Fanzines:
Their Production, Culture and Future

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Contents

Chapter 1 - Introduction

In this dissertation I wish to look at the production, distribution and social aspects involved in fanzine publishing.

I have been interested in fanzines for a number of years. When I was about 15, I had an article published in *Bamber's Right Foot*, a fanzine dedicated to Torquay United Football Club. Since then I have bought copies of various types of zines and worked on the publication of a horror film fanzine, *Firelight Shocks*, and its related web site. What I slowly became aware of was the volume of fanzines being published regularly and the wide breadth of subjects that these cover, despite very few shops stocking them (and even then it is generally only music zines that can persuade independent record shops to take a few copies). I seemed therefore to have come into contact with an underground publishing culture, not done primarily for profit but enjoyment and expression. What seemed particularly strange to me was that, despite the huge amount of zines being published on a semi-regular basis, there was apparently very little awareness of this culture, either in academic writing or amongst the general public. In this dissertation, I wish to explore the area thoroughly and look at all areas in order to come to an understanding of how and why zines are published.

A number of definitions of fanzines have been suggested, although whereas Gunderloy suggests that they are "anything published on a non-commercial basis" (1988: 86), I wish to use Duncombe's narrower definition; "zines are non-commercial, non-professional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves" (1997: 6). It should also be noted that the "fan" of fanzines is somewhat misleading in terms of their subject matter. Although many fanzines do exist to publish fan-related writing and pictures for and by followers of, particularly, a specific band, most are far wider in their scope. In the introduction to his Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics and Alternative Culture, Stephen Duncombe states that his initial reaction when asked the inevitable question 'what is a zine?' is to "hand over a stack of zines and let the person asking the question decide" (1997: 1). There is a certain truth to this statement; the character, content and format of zines is perhaps best understood through looking at a variety of the publications themselves, many of which defy easy description.

Although some people view the term "fanzine" as referring only to publications written by fans of, for instance, a specific band or personality, as opposed to "zines" having a more general content, I wish to take the perspective that zine is merely an abbreviation of fanzine and will therefore use the two words interchangeably throughout this dissertation. Whilst I am dealing with the terminology that I will be using, it should also be noted that due to one person often being responsible for all aspects of a zine's publication, the terms fanzine writer, editor and publisher are also generally interchangable.

Gunderloy offers a number of different categories of zines that are useful here in displaying the breadth of both subject matter and approaches to this form of self-publishing. In terms of format, the two main types that he describes are Genzines (the small-press equivalent to professional magazines, containing an editorial, a letter column, and articles on various subjects) and Perzines (much more stylistically relaxed, often mainly consisting of a personal record of the life of the writer). One of the most important distinctions between these two types is that although Genzines can be the product of just one person, it is often a collaborative effort, unlike Perzines which are only rarely not the work of a single individual (1988: 8).

Concentrating on contemporary zine genres, Gunderloy identifies a high number of different fanzine types according to subject matter. Here he lists political/anti-political zines (including small-scale hate literature), zines dedicated to punk and other musical styles, poetry and literary zines, religious zines, science fiction, fantasy and role-playing games zines, along with many other subject areas from ecology to erotica (ibid. 9-14).

One category that Gunderloy doesn't mention but which Duncombe comments on is the sports zine. Duncombe refers to this category as being only small in America, in contrast to in Britain where football zines "are an integral part of sporting life" (1997: 9). In fact, I have found quite often when mentioning my dissertation subject to people that they assume fanzines to be primarily football-orientated. The scale and extent of fanzine publishing as a whole is commonly not perceived - even though it has been estimated that there are

around 30,000 zines of various description in existence (Mitchell online reference).

In this piece of work I will be concentrating primarily on music fanzines. With fanzines as a whole being too wide an area to examine thoroughly in this dissertation, music zines offer not only an extremely large amount of publications but also a great amount of variety in content and style. This is particularly true in a British context; music fanzines are overwhelmingly dominated by punk in American small-press publications, whereas in Britain, despite the number of fanzines published being lower, a lot more attention is given to different genres of music. I will therefore be able to make more varied comparisons between fanzines covering different musical styles and how this is reflected in their design.

My aim in this piece of work is to provide as complete a view of fanzines as is possible. I wish to cover history as well as current practises and also look at the motivation behind their publication.

This is a particularly interesting time for this dissertation to be written; the long running music periodical *Melody Maker*, after having financial difficulties for a prolonged period, recently folded and was incorporated into the *New Music Express.* However, despite this traditionally successful newspaper being unable to continue publication, fanzines and zine culture continue to flourish, a phenomenon that I wish to investigate.

My dissertation will be structured as follows; in the next chapter I will review the existing literature available on the subject of fanzine production and culture. This will also enable me to engage with the issues and arguments related to fanzines that that are covered in these pieces of writing. The third chapter will deal with the way in which I conduct my research and how I intend to analyse fanzines as both publications and cultural products. The chapter following that will look at the history of fanzines and the 'fanzine culture' that they have created. Chapter five will look at the more technical aspects of the production, distribution and promotion of fanzines; how they are producedand how they reach their audience. Following that, I will look at the development of fanzines on the Internet and the changes that the electronic media might bring. Finally, I will state my conclusions.

I will now examine the material previously written on the subject of fanzines.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

While a considerable amount of fanzines have been published and played an important part in various subcultures throughout the last twenty years, they have only occasionally been written on in any great length. Perhaps part of the reason for this is the division between self-publishers and the professional publishing world. Although the number of commercially published pieces of writing on fanzines is small, there does however exist a larger amount of analytical literature both within fanzines themselves and available on the Internet.

The majority of writing that has been done on fanzines in the United Kingdom concentrates primarily on those that have football as their main topic. Despite the volume of music-related fanzine publications, this is not an area that has been examined at anything more than the most basic level. However, a number of books do exist which touch upon the area and can be used as sources of background information along with various fanzine and Internet sources.

One of the most interesting publications that I found whilst researching fanzines is *How to Publish Fanzines* by Mike Gunderloy, which was written not only about but more specifically for the designing and distribution of them. Gunderloy, the former publisher of zine compilation *Factsheet Five* (which often reviewed in excess of 600 zines in each issue), writes with a large amount of

experience in the field of zines. Originally published in **1988**, *How to Publish Fanzines* is now **available at no cost** in an electronic format on the Internet to be used as a resource guide for people interested in creating their own fanzine or requiring help with their existing one. This publication is therefore a useful text not only as a more general source for this dissertation, but also as an introductory overview of fanzines. I wish then to initially concentrate on Gunderloy's work .

How to Publish Fanzines is aimed at guiding the potential fanzine writer through all the necessary areas of zine production, distribution and promotion, including some quite detailed information on various ways of printing, mailing and financing; not necessarily areas that the beginner to fanzines would think were intrinsic. Gunderloy's first chapter serves as a good introduction to fanzine publishing. The principal reasons for people creating fanzines are suggested as falling into the three categories of fun, fame and fortune, before going on to say that whilst the first of these is almost certain, the second is somewhat more unlikely and the third nearly impossible. For instance, even when *Factsheet Five* had a circulation of 2000, Gunderloy refers to this being "large enough to be a hell of a lot of work, too small to make a lot of money" (1988: 5). It is however recognised that, with the aid of perseverance and hard work, fanzines can produce a certain amount of fame within "limited circles" (ibid.). What Gunderloy is reinforcing here is that fanzines exist for fun, rather than for profit.

Gunderloy then lists the different areas of zine publishing, as described in chapter one of this dissertation, before giving the potential zine publisher some

advice on choosing a suitable topic for their fanzine. The interesting thing here is the underlying idea that someone might be interested in publishing a fanzine before having a subject matter for it. This runs contrary to conventional publishing practise, where an idea is created first, and decisions are then made as to how this can be put into effect; it suggests that in fanzines, the method and the form is perhaps of greater importance than substance. However, Gunderloy does also stress the necessity of content that taps the writer's experience and, at the same time, obtains a 'market niche' through specialisation (ibid. 15-16).

Gunderloy then moves onto the various production aspects of fanzine publishing. Here he makes a point that may not necessarily be associated with zine writing; that drafts and corrections are an important part of production in order to avoid misspellings and bad style (ibid. 18). Editing the work of other writers is also covered in two points, "finding them and taming them" (ibid. 19). On the subject of finding writers, it is suggested that the fanzine publisher asks everyone that they can; the idea that an extremely large amount of people have the hidden ability and desire to get their writing published is one of the foundations of zine culture. On the "taming" side, Gunderloy puts forward a few principles of writer management such as deadlines (for example sending postcards to columnists about two weeks before their piece is due), guidelines for content and any payment terms. In addition to this, it is also mentioned that writers should understand that ""to edit" is an active verb". Whilst fanzines do conceptually exist as a far freer medium of expression than commercial magazines, contributions still require editing for style and size, although some writers will take offence at any changes being made (ibid.). Gunderloy suggests

avoiding all dealings with such writers, with the implication that the only way for them to be satisfied is through them publishing their own fanzine.

The chapter in *How to Publish Fanzines* that relates to production then goes through every stage of getting the zine ready to print and the different options open to the publisher. These begin with handwriting the entirety of the zine, which although sometimes done can often create problems of legibility (whether intentional or not). Some form of "mechanical aid" is therefore required. As the cheapest option for fanzine publishers, Gunderloy goes into some detail on what should be looked for when buying a typewriter. This includes some important points that would not generally be thought of by the beginner, such as the different types of ribbon and their print quality, whether the typeface is changeable, and how hard it types. The other possible options are then dealt with in order of expense; the use of computers and typesetters.

Gunderloy was certainly aware that the computer situation was changing when he wrote *How to Publish Fanzines,* although the rate of change over the twelve years since its publication has been such that much of the computer information supplied is superfluous. This either advises publishers to search for things now taken for granted with computers ("a good word processing program will allow you to justify your text, count the words you have written, or move text from one file to another" (ibid. 21)) or mentions obsolete items such as the dot-matrix printer. The option of professional typesetting is also suggested, along with the capability of many typesetters to accept manuscripts through a modem line.

The section on layout is aimed at fanzines reproduced using either photocopying or offset, with information on cutting and pasting "little pieces of paper to big ones" (ibid. 25). Gunderloy has two main rules on designing layout; not to put too much on any one page, and to make what is there easy to follow. He suggests the creation of a dummy book before anything else is done in order for the publisher to be able to see how the pages will need to be imposed and for the drawing of a rough layout of articles on each page. He then suggests drawing the layout, including blocks of text, images and margins, on a full size piece of paper with a blue pencil (which will not be picked up by the camera when reproduced) and then applying the content to this guide.

Gunderloy then devotes a chapter to printing and binding the zine. He runs through the different options available to the small publisher; the use of hectographs, ditto machines, mimeograph, the traditional photocopier, printing copies directly from a computer, and, at the more professional end, using offset printing. What is stressed here is that the potential zine publisher should use any facilities available to them, and that photocopying is the standard method of printing unless the zine's print run reaches a number where offset printing becomes a less expensive alternative (ibid. 30-39). The small section on binding concentrates on stapling, which Gunderloy strongly suggests that the fanzine producer does personally. His solution to the large task of putting together multiple copies of a lengthy zine demonstrates the social and community-based side of fanzines; he suggests that friends are invited over for a "collating party" to help put the zine together (ibid. 42).

With the zine now finished, Gunderloy now concentrates on distribution and how to reach the intended audience. The first section of this is a lengthy discussion of the various options available in terms of the postal service and how to decide the best means of mailing fanzines. The next section is on promotion and financing, which according to Gunderloy is the area where zine publishers have the most problems (ibid. 52). The first point made here is the importance of advertising, and particularly the need to get reviewed in other fanzines. Gunderloy refers to the necessity of being featured in review zines (such as his own *Factsheet Five*), and stresses the need to reach a large readership through an established review zine. The non-commercial basis on which zines operate is also highlighted in the suggestion that zines should swap advertising space with each other (ibid. 52-53).

Prices and subscriptions are then discussed. Gunderloy's advice here is that the beginning fanzine publisher should not try to price their zine in a way that is attempting to recover all costs, or it will be pricing itself out of the market. He then goes on to discount structures for samples and subscriptions. The subscribing "usual" is perceived as being an extremely desirable commodity for the zine publisher, enabling them to have a little security on how many copies will sell, with the drawback being that the zine is expected to be published on at least a semi-regular basis, which is not always a feature of small-press publishing. One interesting thing regarding subscriptions is that Gunderloy advises that the deal offered should be simply a multiple of the cover price, so if the fanzine is priced at one pound, then subscriptions should be offered at six

pounds for six issues, for example. Whilst this does not initially seem to be a saving for the reader, when it is recognised that the price of zines generally rises, it does seem to be quite an incentive. The problem however lies in fanzines folding almost as often as the prices go up and meaning that the subscriber loses whatever subscription they have paid to the small publisher financially unable to give refunds (ibid. 56).

Gunderloy also stresses the importance of doing basic record-keeping and accounting, avoiding the common fanzine publisher mistake of mixing subscription finances with personal funds and maintaining a list of all readers so as to not lose credibility. Gunderloy also refers here to deals with distributors and the possible arrangements with them such as consignment sale, despite his comment that very few distributors are willing to take small-scale zines (ibid. 60). Finally in this section, it is mentioned that it is necessary for large fanzines to pay their taxes, although very few are of such a size that they fall into this category.

The remainder of *How to Publish Fanzines* deals with three quite different case studies; Gunderloy's diary as he produced a copy of his *Factsheet Five* zine, his experience of publishing a school underground newspaper, and, most interestingly, how to publish when the state will not allow it. This section displays the radical roots of fanzines, dealing with fanzines published anywhere in the world that would put the publisher in danger of prosecution or imprisonment if they were to be discovered. As a tract in guerrilla information warfare, this section does seem out of place appended to the very practical and mundane handbook that precedes it. However, it is clearly an intrinsic part of

fanzines' existence that they should be able to publish and distribute freely, even when this involves following what Gunderloy puts forward as the two basic rules; "you can't trust anyone" and "you can't afford to leave any evidence behind you" (ibid. 71).

I now wish to examine a variety of other writing on fanzines in order to identify the more general theories that have been applied to zines. Quite a number of these are concerned with the establishment of a binary opposition, whether it is between mainstream and independent, commercial and non-profit, or personal and professional.

David Rowe's *Popular Cultures* explores the links between music and sport fandom. His covering of fanzines concentrates primarily on those related to sport, and how sport has "its own media 'independent movement' in the form of the fanzine" (Rowe 1995: 16). Rowe's principal aim in his writing appears to be to set up a binary opposition between the mainstream and independent, which he examines first in terms of the growth of 'indie' record labels. As these independent record labels grew in number and popularity, Rowe refers to the growth of fanzines as "their literary equivalents…established as alternatives to the major music papers", such as the *New Music Express*, in order to relate to the new music being released (ibid. 36).

Rowe quotes Leonard and Shannon as describing the expansion of independent recording activity, and correspondingly, the increase in independent music writing, as being a direct movement against the "virtual

monopoly" held by a very limited number of companies (ibid. 37). This also corresponds with Simon Frith's statement of the "explicitly anti-professional attitude" in music at this time attempting to concentrate again upon musicians, as opposed to markets, and "music as a mode of survival rather than as a means to profit" (ibid. 37).

The discussion of sports fanzines highlights the way that marginalised social groups are able to find express themselves through the small press. The two examples here display ignored groups of supporters finding a voice for themselves through their fanzines. Both in the case of the gay and lesbian *The Football Pink* and the women's *Against the Tide: the Voice of Women Who Just Love Football*, these publications allow writing on areas of sport virtually ignored by the media such as women's football. Rowe does however also note that *The Football Pink* does reflect "the male dominance of 'heterosexual' sport" in that the majority of articles are written by gay men about gay men's football. Despite this, the presence of such fanzines as *Against the Tide* has begun to disrupt the traditional male dominance of mainstream sport (ibid. 142).

Rowe also has an interesting discussion of the problems of expansion for fanzines. When something that has from its origins been a "fan-driven" publication achieves significant turnover and readership, it is clearly difficult for it to continue as an independent fanzine and can be perceived as having turned into the commercial counterparts that it was created in opposition to. The need for fanzine publications is here viewed as being a result of some 'failing' of the

mainstream media. Professionals are suggested to be too close to their subjects and too remote from the "common fan" to be of any real relevance (ibid. 161).

Concentrating on football fanzines, Rowe also discusses the role of fanzines in raising issues that are important to supporters, issues that they, for the most part, are excluded from (ibid. 162). Fanzines are therefore a way of reclaiming the game from those who have taken it away from 'the people', just as Haynes writes about this as imbued with a sense of "nostalgia for a past form of democracy within football, whether real or imagined" (1995: 7).

There is however some concession about the ability of fanzines to reach varying groups of people. Rowe quotes the editor of *When Saturday Comes*, a semi-professional football fanzine, as saying that the average reader is "in their 20s…likely to be a student…predominantly male…we only ever really thought about stuff that we find interesting ourselves; if other people are interested then fair enough" (1995: 162). He later goes on to mention the view of zines as "small-scale, marginal alternative media which confirm the subordinate status of their readerships" (ibid. 165).

Rowe furthermore goes on to comment that sports as well as music fanzines can be viewed as "rounding out" the range of publications available and "occupying complementary niche markets", as opposed to "presenting a fundamental alternative" to the available mainstream media (ibid. 163).

In line with this, Rowe also quotes the views of various professional sports writers on fanzines. These range from being slightly to more deeply disparaging and, where there is limited praise, it is put it more on zines' ability to be entertaining, rather than meaningful or insightful reading. One writer puts the emphasis on fanzine writers not having the connections to the clubs that enable them to get important stories; football fanzine content is viewed as being reliant upon rumours on the terraces. Despite this, there is some recognition of writers who started on fanzines but have now been assimilated into the mainstream; suggesting that fanzines, to some extent, function as nurseries for mainstream organisations (ibid. 163-4).

Rowe does however also suggest two other possible functions of sports fanzines; to act as "popular safety valves for frustrated sports fans" and as specialist niche publications which comfortably co-exist with the more general outlets" (ibid. 164). He does however note the capacity of fanzines to cater to readerships neglected by more established media forms and "celebrate their difference in the face of … marginalisation" (ibid. 165). What is however noted here is that while these limited circulation publications might create a voice and form of expression for otherwise isolated groups, their existence can also be seen as a confirmation of their readership's "subordinate status" (ibid. 165).

Radicalism is seen by many as an intrinsic part of the nature of fanzines; even in the area of sports, a 'Radical Football Faction' (Haynes 1995: 21) can be referred to. Gunderloy recognises that music fanzines, and punk fanzines in

particular, "have overtones of politics, animal rights, anarchy, or similar social movements" (ibid. 89).

This radicalism is in part linked to the subversion of commercial media forms. One of the ways in which this is done is by the overt personalisation of content, at odds with commercial magazines' distance from their subjects, including the presence of working class language and a belief in DIY production values (Haynes 1995: 40). Haynes furthermore goes on to suggest that the emergence of this radical new medium in an "alternative network" (ibid. 41).

The idea of an alternative, underground network, at odds with established media forms, is focussed on in some depth in Stephen Duncombe's *Notes from Underground: Zines and the politics of Alternative Culture.* Here Duncombe describes zines as an alternative, communal network that holds together a "virtual bohemia" (1997: 14).

Haynes also discusses the influence of the original punk fanzines, as will be examined in the chapter of this dissertation concerned with fanzine history and development. A number of articles about the development of fanzines on the Internet have also been written which I will explore in the related chapter later in this dissertation.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The methods used in this research are twofold. Firstly, information on the process of writing fanzines and the views of those producing them was gathered directly from zine producers and secondly, information on zine content and layout was gained through the examination of individual fanzines.

In order to gain information from zine writers and publishers, I designed a questionnaire that could be sent out, whether by post or email, that could then be filled in at the recipient's leisure. This would be particularly suited to my research aims as I wanted people to give answers that really reflected their feelings on fanzines, and I also wanted to get information from a wide variety of sources. By sending out a questionnaire, I was able to send it to any number of fanzine writers that I wanted (often at the same time as asking for a copy of their zine) and then process their information as I received it.

The structure of the questionnaire was quite important in order to gain the information that I required. This was partly because of the wide focus of my dissertation; any particular question could give an answer that would be beneficial to understanding the workings of fanzines and their writers. I therefore used a variety of questions, starting with personal information and the amount of time the person had been producing fanzines, and then moving onto wider questions, such as the writer's view of the mainstream media, whether

their fanzine has a website, and what they think the future for paper fanzines might be.

The questions included in the questionnaire can be found in appendix A of this dissertation.

I sent the questionnaire to all the fanzines that I acquired, which are each listed in appendix B. The fanzines used in this dissertation were obtained from primarily two sources; music shops and reviews in other fanzines. When I set about trying to get hold of as many and as varied a number of fanzines as I could, this was proved easier by all fanzines writers being aware of numerous other people creating similar publications and who I would be able to contact.

My initial aim was to obtain as many examples of different types of fanzines as possible in order to be able to make observations across all the different genres of music zine publications by comparison. This did however prove more problematic than I had at first thought. The problem here however was not a lack of different types of zine, but a colossal amount of types. Fanzines are created in such a personal way that each one can be seen to be a genre of its own. However, using the rough genre distinction of the type of music covered, I did manage to obtain a collection of fanzines covering many different types of music, from pop to metal. The problem in making these sorts of distinctions do however lie in many fanzines covering such wide music areas in any one issue, according to the interests of the writer.

Fanzines are an area of publishing that is extremely difficult to refer to in terms that are not qualitative. As their publication is wholly undertaken by people who are not 'professional' publishers and writers in any way, people who are often learning what to do as they do it, it is necessary to understand the thoughts and feelings of the producers at the same time as looking at the publications themselves, which is what I will attempt to do in this dissertation.

Chapter 4 - The Development of Fanzines and the Establishment of a Fanzine Culture

In this section I wish to look at several areas, starting with the history of fanzines before moving onto the more ideological aspects of zine publications. My appraisal of fanzine history is only a brief outline of the relevant changes throughout their development as has impact upon music fanzines, but is still necessary in providing a background to the establishment of fanzines and an understanding of how fanzines' current situation came to be established.

History and Development

Fanzines have existed for a considerable amount of time, the first one generally recognised as being *The Comet*, originally published in May 1930. This publication was created by the Science Correspondence Club, the first ever science fiction fan organisation to be founded, and its content was grounded in that genre. Science fiction had a dominance over fanzine publications for many years after this as more genre fans developed the desire to create their own publications. As Duncombe notes, "[t]hey sent letters to *Amazing Stories* [pulp SF magazine], then began writing to each other, and finally, pushing one step

further, started writing their own stories and producing their own publications, eradicating the distance between consumer and creator" (1997: 108).
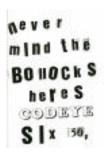
Music fanzines are commonly recognised to be a direct result of the rise of punk music and culture in the late 1970s. As Atton states, "it was the advent of Punk in 1976 that began the self-publishing revolution we see today" (1996: 23). The punk ethic stated that anyone could do things themselves, regardless of a lack of any 'professionalism' or recognised training, as long as they had the enthusiasm to get things done. This ethic was far reaching, ranging from suggesting that anyone could get a band together to inferring that enthusiasm was the only necessary prerequisite for the production of a publication.

The timing of this movement was also beneficial to self-publishers; photocopiers were more readily available, meaning that once a publication had been created, it had a relatively cheap and accessible means of being reproduced for a potentially considerable audience. These factors therefore combined to create "the access and enthusiasm to produce fanzines" (Haynes 1995: 40) that could then have an impact upon the world of publishing.

It is has also been commented that the wider and more expansive use of fanzines was influenced primarily by the British punk fanzines at this time. Haynes has suggested that "the linguistic and production styles of British fanzines", utilising both working class language and a cut and paste, visibly DIY format, were copied "across the globe", particularly in the United States (1995: 41). British punk self-publishers therefore seem to be pioneers of the fanzine

form, and their influence spread further than simply encouraging further music zines. Rowe refers to the militant, challenging side of punk when he writes about "a challenge to the mainstream sports media complex from the fanzine, an informal sports publication 'inherited' from the punk independent rock scene" (Rowe 1995: 145). Here the connection is clearly drawn between the original group of punk self-publishers and the belief, years later, that a degree of the same attitude, DIY ethic and style can make the views of the unrepresented known and provide a voice of expression for those outside of the establishment.

Original punk fanzine cut and paste style in the contemporary Codeye

Original punk fanzines such as *Ripped & Torn*, *Sniffin' Glue* and *48 Thrills*, in the words of Richard Haynes, "provided graphics and typography that were homologous with punk's subterranean and anarchic style" (1995: 40). However, the method of expression of fanzines was not to remain solely the property of the punks who had originally conceived them. Using these original publications as an example of what could be done by virtually anyone motivated enough to try it, many other fanzines in a variety of different areas appeared. Fanzines appeared to cover almost all other areas of music, as well as also covering other, entirely unrelated areas (such as, for example, the American zines dedicated to seventies television programmes). People interested in any subject matter were then able to self-publish their own zine, providing information on any area that had perhaps been previously entirely ignored by the mainstream media.

Fanzine Culture

As fanzines were produced in ever greater volumes and developed into new areas of subject matter, a form of culture also developed around them. A "fanzine scene" is referred to by zine producers; it is difficult in some ways to conceptualise this scene due to its decentralised nature. In addition to this, fanzines are a particularly unstable area, particularly due their reliance solely on the interest of the publisher; if they have no wish to produce further issues, perhaps even after their initial issue, then the fanzine will just cease to be. Therefore, while it can be said that there is a huge amount of people involved in fanzines, the particular people involved are liable to change frequently. However, as geographically dispersed as the writers of fanzines might be, together they do represent a form of scene in the sense in which Duncombe refers to a "virtual bohemia" of zine writers exchanging ideas through their publications (1997: 14). I now wish to look at the more ideological aspects involved in the production of music fanzines.

Different Approaches to Fanzines - an Opposition / Alternative to the Mainstream

As noted in the literature review, a number of the texts concerning fanzines and discussing theories related to them suggest that fanzines can act either as an opposition or an auxiliary to the mainstream media. These

respective theories of zines functioning as resistance or extensions are consciously reflected in the mindset of fanzine publishers. Their attitudes and perceptions of the mainstream music press are diverse, but can be divided into two rough categories. While some believe that music magazines have nothing to offer and that zines are the only worthwhile channel of music news and information, others respect the mainstream and view their zine as providing information that, for one reason or another, the commercial press is unable to provide. It is also interesting that those fanzine writers who fall into the second category profess an interest in writing for commercial magazines, and are to some extent using fanzines as a training ground for this purpose.

The majority of fanzine writer's complaints about the mainstream music media are that it is a capitalist enterprise, interested solely in making money, at whatever cost to content or truthfulness. Allied to this is a conception of the mainstream music media working in conjunction with a music industry that cynically markets its products with no respect for either music fans or musicians. As Michael Thorn of *Maximum Rock and Roll* writes, "commercial mags are garbage - they promote what the record company hype machines and spindoctors tell them to" (response to questionnaire). This view of commercial magazines being nothing more than a marketing arm of the music industry that will only inform the reader on music products that will bring profits to the corporations is widespread throughout fanzine writers.

Similarly, Russell Remains of *Fracture* is also scathing about the financial motivations of commercial music magazines. As he writes, "I have realised from

experience over the years that the mainstream glossy magazines are completely controlled by money and sales; the content is secondary" (response to questionnaire). *Fracture* is also of such a size that it has experienced at first hand attempts at manipulation of coverage. Russell Remains writes about how record companies have offered advertising in exchange for the fanzine interviewing one of their bands, which, because of the status of *Fracture*, he has been able to decline, therefore keeping the content purely centred on what should be included on its own merit.

It is however perhaps unsurprising that the two biggest critics of commercial magazines as the marketing arm of a capitalist recording industry are from two of the largest punk fanzines in publication. Implicit in punk ideology is a belief of the corruption of money, and a support of musicians and record labels that do not have the backing of the commercial establishment and are perceived as operating for a higher goal than pure profit. The original music fanzines did, after all, come from the initial punk movement in order to provide coverage of a new and challenging sort of music that was directly opposed to the traditional music industry ideas of what constituted music. It is only natural therefore that contemporary punk fanzines should continue an assault on what they view as a corrupt industry.

However, many fanzine writers outside of punk ideology also have problems with the mainstream music magazines. One of the main problems stated here is the mainstream's inherent 'professionalism'. Here, professionalism is given a degraded definition. Professional music journalists are seen as people

who write because they are paid to do so, not because they have any particular interest in what they are writing about. Furthermore, that they are viewed as professional writers more than music fans also means that they can write about not what specifically interests them, but what they are instructed to write about, which has clear repercussions in relation to the argument about the commercial motivations of magazine content above.

What is inferred here is that money is just as much of a motivation for music journalists to write as it is for their magazines to publish. Therefore, if the financial incentive for professional writers were to be taken away - if, in short, they were to write under the same conditions as fanzine writers do - then they would simply stop. In addition to this, music journalists are also viewed as being far closer to the subjects of their articles than the "common fan" is. Fanzine writers can claim a far higher amount of authenticity when reviewing a compact disc that they have spent a considerable amount of their own money on than the professional music writer can when they are simply given a collection of albums to review. What fanzines substitute for the "professional" writer is the amateur (and, as Duncombe notes, the roots of that word are in the Latin *amator*, or lover (1997: 14)), the fan as writer. The fanzine writer is therefore writing from the outside, and gaining a new perspective on his or her subject matter from this standpoint.

In opposition to the professional writer then, is the self-publisher who writes purely for their own interest. As Sid Stovold of *Pop Art* comments, "I've always thought fanzines are better because they're written by people who **really**

care" (response to questionnaire). This passion for music is one of the most prized attributes of fanzines, as illustrated by another comment by a zine writer; "the more zines I read … the more boring and lifeless and sort of annoyingly "official" commercial music mags begin to look" (response to *No38* questionnaire). An experience of a number of zines can therefore be seen to make commercial magazines look far less interesting in comparison.

Respect for the mainstream's skills / a more considered judgement of them

However, just as this experience can be seen to have the effect of making some people more critical of the mainstream, in others it produces a more considered judgement of fanzines' commercial counterparts. This is visible in two ways, one that considers the practical skills that are required to write professionally and the second, which is more ideological, as in the following quote:

"I do now see which people and mags are actively trying to make things better for the musical underground and which ones are more interested in their own egos or lining their own pockets, but anyone that reads the press can see that if they think a bit for 2 minutes anyway." (Jockrock Q)

Stuart McHugh of *Jockrock* is here reconsidering the formerly stated view that the whole of the commercial press has a detrimental effect on music as a

whole, stating that while some publications are true to this idea, others are more beneficial in nature.

Some fanzine writers state that they have learnt from their own experience of putting together their publications how difficult such a task is, giving credit to the professionals who are able to do this on a regular basis. As Mark Seager of *But First The News* says, "I've realised just how difficult it is to write pieces as well written as the ones in the *NME* etc." In addition to this, he also states that, while him and his friends are able to produce their own fanzine, "none of us think we're good enough to work as music journalists as a career" (response to questionnaire).

As one further example of this, Paul Haworth of *Homelovin'* writes that, through going through the process of putting together articles himself, he is now "less tolerant of bad/confused writing and more respectful of quality music journalism" (response to questionnaire). Seeing the problems involved in journalism and writing therefore give some fanzine writers an insight into the professional world and allow them the ability to be able to tell "bad/confused" from "quality".

Taking an Ancillary Stance

In line with the respect that many fanzine writers have for the mainstream, there is also a conscious belief that zine publications should and do

function as supplements to, as opposed to replacements for, the mainstream music media. Views such as those of Xana Charnock of *The IndiePendent* that "both [fanzines and commercial magazines] have their pros and cons, and there is a place for both" (response to questionnaire) state that mainstream and fan publications can each operate in their own separate spheres. They do not therefore have to come into direct competition and drive each other out of the market.

This is possible because of the variety that is possible within fanzines' range of publications. Any commercial magazine, whatever subject area it covers, can only hold a certain amount of information, which is of course subject to the constraints related to consumer appeal as outlined above. The subject areas of fanzines can also cover, not only music that does not have a broad enough appeal for mass consumption, but also new bands and acts that would be considered too much of a risk to be covered in large circulation magazines. At any given point there are numerous new musical acts playing and recording; whilst some of these may have true commercial potential, it would be beyond any commercial magazine to cover the majority of new bands, many of whom will never become large and therefore commercially viable subject matter. When bands are therefore small and quite possibly not signed to a record label, small-scale publications are the only form of publicity they can generally get access to. If a band does however attain a following through fanzine publicity, then it may grow to such a size that it can then be covered by the mainstream media.

There are therefore a number of contrasting views held by fanzine writers on commercial music magazines. However, whilst some have gained a greater respect for the skills of professional writers, there is only rarely not a sense of caution where commercial magazines are concerned. The cause of this problem seems to be that mainstream magazines, unlike fanzines, are far less direct communications. Fanzines are as simple, and therefore unsusceptible to the corruption of beliefs, as any publication could be. A fanzine is typically the product of one person or a small group of friends who oversee the entire process of publication without complications such as financial matters and audience targeting to get in the way. Because the production process of a commercial magazine is hidden and includes a far greater number of people, there is a concern that at some point in production an agenda enters the publication, interfering with the communication of information.

Zine Community

One thing that has always been a particular attribute of fanzines as a collection of publications is the community aspect that brings all writers together. Sid Stovold of *Pop Art* refers to fanzines as being more than about the music covered, but also as a direct expression of the writers' interests. He suggests that as well as bringing attention to new bands, zines also exist as "a way of like-minded people meeting and saying 'hey, I'm into that too!'" (response to questionnaire). The production of a fanzine can therefore be seen as, partly at

least, as like creating a large-scale classified advertisement for people with similar interests.

However, this method of forming new relationships with people that share the same interests is more than this. After all, if many of the bands that are covered in fanzines are not covered in the mainstream, then a particular sort of relationship is constructed, one that is built around a taste in 'underground' culture; a solidarity around bands that are, in general terms, 'unknown'. Furthermore, the fanzine writer's interest in such music is not merely limited to them stating such an interest; they have created their own publication purely for that purpose. Their dedication is therefore seen as assured.

So it is perhaps only natural that fanzine writers, each enthusiastic about the music that does not normally get covered in the mainstream media, should form a community of sorts. Probably the most visible way in which this community operates is in its tradition of exchanging fanzines amongst writers.

This has been a feature of fanzine culture since its inception. Fanzine writers have always been able to obtain copies of other fanzines by sending out a copy of theirs. This also stands for the process of reviewing fanzines. Didier Becu of *The Original Sin* states that "there is a sort of zine rule that you review other fanzines while others will do it for you" (response to questionnaire). As much of an unwritten rule as this is, it has endured well as a way for fanzine writers to encourage readers to look further into zine publications and see what others are publishing. Therefore, once an individual acquires one fanzine, they

can look at the zines reviewed in it and choose others to send off for, then sending off for more zines reviewed in those ones and so on.

What should also be noted here is that, although these reviews are being conducted in a community of free exchange of publications, the reviews are not always mutually appreciative. The reviews are sometimes critical, but with an extremely small amount of exceptions, do at the same time respect the efforts of the producer, making their criticisms into ways that the fanzine could be improved. The exception is however in *Maximum Rock and Roll* where the reviewers seemingly have few problems with attacking fanzines that do not live up to their 'purist' view of punk. One review refers disparagingly to a fanzine's glossy cover, use of "promo photos" and "fluff pieces" posing as interviews with commercial punk bands before summing it up as "a complete waste of my time" (*Maximum Rock and Roll* issue 213).

An additional feature of fanzine culture is not only the encouragement to buy more fanzines, but also to produce your own. The majority of fanzine writers that I contacted were prompted to begin self-publishing after reading various fanzines and wanting to have a go at it themselves. This can be done because not only are the means of fanzine production within the grasp of nearly everyone, due to fanzines not being driven by the market, there is theoretically no limit to the number of fanzines that can be produced at any one time.

Because of the distance between fanzine culture and the mainstream, there is also the opportunity for this community of self-publishers to claim a greater

equality in that anyone who wants to publish their own fanzine can. This is at variance with the traditional dominance of music writing by men. However, the equality achieved is only partial; although there is a much more balanced mix of genders in fanzine publishing, other divides still exist. Fanzine producers generally belong to a quite specific social group; as Mitchell states, "most fanzine writers are white, middle class and educated" (online reference). There is therefore a question as to how successful fanzines are as a truly accessible form of expression for all members of society.

It should also be added that fanzine writers are with few exceptions in a particular age range, being either teenagers or in their twenties. Only two of the fanzine publishers I surveyed were outside of this range at 33 and 37. Fanzines are importantly a medium of the young and enthusiastic who, while having ideas, are still learning through experience how to publish them.

There does seem to be a change taking place in fanzine culture as an increasing amount of fanzine writers refuse to trade copies with others. Issue 64 of the American review zine *Factsheet Five* (after its repackaging as a more commercially viable publication at which point it also refused to trade copies with other fanzines) listed 45 music zines. Of these, 22 state that they're not interested in trading with others, 11 trade selectively, and only 4 are openly willing to trade. It could be suggested that one possible reason for this is the increasing amount of fanzines that are not fanzines in the traditional sense, but more like magazines produced by inexpensive means. It therefore follows that these publications are not so interested in the community aspects of fanzines,

and wanting more people to read their own fanzine far more than they are interested in the writings of others.

However, whatever the reason for this change, it can be seen to have a great effect on the nature of an area of publishing that has, in part, always relied on its collective support. Furthermore, this new type of fanzine is not only disruptive to the ideal of community publishing but also puts in its place the traditional relationship between the reader as consumer and the writer as producer, with an inherent distance between the two roles.

The Fanzine Producer as Individual

Due to fanzines being created outside of any commercial constraints and, generally, the constraints of deadlines, it is far more possible for one individual to remain the sole creator of the publication. Of course, they may not wish to, given the community side of fanzine production. But there are still a number of fanzines that can, with a certain amount of pride, stress that the publication is the work of one person exercising their creative skills over the fanzine as a whole. This is demonstrated by the ironic staff list in *P'tahk* issue 3:

<div align="center">

Editor: Doogz

Contributors: Doogz

Advertising Dude: Doogz

Designer: Doogz

</div>

Doogz (aka Steve Russell) is proudly able to say that everything in *P'tahk* is all his own work. It may take him up to six months to prepare each issue, but when it is ready, both he and his readers can be assured that everything within it is from the view of one music fan, with no other influence.

In keeping with the views explored on fanzines' various relationships with the commercial music press, it is perhaps not very surprising that what is valued most of all in fanzine writing is personality. Personality provides verification that the zine is written by a real person and not merely something produced by a professional, and therefore distanced, writer.

This perspective comes up again and again in the comments by zine writers as to what makes a zine good or bad;

"[A good zine needs] personality, otherwise you might as well be reading the *NME*" (response to *No38* questionnaire)

"Good: if it contains its own personality.
Bad: if it's just a copy from the *NME*" (**Response to** *The Original Sin* **questionnaire**)

"You get people throwing together "fact files" on big bands that contain no original material, just culled articles from popular magazines, and pass these off as fanzines. While no doubt informative and entertaining, the info is usually

widely known trivia, thus rendering the whole effort useless." (Response to *P'tahk* questionnaire)

Included in this idea of the personality of the fanzine writer is their enthusiasm for their subject matter. Several times fanzine writers commented on their questionnaires that they view music as being of primary importance to them. "I would hope [to get into a music related job], music is my life!" writes Deano of *Dilemm-ahhh*! (response to questionnaire). However, would it be possible for music to still be Deano's life if it was also his job? As another fanzine producer writes, "I like to do all my musical things on a voluntary level to ensure that I never start treating music like work" (response to *Fracture* questionnaire). Because music is not a source of income for them, fanzine writers can still view albums and concerts as entertainments, as opposed to jobs.

Of course, the fanzine writer is still able to mediate the sides of their personality that they allow onto the pages of their zine. As an example of this, Helen from *No38* refers to writing her, now defunct, fanzine, before coming out, and pretending to be attracted to the men featured in various articles. Therefore, despite one dominant personality being the creator of a zine, this personality can still often be adjusted in order to present an image that the zine publisher wants to portray to the readers.

An Isolated World

A major problem that fanzines have is their seclusion and isolation away from the general public. As much as fanzines are full of recommendations for other interesting small-scale publications available, there is little discussion of fanzines outside of fanzines themselves. Solely concentrating on music fanzines published in Britain, there is a huge volume and variety of zines currently being published. But the question does have to be asked as to how people could find out about them without first being inside fanzine culture itself.

The problems of fanzine distribution will be dealt with in the following chapter, but here I wish to briefly discuss the more ideological aspects of fanzines' isolation.

One complaint of the general reading public made by fanzine writers is that "nobody wants to read about stuff they haven't heard of, they want what they already know" (response to *P'tahk* questionnaire). Therefore, articles on new bands will be of little interest to the majority of the reading public, the only people interested may however be those who are interested in the same or similar bands, possibly publishing a fanzine themselves about them. These fanzines and the music within them will therefore only be able to preach to the converted. Furthermore, they also echo the idea suggested by Rowe that these small-scale publications only serve to confirm their readership's "subordinate status" (1995: 165) by containing this information within a sub-cultural group.

However, as well as this limited readership potential it could also be suggested that the isolation of fanzines is, in part, self-imposed. As will be covered in the section of this dissertation related to fanzine production, there is now a growing number of fanzines that adopt similar production values and layouts to mainstream magazines. This blurring of the boundary between professional and amateur is, however, problematic for the traditional values of the fanzine.

As previously noted, many fanzines now do not accept trades with other publications, which, along with their 'glossy' formats, distances them from what has previously been thought of as a 'zine'.

The main problem here is the extent to which a fanzine can have many of the same characteristics as a magazine without bearing the same criticisms levelled at the mainstream media. While some might say that a fanzine can break out of its traditional bubble and gain greater commerciality without betraying its amateur and honest status, for others any concessions to a wider audience are met with great disapproval; fanzines are supposed to stand against the mainstream, not attempt to be reconciled within it. The theory is that any fanzine writer who is concentrating on his or her audience is not being true to the music they are covering and are just as susceptible to the corruption of content as anything existing in the mainstream. Such publications therefore, whilst bearing some of the characteristics of fanzines, are difficult to describe as such.

Chapter 5 - Fanzine Production and Distribution

In this chapter I wish to concentrate on the more technical aspects of fanzines. This entails the production methods involved, the methods of distribution available to fanzine producers and issues such as advertising and copyright. However, I wish to first look at content and format in their various forms in fanzines.
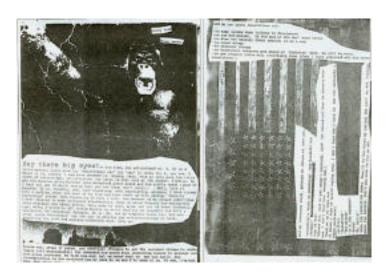
Content

The diversity of content is one of the most striking features of fanzines. Whilst, as I noted in my introduction, there is a perception that fanzines deal with one particular band or personality, the majority of fanzines are exactly the opposite of this. In fact, the majority of music fanzines do not even limit themselves to just covering a variety of music. It is commonplace for a fanzine to also include articles on films, books, short stories and pieces on the zine producer's life. Art and drawings are also an important part of many fanzines.

As one example of the variety of content present in fanzines, I will now have a brief discussion of issue six of *Astrochimps*, produced by Simon Hampson. The zine starts with an introductory paragraph, announcing this as "the latin

issue" of *Astrochimps*. There then follows on the next two pages several lists that Simon has put together, ranging from "my favourite words, phrases or others" to his favourite albums and concerts of 1999. There are then a number of music reviews, in the middle of which is placed a piece on the different colours of denim available and television personality Rolf Harris. After this are four pages of articles on seemingly random topics, following which are pages of cartoons by a friend of Simon's, with more music reviews and pieces on television personalities placed between them.

Pages two and three of issue six, 'the latin issue', of *Astrochimps*

What may seem to be a random assortment of articles is however united by each piece being what Simon himself chooses to write about. Without an editorial board or any necessity to respond to the demands of the market, fanzines have an almost complete freedom to print whatever the producer wants to put in their own publication.

This lack of constraints upon the writer is the biggest determinant of fanzine content. Commercial magazines have to be aware of many factors; as well as the magazine editors and publishers and the demands of the market, also their competition and advertisers. Articles must primarily be written with their audience in mind. The majority of fanzines have no conception of 'audience' (in the traditional sense), and, of those that do, an even more limited number write with the audience in mind. The content of fanzines is primarily prompted from what the writer themselves is interested in; it is merely hoped that after the fanzine has been printed, there will be a significant amount of other people sharing the same interests that would be interested in a publication covering them.

These comments must however be qualified. Firstly, fanzines are very well aware of other similar publications available. There is rarely a sense of competition, however. Instead, a feeling of community between similar publications is more prevalent. Indeed, it is common for a number of fanzine publications to feature articles on a small number of bands, particularly those that are willing to give interviews and have a general interest in gaining publicity from fanzines. There are also a number of bands whose following seems particularly suited to the creation of fanzines, leading to a large amount of fanzines focused on one particular act, whilst many other bands are largely ignored. This is, in part, a reflection of the bias of fanzine writers being, as previously noted, predominantly "white, middle class and educated" (Mitchell online reference) - there are very few articles or fanzines, for instance, about hip hop or rap. It must however be noted that some fanzine writers do recognise this

discrepancy; as one writer comments, "how many Manic Street Preachers zines does the world need?" (response to *But First The News* questionnaire)

Secondly, a limited amount of fanzines have become established to such a point that it is necessary for them to regulate their content in order to continue their high readerships. It is interesting that the two biggest music zines that I have found whilst doing this research, the American *Maximum Rock and Roll* and the British *Fracture* are both punk orientated. Both of these fanzines have been able to attain high readerships and widespread distribution through a successful sense of image; if they were to change their content by, for instance, including articles on pop bands or acts signed to major labels, this image would be greatly damaged, with a resultant drop in readership. Of course, this is entirely hypothetical, as the people responsible for both fanzines are entirely committed to their current, purely punk, content, but it does illustrate how it is at times necessary for even a fanzine to be self-regulatory.

There is also one other thing that has an impact upon fanzine content; commercial magazines. It is difficult to say whether commercial magazines are in direct competition with fanzines; their contents often differ considerably, with fanzines providing coverage of "stuff that would normally be ignored" (response to *P'tahk* questionnaire). However, the content of commercial music magazines, and what is perceived as a lack in it, has a strong influence on fanzines. Bands not getting mentioned in commercial music magazines, whether for reasons of space or because of their limited appeal, is the reason that, firstly, many people are motivated to start their own publication, and secondly, these fanzines are

able to continue because of other people wanting this information that is unavailable elsewhere. As Xana Charnock of *The IndiePendent* writes, "[I] was fed up of not finding any of the gigs I went to reviewed in the weeklies" (response to questionnaire). Therefore, if the mainstream and professional press won't mention what you're interested in, the only way that such coverage can be ensured is if you do it yourself.

Interestingly however, the bands covered in *The IndiePendent* include some of the most commercial that are featured in any of the fanzines that I obtained. Amongst interviews and reviews with lesser known bands are pieces on Travis and Coldplay, two bands that have had several singles in the music charts and which are featured by the mainstream press on a regular basis. *The IndiePendent* does however hope to provide a different perspective on the bands from a fan's view; Xana asserts that, in regard to the mainstream and fanzines, "both have their pros and cons, and there is a place for both" (response to questionnaire). The underlying point here is that even where the commercial press and small scale fanzines share the same subject matter in content, there is room for both types of publication, and different information can be gained from each.

It should also be mentioned that the content of some fanzines have particular content that could never truly be reproduced in any and mainstream magazine. *Hobble Oblong,* for example, is a collection of photocopied questionnaires filled in by the members of various bands. The questions covered are somewhat more eccentric than those usually asked to such personalities, such as "what do you think about mules?" "Sum up your political stance in one word"

and, perhaps most bizarrely, "Draw a shark wearing a fancy hat". However, the questionnaires do provide a certain insight into the personalities involved, and make *Hobble Oblong* an entirely unique publication.

Another example of an entirely different kind is *Veronica*, which combines music articles with pieces on feminist and liberal politics. One two-page spread pastiches a script from Australian soap opera *Neighbours*, placing between the lines information about the state of Aborigines and Australia's treatment of them.

Format

There are a number of different presentation formats available to fanzines. Although some are A4, the majority of them use an A5 size to provide the fanzine with greater bulk. Some also utilise colour covers in order to make themselves stand out more from the primarily black and white photocopied covers.

The motivation behind the fanzine's publication is the main determinant of its format. Some take the form of newsletters; *Fifth Season*, for example, is composed of one two-sided sheet of A4 and provides CD reviews and gig listings. Others, which are intended to provide greater coverage of a cultural group, such as *Maximum Rock and Roll*, *Fracture* and *Dogprint*, run to 160, 104 and 96 A4 pages respectively. The number of pages can however be misleading when dealing with fanzines due to the many possibilities of layout. *Pop Art*, for

instance, has between five and seven reviews on most of its 36 pages, being much more densely packed with information than various other fanzines.

Of course, some fanzines are not interested in 'information'; some fanzines are based entirely around humour. *Planet Boo* is four A5 sides of humorous articles - it is not intended to function as news, but rather as pure entertainment.

Production Methods

The original punk fanzines had one of the most distinctive designs ever produced in any area of publishing; their "cut and paste" layout appropriated from mainstream media but also replaced traditional use of typefaces and paragraphs either created with typewriters or simply handwritten and stuck directly onto the page of the zine.

However, many other types of design exist for fanzines, especially in the current age of readily available desktop publishing software.

DTP is making an impact on fanzine production. As the technology becomes increasingly within everyone's reach, a larger number of fanzines are embracing its opportunities to create their own publications. However, the original concept of putting a zine together with your bare hands, using as little technological assistance (with the exception of photocopiers) is still of great importance within zine culture.

Of all the music zines that I looked at during my research, about half used cut and paste techniques in their production as opposed to DTP or being word processed. However, those which have been created entirely with computers still have important distinctions from commercial magazines.

Firstly, it is generally a financial necessity for fanzines to be reproduced with photocopiers as the cheapest way to copy small runs of publications. This does of course have an impact on the appearance of them, particularly on the quality of photographs and, with colour photocopying being significantly more expensive, often limits the publication to black and white. There are however a few notable exceptions to this; of the fanzines I surveyed, three used colour although each in quite different ways. Firstly, *Juicy*, although printed in monochrome, alternates white and yellow sheets to create an unusual and distinctive effect. *But First The News* is unique in giving people ordering the fanzine a choice between paying one pound for the black and white version, and one pound fifty for the colour version. This was apparently a decision made when the first issue was being created and many of the pictures just looked like a "puddle of black ink" without colour (response to questionnaire). However, the choice is still left open to the person ordering it as to whether they want to pay an extra fifty pence to get comprehensible images. Finally, *Angels Under Starlight* has another, very different, approach; each one is coloured in by hand with felt tip pens.

It is also noticeable that many of the DTP produced zines do not want to make themselves look commercially slick. Even though actual typewriters have played no part in the production of a zine, typefaces such as courier are often used to give the impression that the fanzine has been produced in the same way that zines originally were.
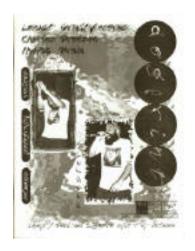
Unsurprisingly, there is a connection between the zines that are consciously constructed as 'unprofessional' (in the best sense of the word) and the belief that commercial magazines and the mainstream music industry is insufficient in some way.

Maximum Rock and Roll is quite possibly the largest fanzine in the world. Its circulation is around 10,000 and, as of February 2001, had put out 213 issues. However, despite it changing form and growing (in both circulation and size; issue 213 was made up of 160 A4 pages) since *Maximum Rock and Roll*'s inception in the late 1970s, it still strives to contain as much of its original character as possible. As one of the editors, Michael Thorn, states, "MRR was started to cover the music that no one else wanted to touch - punk". The image and status of punk has changed a lot over the last twenty years, but *Maximum Rock and Roll* tries to maintain its position of importance within the punk scene by staying non-profit and independent. It furthermore reinforces this through its design; whilst it is necessary for the zine to be "readable, without it being too sterile looking", it is also necessary for "making it look "punk"" to be in the editors' minds whilst working on the layout (response to questionnaire). Remaining true to punk

values is one thing, but just as important is representing the zine's ideology in its presentation in order to convince readers of its authenticity.

However, as prized as the idea of cut and paste and the original presentation of fanzines is, home computer technology is having more and more of an impact upon fanzine production, with possibly devastating results, as will be looked at more deeply in my chapter related to the growth of the ezine. Although I have here talked about desktop publishing, it should however also be noted that is more common for fanzines to use simpler word processing templates. This is becoming so commonplace that publications "put together in Microsoft Word and printed A4 on a colour printer" can be described as being "the future of self-published fanzines" (*Diskant Zine Reviews*, http://www.diskant.net/zine/reviews/zinerevs.html).

It should also however be noted that some fanzines publishers do utilise DTP to a far greater extent to create pages that are as carefully laid out as anything from a commercial magazine. This is not restricted to fanzines dedicated to more mainstream music either; the fanzine *Dogprint*, for example, covers a range of independent and generally punk releases, but its presentation is a long way away from the original cut and paste aesthetic. This can be seen from the cover and double spread from issue ten shown below. The one concession made here to the traditional form of the fanzine is the use of a typeface that mimics that of a typewriter, even though the technology used in producing the publication was far more advanced.

The Dislike of Categorisation and Organisation

As the presence of a clear order and regimentation of content is a recognisable feature of mainstream magazines, it follows that many fanzines, in order to make themselves recognisably stand out from such constraints, are much more anarchic in layout and presentation. As Hugh Platt of *The Paranoid Endjinn* states, "I don't want to put all the album reviews together, or all the live reviews, or interviews, as keeping it "choppy" makes it interesting" (response to questionnaire).

However, in contrast to this, Hugh does state that he prefers "a certain format for album reviews, as well as how it deals with pictures".

However, when layout is deliberately made non-standard in this way, what suffers is often, in the words of Patrick Gray of *Planet Boo*, "legibility. Less is more - some writers tend to 'cram' pages and they end up looking like a serial killer's manifesto". However, this is something to be learnt by a fanzine producer through experience, and even then, ease of reading may not be high on the writer's priorities.

As an example of this, the text in *Angels Under Starlight* is primarily in the handwriting of Helen, the zine producer. Although some of the pages would be much easier to read if they were typed and laid out, the character of the zine is in many ways reliant upon Helen's personally written articles.

Cover and page five of Angels Under Starlight issue two featuring hand-drawn pictures, hand written articles, and personally coloured-in cover.

Distribution

The area of distribution is where the majority of fanzines experience the most problems. Whilst music magazines exist in a very competitive environment (as can be seen from the demise of *Melody Maker*), they can at least secure widespread distribution and therefore be allowed to display themselves on the market, where it can be hoped that if a publication is of a significant quality, it will prosper. Conversely, there are very few places interested in selling or promoting fanzines.

Partly this is a result of the inherent diversity of fanzines; whilst some feature well written and original articles, others can offer little more than reprints of older pieces of work. As well of this, there is also a very significant problem in the perception of fanzines by both retail outlets and consumers. Both of these groups can have a view of fanzines as being badly produced publications, offering at most a small amount of novelty value. Retailers are therefore unwilling to give shelf space to something of variable quality that might not sell.

There are however exceptions to this. Tower Records and various independent music shops do stock fanzines. In the case of Tower Records, their sale of fanzines is overseen by a particularly enthusiastic employee. Tower sells in excess of 500 different fanzines through its outlets, and is able to justify this though an economy of scale. Although profit from zine sales is minimal in

comparison to its other products, the amount of profit from this area reached two million American dollars some time ago (Duncombe 1997: 165).

However, this method of distribution has two distinct drawbacks. Firstly, Tower can select which fanzines they wish to carry, and whilst bringing a lot of American zines to Britain, do not have nearly so many British ones. Although an established zine such as *Maximum Rock and Roll* can be purchased from this outlet, many smaller and/or British fanzines cannot be displayed in this way. Secondly, even if all fanzines were to be available in this way, it would defeat the process of interaction that has been implicit in fanzines since their inception. Therefore, instead of writing to a zine and asking the producer for a copy, the consumer would simply go to Tower and buy one, removing the link to the publication's creator.

A number of independent music shops also sell fanzines, but this is by its nature far less centralised. These music shops often only stock those music fanzines that are produced locally and have been brought into the shop by the producer, and although adequate for promoting the zine on a local basis, cannot make the zine available in any wider areas.

It has been a central feature since the origination of fanzines that they exist to be swapped and exchanged between fanzine writers. However, due to fanzines being the main way for people to become informed about fanzines, something of a 'closed circle' has been created. There is limited scope for people

outside of fanzine production to become aware of these publications, no matter how suited they may be to their interests.

One thing that seems to be lacking is any sort of mass review zine. Before suffering large losses, *Factsheet Five* was an American review zine on a huge scale. By issue 44 in the summer of 1991, its circulation was over 10,000 and included 1,259 reviews of fanzines. *Factsheet Five* was also more readily available than any of the zines it covered, particularly during its latter years when, under a new editor, it expanded its print run to 16,000 copies and arranged distribution through large scale bookshop chains such as Barnes & Noble and Tower Books (Duncombe 1997: 157).

There seems to be no equivalent, even on a smaller scale, in British fanzine culture. Almost all fanzines do however feature reviews of other fanzines to a greater or lesser amount. *Pop Art* has a particularly high level of reviews, with 40 fanzines reviewed along with each one's contact and price details. However, someone would need to become aware of and get hold of one of these fanzines in order to become aware of other ones, which is problematic considering the small amount of outlets where fanzines can be obtained.

The majority of promotion and distribution work undertaken by fanzine writers entails the sending of flyers to as many people as possible, and which can also be included in other people's fanzines. Fanzines and flyers are also taken directly to potential buyers at music concerts, therefore providing a much greater interaction between consumer and producer than is possible for the mainstream

media. A small number of fanzines also utilise advertisements in the mainstream music media such as the *NME* and *Kerrang!,* in variance with Mike Gunderloy's comment about how advertising your fanzine costs too much for too little of an effect.

A small minority of fanzines are however able to arrange wider distribution, albeit in a very different way from how this works for the mainstream media. *Fracture,* for example, is of a high enough circulation and has sufficient advertisers that it is able to get around a thousand copies sent to music shops and venues around Europe, which is made significantly easier in the case of *Fracture,* as no money needs to change hands for a free zine.

Perhaps the most widely available source of fanzine reviews is, curiously enough, the teletext page *UFO - Unidentified Fanzines Observed.* This can be found in a section of teletext which offers music reviews and also gives details and reviews of fanzines. This sort of highlighting of interesting fanzines could also be done in any number of commercial magazines, but as it is, mentions of fanzines in the mainstream press are generally reserved to the classified advertisements pages, where individual fanzine writers can place adverts to draw attention to themselves from the readers of mainstream publications.

Advertising

While the concept of advertising in fanzines clearly carries with it echoes of the debate as to how independent zines should be and whether they can be trusted as authentic publications if they are backed by commercial advertising revenue, some fanzines would not be able to exist without it. As Steve Russell of *P'tahk* says, "I regularly send letters to record companies whinging that they should advertise so that I can afford to print more copies." Although *P'tahk*'s current circulation is around 600, as a free zine it is to be wondered how long it can continue to grow without the aid of the advertisers that Steve wants to acquire. Fanzines such as *Fracture* and *Maximum Rock and Roll* would certainly have been unable to reach their current size without significant support from advertisers. In the case of these publications, their advertising is placed by small, independent record labels - the music industry equivalent to fanzines - therefore supporting the idea of collective action by commercial 'outsiders'.

Copyright

Copyright is an issue largely ignored in the area of fanzines. In part this is due to a less than respectful attitude to the mainstream press; fanzine writers do not feel that they are doing anything wrong if they reproduce an article from the *NME* without permission. Of course, as previously discussed, they would perhaps not want to, but more through the dislike of fanzine writers seeing other merely copying the mainstream instead of creating something original, rather

than because of any fear of repercussions. The copyright and intellectual property rights that are however fully respected are those of anyone directly involved with fanzines. Almost all fanzines include a list of contributors and friends who helped out in any way during the making of the publication.

Chapter 6 - From Zine to E-Zine

As with all areas of publishing, the Internet has had a tremendous impact within the area of fanzines. What I want to do in this chapter is look at how the Internet has been utilised by fanzine writers, what changes it has been responsible for, and, ultimately, the extent to which it puts the traditional concept of fanzines at risk.

Fanzines as the Precursor to the Internet

To a certain degree, it can be said that fanzines created a structure not dissimilar to the Internet years before the 'electronic revolution'. The central idea of the Internet, that of a network of computers each containing separate quantities of information can be seen as having been active within fanzine culture. Just as any web page can feature any amount of links to other sites, it has been an intrinsic part of fanzines to provide information on other publications that the reader can then follow. Just as with websites, fanzines are each constructed separately, but can be regarded as a collective group through their connections to each other. It is for this reason that it can be said that "zine communities were in some respects mini-webs without an Internet; a preview of the Web's informal, do-it-yourself paradigm" (McHugh 1996).

Perhaps what further highlights this comparison between fanzines and the Internet is that both are concerned with the freedom of expression and a 'level playing field' for all. The difference here, however, is that whilst fanzines seek this but are limited by the problems of distribution and promotion, proponents of the Internet would argue that this new electronic media provides far more opportunities for those without power to express themselves.

One of the central features of the Internet is that it is only in a very limited way dominated by money. On the contrary, setting up a website and maintaining its content is reliant upon an individual's skills and the effort that they wish to spend on it. In addition to this, there are any number of information pages and software applications available for free on the Internet which make this easier. Ironically, is far harder to create a website that mirrors the "cut and paste" aesthetic of paper fanzines than it is to design something that looks a lot more 'official'.

The lack of straight forward organisation of Internet websites also acts in a way that blurs the line that previously divided the professional from the amateur. When a list of sites is created by a search engine such as HotBot, the pages are not categorised in a way that gives professional sites prominence; each one, regardless of who its creator is, is simply listed in order of how well it fits the criteria searched for. Following these links to the pages, it is often hard to see at first glance whether the site has been created by a 'professional' organisation or one enthusiastic individual.

As well as this, the Internet is also beneficial for fanzines in another way. As some have commented, with the same minimal distribution costs being "the same to reach an audience of one or 20 million, the Web's a natural medium for smaller niche-audience publishers" (McHugh 1996). Therefore, once a presence on the Internet is established, it can be slowly worked on further, reciprocating links with other sites, and building up an readership which could potentially be far higher than any paper fanzine producer would ever be able to photocopy enough copies for.

The ease with which a website can be set up by almost anyone and then put into the public domain has led to a huge number of sites being established that could very easily be described as a form of zine publication. It has been noted by some writers, for example, the way in which personal homepages can be seen as electronic equivalents of perzines (McHugh 1996). However, even though many people may view it as being a perversely exhibitionist activity for someone to publish a zine that talks entirely about themselves, there has been no shortage of personal web pages set up. Many of these are far more devoid of interesting content than the majority of perzines, some consisting only of mundane information such as a brief biography of the person with a picture of the person, and perhaps a listing of their record collection or favourite films. Still, whilst the publisher of a perzine gains some gratification from expressing themselves through a zine that they might make fifty copies of, the person setting up a personal web page is making this information about them potentially available to the entire world.

The Internet has then perhaps brought publishing within the grasp of virtually anyone to such an extent that people are now publishing, and creating their own forms of perzines, without even being fully aware of it. And because of the Internet hiding the potentially huge audience for any web page, content is not always such a consideration for this as it has been for the entirely conscious process of writing, putting together, copying and distributing paper zines previously.

Perhaps the greatest potential that the Internet presents is the opportunity to overcome traditional boundaries. As well as blurring the line between publications that are professionally funded and those that aren't, geographical boundaries are also largely ignored by the new media. The implications of this are great; it means that, whereas fanzines could previously only be known in the areas where they could physically distribute either copies or flyers, they can now be known about internationally. Perhaps the greatest possibility of this is that small-scale publishers can truly view themselves as members of a community that is not defined by location, but by interests, with community members **anywhere** in the world.

Views of the Internet

A number of different views concerning the Internet were expressed by the fanzine writers that I surveyed; there was also an almost equal divide between the fanzines that don't have web sites and those that do. I now wish to

go through the different views of the Internet and the differing uses to which fanzine writers have put it.

The Internet as Paper Fanzine Promotion

One way in which fanzines have utilised the Internet is by setting up a web site that is then used for either promotion or the supplying of supplementary information. This can be considered the least 'intrusive' way in which the Internet is used by fanzine publishers; the web site is almost entirely ancillary to the paper version and in no way a replacement for it.

The site for *Emancipation*, for instance, was set up by the zine's publisher Ruth Stowell as something that could illustrate what the fanzine was about and what articles feature in the current and back issues. There is a small amount of text as a sample, but it is there purely as a demonstration to get people interested in contacting Ruth to obtain a copy of the paper zine. Similarly, the *Maximum Rock and Roll* web site just contains information on advertising rates and subscriptions.

What sites of this type seem to be suggesting is that fanzines cannot afford to be without at least a token presence on the Internet. As a growing source of information, and of course a distribution aid to a potential audience of millions, to not have even a simple web page giving details of what the fanzine is about and where copies can be obtained from is a bad idea. With the Internet still

being something of an unknown property, it seems desirable to at least have a bare minimum of information available on it for perhaps anyone to find, if even by chance. There seems to be little to lose from just making this small effort.

This is reinforced by the majority of fanzine publishers who do not have any sort of web site attached to their fanzines stating that they either have plans to set a site up or would set one up if they had the skills to do so. Part of this may be that, with a growing amount of fanzines establishing sites, they have a sense of 'missing out' by not having one themselves, rather than because they have particular plans for what they want to put on the Internet. However, this also seems to be having the opposite on some fanzine writers at the same time. Part of fanzine culture is centred around "defending your ground", as can be seen by the at times confrontational stance to the mainstream music media. This can also be seen with the Internet; as there are more fanzines with this connection to the Internet, so the few that remain entirely paper-based feel more territorial in keeping to fanzines' traditional format without the aid of new media.

An Equal Relationship Between Fanzine and Web Site

Some fanzine publishers do however take the opportunities presented by the Internet somewhat further, creating a site that is more than a purely promotional device, having a much stronger function in respect to the paper fanzine. Whereas the promotional web pages discussed are just additions to the

fanzine, here the Internet is utilised to provide facilities that fanzines, in their paper format, would be unable to offer.

What the fanzine writers who have this sort of relationship between the paper and Internet versions of their fanzine are suggesting is that there are both benefits and drawbacks for the Internet and paper fanzines alike. While they place a certain importance on the web site related to their paper fanzine, which may have existed for many years, it is not however intended as a replacement for the zine's traditional format, which is not something they wish to abandon in the face of new technology.

This point is illustrated by the following quote from Helen, the publisher of *No38*:

"The Internet's a good thing in many ways, but there just doesn't seem to be a soul at the centre of it. Having said that, e-zines are good and obviously, free, so I'd rather the two things complimented each other…" (Response to questionnaire)

Here it is implicit that the benefits that the Internet is able to offer do have a considerable drawback; the lack of a 'soul' - any sort of personality or direct communication with zine writers, which is of course a considerable part of what constitutes 'fanzine culture'. This point will be looked at in greater depth later in this chapter in regard to the possibility of paper fanzines ceasing to exist. Still,

the other possibilities available through the Internet have been explored by a number of different fanzine writers.

As well as the lack of expense involved, the main advantage that the Internet has over printed publications is its immediacy. Once an article is written, it can be put onto the Internet, and therefore within reach of an audience, immediately. This is a clear contrast with the zine writer having to wait until he or she is ready to put out a new issue, then putting that article with the other ones to be included, then getting the whole zine copied and distributed. Although Mark Seager of *But First The News* doesn't have a web site related to his zine, he has had several articles published on other zines' sites. These are articles that either *But First The News* didn't have space for or which would have been out of date by the time of publication. The Internet therefore means that articles or news pieces, which would previously have been made redundant due to the amount of time that would pass before they actually got to their audience, can now have an outlet. There is however a downside to this as well; because, as Seager says, paper zines contain "a finite number of items in each issue" (response to *But First The News* questionnaire), a degree of 'quality control' is therefore necessary. The Internet providing a place where all articles that are not viewed as good enough to be put in the paper version can be placed instead will of course have a detrimental effect on quality. As with personal homepages, when anything can be published without any significant cost, the effect may well be that 'anything' indeed is - regardless of how good an article it is.

Another use to which fanzine publishers can put the Internet is illustrated by the comments of Paul Haworth of regarding his *Homelovin'* web site. As well as this functioning as "an advert for the tangible zine", it also features an "archive of material of past issues" (response to questionnaire). This means that previously written articles are kept alive by being on the Internet.

The Internet is also useful to fanzine publishers in another way that strengthens the idea of the fanzine community. In contrast to the perception of the Internet as being impersonal and distancing people involved in fanzines from each other, the way in which the *Fracture* web site is utilised seems to suggest that the Internet can allow better and more direct communication. As publisher Russell Remains comments, "the web site in a way can be the hub of *Fracture* … I guess the web site is like the day-to-day version of *Fracture*" (response to questionnaire).

He suggests particularly that the forums are a particularly successful feature of the site, allowing people to talk directly to each other. This is of special relevance when it is compared to Duncombe's observations of *Maximum Rock and Roll*'s letters page functioning as a key the place for the definition of punk (1997: 160-165). However, whereas in Duncombe's study punks wrote in each month with replies to each other's arguments and new definitions in an attempt to decide exactly what was 'punk', the *Fracture* forum allows these people to talk directly to each other. It is however arguable as to whether the facilitation of this more direct form of communication will lead to any greater understanding amongst the punk community as a whole.

Jockrock has both a web site and paper version. The way in which the

relationship between these two formats works is however quite different from

with other fanzines. For *Jockrock*, the web site is the main part of the fanzine,

with the paper version as the ancillary. As publisher Stuart McHugh states, "the

website is FAR more active than the yearly zine. I do try and get 'exclusive'

interviews into the zine however to add some value for people paying a quid or

whatever" (response to questionnaire). The immediacy and ease of keeping

information updated online is what makes the online version such an attractive

proposition here. Interestingly as well, Stuart McHugh also comments that he

personally doesn't like zines that "look too home made"; the implication here is

that information and content is what he is primarily interested in, with the

presentation style not being of such importance.

Entirely Web Based Zines

Of course, the logical progression of the Internet being embraced by

fanzines is the development of web based zines that have no paper version at all.

These 'e-zines' are growing in number as the possibilities presented by electronic

media are explored in greater depth. One e-zine list, although no longer

maintained, when it was last updated on the 8th of March 2000 had a total of

4,392 zines (*E-Zine-List*, http://www.meer.net/~johnl/e-zine-list/).

There is however a certain amount of confusion about what constitutes a zine when it is published not on paper but on the Internet. For example, Michael McHugh's *From E-zines to Mega-zines* article refers to "one of the most successful" e-zines as being *Word* (http://www.word.com). *Word* is however sponsored by Saab, IBM and Mastercard (McHugh 1996). If it were published on paper, it would have immense difficulty in claiming itself to be a zine with its prominent corporate advertising. However, as it is, *Word* can be considered a zine by some; it seems that with the transition to the Internet, there is also some space for the redefinition of what constitutes a fanzine.

Further complicating this issue, there are also many other sites that would be referred to as music e-zines, but which, rather than possibly being too commercial to qualify as such, might be seen as too personal. There are a huge number of sites around the Internet which are fan sites dedicated to one or more bands, suggesting the earlier discussion about the link between personal homepages and perzines.

However, whilst many music-orientated fan sites do not have much original content, instead often featuring band biographies, discographies, and pictures, there is an additional aspect with them to consider.

Copyright has been one of the biggest issues for the Internet. As the situation currently is, it is unclear how the law stands with images and sound being reproduced and available at many web sites. Fanzines have always acted in part as an oppositional force to the mainstream record industry and media. If

they were however to take this further, having copyrighted music available for download, although they might eventually be stopped in the same way that Napster was, for a while at least they would be challenging corporate domination of the record industry. This can be seen as a particularly significant threat if the number of 'e-zine' sites is taken into consideration.

E-zines are, at the moment, operating in a fairly unclear environment. While there are new e-zines being established all the time, only time will tell the format that they will take, the restrictions upon them, and the direction they will follow.

Do Paper Fanzines Have a Future?

Given the uncertainty about the Internet, it is perhaps not surprising that there are numerous opinions about how important it is, or will be. There is scarcely a single area of life that has not been affected in some way by the rise of the Internet in the past decade. While some people have viewed the new media as heralding a new dawn, others have been little less than apocalyptic in their suggestions as to the Internet's ultimate effect. Fanzine publishing is no different from many other areas in that the Internet has brought with it new opportunities, issues and threats. Perhaps the greatest change that has been suggested is that the electronic media will replace the printed, meaning an end to the paper fanzine.

Some view this possible end to the paper fanzine as a threat. The idea here is that if fanzines lose their traditional format then they lose almost everything. Whilst 'e-zines' may continue on the Internet, they will be zines in name only. Others perceive the Internet as the greatest thing that could have happened for fanzine publishing, solving many of the problems traditionally faced by paper fanzines and opening up new opportunities in addition. I now wish to explore these views as they have been expressed by different fanzine writers and commentators.

John Marr, publisher of the influential 1980s zine *Murder Can Be Fun*, has commented that he thinks paper fanzines have gone past their prime. Although much of his 'Zines Are Dead' article seems rooted in a nostalgia for when he was originally publishing his zine, he does state at the end of it that he thinks the "sprit of zines hasn't died. It's just migrated to the web". He then goes on to state "if I was starting out today, no way would I mess with hard copy - I'd go straight to the net. It's cheaper, easier, and faster" (Marr 1999). These benefits are echoed in the following quote:

"I think that if people continue to publish zines in five years time then it may be through some kind of indie ethic rather than because zines are actually 'better' - the benefits of being online are so great." (response to *Jockrock* questionnaire)

These perspectives suggest that paper fanzines are a dying breed. Whilst it may be that "there'll always be some kid in their bedroom making a new fanzine" (response to *Angels Under Starlight* questionnaire), it is suggested here

that the 'kid in their bedroom making a new fanzine' will be an isolated individual. The Internet will grow in strength, attracting fanzine publishers until the point when, although the occasional paper fanzine may be created, it will have generate virtually no interest due to the competing mass of e-zines.

Of the fanzine publishers that I surveyed, views such as that of *Jockrock*'s Stuart McHugh were in a definite minority. Although many were uncertain about whether paper fanzines would continue in any great scale, very few thought that if paper fanzines were to become obsolete then nothing would be lost. On the contrary, a number of fears were expressed that the transition from paper to Internet would leave something vital behind.

Partly, this fear is based on losing the tangibility of the zine. The book publishing industry holds out hope that people will not be overly attracted to literature available on the Internet at the expense of the printed word on the basis that the public prefers the physical characteristics of the book. How much more important could this be then for fanzines, where much of the publication's character is as much in the format as in the content?

This point is perhaps best illustrated by the following quote by Ruth Stowell of *Emancipation*:

"I know lots of people who have electronicised their zines - what was once a lovely cut and paste glitter-coated wad of paper, all personalised and twee, is now a hi-tech for-people-with-computer-access-only affair … there's nothing like

holding the actual zine in your hands stroking it lovingly and admiring the hand

drawn cartoons on the front cover" (response to *Emancipation* questionnaire)

Here the physical attributes of the zine are acknowledged as being of truly

great importance; to lose them would be to lose something vital. At the heart of

this argument is an opposition between the personal, represented by the

traditional paper zine, and the impersonal e-zine, distanced from reader and

creator by computers. It is thought here that an e-zine could never contain the

same character that is inherent in a traditional zine, put together, copied and

distributed by hand. Furthermore, because publicity could well centre around

sending emails and setting up reciprocal links with other sites, there could well

be an end to direct communication with the audience, as there is with fanzine

writers handing out flyers at gigs. This could be seen as a further weakening of

the community basis that fanzines have treasured for many years.

On the level of the physicality of paper fanzines, the same arguments for

paper issues are made as are for books; that a paper publication can be carried

about and read wherever an individual wants. Not wanting paper fanzines to

disappear, Sid Stovold of *Pop Art* comments, "you can't take your computer to

bed to read, can't you?" (response to questionnaire). The fanzine in its paper

format is then valued because of its accessibility; once obtained, it can be read

anywhere, unlike an e-zine, which has to be read off a computer monitor or

printed out. Allied to this idea of paper fanzines as a physical commodity that

can be carried about by someone, they are also possessions that can be collected

and prized for their interesting aspects.

One of the most powerful arguments for fanzines not to go entirely online is that doing so would alienate that part of their readership without computer access. Although the percentage of people connected to the Internet is continually growing, there is also a tendency to forget that a large number of people, many of whom are outside the traditionally white middle class group of fanzine writers, have no opportunity to look at the Internet. Asking Michael Thorn of *Maximum Rock and Roll* whether he though that paper fanzines would continue to exist, his response was "not everyone has access to computers in this world, so what would the point be?" (response to questionnaire). This is a powerful argument, which has to a large extent been overlooked in the assumption that everyone has Internet access. On the contrary, many of *Maximum Rock and Roll*'s readership doesn't. As the leading punk zine, it has a self-appointed responsibility to be accessible to the widest audience as is possible. This audience can also be far removed from the middle class bias that traditionally makes up fanzine culture, spanning every geographical area and including otherwise entirely alienated individuals such as people in prison. The punks that started music zine publishing, as discussed in the history section of this dissertation, were working class and looking for a means of expression. There would be a certain irony if the zines that have developed as a direct result of their example were now to rush onto the Internet and out of the reach of similar people seeking the same means of expression now, but unable to pay for Internet access.

The area of fanzine publishing as a whole is unsure what the future might be. Or, to put it another way, few think that the Internet won't grow in importance and dominate how people think about the publishing of fanzines. What they're unsure about however is whether this will be a good thing or not, and how fanzines will change form during their online transition.

Despite all the worries about the lack of communication and the impersonal nature of the Internet which will put an end to personalised, individual publications, there are many voices to the contrary. Perhaps the most positive perception of the current situation comes from Chip Rowe, publisher of *Chip's Closet Cleaner* **and editor of** *The Book of Zines.* **He has been involved with fanzines for many years and now runs a site of fanzine resources. He suggests that "the medium isn't as important as the motivation. That's what makes it a zine, not whether it's on paper or online" (response to questionnaire). The enthusiasm of the zine publisher will therefore, according to this view, create something interesting, regardless of the format it takes. Whether paper or e-zine, the fanzine ideal will continue in new hands and perhaps in a new media, but still bearing the characteristics that have made it such an intriguing area within modern publishing.**

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

My aim in this dissertation has been to give an overview and appraisal of fanzine publishing, concentrating primarily on music zines, that encompasses their history, current situation and the motivation behind them.

What has been uncovered in my research is that there is some level of difficulty in making generalisations about fanzines as a cohesive group of publications. Whilst the original punk fanzines can be considered comparatively homogenous, from this point of self-publishing inspiration onwards the range of fanzines produced has extended to such a scale that making comparisons between one zine and another on any grounds other than their shared lack of financial resources is extremely problematic.

This difficulty is visible in almost all the areas that I have looked at. Although David Rowe talks about fanzines being "established as alternatives to the major music papers" (1995: 36), I have found that this is not a universal view. Whilst some fanzine writers are publishing their fanzines in order to consciously create an opposition to the mainstream music media and industry in general, others have little interest in posing such an opposition. On the contrary, the experience of fanzines creates in some publishers a respect for the mainstream media's skills, rather than an increased cynicism for 'professional' writers and the belief that magazines such as the *New Music Express* has little to offer in comparison with fanzines.

What can however be successfully argued is that fanzines have made self-publishing a viable option for almost anyone seeking expression, in many ways prefiguring the Internet in bringing publishing within the grasp of the general populace. The drawback is however that fanzines have severe problems in distribution and promotion. There is so little information about fanzines available outside of fanzine culture itself that there can be little chance of reaching an audience outside of fanzine producers themselves and their white, middle class and educated social group.

The lack of any widely available review zine, such as *Factsheet Five* in its prime, is a huge drawback for fanzine writers who are forced to limit themselves to flyers and reviews in other zines to gain publicity for their publication.

The Internet poses significant opportunities for fanzines as a whole as an area where small-scale publishers can have as good a chance as professionals to be recognised for the quality of their work. At the same time, the electronic media has been suggested as meaning the end of fanzine's personalised style. It is clear that the Internet will have a huge impact on what is thought of as a 'zine'. However, the exact shape that this impact will take is less than clear in any area of modern life, and is even less so in a field where the individual people and publications are as heterogeneous as in fanzines.

What can however be predicted is that fanzines and the spirit that leads to their production will continue indefinitely. The original punk fanzines were

created by a youth movement that wanted to take the power of the printed word into its own hands and since then there has been no shortage of people with the same desire to publish their own work. Even if it is on a small scale and generally limited to its own cultural group, fanzine publishing still means that, in theory, anyone can print whatever they want and get it to a reading audience. This concept has if anything grown in strength due to the availability of technology that broadens the options of the prospective self-publisher and will not now just die away.

Fanzines are perhaps never to achieve a true 'dominance' of the media but at the same time they are not to be discounted. Fanzine publishing and its ideals will always provide an undercurrent of free expression that balances out the established media.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Due to the unconventional form of fanzines, full bibliographic information is not available as it would be for mainstream publications. Information on the fanzines researched in this dissertation is presented in appendix B.

The following e-zine sites were also used in the writing of this dissertation:

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Appendix A -
The Fanzine Questionnaire

The following questions formed the questionnaire that I sent out to fanzine publishers during my research.

Name: Age:

Title of Fanzine: Circulation:

How long have you been producing fanzines and how did you get into it?

What would you say the point of fanzines is?

What makes a fanzine either good or bad?

What are your main thoughts when designing your fanzine?

What are the main things you've learnt (if anything!) while producing fanzines?

How do you take care of your zine's promotion and distribution?

Do you eventually want to get into a music-related job?

Have your views on commercial music magazines changed through your experiences of fanzines?

Does your fanzine have a website? If so, what do you use it for?

Do you think paper fanzines will ever disappear, replaced by electronic ones?

Appendix B – List of Fanzines Researched

Title	Issue Numbers	Production Methods[1]	Publisher/Editor[2]	No. of pages and size	Circul
Angels Under Starlight	2, 3	HW/WP/C+P	Helen	44pp A5	15-
Astrochimps	6	TW/C+P	Simon Hampson	26pp A5	N/
But First The News	1, 2	DTP	Mark Seager	40pp A5	30-
Codeye	6	WP/C+P	Robert Slavery	32pp A5	N/
Dilemm-ahhh!	6	DTP	Deano	24pp A4	N/
Dogprint	10	DTP	Lenny	96pp A4	N/
Emancipation	5, 11 - 13	DTP	Ruth Stowell	28pp A5	50-
Fifth Season	16	WP	Robert	2pp A4	N/
Fracture	4, 8	DTP	Russell Remains	104pp A4	5,0
heldlikesound	3	DTP	John Davis	80pp A4	N/
Hobble Oblong	Deborah	WP/C+P	"Hog", "Moth" and "Shaggy"	22pp A4	N/
Homegrown	5	WP/C+P	N/A	24pp A5	N/
Homelovin'	3	WP/C+P	Paul Haworth	20pp A5	15
IndiePendent, The	7	WP/C+P	Xana Charnock	32pp A5	N/
jockrock	3	DTP	Stuart McHugh	24pp A5	N/
Juicy	3	DTP	K. Harknett	26pp A4	N/
Maximum RockNRoll	213	DTP	Michael Thorn	160pp A4	10,(
Modern Rock Magazine	8	WP	Tim Ellison	32pp A5	250-
No38	2	WP/C+P	Helen	40pp A5	2
Original Sin, The	31	DTP	Didier Becu	52pp A5	5(
Paranoid Endjinn, The	4	DTP	Hugh Platt	60pp A5	5(
Planet Boo	45, 46	WP/C+P	Patrick Gray	4pp A5	N/
Pop Art	4, 5	WP/HW/C+P	Sid Stovold	36pp A5	N/
P'tahk	2	DTP	Steve Russell	24pp A4	6(
Scuba Diver	1, 2	WP/C+P	Charlotte	2pp A4	N/
Veronica	1	WP/C+P	Mhairi, Kirsteen and Marie	40pp A4	N/

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[1] Methods used in the production of fanzines: HW - handwritten, WP - word processed, C+P - cut and Paste, TW - Typewriter, DTP - Desktop Publishing
[2] Some fanzine publishers only use their first names or pseudonyms. The name given for each fanzine is the main person responsible for the publication with the exception of a few fanzines, such as *Maximum Rock and Roll*, which are edited by a small group of people.
[3] Circulation figures are not easy to acquire for fanzines, first because of few fanzine publishers keeping records and secondly because of fanzine writers not wanting to reveal them. "N/A" therefore represents circulation figures not available.