



UNDERGROUND MUSIC FANZINES from the late 1980s - early 90s

I had no musical ability and I wasn't old enough to be a college radio DJ. I was into art and writing but needed something much more interesting to work on than the high school yearbook. I wanted to contribute to the underground music and publishing communities, make new friends and interview my favorite bands. So from 1988 until 1991 I published *Primary Concern*, a thick photocopied 'zine that I wrote, designed, printed, and assembled with few outside contributors. I started the 'zine in Philadelphia when I was in high school and ended it while I was at college in Pittsburgh.

While publishing *Primary Concern* I acquired a pile of similar photocopied publications through trades, free review copies, or purchases. The collection of fanzines in this booklet is the result of my own participation in this culture. Most of these 'zines were made by high school or college kids like myself. We were all figuring it out as we went along, sometimes looking to more established 'zines for inspiration. The musical focus was on hardcore punk and metal with the occasional nod to other noisy forms of rock.

'Zines felt necessary back then. They were a source of news, information and opinion. This was pre-internet and there was little mainstream interest in most of this music. Interviews with bands were hard to come by and information and opinions about new releases - demo tapes in particular - were needed.

INTERVIEWS

Band interviews were conducted through the mail, in person, or recorded over the phone using speakerphone or a cheap suction cup mic. In some cases I looked up band members' phone numbers using directory assistance. For the bigger groups, record labels would schedule interview times and have band members call people from the label's office. One of my favorite memories of doing a 'zine was imploring my mom not to embarrass me by picking up the phone one afternoon because Jeff Hanneman from Slayer was going to be calling. For all I knew, Jeff Hanneman might have still been living with his parents too. Many band members still lived with Mom and Dad.

LAYOUT and PRINTING / PRODUCTION and CIRCULATION

The layout of these publications ranges from raw and nearly illegible to clear and well-organized. Most covers have one central image and a list of contents or a cluster of band logos to announce who was featured. Cut and paste design is the norm; photos were glued directly into the layout. The text might be handwritten, typed on a typewriter, printed on a dot matrix printer, or -less commonly - printed on a laser printer. Some publishers would have a print shop make half tones from their photos to improve the image quality when they ran through a photocopier, but many did not go to this trouble or expense. Circulations were in the hundreds of copies or less. In a recent email, Tony Rettman who published *I4NI*, wrote that he doubts he made more than a hundred copies of each issue. Assembly was done by hand. Most copiers couldn't 'build' a whole publication in the machine like they can now. I often had to print one side of a page at a time, then run the other side through and repeat this process for hours. The double-sided printing often jammed the copier. Collating the pages was done by hand, kneeling on the floor picking up a page at a time. It was back-breaking work.

Most 'zines were made with letter-size (8 ½" by 11") paper and stapled in the upper left corner or along the edges. The binding on the booklet you are holding is a tribute to this aesthetic. The copiers one could use for free often did not have the more expensive 11" by 17" tabloid paper that is used for saddle-stitched letter-size booklets. No one I knew had a long reach stapler. Some publishers made half letter-size booklets, but without a long reach stapler this format was hard to bind. I had to swing the stapler's arm open, place the pages on a soft surface like a carpet, aim for the right place along the spine and then fold the staples closed by hand.

I experimented with letter, half letter, and half legal formats. A few 'zines used full legal formats but this was uncommon; that size is awkward to carry or mail without folding. European 'zines commonly used similar variations but with the taller and skinnier A4 size paper. Some 'zines have a different paper stock for the cover, but generally whatever was used for the inside pages was used for the outside as well. Some publishers added hand coloring to the cover or were able to find a copy shop that could do single color copies with a different toner color such as cyan or magenta. Toward the end of my days of publishing *Primary Concern* I did a couple issues with two color covers by buying a cyan cartridge for a small office copier my parents bought for home use.

DISTRIBUTION and ECONOMICS

'Zines were sold at shows, at independent record and book stores, through the occasional chain like Tower Records, and through mail order. Many 'zines featured a 'zine review section that would tell you how much cash to send to the publisher to get a copy. 'Zine publishers exchanged print ads. A positive review in a well-known publication like *MAXIMUMROCKNROLL* or *Factsheet Five* could yield thirty mail orders from all over the world. I was mailing out thirty or forty letters and 'zines a week.

There was a strong ethic about keeping cover prices low. Few 'zines cost more than \$2.00. If your 'zine looked like it should have sold for less, people wanted to know why you were charging more than everyone else. You were expected to scam free photocopying - at school, a parent's office job, or through a friend at a copy shop. I printed most issues of *Primary Concern* for free thanks to my father who let me use the office's copier on weekends (he also mailed copies all over the world using the firm's postage meter). When I went to college I hunted for copy cards that people forgot in the machines at the library.

Since I wasn't paying for printing I usually gave a portion of the cover price to charity. I used the proceeds from one issue to make dozens of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches that my friends and I piled into bags and passed out to homeless people in Philadelphia. Another issue benefited the anti-censorship group Music In Action. I was inspired by the many benefit records from this period where hardcore bands would submit songs for a compilation album that raised money for a social or political cause.

People illegally recycled postage stamps by coating them in water-soluble white glue so that the cancelation would adhere to the glue rather than soak into the stamp. The recipient could then wash the glue and reuse the stamps or return them the next time they wrote back. Others would soak used stamps in rubbing alcohol, which could sometimes draw out the cancellation ink.

There were some creative approaches to mailing too. Many 'zines were mailed out by taping the pages shut, throwing some stamps on the back cover and writing the recipient's mailing address in a space left free for that purpose. No envelope needed.

Doing a 'zine was not a money-making endeavor; it wasn't expected to be. There were other rewards from publishing: friends, access to bands, other 'zines, the occasional press pass for getting into shows, and a ton of free demo tapes, records, tapes, posters and eventually CDs.

WHERE ARE THESE PUBLISHERS NOW?

Most of these 'zines were short lived. Some lasted for a couple issues; others were published for several years. As far as I can tell, the only 'zines in this collection that still exist are *Metal Core* and *Dagger*. Tim Hinely began publishing *Dagger* in 1987, and he published his most recent issue, #43, in Winter 2010. *Metal Core*, published by Chris Forbes, seems to be web-only at this point. Other publishers are still involved with music journalism or publishing. Tony Rettman from *I4NI* is a regular magazine writer and recently authored the book *Why Be Something That You're Not - Detroit Hardcore 1979-1985* (Revelation Records Publishing, 2010). Newt Rayburn's old commercial website from the mid 2000s shows that he did plenty of other design work for publications after the run of his 'zine *Assault with Intent to Free*.

I stopped publishing *Primary Concern* in 1991 after seven issues. Trying to do a 'zine and be a full-time college student was more than I could handle. I did not try to integrate my 'zine with what I was doing in college, and eventually I burned out. In high school I had a nearly impossible time finding friends who shared my interests; doing a 'zine helped me find friends all over the world. This was no longer a problem when I moved to Pittsburgh to go to college; I was able to find local people who shared my interests in obscure music, art, and leftist politics.

In 1997, a couple years after I finished grad school for art in Chicago, the self-publishing bug bit me again when I realized that I didn't want to exhibit in commercial galleries. I began making self-published artist books, booklets and tracts in an effort to develop a large and diverse audience for my art. Since 1998 I've been part of the group Temporary Services (temporaryservices.org) and over the last thirteen years we have published over ninety booklets and books to share our ideas, document projects, and supplement our exhibitions. In 2008 Temporary Services started the publishing imprint and web-store Half Letter Press (halfletterpress.com) that produces book-length publications and works to improve distribution for printed work by ourselves and other small presses and individuals.

In 2007, in an effort to better circulate obscure cultural resources like these 'zines, I started Public Collectors. Public Collectors makes publications too, and this is the tenth publication under that imprint. Twenty-three years after starting *Primary Concern*, I still see self-publishing as a critical tool for presenting information, generating interest in underexposed art, and building networks and communities. I'm still interviewing people, writing and designing, sending publications out in the mail, and I'm answering more letters than ever (though it's almost all through email). Sometimes I photocopy and I still fold and staple some things myself to save money.

I have copies of every issue of my old 'zine, but I find the juvenilia of other people much more appealing than my own. At least 1,400 copies of *Primary Concern* exist in theory, but I'm sure many were discarded. If you dig deep enough into the other publications in my collection you may find an ad for my 'zine, a review of it, or a piece of writing that I contributed. I've included a reproduction of one cover in this booklet.

A lot of the writing in these 'zines hasn't held up very well, my own in particular. Many of the bands that we interviewed expressed themselves in more compelling ways through their music and concerts. Some of the graphic design is inventive, but a lot of it is as crude as one might expect from a teenager. Nonetheless, there is great youthful energy here and plenty of history. For many publishers these 'zines were only the beginning. Many of us are still devoted to writing, journalism, design, art, political activism, community building and self-publishing. In many cases, these amateur efforts are just a preview of a deeper commitment to come. I know that I'll continue making publications for the rest of my life.

> - Marc Fischer July 2011



Primary Concern #2. Published by Marc Fischer, Philadelphia, PA, 1988.



Metallic Overtones Ltd. #1. Published by Chuck "The Beans" Rampage, North Huntingdon, PA, 1989.



Dagger #9, 10, 11, and 12. Published by Tim Hinely, Somers Point, NJ, 1989-90.



Soulless Structures #4. Published by Michael Mclellan, Pendleton, SC, circa 1991.



This 'Zine Sucks #11. Published by Bob Conrad, Trenton, NJ, 1988.

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UNITED STATES

Bullshit Monthly #20. Published by Mike Bullshit, New York, NY, 1989.

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Bullshit Monthly #21. Published by Mike Bullshit, New York, NY, 1989.



I4NI #8. Published by Tony Rettman, Trenton, NJ, 1988.





The Happy Thrasher #6, 7, 8 and 9. Published by Tin Ear, Orange, CA, 1989.



Real World Fanzine #2? Published by Todd Felzer, Huntington Valley, PA, circa 1987-88.



Hell Toupée #4? Published by Alyson Mead and Phoebe Love, New York, NY, circa 1988-89.



Philly 'Zine #1, 8, 9, and 10. Published by Jesse Townley and Sean, Philadelphia, PA, 1987-89.



Metal Core #9. Published by Chris Forbes, Marlton, NJ. 1989.



Viable Alternative #2. Published by Dave Epileptic, Philadelphia, PA, 1988.



Bulimia #2. Published by Rod Carty, Somers Point, NJ, 1988.



Suburban Death #1. Published by Kevin Templeton, Port Coquitlam, B.C., Canada, 1990.



Total Thrash #10, 12, 13 and 14. Published by Scott Helig, Philadelphia, PA, 1988-89.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARK E. OF

Interview by Mike Farrell

Mike: So, what's up with Unrest these days?

Mark: We have a new record coming out next Friday on Caroline Records entitled "Kustom Karnel Blackxpliotation." And, we are putting out a single on K Records. But, hopefully the next one will be on Teenbeat (Mark's label). Mike: Why didn't you put the new LP out on Teenbeat?

Mark: We had a contract we signed with Caroline, so we had to do it for them or else we'd get sued or something.

Mike: I have heard mixed emotions about them, how are things going with them?

Mark: They're alright, I don't think they pay much attention to us and I don't think they like us very much, but they're doing our record. So...

Mike: How about some history of Unrest?

Mark: We formed in '83. Phil Kroauth and I have been playing around for a while (in high school) and then our friend, Tim Moran, was learning to play guitar, so we invited him to come to some of our practices. So, we kind of had a band going. We were originally called King of Prussia. And, then we changed it to Unrest in 1984. So, it has been pretty much that same band except Tim left in 1987 and we had Dave Park for a couple of years. He just quit the band last week. So, we have no bass player right now (they have since added a bass player). Mike: So, you aren't playing around the area at all. Mark: Actually, no. We are playing Thursday in New York. We are just using a friend of ours to play.

Mike: Had you been in any other bands before Unrest?

THRE

Mark: No, I have never been in any other bands.



We have some little side bands, but nothing real.

Mike: For a while you were doing something with just Kiss covers, right?

Mark: Yeah, we were talking about that, but it never happened. (laughter) Mike: You did some Kiss stuff on the first album.

Mark: Yeah, Unrest did.

Mike: What's the deal with Kiss?

Mark: I don't know, I have just liked them a lot when I was a little kid with their makeup and everything. Actually, I am supposed to meet Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley tomorrow. They are coming up to this radio station in Maryland where my friend is the program direction. So, I am going to go up their and meet them, that should be pretty cool.

Mike: As far as Teenbeat, did you set that up?

Mark: Yeah, I started that myself.

Mike: What is going on with that now? Mark: We are releasing a bunch of stuff. This band called Johnny Cohen's Love Machine by this schizophrenic guy who lives in DC, who is really cool. this band in New York called the DUSTdevils, we are putting out an album by them, and this band in Harrisonburg, VA called Sexual Milkshake, they are kind of like the next GWAR but a little more low key. And, then Scaley Andrew from Richmond, VA. We are doing a bunch of stuff.

Mike: Has the band toured at all? Mark: We did a short tour and went up to Canada and New England.

Mike: How was the response? 'Mark: It depended on each city. Like

Mark: It depended on each city. Like Minneapolis was really, really cool; New York, where we played a bunch of times was very cool; Philadelphia, and probably my favorite place was Pittsburgh because everybody loved us there. (laughter) And, we have been playing a bunch

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The Urinal #3. Published by Mike Farrell, Richmond, VA, 1990.



Disarray #2. published by Tim McCarthy, Philadelphia PA, circa 1988.



Breach of Copyright #3. Published by Robert Pleshar, Pittsburgh, PA, 1987.



Poser Death #2. Published by Chris McClain and Todd Walsh, West Chester, PA, circa 1987.



Stranger #4. Published by Eric Szantai, Trenton, NJ, 1988.

About UNDERGROUND MUSIC FANZINES from the late 1980s - early 90s

This booklet was created to accompany a presentation of over two hundred photocopied fanzines from the collection of Marc Fischer during a two day reading room event at The STORE-FRONT in Chicago, Illinois. This selection of 'zines was also shared alongside over two hundred audio cassettes featuring many of the bands that are featured in these publications. Viewers were invited to play cassettes of their choosing while reading the 'zines.

UNDERGROUND MUSIC FANZINES from the late 1980s - early 90s was presented on Saturday and Sunday, August 6 & 7, 2011, from 12-5 PM at:

The STOREFRONT

2606 N California Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Directed by Brandon Alvendia, The STOREFRONT is an exhibition, event, and publishing venue in the Logan Square neighborhood of Chicago. It is designed to support local artists working on either temporary and/or long-term sustainable projects. Projects will be archived and published for international distribution. www.alvendia.net

Special thanks to Brendan Alvendia for hosting this Public Collectors event and to Jen Blair for copy editing on the essay.

About PUBLIC COLLECTORS

Public Collectors is founded upon the concern that there are many types of cultural artifacts that public libraries, museums and other institutions and archives either do not collect or do not make freely accessible. Public Collectors asks individuals that have had the luxury to amass, organize, and inventory these materials to help reverse this lack by making their collections public.

The purpose of this project is for large collections of materials to become accessible so that knowledge, ideas and expertise can be freely shared and exchanged.

In addition to hosting collection inventories and other information, www.publiccollectors.org includes digital collections that are suitable for web presentation, do not have a physical material analog, or are difficult or impossible to experience otherwise. Additional scans of 'zines can be found on the main website and on the Flickr page of Public Collectors.

Public Collectors is administered by Marc Fischer. If you have a collection you'd like to share, or if you have research questions or would like to see any of these 'zines in person, email: marc@publiccollectors.org.

WWW.PUBLICCOLLECTORS.ORG

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