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NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND

*Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*

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STEPHEN DUNCOMBE



VERSO

London · New York

Chapter 6: "Dirt: DIY Time-Warner": Mike (of Green Day), cover; Joseph Janeczek and Carrie Smith and Time-Warner, eds., *Dirt*, 52, 1994(?), Burbank, CA.

Chapter 7: "It's So Alternative! Ironic Celebration in *NO LONGER A FANzine*": Kyle Baker, comic, Joseph A. Gervasi, *NO LONGER A FANzine*, 3, 1993, Blackwood, NJ; "Making Dirt in *Hell Bound*": Jennifer Beard et al., *Hell Bound*, 7, June 1993, Olympia, WA; "A Singular Pin in *Eleventh Pin*": Phil Snyder and Cyclone Publications, *Eleventh Pin*, 2, 1991, Dayton, OH; "An Original Comic in *Reactor*": Shannon Wheeler, comic, David J. Prince et al., eds., *Reactor*, 6, 1993, Chicago, IL; "DIY and the 'Old' *Factsheet Five*": Mark Campos, cover, Mike Gunderloy and Cari Goldberg Janice, *Factsheet Five*, 44, 1991, Rensselaer, NY; "Listings in the 'Old' *Factsheet Five*": Mike Gunderloy, *Factsheet Five*, 24, 1987, Rensselaer, NY; "Listings in the 'New' *Factsheet Five*": R. Seth Friedman, *Factsheet Five*, 56, 1995, San Francisco, CA; "Zines are Everywhere, the 'New' *Factsheet Five*": Lori Eanes and Mark Frischman, cover, R. Seth Friedman, ed., *Factsheet Five*, 56, 1995, San Francisco, CA; "Public Enemy: *Boiled Angel*": Mike Diana, *Boiled Angel*, 5, 1990, Largo, FL.

Chapter 8: "Realizing the Limits of Culture in *burning America*": Dan and Chris, *burning America*, 3, 1996, Largo, FL.

## 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 USA, 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. And 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. Zinesters consider what they do as an alternative to and strike against commercial culture and consumer capitalism. And 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 twelve-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 – 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.

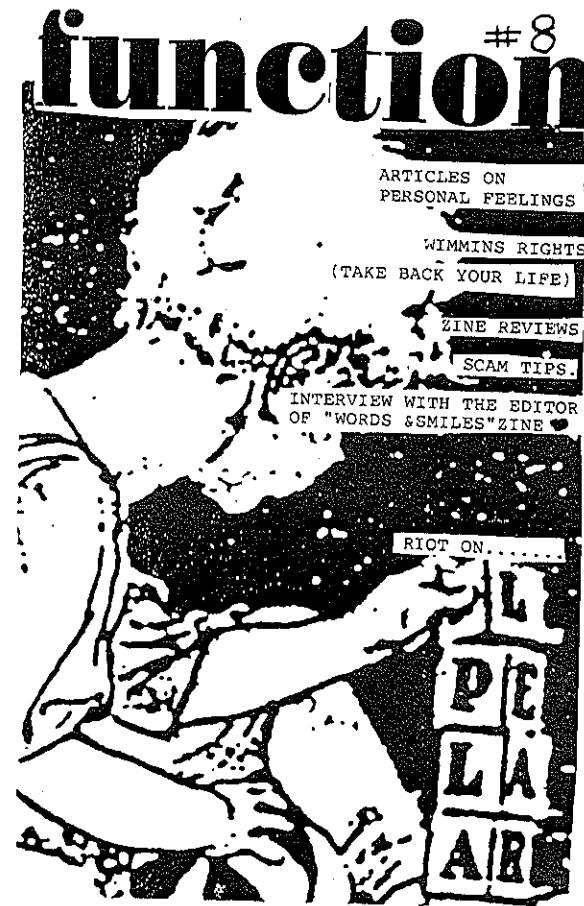
In zines I saw the seeds of a different possibility: a novel form of communication and creation that burst with an angry idealism. A medium that spoke for a marginal, yet vibrant culture, that along with others might invest the tired script of progressive politics with meaning and excitement for a new 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;

ABSOLUTELY ZIPPO'S  
SUBURBAN ESCAPE

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



FUNCTION ZINE

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 above-ground 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 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: 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.

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 produce, 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 SF, 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 communi-

cating 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.

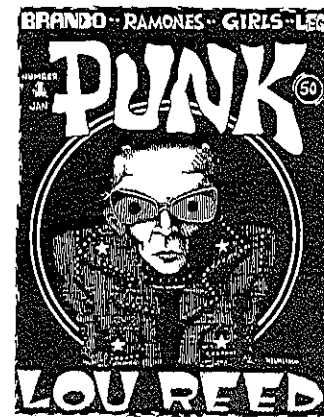
In the early 1980s these two tributaries, joined by smaller streams of publications created by fans of other cultural genres, disgruntled self-publishers, and the remnants of printed political dissent from the sixties and seventies, were brought together and cross-fertilized through listings and reviews in network zines like *Factsheet Five*. As the "fan" was by and large dropped off "zine," and their number increased exponentially, a 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*.<sup>1</sup>

When I think of the typical citizen of this world, I see in my mind Christine Boarts, the 24-year-old editor of *Slug & Lettuce*. Dressed in black from head to foot, hair multi-hued, 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 goes, "you know, her life was saved by rock & roll."<sup>2</sup>

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 forty-fifth issue of *SEL*, fitting it in someplace between organizing punk shows at New York City's alternative space ABC NO RIO, shooting photos for an upcoming book, crisscrossing the



GENESIS: SCIENCE FICTION FANZINES, SNIDE, 1940



THE SECOND WAVE OF PUNK, 1976

country in a van, and spending the winter in an unheated cabin on a mountain in Virginia. Living on the outskirts of a society that equates success with material acquisition, status, and stability, Chris is poor, marginalized, and perfectly happy.<sup>3</sup>

Like Chris, 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, though, 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 SF fan Don Fitch, who describes his age as "65 going on 17", put out zines like *From Sunday to Saturday*. Some zinesters — like Freedom, a Staten Island NY high-schooler 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*.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

"The whimsy of conventional tastes and choices" certainly plays little part in the subjects picked by these writers, whose zines span almost

## 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 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 makes up the largest genre of zines in the United States today.
- **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

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, thoughts, 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 purpose-

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FROM ACNE-RELATED SUICIDE TO  
JULIA CHILD IN COMETBUS

fully 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.<sup>6</sup> "Yikes! *Factsheet Five* arranged in headings/categories? Urgh!!! When zinedom becomes reduced to 'definitions' it loses its soul," one such letter howls.<sup>7</sup>

A typical zine — although "typical" is a problematic term in this context — might start with a highly personalized editorial, move into a couple of opinionated essays or "rants," criticizing, describing, extolling something or other, and then conclude with reviews of other zines, bands, books, and so forth. Spread throughout this 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.<sup>8</sup> Material is also "borrowed": pirated from other zines and the mainstream press, sometimes without credit, invariably without permission.

The form of the zine lies somewhere between a personal letter and a magazine. Printed on a standard copy machine, fastened together on the side or corner, or 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*

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:

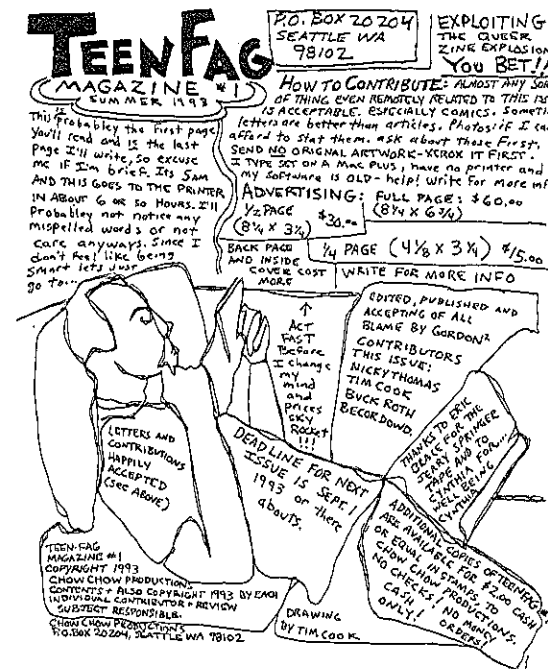
- Politics with a big P. These may be subdivided again according to more or less traditional categories such as: Anarchist, Socialist, Libertarian, Fascist, and "identity" categories such as Feminist and Queer.
- politics with a small p. These do not identify explicitly with traditional categories, but with political/cultural critique as a major focus of the zine.

Personal Zines, or perzines, are 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 *Factsheet Five*, these zines concentrate on reviewing and publicizing other zines, music, art, computer BBSs (bulletin board systems), 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 super-



HAND-DRAWN, LOW-TECH TEEN FAG

*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 cheaper). And 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



TALKING CLASS II

Working Class SM Dyket Lay Down the Line: Part Two by Chelsea, Lisa, Newkirk, Zoe & Bob, edited by Chelsea

Leather Trends
This isn't an article about...
Max You're wearing a lot more...
The first time I saw...
This is the second half...
of a dialog that started...
in that article (p. 11) if...
the elusive subject...
version of several hours...
of tedious conversation...
between the women...
Three of them already...
know each other from...
a discussion group that...
meets occasionally in...
San Francisco.

USING TECHNOLOGY: DESK-TOP PUBLISHED PAGE IN BRAT ATTACK

access to equipment to put out professional-looking publications.

Zines cost anywhere from the price of postage to a couple of 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, SF conventions, and the like. They are advertised via word of mouth, through other zines' review sections, and by zines of zines such as Factsheet Five, whose purpose is to review and publicize these media.

The lifespan of a zine ranges from single-issue "one-shots" to volumes spanning years, with their circulation running from eight copies to Slug & Lettuce's eight 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. Maximumrockenroll, the long-running punk zine, lists ninety-seven individuals who helped put out the June 1994 issue. True, more than 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, Maximumrockenroll is known for its large, complex, and reasonably efficient production organization. Unlike any commercial publication, however, large or small, MRR is decidedly nonprofit.

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

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 (7) 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-3/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

ZINES AND MORE ZINES: LISTINGS IN FACTSHEET FIVE

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 current editor, is 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."<sup>10</sup>

What zines are expected to provide is an outlet for unfettered expression and a connection to a larger

market tabloids, but explored in much more depth and with far more intelligence and sometimes humor.

Religious Zines Witches, pagans, 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, working as a librarian, or practicing fractal geometry.

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

Sex Zines 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 category.

underground world of publishers doing the same. But since most zine writers don't 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.<sup>11</sup> 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 zine readers, as part of a whole subculture, 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 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.<sup>12</sup> Examining the zines reviewed in an issue of *Factsheet Five* – 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 areas. Out of the 1,142 zines listed from the USA, 749 originated from outside the major cities in each state.<sup>13</sup> 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. 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 that is 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 structure of this book unorthodox and perhaps unsettling. I struggled mightily with how to organize this seemingly disorganized subject matter, how to discipline undisciplined subjects.<sup>14</sup> In the end I decided to structure the book around major themes in the zine world, with these broken up by subthematic “vignettes.” It's not perfect, but 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.

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.

## 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*<sup>1</sup>

Freaks, geeks, nerds, and losers — that's who zines are made by. "If you had to stereotype a zine editor," says Cari Goldberg Janice, a later co-editor of *Factsheet Five*, "it would be someone who was usually a social misfit, who doesn't 'fit in' in many respects, who might be a loner who does better in a written forum than face to face."<sup>2</sup> Don Fitch, a long-time science fiction fan, sketches a similar portrait of the typical SF fan and zine writer as "something of a nerd, rather above average in intelligence and below it in social skills... alienated from his peers and finding in SF and fandom a means of escaping some of the unpleasantness and stress of the Real World."<sup>3</sup>

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."<sup>4</sup>

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;

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.<sup>10</sup> In *Hex*, for example, Jane draws a comic of karmic revenge on a boy who thought she was a "dork" in grade school. "I'm still a dork," she writes in the last frame, but now she's "also a punk."<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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 USA, 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.<sup>13</sup>

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 fans. 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."<sup>14</sup>

Most people in the USA 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.<sup>15</sup>

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 what famous authors of published memoirs do – but the fact that 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 includes 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.”<sup>16</sup>

*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 worthless.”<sup>17</sup>

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.

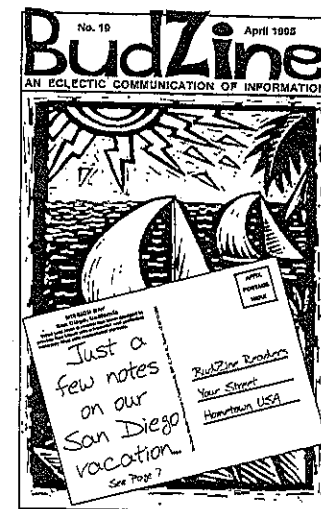
“It’s one of the greatest shoe states in the country. Especially ladies shoes,” William “Fergie” Ferguson tells David and his readers about Massachusetts in one issue.

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 Winston Churchill, and you know what a tall sonofabitch he was! And they’d fall down and say it was their equilibrium – ha! Equilibrium my ass! Those decks were as slippery as a cake of ice and we went to the South Pole...<sup>18</sup>

The hilarity of such offbeat ruminations 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.”<sup>19</sup>

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



BUD'S WORLD IN BUDZINE

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.<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup>

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*.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> And in *Cometbus*, punk rocker Aaron shares his hobo life traveling the fringes of the USA.<sup>27</sup>

Alienation can sell in the USA. 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.<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup>

### 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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup>

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.<sup>32</sup>

Zine writers of a historical mind like Gene Mahoney liken zines to pamphlets, calling *Common Sense* the "zine heard 'round the world."<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup>

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."<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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