, political diatribes, comix, poems, pirated news articles, and letters from friends overseas. When it 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.[69] So what was *Notes from Underground*? A perzine, queerzine, poetry, comix, travel, political, "situationist" zine? Well, actually, all the above (I do like the Situationists after all), and none of them. It was simply *my* zine. And the fact that it is mine is what matters. In an era when every conceivable identity has been cataloged and packaged, yet ordinary people have little say in this process, zines offer a way for their publishers to "package" the complexity of themselves and share it with others. As zines offer a way of communicating that frees individuals from face-to-face interaction (with all its accompanying visual and auditory cues of gender, race, age, and so forth), and the writer is only known by what he or she puts down on paper, the notion of who and what one is in a zine is potentially very flexible. It is with this in mind that 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, son.--- 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."[70]

In the middle of an interview with Kali Amanda Browne, editor of *Watley-Browne Review*, I remembered John's words. I had asked Kali 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 opposite sex. "Oh, she's me," she replied, laughing. And the other contributors? I asked. "They're all me ... different parts of me."[71]

Kali uses her zine to construct her identity – but she does it by dividing up her identity into different characters. Tracing her ethnic roots to Africa, Latin America, Europe, India, and China, she understands the limitations of any identity except a hybrid that she creates. 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 multifaceted, virtual identity.[72] An equally complex cast of characters speaks through *Sweet Jesus*, a zine put together by a group of precocious high-school students. It begins:

This zine was supposed to begin in September. Me, Chaz, and Bloody Mary had been planning it all summer. A publication for the masses to combat the honor-roll, squeaky clean school newspaper and lit mag which we never could get into even though we tried an awful hell of a lot. We'd publish all the rejects like us and become saviors to the socially downtrodden....But life got in the way. Mary started working weekends at Mickey O's so she could buy herself a scooter, my father started making me study since the tuition went up and all, and Chaz fell into some strange black hole and never quite got out and finally ended up hanging himself in his bedroom one Monday night in December with only ten shopping days til Christmas.

In this issue and the three that follow, interviews, recollections, illustrations, and poems from Chaz (found after his death), St Xeno (who penned the introduction quoted above), Bloody Mary, Nasha, Mia X, and others 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 looking for addresses. There, 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.[73]

But in a way they were. Some characters introduced later, including a young black girl who 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. In *Sweet Jesus,* she creates a densely populated world out of herself. I don't think it was any accident that Kali and Franetta – the two people I discovered "passing" as others in their zines – are women of color. As both women and members of ethnic minorities they are acutely aware of the constraints of identity as defined by others.[74]

Unfortunately, not all zine writers splintering characters out of themselves have such applaudable intentions. Robert Dupree created a series of fictional characters whose seemingly sole function was to publish a smut zine together and try to convince local women to have sex with him. Sean Tejeratchi created the zine *Kool Man* in 1996 that reprinted many of Robert's letters and exposed his fairly elaborate scheme. Bill Price is a convicted child molester in prison. He has written numerous zines posing as a molested teenaged girl, with the intent of getting sexually assaulted teenaged girls to confide in him. Despite his reputation, he continues to resurface every few years and has established

numerous pen names, po boxes, and routes mail through his friends – as to conceal that his address is in prison.

For zine writers, the authentic self is not some primal, fixed identity that precedes them; it is something flexible and mutable that they fashion existentially: out of their experiences, out of subcultural values that they take as their own, and in the case of editors of zines such as the *Optimistic Pezzimist*, even out of a fascination for decidedly "inauthentic" items such as Pez candy dispensers. What makes their identity authentic is that they are the ones defining it. 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."[75] The underground call for authenticity doesn't demand that you be who society says you are. Since the mainstream world is "TV horseshit reality," it's better if you're not. Instead, you are who you create yourself to be.

In a way, zinesters are doing the same thing a big-money politician does when he projects himself as a man of the people. Both are manufacturing themselves. The identity creation that takes place in the pages of zines is a reflection of a larger world where reality and representation seem to occupy separate spheres – the society of spin that zinesters profess to abhor. Yet to the underground there is a difference. Politicians are in search of votes and money; zinesters are looking for their authentic selves. Politicians attempt to fit into prescribed roles – carefully thought out and tested in front of focus groups – as an instrumental means to become part of the dominant system. Zine writers are using the same freedom of self-creation not to enter into the mainstream, but to escape it. They rarely do.

I'M AGAINST IT

I don't like Burger King
I don't like anything
And I'm against it.
       - Ramones[76]

The Bush Years, paradoxically, were great for zines. Mike Gunderloy agrees. "[They] encouraged people to think about being self-sufficient and to look for alternatives.... A lot of people discovered they had a voice."[77] Mike is right: being shut out of the mass media and feeling alienated from a conservative society are what led a lot of zinesters to develop their voice. But the voice

those in the underground discovered may not be so "self-sufficient."

Fantasies of an authentic individual unsullied by society's conventions aside, people don't construct their identity in a vacuum; they create who and what they are in conversation with others.[78] This is what zinesters are doing by writing to each other, sharing their everyday lives, assembling their identity, figuring out their politics. But there is yet another interlocutor that precedes the underground culture of zines: the aboveground world of straight society. Notions of identity, politics, and authenticity, so important to the zine world, are arrived at in discussion with, or rather in argument against, mainstream society and culture. As staunch contrarians, zinesters construct who they are and what they do in opposition to the rest of society. Their identity is a negative one.

This negative identity is in many ways a legacy of punk rock. To a great

NOT LIKE THEM IN SCRAMBLED EGGS

degree, punk itself was created in opposition: *against* the commercial music of the mid-1970s, *against* the peace-and-love vibes of the hippie scene that by that time seemed a sham. Punk was rebellion. In response to *Maximumrocknroll*'s effort to channel some of the punk energy into "constructive" 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.[79]*

Punk is pure rebellion, pure negation. Summed up in "I'm Against It," an early punk song by The Ramones, and in the names of later bands such as Born Against. Epitomized by the nihilistic titles of zines such as *The I Hate People Gazette* and *Oh Cool Scene Zine: I Hate Everybody, I Hate Poetry (but that's all I can write)*.[80]

This ideal of the negative is bolstered by how anarchism came to be defined within the punk movement. Dave Insurgent, lead singer for Reagan Youth, a punk band interviewed in *Maximumrocknroll*, asserts: "[Anarchy] 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."[81]

It's a nice ideal, one that complements Godwin's principle of unfettered expression – and raises just as many problems. "Liv[ing] your life the way you want to live it," meaning: "no one telling you what to do," easily becomes doing what someone is telling you *not* to do. Consider the claim that "Punk rock is ... getting a hair cut your parents hate." This is the paradox of negative identity: who you are is contingent upon who you are rebelling against. 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."[82]

Setting yourself apart from "them" is integral to underground identity. If you identify "them" as the forces of "Just Say No" puritanism, you celebrate substance abuse, as *Sauce* and *Exercise with Alcohol* do.[83] And you 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.[84] If "they" are the legalized peddlers of alcohol and tobacco, then you define yourself as a

teetotaling, Straight Edge punk and reject these things.

For a self-consciously rebellious subculture, such identity formation makes a certain sense, but it also contains a serious contradiction. A negative identity only has meaning if you remain tied to what you are negating. Reveling in the fact that you are a loser only makes sense if there is a society that rewards winners you despise. Because of this, the authentic self that zinesters labor to assemble is often reliant upon the inauthentic culture from which they are trying to flee. Josh Norek of *Howhywuz, Howhyam*, for example, concludes his introductory rant with an explanation that his zine "stem[s] from a perpetual sickness of the sterile and homogeneous lifestyle found in greater suburbia."[85] This begs the questions: What would happen if Josh moved out of the sterile landscape he hates? Would he lose the inauthentic world that is so necessary for constructing his opposing authentic world? Would he lose his identity? Would he stop putting out a zine?

But before condemning zines as little more than vessels of negation, it's important to remember a few things. Zines offer a space for people to try out new personalities, ideas, and politics. While it's true that these things often take the shape of a negation of the world above ground, this isn't the only world that zinesters have to compare themselves to. Zines are a medium of communication, written to be shared with others underground. Through this sharing, the argument with the outside world can begin to be replaced by a conversation among comrades. The network of zines, embedded within a larger underground culture, creates a forum through which individuals may become able to construct their identity, formulate their ideals of an authentic life, and build a community of support, without having to identify themselves – either positively or negatively– with mainstream society; and maybe then, what Richard Sennett calls the "bonds of rejection" begin to weaken.[86] While mainstream society certainly precedes an alternative community in terms of reflexive identity construction, this doesn't mean it has the last word. "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."[87] Zines foster a community of losers within a society that celebrates winners.

THREE
COMMUNITY

A CLUB OF OUR OWN

Let's all be alienated together in a newspaper. - *John Klima, editor of Day and Age*[1]

"This country is so spread out," 21-year-old Arielle Greenberg tells me, "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 has thoughts and feelings and experiences that she wants to "express." She also does it because she cherishes the sense of community she gets from exchanging zines.

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.[2]

Zines are an individualistic 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 personal expression. People create zines to scream out "I exist." They also do it to connect to others saying the same thing. *Slug & Lettuce's* Christine Boarts explains: "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."[3]

But why would anybody want to be "connected with all those people" they don't know? Part of the motivation is loneliness, pure and simple. Zine writers may not be able to communicate well face-to-face, but like most people they want company. A regular feature of *The NEW Bloated Tick* is the "Letter Beggars Department," where publisher Paul Dion prints the names and addresses of peo-

ple "begging" for personal letters.[4] And Chris, if you'll remember, is the self-described shy and quiet weird girl who grew up estranged from the other kids in town. The popularity of messageboards on the Internet is additional testimony to the popular desire to "connect" with strangers via the written word.

But loneliness is never pure and simple, and the isolation that generates "letter beggars" comes from someplace. That someplace can be the everyday grind where the demands of job and family leave little time for socializing. "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.[5]*

That someplace can also be a "no place" as it is for Chris, who writes in *Punk Pals* – a sort of letter beggars zine for punks – that he is "Bored senseless! Anyone willing to write to a 17 year old in hicksville USA, then please do so."[6] And that someplace that loneliness comes from can be 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.[7]*

Richard's poignant plea highlights a distinctive feature of the loneliness that motivates zine communication. The personal deprivation Richard describes is not absolute, but *relative*. Stuck inside a state pen, he certainly isn't alone. Nor has he stopped receiving letters: his parents and old friends may have abandoned him, but the evangelical Christians have found him. Instead, what he is deprived of is the "reality" he once knew on the outside: people interested in punk rock, anti-racism, and zines. 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 –

CLASS OF '83

BY JAY

ONE NITE IN FEB. '93, THE PHONE RANG IN MY MOTHER'S HOUSE, AND I ANSWERED IT.

Hello?

Who?

Yeah, That's me.

A WOMAN NAMED "TRACY" LOOKING FOR "JACKIE MCLAUGHLIN". ONE STRIKE AGAINST HER — I'D DROPPED THE NAME JACKIE A LONG TIME AGO. EVERYONE CALLS ME JAY NOW. EVERYONE EXCEPT TRACY.

ITS OUR REUNION THIS SUMMER, & THERES LOTS OF ACTIVITIES...

AND ON THE SATURDAY, THERES A BIG DAN

I CAN SEND YOU THE INFO PACKAGE — IS THIS ADDRESS STILL CURRENT?

NO.

I DIDN'T REMEMBER HER. SHE DIDN'T REMEMBER ME, EITHER. IN A GRADUATING CLASS OF 800, IT'S A LITTLE DIFFICULT TO BUILD UP THOSE DEEP LASTING BONDS OF ETERNAL FRIENDSHIP WITH EVERYONE YOU WENT TO SCHOOL WITH.

OKAY, SO WHAT'S YOUR CURRENT ADDRESS?

WHAT?!

No. I MEAN, I'M NOT INTERESTED.

OH...

BYE.

BYE.

FUCK YOU, LUKE PERRY.

TO BE HONEST, I DON'T REMEMBER MUCH OF GRADE 11 & 12. TOO MANY DRUGS, I GUESS. THE STUFF I DO REMEMBER IS PRETTY BORING— MOST OF MY BUDDIES BY THAT TIME WERE IN THEIR 20'S, AND THE ONLY PERSON I DID WANT TO SEE I'D RUN INTO ON THE FERRY SIX MONTHS EARLIER. IT WAS GREAT TO SEE HER. WE HAD A BIG TALK ABOUT EVERYTHING. SHE'S DOING FINE.

LEAVING THE PAST BEHIND IN *BUNYON*

about direct action, world events, vivisection, etc.," complains Tin-Ear, the publisher of *The Happy Thrasher*, "but by publishing my own zine I reach people that do care."[8] 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.[9] The loneliness that zinesters are striving to overcome through their zines doesn't arise from physical isolation as much as it does from their social alienation. Through their zines, writers are trying to escape the society they feel alienated from while creating a new, albeit virtual, community of friends they can feel connected to.

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."[10] Zines allow writers and readers to select communities of choice rather than those born of circumstance. "Community, as I see it," defines William Baggins in *Scream*, "is a fluid process by which individuals seek out and choose others with whom they wish to live and mutually enjoy life."[11] Jay McLaughlin, for example, in her comic "Class of '83" establishes that she – unlike the teenage gang on TV's *Beverly Hills 90210* – wants nothing to do with the people she went to high school with. By publishing her story in *Bunyon*, she implicitly shifts allegiances to her new community of zine friends.[12] "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.[13]

CLUBHOUSE

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."[14] 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.

Every zine is a community institution in itself, as each draws links between itself and others. Many zines include extensive "letters" columns, sometimes spreading letters throughout their zine, drawing no sharp distinction between these and other content, and most zines print reviews of other zines, telling their readers how to send away for them.[15] Letters and reviews – and the importance that zines give to them – ensure that zines are not only the voice of an individual publisher, but a conduit for others' expressions as well.[16]

This notion of a zine as a community institution – a clubhouse – 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, WA, on bad weather in the Northwest;
• JS, of California, with a first-person account of an earthquake there and a rant on how the media overplayed the event for ratings;
• SL, of Berkeley, CA, who has graduated (after eight years) from college, and gives more first-hand news about the earthquake;
• Susanna Campbell's slightly eccentric personal discourse and history on life-savers – the candy and flotation device;
• comix by Pagan Kenedy, on her loony Southern, Confederate ancestors;
• Cousin Mimi's update on her one-year-old son, a garden report, and mention that all her friends are moving to California;
• LY, from Madison, WI, who is graduating from college and contemplating the grim prospect of a job in the system she hates;
• LSR of Sandstone, MN, a federal prisoner who tells of his job as a clerk/typist and complains about regulations and inhumane treatment.

Letter Parade is a perzine multiplied. Reading it is like stepping into a small, unpretentious community whose diversity stretches from hipsters (Pagan Kenedy), to prisoners (LSR), to Cousin Mimi. But Bonnie Jo's zine also constitutes a community in another way. Of the ten pages that 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, two are given over to an essay by R.A. Bairnes on remembering Christmas as a child, and the last couple of pages are merely reproduced clippings of odd world events compiled by C.J. Magson. (The latter includes an account of a man stopped by police for "walking oddly" and was 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 typeface, layout, and author – stands on its own. Bonnie Jo isn't the editor of her creation, she is an organizer of a virtual community.[17]

This form wasn't invented by Bonnie Jo; it's 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*.[18] 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 nineteenth century as both a creation of and a reaction to the beginnings of the mass-circulation penny press. The new economy of mass media had expanded the notion of a "literate public," but also displaced 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 on, 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.[19] These publications plagiarized popular authors, published corny prose, and reproduced engravings; like zines, they printed pretty much anything their publishers 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 cast my net wider, I think Rau has a valid point. These amateur publishers didn't just produce papers, they created *associations*, systems of communication and distribution that are the prototypes of zine communities today. In 1876, the

NAPA or National Amateur Press Association was formed, superseding a number of regional associations and giving 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.[20] The NAPA faded away, but the model of APAs as both a publication and a means of association was picked up by science fiction fans in the twentieth century as an ideal medium by which to bind together geographically scattered fans, and from here the practice entered 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 the more current, popular, and accurate term is "network zines."

Ashley Parker Owens regularly puts out *Global Mail* – "to help as many people connect as possible", and lists an impressive number (343 in issue 8) of individuals seeking letters, zines looking for contributors, mail art shows looking for entries, and listings for other exchanges.[21]

"Send me belly button fuzz, dolls, and images of Madonna, and I'll send you something special," Patty M. writes in Global Mail. 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."[22]

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."[23] At one time the paragon of network zines was *Factsheet Five*. Founded by Mike Gunderloy in May 1982, the first *FS5* was a one-page mimeograph listing six zines and sent out to – at most – fifty people. Numerous editors, fourteen years, and almost sixty issues later, it averaged over 140 pages, reviewed over 1,400 zines, and had a print run of over 15,000, with periodical distribution in chain stores. Early on, Mike saw the potential of *Factsheet Five* to cross-fertilize the different strains of underground publishing happening in the early 1980s, and in its earlier years zine listings in *FS5* were not categorized by genre, much less alphabetically. Asked at one point by a reader why he didn't do such a categorization, as it would make his zine easier to read, Mike responded, "[E]very time I suggest

doing such a thing the readers get all upset and write me nasty letters."[24] Part of the objection, Mike explained, had to do with the familiar zinester distrust of *any* order. But people were also 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," Janet Fox writes in, "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."[25]

With the help of cross-pollinating institutions like *Factsheet Five*, zines began to slip their moorings 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."[26] "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."[27]

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 *Who's Who?*, Jim Romenesko's zine *Obscure*, which gives community news on the zine world and refers to a species known as "notable zinesters";[28] and even a philanthropist: Tim Yohannan, the former editor (now deceased) of *Maximumrocknroll*, which distributes its annual costs and revenues amongst zine writers and others undertaking similar projects.
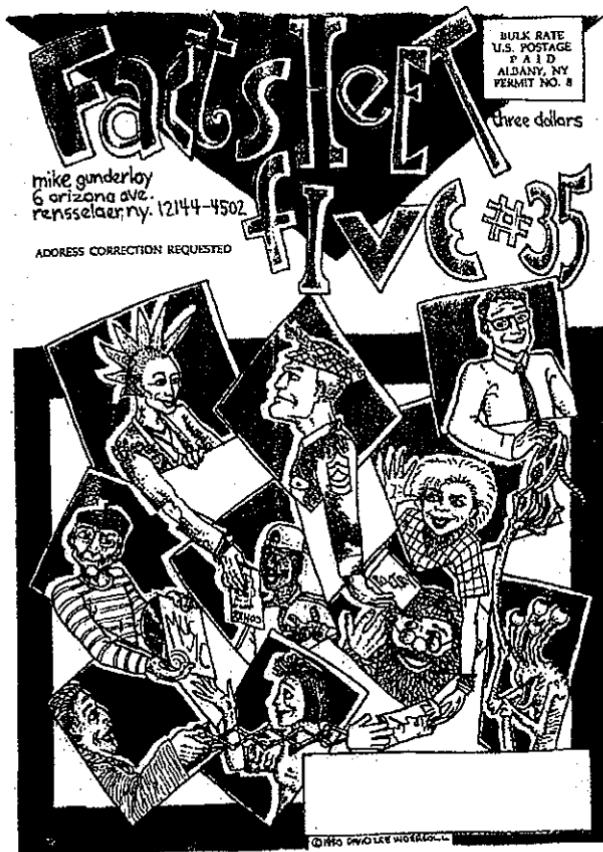
But the type of community being produced and discussed in the world of zines has novel characteristics. In fact, the word "community" as a term is used rarely, if ever, among zine writers. "Network" is the favored term. The ideal of a networked community is visualized in the cover illustration for *Factsheet Five* #35, in which a punk with spiked hair hands a comic to a young black man, a bearded hippie picks up a poetry zine from a soldier in uniform, an older beatnik gets an album from a straight-looking young woman, an older Gypsy passes a zine to a trendy girl, and a businessman with a tie shares a film with a space alien.[29] This vision of disparate individuals each in his or her separate frame, but all reaching across boundaries, is the ideal of the zine network.

Factsheet 5 ceased publication in 1998, Seth Friedman citing mostly the same reason as Mike Gunderloy – the wages were about $2 per hour and it demanded itself as a full time job. The role was picked up by Brent's *Zine Guide*, an annual "telephone book" of all zines being published, with top 10 lists, excerpted reviews from readers and other publications, and attempts at a very objective view of zines. Similarly, *Zine Guide* ceased publication in 2004, also citing financial reasons, and holding onto advertising money from everyone who had purchased ads in their unpublished issue.

The networking role is now primarily filled by *Zine World: A Reader's Guide to the Underground Press* and assorted punk zines like *Slug and Lettuce*, *Razorcake*, and *Maximum Rocknroll*. Factsheet 5 has continually changed ownership and editorship for the last ten years but despite rumors, no one has managed to publish a single issue. No current publications have a page count of zines features or circulation rivaling *Factsheet 5*; but volume has never been the central focus of zines, as much as community has. This may also reflect the current volume of zines being published today, versus their peak period in 1997.

If community is traditionally thought of as a homogeneous group of individuals bound together by their common-

THE NETWORK: *FACTSHEET FIVE*

ality, a zine network proposes 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.*[30]

This model is the very essence of a libertarian community: individuals free to be who they want and to cultivate their own interests, while simultaneously sharing in each other's differences. It allows people the intimacy and primary connections they don't find in a mass society, but with none of the stifling of difference that usually comes with tight-knit communities. This type of association has long been the dream of anarchism, parallels the hopes of multiculturalism, resonates with the virtual community of the Internet, and describes the ideal of the place that is bohemia.

THE SCENE

Networks of science fiction zine writers overlap those of personal zine writers which intersect the webs of queer and anarchist zines, but central to the greater network that connects all zines is the Scene: the loose confederation of self-consciously "alternative" publications, bands, shows, radio stations, cafés, bookstores, and people that make up modern bohemia.

The name "bohemia" conjures up images of Paris cafés, 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" in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley, or "scene reports" from Huntsville, Alabama.[31] These are bohemias in backwater towns and suburbs scattered throughout the United States. Bohemia today is first and foremost not a single bohemia – it is many and they are widely dispersed. As C. Carr coined it, it is a "bohemia diaspora," and "for the first time in 150 years, bohemia can't be pinpointed on the map."[32] The reasons for this dispersal are multiple, foremost being the fact that bohemia followed in the shadow of mainstream society, spreading out of the cities and into the suburbs. But this dispersal is also linked to more recent phenomena: gentrification and a superheated culture market.

While the Beats of the fifties and the counterculturists of the sixties benefited from the cheap urban quarters left in the wake of the middle class

white flight to the suburbs, hipsters of the decades that followed were priced out of established bohemian locales by the return of the middle class. Young professionals, sometimes veterans of the sixties counterculture themselves, wanted the excitement and cultural vivacity that living in bohemian neighborhoods offered, and had good-paying jobs to ensure they could live where they pleased.

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 well established in the 1980s that the president of the art school I attended heralded this practice as one in which "[t]he 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 journalist David Tomere pointed out in the title of his exposé, artists were being promoted as "Shock Troops of Gentrification."[33]

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 the USA's second largest export – and the results for bohemia were disastrous. Immediately after inception, cultural innovations (and their creators) were thrown under the spotlight, feted and dined in Soho or on Wall Street, then bought up and moved out, or discarded as unworthy and unprofitable. The impact of these two forces on the cultural world that traditionally populates bohemia was severe: you were either up and out or down and out; you reached instant stardom or were unable to pay your ever-increasing rent. Either way the result was exodus.

THE VIRTUAL COFFEEHOUSE OF
SLUG & LETTUCE

For the old bohemia and the healthy discontent and creativity it fostered this exodus 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."[34] For some critics this disappearance of physical locale is irreplaceable.

Russell Jacoby, bemoaning the death of the public intellectual, writes,

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.[35]

And for Jacoby that something else signals the death of bohemia. But it 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. There's the Mission in San Francisco, Manhattan's Lower East Side and, across the river, the unfortunate Williamsburg, Brooklyn (unfortunate for being heralded as the "New Bohemia" every couple of years in the Real Estate section of the *New York Times*). Seattle, Olympia, Portland, Austin, Minneapolis, Chapel Hill, Bloomington, Iowa City, Chicago, Columbus, Richmond: 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 Graña, in the preface to a monumental anthology of writings entitled *On Bohemia*, writes as follows:

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 café.[36]

In the new bohemian diaspora, place no longer plays the important part it once did. When cafés are renamed coffee shops, 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 café as a locus of bohemia is in its death throes.[37] One hundred and fifty years of geographical bohemia may indeed be coming to an end. And perhaps that is only to be expected. The world

in which we live is an increasingly mobile one and becoming ever more decentralized across space. Besides, there was always something contradictory about nailing a name synonymous with Gypsies and vagabonds to a fixed location.

If the characteristic of place no longer holds, the other characteristics – those of bohemian ideas, practice and creativity – live on through nonspatial networks. Webs of communication can offer the community, the support and the feeling of connection 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."[38] In other words, *S&L* is a virtual café. In issue 29, Chris is the hostess who greets readers with "Some Thoughts," a long personal editorial about living in New York City and feeling like "a faceless body in a crowd." Inside, entertainment is provided by photos of punk shows, and zine and record reviews. Back pages are given over to armchair philosophers who opine on subjects from information on AIDS to the imprisonment of Native American activist Leonard Peltier to the ever-pertinent question, what is punk? And the free classified ads that make up the bulk of *S&L* are the patrons looking for company: "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, spaces to play shows, zines looking for contributors, bands looking for members, homemade T-shirts for sale – *S&L* makes space for it all.[39]

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.[40] And in many ways the Scene, in terms of community structure, is a lot closer to the nongeographical community of science fiction fandom than to the traditional spatial bohemia. With coffeehouses owned by corporations and traditional bohemian neighborhoods populated by middle-class professionals, zines like *S&L* offer an invaluable service, acting as café, community center, and clubhouse that help connect these bohemians to one another, providing the "cement" that holds together a dispersed scene.[41] But if zines like *Slug & Lettuce* bind the Scene together by providing *virtual* cafés, others do it by providing tour guides to the bohemian diaspora scattered

across *terra firma*. This function explains the almost ubiquitous presence in punk zines of the band tour diary. In these diaries the zine writer takes the reader on a day-by-day tour with the band: riding in vans, playing at clubs, eating bad food, crashing on couches.[42] A member of Born Against chronicles his band's tour in *I, Yeast Roll*:
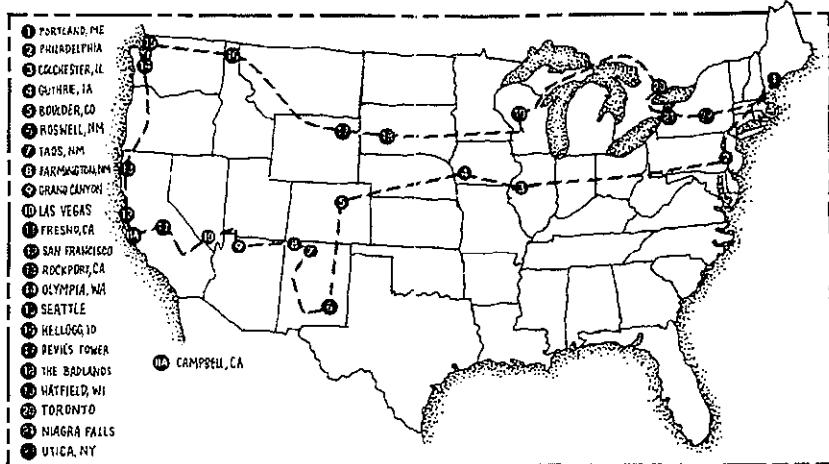
> Baltimore, MD
> March 4, 1993
> Spent last night here at Brooks' house, marinating in my own uselessness. Spent the night before that in a parking lot of a Louisville Taco Bell, sleeping in the loft of my van, after having arrived many hours too late for our show with Agent Orange. I am eating reheated pasta and drinking some old Fresca ... a Coca-Cola beverage, making me guilty in global corporate fascism.[43]

A slight variation on the tour diary theme is the "road trip," where much the same thing is chronicled, sans the band. In *Gogglebox*, Jennifer takes her reader with her as she bums rides from New York City to San Francisco.[44] The editor of *Po* produces a map of his road trip.[45] And in the January 1993 issue of *Crash*, after chronicling their own road trip, 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.[46]

BOHEMIA'S MAP IN *PO*

One way to understand this regular feature of zines is as a modern extension of the great American directive: Go West, young man! Following in the footsteps of Woody Guthrie, Jack Kerouac, the Merry Pranksters, and Thelma and Louise, rebels 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 road trip.[47] Shaking the dust from your heels, beholden only to circumstance, is a deeply American dream.

In this long road trip tradition, chroniclers always present *their* America. Zinesters are no different. 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 individuals the zine writers meet, the clubs where the bands play, the underground bookstores they visit, in brief, the people and places of the Scene. The tour diaries and road trips in zines bring to life the landscape of a dispersed bohemia.

The underground is not a tight, formalized, and coherent social grouping with firm boundaries; instead it is a nongeographical sprawl which must be mapped out. Publications put out by zinesters such as *Book Your Own Fuckin' Life: Do-It-Yourself Resource Guide* list state by state the zines, cafés, radio stations, alternative clubs, and so forth that make up this underground diaspora. "We have shows in the basement," the 700 Club in Fargo, North Dakota, advertises. "Plenty of room for traveling bands ... donations of beer and cigarettes accepted. Talk a lot of shit and you'll fit right in (A few couches, a shower and a kitchen)."[48] Through the narrative of road trips and tour diaries, zine writers draw connections between these scattered sites, charting a map of the underground.

For the occasion of recent zine conferences, organizers and friends have begun to

Greensboro, NC. (910) 288-8221 (Leave message).
Good, safe, clean body piercing at a reasonable price! By appointment only.

NORTH DAKOTA

BANDS

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700 College St., Fargo ND 58102. (701) 239-4213
Five smelly guys trying to play the punk rock music they grew up loving. Will play anywhere. Write and we'll write back. Residents of the rotten 700 Club.

NOBODY'S CHILDREN
425 N. Broadway Apt. 2, Minot ND 58701. (701) 839-2801
It's fun, you'll like it. New LP $5 ppd.

RECORD/BOOK STORES

FAT CAT
511 3rd Ave N. Downtown Fargo ND 58102. (701) 237-9099
Vinyl, some punk stuff, etc...

PROMOTERS & VENUES

700 CLUB
700 College St., Fargo ND 58102. (701) 239-4213
Home the Greasy 7 O'Clock Sucker/Capacity: 50-60 in a basement/ Food, lodging, bev. provided. We have shows in the basement. Plenty of room for travelling bands...donations of beer and cigarettes accepted. Talk a lot of shit and you'll fit right in. (A few couches, a shower, and kitchen).
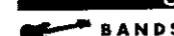
MICAH SCOTT
425 N. Broadway Apt. 2, Minot ND 58701. (701) 839-2801
We know what we need. Lodging and food provided. No guarantee. Usually at least $100.

ZINES

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319 12th Ave. N., Fargo ND 58102. (701) 280-0960
This ain't no shit Jerky (Kicks ass by the way). $1/8 1/2 X 11.

OHIO

BANDS

COLAVISION
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GUIDE TO THE UNDERGROUND:
BOOK YOUR OWN FUCKIN' LIFE
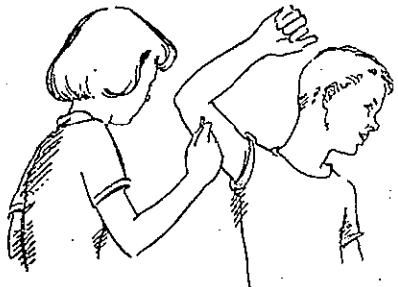
assemble *The Zinester's Guide to New York, Zinester's Guide to Portland, The Zinester's Guide to the Twin Cities,* and more. Originally intended just to be a simple orientation guide for the literal coffeeshops and restaurants that serve vegetarian and vegan fare for the types of people that like to scribble in a notebook, the form has been taken to the extreme by Shawn Granton, who has now developed the *Zinester's Guide to Portland* into 128 pages of virtually every "low/no cost" entertainment within a few miles of downtown. It is written by anyone who has a place to submit an entry for and a circulation of over 10,000 copies. Many people who order and read it live thousands of miles from Portland.

But even with the impressive list of institutions and connections listed in guides like these, modern bohemia is extremely precarious. As a result of the geographical dispersion, which limits a concentration of resources, and a speculative urban real estate economy which curtails investment, there is simply not an abundance of material structures – self-consciously underground coffeehouses, bookstores, clubs – scattered throughout the country. And those that do exist are in constant danger of being "discovered" by non-bohemians: of being gobbled up and ruined by an insatiable consumer culture industry and an all-consuming public with an always watchful eye for the new thrill. Because of the

SMELL EXPERIMENT

YOU WILL NEED: your friend, and something pleasant for her to smell

Now DO THIS. Hold it in front of her nose and *keep it there.* Tell your friend to keep sniffing away. What happens?

Look at the gentleman in the picture. As you might guess, he is queer.

Reading in queer positions is hard work for the muscles that move your eyeballs as you follow the words. They have been trained to do their work with your head in an upright position.

IN THE SHADOWS OF INNOCENCE IN *YOU OWN A WONDERFUL MACHINE, YOUR BODY*

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 the eyes of "normal" society but invisible to their gaze. Zines are a shadow map of the USA. Within the shadow map ordinary things are invested with different meanings. In *Pool Dust*'s road trip, abandoned pools and storm drain culverts become temporary skateboard parks. In other zines, Veterans of Foreign Wars halls become punk clubs, or laundromats are transformed into cafés for impromptu poetry readings. And in countless zine tales, Kinko's is a potential free printing press if you know the right scam.[49]

"There is poetry everywhere," Rob Treinen writes in *Cramped and Wet*, explaining why he reprints letters found on the ground and in garbage cans.[50] Marc Arsenault describes his *Andy's Chair* as "The journal of things missed.... Things forgotten."[51] And, as recounted in Aaron Cometbus's story of killing time in Janesville, forgotten back streets in dusty towns become special merely because they are forgotten. What is "nothing at all" to the straight world becomes something for the underground.

Even mundane items like a children's science experiment book from the 1950s takes on a different meaning when re-contextualized through different eyes and repackaged in a zine.[52] 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 know the scene wouldn't necessarily know are cool."[53]

In addition to reinvesting the everyday with shadow values, zines often highlight and joyfully recount out-of-the-ordinary events and places as testament to the depth and breadth of the weirdness in the USA 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 armbands 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 making his gun show rounds too). On another field trip, Adam and co. have lunch at the LA Police Training Academy sitting beneath the LAPD's brass knuckle collection.[54]

The shadow map is the property of people who possess very little. What they do possess is the ability to give things they don't own *new meanings*. As Dick Hebdige and others in the early days of the Centre for Contemporary Cul-

tural Studies in Birmingham have argued, this "semantic rearrangement of components of the objective world" gives people who are materially impoverished material with which to fashion their subcultures.[55] Stuck with the moniker "loser," zine writers transform it into an accolade; 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 significant 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 the USA. Combined with the network of people and institutions that do exist, and virtual community centers like *Slug & Lettuce* and the *Zinester's Guide,* the bohemian diaspora holds together. The Scene 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 to Maximumrocknroll[56]

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."[57]

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. Also, living within a modern consumer society that celebrates lifestyle choice and stylistic difference, it is more difficult to mark yourself as a cultural rebel than it was in Irwin's day – strict criteria of bohemian inclusion and exclusion help. But there's a conflict. For as much as they need these conventions to exist and hold together, true to their bohemian lineage, those who make up the scene honor, above all, individuality, originality, and freedom.

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

nowhere 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 burgeoning punk music scene, *Maximumrocknroll* is one of the most venerable institutions of the scene. Not everybody likes it. Tim and *MRR* are often slagged for dictating what fits within a very narrow definition of punk, for being too political (or politically correct, PC), for being too authoritarian, for trying to dominate the scene, or simply for being too big. But these criticisms highlight *MRR*'s success: more than any other institution, it has helped to define (and continually redefine) what is "punk."

This definition took place in editorials by Tim, columns by other regular writers, and in scene reports and articles sent in by readers. But the war of definition primarily happens in *MRR*'s extensive letters section.[58] For over twenty five years, and over three hundred 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 1,000 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

MAXIMUMROCKNROLL

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CORPORATE D.I.Y. IS PRETTY VACANT.

RHINO D.I.Y. SERIES

WHAT IS PUNK? *MAXIMUMROCKNROLL*

one anyway. (That'll change!)"[59]

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 reexamine 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.*[60]

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.*[61]

Mike takes us back to Planet Boy's argument: dressing punk is "being himself," because 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, and 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 the mix of authentic individuality and communal solidarity is a rough one. "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.*[62]

What sort of a community do you have if everybody has to have his or her own idea of that community? Answer: an unstable one.

This inherent instability perhaps explains another trope in *MRR* and

other punk zines: the Golden Age of Punk. Two years ago, three years ago ... pick any time in the past three 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. Steve Stepe writes in as early as 1983:

I think it's time somebody speaks up. I can't believe what's happening with the idea of punk. 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.[63]

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE SCENE? IN *FLIPSIDE*

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."[64] 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."[65] This "what's happened to the Scene?" complaint is such a standard feature in punk zines that *Flipside*, a then long-standing Southern California punk zine with an extensive letters column itself, pokes fun at the phenomenon on its cover, projecting the conflict into punk's distant future.[66]

Like all nostalgia, that for the golden age of the Scene is based on trying to escape the realities of the present. In all societies there is conflict between the individual and the community. But because the Scene is a self-conscious construction fashioned in rebellion against the dominant model of society, these tensions between individual and community, which would otherwise be buried in tradition and convention, are laid open and bare. This explains why absolute acts of kindness and support like catching someone diving blind off a stage can exist in the same scene where spitting on the performer – and vice versa – was considered de rigueur. Or why 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."[67] Or why month after month punks brutally slag each other in the pages of *MRR*, *Razorcake*, and countless other zines, yet month after month they keep writing back.

The tension in the punk scene between the individual and community, between freedom and rules, is a microcosm of the tension that exists within all of the networked communities of the zine scene. Zines are profoundly personal expressions, yet as a medium of participatory communication they depend upon and help create community. This contradiction is never resolved. It's one of the things that keeps the underground dynamic and fresh, but it is also debilitating, a morass which leads Viktim Joe to conclude, in all earnestness, that "anyone who calls themselves a punk is definitely not one."[68] If community never goes further than the pages of a zine or the floor of a club, this contradiction matters little. But if this 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, DC[69]

In a 1983 issue of *Maximumrocknroll* – while men were busy defining punk in the letters section – a group of women published the results of an informal poll surveying the feelings of women in the punk scene. The anonymous replies revealed a deep discontent with women's place 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 came up with some solutions:

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?[70]

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, bands, and their anger, dedicated to "putting the punk back into feminism and feminism into punk."[71]

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.[72] "We're tired of being written out – out of history, out of the 'scene,' out of our bodies," the editors of *Riot Grrrl* 3, write. "For this reason we have created our zine and scene."[73] For young feminist punk rockers, Riot Grrrl was founded as a space of their own. "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, no structure, and little formal organ-

ization outside of local meetings and zine exchanges. "There is no particular agenda or pledge or motto," states Ne Tantillo in *Riot Grrrl 6½*, "There is no singular allegiance to any one's thought. There is no structure to follow, only what you build yourself."[74]
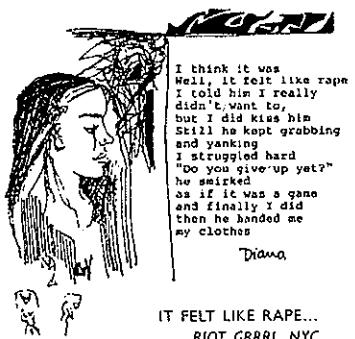
What these women build is a forum for self-expression, "a MEDIUM for grrrls to say what's on their minds."[75] And what's on their minds is the personal effect of growing up as a girl in a man's world. Included in almost every Riot Grrrl zine is at least one – and usually more than one – poem, rant, experiential scream about having been sexually abused, often by a male friend or relative. Diana's from *Riot Grrrl*, 5, is typical (see illustration).[76]

Sexual abuse is an all-too-common problem for young women, with approximately one in three girls a victim before the age of eighteen.[77] One of the most damaging effects of such abuse is the shame girls feel that it's somehow their fault, or, because they often know the attacker, that it isn't *really* abuse.

RIOT GRRRL
REVOLUTION STICKER

Sharing their stories with others and pointing their fingers at the accused, these young women express their rage, relieve their shame, and overcome the isolation that accompanies such an experience.

Another issue Riot Grrrls commonly address is self-image. A study commissioned by the American Association of University Women showed that 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 this 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."[78] Bombarded with idealized mass-media images of what a girl "should" look like, and solicited by lipstick, mascara, perfume, deodorant, and weight-loss advertise-

I think it was
Well, it felt like rape
I told him I really
didn't want to,
but I did kiss him
Still he kept grabbing
and yanking
I struggled hard
"Do you give up yet?"
he smirked
as if it was a game
and finally I did
then he handed me
my clothes

Diana

IT FELT LIKE RAPE...
RIOT GRRRL, NYC

ments whose purpose is to convince a girl that she is, sans product, incomplete, it's no surprise that girls develop a poor 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.[79] 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."[80]

Riot Grrrl zines, like all zines, are "continually re-rehearsed self-definition[s]."[81] They offer a way to reject definitions given by the dominant society and replace them with one's own, a way of "taking over the means of production in order to create our own meanings," as one Riot Grrrl statement puts it.[82] This partially explains another archetypal feature of these zines: the manifesto explaining what Riot Grrrl is. 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 responses in answer to these questions.

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."[83] 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 woman. Working hard to free themselves from one definition, Riot Grrrls are understandably reluctant to adopt another. Their secondhand experience of the codification of the feminist movement of the early seventies into set "feminist" roles makes them

SEXY?

Please, boy, don't tell me what is supposed to be sexy and attractive. Don't tell me how I should look. I will not mutilate my body to please you. To put my body in a pretty package isn't what I want. Not when it hurts me. I want to look how I want, without being uncomfortable, or having you condemn me for it.   c.

ARGUING IMAGE IN *RIOT GRRRL, HUH?*

doubly suspicious of group definitions. But this distinctive feature of what has come to be called Third Wave feminism has other roots as well: in zine tradition. Far from being just the medium of expression, this cultural heritage shapes these young feminists' message.

Women's music zines predate Riot Grrrl. In the early 1980s, for example, Lori Twersky began *Bitch*, "[t]he Women's Rock Newsletter with Bite." Like Riot Grrrl's use of the word "girl" – and zinesters' use of "loser" – Lori appropriates the insult "bitch" as a positive identity,[84] and used 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."[85]

Zines privilege the personal, and Riot Grrrl zines are no exception. The manifesto "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 zines 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 an 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*," one of the founding mothers of Riot Grrrl, Kathleen Hanna, writes in her zine *Bikini Kill*, 2, for – as she counsels in words strikingly similar to those of *Inside Joke*'s Elayne Wechsler quoted in Chapter 2 – Riot Grrrls should "embrace subjectivity as the only reality there is."[86]

The context is important. Kathleen's dictum comes 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 ... recitations rather than meaningful interactions," and thus "new standards arise when the whole thing was to shatter the old and replace it with action."[87]

Others share Kathleen's concern. "The whole idea of Riot Grrrl in the be-

ginning was that you sat around and told your *own* story," Arielle Greenberg explains, mourning the passing of the golden age of Riot Grrrl. Now, she elaborates, 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 too real to me.*[88]

Both Kathleen and Arielle are pointing to the problems with the necessary "routinization" of community, the move from innovation to tradition, from 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 with Riot Grrrls than in the punk scene. "RIOT GRRRL (to me)," Dawn describes paradoxically, is "GRRRLS getting together and standing up for their rights and empowering each other, knowing we are not alone."[89]

Grrrl community is underscored in reaction against the competition that women often feel towards one another in the 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, Huh?*[90]

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 in itself. "Riot Grrrl," writes Ne, "is a river of ideas and perspectives flowing through our minds; a tributary with a swift current rippling over and around obstacles, pouring into an ocean, not to become part of the tide, but to change the tide."[91] The question is, how do you change the tide if you are against becoming a common, communal countertide yourself?

Riot Grrrls, like punks and zinesters writ large, are trying to 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 dialogue. 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.

"This is our revolution – it's right here in these pages..."[92] 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, "creat[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.[93] 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. Propaganda of the deed.

Riot Grrrl breathes 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 with 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. But some crucial political questions still remain. How does cultural action translate into political change? And how do you build a movement when you are afraid to coalesce as a community? Because these problems are routinely neglected by Riot Grrrls (and other zinesters), a more appropriate question might be, do they really want to change the greater society at all?

COMMUNITIES AGAINST SOCIETY?

"Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all dispositions are forever forming associations."[94] So wrote Alexis de Tocqueville, impressed by this distinctive feature of America as he traveled through the country in the early nineteenth century. Voluntary associations, he pointed out, are constituted to govern towns, build churches, promote morals, discuss ideas, throw parties … for seemingly everything. He believed that Americans formed these alliances 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. De Tocqueville also understood associations as a force that mitigated the individualistic tendencies of American society. Coming together in purposeful unions, citizens were no longer isolated individuals.

However, de 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 de Tocqueville: "civil associations ... far from directing public attention to public affairs, serve to turn men's minds away therefrom."[95] Focused 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 shares the characteristics, both positive and negative, of these free associations.[96] 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 they feel that their reality is ignored by the rest of society.

Queer punk rockers, for example, feel unrepresented in both predominantly straight punk zines and the liberal assimilationist gay and lesbian press. Therefore they use zines like *Homocore* and *J.D.s* as virtual meeting places, spaces to define and communicate who they are, and remind themselves (and others) that they are not alone.[97] "Dear Homocore," a reader from Montana writes in, "I am a seventeen year old gay punk. Life in Missoula sux. Thank god for Homocore."[98] In an issue that carried fifty-one letters (totaling almost one third of the zine), letter after letter reads the same.

Gay punks aren't the only ones who 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 *Colorblind* is put out by skinheads who vehemently denounce racism.[99]

These endless divisions and subdivisions of different realities are such a part of the zine and underground scenes that a joker writes into *Maximumrocknroll*:

> *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.[100]*

Ideally the individuals who make up the network of micro-communities of the zine world communicate to one another, sharing their differences, and speaking across voids, materializing the vision of the networked community sketched on the cover of *Factsheet Five*. There is plenty of evidence that this does happen. But there is also a tendency to move in the opposite direction:

hunkering down in your micro-community, surrounded by only your own reality. 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."[101] 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 who to entertain. This means you can visit and be visited by people who have interests and experiences far outside your own. But it can also mean that you can limit interaction to people *just like you*. In our 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 such as the Internet, this dubious privilege has been democratized. The result, as Lewis Lapham writes, is that it is increasingly possible for "[t]he 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."[102]

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 otherwise impossible in a 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.

FOUR

WORK

TAKING WORK SERIOUSLY

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? Keffo[1]

The fact that Keffo has a problem with work is not surprising; most of us probably do. What's remarkable is how much time and effort he expends ranting and writing about it. For fifty pages in his *Welcome to the World of Insurance,* he exposes the parasitical practices of the insurance company he works for, ridicules the servility of his fellow workers and the stupidity of his bosses, reprints public relations booklets and advertisements (after "doctoring" them), advocates sabotage and union organization, then, finally, documents his day of working in the mailroom, doing absolutely nothing.

Keffo isn't 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 industry, 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 fifty states of the Union, puts out *Dishwasher.* And out of Los Angeles comes a zine entitled simply *Work.*[2] Dave Roche produced the zine *On Subbing,* about his first four years of substitute teaching as an education assistant in Portland, OR. While Dave is not entirely out to sabotage his workplace, the tone is continually critical of the school district's priorities and the way that many teachers and principals do their jobs. In *Xtra Tuf,* Moe Bowstern documents and captures her 15 years of experience as a commercial fisher-

man for zine readers who would likely never experience such a profession. Most zines don't focus exclusively on the world of work, but discussions and critiques of labor for money, in some form or another, find their way into many.

Perhaps this is to be expected. Work, after all, is a primary activity of most people's lives. And unlike sleeping, drinking, eating and leisure activities, it is an activity during which we have 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 that gives them little satisfaction. These have been recognized as standard features of the capitalist labor process since at least the Industrial Revolution. But far from having improved over the past century and a half, the lack of control that most employees experience in their job has worsened.[3] The last vestiges of preindustrial work traditions have withered or been eradicated, and organized labor in the United States has, for the past fifty years, by and large followed the 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.[4]

The economic restructuring that began in the 1970s in the USA and elsewhere has only accelerated this process. Since the early seventies, in the effort to compete on a global scale, corporations have successfully fought to create what they call a "flexible" environment. In terms of production this means breaking up large factories and subcontracting component parts all over the world. In terms of consumption this means the abandonment of a stable mass market and the aggressive identification of specialty and niche markets. And for labor, the euphemism of "flexibility" translates as increased part-time, temporary, and nonunion work. Compounding this trend, over the same twenty and more years economic activity has shifted from industrial to cultural/information production and the service industry, sectors where this sort of "flexibility" is more and more a given condition. As a result of these changes, US corporations have effectively regained competitive strength. But this edge has a social price, particularly for young people. The traditional industrial workforce (high-school-educated, blue-collar working classes) has been made superfluous because many of the new information and service jobs that have replaced the old industrial jobs demand the cultural capital of a middle-class upbringing and a college education. At the same time, the bulk of 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 face the reality of downward mobility and declining aspirations, in both income and job conditions.

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 USA were rarely affected by these changes. Culture and information was an expanding sector of the marketplace, and magazine articles, movies, and television shows reflected the optimism by focusing on comfortable and satisfied urban professionals. Shows like *LA 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. With few exceptions, commercial culture readily supplied this escape from the increasingly grim 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. Nate Wilson, for example, illustrates his "Daily Grind" working as a plumber's helper in his comix zine *Scrambled Eggs*, ending the last frame with a picture of himself in a toilet bowl, saying "By the time the weekend is here, I feel like shit." In *The Incredible Flaming Mechanism* Jasper Albeeny takes an equally dim view of his job in the "culture industry." He's a clerk in a video store, and his parting words are:

"Workin Sucks!!"[5] In zines, writers present the real story of the work they do, cutting through the crap – literally, in Nate's case – about the USA's bright future in the high-tech age.

But what's interesting about zine representations of work life is that such simple and direct depiction of jobs as Nate's and Jasper's are relatively rare. More common are tales that dwell less on the actual meaningless and demeaning work their writers perform, and more on the hypocrisy of not having that work recognized as being meaningless and demeaning. For instance, in *The Olecatronical Scatologica Chronicle*, Jokie Wilson (no relation to

THE NEW ECONOMY: *TEMP SLAVE*

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 who "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]

While at one time working organizations rallied to preserve the "dignity of labor," in the new, de-skilled, service economy, zine writers feel there's nothing left to preserve. In this context Jokie's comment that one of the most annoying things a customer can do is to take his workplace "seriously" makes sense. What motivates and shapes the discussion of work in zines is this contradiction between work as it is – an exploitative relationship which pits the boss against the worker against the

WORK BLUES IN *INCREDIBLE FLAMING MECHANISM*

consumer – and how it is *supposed* to be according to the American middle-class mythos: a meaningful vocation.

According to *The Economic Report of the President, 1994*, the service industry (excluding trade and finance) now makes up just a shade less than 30 percent of the economy and, more relevant here, comprised more than 60 percent of new job growth in 1993 and almost 85 percent the following year. Since the mid-1980s, service sector employment has accounted for 52 percent of overall job growth, and retail trade has accounted for an additional 21 percent. In other words, a total of 73 percent of the new jobs created during the decade were in the service or sales industries.[7] These two industries are known for low union membership, high job insecurity, and, perhaps most important, putting a premium on "the managed heart": the public presentation and internalization of work commitment and satisfaction.[8] These are jobs where the employee is supposed to take his or her work "seriously"; as might be imagined, zinesters don't. "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 Joe 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 Economic Report of the President, 1994 goes on to chronicle how "The Personnel Supply Industry," that is, temporary workers, made up 20 percent of payroll job growth in 1993. From 1990 to 1993, part-time employment increased at a rate of almost four times that of full-time jobs.[10] Since temp work is relatively conducive to flexible time schedules and unorthodox lifestyles, zinesters are often drawn to it. Significantly, temp work also highlights the contradictions between the commitment asked of the employee and the lack of commitment offered by the employer. Keffo, writing in *Temp Slave*, describes a temp job in which he was sent an advance letter detailing his task of 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 his 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 care passionately about what is basically scut work. Factories have always been adorned with posters of happy workers and motivational phrases, but the insincerity of this tactic is more apparent today than ever. Through downsizing, eradication of benefits, and use of parttime labor, companies are making it evident that they don't care about workers; simultaneously they are pushing propaganda about control circles and worker participation, and demanding that workers give their moral commitment to the job. It is this disjuncture between the actual workings of these businesses and the image 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 two hundred medical kits an hour, each of which sells for $100, and then being paid only $5 an hour. But it is not this straightforward exploitation that provokes 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 exposés in history past – *The Jungle,* 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 workplace and more about the hypocritical social and economic relationships that surround their work. This emphasis grows out of the ideal of an *authentic* life so crucial to the underground. Hypocrisy dominates discussions of work because it is here that zine 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, raised in the middle class, they've internalized a middle-class ideal of work: work is not just a simple job that demands physical and mental exertion, but a meaningful vocation that requires moral commitment. Work is part of the self.[13] Dumped into the contemporary labor market, however, zinesters soon realize that most work in our society is done for, directed by, and benefits someone else. The disjuncture between these two definitions of work – the former being self-affirming labor; the latter, alienating work – prompts zine writers to first identify the source of this dissonance in the social relations that make up their work experience, then 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 any 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 colleagues go on in the *Sabot Times* to tell tales of fabricating quotes, getting paid by sources for favorable stories, and writing sloppy stories 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, thus shutting it down, has an important place in the modern underground culture, and lore of its practice and defense of its goals fill the pages of zines. After telling another work story, Trevor writes, "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. Joseph 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." Dave Roche tells a tale of organizing the local punks to steal school supplies from local chain stores because the schools cannot afford them. ... and then running his zines on the school photocopier. And amidst numerous dishwashing stories, Dishwasher Pete writes a column in his zine on "Common Dishwasher Problems and Solutions." "PROBLEM: You've been breaking a lot of dishes at work. SOLUTION: What's the problem?"[17]

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 Phoenix airport. She calls it a "very neat job situation" as "[t]he inventory at this place is pretty loose and easy to adjust, so I give a lot of stuff away 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 café, right under the nose of the megacorporation that employs me!"[18]

Tales of sabotage and theft are not just represented *in* zines, but often *by* them. Stealing the materials 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 zines, she responded

matter-of-factly, "[M]y 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 for hurting the corporate world. The latter simply passes on the cost to the consumer – the very same worker in a different role. After bragging of his thieving ability, Trevor Rigler 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, the "effectiveness" of theft and sabotage in a purely instrumental fashion is beside the point. Unlike the Luddites who destroyed textile machinery in England in the early nineteenth century, zine saboteurs aren't hoping to restore a recent tradition of nonalienated or "authentic" labor – at least not within the workplace. While the ideal of nonalienated work is carried over into the cultural realm (something I'll discuss later), it's all but given up for lost at the nine-to-five job. Instead, sabotage is about psychic rather than material 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 so 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 it he outlines strategies for "people that don't want to be bothered at work" by their bosses:

First off, you want your boss off 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 is the kernel of a more consequent philosophy. The idea is to turn around the alienation you feel: *you fight alienation by alienating others.* It's a philosophy common in any workplace, but here its roots are not necessarily in shopfloor culture but instead in the punk-inflected underground culture of which Doug is a part. As Dick Hebdige has pointed out, the punk underground not only reflected the problems of society in the middle to late 1970s, it called additional attention to them by *dramatizing* them.[23] Doug's strategy is to project the personality of the ultimate alienated individual: the sociopath.

This method of resistance is simple and direct: fuck with the boss's 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 tactic of reverse alienation 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; Doug writes that the tactics outlined above work equally well with fellow employees who are trying to be inappropriately friendly. It is not a far, or illogical, leap from promoting workplace sabotage to exhortations to "fuck shit up" at the shopping mall. 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*, giving the sage advice that, "The business of business is theft.... They've been robbing you blind all your life – now it's your turn to take a little back."[25] 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 rest rooms, scam high-grade coffee at low-grade prices, and so on.[26] Again, the point of these acts is not so much that the people doing the thieving need the products – toilet paper, coffee, and stamps are not exactly high-cost items – nor does this theft inflict real damage on the system. What's important is what sabotage and thieving symbolize: a refusal 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 fundraising gumball machines left unguarded in parking lots. Try as I might, I don't see the oppressive character of gumball machines, nor how the charity organizations they support could possibly be construed as "the enemy." This is particularly odd in the case of *Gaybee*, which is otherwise devoted to a caring and compassionate outlook on the world, and whose co-editor, Missy Lavalee, 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 with the underground culture of which she is a part, a culture in which 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 entertaining, and a good number of them target the smug and rich, little moral judgment is made between pranks that harm the powerful and those that target ordinary and therefore powerless "normal" people. In *Pranks!*, watching good Samaritans jump into a garbage dumpster after a plastic doll animated with a tape recording of a baby's cry is as amusing as repainting corporate billboards with subversive messages.[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 gallowshumor sensibility here, but not completely and not always. Another zine, *Crank*, whose editor revels in being a jerk, solicits amateur poetry by pretending to be a literary 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 funny. *Crank's* meanness reveals the cost of the strategy of fighting alienation by embodying it. Projecting alienation may reveal the hypocrisy that lies beneath the surface of work and other inauthentic social relations, but it does nothing to relieve it. Instead, it furthers it.

Amelia G writes an articulate defense of anti-social behavior in *Black Leather Times*, reminiscing, "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, is it any surprise that those who make up the underground take this alienation, turn it into an attribute, and project it outward? As the editors of *Sabot Times* assert, they're not doing anything that isn't part of society anyway. What they're doing is simply drawing attention to what already exists. Sabotage and alienation – a *Bad Attitude* – becomes a lived performance.[31] These modern saboteurs make their life into a theater that foregrounds the disaffection straight society would like to ignore.

While this inversion and refutation is understandable, and perhaps even admirable given the poverty of political options today, it has its real problems, for it divides the world up into us against the rest. Or me against the rest: The 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."[32]

Ironically, even while zines regularly ridicule the narrow-mindedness of "political correctness" and the essentialism of "identity" politics, they end up reproducing a similar, and politically debilitating, worldview: the few of us against all of them.

This reproduction of alienation is also problematic for another reason. Amelia, in the essay cited above, goes on to write, "We had fun at the expense of others because we had nothing of our own to spend." Amelia here reveals a deficit in the entire underground culture. By counseling sabotage *against* and projecting alienation *from*, they allow their identity to be defined by the workplace and

BREAKIN' DISHES WITH PETE IN *DISHWASHER*

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, they link their identity – albeit in opposition – to the outside world, the very repository of inauthenticity. Such a strategy depends on the rather naïve belief that someone, somewhere will notice, care, and call for a change. But a change to what? Embodying social alienation leaves one without ideas of or guides to 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. -Dishwasher Pete[33]

"REPENT! Quit your JOB! SLACK OFF!" *SubGenius Pamphlet No. 1*, enjoins on its first page.[34] The popularization of "slack" as a lifestyle and "slacker" as a role aspiration within the modern underground has its roots in the tongue-in-cheek SubGenius religion/conspiracy started in the early 1980s. The goal of the elect of the SubGenius is to attain slack. As with all religions, what this beatific state actually is remains 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 *cinéma vérité* style, Linklater's film chronicles a day in the life of a group of people "on the fringes of any meaningful participation" in Austin, Texas.[35] 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 his 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 summer 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.
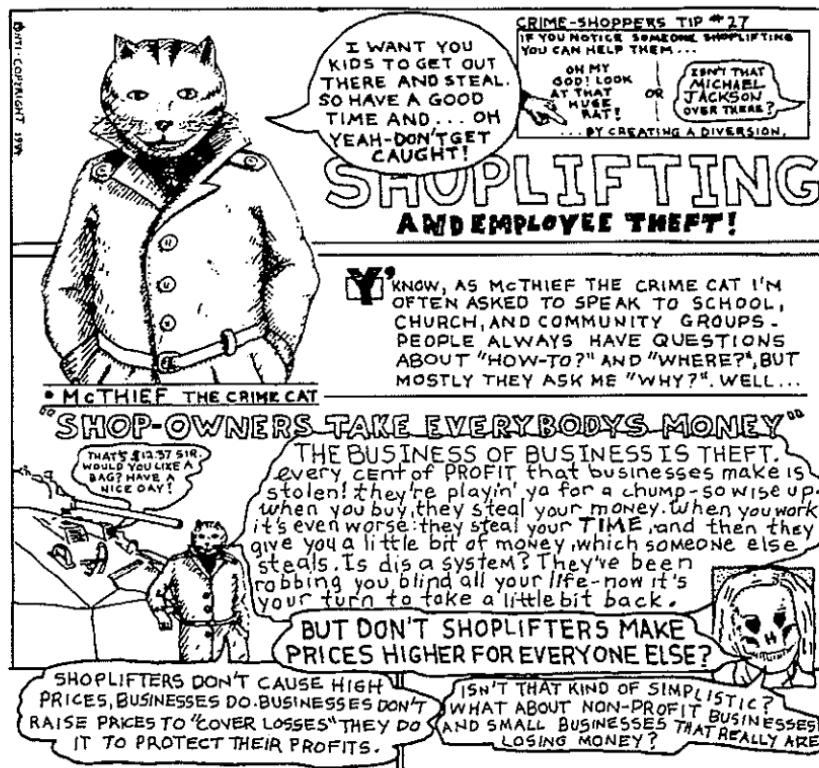
Slacking is a time-honored tradition of those kept at the bottom of society. African-American laborers once sang out their feelings about work with lyrics such as "Dere ain't no use in my workin' so hard," and "When you think I'm workin', I ain't doin' a thing," creating a counterideal to the Protestant 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'."[36] The rejection of the ethic of hard work and determination makes sense if you know that it will make no difference anyhow, but why zinesters raised within the middle class would adopt the ideal of slack is a bit more puzzling. Part of the answer is bohemian tradition. Being on permanent vacation within a society that stresses work has always appealed to the cultural underground. The famed nineteenth-century French bohemian Théophile Gautier once stated, "It appears to me that the most fitting occupation for a civilized man is to do nothing."[37] 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*, 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..."[38] Bohemians, Villagers, Beats, hippies – almost every modern underground has celebrated leisure.

With roots in the past, the slacker as role aspiration fits perfectly with what zinesters know about the economy of the present and their prospects for the future. With mainstream economists predicting that the average person will change jobs five or six times throughout a lifetime, and the *New York Times* reporting that even high-tech industry is "shedding jobs" as part of permanent corporate strategy, the idea of cultivating the knowledge and skills necessary for a "stable" career makes little sense.[39] "My advice to the youth of America is this," writes Stacy Estep, editor of *Box of 64*, "focus instead on your *unmarketable* skills. Don't suppress them in favor of memorizing historical dates or mathematical formulas; revel in them! Cultivate them!"[40]

In the era since World War Two, 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.[41] What growth there has been has occurred in the service sector and sales, and in management and the professions. The former provide dead-end jobs, while the latter demand long

hours and commitment to the corporate world, and are fiercely competitive – yet still offer little security.[42] It's no shock that, faced with these choices, many young people simply opt out and slack off. In the words of Linklater, *Slacker*'s director, the underground is made up of people "rejecting society before society rejects you."[43]

Not discounting this rather economically determinist explanation for slacking, it's not a sufficient one. People don't merely react to the environment that surrounds them; instead, they invest their decisions with meaning. What slack offers to zinesters is a philosophy of laziness as a positive attribute. As we saw with the moniker "loser," the zine world is adept at adopting insults as compliments. Turning the tables on definitions of who and what you are and making

SHOPPING ADVICE FROM *NO LONGER A FANZINE*

a negative into a positive is a subculture's way of taking the sting out of being limited in possibilities and labeled as such. Faced with diminished career opportunities, labeled as an apathetic generation by the mainstream press, the members of this underground have made apathy and a lack of career options something to cheer.

In rebellion against a culture that glorifies the work ethic with silly football-coach aphorisms such as "Winners don't quit and quitters don't win," and 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 quit things yourself but revel in it:
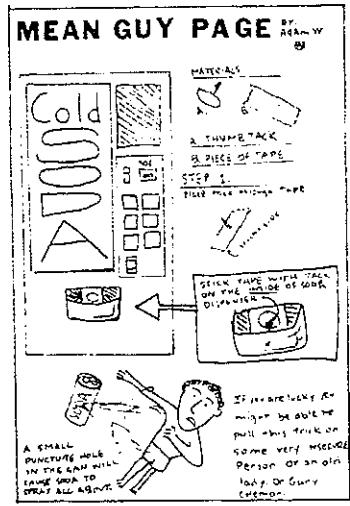
> *Tell everyone you know that you have quit. Because of the stigma attached to quitting, many quitters deny themselves the pride and gratification of quitting.... Send reminders, call [friends] to discuss the circumstances of your quitting, invite people to your house and dwell on whatever you quit.*

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, circumstances force the quitter 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," Dishwasher 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]

As with sabotage, there is a certain political logic to this philosophy of slack. Withdrawal from economic, social, and political production makes sense as a – partially unconscious – strategy of resistance in our (post-)modern world. In the past, people struggled to become subjects of history, demanding what was denied to them: the right to act upon the world. As Jean Baudrillard writes: "To a system whose argument is oppression and repression, the strategic response is to demand the liberation rights of the subject." But this sort of

MEAN GUY PRANKS IN EGG

simple repression, while certainly still inflicted upon those at the bottom of our society, is no longer the dominant logic of control in the West. Instead, Baudrillard 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 citizens, and exaltations to "get involved" in their community or be part of the workplace "quality circle" bombard them. Still, citizens and employees 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. Revolution: the fight for the right to be a subject of history is a strategy of the past, dead and buried. Today's resistance can be found in "devolution."[47] In a very zinester-like move, Baudrillard takes what have traditionally been considered revolutionary deficits – apathy, passivity, ironic detachment – and turns 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 patina of democracy, violent revolution as a tactic for overarching social change is not viable at present, while the simple withdrawal of consent may be an effective tactic.[48] 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:

> *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 seems simply a justification for retreating from politics and society, a politics of pure "devolution." 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 ... in which you can experience the revolutionary pleasure of thinking for yourself." This is what distinguishes the underground philosophy of slack from simple dis-

engagement. What slackers – and perhaps the larger, apathetic population as well – are rebelling against is not participation *per se,* but social, economic, and political participation as it is defined by the powers that be. Is it any wonder that workers look askance at "employee participation" if they are hired as temps? Is it a mystery that people refuse to vote when politicians respond to the interests of Political Action Committees instead of citizens? What others might see as a fatalistic rejection of interest, period, may be reconsidered as a rejection of phony activity, leaving the possibility of an assertion of "authentic" engagement wide open. For slackers are not just dropping out, they are also turning on and tuning in to the possibilities of another culture and society – whether that be "your own little world" or, as the fact that Mickey Z cares to distribute his zine suggests, the larger underground community. As one of the characters in the film *Slacker* states: "Withdrawing in disgust is not the same as apathy."

What starts out in negation can lead to revitalization. Rejecting the "rat race" allows for time and mental space to rethink what matters in work, in leisure, in life. Missy Lavalee, for example, told 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]

Missy's life strategy is one of withdrawal but also engagement: her new definition of success includes putting out her own zines and working with others in Blacklist Mailorder, a cooperative networking organization that distributed underground zines and records worldwide.

On a more intimate plane, slacking is about rediscovering experiences that are lost in the hurry 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 celebrating the waste of a day 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] Dishwasher Pete tells me that his slacker 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]
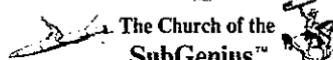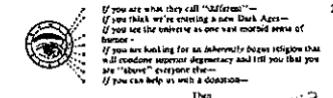
As "super slackers," Pete and other zine writers live, then write about their life, outside the bourgeois ideals of hard work, material success, and boundless consumption, implicitly setting up an alternative model of the good life. As a counter-model to mainstream society, however, slacking is problematic.

Like Henry David Thoreau at Walden Pond, slackers rely upon the privilege of the better-off. As 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, Dishwasher 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 seventeen 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]

"Mack", the anonymous author of *Evasion*, writes extensively about squatting plush suburban homes and shoplifting and dumpstering all that he consumes. He abandoned his suburban upbringing in lieu of a remarkably similar one; one that is wholly reliant on the majority of the population not leading a similar life.

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 decisions to reject the life of "career chasing" that are found empty. But such a decision to crash on others' floors and wash dishes

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO *SUBGENIUS*

for a living is only possible because of the material success of those career chasers who eat out or 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 strategy of resistance depends on the very society it resists. Writing in 1939, George S. Snyderman and William Josephs offered 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 feasible. 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 for his privileges.[55]
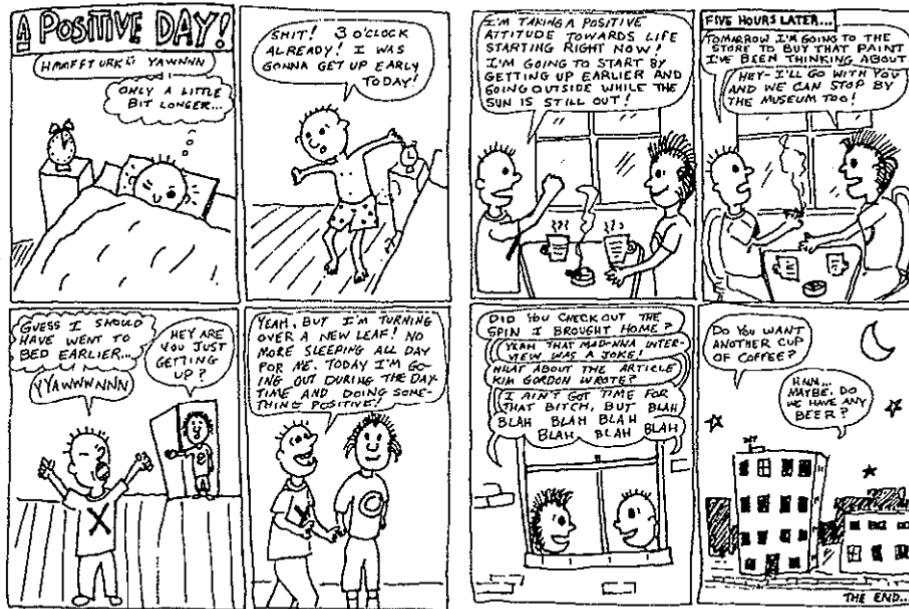
As the SubGenius Foundation gleefully admits, "Slack is like freedom, but unlike freedom it brings no responsibility."[56]

There is another problem with slacking as a resistance strategy: the celebration of leisure poses no challenge 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, 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 Dishwasher Pete declares in the quotation that opened this section, he is merely taking a shortcut to what his nonbohemian 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, though for political reasons it does not. As economist Juliet Schor points out in her book *The Overworked American*, Americans work harder today than they have at any time in the post-1945 era, with one fourth of all full-time workers spending forty-nine or more hours on the job each week, and half of these working sixty hours or more.[57] This workload is further compounded for those, often women, who have fulltime responsibilities both at work and at home. Ironically, the other labor statistic that has risen in the past half-century is worker productivity. The amount a 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 with each of us working only four hours a day, or six months a year, or every other year. Yet we don't. The efficiency of capitalist production and advanced technology has ended natural scarcity. In other words, the scarcity that exists today is the result not of not enough to go around, but of unequal distribution of what there is already: it's artificial, and thus political. It is well within our capacity to provide leisure and material comfort to the population of the USA at least, 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, which promotes finding enjoyment less in Nintendo and Disneyland and more in contemplating turtles swimming, in exploring old buildings, in talking to others, and in creating one's own culture. "All understand the value of useful things, but how many perceive the value of useless-

FINDING NOTHINGNESS IN TEEN FAG

ness?" Not surprisingly, these words of Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu turned up in the pages of *Factsheet Five*.[58]

There is an important exception to the slack ethic of zero work in the zine world, for the zines that carry these articulate arguments against work are themselves products of intensive labors. In conversation, I pressed Pete on his dislike for work and responsibility. I brought up the fact that his zine *Dishwasher* is lovingly designed and manufactured and must have taken an immense amount of time and effort 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."[59] As Pete points out, there is another ideal of work operating in the zine world: non-alienated 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.
<div align="right">C. Nash, Queer Magnolia[60]</div>

For most people, for most of the time, the work they do and the experience they derive from that work resonate with what a young Karl Marx called estranged or alienated labor in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844. Simply put: This is work in which the producer is "alienated" from what it is he or she produces, how it is produced, and what is done with the product.[61] But in identifying the traits of alienated labor, Marx implicitly held out the possibility of its opposite. While time may have proved Marx mistaken in other things, his 150-year-old ideal of nonalienated 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 so 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 important, 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 likes to say, 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 of which they are a part, implicitly embody a critique of the driving force in our society: the pecuniary and narrowly instrumental nature of nearly all work. 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."[62] 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 beside the point. If you make it, great. If you lose it, it's to be expected. The oft-repeated statement that zines are produced for love, not money, is really a stand-in for another argument: about the type of work that is done for money versus the type of work that is done for love. For at the heart 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 nonalienating creation is not born by immaculate conception. It has its roots in rejection, in particular the zinesters' rejection of their day-in, day-out experience of work.

To understand the importance of zines as an antidote to the work 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 people could escape from work and create their own world. As rock critic Simon Frith has pointed out, one of the things that make popular music so attractive – particularly to young people – is that the musician represents a life free from work, a person whose work is their play, an individual, in short, who "did it their way."[63] 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 work has a strong hold.[64]

But this inverse relationship between straight work and zine work is more explicit than the choice of topics covered; the idea that zines are a strike

against alienating labor is asserted openly by zinesters such as *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. 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, it's 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.*[65]

For the editors of *Pinto*, work on the zine, even the unpleasant tasks, is
different from the work they do for a living. It's different because it's 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 it – in a way that is markedly different from that which 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."[66] Michelle Rau, zine historian and creator of the feminist comix zine *Lana's
World*, echoes Tad's words, commenting too 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.*[67]

For both Tad and Michelle, work on zines is marked out in a more natural, albeit
feverish, rhythm than the hours and minutes that have become standards in
capitalist production, even in this era of so-called flextime. Whereas time spent
working for a living is strictly delineated in a manner that enables account to be
kept of the production process, the meaning of time devoted to working on a
zine is centered on the product itself.[68]

Unlike most employment, working on a zine is fun. "It's fun as hell," writes Lois Lane about putting out *Sabot Times*; in reply to the question "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 it is meaningless in itself: even J.C. acknowledges it's "very cliché." But the reasons J.C. gives for why "it's fun" reveal a bit more complexity and hint at where the pleasure one gets from producing a zine comes from. "The only restrictions are those I put on myself," he writes. "That's what makes it fun, the freedom to just do it."[69] That zines are a place where the creator has only his or her own restrictions to heed is key in understanding what they offer their makers.[70] 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.

This issue of control sculpts the very aesthetics of zines. Zines, as a material medium, have form, and this form becomes part of the message from zine creators to their audience. The physical form of zines often complements their personal nature, and as zines are handmade, the hands of the creator are often clearly visible in the publication. Aaron Cometbus, for example, carefully hand lettered each of the eighty-two pages that make up issue 31 of *Cometbus*. This intimate quality complements Aaron's personal 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:

> Where I am now and where I've been every night, working on this issue midnight to 6:30 am, with a half hour lunch and two smoke breaks. Writing. It's taken me six weeks just to do the damn handwriting. But tonight I'm finishing this little book, and tomorrow I'm gonna take my piles of notes out into the alley and have one hell of a bonfire.

By concluding like this, Aaron brings the *Cometbus* reader into his very process of creation.[71]

Most publishers don't hand letter their zines, but choose to use typewriters, word processors, and computers instead. But even here, emphasis is placed on physically demonstrating the control of individuals over their technological tools. 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.[72] 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."[73] Which is exactly what she does.

Hand-done drawings often illustrate the pages of zines. In *The Catbox Room*, for example, Lisa Maslowe sketches vignettes from her life, such as a trip she took back to Los Angeles, where she grew up.[74] The fact that the drawings are not of professional quality does not really matter.

It's not that good drawing doesn't exist or isn't appreciated in the zine world. More than technical expertise, however, zinesters value the bonds between the zine writer/artist, what he or she is drawing, and the person reading the zine. The amateurism of the illustration reinforces this familiarity. Instead of emulating the slickness of the commercial mass media, (which, as I'll discuss in Chapter 5, constitutes an aesthetics of separation), the illustrations in zines are more reminiscent of the doodles and sketches in the margins of a personal letter: a style of intimate connection.

The design possibilities opened up by Xerox reproduction and computer scanners liberate zinesters from their own hand-done illustrations. By "borrowing" images from other sources they can expand their visual palette to include pictures made by and for others. In *Crap Hound*, for example, editor Sean Tejaratchi reassembles image fragments of media refuse: appliance catalogs, sleazy advertisements, old medical textbooks, and pornography, into humorous (and often beautiful) collages.[75] This common practice of borrowing material from the mass media and reproducing it in a zine is one of the ways in which zinesters take control of the commercial images and words that surround them, making the mass media speak their own underground language. Zine aesthetics not only reflect who the individual creator is, they also delineate what the zine is not.

"The scruffier the better," as Michael Carr, a writer for *Ben is Dead*, argues in describing what makes a zine look like a zine. He continues: "[P]hotocopied 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

HOUSE IN THE MIDDLE
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AARON'S HAND IN *COMETBUS*

words, the zines *look* as if they are controlled by no one other than their producer.

Control is not just something that zinesters want, it is also what they are trying to get away from. The cut-and-paste style, first popularized in punk zines but now a part of many, draws upon the aesthetics of a ransom note to create an anti-style. While this style has become standard in commercial publications aimed at young audiences, it originated as a reaction against professional design. Unlike the meticulous control of a professional design team in the commercial media world, cut-and-paste is deliberately spasmodic. The ideal is to replicate visually the energy and spontaneity of a punk show, combined with the outlaw connotations of the kidnapper's or terrorist's note. Pasting down words on top of images on top of other words, cut-and-paste steals raw material from the commercial press, but uses it to create the opposite of a professionally designed, well-planned, easy-to-read page.

Zine editors such as Queen Itchie of *Sneezing Jesus* use cut-and-paste to scramble the control of seamless commercial design, then exert their own (anti)control by assembling tattered scraps into their own creation.[77] This issue of control crosses over from aesthetics into the production and distribution of zines as well. Scott Cunningham, a co-editor of *World War III,* once worked for what he calls a "mega-corporate" commercial publishing concern, housed in a tall building whose floors were divided into different divisions: art, editorial, advertising, business, and distribution. In all the time he worked as a proofreader in the circulation department there he never spoke to anyone in other departments, though they were all working on the same projects. He juxtaposes this fragmented organizational model to the lack of both hierarchy and any 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.[78]

Dan Werle, the sole editor of *Manu-mission,* defines this degree of involvement as "one of the greater aspects" of putting out his

PERFECT? UGH! *CATBOX ROOM*

zine, in that, "I can control who gets copies, where it goes, how much it costs."

"Why is that so important?" he asks rhetorically, then 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 ... and I talk directly to them instead of having to go through a long chain of never-ending bourgeoisie.

The small circulation of zines is one of the things that keep them intimate. While some publishers would like to have their zine read by as many people as possible, they're also concerned about the loss of control that an increase in print run might bring.[79] 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?"[80]

Wielding complete control is one of the joys of being a zine editor. 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 accents 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 time as a government clerk. In this lowly job 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. Making the officer finally bend to *his* will and acknowledge *his* power was the underground

RECYCLING COMMERCIAL CULTURE
IN *CRAP HOUND*

man's mean victory. It is one of the weapons of the weak.[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 through 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 antihero – in passing it along. *Beer Frame*'s Paul Lukas talks about his zine, using words by now familiar: "I want control over the whole fucking thing myself. *Beer Frame* 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]

Paul is an editor for a book publishing company. There he works with others, but not necessarily cooperatively; as with most jobs 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 enjoys while working on his zine.

This common zine ideal of control over work, but defined in strictly in-

CUT AND PASTE DE-CONTROL IN *SNEEZING JESUS*

dividualistic terms, raises serious problems for traditional radical notions of po-
litical and economic solidarity. For how can people act together to change the
world if it's their search for individual control that motivates their dissent in the
first place? In many ways, this conflict is similar to the clash between radical
individualism and bohemian community discussed in Chapter 4. But while it is
politically problematic, zinesters' desire for individual control is readily compre-
hensible. It stems from a contradiction inherent in the wider economic system.

The "conditions of production" in our economy are most often commu-
nal. We cooperate with others in the act of producing whatever is to be pro-
duced, and count 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, some-
one to solicit this material, and the staff of his office to manage the environment
in which he works; but in the end it is someone else – often removed from this
day-to-day process – who 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
workers' cooperation was how things got produced, then the decisions about
work, and the profits from it, should be arrived at and divided cooperatively. So-
cialized ownership was the historically logical outcome of already socialized pro-
duction. Needless to say, things haven't quite worked out this way. Yet the basic
contradiction of capitalism that Marx analyzed remains.

The underground culture, like bohemia throughout time, responds to
this contradiction in a different way from that hoped for by Marx. In rebelling
against the relations of production that make their work an alienating experi-
ence, they also rebel against the conditions of production, thus rebelling against
communal and interdependent relations. The result is a celebration of 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,
such as *Pinto*, are put out by small groups. Still, the vast majority of zines are
solitary endeavors. The underground fails to transcend the individualism that
wracks the very society they are trying to distance themselves from. But the
pleasure that zinesters gain in controlling the product of their labors is not en-

tirely solipsistic. The fact that zines are a communicative medium ensures inter-action between individuals. It also enforces something of an implied community standard. The networking function of the underground and the commitment that individual zine producers have to participating in this underground mitigate against a debilitating personal isolation.

Individualism, defined and acted upon as it is in the underground, is something for those interested in social change and social movements to look at and possibly learn from. It may very well be that this sort of individual creation and production, linked through a vast network of individual producers, is a model for a new sort of micro-coalition community and for a politics that allows individual autonomy at the same time as it encourages communal exchange. In order to be an effective model for social and political organization, the under-ground must resolve the problems with networking laid out in previous chapters, and with political engagement to be explored in the ones that follow. But this marriage of individual control and communal experience offers – qualified – hope and direction. One could argue that zinesters are only doing what non-bohemi-ans do when they build birdhouses, knit sweaters, or engage in any one of a thousand hobbies. There's some truth to this. Like zinesters, hobbyists are flee-ing their alienating work experiences by creating their own products and sharing that experience with others. But there the similarities end. For unlike hobbyists, the creators of zines consciously bestow their activity with adversarial meaning. It is this adversarial intent that elevates what might be considered just a varia-tion on a common practice of a majority of Americans into a political proposal. But the fact that millions of "normal" Americans share the basics of a practice that distinguishes work done for money from work done for love, holds out the promise that such critiques of alienated labor are not the sole possession of un-derground malcontents.

There are also some zine world responses to work that I've neglected. Keffo of *Temp Slave* is actively involved in unionizing temp workers through a new incarnation of the Industrial Workers of the World, and Dishwasher 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. Moe Bowstern of *Xtra Tuf* similarly employed her DIY ethic and was involved in organizing the United Salmon Association (USA), a union of independent boats, that set out to raise the price that the canneries would pay for fish. Only half jesting, Pete even goes

so far as to call for revolution in response to being offered a head dishwasher position. I've turned my attention elsewhere, not because these older ideals of union organization and class solidarity are invalid, but because they are not nearly as widespread as the ideas cataloged above and, perhaps more important, because I am especially interested in the ideas particular to this underground culture. These new ideas and radical forces will not replace older ones – pace Baudrillard – but might complement them, offering new ways of seeing and doing things that resonate with modern conditions and experiences: radicalism in the vernacular.

With all their contradictions and all their limitations, zines testify power-fully to the underground culture's unwillingness to accept the definitions of work that reign supreme in our society. They are evidence of a radically different way of defining and acting upon the productive and creative urge that runs through everyone, a definition that backs up C. Nash when he states simply, "No, I don't work in the way that people usually understand the expression." And most impor-tant, 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 are, an unrepen-tant 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 pre-mier 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]
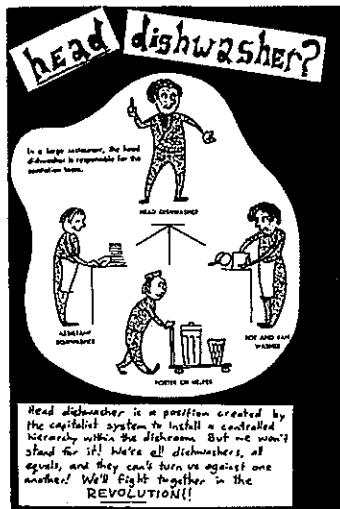
FIVE
CONSUMPTION

PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

Doing something like a zine, as small as it may be, is very much a refutation....It's re-futing 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 upon consumption – of the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the culture we enjoy – the ideal that one should be "the entertainer of myself " is a defiant one. It is also a sentiment commonly shared in the zine world. This makes sense. For if zines are the expression of an underground culture that marks its identity in opposition to the aboveground 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.[2] Any critique of the existing order 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.

REVOLUTION *DISHWASHER* STYLE

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 embedded 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 such products seems absurd. But we live in a strange world today, where in the United States 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 citizens. Consumption has been democratized.

In the United States, this democratization of consumerism began in the early to mid-nineteenth century as a corollary of 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 the heartland city they called *Middletown*, 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, was becoming a symbol of "independence" available to the expanding middle classes. The automobile, thanks to the efficiency of mass production and the spread of mass consumption, had become an important part of the life and dreams of everyday people. Consumerism was becoming part of the way in which 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 being 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 buy their 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. Stifling, provincial cultural worlds were blown apart. And the people

that had been producing the wealth of society were finally able to share in 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, to adapt 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, so the bonds between individuals and the material or cultural creations they enjoyed were strongly fashioned. People were *connected* to what they consumed. With the rise of mass consumption these ties were strained. People were – and are – less and less connected to what they consume.

We make sense of our world and construct our identities, in significant measure, out of the physical and cultural materials that surround us. Not only do we enjoy 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 according to the logic of community tradition or individual inspiration, but according to the pecuniary rationale of the market. The result is a 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 zinesters are protesting – as they do also with respect to identity, community, and work – is this alienation. And what they are trying to do, consciously and not, is to reforge the links between themselves and the world they buy.

TALKING BACK

By the early twentieth century, consumer culture had come to dominate the landscape, yet older, more participatory models of culture had not completely died off. In the interstices between these two worlds of culture, the first publication to be called a "fanzine" was born.

During the first few decades of this century, commercial magazines focusing on consumer interest in products, leisure activities, and entertainment began appearing on newsstands. These publications – their topics 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 named "scientific fiction." These stories, which would later be called simply science fiction, were so popular that in 1926 Gernsback put out *Amazing Stories*, the first pulp SF magazine.[5]

Gernsback also did something else: he published his readers' letters. In the "Discussions" section, readers wrote in to discuss the veracity of the stories, debating the scientific principles upon which the stories were based. Importantly, Gernsback also printed the letter writers' names and addresses. Supplied with these, writers and readers began to bypass *Amazing Stories* and write to one another directly. As 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 1920s, the first science fiction fan organization, the Science Correspondence Club, was founded, and in May 1930 it published what is acknowledged by many as the first fanzine, *The Comet*.[7] This brief history of science fiction fanzines reveals a motif 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 insist on interacting with the commodity in ways that go well beyond these limits. For example, SF fans, instead of accepting the unidirectional information flow of commercial mass media, where it speaks and you listen, insisted on talking back to the stories being written for them in the new commercial magazines. They sent letters to *Amazing Stories*, then began writing to one another, and finally, pushing one step further, started writing their own stories and producing their own publications, eradicating the distance between consumer and creator.

Moving our attention from this oldest genre of zines to music, the largest today, demonstrates the continuity of this line. By writing record reviews, interviewing their favorite bands, and commenting on their local music scene, the people who put out music zines are taking a product that is bought and sold as a commodity in the marketplace and forcing it into an intimate rela-

tionship. Instead of relying upon sanctioned mediators like *Rolling Stone* or *Spin*, they assert their own right to speak authoritatively about the music they love – making the culture theirs.

Dumpster Dive is a typical music zine. In it, John "Bomb" Colletti interviews members of a number of bands on subjects ranging from recent gigs to whether they have ever found anything of value in a garbage dumpster. John follows these interviews with highly personalized record reviews; in one, for example, a band, the Wretched Ones, are commended as "veterans of the DIY punk way. I love these guys. We could drink and watch channel 39 all night."[8] Through both his interview format and his personalized commentary, John levels the ground between himself and the bands he loves.

But the distance between John and the Wretched Ones 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." However, the divide between the audience or consumer and what they are purchasing is usually far greater. Other bridges have to be built, and one material that zine writers use in this construction is humor.

Humor can be subversive. Historians and anthropologists have described how carnivals, skits, and jokes are used by those at the bottom of society to "get back" – if only symbolically and only for a day – at those who usually wield power over them. Laughter is used to flatten social hierarchies, humor is employed to collapse the distance between groups.[9]

Applying this lesson, zine writers use laughter to assert control over a culture that is close to them, but impossibly distant at the same time.

Some of this humor is relatively good-natured. *Judy!*, for example, is published by a group of young scholars in Iowa City and devoted to hotshot academic Judith Butler. Through gently teasing sexual fantasies about Butler, gossip on the personal exploits of celebrity academics, and quizzes like, "Are you a theory-fetishizing biscuit head?" (Question 2: "Can you say these words in public, confident of your pronunciation? a) hegemony b) paradigm c) Luce Irigaray"), the authors effectively deflate celebrity academics and in doing so close – if again, only symbolically – the gulf between their "loser" status as graduate students and the elite world of the tenured superstar.[10]

The I Hate Brenda Newsletter, a zine put out by the long-time publishers of *Ben is Dead*, has more bite. The focus here is on Shannen Doherty, the actress

who played Brenda Walsh in *Beverly Hills 90210*, television's once popular drama of rich kids in sunny California. As a young Republican and by all accounts rather unpleasant person, Doherty is mercilessly lampooned: gossip and rumors are dished out in the zine with glee and malice, and a "Shannen Snitch Line" is advertised to invite a steady supply of new dirt.[11]

Celebrity depends upon the star being familiar and untouchable: at one and the same time familiar enough so our fantasies intertwine with their imaginary lives, yet far enough away for these dreams to remain forever unobtainable and keep us coming back for more. 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, the satirical mocking of both *Judy!* and *I Hate Brenda* bring the stars down to their fans' level, deflating celebrity, and giving the fans (or enemies) the last word.

This ideal of talking back to what you buy and making it speak your vocabulary isn't limited just to culture. *Meanwhile*... doesn't review bands, academics, or TV stars; instead it reviews consumer products like the "Giant, new 20 oz. coffee at Dunkin Donuts" and the "Super Snacker, triangle making pastry iron as seen on TV." Tongue-in-cheek, writers Don and Steve Steinberg offer personalized (and in this case Proustian) critiques of these bottom crawlers of the commodity world.
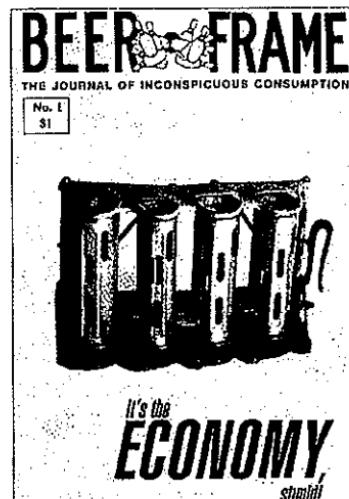
> *Recently, a product advertised on two different cable commercials – both of them half-hour pitches that pose as real shows – sent me reeling in a similar wave of gastronostalgia. The Super Snacker put me back at the kitchen table of my youth, sitting, staring, eyes of awe, at my mother while she turned multi-colored, multi-shaped food bits into uniform – no identical – triangles. No one extruded a meal like my Mother.[12]*

In *Beer Frame*, Paul Lukas devotes himself to such unsung commodities as the Victor Mouse Trap, The Real-Fur Mouse cat toy, the Brannok Device (the contraption used to measure your foot at the shoe store), and Salamida's Original State Fair Spiedie Sauce Marinade, lovingly surveying each item in his zine. For his reviews, Paul 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 shish kebab) are 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.[13]

Nor did I really want to. There's no doubt that part of the appeal of

Paul's zine lies in the fact that, like Don and Steve, he is poking fun at the attention this society lavishes on consumer goods by examining those products 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 explained to me. "If it's a slick contemporary product, 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."[14]

All products have identities. A product traditionally received its character and value from the person who made it and the use to which it was put. For example, if a master carpenter built a hand loom, then the character of that loom was identified with that carpenter. When the loom was used by a weaver, it took on another value: it became a tool with which to weave cloth. That cloth, in turn, would be known by the skill of the weaver and then take on another identity as it was used by a tailor, and so on. What was important was the connection between the producer and the product, and thus the consumer and that producer. But with the rise of mass production – and its accompanying complex division of labor, assemblyline manufacture, and subcontracting of component parts manufactured across the globe – the lines between the actual producer and the product become tenuous. What at one time used to be considered the product'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 competitive market economy, for it is a product's identity that differentiates it from an untold number of nearly identical goods. But the "real" history of a product nowadays (market strategies, research and development, boring and repetitive labor) and the people who produce it (overpaid executives, colorless engineers, anonymous factory workers) is often grim and disappointing. So the age-old character of the product is discarded and replaced by a more appealing fantasy. The reality of bureau-

BEER FRAME

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It's the

ECONOMY,

stupid!

BEER FRAME'S INCONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

cratic organization and mass production that goes into the building of a car is wiped away by the more appealing slogan: "Pontiac Builds Excitement." (Or in the case of Saturn automobiles, the production process itself is mythologized with carefully crafted and personalized portraits of caring salespeople and conscientious factory workers.) The result of this replacement of the history of production with an idealized Madison Avenue image of a commodity is that, in the words of Karl Marx, "definite social relation[s] between men themselves ...assume here ... the fantastic form of a relation among things."[15] In other words, what even under conditions of mass production is still a *human* creation becomes instead a thing: a disembodied commodity or a glamorous image. As things, commodities become distant, magical, and mystical -- extraneous of the will of individuals. This "thingification," or what Marx called fetishism, is a way of seeing the world that then becomes generalized. All human creation, from products and culture to politics and society, exists outside the influence of humankind. The politics that stem from this way of understanding the world are inherently conservative: Things aren't within our control, they can't be changed, and 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 so he begins the process of "defetishization": starting with a thing, and inserting it within a process – of germination, design, production and use – thus implicitly arguing that history is something created by us. 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 consumer society and the individuals who use them. He is "talking back" to commercial culture, reforging the links between people and what they consume.

Some words of warning are needed, however. The idea of an active engagement with culture – "talking back," "appropriating," or "re-reading" – is nothing new. People have long made their own use of the cultural texts surrounding them, fashioning them into formulas and relationships best suited to their needs and desires. When "the Culture" in Colonial America was the 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 to the Crown. Biblical passages justifying slave ownership and extolling the virtues of obedience were fashioned into sermons by slave owners and the

preachers they employed. In turn, the story of Exodus was reshaped by African-American slaves into spirituals that assured eventual retribution and freedom.

Today the dominant culture is commercial, but in many ways what zine writers are doing is the same thing that people have done for years: using the dominant culture and recreating their own relationship to it, and thus to the world. One of the most interesting examples of this phenomenon is described by Camille Bacon-Smith in her fine ethnography of the predominantly female community of media fans in the United States. Coming out of the science fiction fan scene, the women Bacon-Smith describes use their interest in dramatic television shows such as *Star Trek* as the defining element of their community, a community that comes together through a regular series of conventions, and communicates through fanzines.[16]

What is particularly fascinating about this community is what these women fans do with mass media material. Through home-edited music videos, poems and stories, they literally recreate 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 subgenre known as "slash" stories (so named for the virgule [/] between characters' initials, for example, *K/S* for Kirk Spock slash) go so far as to detail the homosexual relationships between primary male characters of these shows. The stories, once circulated through fanzines, become the basis for more stories, resulting in whole alternate universes of *Star Trek*, for example, that draw as much on fan lore as they do on the original show. Slash fiction writing is now primarily carried on through websites and blogs.

As Bacon-Smith points out, these stories provide a common narrative, a comfortable frame within which these women fans can 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 commercial culture that surrounds them and which they enjoy.

But it is important to recognize that the negotiation between consumer culture and its fans is forever lopsided. True, fans' ideas were incorporated into later *Star Trek* movies, but the official guidelines for writers of *Star Trek* episodes also explicitly forbid the inclusion of certain fan innovations – sexual relations between male members of the crew, for instance – that might be unacceptable to

a mass (read: profitable) audience.[17] In the end it is the culture industry that has final control over *Star Trek*, and it is they who profit from any of the fans' innovations that are incorporated. 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. As a result, fans are continually betrayed in their quest to make the culture theirs, and the process of connection must be continually reinvented, ad infinitum. The whole phenomenon of fans and fanzines can best be understood as a repeated attempt to close the gap between audience and entertainment, consumer and product, that consumer capitalism accentuates. But in the absence of an explicit understanding that it is the entire system of consumer capitalism that is at the root of the separation that zines are continually trying to overcome, the sort of bridging functions that zines provide will remain at best a coping mechanism: an eternally frustrated strategy that does little to identify and nothing to cure the problem.[18]

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.[19] Trevor Rigler, Temp Slave

Mediation, however, is not the only type of relationship zine writers cultivate with consumer culture. While some implicitly question the separation between themselves and consumer culture by trying to bridge the gap, others explicitly critique the entire system, trying to demolish 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*, for example, 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, or a Rabelaisian festival of subversion, Jane sees Lakefair 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 public display of wholesome entertainment or subversive energies, Jane argues, Lakefair reinforces the dominant system. It is, she claims,

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.[20]

What is interesting about her jeremiad is what she critiques. Paralleling the zine condemnation of workplace hypocrisy, Jane locates the "evil" of Lakefair in the fact 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." This criticism of consumer culture – that it's a substitute for something more worthwhile, more authentic – is picked up and amplified by other zine writers. "I don't think they express what they truly feel," Freedom of *Orangutan Balls* argues, referring to how people often express themselves in a consumer society. "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.'"[21]

Like Jane, Freedom believes that authentic expression is somehow "suppressed" and then sublimated away from meaningful activity and into the purchase of commodities. These two zinesters are not alone in this belief. Social historians such as 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.[22] Simply put, the ability of modern capitalism to include the public in its consumer dream has allowed the continuation of a system which systematically denies that same public 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 capitalists' pocketbooks.[23]

One of the seductive pleasures of living in a consumer society is the ability to surround yourself with enough pleasure-producing commodities 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. Consuming is the key "in this world where middle class comfort can buy you a blind eye to suffering," rages the angry editor of *Minions of Evil*, himself a product of such middle-class comfort.[24]

Anti-consumerist zine writers use their zines to rip away this comforting illusion, pointing out that the bright and shiny shell of consumerism hides the tawdry realities of capitalism.

By juxtaposing pictures of starvation and political horror with insipid descriptions of consumer goods, Simon Taylor, in his sardonically titled "I Am Free" issue of *ARTichoke*, opens his readers' 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 text lifted from a shopping catalog describing a "100% nonallergenic Merino-wool comforter" that promises "a good night's rest even with a lowered thermostat."[25]

As Paul Lukas reconnects the links between the products of everyday life and those who actually produce them, Simon and other zinesters trace the lines from deprivation and brutality in other parts of the world to banal consumer satisfaction in the United States.

Faced with this truth, zinesters try to distance themselves, alienating themselves from what they perceive to be an alienating system. Part of their hope is that by withdrawing their participation they begin a process of destroying it. In an essay in *Another Pair of Shoes*, "J" recalls listening to the *Wall Street Journal Report* on the radio and explains that all the presenters talk about is consumption. Having divined the secret of our economy he offers this advice: "I have a proposition to make. Let's help the economy ... let's 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 practice 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 "[b]uy your food from a co-op, buy your clothes from a thrift store, buy your music from a not-for-profit label."[26] Distancing themselves from the American Dream of unlimited consumption is something many in the zine world strive to do. "Living a lot lower impact" is what zine writer and distributor Marc Arsenault calls it.[27] The editor of *Kill Your Television* – as the zine's title suggests – has a straightforward strategy for purging the consumer culture. Issue 4 begins, in true zine

style, with a personal confession:

> *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 any way you kill your TV is fine.[28]*
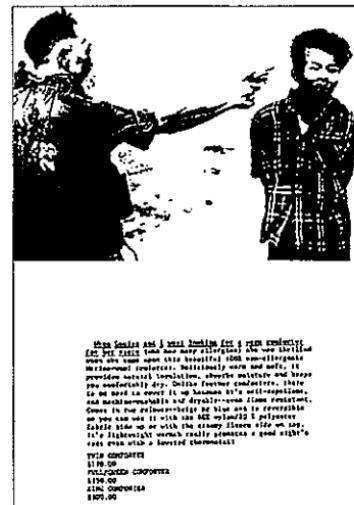
As is common in the politics of underground culture, rejection begets creation. The anonymous editor of *Kill Your Television* describes how he or she used the experience of literally disassembling the TV to learn something new: how a television is made. As the rest of the zine makes clear, this experience of destruction also started this editor on a journey of constructive self-study: reading about television, and finding out about watchdog and advocacy groups such as Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting and Center for a New Television. Most important, the editor started a process of removal from a passive relationship with consumer culture and toward engagement in a participatory model of culture. In other words and in more concrete terms, out of rage at and alienation from consumer culture, this person produced an alternative: *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 seemed 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, Factsheet Five[29]*

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 maxim shows up in zine titles like *DIY: a how-to guide for publishing a high school zine.* It appears in articles: "Bookmaking DIY with Missy" , "Herbal First Aid", or "DIY Screenprinting." And it creeps into the standard parlance of zine writing: a small label will be

MAKING CONNECTIONS IN *ARTICHOKE*

called a DIY label, or a project will be described simply as DIY.[30] Doing it your-self is at once a critique of the dominant mode of passive consumer culture and something far more important: the active creation of an alternative culture. DIY is not just complaining about what is, but actually doing something different.

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 are not like a symphony concert or soap-box oration, where you only listen, and applaud ... they're 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.[31]

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, the term as it is commonly used today in the zine world originated inside science fiction's twin feeder into the world of zines: punk rock.[32]

Beginning in the mid-1970s as a reaction against the professionaliza-tion of rock music, punk took music back to its R&B, hillbilly, thoroughly unre-spectable, roots. Songs were loud and fast and short: pure blasts of adrenaline with little pretense to studied musicianship. Part of punk's ideal was to decrease the distance that had been created between performers and audience: Kill Rock Stars, track down a couple of instruments, and make your own band.[33]

The first punk fanzine, appropriately named *Punk,* came out in New York City in early January 1976. *Punk*'s premiere issue included features on the Ra-mones, proto-punker Lou Reed, a fictitious interview with Sluggo from the *Nancy* comic strip, several comic strips, and, tellingly, a derisive "do-it-yourself " six-ties protest song. The issue sold 3,000 issues locally and eventually 25,000 worldwide. *Punk* stayed afloat for four 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.[34]

Part of the mission of the early punk fanzines, besides spreading news about and interviews with punk bands, was to convince their readers to go out

and do it themselves. Boldly illustrating this philosophy was an early British zine called *Sideburns* which printed a drawing of three guitar chords, followed by the commandment: "Now Form a Band."[35]

This ideal that anybody can do it was important to how punks were defining themselves in these new zines. John Holmstrom, in an editorial in *Punk, 3*, writes:

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.[36]

This celebration of the amateur carried over from the making of the music to the making of a zine. The same issue of *Punk* carries an interview with punk musician Richard Hell, then of the band Television. The interview starts off well, but soon degenerates because of the intoxication of the interviewer and cofounder of *Punk*, Leggs McNeil. It ends with Leggs leaving to vomit and Richard Hell completing the interview himself.[37] As in *Dumpster Dive* and other zines discussed above, the distance between entertainer and entertained is eradicated. But this *Punk* interview also does something else: it makes it obvious that *anybody* can do a better job as an interviewer than Leggs (if not be more humorous). In this vein Mark G of *Sniffin' Glue* gave his readers the following advice: "All you kids out there who read 'SG' don't be satisfied with what we write. Go out and start your own fanzines."[38]

Which is exactly what punk rockers did. Today, music – particularly punk music – comprises 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: "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."[39] 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.[40] The ideal of do-it-yourself arose out of necessity within the punk movement. While punk rock became a major – and profitable – musical movement in England in the 1970s, stateside the recording and magazine industries showed little interest. With their eyes on the safe-money stars of the late sixties and early seventies, and the new dance music, disco, they didn't consider punk as much of

a paying proposition. So if you were a punk musician and wanted to play to an audience you rented the local VFW hall. If you wanted to make a record you financed it yourself. And if you wanted to write about your music 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 seventies and eighties a whole generation was by and large ignored by the commercial culture industry. In retrospect, considering what has been done with "Generation X," this was a great luxury, but at the time it was a problem. 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 referenced back to *their* experiences, or *their* generation. The fact that this generation also composed the largest demographic group in terms of purchasing power guaranteed their consistent representation.
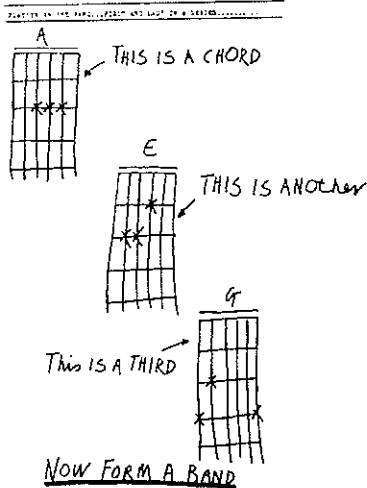
To come of age in the post-sixties era – punk rocker or not – was to come of age in a cultural world that was both suffocating ("we've done it all before and better in the sixties") and a vacuum: a blank generation.

Zines and other forms of underground culture became the space where members of the post-sixties generation – or anybody revolted by or left out of the mainstream retelling of the sixties – could work on defining who they were and what they believed in. You did-it-yourself because no one else out there was doing it. Or because when they did it, they got it horribly wrong. Doing-it-yourself was also a reaction against how the mass media was doing you.[41]

The "punk rock episode" of the law-and-order TV drama *Quincy* is infamous in punk history.[42] In one of the first mass media representations of what was then the burgeoning California hardcore scene, punks were portrayed as buffoonish, violent thugs, their music as something that, in the words of Quincy, "literally cried out for murder."

In a 1983 issue of *Maximumrocknroll*,

A
THIS IS A CHORD

E
THIS IS ANOTHER

G
This IS A THIRD

NOW FORM A BAND

DO-IT-YOURSELF PUNK ROCK IN *SIDEBURNS*

Quincy's negative portrayal of punks became 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 biased 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 redefine 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 place of *Quincy*'s nihilistic portrait, Tim paints an equally one-sided positive 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.[43]

Stretching back at least to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People'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, for many groups, been part of the fight for equality and dignity. These struggles have been important, for it is often through the media that people develop their impressions of others – particularly of those with whom they would normally 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 how disempowered groups have been imagined, portrayed, and often stereotyped by the mass media.

But this demand for "accurate representation" in the mass media is naïve. If the petition is successful one image is merely traded for another, the new one perhaps a little kinder, a little gentler. But because control over that image resides outside the hands of those being portrayed, the image remains fundamentally alien. As the mass media are commercial, this separation is multiplied, for the range of possible imagery is reduced to that which will appeal and sell. At the end of the line the process is complete: transformed into a mass media commodity, you buy your own image back. Since these representations are often how we know one

another in a mass society like our own, the consequence of separation from one's own image is estrangement from one another. Social relations become relations between (mis)representations. Elsewhere in the issue of *Maximumrocknroll* in which Tim slams *Quincy*, Dave, a reader, writes in complaining:

> *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, wraparound 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 [Los Angeles 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.[44]*

Dave's letter is eerily prescient. While the first two thirds chronicles the injustice done to the image of punks by fictional representation, the last third, although written as pure fantasy, is an accurate projection of what will happen a decade later when the media discover "real" punk rockers and put them in the limelight. For Dave, this prospect of positive representation of "the nice guys in Black Flag" is equally grim, for he knows that even if real punks are portrayed positively in the mass media, their portrayal will still be suspect. It will be suspect because punks don't control the terms of their own representation. But there has always been another model of resistance to misrepresentation in the media. Instead of pleading with the mass media to do you better, you do it yourself. In 1827, two African-American freemen, Samuel Cornish and John B. Russworm, outraged by the racist writings of the *New York Enquirer*, wrote letters to the editor protesting this defamation.

When these letters went unpublished, they started their own newspaper. *Freedom's Journal* began 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..." And like many alternative papers then and now, it soon folded, one year later in fact. But Cornish and Russworm had paved the way for others: women, radicals, immigrants, to plead their own cause.[45]

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 manufac-

turing their own identity through the pages of a zine.[46] 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* catalog is "Self Representation." The writers assert: "We need to make ourselves visible without using the mainstream media..." They feel that their representation by that media has "co-opted and trivialized a movement."[47] In representing themselves, zine creators such as the Riot Grrrls strip away the layers of separation between themselves and how they are symbolized in a medium. One of the things that has greatly facilitated this do-it-yourself representation is how easy it is to put out a zine. In *Freedom's Journal*'s day, putting out a paper was a costly proposition and dependent on skilled editors and printers (both Cornish and Russworm represented the elite of African-American society). But with the rapid spread of photocopy machines and an aesthetic sense that rejects slickness, the decision to create, not buy back, your identity has been democratized. "It used to be said that freedom of the press is for people who own presses; Xerox makes that everyone," writes zine editor Patrick Clark.[48] Edward Dean of *Band Age* argues, "In these high-tech times, the question isn't why publish, rather it's why not?"[49] *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."[50] True, putting out zines is a lot of work, but the tools and skills necessary are freely available in a country like the United States, and by not hiding the fact that common materials and ability are what goes into the making of a zine, each one is testimony to their readers that they, too, can do-it-themselves. "I think zines are about action," *William Wants a Doll*'s Arielle Greenberg explains. "And hopefully if people read my zine they'll feel inspired to do one."[51]

This notion of *emulation* – turning your readers into writers – is elemental to the zine world. Emulation is facilitated by the fact that most zines don't copyright their material. As in the early days of newspapers and magazines in the United States, material is expected to be shared and reprinted, or "borrowed" as zine writers delicately put it. While a number of zines – and increasingly more – are explicitly copyrighted, an almost equal number are explicitly anticopyrighted.[52] In *Shithappy*, Adam Bregman prints: "Anti-Copyright. Feel free to copy and distribute."[53] The editor of *Fugitive Pope* offers a selective copyright,

with a bit of humor. The inside front cover reads "© Raleigh Clayton Muns. All Rights Reserved," then this advice follows:

> *Actually if you're cool, you can gamble that my relatives, the hoighty-toity Washing-*
> *ton DC 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.*[54]

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.[55]

Zines creators help facilitate emulation by giving tips and providing information on how to put out a zine. Mike Gunderloy published 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, Bill Brent wrote and self-published the book *Make a Zine*, which was followed five years later by the updated and notably scrappier *Stolen Sharpie Revolution*, providing information on zine-friendly print shops, bookstores, and distributors. This is many networking zines 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*.[56] One of the oddest appeals for emulation comes in the form of *Your Name Here*. In this zine the editor asks for new editors to take over and do "whatever it is that you want" for the next issue, effectively reinventing the zine each issue by turning his readers into creators.[57]

Having readers become writers and writers become readers circumvents a fundamental tenet of the logic of consumer culture: the division between producers and consumers. This division is normally reinforced by the professionalization of cultural creation, which divides the world into those with the talent, skills, and authority to create, and those without. Missy Lavalee argues that zines don't live by these rules:

> *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 cre-*
> *ate anything of interest to others.*[58]

Those inside the underground culture cast aside 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 back-*
> *ground in writing/editing? I would have to say "no" to both questions.*[59]

This freedom from the "specialness" or "professionalism" that are supposed to accompany any creation of culture in our society is liberatory. 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, "[t]hat 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."[60]

Interestingly enough, the nonprofessional character of zines can also be liberatory for the "special" and "professional" creator. *WWIII*'s Scott Cunningham related to me his experience at a graduate program in fine arts at an elite university:

> *When I got to Yale, 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:

> *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 a professional artist, Scott found that his education, far from training him to create great art, crippled him, erecting barriers between him and his art, and between him and his audience. Zine creation, with no formal creative criteria and an anarchic disdain for rules, flattens 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."[61]

Without prerequisites, authorizations, or specialized training, innovative creativity can flourish. The result is not always what Matthew Arnold once de-

scribed as "the best which has been thought and said." Often far from it. But that is not the only criterion of good culture. What is invariably forgotten by those who trundle out Arnold's definition in defense of professionalized culture, is his next sentence in *Culture and Anarchy*. Arnold goes on to argue 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."[62] While the do-it-yourself amateurism of the cultural underground assures that the vast majority of zines may not exhibit the qualities demanded in the first 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 be sublime. They can also be quite awful. 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 relation to culture and commodities.

THE POLITICS OF FORM

In 1934, the brilliant and tragic critic Walter Benjamin asked a simple question: What is politically progressive culture? In his essay "The Author as Producer" he came up with a fascinating answer: it's *not* the progressive content of culture which makes it progressive. He came to this conclusion after observing that "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."[63] That is, the most radical of political themes, expressed through standard cultural forms, seem no threat to the most conservative of political systems.

This ability for themes of resistance to be incorporated painlessly into the system holds true in our time as well. Take television, for example. While the majority of TV programs in the US are predictably slavish in their reproduction and representation of the established order, there are some critical shows: *The Simpsons, Roseanne, The X Files,* and *TV Nation*, to name a few. But the fact that all four of these programs can be found on conservative media mogul Rupert Murdoch's Fox network suggests that the powers that be don't stay awake at night fearing the subversive effect of this critical culture.

Illustrating this point in his own time, Benjamin described a show of photographs of poor people exhibited in Germany. These photographs, he wrote,

which aspire to raise the viewer's consciousness about the tragedy of poverty, 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 "political" art of an accomplished artist such as Adrian Piper, when exhibited in an established art gallery or museum, is less apt to prompt the viewer to organize against the racism that is the theme of Piper's work than it is to provoke admiration for the artist's skill in revealing the nuances of oppression. Similarly, the effect of watching *The X Files* is to reinforce inactivity. Yes, conspiratorial forces do undermine our democracy, but knowing about it is simply "cool ... cool like us" as the Fox billboard campaign for the show goes.[64] Because this variety of political culture is something that people just watch, their natural role is that of audience to a spectacle.[65]

One might easily give up hope here, lamenting that the culture of consumption can neutralize all dissenting voices. But Benjamin was not so pessimistic. The problem, he insisted, is that the wrong question is being asked of progressive culture. "Rather than ask, '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?'"[66] 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 its creator and his or her 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 that 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 world. And by their practice of eroding the lines between producer and consumer they challenge the dichotomy between active creator and passive spectator that characterizes our culture and society.

For Benjamin, genuinely progressive culture is that which can "transcend the specialization in the process of production" that characterizes bourgeois culture and society. Culture "is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers – that is, readers or spectators into collaborators."[67]

This radical cultural practice of turning "spectators into collaborators" today, while absent from both high art and commercial culture (except insofar as

the audience collaborates in a society of spectacle) is at the heart of the zine ethic. What Benjamin has usefully theorized is the centrality of the medium, and the mode in which this medium is employed, for the politics of underground culture.

The aesthetic form that the medium assumes is a great part of the political message of zines. Commercial media (like much high art) are professional: slick, polished, seamless. The purpose of a good piece of commercial media culture is to draw the viewer in. It makes you, the viewer, forget your world – for twenty seconds, for two hours – and become part of theirs. Escape.

Zines, whether as a result of conscious design – using jagged cut-and-paste layout, ranting sledgehammer 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 allowing readers to relax and slip into the medium, zines push them away. Zines are dissonant; their juxtapositions in design and strong feelings in content are unsettling. Instead of offering a conflict-free escape from a tumultuous world, they hold up a mirror to it. As opposed to the happy fantasy world of mass culture, the purpose of many zines is to piss readers off, have them work to make sense of the bizarre world of the writer. Their purpose, as the closing plea of *Cheap Douchebag*'s lead editorial suggests, is to make their audience "Read, React."[68]

This desire to have an audience "read" and "react" also lay behind Bertolt Brecht's "epic theater" (a style of drama that Benjamin much admired). Horrified by the fact that his audience might "lose" themselves watching one of his political plays, Brecht set out to create a theater that purposely alienated the audience from what they were viewing. By having actors speak directly to the audience, introducing political commentary and economic facts and figures with signs and slide projections, and giving away the ending of the play at the beginning, Brecht hoped to keep his audience from slipping into passivity, from finding a sort of political catharsis in his play. He hoped instead that his plays would encourage the members of the audience to think about their own situation – not the actors' – then act in the political world, not live vicariously through art.[69]

Following up on Brecht's ideas, anarchist theorist, author, and alternative radio zine show host Peter Lamborn Wilson (aka Hakim Bey) argues that in terms of alternative media "the clunkier, the better." He offers this advice: "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."[70] Zines do this, knocking people out of 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 on its terms, as a consumer. The big budgets and professional training necessary to emulate the commercial aesthetic insure that consumers will stay on their side of the line. Zines, on the other hand, while pushing readers away, also welcome them back in – but as equals who make the switch from spectator to collaborator. The seamlessness of commercial culture and the technical virtuosity of high art encourage spectators/consumers to stand back and utter in awe, "Wow. That's amazing. How did they do that?"

Zines, with all their seams showing, encourage the opposite response, encourage you 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.'"[71] In certain ways what I am arguing here could be summed up in Marshall McLuhan's oft-cited phrase "the medium is the message." But as Larry-Bob suggests, underground culture proposes something more. The medium of zines is not just a message to be received, but a model of participatory cultural production and organization to be acted upon. The message you get from zines is that you should not just be getting messages, you should be producing them as well.[72] This is not to say that the content of zines – whether it be anti-capitalist polemics or individual expression – is not important. But what is unique, and uniquely valuable, about the politics of zines and underground culture is their emphasis on the practice of doing it yourself. It's a simple idea, but in a society where consuming what others have produced for you – whether it be culture or politics – is the norm, the implications are far-reaching and radical, for doing it yourself is the first premiss of participatory democracy.

FUN

That's why I publish. To change the world. It may not work but it sure is fun trying.
-Eric Rudnick, editor of Aftershock[73]

If all this emphasis on hard work over lazy consumption brings to mind dour and old-fashioned Puritans, frightened by the seductions of pleasure,

there's some justification for the reaction: there is a puritanical strain in the underground culture. Carnivals are "representative of a quintessential evil of this country," "don't buy their shit," *I Hate Brenda, Kill Your Television*.

What's a person to do on a Saturday night? Zinesters are trying to chart out an identity outside the mainstream culture. In this struggle to separate themselves from modern society, pleasure – as the seeming be-all and end-all of consumer society – is sometimes viewed with suspicion. Enjoying yourself too much may be a sign of weakness, it means you've given in to what *they* define as the purpose to life. The result is that underground culture can come across as, well, conservative. Acknowledging this fact, Arielle Greenberg compares her certainly not Puritan but instead traditional Orthodox Jewish upbringing with her current punk rocker identity in a comic in *Mazel-Tov Cocktail*. In it she points out – only half in jest – the similarities between the two species: bizarre hairstyles, grim expressions, and self-righteous literature (the Torah and *Maximumrocknroll*, respectively).[74]

But far more common than this retreat from pleasure is its redefinition. Pranks, sabotage, watching turtles, crashing on couches, striking up new friendships, taking apart a television, producing a zine – all these things are fun, yet none of them concede to the ideology of consumer society that the act of consumption is the only viable path to pleasure.

Zinesters critique consumption and the morality of consumer society, but they do not jettison pleasure. Instead they take immense pleasure in the very practice of criticizing 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!"[75] 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 such as *Manumission*'s Dan Werle assert in bold protest: "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."

SIX

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 & Lettuce[1]

Chris's confusion is understandable. Like other zinesters, she uses her zine to represent herself and her interests as "other," against the mainstream. Why would a world she's not interested in have any interest in her? If she'd been reading the business press just a few months earlier she'd know the answer. In a December 1992 cover story, *Business Week* spelled it out clearly: "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 twenty-somethings. But it's worth it. Busters do buy stuff."[2]
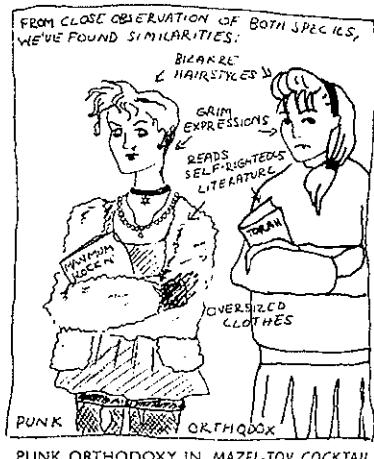
In the last years of the 1980s and the first few of the 1990s, a lost generation was found. Young people born in the sixties and seventies were dragged from anonymity and thrown under the spotlight. The process began in newspapers and the major newsweeklies and soon spread to television news magazines and "special reports" – the mainstream media scrambled over one another trying to figure out just what this generation was about: angry, lazy, cynical, media savvy, apathetic … *whatever.* And what to call it: Generation X, Busters, Twenty-somethings, MTV generation, 13th Gen … *whatever.* Tellingly, both *Business Week* and *Advertising Age* ran prominent features, advising their profit-minded readers how to woo this 46-million-strong 18- to 29-year-old generation, in the process endowing it with its most important demographic tag: a neglected, $125 billion "market."[3]

Simultaneously, the US music industry, facing stagnating sales in both rap and mainstream rock music, discovered grunge: post-punk garage rock. In autumn 1991 a band from the Seattle, WA, scene called Nirvana rode to the top of the charts and stayed there with their second album *Nevermind*. With them Nirvana brought the underground music scene into entertainment industry boardrooms, onto MTV, and into the CD bins of shopping malls across the country. More than fifteen years after its inception, mainstream America discovered punk rock.

As both the underground press of a generation and the voice of what came to be called "alternative" (to mainstream) music, zines became *de rigueur* in any reporting on the new generation and its music. CNN, for example, devoted a special section to the zine threat to formerly-hipnow- staid *Rolling Stone* as part of their "war of the generations" special report.[4]

Earlier in the 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'."[5] By the end of the decade 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."[6] Following the lead of the medium-sized media outlets mentioned by Mike (whose reporting was

PUNK ORTHODOXY IN *MAZEL-TOV COCKTAIL*

often sensitive and accurate because the reporters were sometimes moonlighting zine writers themselves), the media heavies such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Time*, and *Newsweek* began to run features on zines (which, judging by their inaccuracies, were written by people who had never read a zine before).[7] In these latter stories, the reporting bordered on the breathless, with zines extolled as authentic artifacts of "the real underground," as *Time* put it.[8] The coverage was often condescending: for *USA Today*, zines are "wacky"; for the *New York Times*, they are "quirky." Zines were

something endearing but not to be taken too seriously, something to be commented upon in the "Styles," "Ideas and Trends," or "Diversions" section.[9] Nevertheless, zines were news.[10] The mainstream media had discovered the modern underground press.

The news media were mainly interested in zines as an exoticism to titillate and amuse their readers, but others recognized a different sort of value in underground culture. In story after story in the business press, experts in the advertising field worried openly that the marketing techniques of the past were failing to excite anything more than the suspicion and contempt of the younger generation. This was a generation of "savvy – and cynical – consumers," according to *Business Week*, who "feel alienated from the mainstream culture which ignored them," as *Advertising Age* further explained.[11] By cribbing some of the distinctive characteristics of "the real underground," advertisers might add an edge to a commercial marketing campaign, help cut through the clutter of the garbage heap of advertisements, or lend a little street credibility to the latest business endeavor. Just as zinesters "borrowed" material from the dominant culture, the culture industry was borrowing aspects of the underground – and in the process changing their meaning. The underground's condemnation of the dominant culture was being used to package and sell that very same culture.

Being a loser sold Converse sneakers in advertisements 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 bohemian losers 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 a 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.[12] Relying heavily on the Gen X demographic, MTV 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 devised programs such as *The Real World* which – like a perzine – chronicles the everyday life of everyday young people. In the summer of 1995, they introduced *Road Rules*: the road trip ... MTV style.

Slacker was the name of the newspaper put out by Third Millennium, a very non-slacker collection of self-promoting, self-described political "Gen Xers" whose founding convention was held at the Kennedy family estate and whose

political program highlighted the accepted wonk wisdom of reducing the federal budget deficit.[13] "Do-It-Yourself " was the call in the slick young men's fashion and culture magazine *Details*, which gave advice on how to "rough up your clothes real good" in order to effect the grunge look. Simply by 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."[14] Gen X disgust with the US landscape of malls and shopping centers encouraged shopping mall developers to build an "anti-mall" in Orange County, CA. Surrounded by old couches, rusted oil drums, and half-demolished walls, chain stores such as Tower Records and Urban Outfitters found a home in this apocalyptic punk paradise.

By the time Anheuser-Busch, the largest brewery in America, sold Bud Dry as "the alternative beer" over a picture of a greasy-haired grunge rocker, and proudly sponsored "the world's largest alternative rock concert" as they did in 1994, the term "alternative" had lost any connection to its original meaning as an alternative to mainstream culture.[15] "Alternative is used as a marketing term," famed underground musician and recording engineer Steve Albini frankly asserts, "it doesn't distinguish a band from the mainstream music industry."[16] The transformation from critique into marketing category was already 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.[17]

The borrowing of underground cultural markers extended to zines themselves. In the early 1990s a television subsidiary of Time-Warner contacted Mike Gunderloy with an interest in doing a "reality-based TV show" centered on zines.[18] 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 *Dirt* in my hands. Filled with comix, record reviews, and hand drawings, it looked and read like any other zine. *Dirt* is thus an unexceptional zine -- except for the fact that it's bankrolled entirely by the corporate behemoth Time-Warner Inc.[19]

While *Dirt* is produced primarily for internal consumption to boost employee morale 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 – complete with zine-style scruffy layout – as the program guide for their show on "Bad Girl" artists.[20] *Slant*, another example, is an oversize zine-like publication given away free at Urban Outfitters, a "hip" clothing and style chain outlet located – among other places – in the Orange County anti-mall. Paying zinesters for their words and art, 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.[21] Like *Dirt* and *Bad Girls*, *Slant*'s sell is low-key. The attributes of the products it pushes are secondary to the identification with the whole life-world of the underground it promotes.

In one of the more peculiar incidents of "innovative" experimental advertising, the satellite radio company Sirius produced a zine that was basically a glorified and obvious ad for its services. This is particularly odd, as the primary audience of zines would not be interested in its services – even if they did own a car.

It is done because the alternative life-world is coveted by advertisers, commercial designers, and corporate image consultants as a link to a generation of consumers they fear has passed them by. In this matter, the content of the culture means little; if the kids are into basketball, then advertisers use basketball culture to lend their products cachet. Basketball fans, underground world – they're just niches to be exploited. But this isn't the whole story when it comes to the commercial discovery of zines and the underground. The very fact that alternative culture is created in opposition to commercial culture is what makes it so attractive.

Marketers, like zinesters, understand that what mainstream culture lacks is "authenticity." Based primarily on an instrumental market relationship with people – where people are considered a means to an end and not an end in themselves – the system is forever alienating the very people it relies upon to work, to vote, and to buy. It pushes away the very people it needs for support. This is an intractable contradiction, and a problem for those looking for a disciplined workforce, a loyal citizenry, or, in our case, a consuming public. Ironically, it is underground culture that offers one of the antidotes: primary connections between individuals and their lives, passions, and desires; homegrown, do-it-yourself authenticity. If properly packaged, the ideas, styles, and media of the underground can provide material to renew and refresh the very

culture they are created in rebellion against. As *Business Week* reported in a special feature on new strategies in marketing, advertisers are now looking to "hide their corporate provenance." The report continues: "The idea is to fake an aura of colorful entrepreneurship as a way to connect with younger consumers who yearn for products that are *hand-made, quirky, and authentic.*" An example *Business Week* offers of this fakery? No surprise: "mock 'zines."[22] "Discovering" underground culture addressed a real problem for marketers: how to reach a younger generation that feels particularly estranged from the culture and products – factory-made, mass-produced, and phony – of the corporate world.

There are any number of ways to convince people to buy a product. The simplest is to persuade them that it will fulfill a real need they already have. A soda company might make the pitch "You need a drink? We make a good beverage." The problem with this tactic is that good beverages are made by many companies and if they all wait until people actually *need* a drink, most will be out of business.

Failing this, you convince your potential consumers that they will become part of a glamorous new world – your world – if they drink this beverage. Promise, for instance, that if they drink Pepsi they will be part of the Pepsi Generation, and then throw in a couple of superstars – Michael Jackson or Madonna will do – for company. But remember: this is a generation of "savvy – and cynical – consumers," who "feel alienated from the mainstream culture which ignored them." By such savvy and cynical consumers, the "Pepsi Generation" is all too clearly seen for what it is: a marketing team's fabrication. There's no ring of authenticity in such a bogus "generation," it doesn't build the emotive bond that self-identification does. What do you do if they don't want to be part of your world? You convince them that your product is already part of *their* world, or a life-world that is created, not by aging baby boomers in suits and ties, but by people a lot like them. According to market researcher Judith Langer, what works best for this hard-to-

DIRT: D.I.Y. TIME-WARNER

reach generation is "[a]dvertising that is funny and hip and says, 'Hey, we know.'"[23] Using market research to "know" what is "funny and hip," you discover the underground culture.

You name your new cola something suitably cool and blasé, like OK Cola. Then you hire someone who is a part of the underground scene to design the can. The talented and respected comic book artist Dan Clowes is a good choice. Finally, you market 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, the product offers a key into an already existing, that is, authentic, community. This particular key to authenticity was manufactured by OK Cola's parent: the Coca-Cola Company. Besides its homegrown authenticity, another characteristic of the underground makes it such potentially profitable property to business: its bohemian libertarianism. Many critics of the status quo – zinesters included – point to the system's stifling conservatism and rigid moral order as its defining attributes and the cornerstone of its oppressive nature. They are only half right. Capitalism may need order to keep the rabble in line, but it also needs change to keep from stagnating. Old-fashioned ideas stand in the way of adaptation to new labor processes and attraction to new products. "Make change an ally," and "help interpret it for your people," Robert Dilenschneider, president and CEO of the established public relations firm Hill and Knowlton, advised business leaders in 1990. If business is not going to be left behind, this corporate heavyweight goes on to argue, it must keep abreast of "emerging trends." He does this, so he claims, by reading the "alternative press."[24] What Dilenschneider understands is that underground culture represents dissent and dissent is change. Although born in rebellion against the instrumentality of the market, the iconoclasm of underground culture can fit well with the needs of capitalism – particularly if it is "interpreted" by people like himself. As *The Baffler* editor Tom Frank caustically comments:

> Over the years the rebel has naturally become the central image of this 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.[25]

The bohemian – stripped of all criticism of capitalism – is the model consumer citizen, and bohemia can serve the interests of capital well. 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, "[i]t 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.*[26]

While Cowley may be overstating his case, there is a great deal of truth to his assertion that bohemians were "trade missionaries" (as he called them), and that the business world was conscious of this fact. In 1929, for example, 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.[27]

The "Greenwich Village ideas" Cowley spoke of, 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. But something happened to these ideals along the way: as they reached the market, cultural rebellion turned into "fashion" and "lifestyle" and products to be bought and sold. The Village's ideals were spreading but its soul was dying; "If ... the Village was dying," Cowley wrote, "it was dying of success."[28]

This cycle of cultural rebellion, discovery, celebration, then devastation repeats itself throughout the twentieth century.[29] The heirs apparent to the Villagers, the Beats of the 1950s, consciously disengaged themselves from US post-WWII 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 Americans saw something in them that they themselves had lost, a freedom that had disappeared while they were hunkered down in the kitchen or stuck on the freeway. Like all bohemians, the Beats embodied a counter–American Dream to that of suburban comfort and consumption. "So much about 'lightin' out' for the frontier...," C. Carr writes, "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."[30] The Beats were also attractive because business had discovered a bulging post-war

youth market, and if the kids weren't digging Davy Crockett hats and penny loafers, then maybe black sweaters and tights would sell. By 1959, Beats were being used as living mannequins to feature "Beat but Neat" styles in *Life* magazine.[31]

The Beats were followed by the counterculture of the 1960s. Millions of individuals reared to the fifties mantra of "freedom" and "the good life" were discovering that middle-class American freedoms were based on other people's servitude and that the materialistic good life was a shallow one. They were redefining "freedom" and the "good life" in their own very personal language and spreading the word: through their scene, through their music, and, importantly, through the underground press.

Each study of the underground press locates its genesis at a different time and place, many with the beginning of the *LA Free Press* in 1964. I prefer to mark it with Paul Krassner's *The Realist*, first published in 1958. Krassner 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.[32] It was a model that spread quickly, transforming itself to fit its editors' passions and its audiences' desires.

Underground papers such as New York's *East Village Other* concentrated on the burgeoning countercultural scene, while the nearby *Rat* focused on radical politics. The *Seed* in Chicago lifted dynamic graphic styles from television, color magazines, and LSD hallucinations to make psychedelic multicolored newspapers in which type didn't line up in rows but twisted and turned down the page like serpents. *The Black Panther* spoke to militant blacks, *El Malcriado* to Chicanos, *off our backs* to lesbians, *The Gay Liberator* to gay men, *Vietnam GI* to soldiers, and *Green Revolution* to environmentalists. By the late sixties there were literally thousands of underground papers in the United States, with a combined readership estimated at over 9 million. But like so many other cultural experiments before, this great flowering of printed dissent didn't last for long.[33] Beginning in the early 1970s the underground press in the USA collapsed. It collapsed because of state repression: pressure was applied on print shops not to print "un-American" papers, and the law was used to harass editors, often on obscenity charges.[34] It collapsed because the political movements that supported many of the papers disintegrated, fragmented, or digressed into infantile radical-

ism. 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 counterculture became a viable product; the presses either sold out to the dominant culture themselves or were eclipsed by those willing to do so. "But The Man can't bust our music," the confident words read over a photograph of young demonstrators in a jail cell. "And the man can't stop you from listening. Especially if you're armed with these." But by 1968, when some of the most furious demonstrations, riots, and repression of the era were taking place in the streets, "The Man" had little interest in stopping the readers of the underground press from being "armed" with "their" music. Columbia Records was already selling it with this ad on the pages of some of the most prominent underground newspapers.[35] The counterculture was being recognized as a potentially lucrative business environment.

As the sixties gave way to the seventies, "freedom" was to be defined, once again, in terms of personal liberty. And the "good life" was not something realized in the transformation of society but found roaming and shopping the groovy neighborhoods, stores, and cafés that catered to the counterculture. By 1971, staff from *The Rat* and *The East Village Other* had gone on to the sex papers *Screw*, *Kiss,* and *Pleasure*.[36] On the West Coast, 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.[37] By 1980 Bruce Brugmann, the editor–publisher of the 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 hard times."[38] As underground papers metamorphosed into the sex press or alternative newsweeklies, many became little more than shopping guides to "alternative" lifestyles.

Crushed, fragmented, and bought up, this underground culture, like those before it, was over. For some the lesson learned was one in the cooptive power of capitalism. As the mainstream United States was becoming more liberal, in image and word if not in deed, to distinguish yourself you 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. To stay ahead of the liberal establishment, radicals hallucinated theories of the possibility of armed revolution in the United States.[39] The message of both hippies and radicals was clear: stay hidden, underground, deep within your subcultural ghetto ... stay pure. But for others the lesson lay in marketing: new ideas for new products were to be found less in designers' studios and more often out on the street. The counterculture had developed something that mainstream society lacked, wanted, and was willing to pay for. Its libertine values meshed well with the needs of a restless marketplace. In the argot of the day, this lesson was one in the benefits of "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, they would not exactly be learned from either.

SEVEN

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 DIY (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 DIY 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 are products of an attempt to create an authentic, nonalienating culture. But this culture, like all bohemias before it, is produced within a larger, 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 in 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. The underground is filled with people who have heard the Beatles' song "Revolution" and Gil Scott-Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" used to sell Nike shoes. 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 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 the underground that become as constraining as any rules on 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? Who was interested in an obscure culture that celebrated losers? But with the mainstream discovery and celebration of zines and the underground, the struggle between purity and danger was pushed to the fore.

Ironically, even as this divide 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 conflict offers a locus around which the zine community can define itself. But whereas Douglas argues that the divisions are often arbitrary, I believe that in the world of zines they are not. The debate in the zine world around purity and danger is a natural outgrowth of the difficulties encountered in attempting to create an alternative community within a society that seems to thrive on its discontents.[2] Threatened by their enemy's embrace, 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 have been "discovered" by the mainstream media. This is not too astonishing; after all, it is in reaction to 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 its feature on zines, arguing that as much as he was interested in the subject matter of the 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 of how the major media will represent them when they do come knocking. After a *New York Times* reporter leaves numerous messages on his answering machine, Doug, editor of *Pathetic Life*, ruminates in his zine as to why he won't return the calls. "A little publicity would be nice," he admits:

If I had a few hundred subscribers I wouldn't have to hand out fliers [advertising department store sales and the like 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 *New York 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 *New York Times* not running the article, and they included his zine even without an interview, but he was right on other points. They didn't print his address, and they reduced the multi-dimensional personality that 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 re-

porter] should have had him believing this."[7] Zine writers contacted by the commercial media were finding out that the media were not really interested in them, but were creating a package of what they thought that zine writers represented. For example, CNN once 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 got around to seeing Aaron's own zine, "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 human/animal copulation.

Faced with this selective representation some zine writers simply decide not to cooperate with the 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 we're 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 we're 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 it's destructive to talk to a mainstream

media that they don't respect and that doesn't respect them, others, in the zine tradition of sabotage, feed them misinformation. Dishwasher Pete has repeatedly declined interviews with the mainstream media. But when asked to appear as a guest on the "Late Night with David Letterman" show in summer 1995, he agreed. Knowing, however, that nobody at the show had any idea what he looked like, he had them fly in Jess Hilliard, an old friend from California, to impersonate him. I spent an amusing evening sitting with the real Pete and a bunch of other zine writers watching the faux Pete answer questions about his quest to wash dishes across the nation (and nearly light the TV host on fire with a demonstration of his burning hand trick).[12]

Another episode, which became better known, involved Megan Jasper, a sales rep at Seattle's Caroline Records, who fed a *New York Times* reporter bogus lingo for a "Grunge Lexicon" that accompanied the paper's feature story on the success of grunge music and style. Amazingly, the reporter actually believed that such phrases as "swingin' on the flippity-flop" (hanging out) and terms like "cob nobbler" (loser) were authentic subcultural "code."[13] 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.[14] The *New York Times* got what it wanted: a story on the newest hip trend, the voice of the new generation.[15] Because zines are so small and "underground," and because the mainstream media are so powerful and their reach is so immense, it really doesn't matter whether the underground talks to the mainstream media or not, whether it tries 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 United States, 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,'" zine editor Missy Lavalee writes, "because the media distorts it terribly, but then people see the media version, adopt it themselves, and then the underground culture ends up being exactly how the media portrayed it."[16] Missy is right. I wouldn't be surprised if somewhere out there in the USA, a young, alienated kid, looking for a culture to call his or her own, is asking some others if they plan on "swingin' on the flippity-flop" tonight.

IRONY
The sun beams down on a brand new day
No more welfare tax to pay
Unsightly slums gone up in flashing light
Jobless millions whisked away
At last we have more room to play
All systems go to kill the poor tonight
Gonna
Kill kill kill
Kill the poor
Kill the poor.... Tonight.
        -Dead Kennedys

For adherents of 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* prints a comic by Kyle Baker, "God Bless Alternative Rock,"[17] which praises "the idea of featuring bands of long-haired white guys with no shirts and big muscles! [because] It's so alternative." In the broader underground, the biggest hits of the seminal American political punk band, the Dead Kennedys, included songs such as "Kill the Poor," which proposed killing poor people with a neutron bomb as a way to rid society of poverty while leaving valuable real estate intact.[18]

Authenticity, as I've argued earlier, is an ideal of the underground to be "true" to the "real" self. Zines, therefore, are best when, to use Lionel Trilling's definition, they demonstrate "a congruence between avowal and actual feeling."[19] Yet again and again, in the pages of zines or 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 believes and what one expresses, irony succeeds when it does the opposite: when one's 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 words say the opposite. What explains this? Unlike an affirmative assertion, irony depends for its meaning entirely on context and on a knowing audience. Outside its original setting and translated for an uninitiated audience, it makes no sense. This is its value. For those in the cultural underground, using irony is a pragmatic response to a commercial culture that eats up any positive statement, strips it of its original meaning and context, and repro-

duces and disseminates it as an affirmation of its own message of consumption. No key is needed to unlock the meaning of 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. Just try selling Nikes with the Dead Kennedys' "Kill the Poor." Irony is one of the ways that zinesters keep 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 their meanings allows for a certain amount of control over that language and those symbols. As Mikhail Bakhtin writes, "The satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery."[20] Irony is a secret laugh at one's oppressor. It allows the zine writer to dominate, if only in laughter, the dominant culture.

Irony also demands an active engagement with its audience, and this fits well with zinesters' ideals of an active engagement with culture. Given clues only to what the author *doesn't* think, the reader deciphering an ironic statement has to use his or her imagination to figure out what the author does believe. The reader helps create the message. And as it takes at least two – with a shared meaning system – to make effective irony, this form of humor reinforces community. 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. In a virtual community such as the zine world in which there are no explicit rules orstrong bonds holding it together, irony – or more accurately, the shared meaning system upon which irony depends – acts as a sort of glue holding together an otherwise disjunct group of individuals.

But boundaries of inclusion are necessarily also boundaries of exclusion, and irony reinforces the ghettoization of the underground. Not only are the marketing creeps locked out, but as the irony gets thicker and thicker and the references become more and more obscure, so is anybody new. "You're either on the bus, or you're off the bus," 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 – it's very hard to find a way to get on in the first place.[21]

There is also another price paid for the irony that holds this community together and keeps outsiders out. Irony is negative. I don't mean this in a

touchy-feely sense of "bad vibes" and all that, but in the way I've explained before. Irony can only work as negation of an already existing culture which it uses as a reference point. This relationship is complex, but the problem is simple: irony renders the underground's role and its zine voice that of a parasite. While criticizing the dominant culture obliquely through irony, the underground reaffirms its dependency on it. Irony is not cynicism and a resigned acceptance of the way things are.

It holds out the ideal that there might be something else on the other side of the reality it lampoons, and then leaves what that might be up to the reader. It's playful and fun. It's my preferred voice when I write for zines. Yet I sometimes fear that irony also keeps the underground forever living in a dominant world that it can see through, with ironic vision, but never escape. Besides, the article of faith that critical irony cannot be co-opted by the commercial culture is a shaky one. Exactly how shaky was demonstrated in 1996 when Nike, the master of this game, added the song "Search and Destroy" to its sneaker ad lineup. The song, written in the early seventies by draft-dodging punk pioneer Iggy Stooge (aka Iggy Pop), was originally a mock celebration of the Vietnam War and American testosterone-driven culture. Reborn and stripped of any ironic message, "Search and Destroy" is now the soundtrack to a testosterone-driven basketball game and marketing strategy. I suppose it's only a matter of time until "Kill the Poor" sells Nikes too, most likely providing the musical backdrop to a scene of Nike-wearing ghetto kids playing aggressive b-ball.

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" in the Factsheet Five Collection, New York State Library[22]

Originality is highly prized in the zine world, finding its expression in the immense breadth of topics that zines cover and the idiosyncratic forms they take. As part of the libertarian belief that each individual is entirely unique, the ideal that each individual's creation should be unique naturally follows. Creation becomes testimony to a person's originality. This is one of the wonderful traits of zines. Freed from having to address either a mass audience or a profitable niche market, zine writers explore and express their individuality. Brett Sonnenschein creates *Roulez*, "the newsletter for and about the serious Milles Bornes

player," expressing his devotion to the game and his eagerness to trade and share it with nonplaying zine writers.[23] *Murtaugh* is a zine that brings together the unlikely pair of punk rock and baseball. Why? Because these are the things that interest its editor Spike Vrusho.[24] Or meet the Renaissanceperson 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."[25] In each case the originality of the zine is a byproduct of the originality of the author, and the zine illustrates his or her desire to be "true to 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 zine, however original, 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 – that has not already been manufactured by the commercial culture industry and, moreover, will be difficult for it to co-opt. As Aaron of *Blue Persuasion* found out, it takes very little for the mass media to understand and use a zine that celebrates nostalgia for pop culture as *Teenage Gang Debs* does; it's more difficult for them to assimilate a picture of a man having intercourse with a turkey carcass, or stories about dead dogs.[26]

It's also hard to assimilate things that barely make sense. It's a stretch to imagine anyone co-opting a list of "What's in the bag?" a feature in *Exformation* that lists pennies, flies, wadded-up tissue, and other refuse left in a bag.[27] Or *Feh*, odd comix illustrating stories with neither rhyme nor reason.[28] Or, for that matter, an article in *Hell Bound* on "How to turn our bread into fertile dirt" by leaving it sealed in a bag for a month.[29] 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."[30] But equally part of this urge to create nonsense is 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 copy to a popular soda advertisement runs. As I've discussed earlier, one of the ways zinesters create something new is to personalize what they are writing about, another is to strive towards the novel. And completely novel, I must admit, is *Eleventh Pin*, a zine that consists solely of pictures of a solitary bowling pin in different settings.[31] Or Donald Busky simply

making up his own national and international news in his zine, *The Weird News.*[32] In the editorial of his first issue of *Beer Frame*, Paul Lucas explains his choice of such items as mousetraps and foot-measuring devices to write about: "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.*"[33] *Hate* is an underground comic that 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 fate; and Ludlow Street in the Lower East Side of New York features a string of "cool" bars frequented by the suburban "bridge and tunnel" crowd.[34] All these things have been "discovered." Paul, by contrast, writes about admittedly banal things that no one has ever given much thought to, justifying his picks by arguing that he "wasn't interested in doing just another version of something that had already been done before."[35]

Even zines themselves are suspect, now that they've become too well known. Paul, like other zine writers I've talked to recently, is shying away from calling *Beer Frame*

IT'S SO ALTERNATIVE! IRONIC CELEBRATION IN *NO LONGER A FANZINE*

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."[36]

As the underground is discovered, virgin ground needs to be unearthed. 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 together drive a perpetual raising of the stakes. In the free-wheeling, image-swapping, postmodern information economy, it is genuinely difficult to set anything apart as novel for long, since its very novelty becomes its selling point. After just a few issues, Paul Lukas parlayed *Beer Frame*'s originality into a syndicated column in alternative newsweeklies, then a column in the glossy *New York* magazine, and finally into a commercial book. But the quest for the original is continually undertaken. On the Lower East Side, some young squatter punks – or "crusties" as they're called – tattoo their faces, forever drawing a distinction between themselves and the bourgeoisie (or at least until it becomes next year's hit fashion). And zines such as *Murder Can Be Fun*, *Answer Me!*, and *Dead Star: for John Wayne Gacy*, celebrate mass murderers as the ultimate un-cooptables, positing pure evil as the only purity left.[37]

In this 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 comprising handwritten "hat sizes of some of the major poets in America."[38] Such zines fetishize originality. No longer is the choice of unique subject matter an authentic expression of an individual; instead, it becomes 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,

MAKING DIRT IN *HELL BOUND*

drawing an "original" comic of drawing an original comic.[39]

Originality is important in the creative expression of an individual, but it loses something when it's not coupled with a critical discernment of worth.[40] Even though the zine tendency to strive toward the original originates in reaction against commercial culture's colonization, zine writers can easily end up replicating the very same consumerist logic: in with the new and out with the old, a celebration of this year's model without any judgment of value. 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, in which 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."[41] Following the ultimate illogic of underground originality, the price of being truly cool is to risk talking to yourself about absolutely 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[42]

The rejection of mainstream media and culture that is such an integral part of zines and underground culture 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: to try to keep the barbarians at the gates while retreating further into a bohemian ghetto. Irony and the search for the ever more esoteric complement this process. This retreat is nothing new. While many ghettos – of Jews in Europe, African-Americans in the United States – are imposed from the outside,

A SINGULAR PIN IN *ELEVENTH PIN*

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 principal activities of the early sects."[43] Ghettoization does two things: it builds walls to repel those outside the community, and it cements the bonds among those within. But, as Hill points out, these walls must be continually patrolled. Since the zine world is a non-localized 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 DIY band, the Libido Boyz, have 'sold out,' signing to a major record label," Brixton Kent and Michael Wood write in to *Maximumrocknroll* about a band from their local Mankato, MN, scene. In a culture that values 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 engaged not in a private act, but in a betrayal of community. "It makes us sick," Brixton and Michael 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.[44] 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 – a more 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."[45]

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 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."[46] Some zine publishers write of seeing this phenomenon 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," Missy Lavalee explains, "which I believe entails the ethics of DIY ... and not seeing writing as your opportunity to get rich and famous." Already, Missy sees outsiders producing zines who either don't understand or don't respect zine "ethics," 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 impostor zines from real zines. We, she writes, "call these publications 'zines' (pronounced 'zynes' with the long i sound)."[47]

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" in the great unearthing 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, refuse to be interviewed by magazines they wouldn't normally read, play free and reduced-admission shows, and never restrict concert attendance 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."[48] Like the search for the ever more obscure, any hint of popularity or accessibility is suspect. In a way this attitude is understandable: in our consumer society, popularity is equated with mass sales which are equated with a form and content dictated by the bottom line. Therefore, if you're against bland media and corporate profiteering, popularity is bad. But this distrust of all popularity is destructive, severely limiting the range and scope of truly alternative culture. This irony is understood by Christine Boarts, who 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."[49]

As critic Leslie Fiedler once commented: "Death is the only airtight Bohemia."[50] In insignificance lies a certain freedom.[51] Describing the early punk scene in California, Claude Bessey, the editor of *Slash*, explains that "[t]he 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."[52]

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 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* back in 1985.

"A lot of punks feel that [lead singer] Jello and company are a

AN ORIGINAL COMIC IN *REACTOR*

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?"[53] 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.*[54]

Scott has a point, but so does Patrick. There's a real tension between the need to turn inward to reassure the faithful and the need to proselytize among 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 Stepe:

> *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 MDC [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.*[55]

In order for "something to be done" about Reagan, war, racism, and police violence, 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 problem of proselytization is not merely a logistical one of quantity, but a political issue of quality. And this – translating the qualitative ethic of the zine world to a wider audience – she maintains, is "the hardest thing."[56]

FACTSHEET FIVE VERSUS FACTSHEET FIVE

The task of spreading the underground gospel is not easy. Situated within a greater capitalist society that sets the rules of engagement, it is very difficult to open your culture up to new converts without crossing over into the logic of the commercial culture you originally rebelled against. I am not interested here in setting up a line, labeling some zine writers pure and condemning others as sellouts – too much of this happens already in 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 respect, the nearly decade-and-a-half-long story of the *Überzine* 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 mininetwork centered on a discrete interest: science fiction, fantasy stories, mail art, anarchism, or punk rock. These mini-networks were relatively insulated from one another, there was little common culture, and one could not honestly talk of a "world of zines." Then, in May 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.[57] There had been review zines before. First published in the mid-1970s, by 1981 *The Whole Fanzine Catalogue* was listing over 150 zines from nine countries, and including features that were to become standard in *Factsheet Five*: a glossary of "insider" terms, trade policy, changes of address, etcetera. 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 Catalogue*, while borrowing its name from the eclectic *Whole Earth Catalog*, focused exclusively on other science fiction fanzines.[58]

Factsheet Five was different. It reviewed zines covering any and all interests. In fact, one of Gunderloy's policies was to review everything that was sent to him, no matter how obscure or offensive. Issue number 1 was printed on a single piece of typewriter paper, mimeographed and so blurry that you could barely read it. The subjects covered in the six publications it listed ranged from the theory of slack (*Church of the SubGenius*), to anarchism (*Church of the Anarchist Avatar* [*The Gospel According to Fred the Pelican*]), to an all-purpose poetry/punk/review zine. It also listed three computer BBSs – bulletin board
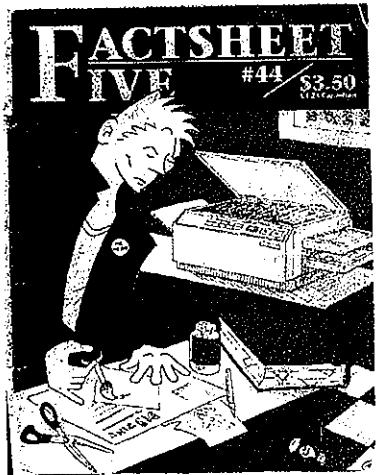
systems – and one experiment in extrasensory perception.

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 copies were being distributed; it included 1,259 zine reviews, 95 poetry reviews, and 366 audio reviews. In 1990, Cari Goldberg Janice had joined Mike as the zine world grew and their work mushroomed – but it eventually proved too much for both of them and after eighty-hour work weeks and starvation wages they quit for reasons of "mental sanity" after issue 44.
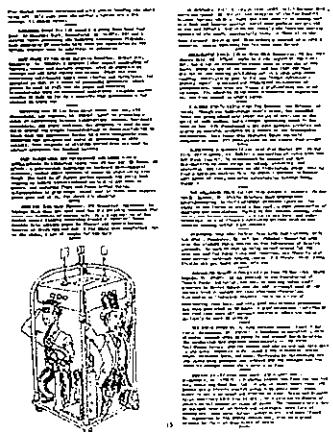
After an ill-fated false start under a different publisher, zine writer R. Seth Friedman – creator of *Food for Thought* – took up the project and moved it from Rensselaer, NY, to San Francisco, CA. As the new editor, Friedman was successful in keeping *Factsheet Five* afloat, vibrant, and even expanding. One hundred and forty-four 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.

Let us return to the beginning. 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 back home 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 a circulation of more than 10,000. Stupid, perhaps, but foreseeable, for Mike's personal history had trained him well for his job as community center organizer for an eclectic press: while attending high school in the 1970s he had published an underground paper; later he edited the fanzine of the Los Angeles Science Fiction Fantasy Society for a brief spell; and he recognized early on the potential of computer-mediated communication. Mike, you may recall, is also an anarchist. The second version of *Factsheet Five*'s foundation story – which, being a properly seasoned and cynical politico, he 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.[59] Intimately understanding the insularity of both the science fiction and the 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."

D.I.Y. AND THE "OLD" *FACTSHEET FIVE*

Mike hoped that by getting people to recognize their similarities, something with 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.

By bringing together through *Factsheet Five* all these people who produced

LISTINGS IN THE "OLD" *FACTSHEET FIVE*

zines and shared this inchoate politics, Mike hoped to cultivate "a somewhat larger voice instead of a hundred scattered voices." The key to the character of the early *Factsheet Five* is understanding that it was made for internal consumption, as a resource for a community, or rather communities, already in formation. While *FS5* 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, illustrated with amateur drawings, listing "community services" such as changes of addresses and warnings of zine deadbeats, sprinkled with essays on topics ranging from movies to the history of the alternative press to the regularly featured "Conspiracy Corner," and including a hefty letters section, *FS5* was like the sacred text to a hidden world. "The old *Factsheet Five* felt like Alice's rabbit hole. This whole other world," as zine writer Arielle Greenberg describes it.[60] *FS5* was a container for the world of zines; Paul Krassner, of *The Realist* fame, once called it a "central clearing house for the new underground."[61] Mike's policy of trading with other zines also made *FS5* part of the world it reviewed. With its personal touch and competent yet less-than-professional layout, and printed on cheap newsprint with a dull paper cover, the old *Factsheet Five* was a zine.

The next generation of *Factsheet Five* was not. When Seth Friedman took over *Factsheet Five* he inherited a full-blown proj-

LISTINGS IN THE "NEW" *FACTSHEET FIVE*

ZINES ARE EVERYWHERE. THE "NEW" *FACTSHEET F*

ect, with full-blown financial difficulties aggravated by its interim publisher. In order to stay afloat financially, Seth took some radical steps: canceling Mike's policy of giving free subscriptions to prisoners, renegotiating previous subscription rates, and, most drastically, announcing that he would no longer trade *Factsheet Five* for other zines. *FS5* was no longer part of the zine barter cycle.[62]

In addition, Seth jettisoned all non-zine reviews. While keeping the community service features of changed addresses and cheap classifieds, he cut the letters section. And in issue 53, in October 1994, *Factsheet Five*'s hallowed tradition of zine egalitarianism came to an end: Seth announced that because of 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.[63] The underground world was being pruned, and for two reasons. Seth and his collaborators were concentrating on zines exclusively, and later only on certain zines, in a pragmatic effort to cope effectively 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. *FS5* was now a commercial project, in the words of its new publisher "a capitalist venture."[64]

From the start, the new *Factsheet Five* looked different. While printed on newsprint inside, it was wrapped in a glossy cover, which by issue 56 was full color. It was laid out by someone 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 the 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 Factsheet Five?" and "What's a Zine?" the latter with a pronunciation guide: "Sounds like 'zeen.'"[65]

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 the chain stores of your local shopping mall. Mike's zine broke down the insular subworlds 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 that of *Factsheet Five*, as different from that of Mike and the old *FS5*. "It was [Mike's] goal," he explains accurately, "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 lay in expanding out instead of cultivating in. Explaining his decision to include an index and genre categorization, Seth acknowledges that some of the cross-pollination function of the old *FS5* has suffered because readers are no longer forced to browse through unfamiliar territory, but he also believes he succeeded in making *FS5* more user-friendly to outside readers. Seth's choice of the phrase "user-friendly" is telling, for what he was interested in is access. He wanted to get the word out about zines to people who have never heard of them before, breaking down the ghetto walls of an internally focused bohemia and democratizing the elite world of those-in-the-know. His method is to circumvent the cultural networks of the underground and to 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 on 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, "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 bookstores, that unless he removes his zine from the world of zine trading it will not survive financially, and that unless he sends out press packs to the mainstream media promoting "the zine revolution" he won't get new readers. So he did all these.

And his strategy worked. The print run for the final year of *Factsheet Five* was over 16,000 copies (12,000 guaranteed circulation) with sales increasing at the rate of 800 per issue. It was carried in nationwide book chains including Tower Books, B. Dalton's, and Barnes & Noble.[66] Seth has indeed improved *Factsheet Five*'s access: more people sent in their zines to be reviewed, more geographically out-of-the-way places carried it, and more people read it.

But this is not access as it is commonly defined in the zine world. Instead of access into cultural *production*, what Seth was promoting is access into cultural *consumption*. The model that he likes to refer to in describing his *Factsheet Five* is not a zine but a "consumer guide," or "consumer catalog." It's an

accurate description, for the new *FS5* pruned, organized, and presented zines as products to be consumed by an ever-expanding underground market. Its advertisement rate card makes the point clear in bold headlines:

Factsheet Five Readers Are Intelligent

Factsheet Five Readers Seek Out The Unique

Factsheet Five Sells Products[67]

What Seth's *Factsheet Five* also sold was access for advertisers to this burgeoning market. Seth succeeded in both keeping *Factsheet Five* afloat and introducing it to new audiences, but only by adopting rules of mainstream media and culture. The result is mixed. As a consumer catalog that opened up the world of zines to people who had never seen a zine before, it was a success; as representing a culture born in opposition to the mainstream consumer culture, it was 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 to bury. Mike is not the puritan saint of anti-commercial zinedom. After quitting *Factsheet Five*, he and Cari Goldberg Janice produced a rather shoddy version of *FS5* for Penguin Books, the first of what would become a tide of zine-related books.[68] Mike's reasons for publishing with a division of the multinational Pearson conglomerate (with interests in, among other things, "international banking, oil services, fine china, and book publishing," as their public relations counsel proudly informed me), he admits, 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.

Ironically then, Seth called it quits with *Factsheet 5* in 1998 – citing hourly wage and hours required as reasons. He also assembled a compilation book for a major publisher. He is now living in Portland, OR. The sales of both books were commercial failures.

OPENING UP OR SELLING OUT?

He's the one
Who likes all our pretty songs
And he likes to sing along
And he likes to shoot his gun
But he knows not what it means
Knows not what it means ...
-Kurt Cobain, singer/songwriter of Nirvana, 1991[69]

"I'm sure you've heard the debate about is it really a good thing that Nirvana has done what they've done," asks Dan Werle, editor of *Manumission*, referring to the fact that the band signed to a major label and appeared on MTV. *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.[70]*

This, once again, is the conundrum facing the underground: is it preferable to proselytize the good news – even via the commercial culture industry – or to stay small and pure and avoid "selling out."

For some zine producers the choice is clear. Mike Gunderloy told me of diehard 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 – in their eyes an unforgivable betrayal of the pure trade ethic.

Others – subcultural entrepreneurs I call them – use their zines and zine experience as a stepping stone to launch themselves or their zines into the commercial media world. Reporting in the *Village Voice* on a zine show held in one of the already-discovered bars on Ludlow Street, where a disproportionate number of slickly published "zines" were displayed, Julia Chaplin writes that "several of the more upwardly mobile publishers admit that their zines are essentially disguised resumes they mail out to prospective employers."[71] Underscoring this new relationship between mainstream and underground cultural worlds, *Factsheet Five* ran a series of articles in a recent issue on how to sell your writing and market your zine commercially under the barely ironic collective headline: "How To Sell Out!"[72] In the post-discovery age, zines can be the path from being a loser to

becoming a winner.[73]

For others, the choice to enter into the mainstream cultural world is one of more complex means and ends. Roxxie, who has transformed her lesbian sports zine *Girljock* into a glossy magazine complete 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 zine's reach through commercial channels. "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*."[74]

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 who like sports. It tells young lesbians that they're not sick and not alone, as zines like *Homocore* did for gay punk rockers. But gay punks, because of their interest in punk rock, can easily find out about *Homocore* from an ad in *Maximumrocknroll* or a review in another zine. They are already hooked into the underground world that gives them access to this material. Teenage lesbian jocks are not. For them, it may be what's in the sports section of the magazine racks 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, Roxxie got *Girljock* accepted by two national distributors who sell widely outside the hipster record and bookstores that traditionally carry zines. Roxxie "sold out" in the hope that a teenage girljock, shopping in a mall someplace, is finding *Girljock* next to *Sports Illustrated* and realizing – perhaps for the first time – that she is not alone.[75]

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 does not flow only one way. The mass media can also serve as reverse conduits back into alternative culture. A couple years ago I received a letter from a young woman named Kate Wolfe requesting my zine. When I later asked her how she had found out about my zine, she replied: "I guess I'm a newcomer to the whole zine scene. 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." Mine was one. Through a decidedly commercial medium, Kate had discovered the world of zines.[76]

However, even without zines going slick or appearing in *Sassy*, commercial access to them is spreading. The Tower chain, under the guidance of zine enthusiast Doug Biggert, and later, Clint Johns sold more than 500 different zines through its bookstores and record outlets. While Biggert argues that the profit Tower makes on zines is minimal compared to that garnered from more commercial products, he still admits, "We've already sold over a million dollars worth of zines ... and sales are always increasing."[77]

Dwarfing the few underground bookstores, and not bound by the conservatism of the few remaining independents, Tower Books – unti they went out of business – had by far the widest selection of zines in my home city of New York. 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 this near invisibility. "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.[78]

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 embedded 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."[79] In discovering zines through personal connections, trading a zine in a network, you become, as Kevin says, "part of something ... an air of conspiracy." 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.

The context of reception is particularly important in the case of zines since, as I've argued before, their politics reside less in what they say and more

in what they are: repositories of nonalienated creation and media for nonalienating communication. This becomes clear when the zine gospel is spread through nonzine means. Mike Gunderloy's and Cari Goldberg Janice's commercial book *The World of Zines* begins with the encouraging advice: "Everyone can be a producer! That's the underlying message of the zine world."[80] But the very form through which they communicate this message argues against them. Professionally produced, bankrolled by a multinational corporation, distributed and sold in commercial bookstores, *The World of Zines* sends a clear but quite different message: 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 *Curio* does contain the words and artwork of zinesters, to sell a slick magazine, with a 50,000 circulation and a "corporate soul to foot our print bill," undermines the entire purpose and significance of zines.[81]

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 in 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 "sellout" tossed across the pages of zines, and the denial of the charge of "selling out" in others. ("Don't worry, we haven't *sold out*," begins Seth Friedman's editorial in *Factsheet Five*, 55.)[82] While the accusation of "selling out" is sometimes just an elitist defense of the pure, bohemian ghetto, it's not always so simple. Rather, given the manner in which the opening up of the zine world is taking place, the concern that in the process of popularization the real message of zines – as an alternative to the consumer cultural world – will get lost is a valid one. To many in the underground the idea of a nation of people reading zines is great, but not if they know not what they mean.

BY FIRE OR ICE

Teenage angst has paid off well
Now I'm bored and old...
-Kurt Cobain, 1993[83]

On April 7, 1994, twenty-seven years old and at the height of his career, a shotgun in Kurt Cobain's mouth blew his head off. "I told him not to join that stupid club," his mother was quoted as 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 appeared to have killed himself on purpose, *because* of his fame – intensely uncomfortable with his popularity and status as a rock star. In the suicide note, it was written that he no longer enjoyed playing; "sometimes I feel as if I should have a punch-in time clock before I walk out on stage," and "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 – now Mountain Dew soda pitchman – Johnny Rotten, "it's better to burn out than to fade away."[84] 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.'"[85] Kurt Cobain was suffering from a heroin addiction, a rocky relationship, and the sensitive rage that made his songs so hauntingly beautiful, but Scott is at least partially right: it was Kurt's discomfort with the demands of the corporate music industry and his fear that he was "faking it" that filled 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 the demands of the commercial music industry for popularity and the underground call for authenticity, Kurt died, entering the only airtight bohemia. Playing out a tradition of bohemian elitism, as well as pragmatically responding to a culture industry that feeds off innovation and dissent, the underground has learned to worship purity and obscurity. This is part of its romance, but it is also 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 sustain enough people to function as an alternative?

Dissatisfied with the constraints of this self-ghettoization, others attempt to break out. 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. The result is that underground culture is sold as style. Stripped of their meaning, zines are an empty husk. A concept is marketed rather than a culture experienced.

Stunted in the darkness or burned up in the light: there is no clear path between the two, but there are explorations. One is to create independent distribution services that can mediate between the zine producers, zine readers, and at times, large commercial outlets. Blacklist Mailorder, a project of *Maximumrocknroll*, was a volunteer-run mailorder operation that distributeds both music and zines with a minimal markup price.[86] *Riot Grrrl Press* reproduced, listed, and circulated Riot Grrrl and other women-centered zines.[87] Wow Cool, started by zine writers Mark Arsenault and Josh Petrin, distributed zines, comix, books – printed matter of the underground.[88] Ericka Baillie started Pander Zine Distro in 1995, primarily distributing personal zines, zines by women, and zines discussing mental health, transgender, and queer issues. Sales were principally through her website but Pander closed in 2005.

Ramsey Kanaan founded AK Press around 1979 in Scotland, selling zines, pamphlets, and books at punk shows. Thirty years later, it is now a full blown self-managed anarchist worker-collective that publishes a dozen books per year and offers a true alternative to this predicament. AK Press services their published and distributed titles to the remaining true underground – kids selling out of their backpacks at high school, independent bookstores, touring bands, mailorder to the suburbs, and at the same time selling to Amazon.com and chain bookstores. Their sales and print runs rival that of "mainstream" publishers and distributors.

The publisher of this book, Microcosm Publishing, was founded in 1996. They operate on a similar set of principles and management, distributing thousands of zines and related materials all over the world through direct networks that mostly circumvent conventional booktrade distribution. They have published several dozen anthologies of zines and quite a few books related to zines.

They specialize in selling zines to stores that sell no other reading material – clothing stores, toy stores, record shops, boutiques, and newsstands.

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 their own difficulties. The prospective reader or listener still has to be "in the know" even to find out that these services exist. The introduction of the world wide web has helped immensely with this but the spark still needs to originate somewhere. Once found they can open up a wide world that allows the bypassing of 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. After *Cometbus*, 30, was reviewed in *Sassy*, he says, "We must have gotten a couple hundred orders ... 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."[89]

That personal exchange becomes a casualty of even subcultural distribution services is partly a matter of size. As I discussed earlier in terms of zine production, increase in size limits the sort of personal touch and control over the process that a zine producer can have. As they've come to be featured in the mainstream media, even zine purists like Dishwasher Pete and Aaron Cometbus have begun swapping their zines for others 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?"[90]

Perhaps. As the zine world has grown and rubbed shoulders with the mainstream, some of the practices of the latter have rubbed off. When zinesters set up institutions that spread the underground, they also invariably end up contributing to the status quo separation between cultural production and consumption.[91] "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 their *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."[92] These women worry because they know it will happen; their catalog, while expanding access, will also increase the distance between producers and consumers.

Likewise, the zinesters who set up distribution services and the like, 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."[93] But what can the underground do? It seems that any attempt to give it secure footing and a more expansive reach results in its betrayal. AK Press and Microcosm Publishing are both continually criticized for being simply "too big" and too much "like a brand". In response, anarchist theorist and zinester Hakim Bey (aka Peter Lamborn Wilson) counsels the rejection of underground stability. He concludes that direct confrontation with mainstream society – a "Spook capable of smothering every spark in an ectoplasm of information" – is futile. The power of the modern corporate culture state can soak up anything it encounters, transforming discontents into affirmations. The solution then is to disappear. This is the strategy of the TAZ, or Temporary Autonomous Zone. As Bey explains:

> *Its greatest strength lies in its invisibility – the State cannot recognize it because History has no definition of it. As soon as the TAZ is named (represented,mediated), it must vanish, it will vanish, leaving behind it an empty husk, only to spring up again somewhere else, once again invisible because undefinable in terms of the Spectacle.*

The only way opposition can survive, according to Bey, is to become "a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to reform elsewhere/elsewhen, *before* the State can crush it" – or, more likely, before the consumer market can co-opt it. [94] When confronted with the modern threat of capitalist co-optation (and the disappoint-

ment of so-called "revolutionary" police states), celebrating temporality seems to make sense, and some zine writers embrace the idea of TAZ. "My revolution starts today," the editor of *Forever & a Day* writes. "My revolution started yesterday, and the day before and the day before that. I will begin the whole thing over again tomorrow." Fearing that the underground "revolution" has now become "an advertising campaign," the editor goes on: "I will find it necessary to revolt against the revolution."[95]

Permanent revolution: an old line of Leon Trotsky. But "rebellion" is the term that Bey prefers, and it's more accurate. For the TAZ, as he recognizes, is a "counsel of despair."[96] As a strategy for survival it cedes 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 his or her 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 TAZ-like rant in his *Reality Manifesto*, concludes, "Individual liberation is all we can hope for and that is what you must challenge yourself to pursue."[97]

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 because of any lack of will or intelligence on the part of their supporters, but because they are attempting to patch over conflicts inherent in the project of creating an alternative culture that rebels against but resides within the belly of the beast.

In the discussions that followed Kurt Cobain's suicide, I frequently heard people ask why, if he was so 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? Maybe he didn't do either because the underground culture in which he was embedded 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 that gives this culture its passion, and, ironically, gave Kurt Cobain's music the same.

FALLING OUT OF FAVOR

The underground culture is not the only culture with contradictions; the culture of capitalism is also riven in two. True, the market celebrates novelty and change, as the promiscuity of the commodity demands a libertarian culture. But just as this aspect is often not acknowledged, the other side of capitalism should not be forgotten. If profits are to be made and inequality is to be enforced, there must be order. And order requires a culturally conservative milieu.

While the mainstream media were fawning over "quirky" zines such as Brady Bunch fanzine *Teenage Gang Debs*, the state of Florida was busy prosecuting 24-year-old Mike Diana on three counts of publishing, distributing, and advertising obscene material: his comix zine *Boiled Angel*. Admittedly *Boiled Angel* is a far cry from the cloying suburban values celebrated in the Brady Bunch, but with a circulation of three hundred copies, the charges against it and Mike were not about stopping a porno czar from profiting from exploitation, but about policing what is and what is not acceptable cultural expression.

The punishment meted out was severe. Convicted on all three counts in a trial where zine and comix writers testified for the defense, Mike was sentenced in February 1994 to three years' probation and ordered to pay a $3,000 fine, $50 a month in probation fees, and a $1,200 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 fulltime 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.[98] With lawyers paid for by the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, Mike appealed the decision but lost again, a Florida Circuit Court judge upholding the decision. *Boiled Angel* would not be the last zine noticed by the law. One year after Mike's initial trial, both the owner and the 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!*[99]

Such clumsy acts of repression, of course, only served to spread the news of the two zines in question, in the process gaining them ironclad subversive credentials. The publicity generated by Mike Diana's case familiarized his name to everyone in the zine world and to First Amendment activists outside, while attracting still others interested in publishing comic books of Mike's drawings. Similarly, the legal repression of *Answer Me!* helped keep it on *Factsheet Five*'s list of top ten zines and made it Chicago's Quimby Queer Store's number-one-selling zine of 1995.[100] Shortly afterwards, a copy of *Answer Me!* was found on the body of a Whitehouse shooter. As much as conspiracy-minded zine writers may fear (and secretly desire) the spectre of jackbooted thugs snatching away their zines, it won't be repression that forces zines out of the light and back underground ... it will be lack of interest.

"Why is our voice suddenly being heard?" *Emit*'s editor Mole asks rhetorically. "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."[101] At that point it's time for the culture vultures to move on.

The mining of the underground is so passé that the editors of *Dirt*, the zine financed by Time-Warner, 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."[102] The selling of the underground is so complete that *Time* magazine printed a – quite perceptive – feature story on the phe-

PUBLIC ENEMY: *BOILED ANGEL*

nomenon, 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."[103] *Time*'s doppelgänger, *Emit,* had pointed it out a year earlier, but said it no better. Meanwhile MTV produced a short video clip on the issue of alternative rockers "Selling Out," demonstrating that even the discussion of selling out had sold out.[104] 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.

By 1995, the *New York Times* was celebrating 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."[105] A year later, Judith McGrath, president of MTV, confided to the *New York Times* that "The us-versus-them thing seems to be disappearing. [Young] people are more complacent."[106] And writing on the world of fashion and teen buying patterns, *Business Week* reported that "grunge is going out and Fifth Avenue is cool again."[107] Alienation, rebellion, underground culture, and zines are last week's story.

This doesn't mean that zines are finished, perhaps they are just moving back underground. "If the 'zine world' disappeared tomorrow it wouldn't really affect me," says Dishwasher Pete. "I'll still be doing what I'm doing."[108] And so will untold numbers of others who existed before the discovery of the underground, and will continue long after zines have been forgotten.

EIGHT

THE POLITICS OF ALTERNATIVE CULTURE

I have a problem with underground culture and radical politics. Both are part of my life. Both shaped who I am and how I see the world. Both have disappointed me.

The Left in the US is a joke. Unfortunately the world is not. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of totalitarian states haven't led to peace, prosperity, and freedom, but have exploded instead into ethnic and religious barbarism, or, as evidenced by negotiations for a partnership between right-wing capitalist Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation and the communist *China People's Daily*, threaten to solidify 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 has turned its attention toward policing desire and the poor. Since the beginning of the 1980s, here in the USA at least, progressive ideals have been in retreat and Left organizations are in shambles. The vibrant social movements are those of the Right.

During the same period, however, my beloved underground, or alternative culture has grown impressively. The scene – its values, its critiques, its zines – has spread across the country, finding a receptive place in the hearts and

minds of alienated young people. Even its very co-optation is testimony to its popularity. 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 – seem incomplete, and woefully inadequate, responses in the face of all this disaster. There has to be something more.

Progressive politics need new imagination and new organization to replace the exhausted carcass of the 1960s. Culture is a space where radically different ways of seeing, thinking, and being can be experimented with and developed. Zines are one means for creating this space. 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, and more important, reason to be concerned with the politics of zines. They ask for it. Espousing anarchism, denouncing capitalism, exhorting others to do-it-yourself, spreading the ideal of an authentic life, the vast majority of zines are critical of mainstream society and mass culture, and at least hint that there might be a different way. To interrogate underground culture as to its possible political impact is merely taking zines 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 medium such as zines. *Culture*: artistic creation, is an expression of *culture*: tradition and lived experience.[2] Both the Culture that people enjoy and the culture in which they are embedded provide them with ideas about how things are and how they should be, or, more accurately, with frameworks through which to interpret reality and possibility. Culture helps us account for the past, make sense of the present, and imagine the future. This is why it is so deeply political. Yet unlike a political treatise or a demagogic speech, the politics of culture never announce themselves as political. As we live our lives and take pleasure in our entertainment, the politics expressed within and through culture become part of us, get under our skin, and become part of our "common sense." This is what gives the politics of culture their power. And while the cards are stacked in favor of those who control the means of mental and material production to create and disseminate cultural values and creations that flow from and reflect their experience and their interests, those without

power also have the capability to create a culture – one that arises out of *their* way of understanding the world. Thus, culture plays an important function in forming and solidifying the rule of the dominant or hegemonic power in society or, conversely, in acting as a language and space enabling subjugated groups to challenge that rule.

I am particularly interested in this latter role, in what Antonio Gramsci called *counterhegemonic culture*: a culture arising out of dissent and providing a countervision of society. Zines and the underground manifest such a vision. In reaction against the dominant culture, and drawing upon residual models of participatory culture, zinesters have produced their own alternative meaning systems and representations. This counterhegemonic culture – like all others – is shot through with contradictions, but within it lies the potential for political resistance.[3]

This emphasis on "potential" is crucial, for it is quite popular in academe these days to point to any cultural manifestation – no matter how ridiculous – as evidence of counterhegemonic culture and leave it at that, expecting the Revolution somehow to follow.[4] Often using Gramsci's name to support their own assertions, these scholars rarely acknowledge his other provisos. Gramsci was a brilliant theoretician, but first and foremost he was a revolutionary, a leader of the first Italian Communist Party.

While he believed that counterhegemonic culture was essential, and that an attack on capitalist culture must accompany, and in some ways preface, the project of changing the material relations of society, culture was not enough for Gramsci. Changes in culture and consciousness had to be linked to a political program and political organization and result in real changes in the physical structure of the economic system.[5]

A number of years back, the historian Eric Hobsbawm made the useful distinction between *political* and *pre-political* movements. Political movements have the organization, ideology, and will to effect political change. Pre-political movements, such as the bandits and religious fanatics Hobsbawm studied, are made up of "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 which have revolutionary potential.[6] They also have something that more formal, "political" groups can sometimes lack: a close 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

Zines and underground culture constitute a free space where people can experiment with possibility. 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."[7] 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, undermining the most powerful hegemonic tool that the powerful have at their disposal: the justification of the current order as "natural."

Considering zines' lineage from science fiction, the fact that readers and writers use them to imagine and explore different worlds is not surprising. Science fiction has always allowed an imaginary place in which to construct utopian visions of what might be or dystopian warnings of what could be. The gap between flights of SF fancy and imagining real political change can be slight. Science fiction has attracted political writers such as the socialist H.G. Wells and the libertarian Robert Heinlein. And the Futurians, an early fan club which spawned many famous SF authors and editors, shared its first meeting space – and a number of its members – with the Flatbush Young Communist League, publishing its first fanzine on the mimeograph machine used to put out the Young Communist *Flatbush YC Yell*.[8] What zines and underground culture writ large offer is a safe place in which to test out new ideas and to imagine a different way of ordering things.

Scott Cunningham, one of the editors of the deeply political comic *World War III*, once told me a curious story. We were discussing the political function of zines when all of a sudden he began talking to me about growing up as a kid and reading Superman comics. There was a problem with Superman, Scott explained: he was just 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 wasn't much they could do with a hero like this. So the comic book 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."[9]

At the time I remember being sort of annoyed with Scott for going off the subject, but I later realized he hadn't strayed at all, he *was* talking about the political functions of zines. Zines are "Imaginary Tales" that 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 – they give their writers and readers "a chance." In some cases this aim is explicit: *Designing New Civilizations* is an APA through which the participants "are 'designing' new civilizations – societies that are many times more intelligent, enlightened, loving and peaceful than the present civilization."[10] 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 England, which recruited young skinheads in the late 1970s and produced a zine espousing their views. But the political possibilities of subculture were also recognized by members of the British left-wing Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

Reacting to racist attacks and the growing popularity of the NF among young whites, the SWP staged a series of successful Rock Against Racism concerts linking black rastas with white punks, while producing its own zine: *Temporary Hoarding*. To the late David Widgery, one of RAR's main organizers, the imaginary world produced within a cultural setting was powerful politics. At an RAR concert, he wrote, 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."[11]

The fact that this alternative was noisy, messy, unconventional, and emotional is important, for it was a sign that politics was speaking the language of its constituents. The power of the imaginary worlds of underground culture comes 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, "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."[12] 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 an – albeit ill-printed – 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 they feel are not being expressed elsewhere. These networks make up a distinct material infrastructure of communication that uses the technology of mass commercial society – computers, copy machines, mail system – but steers the use of these technologies toward nonprofit, communitarian 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, nonhierarchical, with omnidirectional communication flows, and 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."[13] "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."[14] 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.[15] It's radical because the first politics, as Mike Gunderloy enjoined, must always be that of people "get[ing] off their butts and do[ing] something."[16]

Yet in some ways the ideal of do-it-yourself is a far-from-radical proposition.[17] 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."[18] 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, the contemporary United States is a far different place from the idyllic land of independent yeomen 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.

Zines offer a way for those trained in the ideology of the American dream of individual creativity to act upon it. But the context in which this individualism is expressed – an underground network set in opposition to the dominant society – ensures that the variant is not of the "fuck you jack, I got mine" school: that is, it is not atomistic or driven by possessive individualism. In the zine world, 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 individuality.

Because the cultural world of zines is built in explicit opposition to the mainstream, 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*.[19] And just sitting down to do his zine, *Manumission*'s Dan Werle says, 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.[20]

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 this. "Listening to the Clash," Roy SanFilippo matter-of-factly explained. Growing up in Orlando, FL, and feeling like an 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 such as the Clash's "I'm So Bored with the USA." This, Roy says,

got him wondering 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. Later, he became an anarchist activist and part of the collective that runs Blackout Books, a radical 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."[21]

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."[22] In the case of drug abuse, a person begins with legally sanctioned drugs such as tobacco and alcohol, moves to soft drugs like marijuana, then on to the 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 its stages cultivated. Politicos are not born, they are made. People become political through a socialization process. As Roy's case illustrates, there is such a thing as a deviant political career and underground culture can be a stage in it.[23]

First and foremost, zines 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 to learn that they are not alone. In this process they rename 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 do 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. Last, the Riot Grrrl network offers a point of communication and solidarity. Riot Grrrls' 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 the consciousness of 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 readers to think about who they are and what they believe in. Such testimony from regular people – fellow losers – 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 toward 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."[24]

The last I heard from Dan was a postcard. He had moved to Kentucky to enter nursing school and become an AIDS nurse.

Dan isn't the only one to make a political move up through the underground world of zines. Distressed by the dearth of critical information about US involvement and interests in the Middle East during the Gulf War, Greg Ruggiero and Stu Suhulka used their experience publishing their zine, *Open Magazine*, to print and distribute a lecture by Noam Chomsky on "US 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 such revolutionaries as Subcommandante Marcos of the Zapatistas.[25] 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*), help organize the alternative cultural space ABC No Rio, run a food co-op in New York City, put out a weekly news update on Latin America, and produce *Time to Organize,* a

zine "to encourage people to organize."[26]

Jen Angel, an ex-MRR coordinator, published an annual book anthology of zine writings called the *Zine Yearbook*. She also co-founded and published the politics and culture magazine, *Clamor* for seven years.

Would these people have been politicized even without the stepping stone of zines and underground culture? Maybe, maybe not. While it's possible to note who has used zines as a springboard, it's pure conjecture to try to determine who would have followed the same trajectory even without them. But 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.[27] "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?"[28] Once 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 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; a tradition that spoke a language I could understand and that made sense to me being who I was and where I was. But I also hung out in this scene long enough to know its limitations and contradictions. One of the members of the first punk band I was in turned his rebellion against the hypocrisy of the status quo into a flirtation with fascism, and eventually became a small-town cop. 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 counterculture 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."[29]

The inchoate rage of radical culture can work as a stepping stone to the Right as well as the Left. 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 – where you can escape from the real world. The other member of my first 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 US State Department. For as much as there are facets of underground culture that move individuals towards political engagement in the larger world, there are equal forces that move them away.

HAVEN IN A HEARTLESS WORLD

"This zine is our way of saying fuckoff to all the people who shit on the good things in life..." begins *burning America*. Zines, as part of an adversarial subculture, face a political obstacle. Politics require solidarity, planning, and a vision, while what unifies the underground is *a negation of what is*. In their zine, Dan and Chris go on to list who they want to say "fuckoff to":

All the worthless, annoying neo-nazis & everything they stand for. All the macho ass-holes that abuse & degrade women (& people in general). The pro-lifers, the fucking politicians & policemen. The insecure, sexually confused homophobic shitheads. All the naive little kids who think it's cool to hang out with racists. The greedy fucking machine that sells us everything that it can think of.[30]

Clear about who and what they don't like, the editors of *burning America* are considerably more hazy when it comes to explaining exactly what the "good things in life" are that these people shit on. This elision is commonplace in zines, for the only defining image of the underground is a camera obscura reflection of the dominant culture; its identity is an anti-identity.

While this negation is an asset in rebelling, it quickly becomes a liability in building. Slacking is a fine rebellion against the go-go, best-and-brightest, yuppie eighties, but it 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 toward the unfortunate, but the band's dystopian vision gives no clues to what might replace such policies.[31] To borrow distinctions used by Erich Fromm, the underground is vocal on what it wants freedom *from*, but often inarticulate in defining the substance of a freedom *to*.[32]

I regularly ask the zine writers I interview about their vision of an ideal society. Almost to a person, they respond in negative terms. In the perfect future there won't be war, poverty, or environmental degradation, there won't be censorship or stultifying mass media, there won't be racism, sexism, or homo-

phobia.[33] 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 from regulation" enshrined in the US Bill of Rights. In turn, the importance placed on this definition of freedom is also a reaction against what zinesters see as the limiting of these freedoms today by prudish politicians and profitminded corporations. As a realm relatively free from political and commercial 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 Matthew Arnold once wrote, "Freedom ... is a very good horse to ride, but to ride somewhere."[34] The underground culture is so desperate to ride away from the dominant 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 ordinary people. Perceived to be blind to the hypocrisy around them, hostile to new ideas and lifestyles, buying into mass culture, "the American people" are considered idiots. Bohemians have worked long and hard, shedding the values and appearance of their upbringing and creating new ones in replacement, why should they turn around and embrace the very things and people they've left? Think again of the pride of *Black Leather Times*'s Amelia G 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 exulted in one another."[35] 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 should 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 important – the desire to work with others. As the sectarian politics of the late sixties and seventies, and the identity politics of the eighties, have sadly proved, celebrating otherness may be useful as self-therapy, but it is relatively useless as political strategy.

What the writer and critic V.S. Pritchett sardonically wrote of the historical relationship between bohemia and politics in the past holds 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 captains of industry. The latter need the public as workers, consumers and subjects; the former, safe inside their self-enclosed subculture, do not.

Raymond Williams, echoing John Dewey before him, once argued that the strongest weapon in the arsenal of democracy is communication – not as it is but as it should be: with multiple origins and open channels, and with its goal not to dominate, but to achieve "active reception, and living response." Zines succeed admirably in these goals. However, the community of free communication and participation that Dewey and Williams argued for is "common culture," open to all and for all.[36] This is one of the places where the promise of zines falls short. While not limiting participation to only the best and brightest of a meritocracy, underground culture nevertheless does not invite the openness and inclusion necessary for a truly democratic culture; 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*.[37] And as such it abandons the only large-scale, coherent "common culture" today to consumer capitalism.

"The scene was directly political," explains Exene Cervenka, former singer for the celebrated punk band X, talking about the early punk scene in Los Angeles. "[I]t 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."[38] 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 wholly untrue.

Rosa Parks was a committed political activist, a former secretary of the Montgomery, AL, chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. 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 says much about how the history of the civil rights movement has been recast – by

both liberals and conservatives – over the years, but it also reveals something about the politics of underground culture, and specifically about the politics of authenticity.

The ideal of a politics that is "honest and visceral" arises out of justifiable disgust with traditional politics in which ideology and policy are separated from people's lives. Because the idea of doing something to get something else is identified with self-serving careerism or the profit-driven logic of the market, all forms of instrumentality are suspect. From this disgust comes a distrust of any politics that is detached from immediate, individual experience. This is part of the "personalized politics" of the zine world that I've discussed before, a politics that privileges the personal and the intimate over the public and the abstract: politics with a little *p* instead of a big one.[39]

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.[40] Zine writer Missy Lavalee, though once active in a food co-op and the Blacklist Mail Order collective, focuses her politics even more narrowly, stating, "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 she admits, "I don't really see the outside world taking on any of these ideals on a massive scale."[41] Ashley Parker Owens takes up the refrain. 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."[42]

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 such as *Global Mail* precisely so people can witness and learn from each other's "Little Rebellions." She also successfully reaches outside the cultural underground to include others – notably pris-

oners – 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 the FTAA, NAFTA or GATT, structural inequality, institutionalized racism and sexism, or capitalism without abstractions? The privileging of a politics of "honest and visceral reaction" may guard against hypocrisy, but the price one pays is high. The focus of political discourse is always on the *consequences* of political injustice, with little attention paid to 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 political action groups, like Innu Rights Now and Earth First!, are mentioned, the interview is not really about political issues, nor is it a how-to on civil disobedience. Instead it's a discussion of the *personal experience* of doing CD. For Corrine and Bee, CD is a political act in itself, and its efficacy and the cause that it serves are 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.'"[43] For Corrine the value of civil disobedience lies not in "the effect" 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 of the deed.[44]

According to the politics of authenticity, political organizations are something to be wary of. "Fuck the Mass Movement," the anarchist zine *Harbinger* proclaims, devoting an article to the evils of political organizations.[45] The demand of such organizations for structure, solidarity, and strategy necessarily limits personal connection, individuality, and authentic action. Instead of mass political organization, in the words of Exene, a politics that is "so political it didn't even know it was political" is the underground ideal. Underground theorist Hakim Bey argues that a political body that refuses to name itself, stand still, and coalesce into a self-conscious organization 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, former editor Tim Yohannan – usually criticized for excess political instrumentality himself – justifies the prac-

tices of the zine, and its subsidiary cultural/political projects such as Blacklist Mail Order and the music space Gilman, by arguing, "It's the projects themselves – self-governing, independent, and anti-commercial in nature – that are a political statement. It's politics by example."[46] 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.[47]

Bud's faith is not entirely misplaced. In 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 serious limitations to this ideal. It conflates a model of communication with a model of politics, and politics at the macro level is about not communication, but contestation. In a society like our own, rooted in inequality, conflict is unavoidable. 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 it 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 dissent, 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 also on 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. He's angry that 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."[48] 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 disappointment and rage are 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 over-throwing that, zines are merely a form of political catharsis, and underground culture is meant only to be a rebellious haven in a heartless world.[49] One of the attributes of a cultural space like the underground is that it allows its partici-pants to engage in a 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 con-fines of the cultural world? What then does it signify? As I mentioned briefly be-fore, this was a question that deeply troubled Bertolt Brecht. As a playwright he understood the immense potential of art in capturing the hearts and minds of people, yet as a radical he feared that political art, instead of politicizing peo-ple, would act as a sort of pressure release valve for dissatisfaction. He was con-cerned that people would mentally and emotionally resolve their political anxieties through culture, when the real resolution of these problems could only

happen by confronting power in the political realm.

Other students of culture and subculture share Brecht's worries. John Clarke – one of the early scholars of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) – describes how white working-class youth in 1960s Britain, their traditional community threatened by domestic unemployment and foreign immigration, attempted a "magical recovery of community" through their skinhead subculture. Needless to say, nothing the skinheads did – dressing in regimented costume, exaggerating their machismo, or beating up immigrants and hippies – helped to bring back the stable and homogeneous working-class community their parents had enjoyed.[50]

Similarly, what zines offer is a *magical resolution* of the problems of capitalist society and mass culture.[51] 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 that otherwise might have been expressed in political action.[52] In this light consider once 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."[53]
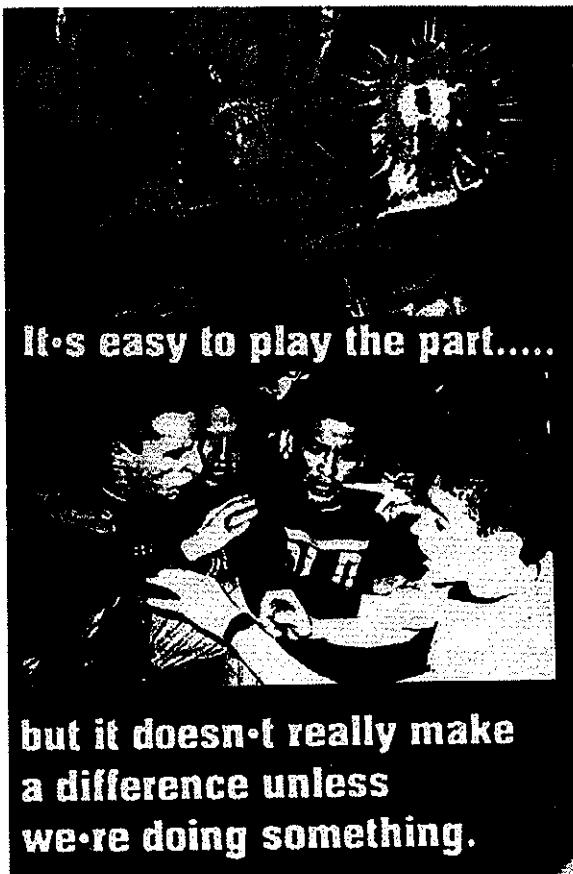
There's no doubt, as Joe Gervasi states above, that "doing a zine … is a radical act," but when it becomes the beginning and end of action it may no longer be so radical. "ACTION IS EVERYTHING! … Be an ACTION GIRL (or boy)!" writes Sarah in *Action Girl Newsletter*, a review of primarily feminist and queer zines. But she then defines "action" purely in terms of cultural creation: write for or begin a zine, put on a punk show, start a record label.[54] The selection of zines she reviews makes it clear that Sarah is interested in politics, but the radical intervention she proposes is cultural communication, not political action. This problem hasn't gone unnoticed in the underground. Tim Yohannan concedes that his efforts to propagate radical political action through *Maximumrocknroll* have met with limited success, while the self-sustaining cultural network he has helped to cultivate has bloomed.[55] And the realization of the political limits of cultural action, especially circumscribed by an insular subculture, finds its way into the songs of such bands as Bad Religion who, in the chorus to their "Punk Rock Song" acknowledge that,

This is just a punk rock song
Written for people who can see something's wrong
Like ants in a colony we do our share
But there's so many other fucking insects out there
And this is just a punk rock song[56]

As Dan and Chris of *burning America* remind their underground audience, "It's easy to play the part ... but it doesn't really make a difference unless we're doing something."[57]

Bad Religion and the editors of *burning America* understand that 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 Man, innovations in culture are the fuel of a consumer economy. The position of the zinester vis-à-vis the consumer culture 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."[58]

So long as the politics of underground

It·s easy to play the part.....

but it doesn·t really make a difference unless we·re doing something.

REALIZING THE LIMITS OF CULTURE IN *BURNING AMERICA*

culture remain the politics of culture, they will remain a sort of *virtual politics*.[59] As such, I have little hope that underground culture can effect meaningful social change, the very change it cries out for through its articulated critiques and very form. 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 – is in desperate need of the enthusiasm and innovation the underground culture has in spades.

The political faults of underground culture, however, are not entirely its own. Although underground culture is created in reaction against the main currents of society, it is 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 have 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 late seventies had more to do with their relationship to political organizations such as the National Front and the Socialist Workers Party than with 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,"[60] it is important to consider again the original intention of the early students of cultural resistance: Gramsci, Hobsbawm, and the scholars of the CCCS.

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, the politics of underground culture, like all "counterhegemonic cultures" and "prepolitical" formations, offers 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.[61]

V.I. Lenin once argued that the reason the Russian Revolution was ini-

tially 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 was also why the revolution would be so hard to sustain. For just as there was no old culture to retard change, there was also no cultural bedrock on which to construct the new society.[62] Standing Lenin's theory on its head, one could argue the same of the modern underground culture. The reason it has been so vibrant and expansive in a time when radical politics were in retreat is that it has no real politics. In its safe haven it can lambast the powers that be, tilt at windmills, conjure up new ways of seeing, being, and doing, but never have to confront power.

But – as was the case with Lenin's dialectic – the reason why this underground culture can never be sustained, nor its ideals be expanded intact, outside its own ghetto is also because it has no politics. It has no effective way to repel co-optation by parasitic marketers, no way to reach out to the unconverted, no way 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 it protests. 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 it hates, the underground inevitably fails. What Marx and Engels once wrote of "petty bourgeois" socialism holds equally true here as well: "Ultimately, when stubborn historical facts disperse all intoxicating effects of self deception," this cultural utopia "end[s] in a miserable fit of the blues."[63]

The final irony is that if the underground were to win, and through political struggle vanquish the evils of consumer capitalism, it would die.

For what gives bohemia its love and rage and creativity is its uneasy embrace with the enemy.

NINE
CONCLUSION

The 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.[1]

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 the limits of the present. But, as Galeano understands, *utopia is 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.[2] Utopia is good for walking. And so are zines. No matter the courage they may provide, zines act as a kind of falsehood, a lie; they promise a dream of non-alienation they can't deliver outside of their own subcultural confines. Like Allen Ginsberg's "angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection," zinesters are searching for something they can never find – not within a larger capitalist society, maybe not within any society at all.[3] The underground's search for authenticity is a failed project. But without this futile struggle they would give in to something far worse – the tyranny of the here and now.

Zines and the underground culture from which they come are a lie that gives direction and sustenance, solidarity and a sense of accomplishment; they keep you moving forward, against a world dragging you back. Zines, with all their limitations and contradictions, offer up something very important to the people who create and enjoy them: a place to walk to. In the shadows of the dominant culture, zines and underground culture mark out a *free space*; a space

within which to imagine and experiment with new and idealistic ways of thinking, communicating, and being.

Underground ideals such as an authentic and non-instrumental life provide – albeit in amorphous 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 such as 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. Participation in the zine underground is *pleasurable*, not a forced march. Asked why he publishes, *Aftershock*'s Eric Rudnick explains: "To change the world. It may not work but it sure is fun trying."[4]

Such impossible dreams are essential today, for the power of hegemonic ideology has never been its ability to make people love the system; rather, it is to deny them any alternative. Zines, in their content, form, and organization, constitute an alternative ideal of how human relations, creation, and consumption could be organized. Critically, their strength lies not in what they say they will do, but in what they actually are; politics by example. In religious parlance, zines and zinesters *bear witness* to a rejection of the old and a creation of the new. When *Dishwasher*'s Pete refuses to show up on *Letterman*, when he won't sell his zines in chain bookstores, when he consciously rejects the American Dream of success, and then writes about it, 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 whoever 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."

After the collapse of the 1871 Paris Commune and a year before his death, the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin admitted that the Revolution had failed. "Yes, you are right," he wrote to his friend, "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."[5] Even in Bakunin's pessimism, however, 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.

Zines aren't the Revolution. But they are one of Bakunin's "subterranean

revolutions, insensible and even often imperceptible," and in this subterrane lies a utopian dream and smolders a radical hope. As zinester 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 represents 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 selfimportant, 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 agree with Tad on all but one point: His rant *is* the hope and promise and humility of the politics of zines and underground culture at its best. It keeps you walking.

What's next, then? What is the future of zines? Since the publication of this book's first edition, numerous zine editors have received offers from major publishers and many of them went for it. Not surprisingly, virtually all of the books bombed by commercial standards and almost all are out of print. Most of them were not very well put together and were, more often than not, rushed to market. Zine editors squabbled about entitlements with each other and the money *did* corrupt the scene – as predicted. The books that remain in print, like Jeff Kelly's *The Best of Temp Slave*, were published by small independents and were not meant to be a major boom in a split second of trend culture.

Also, zines were briefly taken seriously as a financial interest and handled through periodical distributors to chain stores – at least for those publishers who wanted it. And the cost was high; one after another the distributors went bankrupt and zinesters learned the hard way one of the reasons that this particular capitalist game was rejected. Zines, without vast cover markups and financial backing, were often not capable of taking a loss on hundreds or thousands of copies that they would never be paid for.

The boom and clamoring around zines has since quieted and many zinesters have resumed their quiet revolutions in the true underground. A good number of the people featured in this book are still publishing, some for 10-25

years and counting. Dishwasher Pete appeared on National Public Radio and in 2007 he published a book collecting his work – through Harper Perennial. His hopes are that it will make enough of a splash to fund a second book about his new passion – city planning – which he currently practices in Amsterdam.

Aaron Cometbus is still publishing and has released numerous books – some self-published and others through the small independent Last Gasp.

There are now dozens of zine conferences and festivals around the world that attract hundreds and sometimes thousands of people – something that was not happening even when the number of zines being published was at its peak around 1997. It is through this ever-changing, growing community that new people are discovering publishing and quickly producing their own zines while networking in new ways and creating a tighter community.

In the last ten years library cataloging of zines has taken on a much larger role and numerous special collections have appeared in small private archives as well as major collections in public libraries in San Francisco, Salt Lake City, and Portland. Seattle's Zine Archive and Publishing Project, Portland's Independent Publishing Resource Center, and New York's Barnard College are leading the way in establishing ways of doing the impossible – cataloging and circulating zines through their increasingly vast collections.

It was once assumed that zines would largely disappear as a print medim and reinvent themselves on the internet. While many former zine personalities have chosen this route, the internet has become more of an avenue to keep an online diary than carry on the kind of bohemian community that zines comprise. Print zines have evolved to encompass printing techniques that cannot be recreated on a cold computer screen, such as the letter press printing in Artnoose's *Kerbloom*, or the screen printed covers adorning such zines as Icky Apparatus' *Nosedive*, Eric Ruin's *Trouble in Mind*, Meredith Stern's *Crude Noise*, Eian's *Am I Mad...Or Has the Whole World Gone Crazy?*, and Colin Matthes' *Ideas in Pictures*. Zinester Dan Hack teaches workshops about mimeograph printing at Portland's Independent Publishing Resource Center and still prints his zines with this method. Some zinesters are using the Japanese toy Gocco Printer to print multi-colored zine covers with texture, such as Shawn Granton's aptly named *Better Looking Than a Blog*.

That being said, networking for zines has taken an increased presence online. Many distributors have given up using traditional print catalogs and are

now basing their operations primarily around a website, in which listings can be updated as often as desired. Networking and communicating exchanges have become much more immediate in the last five years. Zinesters are now free to debate the nuances of the importance of various ethics in virtual realtime from the comforts of their own bedrooms.

Still, there is something about the materiality of a zine – you can feel it, stick it in your pocket, read it in the park, keep it in your bathroom, give it away at a show – that I myself would be reluctant to give up.[6] Regardless, no matter what their medium of transmission, as long as there is a mass media there will be micro communiqués; as long as there is the instrumentality of the market there will be communication based on love and rage; and as long as there are subterranean revolutions there will be notes from underground.

DO ZINES STILL MATTER?

SOME THOUGHTS ON SELF-PUBLISHING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

When I wrote Notes from Underground in the mid-1990s I defined zines as "the variegated voices of a subterranean world." More than a decade later, zines are still being published and my definition, I think, still holds: zines are the creative outpourings of an underground world that passes below the radar of most people.

What's surprising is how little has changed in the zine scene. Moe is still publishing her *Xtra Tuf* and still making it "free to commercial fishing women." *Cometbus* hit issue #50 and Aaron continues to tell stories about his life on the fringe, even if it's now the fringes of New York City rather than the Bay Area. Politically, zines remain on the margins of mainstream politics, staking out their position through exhortation (*Am I Mad...Or Has The Whole World Gone Crazy?????*) or expose (*The CIA Makes Science Fiction Unexciting*). And zines still revel in the absurd ephemera of our culture, be it the biographies of long forgotten, and by conventional standards quite wacky, scientists in D.B. Pedlar's *Rogue Reader*, or Chris Pernula's lovingly hand-sketched portraits of champion bowlers in *Bowling Stars of 1989* (Serious? Ironic? Does it matter?)

As evidenced by J.L. Heckman's *Work Stories*, zines still chronicle and condemn the soul-sucking labor that most of us do for money, while at the same time zines bare witness to the possibilities of a different sort of labor; work which is done, in the words of the pioneering zine scene organizer Mike Gunderloy, for "love, not money." Zines continue to champion the life of "losers" like "Bubby" in Chris Johnston's comix zine, *My Friend Bubby*. And, perhaps most important of all, zines still record and relate the everyday thoughts of maybe not so everyday people trying to make sense of their place in a world in which they often feel they don't quite fit.

Even the aesthetics of zines have not changed all that much over the past dozen or so years. Text is still cut out and pasted over images, introductions are still hand lettered, amateur pictures and comix are still scattered across pages, and the odd snippet from the mass press is still reproduced for comic or dramatic effect. From the outside many zines look the same too: photocopied and fashioned from standard size paper, folded in half and stapled at the spine.

The world of zines has remained remarkably steady. Meanwhile the world of self-publishing has changed radically.

In the coda to the first edition of this book I wrote: "What is the future of zines? One word: computers." I was hardly going out on a limb with this prediction. Even back then, when the Internet had just recently broken out of its geek ghetto and the graphic interface of the Web was just beginning to take off, the transformative importance of computers to all forms of communication was obvious. Today, in the overdeveloped world at least, computers permeate nearly all aspects of our life. The price of technology has dropped, public access to the Internet has improved, and new software makes it ever easier to make and share your own media creations. We live in a digital age.

This raises some obvious questions: In this digital age, when anyone with a computer can publish whatever they want to an anonymous audience of millions, are analog zines obsolete? Are personal websites, blogs and social networking sites playing the role that zines once did? Are zines today the self-publishing equivalent of that embarrassing older guy in the non-ironic 80s-era band t-shirt who lurks at the back of rock shows? (mea culpa) To sum it up: Are print and paper zines merely an exercise in nostalgia?

In part, the answer is an uncomfortable: yes. Zine producers have historically embraced new technology. They quickly adopted small hand presses in the 1930s, mimeograph machines in the 1950s, photocopy machines in the 1980s, and desktop publishing in the 1990s – why stop now and fetishize the materiality of paper? One could plausibly argue that blogs are just ephemeral per-zines, and fan sites on the web are nothing other than digitally displayed fanzines. Perhaps the only thing that separates a zine from all these new forms of computer-mediated communication is the medium.

Zines have always been more than just words or images on paper: they are the embodiment of an ethic of creativity that argues that anyone can be a creator. Professional newspapers, slick magazines, and academic journals, art galleries and television shows, regardless of their content, have a uniform message to the reader or viewer: you can't do this, you are not skilled enough, you don't have the resources, so just sit back, appreciate and consume the culture that professionals have made for you. A zine, with all its amateur, low-rent, scruffy seams showing, says something else to the reader: this is easy, you could probably create something just as good, now go out and Do-It-Yourself. In this way zines are profoundly democratic. However, if the ideal of DIY constitutes the raison d'etre of zine production, then the Internet serves that purpose far better

than the photocopy machine. At its peak zine publishing involved maybe tens of thousands of people; self-publishing on the Internet touches millions. From this perspective one might argue that while zines made the promise of democratizing the media, the internet has actually delivered it.

But there's something missing from the blogs, the fan sites and the social networking pages – and I think this something has everything to do with democratization. I recall an incident, discussed in a different context later in this book that happened in the zine scene in the early 1990s. It was in the wake of the discovery of the Seattle underground and "alternative music," and zines were getting a bit of mainstream attention. My friend Pete, who published the brilliant zine *Dishwasher*, was invited to appear on *Late Night with David Letterman* to talk about zines and his quest to wash dishes in all fifty states. Pete agreed, but then sent a friend to pretend to be him on the show. As Letterman interviewed the fake Pete, all of us in the zine scene watched and had a good laugh. If the mainstream world thought they could appropriate our culture then we'd feed them a bogus world to appropriate. Then I came across a posting on an early computer bulletin board devoted to fanzines. A young man had seen the bogus Pete on Letterman, heard about the gag, and felt betrayed; he wanted to see his hero, the real Pete. At that moment I realized something: that the world of zines wasn't just about self-publishing and individual expression, it was a culture; a culture with its own set of norms and values, expectations and restrictions, insiders and outsiders. This kid, who had found zines via the wide-open anonymity of the Internet, was still outside. He just didn't "get it."

One zine writer I interviewed for this book likened her discovery of the zine scene to falling down Alice's rabbit hole and emerging into a completely different world. In this new world scraps of paper found on the ground constitute creative content and a job at Kinko's is a coveted position; a Laundromat can become a covert setting for a poetry reading and being called a freak, loser, or anarchist is a compliment, not an insult. It was a subterranean counter-world to the straight world above. The rules of this world were continually debated: Was it okay to charge money for a zine or must it only be traded for another? Is newsprint legitimate, or does hiring someone to print for you constitute a betrayal of the DIY ethic? Was it selling out to write a book about zines? But the fact that these issues were continually contested cemented the community together. We were, in essence, defining and redefining, an alternative culture.

The world of self-publishing on the Internet is not an alternative culture. There is no cultural price of admission into the digital realm, there are no arcane

rituals to master or rules to follow (or even debate). The result is a multiplicity of voices and values. There is nothing wrong with this; indeed there is a lot that is good. But this diversity does not constitute a community, and as such, there are no coherent community values. This doesn't mean that there aren't any values expressed, but it does mean that in the absence of a set of counter-norms, the values articulated or manifested on the web can often conform to those of the dominant arbiters of cultural value: the marketplace and the cultural establishment. As such, blogs become calling cards for aspiring mainstream writers, Facebook and Myspace pages become advertisements for one's own celebrity, and so on.

When the values we've so dearly cultivated venture out into the wider world they become transformed. Take our sacred DIY ethic for example. In the zine scene Do-It-Yourself means a rejection of consumerism: we don't want to consume a culture that others have produced for us so instead we'll make our culture ourselves. But DIY culture has now become a big consumer business: "scrapbooking" is a 2.5 billion dollar enterprise and Build-A-Bear "workshops" populate malls across the country. On the Web, Internet powerhouse Google now owns the user-generated YouTube, while sites like Etsy.com create a platform for people who do-it-themselves to sell their creations to others, who don't. I'm not necessarily condemning these things. Etsy.com was built by ex-students of mine and I appreciate how it helps independent crafters make a living. Scrapbooking gives creative pleasure to millions of people. And, much to my horror, my son truly loves the bear he "built." I'm only pointing out that as an ethic spreads – as it is democratized – it mutates and no longer retains the original meanings it once had. In the zine scene we preach the ethics of DIY and democratic creation but the experience of self-publishing on the Internet demonstrates that when everyone begins to express themselves then there isn't the scale or coherence that encourages the formation of an alternative world-view.

The zine world, like all bohemia, is a ghetto. This sounds negative, but I don't mean it this way. For in this ghetto, we get to set the standards of what constitutes valid expression and creativity, instead of having these definitions determined by the academy, art world or the commercial marketplace of culture. We create an alternative culture. Self-publishing may have been democratized with the rise of the Internet, but within the zine scene Do-It-Yourself is more than just a publishing practice, it is an entire way of thinking, being and creating; a shared ideal of what culture, community, and creativity could be. It is this subterranean vision that needs to be nurtured ... and shared. Zines do this, and that's why they matter. They are, still, notes from underground.

NOTES

1. ZINES

1. Mike Gunderloy and Cari Goldberg Janice, *The World of Zines* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

2. Velvet Underground, "Rock & Roll," *Loaded*, Atlantic Records, 1970.

3. Christine Boarts, personal interview, May 29, 1996, New York City.

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

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

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

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

8. The criteria for the zine editor's selection of material from others are not too different from what operates in many journals or magazines: nepotism. Editors ask 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 is that zine networks are made up of people who are kept – or have opted – out of the halls of cultural power.

9. This small circulation is one of the things that distinguishes zines from other periodicals; as a rule zines have small runs, of under 1,000, while magazines have runs 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 editors of *Ben Is Dead*, has a circulation of over 25,000; on the other hand, many academic or literary journals are lucky to break 1,000.

10. Most magazines try to deliver a profit, even though some, including substantial ones such as the *New Yorker*, operate at a loss. It is not the actual profit that is the issue, but the intent of the producer that differentiates zines from magazines. I'll stay 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 bear, a new editor was brought in to change its content and layout to make it more popular and profitable. This sort of change would be heresy to most zine writers, who would rather burn at the stake than alter their publication to please anybody but themselves.

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

12. These are the birthplaces of *Frederick's Lament, The Holy Experiment*, 10, *The Kansas Intelligencer*, vol. 5, no. 5, and *Moonshines*, vol. 1, nos. 1–2.

13. A breakdown of the geographical origin of zines listed in the Spring 1991 issue of *Factsheet Five* (no. 44) turned up the following results. Out of 1,301 zines listed and reviewed, forty-nine states were represented, with South Dakota being the lone exclusion. Of the 1,142 US zines listed, California produced the most with 226, New York the second with 135, while Ohio, Texas, and Washington state churned 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 deficiency with the importance of Seattle and Olympia as cultural centers for music and young people throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. Of the twenty-four foreign countries represented, the major English-speaking nations led the pack, ordered by geographical distance from the USA. Canada was first with 58 zines, followed by the UK 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 according to the categories "major urban" and "suburban/rural." Here, contrary to expectations about the urbanity of underground cultures, I found that the majority of zines did not originate from large metropolitan areas. Only 393 of the zines from the United States originated from the major cities in each state, whereas the remainder – 749 – did not. It should be noted that doing this sort of sampling from *Factsheet Five* has its strengths and its weaknesses. The main strength is that, up until very recent times, the producers of *Factsheet Five* reviewed every zine that was sent to them. Thus the population was self-selected and not edited. The weaknesses stem from the same source: those individuals who produce publications who don't feel the need to be reviewed by *FS5*, or are ignorant of its existence, are not included in my sample. However, my study is of the *culture* of zines, and *FS5* was and may still be the locus of that culture. In addition, those who submit to *FS5* are aware of this culture and have chosen to participate in it. Thus, 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.

14. "Disciplining undisciplined subjects" is how friend and anthropologist Ara Wilson once described my project.

2. IDENTITY

1. Andrew Johnston, "I'm a Nerd," *Stuff and Nonsense*, 2, 1993, New York City, no page.

2. Quoted in J.C. Hertz, "Zine Stream: An Undercurrent Magazine Culture Explodes," *New York Perspectives*, May 6–12, 1993, p. 10.

3. 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* (New York: John Day, 1977), p. 149. In describing parties he used to throw for zine publishers at his house in upstate New York, Mike Gunderloy highlighted their odd dynamic: people would come, talk to one another for a bit, then invariably 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.

4. Mitzi Waltz, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, 23, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, no page.

5. Mike Appelstein, *Writer's Block*, 8, late 1991/early 1992, Spotswood, NJ; Jokie X. Wilson, *The Olecatronical Scatologica Chronicle*, July 1991, Tucson, AZ; Pathetic Doug, *Pathetic Life*, 11, April 1995, San Francisco, CA.

6. John Foster, "Three Days in the Life of a Loser," *Ched*, 2, October 28, 1993, Portland, OR, no page.

7. Aaron Lee, "Your Reflection," *Blue Persuasion*, 4, 1994, Lexington, KY, pp. 58–9

8. Jery Vile, in Mike Gunderloy, ed., *Why Publish?* (Albany, NY: Pretzel Press, 1989); from camera-ready copy (Factsheet Five Collection – New York State Library; henceforth abbreviated FS5–NYSL).

9. *Losers*, 2, Polk, LA, no date (FS5–NYSL).

10. Wendy and Monica, *Cool Loser*, 2, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA, no date (FS5– NYSL).

11. Jane, *Hex*, 1, 1993, Olympia, WA, p. 49.

12. Editorial, *New York Times*, April 18, 1995, p. A24. The data come from a study done by Edward N. Wolff for the Twentieth Century Fund.

13. For an interesting discussion of the problems of the American meritocracy, see Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites, and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: Norton, 1995).

14. Quoted in Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), p. 131. In 1975 McNeil co-founded *Punk*.

15. Josh Abelon, *The Elana Rosa Veiga Torres Newsletter for This World and Beyond*, vol. 1, no. 1, July 7, 1991, Claremont, CA. Josh also puts out a music zine, *Cramped*.

16. Letter from David Demming in Jen Payne, *The Latest News*, vol. 4, no. 2, Summer 1992, p. 4.

17. John Banks, *BudZine*, 1, May 1993, Tucson, AZ, p. 3.

18. David B. Greenberger, *The Duplex Planet*, 112, 1991, Saratoga Springs, NY, no page.

19. Aaron Rat, *Tard Nation*, 3, 1995?, Olympia, WA, no page.

20. *Manhattan Slow Lane* is what Susanna Sloat calls her own NYC-based perzine. *Manhattan Slow Lane*, 1, 1991, New York, NY.

21. Jen Payne, "Jen on ... the National Debt," *The Latest News*, vol. 4, no. 2, Fall 1992, Clinton, CT, p. 6.

22. John "Bud" Banks, "News Casting," *BudZine*, 9, March 1994, Tucson, AZ, p. 5.

23. Vicki Rosenzweig, *Quipo*, 1, 1993, NYC, 1993, no page.

24. Dennis W. Brezina, *America's at Our*

Doorstep, September/October 1991, vol. 4, no. 4, Churchton, MD.

25. Terry Ward, *Notes from the Dump*, Acworth, NH.

26. Ernest Mann, *Little Free Press*, Little Falls, MN.

27. Aaron Cometbus, *Cometbus*, 31, early 1990s, Berkeley, CA.

28. Ibid., p. 72.

29. Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction," in *The Marx–Engels Reader*, 2nd edn, edited by Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 63.

30. Fredric Wertham, *The World of Fanzines* (Illinois: Southern Illinois Press, 1973), p. 35. *Seduction of the Innocent* was Wertham's salvo in the 1950s war against comic books.

31. Jim Hogshire, *Pills-a-go-go*, Spring 1993, Seattle, WA.

32. Bernard Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750–1776*, Vol. I 1750–1765 (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1965).

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

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

35. Bailyn, pp. 15–16.

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

37. The purpose of the pamphlet was also not to present the musings of an "everyperson" unrepresented in the media of the day. John Dickinson might sign a later pamphlet "from a Farmer in Pennsylvania," but this member of the Philadelphia elite was far from being a simple yeoman.

38. "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 edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

39. Dishwasher Pete, *Dishwasher*, Portland, OR.

40. Patrick Splat, *Loring Punk*, 1, 1993, Minneapolis, MN.

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

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

43. KJ, Erin, Rebecca, and Mary, *Finster*, 3, 1992, Arcata, CA, no page.

44. Jason Page, *Cheap Douchebag*, 11, 1990s, Hollywood, FL, no page.

45. Editor, *Forever & a Day*, 7, 1993, Seattle, WA, no page.

46. Joshua, "How to Use a Zine," *Notes from the Lighthouse*, 7, Eureka, CA, p. 2.

47. The poll, of 1,045 registered voters, conducted by *US News and World Report* is reported in Michael Barone, "The New America," July 10, 1995, p. 22.

48. Elayne Wechsler, "Why Publish," *Factsheet Five*, 29, Renselaer, NY, p. 54.

49. Zines like *Interesting!*, Richard J. Sagall's "compilation of things I find interesting," or *Goldstein: A Newsletter About Me, Paul*, are examples of this solipsistic turn. "Everything is bullshit" begins a rant in *Forever & a Day*. It concludes with the editor's advice: "Close your eyes and build your own meaning. You

will be right." Paul Goldstein, *Goldstein: A Newsletter About Me, Paul*, 1992, Long Island City, NY; Richard J. Sagall, *Interesting!*, premiere issue, 1994, Bangor, ME. Anon., *Forever & a Day*, 7, 1993, Seattle, WA, no page.

50. Edgar "Bolt" Upright, from Mike Gunderloy, ed., *Why Publish?*

51. This authentic self marches through history, reappearing in the nineteenth century as the young Marx's "species-being," at the root of existentialism in the first half of the twentieth century, and in Norman Mailer's "White Negro" beat of the 1950s; the idea of living an authentic life weaves through the Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society in 1962, and colors the New Left that follows.

52. Christina, *Girl Fiend*, 3, August 1992, Amherst, MA, p. 1.

53. Al Quint, quoted in Hertz, "Zine Stream," p. 10.

54. Freedom, personal interview, June 13, 1992, New York City.

55. Gene Mahoney, "Why Publish?," *Factsheet Five*, 30, 1989, Rensselaer, NY, p. 95.

56. At a discussion I attended, David Mandl, a disc jockey at a New York area noncommercial, "alternative" radio station, was asked to describe his station's politics. He began speaking about how WFMU broadcasts lectures by Noam Chomsky and other notable dissidents, but then 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." For Mandl, as for many in the underground, the politics reside less in the content of what is said and more in the form of expression that the saying takes. David Mandl, talk at the Libertarian Book Club, April 17, 1995, New York City.

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

58. "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.

59. *Frederick's Lament*, 1991, Harvest, AL.

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

61. Cited in Cesar Graña and Marigay Graña, eds., *On Bohemia: The Code of the Self Exiled* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990), p. 7

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

63. William Godwin, *An Inquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Vol. II, London: 1793, pp. 846–7; cited in James Joll, *The Anarchists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 19. Setting the stage for Godwin's passion for original and experiential thought is the Puritan revolutionary Gerard Winstanley: "Men must speak their own experienced words, and must not speak thoughts." Quoted in Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1975), p. 369.

64. Michael Harrington, "We Few, We Happy Few, We Happy Bohemians: A Memoir of the Culture Before the Counterculture," 1972; in Graña and Graña, *On Bohemia*, p. 781.

65. A politically disastrous example was Alexander Berkman's botched assassination attempt on Henry Clay Frick, which gained Frick and the Carnegie Steel Company public sympathy while they were violently suppressing a strike. And a ludicrous one was the 1886 case of Charles Gallo, who threw a bottle of acid from one of the galleries of the Paris stock exchange then fired three random revolver shots, hitting no one. At his trial – during which 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!" Gallo's case is described in Jean Maitron, *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France (1880–1914)* (Paris, 1951), cited in Joll.
66. Joll, p. 111.
67. Leah Zeldes Smith, *STET*, November 1990, Wheeling, IL, p. 25 (FS5–NYSL). Another example is *Lan's Lantern*, a zine by Michigan schoolteacher George "Lan" Laskowski. Issue 34 is devoted to SF writer Isaac Asimov, and includes 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*. George "Lan" Laskowski, *Lan's Lantern*, 34, 1990, Bloomfield Hills, MI (FS5– NYSL).
68. Brian Shapiro, "Letters," *Factsheet Five*, 22, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p. 66.
69. *Factsheet Five*, 50, December 1993, San Francisco, CA, p. 46; *Queer Zine Explosion* (with *Holy Titclamps*), 13, 1994, San Francisco, CA, no page.
70. John Newberry, in Mike Gunderloy, ed., *Why Publish?*
71. Kali Amanda Browne, personal interview, June 22, 1992, NYC.
72. The following letter, from "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.
73. Franetta L. McMillian, *Sweet Jesus*, 1, early 1990s, Newark, DE.
74. The capacity of zines to project a virtual identity can lead to misunderstandings. There have been well-documented incidents of deception – often with hurtful results – involving another medium of virtual identity. 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. Unable to categorize her by looks, he spoke with her as a person. 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 he was forming. When she told him 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). Franetta L. McMillian, telephone interview, November 11, 1993. For accounts and analysis of

virtual identity in computer-mediated communications see Lindsy Van Gelder, "The Strange Case of the Electronic Lover," in Charles Dunlop and Rob Kling, eds., *Computerization and Controversy* (Boston: Academic Press, 1991), pp. 365–75; David Myers, "Anonymity is Part of the Magic': Individual Manipulation of Computer-mediated Communication Contexts," *Qualitative Sociology*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Fall 1987), pp. 251–66.
75. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 29.
76. Ramones, "I'm Against It," *Road to Ruin*, 1978, Sire Records.
77. 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*.
78. "The self is something which has a development," social psychologist George Herbert Mead argued at the turn of the century, theorizing that "[The self] 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." George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1934), p. 135.
79. Matt, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 85, June 1990, San Francisco, no page.
80. Born Against is the name of a punk band whose lead singer puts out the zines *I, Yeast Roll* and *Dear Jesus*; Kevin Person, Jr., *The I Hate People Gazette*, 5, early 1990s, Pennsauken, NJ; Anon., *Oh Cool Scene Zine*, no address, no date.
81. Interview with Al Pike and Dave Insurgent of Reagan Youth, *Maximumrocknroll*, 4, January–February, 1983, San Francisco, no

page.
82. Nate Wilson, *Scrambled Eggs*, 1, 1993, Albany, NY, no page.
83. Zak Sally and Mike Haeg, *Sauce*, 1993, Oakland, CA; Bruce Clifton, *Exercise with Alcohol*, 1994, Portland, OR.
84. Cited in Jim Hogshire, "You Can Be The Publisher," *Nuvo*, December 26, 1990–January 2, 1991, p. 8.
85. Josh Norek, *Howhywuz, Howhyam*, 1992, Albany, NY, p. 1.
86. Richard Sennett, *Authority* (New York: Norton, 1980). See pp. 15–49.
87. The Raven, *Losers*, 2, no date, Polk, LA, inside cover (FS5–NYSL).

3. COMMUNITY

1. John Klima, personal interview, December 30, 1993, Seattle, WA.
2. Arielle Greenberg, personal interview, August 25, 1993, New York City,
3. Christine Boarts, personal interview, July 12 1993, New York City.
4. Paul W. Dion, *The NEW Bloated Tick*, vol. 5, no. 7, 1991, South Grafton, MA, no page.
5. Robert DuPree, *Notes from Earth*, vol. 1, no. 1, Summer 1993, Vancouver, WA, p. 3.
6. Chris from Redmond, OR, in Robert Brown, ed., *Punk Pals*, March 1990, Berkeley, CA, p. 3 (FS5–NYSL).
7. Richard Stazenski, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 60, May 1988, San Francisco, no page.
8. Tin-Ear, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, 31, 1989, Rensselaer, NY, p. 99.
9. Feral Faun, in Mike Gunderloy, ed., *Why Publish?* (Albany, NY: Pretzel Press), 1989, p. 6, from camera-ready copy (FS5–NYSL). Feral puts out *Beyond the Fringe* and *Chaotic Endeavors*.

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

11. William Baggins, *Scream*, Fall 1995, Frostburg, MD. William uses his definition of community to argue against a professional football team's training camp moving to Frostburg, asking whether community is something dictated by outside forces of capital or something created together by citizens.

12. Jay McLaughlin, *Bunyon*, October 1993, Vancouver, BC, no page.

13. Mark Morelli, personal correspondence, 1993(?).

14. Robert Park, "The Romantic Temper," in Robert Park and Earnest W. Burgess, eds., *The City* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1925), p. 115.

15. Letters to the Editor pages are, of course, not exclusive to zines, but their importance to zine culture is distinctive. The *New York Times* receives 1,500 letters a week and runs 60; *Time* magazine gets the same number and runs 35. Even opinion magazines run a miniscule percentage 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 practice. Issue 23 of *Maximumrocknroll* (March 1985) listed 37 letters, most of them seven to ten paragraphs long. Data on letters are from J. Peder Zane, "A Rivalry in Rabble Rousing as Letter Writers Keep Count," *New York Times*, June 19, 1995, p. D5.

16. Fredric 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* (Illinois: Southern Illinois Press, 1973), pp. 97 and 112, respectively.

17. Bonnie Jo, *Letter Parade*, February 1990, Comstock, MI.

18. Mike Gunderloy, *Factsheet Five*, 13, 1984, Rensselaer, NY, p. 2.

19. Cited in Michelle Rau, "From APA to Zines," unpublished manuscript, 1991.

20. Ibid.

21. Ashley Parker Owens, e-mail correspondence, June 4, 1994.

22. Ashley Parker Owens, *Global Mail*, 8, May–August 1994, Chicago, IL, p. 4.

23. Mark Corroto, *Face: Tools for a Network*, 6, 1993, Youngstown, OH.

24. Mike Gunderloy, *Factsheet Five*, 22, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p. 66.

25. Janet Fox, "Letters," *Factsheet Five*, 23, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p. 67.

26. Letter from William Peschel to Mike Gunderloy, June 5, 1991, "Misc. Correspondence" folder, correspondence box (FS5–NYSL).

27. Mookie Xenia, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, 28, 1988, Rensselaer, NY, p. 65.

28. Jim Romenesko, *Obscure*, 24, 1993(?), Milwaukee, WI, front cover.

29. David Lee Ingersoll, *Factsheet Five*, 35, Rensselaer, NY, 1990.

30. Luke McGuff, "Letters," *Factsheet Five*, 22, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p. 66.

31. Eric, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, 22, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p. 47; Dommie Sharp and Greg Skalka, "The South," *Maximumrocknroll*, 6, May–June, 1983, San Francisco, CA, no page.

32. C. Carr, "Bohemia Diaspora," *Village Voice*, February 4, 1992, p. 27.

33. President Sheldon Grebstein, SUNY Pur-

hase, "Institutional Overview and Program
lans, 1987–88," cited by David Tomere,
hock Troops of Gentrification," *The Load,*
ctober 15, 1986, p. 5.

4. C. Carr, "Bohemia Diaspora," *The Village
oice,* February 4, 1992.

5. Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals:
merican Culture in the Age of Academe* (New
ork: Basic Books, 1987), p. 28.

6. Cesar Graña and Marigay Graña, *On Bo-
emia* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publish-
rs, 1990), p. xv.

7. Starbucks Coffee Company, with its chain
f coffee bars, saw its net income increase 71
ercent in 1992 to $4.1 million. Charles
cCoy, "Entrepreneur Smells Aroma of Success
n Coffee Bars," *Wall Street Journal,* January
, 1993, sec. B, p. 2.

8. Christine Boarts, personal interview, July
2, 1993, New York City.

9. Christine Boarts, *Slug & Lettuce,* 29, Feb-
ary/March 1993, New York City.

0. Don Fitch, personal letter, April 22, 1994.

1. By providing this service zines can actu-
lly help to *create* the Scene as well. As
laude Bessey, editor of *Slash,* an early punk
ne based in Los Angeles, explains: "we were
retending there was an LA scene when there
as no scene whatsoever. The magazine was
.... Then all these disaffected loonies
arted focussing on the mag and decided 'We
an be it, too.'" Within a few months there
as a self-conscious LA punk scene. Claude
essey, quoted in Jon Savage, *England's
reaming* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992),
.437.

2. The tour diary is such a part of punk zine
adition that the editor of *Minions of Evil*
rites a five-page "Generic Band Tour Diary"
aking fun at the genre. Anon., *Minions of
il,* 1992(?), Middletown, CT.

43. S. McPheeters, *I, Yeast Roll,* 78, October
1993, Richmond, VA, p. 8.

44. Jennifer, *Gogglebox,* 4, Winter 1995, New
York City.

45. Mono, *Po,* 14, 1993, Portsmouth, NH.

46. Miles Poindexter and John Labovitz,
Crash, 1993, San Francisco, CA.

47. Jennifer, *Gogglebox,* 4, Winter 1995, New
York City, p. 28.

48. *Book Your Own Fuckin' Life,* 1, Maximum-
rocknroll 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.

49. Jack Patten, *Pool Dust,* 20, 1993, Seat-
tle, WA.; Laundromat café: Adam Bregman,
Shithappy, 3, 1993(?), Los Angeles, CA, p.
15; Kinko's scam: Aaron, *Cometbus,* 31,
Spring 1994, Berkeley, CA, p. 28.

50. Rob Treinen, *Cramped and Wet,* "com-
pletely disjointed issue," no date, Sioux City,
IA, pp. 19–20.

51. Marc Arsenault, telephone interview, De-
cember 12, 1993.

52. Michael Dixon, *You Own a Wonderful Ma-
chine, Your Body,* 1992, Chicago, IL, no
page.

53. Arielle Greenberg, personal interview,
August 25, 1993, New York City.

54. Adam Bregman, *Shithappy,* 3, 1993(?),
Los Angeles, CA, pp. 12–13. The Cacophony
Society is also mentioned in "Tales from the
Zone," *Iron Feather Journal,* 11, 1991, Boul-
der, CO.

55. Dick Hebdige, "The Meaning of Mod," in
Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resist-
ance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in
Post-war Britain* (London: Unwin Hyman,
1976), p. 93.

56. Wolfboy, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll,*

23, 1985, San Francisco, CA, no page.

57. Edwin P. Irwin, "In Quest of Bohemia," 1906, in Graña and Graña, p. 314.

58. Issue 23 (March 1985) listed thirty-seven letters, issue 63 (August 1988), thirty-two letters, and even though the number has slipped recently, in issue 120 (May 1993) to twenty-one, and issue 129 (February 1994) to eighteen, most of the letters are still seven to ten paragraphs long.

59. Planet Boy, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 5, March–April 1983, San Francisco, no page.

60. John Hurt, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 6, May–June 1983, San Francisco, no page.

61. Mike Impastato, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 7, July–August 1983, San Francisco, no page.

62. Carlos Fernandez, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 85, June 1990, San Francisco, no page.

63. Steve Stepe, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 7, July–August 1983, San Francisco, no page.

64. Javi (John Souvadji), "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 23, March 1985, San Francisco, no page.

65. John Jankowski, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 7, July–August 1983, San Francisco, no page.

66. Illustration by Lee, *Flipside*, 44, 1984, Whittier, CA.

67. Thomas Pluck, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 88, September 1990, no page.

68. Viktim Joe, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 62, July 1988, San Francisco, no page.

69. Cited in Lisa K. Wildman, "Where the Boys Aren't: Riot Grrrl NYC," *SUNY Purchase Free Press*, March 4, 1994, p. 7.

70. 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.

71. Liberty, "What Riot Grrrl Means To Me," *Riot Grrrl* 5, March 1993, New York City, no page.

72. Emma, "What Riot Grrrl Means To Me," *Riot Grrrl* 5, March 1993, New York City, no page, emphasis mine.

73. Jen Devosb et al., *Riot Grrrl* 3, May 1992, Amherst, MA, no page.

74. Ne Tantillo, *Riot Grrrl* 6½, December 1991, Arlington, VA, p. 3.

75. Ne Tantillo, *Riot Grrrl* 6½, December 1991, Arlington, VA, p. 8.

76. Diana, *Riot Grrrl* 5, March 1993, New York City, no page,

77. D.E.H. Russell, "The Incidence and Prevalence of Intrafamilial and Extrafamilial Sexual Abuse of Female Children," *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 7, 1983, pp. 133–46.

78. Suzanne Daley, "Little Girls Lose their Self-esteem On Way to Adolescence, Study Finds," *New York Times*, January 9, 1991.

79. *Riot Girl, Huh?*, 1991(?), Olympia, WA, no page.

80. Kathleen Hanna et al., "Riot Grrrl is..." *Bikini Kill*, 2, Washington DC, no page. In addition to being one of the founding mothers of Riot Grrrl, Kathleen Hanna is the lead singer of a punk band, also named *Bikini Kill*.

81. Joanne Gottlieb and Gaye Wald, "Smells Like Teen Spirit," in Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose, eds., *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 253.

2. Kathleen Hanna et al. "Riot Grrrl is...", *Bikini Kill*, 2, Washington DC, no page.

3. Wildman, p. 7.

4. Why the title *Bitch*? Lori asks rhetorically. "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).

5. Lori Twersky, "Smashing Cinderella's Slippers, part one," *Bitch*, 19, 1988, Campbell, CA, p. 27 (FS5–NYSL).

6. Kathleen Hanna, "0069," *Bikini Kill*, 2, 1992(?), Washington, DC, no page.

7. Kathleen Hanna, "0069," *Bikini Kill*, 2, 1992(?), Washington, DC, no page.

8. Arielle Greenberg, telephone interview, March 28, 1994.

9. Dawn, *Riot Grrrl Newsletter One*, 1991(?), Newbury Park, CA, no page.

0. R.F., *Riot Grrrl, Huh?*, 1991(?), Olympia, WA.

1. Ne Tantillo, *Riot Grrrl*, 6½, December 1991, Arlington, VA, p. 3.

2. "Riot Grrrl Intro," *Riot Grrrl*, 8, 1992(?), Washington, DC, no page.

3. "Riot Grrrl is," *Bikini Kill*, 2, 1991(?), Washington, DC, no page.

4. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated by George Lawrence and edited by J.P. Meyer (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 513.

5. Ibid., p. 523. Marshall Berman suggested that I consider the dialectics of de Tocqueville's views on voluntary associations.

6. De Tocqueville felt that *both* these attributes were positive ones. The former for the same reasons as I, and the latter because distraction from public affairs led to an implicit support of the status quo, and as such was a politically stabilizing force.

97. Tom Jennings, *Homocore*, issues 1–7, September 1988–February 1991, San Francisco, CA; Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones, *JDs*, 8, 1991, Toronto, Ontario (FS5–NYSL).

98. Steve Ackert, "Letters," *Homocore*, 7, Winter/Spring 1991, San Francisco, CA, no page (FS5–NYSL).

99. *Skinned Alive*, 1, 1987, Murrieta, CA; *Colorblind*, 1, 1989(?), Chicago, IL (FS5–NYSL).

100. Ivory-Snow Dial, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 5, March–April 1983, San Francisco, CA, no page.

101. Ann Wilder, "Letters," *Factsheet Five*, 22, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p. 65.

102. Lewis H. Lapham, "Seen But Not Heard," *Harper's*, July 1995, p. 31.

4. WORK

1. Keffo, *Welcome to the World of Insurance*, early 1990s, Bethlehem, PA, p. 1.

2. Jean Railla, *Work*, 1993 94, Los Angeles, CA.

3. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 1844, in *Early Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1975), pp. 332–44.

4. In 1974 Harry Bravermen commented upon this "de-skilling" of the workforce in *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press). For a discussion of this process in the present era, David Harvey's *The Condition of Post Modernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 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, DC: USGPO, 1994) pp. 101–2; *Economic Report of the President, 1995* (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1995) p. 58. I've used the 1994 report because of the special emphasis that year on reporting trends in service and temporary employment. As the 85 percent figure listed in the 1995 report underscores, these trends have only accelerated.

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, DC: USGPO, 1994) pp. 101, 123.

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 employees 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," *Sabot Times*, 1, April 1992, Seattle, WA, p. 2.

17. Dishwasher Pete, *Dishwasher*, 9, early 1990s, Arcata, CA, no page.

18. Brendan, "Brendan's Free Café," *Temp Slave*, 4, 1994, Madison, WI, p. 6.

19. Cited in J.C. Herz, "Zine Stream: An Undercurrent Magazine Culture Explodes," in *New York Perspectives*, May 6–12, 1993, pp. 10–11.

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. Dishwasher Pete, *Dishwasher*, 11, 1994, Portland, OR, no page.

25. Joe Gervasi, *Philly Zine*, 11/*NO LONGER A FANzine*, 1, Summer 1992, Blackwood, NJ, p. 34.

26. Missy Lavalee and Joe, "Scams," *Gaybee*, early 1990s, Portland, ME.

27. Andrea Juno and V. Vale, eds., *Pranks!* (San Francisco: Re/Search, 1987).

28. Adam W., "Mean Guy Page," in *Egg*, 8, 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*, vol. 3, no. 4, Gaithersburg, MD, no page.

31. *Bad Attitude,* appropriately, is the title of an anthology of a zine for disaffected office workers: *Processed World.* Chris Carlson, ed., *Bad Attitude* (London: Verso, 1990).

32. Cited in Devon Jackson, "Serial Killers and the People Who Love Them," *Village Voice,* March 22, 1994, p. 31. As to the popularity of this extreme alienation, the Goads's *Answer Me!* was recorded as the best-selling zine of 1995 at a popular underground bookstore in Chicago, Qvimby's Qveer Store (Qvimby's Qveer Store *Megamegadoggylogtwo,* Chicago, IL, 1995).

33. Dishwasher Pete, telephone interview, March 30, 1994.

34. SubGenius Foundation Inc., *SubGenius Pamphlet No.1,* Dallas, TX, 1981.

35. Richard Linklater, *Slacker* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992).

36. Lawrence Levine, "The New Negro and the Realities of Black Culture," *The Unpredictable Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 104.

37. Théophile Gautier, "The Glory of the Senses," 1836, in Cesar Graña and Marigay Graña, eds., *On Bohemia: The Code of the Self Exiled* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990) p. 263.

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

39. James Sterngold, "Facing the Next Recession Without Fear," *New York Times,* May 9, 1995, sec. D, p. 1.

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

41. Compared to others in American society, the job outlook for the middleclass, 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 when rising or high expectations ("wants") are met with falling possibilities ("gets"), rebellious ideas and ideals ferment.

42. *Economic Report of the President, 1994* (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1994), p. 58; *Economic Report of the President, 1995* (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1995), p. 102.

43. Richard Linklater, *Slacker* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), p. 17.

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

45. Dishwasher Pete, telephone interview, March 30, 1994.

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

47. Ibid., 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 accusation 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 by public petition of anger. J.R.

Molloy, *Alligator Grundy Captions Wonder*, vol. 1, no. 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.

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. Dishwasher Pete, telephone interview, March 30, 1994.

54. Dishwasher Pete, telephone interview, March 30, 1994.

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

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

57. Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), p. 30; 1990 is the year given for these figures.

58. The quotation 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. Kennedy quotes Lao Tzu in between punk fiction and record reviews.

59. Dishwasher Pete, telephone interview, March 30, 1994.

60. C. Nash, "Text," *Queer Magnolia*, 40, Lansing, MI, late 1980s or early 1990s, no page.

61. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," 1844, in *Early Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1974), pp. 332–44.

62. Carl Bettis, editor of *The Slapdash Hackery Factory*, in "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, 23, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p. 59.

63. Simon Frith, *Sound Effects* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), p. 77; "My Way" was one of Frank Sinatra's big hits, later (sardonically) covered by former Sex Pistol Sid Vicious.

64. 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.

65. Tina Herschelman, Sara Lorimer, and Paul Schuster, group interview, December 29, 1993, Olympia, WA.

66. Tad Hirsch, e-mail correspondence, September 18, 1984.

67. Michelle Rau, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, 38, 1990, Rensselaer, NY, p. 95.

68. See also E.P. Thompson's classic essay "Time, Work Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," reprinted in *Customs in Common* (New York: New Press, 1991), pp. 352–403, for a history and further discussion of the concept of time produced by new modes of organizing work under capitalism.

69. J.C. Coleman, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, 27, 1988, Rensselaer, NY, p. 54.

70. In his study of mostly science fiction and fantasy zines in the early 1970s, Fredric 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." Fredric Wertham, *The World of Fanzines* (Illinois: Southern Illinois Press, 1973), p. 71.

71. Aaron Cometbus, *Cometbus*, 31, early

1990s, Berkeley, CA, p. 82.

72. Arielle Greenberg, personal interview, August 25, 1993.

73. Lizzard Amazon, *Slut Utopia*, 2, early 1990s, San Jose, CA, inside cover.

74. Lisa Maslowe, *The Catbox Room*, 1, July 1993, San Francisco, CA, no page.

75. Sean Tejaratchi, *Crap Hound*, 3, Summer 1995, Portland OR.

76. Michael Carr, quoted in Reon Carter, "The Zine Scene," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 8, 1993, sec. C, p. 1.

77. Queen Itchie, *Sneezing Jesus*, 8, early 1990s, Sherburne, NY, no page.

78. Scott Cunningham, telephone interview, May 24, 1995.

79. 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* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

80. Dan Werle, telephone interview, December 15, 1992. Another zine editor, Missy Lavalee, fears that a growth in size might bring pressure for a change in the personal form she values in her zine. 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. compromis-
ing 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, Rensselaer, NY, p. 100.

82. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground/The Double* (New York: 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).

5. CONSUMPTION

1. Dan Werle, telephone interview, December 15, 1993.

2. Consumer spending makes up two thirds of US economic activity, according to 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*, Vol. 4 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), p. 44.

4. Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrel Lynd, *Middletown* (New York: 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, "I'll go without food before I'll see us give up the car," to which the Lynds commented

that "several [families] who were out of work were apparently making precisely this adjustment" (p. 256).

5. Damon Knight, *The Futurians* (New York: John Day, 1977).

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

7. Michelle Rau, "From APA to Zines," unpublished manuscript, 1991, p. 4; Frederic Wertham, *The World of Fanzines* (Illinois: Southern Illinois Press, 1973), pp. 38–40. Rau qualifies her support of *The Comet* as the first zine by writing that it is the "first fan magazine printed by a club." Wertham states unequivocally that it is the first. I hedge my bets by siding with Rau.

8. John "Bomb" Colletti, *Dumpster Dive*, 7, Norwalk, CT, 1993(?).

9. "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, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Books, 1984), p. 7.

10. *Judy!*, vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 1993, Iowa City, IA, no page. Judith Butler, by all accounts, does not see the good humor behind *Judy!*

11. *The I Hate Brenda Newsletter*, 1993, Hollywood, CA.

12. Don Steinberg and Steve Steinberg, "Reviews," *Meanwhile...*, premiere issue, Spring 1991, Philadelphia, PA, p. 3.

13. Paul Lukas, *Beer Frame*, 1, 1994(?), Brooklyn, NY.

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

15. Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. I* (New York: Vintage, 1865/1977), p. 165.

16. Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women* (Philadelphia: Penn University Press, 1992).

17. On the World Wide Web, Viacom, which owns the copyright to *Star Trek* products, has ordered the removal of any artistic renderings, sound files, video clips, from amateur websites, steering fans instead to the official *Star Trek* website – available only to those who subscribe to Microsoft Network. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 3, 1997, p. F3, cited in *Edupage*, January 5, 1997.

18. Zines like *Fan Mail*, a fanzine devoted to the lead singer of the pop group Blondie, Debbie Harry, demonstrate the more troubling aspects of being bound to commercial culture. Here, as other editors do, they try to connect with their subject. But instead of de-fetishizing their subject matter, they fetishize it further. In *Fan Mail* the editors obsess over the minutiae of Harry's life. Her once mentioning that she flew over Tusunka, Siberia, and saw where the great meteor landed in 1908, creates 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 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...'"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 individuals 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, 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 gets translated into the desire to covet and to own. *Fan Mail* is the publication of the "Debbie Harry Collector's Society"; in the pages of the zine, Debbie Harry memorabilia are advertised for sale. Barry Kramer, ed., *Fan Mail,* April 1991, Mechanicsburg, PA, p. 5 (FS5–NYSL).

19. Trevor Rigler, "Double Dose O' Bullshit," *Temp Slave,* 4, Madison, WI, 1994.

20. Jane, "Lakefair," *Hex,* 1, September 1993, Olympia, WA, pp. 43–4.

21. Freedom, personal interview, June 13, 1994, New York City.

22. Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen, *Channels of Desire* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982).Writing forty-five years earlier George Orwell argued: "It is quite likely that fish and chips, art-silk stockings, tinned salmon, cut-price chocolate (five twoounce bars for sixpence), the movies, the radio, strong tea and the Football Pools have between them averted revolution." Orwell added this important caveat: "Therefore we are told that the whole thing is an astute manoeuvre by the governing class – a sort of 'bread and cir-

cuses' – to hold the unemployed down. What I have seen of our governing class does not convince me that they have that much intelligence. The thing has happened, but by an unconscious process – the quite natural interaction between the manufacturer's need for a market and the need of half-starved people for cheap palliatives." George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1937/1958), p. 90.

23. This phenomenon is by no means limited to the United States. "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 the reunification of Germany. Liberty, they tried to warn their fellow citizens, had to be defined in terms larger than mere access to the consumer goods of the West. Their pleas fell on deaf ears, and East Germans voted to trade in their revolution for the freedom to consume. Most of them soon learned they would not obtain even that.

24. *Minions of Evil,* 1994(?), Middletown, CT(?), no page.

25. Simon Taylor, *ARTichoke, i am free issue,* 1, College Park, MD, 1985, no page.

26. J, "Don't Buy Their Shit," *Another Pair of Shoes,* 8, Minneapolis, MN, 1992, no page. 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.

27. Marc Arsenault, phone interview, December 14, 1993. Marc began *Wow Cool* distribution, and used to edit *Andy's Chair*.

28. Anon., *Kill Your Television*, July 1994, 4, Oberlin, OH, p. 1.

29. Mike Gunderloy, personal interview, December 6, 1992, New York City.

30. Missy Lavalee, *Gaybee*, 2 and 3 respectively, early 1990s, Portland, ME.

31. Don Fitch, *From Sunday to Saturday*, Covina, CA, 1993, pp. 77–8.

32. *Do-It-Yourself Retailing* is still the name of the association magazine put out by the National Retail Hardware Association.

33. Kill Rock Stars is the name of an independent record label from Olympia,WA.

34. *Punk* was founded in October 1975; the first issue came out late December, with the official cover date reading January 1976. The last issue of *Punk* was published in the spring of 1979. John Holmstrom, personal correspondence, July 9, 1997. 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* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992).

35. *Sideburns*, December 1976, illustrated in Savage, pp. 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.

36. John Holmstrom, *Punk*, 3, April 1976, New York City.

37. Cited in Henry, pp. 101–2.

38. Mark G., *Sniffin' Glue*, 5, cited in Savage, p. 279.

39. Bryan Hutcheson, quoted in J. C. Hertz, "Zine Stream: An Undercurrent Magazine Culture Explodes," in *New York Perspectives*, May 6–12, 1993, pp. 10–11.

40. Kid Smiley, in Mike Gunderloy, ed., *Why Publish?* (Albany, NY: Pretzel Press, 1989), p. 46; from camera-ready copy (FS5–NYSL).

41. For example, in an interview in an early issue of the punk zine *Flipside*, the seminal hardcore punk band Black Flag lambasts 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."

42. *TV Guide*, reprinted from *Maximumrocknroll*, 4, January–February, 1983, San Francisco, CA, no page. 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 develop a sense of their own identity.

43. Tim Tonooka, "Guns Don't Kill People, Songs Do," *Maximumrocknroll*, 4, January–February 1983, San Francisco, CA, no page. All quotations above, including the one from *Quincy*, are from this article.

44. Dave, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 4, January–February 1983, San Francisco, CA, no page.

45. *Freedom's Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, March 16, 1827, p. 1.

46. In Britain, where football zines equal or exceed the number of all other types, critics have pointed out that "[f]anzines were born because football clubs treat their fans as if they were idiots." As football became a major business in the seventies and eighties, fans began to resent decisions made about the sport that had less to do with their concerns and more with the money that could be made off their spectatorship. Fanzines became an outlet for 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'," *Sociological Review*, vol. 39, no. 3 (August 1991), pp. 581–97.

47. *Riot Grrrl Press*: catalog for September thru November, 1994(?), Washington, DC, no page.

48. Patrick Clark, personal correspondence, March 31, 1994. Patrick puts out a zine called *Interference on the Brain Screen*.

49. Edward Dean, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, 23, 1987.

50. Erik Kosberg, in Mike Gunderloy, ed., *Why Publish?*

51. Arielle Greenberg, personal interview, August 25, 1993, New York City.

52. A good rule of thumb is: the higher the cover price, the slicker the design, the better the chance the zine is copyrighted.

53. Adam Bregman, *Shithappy*, 3, early 1990s, Los Angeles, CA, inside cover.

54. Raleigh Clayton Muns, *Fugitive Pope*, vol. 2, no. 3, May 1991, Los Angeles, CA, inside front cover.

55. 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 that illuminates 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." In the case of 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 USA, 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, UK

(FS5–NYSL).

56. Jane, *Hex*, 1, September 1993, Olympia, WA, p. 2.

57. Graham Fenderson Trieval, *Your Name Here*, early 1990s, Lionville, PA, front cover.

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

59. *Femzine*, 1, edited by Melanie Maria Liwanag Aguila, late 1980s, Toronto, Ontario, p. 5 (FS5–NYSL).

60. Karin Falcone, personal interview, May 28, 1993, Albany, NY.

61. Scott Cunningham, personal interview, September 1, 1993, New York City.

62. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 7.

63. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in *Art After Modernism*, edited by Brian Wallis and Marcia Tucker (New York: New Museum, 1984), p. 303.

64. Fox billboard campaign, summer/fall 1995.

65. In a similar vein Peter Lanborn Wilson (aka Hakim Bey), anarchist theorist, and host of a zine show on a NYC alternative radio station, explains: "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, New York.

66. Benjamin, p. 298.

67. Ibid., pp. 304 and 306, respectively.

68. Jason Page, *Cheap Douchebag*, 16, Hollywood, FL, p. 2.

69. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theater*, edited and translated by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

70. Peter Lanborn Wilson, talk at the Libertarian Book Club, April 17, 1995, New York.

71. 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.

72. The importance of the *form* of political or, in this case, cultural organization is emphasized by contemporary scholars of post-sixties political formations. One of the best, Alberto Melucci, argues: "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 form of zines and the DIY mode of creation make up a great deal of the politics of underground culture. 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." Alberto Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements," *Social Research*, vol. 52. no. 4 (Winter 1985) p. 801.

73. Eric Rudnick, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, 39, 1990, Rensselaer, NY, p. 100.

74. Arielle and Dvora Greenberg, "Punk and

Jewish," *Mazel-Tov Cocktail*, 1, 1995, New York City, p. 3.

75. Timothy Paxton, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, 23, 1988, Rensselaer, NY, p. 52.

6. DISCOVERY

1. Christine 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. Ibid., pp. 74–82; Scott Donaton, "The Media Wakes Up to Generation X," *Advertising Age*, February 1, 1993, pp. 16–17.

4. CNN, "Boom or Bust," rebroadcast July 2, 1994.

5. Mike Gunderloy, ed., *Why Publish?* (Albany, NY: Pretzel Press, 1989); from camera-ready copy, Factsheet Five Collection, New York State Library (FS5–NYSL), p. 53.

6. Mike Gunderloy, *Factsheet Five*, 30, 1989, Rensselaer, NY, p. 11. 1989 was the year the US mass media discovered pit bulls, devoting excessive print space and airtime to discussion of this dire canine threat, then forgetting the pups within the year.

7. Eric Messinger, "Public Access for the Literate," *New York Times*, 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; Pat Guy, "Wacky Magazines Know No Limits," *USA Today*, August 3, 1992, B6; 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 error was listing clearly non-zine periodicals as 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, p. 4E. Of the two articles the *New York 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 note 7 was in the "Diversions" section.

10. A wide array of other publications had "discovered" zines were news as well: *In These Times*, *New Republic*, *Artforum*, *American Journalism Review*, and *Chronicle of Higher Education* to name but a few. See Mickey Z, "Do-It Yourself Mags," *In These Times*, February 19–25, 1992, pp. 18–19; Alex Heard, "Art to Die For," *New Republic*, February 21, 1994, pp. 20–24; Lawrence Chua, "Press," *Artforum*, October 1992, p. 9; Jim Romenesko, "The Zine Explosion," *American Journalism Review*, April 1993, pp. 39–43; Christopher Shea, "The Zine Scene," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 3, 1993, A37. Chris Dodge of Minneapolis, MN, has probably the most complete bibliography of zine-related articles to date.

11. Zinn et al., p. 75; Donaton, p. 17.

12. Ad for Converse on MTV, May 28, 1993.

13. *Slacker*, newspaper of "Third Millennium," 1993.

14. "Damage Control," do-it-yourself section of *Details*, July 1993, pp. 55–6.

15. Ad for Bud Dry in *Rolling Stone*, June 2, 1994.

16. Interview with Steve Albini, *Under the*

Volcano, 20, 1994, Nesconset, NY, p. 8.

17. "Talkin 'Bout Their Generation," *New York Newsday*, July 11, 1993.

18. Mike Gunderloy, personal interview, December 6, 1992, New York City.

19. *Dirt*, 50–56, 1994(?), c/o Warner Bros, Burbank, New York City, Atlanta, Seattle, and Edina, MN.

20. *Bad Girls*, the New Museum and Wight Gallery, New York City and Los Angeles, 1994.

21. *Slant*, 3, 1995, Philadelphia, PA.

22. Mary Kuntz, Joseph Webber, and Heidi Dawling, "The New Hucksterism," *Business Week*, July 1, 1996, p. 79. Emphasis mine.

23. Cited in Zinn et al., p. 78.

24. Robert L. Dilenschneider, "Forum: A New Understated Kind of Power," *New York Times*, June 3, 1990, sec. 3, p. 13.

25. Tom Frank, "Alternative to What?" *The Baffler*, 5, 1993, p. 12.

26. Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (New York: Penguin, 1934/1976), p. 62.

27. Edward Bernays, *Biography of an Idea* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), pp. 377–94.

28. Cowley, p. 65.

29. This cycle dates back to the first cultural bohemia of Paris in the midnineteenth century, which was chronicled by Henri Murger in his *La Vie de Bohème*, made into the opera *La Bohème* by Puccini, and celebrated across Europe by the bourgeoisie.

30. C. Carr, "Bohemia Diaspora," *Village Voice*, February 4, 1992, p. 28.

31. "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 beatknits, loose sweaters that are the respectable versions of those Beats live in." "Real Gone Garb for Fall, Beat but Neat," *Life*, August 3, 1959.

32. 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 JFK's corpse on the plane home from Dallas. Krassner published *The Realist* from 1958 to 1974, then started it up again in 1985; it 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).

33. David Armstrong, *A Trumpet to Arms: Alternative Media in America* (Boston:South End Press, 1981); and Lawrence Leamer, *The Paper Revolutionaries: The Rise of the Underground Press* (New York: 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).

34. 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 descriptions 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 Armstrong, p. 137.

35. Cited in Edward P. Morgan, *The Sixties Experience: Hard Lessons about Modern America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), p. 323, n.115.

36. Johnson. Classified sex ads had always paid the bills for the underground press, but the new sex newspapers made it their only focus.

37. Armstrong.

38. From Brugmann's speech at the 1980 National Association of Alternative Newsweeklies (NAAN) Conference, cited in Armstrong, p. 362.

39. For a pioneering 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).

7. PURITY AND DANGER

1. Exchange of letters reprinted in *Maximumrocknroll* and *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 Magazine of 'Me,'" *New York Times*, May 14, 1995, p. E4.

7. Joseph A. Gervasi, "Introduction," *NO LONGER A FANzine*, 4, 1994, Blackwood, NJ, no page.

8. CNN, "Boom or Bust," rebroadcast 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, DC, 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. 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 USA and calling for the deportation of Mexican American Linda Rondstadt. Ed Morales, "Pocho Man," *Village Voice*, November 15, 1994, p. 51.

14. Tom Frank in *The Baffler*, 4, 1992, Chicago, IL.

15. "Cultural jamming" is what critic Mark Dery calls this underground sabotage that feeds off a medium that "accepts photo ops and buzz words as meaningful discourse." Ironically, or perhaps tellingly, Dery's best writing on the practice of "cul-

tural jamming" appeared in the "Styles" pages of the paper of record – media sabotage as the new hip style? Mark Dery, "The Merry Pranksters and the Art of the Hoax," *New York Times,* December 23, 1990, p. H1.

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

17. Kyle Baker, *NO LONGER A FANzine,* 3, 1993, Blackwood, NJ, no page.

18. Dead Kennedys, "Kill the Poor," *Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables,* IRS Records, 1981.

19. Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 2.

20. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1936/1984).

21. The bohemian tribe was Ken Kesey's "Merry Pranksters"; the book is Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1968).

22. Vortext Publications, *Locust,* no date, Seattle, WA (FS5–NYSL).

23. Brett Sonnenschein, *Roulez,* vol. 1, no. 2, Summer 1993, Jersey City, NJ. Brett traded *Roulez* for a copy of one of my zines through *Factsheet Five.*

24. Spike Vrusho, *Murtaugh,* 10, 1993(?), Brooklyn, NY.

25. *Gamma-Ray Universe,* no. 00–1, 1994(?), Ithaca, NY, no page. Emphasis mine.

26. *Poor Doggie,* no date, Cambridge, MA (FS5–NYSL).

27. T.L., "What's in the Bag?" *Exformation,* 2, 1994, Brooklyn, NY, p. 14.

28. Sam Andreeff, *Feh,* 1990s, Toronto, Ontario.

29. Jennifer Beard et al., *Hell bound,* 7, June 17, 1993, Olympia, WA, p. 40.

30. *Feh,* Toronto, Ontario; Sam Andreeff, personal correspondence, March 11, 1994.

31. Phil Snyder and Cyclone Publications, *Eleventh Pin,* 2, 1991, Dayton, OH.

32. Donald F. Busky, *The Weird News,* 12, Winter 1992, Philadelphia, PA.

33. Paul Lukas, *Beer Frame,* 1, 1994(?), Brooklyn, NY, p. 2.

34. "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.

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

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

37. Jim and Debbie Goad, *Answer Me!,* LA, CA, early 1990s; John Marr, *Murder Can Be Fun,* San Francisco, CA, late 1980s; Future Tense Publishing, *Dead Star: For John Wayne Gacy,* 4, Portland, OR, 1994.

38. Sparrow, "Letters," *Factsheet Five,* 32, 1989, Rensselaer, NY, p. 102.

39. Shannon Wheeler, *Reactor,* 6, 1993, Chicago, IL, p. 44. Shannon has also done comix for *Factsheet Five.*

40. Charles Taylor calls this criterion "horizons of significance." *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) pp. 35–7.

41. John Foster, "Three Days in the Life of a Loser," *Ched,* 2, October 28, 1993, Portland OR, no page.

42. Jan Byron, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five,* 23, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p. 59.

43. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1975), p. 378.

44. Brixton Kent and Michael Wood, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 99, August 1991, San Francisco, CA, no page.

45. Joseph A. Gervasi, "Me vs. Green Day," *NO LONGER A FANzine*, 3, 1993, Blackwood, NJ, no page.

46. 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.

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

48. Bob, *Second Guess*, 7, Summer 1993, Reno, NV, p. 16.

49. Christine Boarts, personal interview, July 12, 1993, New York City.

50. Cited in Cesar Graña, "The Ideological Significance of Bohemian Life," in Cesar Graña and Marigay Graña, *On Bohemia: The Code of the Self-Exiled* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990), p. 9. In a similar vein, Graña 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).

51. As Virginia Woolf wrote in *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.

52. Cited in Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock and Beyond* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), p. 439.

53. Patrick Spencer, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 23, 1985, San Francisco, CA, no page.

54. Scott Cunningham, personal interview, September 1, 1993, New York City.

55. Steve Stepe, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll*, 7, July/August 1983, San Francisco, CA, no page.

56. Christine Boarts, personal interview, July 12, 1993, New York City.

57. 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 this 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 run the words: "This Issue is Dedicated to God." Although relating Gunderloy to a deity is done a bit tongue-in-cheek, the respect is sincere.

58. Brian Earl Brown, ed., *Whole Fanzine Catalogue*, 18/19, March 1981 (FS5– NYSL).

59. Mike Gunderloy, personal interview, December 6, 1992, New York City. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Mike are from this source.

60. Arielle Greenberg, personal interview, August 25, 1995, New York City.

61. Paul Krassner, personal correspondence to Mike Gunderloy, February 22, 1989 (FS5– NYSL).

62. R. Seth Friedman, "Editorial," *Factsheet Five*, 46, 1993, San Francisco, CA, pp. 2–3.

63. R. Seth Friedman, "Editorial," *Factsheet Five*, 53, October 1994, San Francisco, CA, p. 3.

64. R. Seth Friedman, telephone interview, September 21, 1993. Unless otherwise noted all following quotations from Seth are from this source.

65. *Factsheet Five*, 56, June 1995; 55, March 1995, San Francisco, CA, p. 3.

66. R. Seth Friedman, form letter accompanying rate card, June 1995.

67. *Factsheet Five* rate card, January 1995.

68. They include R. Seth Friedman, *The Factsheet Five Reader* (New York: Crown, 1997); Chip Rowe, *The Book of Zines* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997); V. Vale, *Zines!*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: V/SEARCH, 1996); and of course the book you're reading.

69. Nirvana, "In Bloom," *Nevermind*, 1991, Geffen Records.

70. 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 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 said, "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, "Nirvana," *Rolling Stone*, April 16, 1992, p. 97.

71. Julia Chaplin, "Zine and Heard," *Village Voice*, July 30, 1996, p. 6.

72. 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.

73. Underground culture can be a sort of 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, they are

plucked by big business. "In allowing small-scale and relatively independent activity to continue to exist in cultural work," media critic Herb Schiller explains, "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." This pattern can be seen particularly clearly in the music industry. 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" of the commercial music industry. 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 the commercial music industry. "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." But the culture industry recognizes profitable underground-grown executive talent as well. Cosloy, who began his underground career in 1979 putting out the zine *Conflict*, 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." Herbert I. Schiller, *Culture, Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 42; David Browne, "The Independents See Vultures Circling Overhead," *New York Times*, October 27, 1991, sec. 2, p. 26; 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.

74. *Girljock*, 10, 1993, San Francisco, CA.

75. Roxxie, telephone interview, June 23, 1994.

76. Kate Wolfe, personal correspondence, November 1993. 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, 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 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. Arielle refers to this as her "success story." Arielle Greenberg, telephone interview, March 28, 1994.

77. Cited in Jeremy Mindich, "Soapbox Samurai," *Details*, August 1993, p. 99; also telephone interview with Doug Biggert, October 4, 1993.

78. Kevin Pyle, panel discussion with editors of *WWIII*, October 6, 1993, Exit Art, New York City.

79. Arielle Greenberg, personal interview, August 25, 1993, New York City.

80. Mike Gunderloy and Cari Goldberg Janice, *The World of Zines* (New York: Penguin, 1992), p. 3.

81. M. Teresa Lawrence, "The *Curio* Manifesto," received August 15, 1995. *Curio*'s mailing list comes from *Factsheet Five*.

82. R. Seth Friedman, *Factsheet Five*, 55, March 1995, San Francisco, CA, p. 3.

83. Nirvana, "Serve the Servants," *In Utero*, Geffen Records, 1993.

84. Cited in "A Cry In the Dark," *Rolling Stone*, June 2, 1994, p. 40.

85. Scott Munroe, *Chairs Missing*, April 1994, Stratford, CT, no page.

86. Listed in *Maximumrocknroll*, 63, August 1988, San Francisco, no page.

87. *Riot Grrrl Press*, September–November, 1994(?), Washington, DC.

88. *Wow Cool*, Winter 1994 Catalog, Berkeley, CA.

89. Marc Arsenault, telephone interview, December 14, 1993.

90. Chip Rowe, "Chicago Fun Times," *Factsheet Five*, 53, October 1994, San Francisco, p. 126.

91. Scott Cunningham, among others, drew my attention to this point. Personal interview, September 1, 1993, New York City.

92. May and Erika, *Riot Grrrl Press* catalog, July (1993?), Arlington, VA, no page.

93. Marc Arsenault, telephone interview, December 14, 1993.

94. Hakim Bey, *TAZ* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1985), pp. 100–101; also Peter Lanborn Wilson (aka Hakim Bey), talk at the

Libertarian Book Club, April 17, 1995.

95. Anon. *Forever & a Day*, 7, 1993(?), Seattle, WA, no page.

96. Bey, p. 100.

97. Mickey Z, *The Reality Manifesto* (Baltimore: Apathy Press Poets, 1983), no page.

98. Mike Diana, telephone interview, May 13, 1994.

99. 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.

100. See Mike Diana, *Superfly* and *The Worst of Boiled Angel*, both from Mike Hunt Publications, Bensenville, IL. For *Answer Me!*'s place among the top ten zines listed in *Factsheet Five*, see issue 56, June 1995, San Francisco, CA; its position as number-one-selling zine in Qvimby Qveer Store was reported in Qvimby's catalog no. 2, 1995.

101. Mole, "Whine & Cheez," *Emit*, 1, November–December, 1993, North Vancouver, BC, p. 12.

102. *Dirt*, 51, 1994(?), no page.

103. Richard Lacayo, "Is Anyone Hip?" *Time*, August 8, 1994, p. 52.

104. 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 against the populist free market. No mention was made of profit or corporate control.

105. Neil Strauss, "They're Normal. And Rock Stars?" review of Hootie and the Blowfish, *New York Times*, June 22, 1995, p. C13.

106. Quoted in Neil Strauss, "For Record Industry, All Signs Are Gloomy," *New York Times*, December 4, 1996, pp. A1, C14.

107. David Leonhardt, "Like Totally Big Spenders," *Business Week*, June 3, 1996, p. 8.

108. Dishwasher Pete, personal interview, June 21, 1995, New York City.

8. THE POLITICS OF ALTERNATIVE CULTURE

1. *Financial Times*, June 14, 1995, p. 1, reported on *Edupage*.

2. For a good discussion of this issue see Stuart Hall, "Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect,'" in James Curran, Michael Gurevitch, and Janet Woolacott, eds., *Mass Communication and Society* (New York: Edward Arnold, 1977), pp. 315–47.

3. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, translated and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: 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.

4. 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 fieldwork in a peasant village in Malaysia, recounts how peasants resist class inequality. By what? Political organization? Armed rebellion? Sabotage? No – *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). Simultaneously honoring and rejecting Hobsbawm's notion of the pre-political,

Scott wishes to recognize as political acts, acts that are not organized as such. For an example he uses the mass desertions of Russian soldiers in the summer of 1917, arguing that these were largely responsible for the revolution (p. 293). It's a telling example because it is historically naïve. 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 rightly recognizing the breadth of political resistance, Scott ends up confusing what one does to get by in adverse conditions (grumble or desert), with active resistance. In brief, he conflates survival with resistance.

5. Much of my thinking on Gramsci, culture, and political power – though truncated to a few paragraphs here – has been influenced by the ideas of and in discussions with Joseph Buttigieg.

6. E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), p. 2.

7. Thornton Kines, "Why Read?" *Factsheet Five*, 44, 1991, Rensselaer, NY, p. 89.

8. Damon Knight, *The Futurians* (New York: John Day, 1977), pp. 8–9.

9. Scott Cunningham, personal interview, September 1, 1993, New York City.

10. *Designing New Civilizations*, vol. 7, no. 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. 140–41) (FS5–NYSL).

11. David Widgery, *Beating Time: Riot 'n' Race 'n' Rock 'n' Roll* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1986), p. 9.

12. Widgery, p. 184. See also Jesse Lemisch, "I Dreamed I Saw MTV Last Night," *Nation*, October 18, 1986.

13. Joseph A. Gervasi, "Introduction," *NO LONGER A FANzine*, 3, Summer 1993, Blackwood, NJ, no page.

14. Anon., *Short Fuse*, 58, 1994, Santa Barbara, CA, front cover.

15. Gramsci, p. 8.

16. Mike Gunderloy, personal interview, December 6, 1992, New York City.

17. 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 an article extolling "Do It Yourself " natural cleansers *Mongrel*, 1, early 1990s, New York City, no page.

18. Mary Rowland, "The Do-It-Yourself Employer," *New York Times*, January 22, 1995, sec. F, p. 15.

19. Chris O'Brien, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, 36, 1990, Rensselaer, NY, p. 94.

20. Dan Werle, telephone interview, December 15, 1992.

21. Roy SanFilippo, personal interview, April 16, 1994, New York City.

22. Howard Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1963).

23. There is also a "career" that 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*." Mitzi Waltz, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, 23, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p. 58.

24. Dan Werle, telephone interview, December 15, 1992.

25. Greg Ruggiero and Stuart Suhulka, telephone interview, October 13, 1993.

26. Jane Guskin, *Time to Organize*, 1, 1994, Elmhurst, NY, no page; also personal interview, February 4, 1993, New York City. In a follow-up interview Jane told me that since she has started *Time to Organize* several people have told her that her zine led them into politics, including one young woman who is leaving high school early to start her "real education." Personal interview, July 10, 1996, New York City.

27. Glenn Grant, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, 24, 1987, Rensselaer, NY, p. 50.

28. Christine Boarts, personal interview, July 12, 1993, New York City.

29. *Third Way*, vol. 2, p. 1, early 1990s, Windsor, Ontario, p. 2 (FS5–NYSL).

30. Dan and Chris, *burning America*, 3, 1996(?), no page, Largo, FL.

31. An interesting side note is what happened after a case was brought against the band by the FBI for interstate obscenity trafficking. The Dead Kennedys broke up and lead singer Jello Biafra started touring 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.

32. Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1941).

33. 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.

34. From *Friendship's Garland*, cited in Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 117.

35. Amelia G, "Making Scenes in Public Places," *Black Leather Times*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1992(?), Gaithersburg, MD, no page.

36. Williams, pp. 316–17, see also John Dewey, *The Public and its Problem* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1927/1981).

37. The term "small culture" was suggested by L.A. Kauffman.

38. Exene Cervenka, quoted in an interview with Jeff Spurrier, "California Screaming," *Details,* December 1994, p. 126.

39. For a good debate between 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.

40. *Ben is Dead No Pay-To-Play Booklet,* 1989; *Ben is Dead,* 12, April 1991, Los Angeles, CA.

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

42. Ashley Parker Owens, e-mail correspondence, June 4, 1994.

43. Melanie Maria Liwanag Aguila, ed., *Femzine,* 1, Toronto, Ontario, no date, p. 32 (FS5–NYSL).

44. This emphasis is something noted by Barbara Epstein in her study of post-sixties 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 because it didn't affect 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 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: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 127–8.

45. Anon., "Fuck the Mass Movement," *Harbinger,* 3, 1996, Fremont, CA, pp. 24–7.

46. Exchange between Dino Hyssen and Tim Yohannan, "Letters," *Maximumrocknroll,* 59, April 1988, San Francisco, CA, no page.

47. John "Bud" Banks, personal correspondence, January 14, 1994. Zine writer Blair Buscareno echoes Bud's words, writing, "The more we know about one another, the better chance we have of understanding each other. The better our 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.

48. Santa Mike the Golden Yahoo, *7 Aardvarks for Alice,* 2, 1992, Portsmouth, NH, no page.

49. "Haven in a heartless world" is a phrase popularized by Christopher Lasch. It is an adaptation of Marx's reference to religion as the "heart of a heartless world."

50. John Clarke, "The Skinheads and the Magical Recovery of Community," in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Postwar Britain* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1976), pp. 99–102.

51. 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.

52. The 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 nineteenth century. Marx saw this same potential in the guise of religion, and for that reason despised it.

53. Mickey Z, *The Reality Manifesto: A Look at Pseudo-life in the Post-modern Age* (Baltimore, MD: Apathy Press Poets, 1993), no page.

54. Sarah, *Action Girl Newsletter*, 7, 1994, Staten Island, NY, no page.

55. Tim Yohannan, telephone interview, May 14, 1994.

56. Greg Graffin, "Punk Rock Song," *The Grey Race*, Sony Music, 1996.

57. Dan and Chris, *burning America*, 3, 1996(?), inside back cover, Largo, FL.

58. Theodor Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression in Listening," 1938, in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, eds., *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 293.

59. Pam Donovan drew my attention to how cultural politics constitute a virtual politics.

60. Ellen Seiter, et al., "Don't Treat Us Like We're Stupid and Naïve," in Seiter et al., *Remote Control* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 237 and 244 respectively. These two sentiments are linked in the chapter's concluding paragraph.

61. 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," in Raphael Samuel, ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 239.

62. The story was told by Terry Eagleton at the Seminar on Marxism and Aesthetics, New York Marxist School, October 17–19, 1993.

63. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," in *The Marx/Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1848/1972), p. 493.

9. CONCLUSION

1. Eduardo Galeano, *Walking Words* (New York: Norton, 1995); reprinted in the *Nation*, June 12, 1995, p. 829.

2. In this way the lie of utopia is like George Sorel's "myth of a general strike," or Nietzsche's "creative forgetting."

3. Allen Ginsberg, *Howl* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1956), p. 9.

4. Eric Rudnick, "Why Publish?" *Factsheet Five*, 39, 1990, Rensselaer, NY, p. 100.

5. Mikhail Bakunin to Elisee Reclus, February 15, 1875, cited in James Joll, *The Anarchists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 96.

6. The very possibilities for unlimited access that the Internet opens up introduce new problems. 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 can make communication too easy, and the deviant socialization process of the underground

might be lost as a consequence. In the
weeks following Dishwasher Pete's prank on
Letterman, I was surprised to find that a
good number of people leaving messages on
the Usenet (Internet-wide) zine newsgroup
– alt.zines – were genuinely confused about
why Pete had pulled such a prank – and dis-
appointed that he had. That such an act
against the commercial mass media needed
explanation or justification to these Inter-
net users demonstrates how disconnected
these individuals are from the norms and
mores of the traditional underground world.

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illustration by Matt Mimiaqa/Steve Lambert

In addition to *Notes from Underground*, **Stephen Duncombe** is the author of *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in the Age of Fantasy*, co-author of *The Bobbed Haired Bandit: A True Story of Crime and Celebrity in 1920s New York*, and editor of the *Cultural Resistance Reader*. He is an Associate Professor at the Gallatin School of New York University, where he teaches the history and politics of media and culture, and a life-long political activist, co-founding the *Lower East Side Collective* and helping organize the New York City chapter of the international direct action group, *Reclaim the Streets*.

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"Duncombe's criticisms are all on the mark; zines define themselves negatively, a process utterly dependent on the culture that is being opposed; the "self-ghettoization" of the zine community and its well-founded fears of co-option has debilitated its potential to affect overground culture in any politicized manner." - Social Anarchism #25