

Zines

The term "zine" is an abbreviation for "fanzine", a self-published, non-commercial periodical customarily distributed at cost through the mail. The North American culture of fanzine publishing originated in the 1930s, and reached an apex fifty years later with the heterogeneous "zine scene". By the late 1980s, the practice of making and distributing zines spread beyond fandom (and specifically the small clusters of "correspondence clubs" that networked science fiction fans) to a wide range of other outsider subcultures. The entanglement of these subcultures gave rise to a shared media space, the zine scene, which encompassed a vast underground culture populated by tens of thousands of participants creating and circulating their own periodicals. Small-circulation magazines, newsletters, and APAs ("amateur press associations") were the most common media in this alternative communication network; however, the zine scene was not limited to paper ephemera. It included a diverse array of creative endeavors, such as graphic literature ("comix"), mail-art, self-recorded music, amateur video, alternative pornography, poetry chapbooks, →grimoires, and novels.

Vouchsafed by the anonymity of postal communication, zines were the locus for forbidden, illicit, or otherwise rejected knowledge. Esotericism flourished across dozens (if not hundreds) of publications devoted to occultism, witchcraft, →paganism, →Satanism, ceremonial magick, →UFOs, →New Age, esoteric Christianity, and psychedelicism. Alongside these more familiar esoteric currents arose a radical new movement dedicated to chaos spirituality, of which more will be said shortly. Participation in the zine scene propitiously declined in the early-1990s following the spread of personal computing, and internet discussion forums (BBS boards) in particular. Now largely forgotten, the vast reserve of material that circulated in these small-circulation print periodicals represents an undiscovered continent for scholars of esotericism.

As a decentralized network that included thousands of participants, the zine scene served as the literary forum for a variety of subcultures. The most prevalent touchstones were punk and to a lesser extent anarchism, though all manner of antiestablishment schools of thought flourished in the zine scene. Despite the immense diversity of this epistolary network, a clear vanguard is discernable. This avant-garde coalesced in the pages of *The Stark Fist of Removal* (1980-2010), the in-house organ for The SubGenius Foundation (→Church of the SubGenius). Its initial date of publication, 1980, provides a convenient starting point for the advanced guard of chaos enthusiasm.

The Church of the SubGenius began as a collaborative epistolary experiment, which linked outsider milieus under the auspices of a spoof doomsday cult. Its zine, *The Stark Fist of Removal*, featured the latest news from SubGeniuses across the US, in addition to showcasing the most impressive (or at least outré) material that circulated among them. The "Other Mutants" section of the zine was particularly influential in the formation of a shared culture of radicalism, as it offered readers a directory of addresses for similarly esoteric factions and the antiestablishment luminaries behind them. The most influential of these likeminded "mutants" was Mike Gunderloy (b. unknown), a veteran of science fiction fandom with years of experience as a zine editor and contributor. Frustrated by the infrequent publication of *The Stark Fist of Removal*, Gunderloy produced his own zine, *Factsheet Five* (1982-1998), composed entirely of listings and short reviews. It soon superseded the "Other Mutants" section as the central index for underground social networking.

Factsheet Five shifted the axis of the nascent zine scene away from the SubGenius Foundation and towards the wider underground movement that developed in and around the church. Before launching his own zine, Gunderloy had worked on the principal →Discordian zine, *No Governor*, published from 1975 to 1987, and his affiliation with this anarcho-psychedelic faction carried over into his newest enterprise. In addition to allotting a regular column to the co-founder of Discordianism, Kerry Thornley (1938-1998), Gunderloy filled his directory with glowing reviews of zines produced by other Discordians, SubGeniuses, Neoists, and Pro-Situs. Ostensibly dedicated to the cross-pollination of alternative milieus, *Factsheet Five* served as a flagship for the zine scene's nascent avant-garde.

The vanguard of the zine scene, known as the "marginal milieu", drew together a handful of esoteric factions. The principal groups included the Discordian Society, the Church of the SubGenius, ShiMo Underground, and the Moorish Orthodox Church of America. Multiple affiliations were customary for members of these sects, as was the use of pseudonyms, both of which are important to keep in mind when identifying the most recognizable "marginals". This alternative publishing microcosm's most revered personas included the aforementioned Kerry Thornley (1938-1998), →Hakim Bey (né Peter Lamborn Wilson, b. 1945), →Robert Anton Wilson (1932-2007), Robert "Bob" Black (1951-), and John Zerzan (1943-). Similarly conspicuous were the artists Donna Kosey (?), James Koehline (1955-), and Freddie Baer (1952-), as well as the aforementioned Gunderoy, Rev. Crowbar (Susan Poe, b. unknown), and Rev. Ivan Stang (Douglass St. Clair Smith, 1953-) who worked primarily as zine editors. All these figures tended to publish in the same zines, which in turn garnered more prestige than literary digests unaffiliated with members of the marginal milieu. The earliest publications to feature this underground elite were Rev. Stang's *Stark Fist of Removal* and Elayne Riggs' *Inside Joke* (est. 1980), which were followed by Rev. Crowbar's *Popular Reality* (1983), and Jim Keith's *Dharma Combat* (1988). Though members of the marginal milieu were not bound together in a shared worldview, many aligned their ideologies with metaphysical chaos--which became emblematic of zine scene radicalism.

Chaos was the *au curreant* spiritual orientation within the zine scene. That said, it should not be confused with →chaos magick, which represented a subset of the larger chaos discourse. The chaos magick current was largely the preoccupation of British occultists, who shaped this discourse across an array of English occult zines including →Ray Sherwin's *The New Equinox* (1976-?), Chris Bray's *Lamp of Thoth* (1980-84), →Joel Biroco's *Kaos* (1980-1989), Stephen Sennitt' *Nox* (1986-1991), and *Chaos International* (1986-?) collaboratively edited by the Illuminates of Thanateros. Chaos enthusiasts in the US remained, however, somewhat aloof from the allegedly post-modern discourse of magick popular across the Atlantic. Instead, American marginals affiliated with the esoteric factions mentioned above, i.e. Discordianism and the Church of the SubGenius. That said, these two cultures of chaos were brought together in the work of Hakim Bey, who established his reputation in Biroco's *Kaos* before becoming, arguably, one of the

most recognizable figure in the marginal milieu. Expanding on the marginal milieu's dismissal of conventional Leftism, Bey's debut zine, *Chaos* (1985) introduced an "ontological" brand of anarchism that advocated "sorcery" to counteract the stupefying banalities of the dominant social order. His enchanted interpretation of anarchism inspired a variety of chaos-based ideologies, which likewise scorned the Left for its arid secularism. As evidence of Bey's popularity, selections of *Chaos* were repeatedly reprinted across the zine scene, and the complete work was eventually reissued as the opening section of his breakout volume, *The Temporary Autonomous Zone* (1991). The *piece de resistance* of zine scene radicalism, the text filtered out of the zine scene into the cultural underground where it was absorbed by proponents of rave culture, the Burning Man festival, and more recently, the Occupy Movement.

The marginal milieu was a hotbed of controversy. The social world created by these underground cognoscenti was, more often than not, defined by polemical exchanges and constant feuding. The most memorable controversies involved the apostate SubGenius and *enfant terrible* of North American anarchism, Bob Black. Author of *The Abolition of Work* (1985), a widely read polemic against wage labor, this arch-iconoclast was as prolific as he was vindictive. Black was embroiled in a number of on-going (and on occasion violent) campaigns that sent shockwaves across the subcultural communities interconnected within the zine scene. The three most noteworthy include his skirmish with the editorial collective of *Processed World* (1981-2005), which resulted in him having to flee the Bay Area of San Francisco; his acrimonious falling-out with Rev. Ivan Stang and the Church of the SubGenius; and lastly, his imbroglio with Jim Hogshire, the editor of *Pills-a-Go-Go* (1991-1996), which ultimately ended with Black's collaboration with the police and the subsequent arrest of the renegade pharmaceutical aficionado. Though some marginals were loathed to align themselves with Black on a personal level, his shrewd polemics demarcated the ideological commitments of the marginal milieu. Furthermore, his "type-3" school of anarchism, which was neither collectivist ("type-1") nor individualist ("type-2"), but both simultaneously, continues to exert a lasting impression on the so-called "post-anarchism" movement today.

The robust appetite for confrontation within the marginal milieu should not overshadow the primacy of collaboration amongst marginals. Co-operation was integral

to zine making, as publications were typically composed of work from numerous contributors. With respect to fostering community that was immediately physical, it was not unusual for editors of larger zines, such as *Factsheet Five*, to host small collation parties when preparing new issues. Likewise, marginals also worked together on larger gatherings (e.g. the annual SubGenius World Conventions) and public demonstrations (the centennial celebration of the Hay Market Anarchists in 1986) that brought together this otherwise decentralized scene. Undoubtedly, the most unusual event hosted by marginals was the Antarctic Astral Autonomous Zone (AAAZ) in 1987. This all-night gala was scheduled for August 31st – September 1st, when, according to the invitations, guests were to project their astral selves to a crystal minaret that had been constructed on the Palmer Peninsula in Northwest Antarctica. Partly a satire on the Harmonic Convergence staged just a few weeks earlier by overly earnest New Agers, the event was orchestrated by Hakim Bey and Yael Dragwyla, the “Magus Ipsissima” of the SubGenius movement. With notices posted across the zine scene, this masquerade represented a landmark for marginal scene *communitas*.

The dissolution of the zine scene began in the early 1990s when self-publishing gave way to online computer networking. The migration to cyberspace was not initially seen as a rupture within this underground communication network; conversely, the marginal milieu was awash in an unbridled enthusiasm for computer networking. Gunderloy, for example, operated his own BBS version of *Factsheet Five* as early as 1987, and, as the case of the infamous Cold War spy Hagbard Celine (né Karl Koch) demonstrated, many first generation hackers were card-carrying Discordians. There was even a persistent rumour that the first computer virus was launched as a SubGenius/Neoist hoax. The source of this pervasive enthusiasm for computer technology was cyberpunk, a literary movement that originated in Bruce Sterling’s zine *Cheap Truth* (1983-1986). Cyberpunk developed from a reform movement within the science fiction community into a subversive subculture onto itself. Cyberpunk culture, more accurately described as “Neuromanticism”, came into its own within the pages of R.U. Sirius’s *Mondo 2000* (1984-1998) and Mark Frauenfelder’s *boING boING* (1988-1997), both of which were intimately tied to Discordianism and the SubGenius movement. Evidently, these subterranean radicals misjudged the utopian possibilities afforded by the net. The colonization of cyberspace, and the subsequent disbanding of the zine scene, left the

marginal milieu without the literary venues and readership necessary to continue their cultural crusade. An obvious harbinger for the death of the zine scene occurred in 1991, when Gunderloy resigned as editor of *Factsheet Five*. Though this flagship zine lasted another seven years, the community it served had lost much of its vitality. In recent years, there has been a minor revival of the zine scene spurred by a growing dissatisfaction with the internet; however, it is still too early to determine if it is a portent of things to come.

J. Christian GREER

Literature

- Atton, Chris. 2002. *Alternative Media*. London: Sage Publications.
- Black, Bob. 1994. *Beneath the Underground*. Portland, WA: Feral House.
- Duggan, Colin. 2015. "Perennialism and Iconoclasm: Chaos Magick and the Legitimacy of Innovation". In Christopher Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World*, pp. 91-112. London: Routledge.
- Duncombe, Stephen. 2008. *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. Portland, Or: Microcosm Publishing.
- Freidman, R. Seth. 1997. *The Factsheet Five Reader*, New York City: Three Rivers Press.
- Vale, V. 1996. *Zines Vol.1*, San Francisco, CA: Re/Search Publications.
- Wilson, Peter & Jim Flemming. 1997. *Semiotext(e): USA*, Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia.