Margins in Motion: Towards a Political History of Zine Culture

By

Izabeau Legendre

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Abstract

This thesis is a problem-based history of zine culture. It is conceived as an intervention in the burgeoning field of Zine Studies. It spans across about a century of zine history and covers a wide range of corpuses: from science fiction fanzines of the 1930s and 1940s to punk and post-punk zines of the 1970s to 1990s, to more recent graphzines and artzines. Its comparative approach also covers large areas: North America and Western Europe, English and French linguistic areas.

Through a series of case studies, important theoretical questions are addressed: How are zines defined? On what grounds was zine culture founded? What role did political discourses and ideologies play in zine history? How is the international dissemination of zine culture affected by culture at the national level? What are the political consequences of Zine Studies on zine culture?

The political underpinnings of these questions are the focus of my approach, the objective being to recast the notions of “zine history” and “zine politics” in more clearly defined terms. The overall aim of this thesis is thus to open new questions and renew a field of study in steady growth since its inception more than 25 years ago.
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Introduction

In *Writing a Riot*, one of the most recent book-length studies of zines and zine culture, Rebekah Buchanan (2018) explicitly situates her work on Riot Grrrl zines in the growing field of Zine Studies. In doing so, she points at the extraordinary development of scholarship on zines and zine culture over the last quarter of century or so. Zine Studies have only recently been acknowledged as constituting a distinct field of scholarship. Anna Poletti (2008) was perhaps the first scholar to use the phrase. Janice Radway (2011) was certainly the first to take Zine Studies as an object proper and to consider its recent history, and the role it plays in zine culture. Radway was also, incidentally, the first to outline various perspectives for future scholarship on zines, a call explicitly answered some years later by Buchanan (Radway, 2011: 142; Buchanan, 2018: 3). Despite being a strong and welcome addition to Zine Studies, Buchanan’s work also illustrates some of the limitations of the field in its current state. In many ways—that is, in terms of national context, historical period and population of zine makers—Buchanan engages only with a corpus that has become the closest thing to a zine “canon” over the last 15 years: zines produced by American young women in the 1990s, mostly in relation to the Riot Grrrl movement1.

This thesis is primarily conceived as an intervention into Zine Studies, motivated by a desire to expand its horizons. In her citation analysis of Zine Studies, Anne Adkinson (a.k.a. Hays) has eloquently shown how scholarly literature on zines has been steadily gaining momentum since the beginning of the 1990s (Hays, 2020: 10). Yet major portions of zine culture have remained relatively

1 Buchanan herself recognizes her preference for this well-studied corpus, noting that “By far, Zine Studies is most heavily populated by the work on young women zine creators.” (Buchanan, 2018: 5) She situates her work more specifically in the field of “girl Zine Studies,” although she considers it a contribution to the broader scholarly field of Zine Studies: “I hope to show the amount of work that is done just on women and girls as cultural producers and how this work alone is enough to make Zine Studies a legitimate area of scholarship and exploration” (Buchanan, 2018: 19: endnote 7).
untouched by scholars thus far. I want to expand both the historical breadth—upstream into the birth of zine culture in the 1930s and 1940s, downstream into contemporary zine culture—and the cultural and geographical scope, touching on other English-speaking areas (the United Kingdom, Canada) but also Francophone and European contexts (mostly France, with hints into Quebec, Belgium, and Germany). By offering, to the best of my ability, a macro perspective on zine culture, my hope is to open Zine Studies to new approaches, new objects, and new questions.

Although the author did not use the term, Zine Studies is generally considered to have made its introduction in academia with the publication of Stephen Duncombe’s *Notes from Underground. Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* in 1997. This was a brilliant piece of political scholarship, at once erudite, acute, and incisive, so much so that, over 25 years later, most zine scholarship seems to have remained in its tracks. *Notes from Underground* remains by far the most cited work in the field of Zine Studies (Hays, 2020: 3). In 2011, Radway considered Duncombe’s work “still the best account of the zine phenomenon” (Radway, 2011: 142). More recently, Buchanan suggested that it might still be the most up-to-date, exhaustive study of zines and zine culture (Buchanan, 2018: 19, endnote 7). This certainly attests to the great quality of Duncombe’s approach to the zine culture of his time. But it may also indicate a severe limitation in the scope of the field today.

Duncombe centred his study on a series of three interlocked concepts: individuality, community, and the Do-It-Yourself ethics (DIY). Zines, for Duncombe, are simultaneously acts of personal expression and a tool for community building. They gather people in networked communities and promote self-realization through active participation in cultural production. Drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin (1970), Duncombe sees in zine culture a critique in action of the cultural

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2 1,381 citations on Google Scholar as of December 6, 2023. Compare this with the second most cited work in the field, Alison Piepmeier’s *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism*, published in 2009, with 401 citations. I can also note that citations to Duncombe seem to grow faster than those to Piepmeier.
producer/consumer divide, encouraging instead a blurring of the roles: “This notion of emulation—turning your readers into writers—is elemental to the zine world” (Duncombe, 1997: 123). This, in turn, makes zine culture a social space at the border of the public and the private (Duncombe, 1997: 71), an “underground” community opposed to, and sheltered from, the “mainstream” society and its imperatives (Duncombe, 1997: 141—173). For Duncombe, this creates an implicit affinity of zine culture with anarchism as a political ideology:

On the most basic level, anarchism is the philosophy of individual dissent within the context of volunteer communities, and zines are the products of individual dissenters who have set up volunteer networks of communication with one another […] the underground ideal of authenticity is part of the tradition of anarchism as well. (Duncombe, 1997: 35)

The approach favoured by Duncombe—privileging political analysis and cultural criticism—has ever since dominated academic Zine Studies. Most of the book-length studies forming the core of the academic literature on zines have adopted a similar focus (Hays, 2020: 13). More importantly, the zines he dedicated his attention to—American zines of the 1980s and 1990s—have remained the focus of subsequent zine scholars. While Duncombe studied the zine culture of his time, later scholars have drifted towards history by working on zines from the same period. This has contributed to obscure other zine corpuses and to narrow our understanding of zine culture. What I intend to do with this thesis can be understood as an attempt to follow the spirit rather than the letter of Duncombe’s seminal work.

One point on which Duncombe has been severely criticized in subsequent scholarship is his understanding of zine politics. According to him, even though zine culture fostered radical political

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3 This concurs with my own observations as I surveyed zine scholarship. I have published elsewhere an extensive bibliography of Zine Studies (Legendre, 2023). Building on previous efforts (Dodge, 1998; Zobl, 2003; Wulff & Vonderau, 2007; Macquarie, 2011; JuBri, 2017; Rauch, 2021), my work gathers 918 references spanning from 1939 to early 2023, including 118 references in French. This bibliography is the most exhaustive effort of its kind to date to be published in either language.
discourses and concrete political ideals in action, zines remained “pre-political,” ultimately unable to accomplish the political goals their makers set for them:

The reason [modern underground culture] has been so vibrant and expansive in a time when radical politics were in retreat is that it has no real politics. In its safe haven it can lambast the power that be, tilt at windmills, conjure up new ways of seeing, being, and doing, but never have to confront power. But [...] the reason why this underground culture can never be sustained, nor its ideals be expanded intact, outside its own ghetto is also because it has no politics. It has no effective way to repel co-optation by parasitic marketers, no way to reach out to the unconverted, no way to mediate between the annihilation of purity and the danger of selling out, and finally no way to combat the political and economic machine that is the cause of the alienation it protests. By looking for cultural and individual solutions to what are essentially structural and societal problems, and locked into the contradiction of being wed to the society it hates, the underground inevitably fails. (Duncombe, 1997: 193–194)

Given the central place of politics in his study of zine culture, this assessment did not sit right with scholars working in Duncombe’s wake. Alison Piepmeier was perhaps the first to formulate an alternative to the dead-end he thought zine culture was stuck in. Duncombe, Piepemeier argued, was wrong in trying to impose the categories of conventional political movements and theory on zines, an essentially unconventional object:

What replaces traditional political engagement, in the world of grrrl zines, are pedagogies of hope. These hopeful interventions are not identical to traditional modes of doing politics, but they are political nonetheless, because they are drawing attention to what’s wrong with the world, awakening their readers’ outrage, and providing tools for challenging existing power structures. (Piepmeier, 2009: 162)

The most important contributions to Zine Studies have stepped into the breach opened by Piepmeier, finding innovative ways of understanding zine making and zine culture as inherently political, be it in different terms than traditional politics and social movements.

To this day, the scholarly understanding of zine politics seems to have remained in this reaction to Duncombe’s pessimism. Buchanan, for instance, concurred with Piepmeier in seeing zines as spaces for intimate yet public forms of writing for young women, occasions to challenge and reconfigure dichotomies, and explore active cultural participation (Buchanan, 2018: xxvii). Another important zine
scholar, Adela Licona, extended and radicalized for her part the framework offered by Piepmeier to include a more consistent emphasis on race and intersectionality. In her work, however, zine politics moved even further into theory, to the point of making zines instruments of political theory, rather than using theory to better understand zines and zine culture:

Understanding the countercultural production of zines is important especially insofar as it reveals the pursuit of social change, the building of community, and the participation in community action [...] As I illustrate, zines also have much to teach us about re-presentations of self and community as contradictory, complicated, ambiguous, and on the move. They have much to reveal about the practices and performances of lived theory. (Licona, 2012: 2–3)

In reaction to Duncombe’s apparent pessimism, these scholars have highlighted the political work of feminist, queer and racialized zine makers and their own optimistic understanding of zine politics. The emphasis on a different zine maker population—mostly young women—has considerably opened the field to questions previously unaddressed. Yet, both Duncombe and subsequent zine scholars working with and against his seminal study seem to have overlooked important aspects of zine politics. So far, zine scholarship has lacked description of internal political dynamics within zine culture, in my opinion a necessary step to assess its transformative political potential. Too focused on affirming—or negating—the political character of zine culture, Zine Studies has been unable to see the political where it is. Instead, it focused on where it should be. Building on the work of political theorists and sociologists (Arendt, 2013; Bourdieu, 1985; 1991a; 1991b; Foucault, 1978; 1997; Freeden, 1996; 2013; Mouffe, 2005; Rancière, 1999; 2010), I am hoping to provide a more solid definition of zine politics recast in its own context of production.

It is common practice for zine scholars to disclose their own positionality regarding zines and zine culture. Usually, this takes the form of a narrative highlighting a personal connection with zine making. In my case, although I have occasionally contributed to zines since over a decade, my
approach is most strongly rooted in my experience as a scholar working on zine culture in Quebec. As a researcher, I have been working with zine makers in Quebec since 2017, a work that eventually led to the publishing of the first major study of French-language zine culture in Quebec, *La scène du zine de Montréal* (Legendre, 2022). As I was becoming more familiar with the history of zines in Quebec on the one hand, and with zine scholarship on the other, it became increasingly visible that my object of study was at odds with how zines were generally understood by scholars. Zines were generally described as self-published periodicals strongly influenced by the punk subculture, DIY ethics, and radical politics. Most contemporary zines in Quebec, however, were single issues, better understood as small self-published books than periodicals, and were borrowing more heavily from artists’ publications than from radical political pamphlets or subcultural periodicals. Scholars celebrated the underground character of zines and their participation in alternative culture. In Quebec, however, contemporary zine culture seemed to be increasingly integrated to the cultural field, in dialogue with contemporary comics, poetry, and visual arts. The “zine economy”—the circuit in which zines were created, printed, distributed, read, and archived—seemed to have a stronger impact on the political, aesthetic, and ethical values referred to by actors of Quebec’s zine culture than any direct connection with social or political movements, although these certainly also existed. The chronologies did not match either. The birth of zines as a distinct medium is usually dated to the 1930s science fiction fan circles. In Quebec, the first French-language zine, *Requiem*, was published in 1974, soon followed by other science fiction and comics zines. It was, however, obvious that these zines were not born locally in isolation from the global dissemination of zine culture. They explicitly mentioned American and French sources of inspiration and drew heavily on the international networks established over the previous four decades. In short, my experience with zine culture in Quebec highlighted major shortcomings in scholarship, namely the universalizing of the American context, and the overemphasis on zine culture of the 1980s and 1990s at the expense of both older and more recent corpuses. In
addition to reframing zine politics, this thesis thus answers to a need for a comparative approach to zine history. These seem to me the two preconditions for an opening of the field of Zine Studies, in which scholars can embark on retrieving corpuses and connections between them, renewing approaches, raising new questions and, more importantly, mapping out promising new topics for further research.

A patient and cautiously critical reading of zine scholarship has guided my approach. As I dug into this flourishing literature, I realized that Zine Studies itself had become an important part of contemporary zine culture. It appeared necessary to take zine scholarship as an object of study to really bring a substantial contribution to the field. The first chapter of this thesis follows this intuition by engaging with the question of zine definitions. Instead of formulating a provisional, “working definition”—a feature of virtually all important contribution to Zine Studies—it interrogates previous efforts. This shift in perspective reveals the role definitions play in zine culture, for academics and commentators, but also for creators. Drawing from semiotics and structural linguistics, I try to show how the problem of definition touches upon discursive representations of zines and zine culture, but also impacts how and what kinds of zines are created and circulated. Two case studies—the debate over what was the first zine, and the anxiety over the death foretold of zines at the turn of the previous millennium—illustrate the stakes at play in zine definitions. Incidentally, this first chapter also provides the historical background necessary to navigate zine history as explored throughout the subsequent chapters.

The remaining four chapters of this thesis can be read as separate essays structured around specific case studies, each highlighting a different corpus, and each relying on a different theoretical and methodological framework and raising its own series of questions and problems. This approach, privileging induction over deduction, seemed necessary to the type of intervention I wanted to make in Zine Studies. It is inspired by the Italian school of microhistory. Not necessarily a history of minor
objects—as an uninformed parallel with the notion of “micropolitics” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) might suggest—nor a history of the “micro” in opposition to the “macro,” microhistory addresses large scale phenomena starting with the details, the banal. A metaphor often used is “history through the lens of a microscope” (Ghobrial, 2019: 13). As one of the founders of microhistory, Giovanni Levi, put it: “even the apparently minutest action of, say, somebody going to buy a loaf of bread, actually encompasses the far wider system of the whole world’s grain markets.” (Levi, 2001: 100) This approach makes it possible to cover a wide range of objects and treat them with care for both their specificity and their interrelations. Understanding the bigger picture must be grounded in the methodical study of primary sources. These include zines, of course, but also blogs, social media posts, personal websites, magazine and newspaper articles, podcasts, documentary films—any form of discourse produced by actors of zine culture.

The second chapter of this thesis focuses on the beginnings of zine culture in American science fiction fandom in the 1930s and 1940s. It follows the story of The Futurians, a collective of aspiring science fiction writers, editors, publishers, and literary agents who later played an instrumental role in the development of modern science fiction. Building on the mass of available scholarship and primary sources, through online resources such as the Internet Archive, the Fanac.org fanzine archive, and the Fancyclopedia 3 project, I sketch a prosopography—or collective biography—of both the Futurians and the broader population of early zine makers. The Great Exclusion, a controversy opposing the Futurians to another group of fans, New Fandom, is at the centre of the narrative of early zine culture I present. Acts of foundation, mostly the creation of the first institutions dedicated to zines, appear as the main stake in this major confrontation, showing how power relationships and political in-fighting has been part of zine history from the beginning.

The third chapter dives into the most studied corpus in zine scholarship: punk and post-punk zine culture. More specifically, it builds on Michael Freeden’s conceptual approach to political
ideologies (1996) to study the evolution of ideological discourses in punk zines. Starting with Crass and British anarcho-punk in the late 1970s, I follow the ebbs and flows of political debates throughout the 1980s and 1990s. To do so, I draw from zines and supporting material, but also from the extensive literature already available on punk and post-punk zines. My focus is on the relationship between ideological discourses and political action on the one hand, and on the dynamics opposing internal political and external political change on the other. By emphasizing the intricacy of political discourse and action, and of internal debates and external political change, I hope to contribute to the ongoing discussion in zine scholarship over the political relevance and potential of zines and zine culture.

I had to come to grips with the field as well, of course. I knew from my work on Montreal’s zine scene how even the most influential zine makers could be unknown to the outside world. Given the scope of this thesis, I had to make choices for my international case study. I decided to prioritize field work in France over the United States or the United Kingdom. The lack of available studies on zine culture in France, even in the French language, made the choice an easy one. Less obvious was my choice not to conduct interviews. Although it was a gamble, I assumed that once on location, I would find a wealth of interviews already published in zines, books, and blogs, just like I had found for the American and British contexts. This gamble largely paid off. I thus focused my efforts on getting access to zines, visiting archives and libraries, and informally meeting the largest number of zine culture actors as possible.

The result of this field research trip was the fourth chapter of this thesis, in which I explore the particularities of French zine culture. At the centre of my analysis is a court case against a major actor—printer and publisher of graphzines Le Dernier Cri—and the controversial Berlin-based American artist Stu Mead, filed in 2015 and still pending to this day. The art of Mead, the graphzine tradition to which Le Dernier Cri belongs, and the threat of legal repression embodied by the lawsuit
all offer a privileged point of entry into the particularities of French zines and their place in global zine
culture.

The fifth and final chapter operates a reflexive turn and explores the role played by zine scholars
in contemporary zine culture. At its centre is the Teal Triggs Affair, a major controversy opposing a
British scholar to American zine makers in the wake of the publication of a 2010 book about zines.
Like all affairs of this kind, the Teal Triggs Affair raises important questions regarding who, and under
what conditions, can act as representatives of a group or a culture. More generally, it illustrates the
role institutional actors—academics but also publishers, librarians and archivists, among others—have
come to play in contemporary zine culture. Building on Boltanski’s sociology of critique, I explore
internal tensions over the distribution of legitimacy and authority within zine circles. Arguing for a
recognition of the role of zine scholars in zine culture as much as insisting on the responsibilities that
come with it, I offer, in conclusion, my own idea on what academics can bring to zine culture today.
Chapter 1  Defining Zines

But what are they? That’s the first question I’m usually asked when I start to talk about zines. My initial—and probably correct—impulse is to hand over a stack of zines and let the person asking the question decide, for this is how they were introduced to me. (Duncombe, 1997: 1)

These are the opening lines of Stephen Duncombe’s *Notes from Underground*. They hint at a difficult question, one that has been picked up on by most contributions to academic Zine Studies since. Similar remarks by Poletti and Buchanan, each published at a decade’s interval, show how the difficulty of defining zines has been and remains a central problem in zine scholarship:

Any attempt to devise a succinct and suitably flexible definition of the zine form is bound to be troubled. (Poletti, 2008: 6)

Zines are fleeting […] in many ways, it is the very incompleteness that helps define the narratives and work of zines. (Buchanan, 2018: xi)

Like most of the vocabulary related to artistic practices and cultural production, “zine” is an unstable and fundamentally contestable concept (Freeden, 1996: 55–60; Hamel, 2014: 13; both citing Gallie, 1955). There are perhaps as many definitions of “zines” as there are people trying to define them. Definitions are, moreover, not the exclusive prerogative of scholars. Zine makers produce definitions all the time, sometimes even adapting them to changes in their own practice. Librarians also produce definitions. Their definitions reflect the necessities of their trade, and thus tend to be more restrictive and stable; the use of their collections and catalogues depend on it.

No single definition seems to be able to encompass zines in all their diversity. Restrictive definitions will necessarily exclude many publications that others would legitimately consider as falling into the category. Overly inclusive definitions, on the other hand, run the risk of losing sight of zines’ specificity in face of other types of publications. While this might appear as an unsolvable puzzle in theory, actors of zine culture seem, in practice, to find their way around this conundrum quite easily.
Actual definitions of “zine,” however limited, contradictory, or paradoxical they might be, do exist. Zine history is full of them. By turning to these actual definitions and how they are put into practice, we can perhaps find the way that leads to a more precise and more fruitful definition.

This chapter is an attempt, if not to come to a final definition, at least to outline and circumscribe the problem this task poses. Confronting the contradictions and paradoxes of zine definitions, I hope to make at least sense of the frameworks within which they operate. Most definitions hint at zine history to give substance to their claim. As we will see, this has led scholars to produce two kinds of narratives of zine history. One focuses on the word “zine” (or “fanzine”), retracing its use back to the birth of American science fiction fandom in the 1930s. The other highlights the characteristics attributed to zines, and usually has the history of zines begin much earlier, tracing a composite ancestry that reaches well into the 19th, and even 18th centuries. From the perspective of Zine Studies, I contend that it might be counterproductive to privilege one or the other approach. After exploring in depth the implications of both approaches and the narratives of zine history they have produced, I will thus present additional ways of approaching zine definitions from a historical perspective.

1.1. Of “(Fan)zine” and Zines

Let us consider two different accounts of zine history:

zines as a distinct medium were born in the 1930s. It was then that fans of SF, science fiction, often through the clubs they founded, began producing what they called “fanzines” as a way of sharing science fiction stories and critical commentary, and of communicating with one another. Forty years later, in the mid-1970s, the other defining influence on modern-day zines began as fans of punk rock music, ignored by and critical of the mainstream music press, started printing fanzines about their music and cultural scene. In the early 1980s these two tributaries, joined by smaller streams of publications created by fans of other cultural genres, disgruntled self-publishers, and the remnants of printed political dissent from the sixties and seventies, were brought together and crossfertilized through listings and reviews in network zines like Factsheet Five. As the “fan” was by and large dropped off “zine,”
and their number increased exponentially, a culture of zines developed. By the early 1990s the two editors of the early *Factsheet Five*, deciding upon a title for a commercially published version of their zine, could honestly and accurately refer to *The World of Zines*. (Duncombe, 1997: 6–7)

The fanzine as a self-publishing form stretches as far back as the publications of the radical social critics of the French Revolution. Thomas Paine’s political pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776), for example, is often cited as an early example. The literary self-publisher, poet and engraver William Blake produced his *Songs of Innocence* in 1789, with poems illustrated by lavish engravings—a sort of forerunner to the contemporary artzine. Other historical roots for fanzines include little magazines, which emerged in force in Britain and the United States around 1910 as a form of non-commercial, self-published literary publication. The focus tended to be on experimental poetry, fiction and criticism. *The Dial*, published by Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1840-44), is often cited as one of the precursors to the zine form of publishing […] However, it is not until the early twentieth century that we begin to see the formalization of some of these early visual characteristics, which help to establish a readily identifiable form. It may be suggested that what we might consider a graphic language of fanzines has its roots in two main areas: one that draws from the forms, techniques and contexts of artistic and literary practices such as Dada, Fluxus and Surrealism; and a second one based primarily in the intentions of political and counter-cultural activity as found in Situationism from the 1950s and 1960s, in the underground radical press and in the music and subcultural movement that came to be labelled punk in the 1970s. (Triggs, 2010: 14–15)

We have here two different accounts of zine history. The first is more focused in time, starting with the 1930s. Its account is more exclusive, privileging publications that were explicitly referred to as “zines” or “fanzines” by their makers and readers. The second is much more extensive, going all the way back to the 18th century, and including a wide range of objects and movements: political pamphlets, artists’ books, literary magazines, artistic and political avant-gardes, subcultural movements. Most histories of zines adopt one of these two approaches. To be fair, most scholars will alternate between the two, and Duncombe and Triggs are no exception. It seems nevertheless important to distinguish both approaches because they imply different conceptions of the work of defining zines. We can see that the history presented above by Duncombe focuses on the word “(fan)zine” and how it was applied to a series of different objects since the 1930s: science fiction fanzines, punk zines, political zines. It focuses on the label “(fan)zine” and its application to qualify a range of publications. On the other hand, the approach presented by Triggs insists on the different
sources from which zines, as she sees them, have drawn. Her emphasis is not on the word—most of the examples she uses were not labelled as “(fan)zines” by their makers or original readers—but on the elements of definition it might include. For Triggs, zines are part political pamphlets, part avant-gardist publications, part artists’ publications, etc.

This distinction between a word and the elements of signification it contains has been at the centre of a whole branch of linguistics: structural linguistics, developed in the wake of the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. For Saussure, linguistic signs—words—have a dual nature, part signifier, and part signified (Saussure, 2011: 65–67). The signifier is the visual or “sound-image” of the word. The signifier of “zine” is its written form (z-i-n-e), or its spoken form (zeeen). The signified, on the other hand, is the concept, the “content” of the word. The signified for “zine” would then point to the elements comprised in its definition. Both are, of course, inseparable: there can be no signified without a signifier to signal it, no signifier without a signified. The analogy often used to understand this interdependence is that of the sheet of paper: it has a recto, which is distinct but inseparable from its verso (Saussure, 2011: xxx). Just like the recto and the verso of a sheet of paper, the signifier and the signified of a word can be looked at separately. Based on this distinction, we can turn to zine history in search of how the “(fan)zine” signifier and its signified have evolved.

1.1.1. Retracing the “(Fan)zine” Signifier

The term “zine” commonly used today derives from the earlier “fanzine.” According to Atton, it “was established in the 1980s to refer to a far wider range of amateur publications than could be encompassed by ‘fanzine.’” (Atton, 2002: 54) “Fanzine” itself originates from science fiction fandom. It is devised as a portmanteau blend built from “fan” (itself short for “fanatic”) and “magazine,” and is attributed to Louis Russel Chauvenet (Warner, 1969: 41; Fancyclopedia 3: “Fanzine”). In the fifth
issue of his *Detours*, dated of October 1940, Chauvenet stated: “We hereby protest against the uneuphonious word ‘fanag,’ and announce our intention to plug *fanzine* as the best short form of ‘fan-magazine.’” (Chauvenet, 1940: 4. Emphasis in original)

From its inception, the term was thus used with a retroactive effect in mind, to designate fan-made publications that circulated in science fiction fandom since the early 1930s. As for the reason it stuck, fan historian Harry Warner speculates: “Patriotism in fandom [during the Second World War] appeared in such projects as Fanzine Service for Fans in Service, a title that may have made permanent the new name that Louis Russel Chauvenet had devised for fan magazines.” (Warner, 1969: 156) I could not find a better explanation!

Science fiction was not the only form of organized fandom to use fanzines as a means of communication between fans. The category of “science fiction” itself was, then, still in gestation, and wouldn’t acquire its distinctive features until later, the specifics of the genre having been themselves in large part established through discussions held in early fanzines. In his 1944 *Fancyclopedia*, a key document of early zine culture, Jack Speer (a.k.a. John Bristol) still defines “science-fiction” as a “branch of fantasy,” and “fantasy” as “a general term covering science fiction, weird fiction, and pure fantasy; also used interchangeably with pure fantasy” (Bristol, 1944: 31; 75). Horror, particularly surrounding the figure of H. P. Lovecraft, also played an instrumental role in the development of both fandom and early fanzine culture (see Warner, 1969: 9–14).

Throughout the 1940s, and further into the 1950s, fandom considerably diversified, and “fanzine” came to refer to an increasingly larger set of publications. The first comics fanzines emerged within science fiction fandom as early as 1936 with the three issues of David A. Kyle’s *Fantasy World* (1936-1937). These first comics fanzines were, however, relatively short-lived. Only decades later did comics fanzines become a distinct genre, as a separate fandom dedicated to comics was consolidated at the
turn of the 1950s and 1960s (Schelly, 2003: 18; 27–35). These comics fanzines nonetheless played an instrumental role in broadening the range of publications encompassed by the “fanzine” signifier. The necessary division between (drawn) comics and (written) commentary contributed to the inclusion of single-authored amateur publications publishing original creations in its orbit, rare in science fiction fandom.

The addition of film-related content under the umbrella followed a similar pattern. As early as the late 1930s, science fiction “newszines” weeklies like *Science Fiction News Letter* (1937–1939) or *Fantasy News* (1938–1945) included movie-related content. Even before that, as early as the 1910s, the term “fan magazine” was used in the movie industry, applied to magazines published by the studios for fans, circulated in official fan clubs as part of their marketing strategy (Walker, 1970: 37–38). The top-down approach behind these publications contrasted with the practices in use in fanzine circles of the time, and there was no overlap between the two. The real rise of fanzines dedicated to film was not until the 1960s and the rise of enthusiasm for older B movies and exploitation films. Horror movies, through a connection with existing interests in fandom, were the object of the first publications focusing on cinema to be labelled as “fanzines.” (Szpunar, 2013) Later in the 1980s, this nexus of horror literature and horror movie fandom played an instrumental role in the birth of the gothic subculture and its associated zine culture, notably through the circulation of the horror movie fanzine *Twylight* (started in 1967) (Nally, 2018: 112).

The use of the signifier was significantly extended by the introduction of music fanzines, and in particular rock fanzines. Drawing from the jazz “little magazines” of the 1930s and 1940s (Welburn, 1987), these new fanzines built on the existing fanzine culture and geared it towards a fast-changing music industry. Connections with existing fandom were, here again, key to this new development. Paul Williams of *Crawdaddy!* and Greg Shaw of *Mojo Navigator*, two very early rock and roll fanzines
both first published in 1966, had been active science fiction fans before turning to rock criticism (Ginsburg, 1979: 30).

Music fanzines quickly and radically changed zine publishing. The counterculture of the 1960s consolidated previously tenuous connections between science fiction (Latham, 2006; 2014), rock music (Berthomier, 2012), and comics, through the underground comix movement that followed the censoring of the industry by the creation of the Comics Code Authority in 1954 (Gabillet, 2010: 84–90; Blechschmidt, 2016). Fanfics cutting across previously impermeable boundaries started to multiply. It is with this context as backdrop that punk zines emerged in the second half of the 1970s. The further politicization of the punk subculture in the 1980s, notably through the development of anarcho-punk led to a shift in political culture within alternative circles (Atton, 1999), some starting to privilege self-published political and activist zines over the more “official” and instituted political newspaper (Jeppesen, 2006). Around this time, political pamphlets and journals started to label themselves as “zines,” thus enriching the category, expanding the application of the signifier.

Stemming from the conjunction of punk and fandom are sports zines. There is indeed a clear genealogy linking British punk zines to soccer zines in the late 1970s, especially through a desire for punks across the United Kingdom to grow local and regional roots beyond major urban centres. This was done in part by integrating local supporter clubs and publishing soccer zines (Haynes, 1995: 41–42; Atton, 2002: 15). By the mid 1980s, a whole sport fanzine culture had fully developed in relative separation from the existing fandoms and emerging zine-specific subculture already mentioned.

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4 The title of Ginsburg’s article, “Rock is a way of life,” is itself a reference to a common saying in science fiction fandom, “Fandom is a way of life,” often abbreviated as FIAWOL (Warner, 1969: xx). Again, this illustrates the genealogical connection between science fiction and early rock and roll fans.

5 Sports zines are still published in large numbers today, particularly soccer zines in Europe. There are a handful of “generalist” soccer zines aimed at a larger audience, the French Gazzetta Ultra, for example. The rest, hundreds of titles, circulates only within stadium stands and other exclusive supporter channels, and are therefore practically invisible to outsiders, including zine makers publishing other genres of zines.
“Fanzines” as they were initially understood did not disappear, however. The broadcasting of the first Star Trek television series in the late 1960s breathed a new life into an already well-established culture (Verba, 2003). Media fanzines covering more and more television shows created their own separate fandom, alongside science fiction, comics, film or music starting in the 1970s (Jenkins, 1992; Bacon-Smith, 1992). In contrast with science fiction or fantasy literary fandom, media fandom was by and large a female phenomenon. This was the first female appropriation of the zine medium. It would not be the last. In fact, the history of zines from the 1980s through to the 2000s can be read as the appropriation of the medium by female, queer, and non-binary writers and editors, who considerably impacted the use of the “(fan)zine” signifier, from Homo/Queercore to Riot Grrrl, and continuing to more recent adoptions.

After a short-lived enthusiasm over “e-zines” (for “electronic zines”), the signifier was increasingly applied to publications emphasizing craft and materiality, especially starting in the 2000s (Triggs, 2010: 205–247). Closer ties to the art field (Farrelly, 2001; Lefebvre, 2019; 2023), notably through a connection with artists’ books (Zweig, 1998; Thomas, 2009), also considerably impacted how the label is applied today. This has led to an explosion in form and format, and, consequentially, a significant displacement in the “zine” category to include “zine objects” far removed from the initial reference to magazines or even books. We even see it applied to home-made music cassettes (Spencer, 2005: 323–369; Darms, 2013). Donna Dresch’s Chainsaw, of which the fourth issue was not a printed publication but a music compilation on a tape cassette, is a precursor in this sense. In science fiction fandom such as Paula Smith claims that “Trek fandom was the mirror image of science fiction fandom. I would say 90 percent of science fiction at the time was men and 10 percent was women, and there was a reverse 10-to-90 men-to-women split in Trek fandom.” (Walker & Smith, 2011) Fan and historian Harry Warner suggests, for his part, notes that “Around 1940 […] virtually all the females in fandom had a fannish boy friend, brother, husband, or some other masculine link” (Warner, 1969: 26). Although she concludes that science fiction was male-domination, feminist fandom scholar Helen Merrick points out that there were, already in the 1950s, many all-female and feminist inclined science fiction fanzines (Merrick, 2009: 77-79). Merrick also points out the underlying sexism of male fans disqualifying female fans based on them having been introduced to fandom via male colleagues (Merrick, 2009: 42-43). If being introduced to fandom by another, male, fan was enough to be disqualified as an authentic active fan, we would have to write off most “Big Names” from fan history.
fandom, the earliest “audiozines,” anticipating podcasts, were published in the early 1980s (Fancyclopedia 3: "Uncle Albert’s Electric Talking Fanzine"). Homemade films and videos have also been identified as “(fan)zines” in the same vein (Jenkins, 1992: 223–249; Kearney, 2006: 189–237). More recent uses were noted for crafted items and toys (FL@33, 2009) and even videogames (Anthropy, 2012).

Retracing the many inflexions in the use of the “(fan)zine” label, this history of the signifier has several advantages. As Atton notes, it has the advantage of minimizing the anachronism inherent to the inclusion of, say, avant-garde publications under the “(fan)zine” umbrella:

Though not an unreasonable claim, it seems to require a revision of the meaning and functions of publishing in previous artistic movements such as Dada and surrealism: whatever their revolutionary aims, the protagonists and their products in such movements were firmly located in the value discourses of high art. (Atton, 2002: 56) In other words, Dadaist and Surrealist publications had, when they were published, nothing to do with the science fiction fanzines that were published at about the same time. They were included into the “(fan)zine” category later, in retrospect.

By privileging self-identification—the labelling of a publication as “(fan)zine” by its makers and immediate readership—we can locate them in their own context, highlighting what a “(fan)zine” is and is not at a given time. This allows for a more rigorous approach to definition, highlighting new inclusions and even possible exclusions when they occur. One can note, for example, that the first science fiction fanzines have little to do with most contemporary zines, and that today’s zine makers might not recognize them as such. On the other hand, focusing exclusively on the signifier is far from

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7 They almost had nothing to do with each other. In fact, early zine makers were aware of avant-gardist artistic movements, including Dada and Surrealism, as evidenced by a debate over the “Dadaist” aspect of some fanzine covers at the time. The fans’ verdict: Science fiction art could not be Dadaist, but it could be Surrealist: “Dada represents nothing at all. A Dadaist picture portrays nothing, has no conceivable or intended significance, conscious or sub-conscious. On the other hand a Surrealist picture does intend to convey an idea, has a definite meaning, and purpose […] The [Novae Terrae 18, November 1937] cover by Mr. Dobby carries a definite meaning. It is clearly and obviously intended to represent Science-Fiction.” (Wollheim, 1938b: 1) There is, of course, no evidence of Dadaists and Surrealists knowing anything about science fiction fanzines of their time.
satisfactory. If it can highlight the different types of objects that have been referred to as “(fan)zines” over the last century or so, it provides no real definition. It also neglects an important fact: every use of the signifier implies a considerable extension of the category beyond its immediate application. This includes extensions in time. When the “(fan)zine” signifier was applied to punk zines, for instance, the meaning of the word and its perceived history also changed to include a wider range of objects like political pamphlets and avant-garde publications. A historical account of zine definitions must also consider these inclusions. And this is the object of a history of zine signifieds.

1.1.2. Contractions and Extensions of “(Fan)Zine” as Signified

To lay the basis of a history of (fan)zine signifieds, it might be useful to turn to another important distinction developed in structural linguistics, opposing diachronic and synchronic approaches to the study of language. For Saussure, “What diachronic linguistics studies is not relations between co-existing terms of a language-state [that would be synchronic] but relations between successive terms that are substituted for each other in time.” (Saussure, 2011: 140) In other words, the diachronic approach focuses on a succession of events, while the synchronic approach considers the extension of a phenomenon at a given time. The narrative of the uses, appropriations, and displacements of the “(fan)zine” signifier presented above falls into the diachronic approach. It began with the creation of the word in 1940, following its circulation all the way up to usages established only recently. A synchronic approach seems more adapted to highlight the historical contractions and extensions of zine signifieds. Such an approach makes clear how definitions of “(fan)zine” include a variety of elements, creating connections with objects beyond their immediate cultural environment.

In Fancyclopedia 1, Speer defines “fanzine” as: “An amateur magazine published for fans,” adding, “The contents of fanzines include fiction, editorial stuff, departments, poetry, articles, and art work.
Fan magazines are the great vehicle of thought in our republic of letters, and our most characteristic product.” (Bristol, 1944: 33–34) From this point of departure, science fiction fanzines included a wide range of publications, ranging from “adzines” for advertising, “clubzines” serving as official club organs, “cardzines” made of a single postcard, “letterzines” publishing fans letters of comments, “newszines” serving as newsletters, and so on (See Fancyclopedia 3: “Fanzine”). These fanzines could be anywhere from the professional looking printed magazine topping at dozens or hundreds of pages, to single-paged, poorly copied leaflets and postcards. The main criterion to distinguish fanzines from their opposite—prozines, or professional pulp magazines publishing science fiction—was their belonging to fandom, the community of science fiction fans. If it was produced by fans and for fans, it was a fanzine; if it was produced by professional publishers for the general public, it was not.

It is important to note that the focus was on fandom, not science fiction. As fan historian Harry Warner notes, a “fandom qua fandom” attitude was already starting to settle in fanzine publishing as early as the end of the 1930s (Warner, 1969: 35–36), allowing for such fanzine genres as “perzines” or “individzines,” in which an individual fanzine editor publishes their own thoughts and ramblings, often far removed from science fiction (Fancyclopedia 3: “Fanzine”). As early fanzine editor Frederik Pohl noted:

My favorite of the fanzines I edited was a tiny quarter-size mimeographed job named Mind of Man, and what it was mostly about was playing with words. MoM was tiny, infrequent, and died at an early age, but I loved it. The contents owed something to Lewis Carroll and quite a lot to James Joyce (whose “work in progress,” later called Finnegans Wake, was running in batches in a strange little magazine called transition). There was also a little science fiction in Mind of Man now and then, but you had to look pretty close to find it; then, as now, there was no rule that the contents of a sf fanzine had to have anything to do with sf. (Pohl, 1983: 49)

In keeping with this logic, fan-published books would also be considered on the same terms as fanzines, for instance fan-made posthumous memorial books circulated through fanzine channels (Moskowitz, 1974: 80). Conversely, self-published magazines that might be otherwise identical to
fanzines but unrelated to fandom were considered “mundane,” that is: “Everything and everyone except fanac ['fan activity'], fans, and their literature.” (Warner, 1969: xx)

This attitude prevailed in definitions of “(fan)zines” long after science fiction fandom could claim exclusivity on zine publishing. We can see remnants of it up to the first punk zines published in the second half of the 1970s. The best example, of course, can be found in Mark Perry’s *Sniffin’ Glue*, published in 1976-1977 and considered the very first punk zine. For Perry, fanzines are a medium for music fans: “most of the boring old cunts don’t know what a fanzine is cos they’re not really fans … most of ’em are layabouts who think ‘punks’ are the ‘in-thing’” (*Sniffin’ Glue* 5, November 1976; in Perry, 2009)8

Unlike for fandom, however, punk opted for a more dismissive and antagonistic relationship with the “mainstream,” introducing a whole new set of signifieds to the “(fan)zine” signifier. Punk zines notably translated the “fannish” and amateur character of earlier fanzines into a DIY ethic and aesthetic, and integrated avant-garde movements—Situationism and, through it, Dada and Surrealism—into zines’ horizon (Triggs, 2006: 74). Zines became a site of political and cultural resistance: “the fanzines that emerged with punk soon transcended their ‘fan’ prefix [...] they spanned a subterranean web of alternative media through which dissenting voices and formative political opinions could be expressed and discussed.” (Worley, 2015: 78–80)

The work of Mike Gunderloy, founder and editor of *Factsheet Five* from 1982 to 1991 and arguably one of the most influential actors of zine history illustrates how productive this shift of signifieds could be. *Factsheet Five* was built on the policy of reviewing anything its editors would receive by mail. By the early 1990s, it had reached a circulation of over 10,000 and published well above 1,000 reviews quarterly, making it an indispensable point of reference for zine culture around the world. As he was

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8 All issues of *Sniffin’ Glue* have been reprinted in Perry, 2009.
passing *Factsheet Five* on to his successor in the early 1990s, Gunderloy could synthesize his own definition of zines as publications “created by one person, for love rather than money, and focus on a particular subject,” arguing that despite their incredible diversity, zines did share the single overall purpose of “building networks independent of big business, big government, and big media”. (Gunderloy & Janice, 1992: 2) As they had come to be defined, zines were synonymous with notions such as the “small press,” alternative, or radical publishing. It is in this context, and not before, that accounts of zine history like Triggs’—encompassing political pamphlets, independent magazines, avant-garde publishing, and artists’ books—could emerge.9

By then, the fandom-based definition of “(fan)zine” had, if not totally disappeared, been marginalized within the broader zine culture. Long-time science fiction fan Nicki Lynch, co-editor with her husband Dick of the fan history zine *Mimosa,* gives a potent expression of how much this gap had grown in the early 1990s. In a column titled “The *Zine* Scene,” she compares a definition of “zine” put forward by a *Washington Post* reporter with her own experience in fanzine publishing:

I especially enjoyed the article’s definition of zine: “… a small-circulation periodical produced mainly for kicks and almost always at a loss to the publisher.” Stressed throughout the article was how these zines are done on the cheap with “… excellent writing and tight editing not the hallmarks of the genre…” […] On reading the article, I could see how Dick and I (and *Mimosa*) didn’t fit the feature writer’s idea of zine editors or of a zine. We were beyond our twenties, had a tightly edited zine with well-written articles, and had been doing this for about 15 years. (Lynch, 1993: 64–65)

Newer definitions come to replace previous ones, in this case literally by writing them off from zine history: the reporter had the beginning of zine culture coincide with the beginning of *Factsheet Five.*

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9 Gunderloy himself claimed responsibility for this extension of the “zine” category. In an essay written for his personal website and presented as “an epitaph for a project that took up much of ten years of my life”, he states: “Gunderloy was responsible for hijacking the term ‘zine’ from science fiction fandom and applying it to any small press effort” (Gundelroy, 1992). What was definitely an overstatement on his part nevertheless characterizes the spirit behind Gunderloy’s effort with *Factsheet Five.*
Five in 1982. The confrontation between the two definitions illustrates how much the 1980s and 1990s instilled a change in paradigm in zine signifieds.

When combined to the writing of zine history, extensions in signifieds can be motivated by efforts to include disregarded corpuses, and to redefine the medium on a new basis. When successful, these deliberate efforts of redefinition can have a profound impact on how zine history is understood, and how the future of zine culture is created. The case of feminist zines is particularly interesting on this respect.

Building on the legacy of the Riot Grrrl movement that deeply transformed zine making in the 1990s, zine scholar Alison Piepmeier proposes, in her 2009 book *Girl Zines*, a revision of zine historiography. Her effort to counter male-centric historiography was expressly directed against scholars like Duncombe:

I trace a feminist trajectory for zines, from the scrapbooks of nineteenth-century women’s clubs through the mimeographed manifestos of second wave feminism. Positioning grrrl zines within a feminist legacy makes women’s resistance visible. This perspective also keeps grrrl zines from appearing to be an aberration when, in fact, they are part of a long-standing feminist legacy (Piepmeier, 2009: 18).

This history of zines, repositioning them as the latest instalment in a long history of feminist publishing, attests to the local revolution Riot Grrrl imprinted on zine culture in the 1990s. But it also demonstrates a desire to legitimize zines produced by girls and women by providing them a nobler ancestry.

French sociologist Luc Boltanski notes how such rewriting of history focusing on signifieds is often motivated by a quest for legitimacy. His remarks on French comics in the middle of the 1970s perfectly apply to zine histories such as Piepmeier’s or Triggs:

the care that is taken to establish a connection between high culture and comics, and to confer on comics the antiquity that is constitutive of every legitimate cultural tradition, accounts also for the tendency (found primarily among internal commentators), to relocate the origins of comics at the greatest possible historical
distance: in the case of J. Marny with the Bayeux Tapestry, or in cave painting or Egyptian books of the dead in the case of F. Lacassin, for example. (Boltanski, 2014: 288)

The legitimacy granted by historical precedent and seniority to works long recognized and canonized is thus sought after by historians and practitioners to legitimize their own practice. The most daring attempts, when it comes to zine history, can be found in trade books presenting zine culture to a wider audience, their authors being particularly wary to valorize their object in the public’s eye. A comic strip published in one of those books half-seriously pushes this attitude to its very limits. Presenting a timeline of zine history, it has the first zines being published in 25,000 B.C. in the form of cave paintings, followed by Egyptian hieroglyphs and Moses’s Tablets of Stone, all the way through Guttenberg and Luther, 1950s mimeographs, 1960s photocopy machines, 1970s graffiti, and, finally, the 1980s “zine scene explosion” (Coulson, 1998). One can but note that the only mention of actual zines in this history is to those of the author’s time, leaving no doubts over his intentions: not to provide a history of the medium but to grant historical backing to his own culture.

Incidentally, this use of zine history illustrates the character of definitions and histories based on signifieds: more flexible in their inclusions and exclusions, they also have a strong tendency towards anachronism. In fact, these attempts are better understood in relation to their present and the paradigm they are operating in, rather than for the actual historical examples they introduce into the definition of zine. That being said, this working and reworking of zine signifieds is not a fallacy. At every moment of zine history, definitions are put forward, building on core elements to extend the reach of the category. By comparing the criteria historically mobilized in these efforts of definition—

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participation to fandom, a Do It Yourself approach, subversive aesthetics, feminist politics being but a few—we can appreciate the vast horizon in which zine history is engaged.

1.1.3. (Fan)zines: The Referent

Signifier and signified are the two components of the sign. They should not be confused with the referent, the extralinguistic reality the sign refers to. If the signifier for “zine” would be the word itself, the signified the elements of definition included under its umbrella, its referent would be the zines themselves, the actual objects labelled and categorized by the term. A third, necessary dimension to any historical definition of zines would not emphasize “(fan)zine” as a sign but the bustling proliferation of zine making practices. Pushed to its logical conclusion, the definition of “(fan)zine” thus becomes the incalculable sum of all the (fan)zines made. As Duncombe noted, building on Gottlieb and Wald (1994: 253), “zines are ‘continually re-rehearsed self-definition(s).’” (Duncombe, 1997: 67)

The contents alone of the zines we briefly touched upon above show the immense diversity of zine practices. Early science fiction fanzines were already declined into countless genres, and from there the diversification only increased. Already in the 1970s, zines were published to cover a range of topics too wide to be listed: “now [zine creators] produce fanzines which contain any damn thing they can think of,” wrote science fiction fan Peter Roberts as early as 1978 in his Guide to Current Fanzines (quoted in Devee & Duff, 2022: 3).

The rise of punk zines in the 1970s and 1980s pushed this process a notch further by reinscribing zine publishing into new relations with lifestyle and everyday practices. According to Hebdige, the particularity of punk was specifically to establish homologies between apparently disconnected practices, thus establishing new meanings. Zines were at the centre of this nexus of signification:
There was a homological relation between the trashy cut-up clothes and spiky hair, the pogo and amphetamines, the spitting, the vomiting, the format of the fanzines, the insurrectionary poses and the “soulless,” frantically driven music. The punks wore clothes which were the sartorial equivalent of swear words, and they swore as they dressed—with calculated effect, lacing obscenities into record notes and publicity releases, interviews and love songs. (Hebdige, 2012: 114)

From that point on, as we have seen with Gunderloy, the zine medium could embrace just about any form or topic. Emphasis on print and materiality following the rise of digital culture in the 2000s, of course, pushed this even further, to the point of obfuscating previously established practices. Whereas their predecessors were periodicals modelled on magazines, contemporary zines are closer to books and are generally single issues. By their form, some are better characterized as artworks or printed objects than in relation to magazines and books (Zweig, 1998; Thomas, 2009).

To narrow down the scope of this history of referents, we can focus on major determinants of zine production: publishing and editorial practices, financing, means of distribution, or print techniques. These determinants will be touched upon extensively in the following chapters. However, it is worth outlining here a brief history of the most common techniques of reproduction, to give a sense of how they impacted the history of zine making.

Like all technologies, techniques of reproduction carry meanings that go largely beyond their intended use and application. These meanings are in part passed into the objects they contribute to produce. A key distinction between printing and copying, fundamental before the spread of digital printing, illustrates this perfectly:

The word “print” is related to the word “impression.” When you print, technically speaking, you are making a mark by pressing it into the medium […] A duplicator or copying machine does not impress the text onto the page. The roots of copying are much older than printing, and are more closely related to writing […] Printing, in general, has always been a mechanized process, a process closely tied to the rise of industrial capitalism. Although copying and duplicating machines were also created and manufactured as a result of industrial capitalism, they are an extension of the scribal tradition, not the printing process. The hand of the maker is still very obvious in the product of a duplicator […] The roles of the mechanical copier and printing press were clearly delineated until
the advent of personal computing and desktop publishing, when the dot-matrix printer and the photocopier were both replaced by the inkjet and laser printer, neither of which actually “print” a page in the original sense of the word. Now, “printing a page” is synonymous with “making a copy.” (Dana, 2021: 15–16)

The vast majority of fanzines published in the 1930s and 1940s were not printed but duplicated. Their editors relied on processes like hectography, and mimeography. This distinction matters because it mattered to zine makers then.

Hectography derives its name from hecto—Greek for a hundred, the ultimate limit of copies a single hectograph master can produce. Circulation for hectographed fanzines averaged closer to between 30 and 60, depending on the talent of the hectographer. The technique is simple. First, a master copy is made using an alcohol-based ink, most commonly purple aniline dye. The master can be made using either a ribbon passed through a typewriter, or freehandedly with a special pen. Second, this master copy is pressed on a pad made of gelatin and glycerine, transferring the ink from the master to the pad. Finally, sheets of paper are pressed against the pad, transferring back the ink from the pad to the paper. Every copy made absorbs a part of the ink from the pad, thus making duplicates progressively paler. Two-side copies must be made manually. However, multiple colours can be copied using a single master by combining different inks, allowing for some flexibility. Due to the inherent limitations of this duplication process, hectographed fanzines were often letter-sized, sometimes one-sided, and simply stapled on the top left-hand corner. More rarely, fanzines were bound by stapling the left-hand side with two or three staples, recalling a magazine binding at the expense of reducing the readable area of the page. Smaller formats could be made by printing two or four pages on a single side of a sheet, and then folding or cutting it into separate pages. Added to the occasional smudge, the low intensity of the colours makes hectographed fanzines often hard to decipher.

The process of hectography can be semi-automated using a spirit duplicator, often referred to as Ditto, the name of its most popular manufacturer. The idea is the same: a master copy is made using
a special kind of ink, that is then transferred on blank sheets of paper. The process is automated by
the use of a rotative drum on which the master copy is fixed. The machine can then be activated
manually using a handle. Single sheets of paper must be fed one at a time. Copies are made when
pressed under the drum on which the master copy was clipped. The copies thus made are more regular
and produced faster than when using a hectograph.

Mimeography, also called stencil duplication, usually refers to a larger number of such semi-
automated duplicating machines. At its simplest, a mimeograph is simply a single-page stencil,
scratched with a dry point or a typewriter to create tiny holes allowing ink to pass through, and then
manually inked over a fresh sheet of paper. In comparison with hectographs, such simple
mimeographs can produce more copies, and be used with any kind of ink. To produce multicoloured
copies, however, every colour must be added separately. At its most complex, however, mimeography
can be automated using rotative drums on which a stencil can be set, inked by rollers, and mechanically
pressed against a sheet of paper. Developed and patented by Thomas Edison in the late 19th century,
these mimeograph machines were common in classrooms and offices in the 1930s and 1940s. The
resulting copies made with these semi-automated mimeographs are generally of higher quality than
those produced by a hectograph or a spirit duplicator. The possibility to use darker inks also improved
readability. In early fandom, well mimeographed fanzines were often the highest standard of quality
zine makers could hope for. Well made, mimeography could make copies that looked as if printed to
today’s readers. Zine makers of the time could, however, immediately distinguish mimeographed and
printed publications.

The value scale with which early zinesters considered their own work was predicated on a clear
hierarchy between printing, professional status, industrial standards of production, and wider
circulation, on the one hand, and copying, amateur status, sub-professional quality and limited
circulation on the other. The implied distinction between (printed) magazines and (duplicated)
fanzines redoubled the one opposing between fans to professionals. It must be noted that early science fiction magazines might have been printed, but that was their only advantage in terms of production quality. Pulps had untrimmed edges, poor quality paper and often messy layout. It was thus not unthinkable for science fiction fans to at least try to match the publications they modelled their fanzines on. That being said, examples of how the superiority of professional magazines over fanzines was perceived in fandom abound. For instance, *Science Fiction News Letter* referred to the distinction between duplication and printing to sort the materials it reviewed into three categories: “printed,” “mimeographed,” and “hectographed.” The classification clearly indicated a decreasing order of symbolic value, the “printed” category being reserved for books and magazines, the other two being used for fanzines of higher and lower production quality, respectively. Generally speaking, the closer a fanzine drew to magazine standards, the higher its perceived value was—and many attempts were made in early fandom to gather funds to print zines instead of duplicating them.\(^\text{11}\)

Interestingly, this hierarchy was flipped on its head by the turn of the 20\(^{th}\) and 21\(^{st}\) centuries. The very same reason early zinesters looked down on their own publications and looked up to the professional magazines became sought after and celebrated: “The visual aesthetic of zines can cover a wide spectrum, from neat to messy, from flowery to plain, but most zines do offer evidence of the creator’s hand […] Many zine makers embrace “scrappy messiness,” an aesthetic that serves to humanize the creator and the zine.” (Piepmeier, 2009: 67)

Reproduction technologies can imprint meanings on zines that escape the control of their maker. Over time and repeated use, however, zine culture can also refract and alter these meanings, granting some autonomy in the way zine practices are valued. Photocopied zines reveal not only how

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\(^{11}\) For instance, this comment of Moskowitz on the last issue of *Cosmology*, previously titled *The Comet*, considered by many to be the first zine ever published: “Heretofore, *Cosmology* had been a mimeographed publication. In 1933 as a last effort at revival, the seventeenth (and last) issue was printed.” (Moskowitz, 1974: 9)
duplication and printing techniques have impacted zine history, but also how zines, and zine making practices, have impacted the “history of technology-in-use” (Edgerton, 2014: xi) of these very same techniques.

In *The Shock of the Old*, historian of technology David Edgerton reminds us of the significant time lapse that can exist between the invention of a new technology, its public access through the market, and its actual use, often way beyond its planned cultural and social life expectancy. Xerography, the reproduction technology the most closely associated with zine making historically, illustrates this perfectly.

Xerography introduced two major innovations to duplication: a photographic process replacing the production of a master copy (thus leaving the original copy intact), and dry ink printing. While the process was invented in the late 1940s, it only became associated with alternative cultural scenes at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, notably as punk and post-punk subcultures appropriated the zine medium and turned to then widely available photocopy machines in offices for production. Zine scholar Kate Eichhorn notes: “If copy machines and their gritty output of posters, flyers, and zines helped to define and spread movements intent on bolstering the rights of people on the margins, it was largely against, not with, the grain of the machine’s original intentions.” (Eichhorn, 2016: 25–26) The technique nevertheless allowed for aesthetic elements to be included into zine makers’ register, elements that could not be hectographed or mimeographed: photographs, Letraset typefaces, and collages. This widening of the aesthetic language available to zine makers allowed for an unprecedented crossing of high and popular art, best exemplified by British punk zines of the 1970s like *Sniffin’ Glue, Ripped and Torn*, or *Chainsaw* (Triggs, 2006).

Screen printing—also called serigraphy, particularly in French: “sérigraphie,” in keeping with the distinction between printing and duplication—is another telling case of such discrepancy between
invention, intended use, and later appropriations in reproduction technology. Invented around the beginning of the second millennium in China, screen printing was introduced in Europe in the 18th century. The process is akin to stencil duplication but involves a silk screen with regular meshes. The screen is covered with a negative of the image or the text to be duplicated, the uncovered meshes letting the ink pass through to a sheet of paper. The regularity and size of the meshes divide the screen into uniform holes akin to pixels. This allows for more precise superpositions of copied images, making possible the copying of highly detailed multicoloured images by adding layers of ink on the same copy. Rudimentary uses of screen printing were already present in the early days of zine culture. Advertisements for screen-printed colour zine covers, another way to emulate professional magazines, were circulated in the pages of newszines like Fantasy News: “SILK SCREEN COVERS FOR ALL FAN MAGS AT VERY LOW PRICES! ONLY THE MOST MODERN SYSTEM USED! Now your magazine can have that colourful cover!” (Sykora in Taurasi, Fantasy News, February 5, 1939: 5)

The development of a photosensitive emulsion to produce images on the screen in the beginning of the 20th century was a major technological turn for screen printing. Through this process, photographic images could be reproduced on the screen, before being copied on paper using the stencil thus produced. These further innovations in the process of screen printing have impacted its cultural meaning. On the one hand, the high-quality results it could produce immediately increased its appeal. On the other, the process became more dangerous. The photosensitizing of the screens relied on highly toxic chemicals, notably chromates and bichromates compounds. New processes mitigating the detrimental effects on health were only developed in later decades of the 20th century. These changes entailed that screen printing was becoming reserved to either well equipped professional workshops, or unaware and reckless artists and craftspeople (Néret, 2019a: 92; 114). This explains why screen-printed zines were almost exclusively found in punk circles until recently. In France, a European hub for screen-printed zine making since the 1980s, a new genre of zine developed in this
context. Graphzines are a mix of raw and crude aesthetic, shockingly violent and sexually explicit themes, Do-It-Yourself ethics, and post-punk cultural references.

The actual uses of printing and duplication techniques for zine making are never themselves made obsolete by technological innovation. Individual appropriations often push the technological and symbolic limits of techniques, contradicting their initial purpose and associated values. Individual mastery also comes into play. Some early fanzine makers, like later fan historian Sam Moskowitz, were renowned for their ability to make the best of a hectograph. Contemporary zine artists, like founder of Le Dernier cri Pakito Bolino, are considered masters of screen printing. Zine makers of all eras have consistently appropriated duplicating and printing techniques in highly individualized ways, juggling not only with their technical properties but with the meanings and values they are associated with. These individual makers are, in the last instance, the real actors of any history of zines as referents.

1.1.4. What Was the First (Fan)zine?

There has been an ongoing debate in science fiction fandom as to what publication should be honoured as the first fanzine ever published. An article on Fancyclopedia 3 titled “What Was the First Fanzine?” summarizes the terms of this debate. The argument mobilized on all sides crystallizes the remarks made thus far regarding zine definitions and the historiographies. Moreover, this question highlights important limitations to the approaches already deployed, requiring an important theoretical step back that will inform the analyses presented in further chapters.

It should first be noted that the question of what was the first fanzine is unapproachable from the standpoint of the signifier. As already mentioned, the term was coined in the fifth issue of Chauvenet’s Detours (six issues in 1940). Strictly speaking, it would then be the first “fanzine,” as it was
the first publication to be labelled as such. The ridiculousness of this proposition is immediately perceptible. It would, for one thing, disqualify the previous issues of the same publication. Moreover, Chauvenet coined the term explicitly to apply it to publications already in circulation. We therefore have to turn to the fanzine as signified to find referents that could seriously be considered as the first of their kind.

There was never a single signified for “fanzine,” not even in the early days of zine publishing. The debate about what was the first fanzine thus largely revolves around what can be defined as a “fanzine” in the first place. Since at least Duncombe, it has been customary in Zine Studies to refer to The Comet, first published in May 1930 and later retitled Cosmology, as the first fanzine ever published (Duncombe, 1997: 108; Atton, 2002: 56; Triggs, 2010: 17). This claim can be traced back to early zines as well, notably William Crawford’s Science Fiction Bibliography, published in 1935. The Comet does not feature, however, in Jack Speer’s Up to Now, the earliest history of fandom and early zine culture, published in 1940. This indicates that, at least for an important portion of fandom at that time, the publication of The Comet might have went unnoticed.

The Comet was the club organ of the Science Correspondence Club (founded in 1928, changing name for the International Scientific Association), a club founded by readers of Amazing Stories, the first magazine entirely dedicated to science fiction stories, edited by Hugo Gernsback. Both the club and The Comet were thus heavily influenced by Gernsback’s vision of science fiction, characterized by an emphasis on science at the expense of narrative invention and literary quality. According to the introduction of the first issue, the Science Correspondence Club is described as “a club whose central

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12 Duncombe cites Wertham (1973) and Rau (1994) to back his claim, stating: “Rau qualifies her support of The Comet as the first zine by writing that it is the ‘first fan magazine printed by a club.’ Wertham states unequivocally that it is the first. I hedge my bets by siding with Rau.” (Duncombe, 1997: 214, endnote 7)

13 The original published version of Up to Now has not been digitized and made available online. However, Fancyclopedia 3 reproduces the text in its entirety in separate pages (Fancyclopedia 3: “Up to Now”).
idea was to spread science and scientific thought among the laymen of the world so inclined, by means of correspondence.” (Dennis & Palmer, 1930: 2) The contents of the same issue are mostly devoted to the club’s internal business, as well as to an essay titled “Trends in Psychology” signed by Lilith Lorraine, a writer publishing short stories in Gernsback’s magazines. The closest thing to science fiction it featured was a poem by Frank Brent Eason titled “Evolution” comparing club members late in paying their dues to fish from the Paleozoic time.

Prominent fan Donald A. Wollheim unequivocally denied first fanzine status to The Comet: “It would make [an] exceedingly dull reading to a fan today. Many fans would probably reject it as a fan magazine entirely.” (Wollheim, 1944: 4) Moskowitz, one of Wollheim’s dire enemies in early fandom, agrees on this point: “Many erroneously title Cosmology as the first fan magazine, but in all honesty such a term as ‘fan magazine’ is decidedly out of place when applied to this magazine.” (Moskowitz, 1938: 10-11)

The candidate preferred by both Wollheim and Moskowitz is The Time Traveller, the first issue of which was published in January or February of 1932. The reasons given to support this claim are many. First, The Time Traveller fashioned itself as “Science Fiction’s Only Fan Magazine” with its first issue. This indicates at least that its editors—all later major figures in science fiction and fandom—had no consciousness of any predecessors. It was also the first fanzine known to this day to make science fiction—and not amateur science—the focus of its attention. Additionally, it was the first fanzine to be published independently of any club or organization. It was, finally, the first fanzine to circulate enough to be well-known by later fans. Its creators were active in fandom long after 1932. This last point might seem trivial on the surface. It is, however, a most determining element.

As was noted already, the earliest definitions turned to fandom to define what a “(fan)zine” was. This is echoed by the Fancyclopedia 3 article:
A fanzine is created primarily for fandom and is a part of the nearly century-old conversation among fans. It is more than simply a publication’s form […] If a fanzine-like-thing was done primarily for other members of fandom, it’s a fanzine; if not, it’s a paleo-fanzine or perhaps a separate invention (Fancyclopedia 3: “What Was the First Fanzine?”).

There are countless examples of “paleo-fanzines” antedating Time Traveller or even The Comet. The Fancyclopedia 3 article cites The Recluse, published in 1927, disqualified for being unconnected with fandom and limited to its immediate environment, the Lovecraftian circle. During my own research on the context of early zine culture, I was lucky enough to come across a mention of an even earlier example, a publication that, given its age, could well be considered the very first fanzine.

I found it in Middletown, a classic of American sociology first published in 1929 by Robert and Helen Lynd. The idea behind Middletown was to conduct an extensive analysis of an undisclosed middle-sized Midwestern city. The Lynds devoted significant attention to the transformation of leisure at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Among the activities cited by the youth participating to their study, one boy was producing his own “little magazine” (Lynd & Lynd, 1957: 309). The questionnaire from which this information was gathered was passed in the spring of 1924, making this would-be fanzine anterior to Amazing Stories and professional science fiction publishing. No details are given about the publication, neither about its contents nor its production. The omnipresence of magazines in Middletown suggests, however, that it might have been inspired by one of them14.

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14 “Into the 9,200 homes of the city, there came in 1923, at a rough estimate, 20,000 copies of each issue of commercially published weekly and monthly periodicals, excluding denominational church papers, Sunday School papers distributed free weekly to most of the 6–7,000 attending Sunday School, and lodge and civic club magazines.” (Lynd & Lynd, 1957: 231)

“Any detailed analysis of the contents of the periodicals which flood Middletown weekly and monthly is impossible […] Approximately one in each five of the 9,200 homes in the city receives the American Magazine and one in each six the Saturday Evening Post. Each of the following goes regularly into from one in each five to one in each ten of the homes: Delineator, Ladies’ Home Journal, McCall’s, Physical Culture, True Story, Woman’s Home Companion. Two hundred to 500 homes receive one or more of Adventure, Argosy, Collier’s College Humor, Cosmopolitan, Country Gentlemen, Dream World, Good Housekeeping, Hearst’s International, Modern Marriage, Motion Picture Magazine, National Geographic, Pictorial Review, Popular Science, Red Book, True Romance, and others.” (Lynd & Lynd, 1957: 239)

It can be noted that some of these magazines, including Argosy, occasionally published science fiction stories. None of Gernsback’s early radio and electronics magazines, in which he published his own science fiction stories, are mentioned by the Lynds.
This example reveals how widespread self-publishing might have been in the first decades of the 20th century, at least in the United States. The whole idea behind Middletown was to provide an account of the social and cultural life in a “typical” middle-sized American city at the turn of the century. It is therefore safe to assume that if there was a young fanzine editor in Middletown in the mid-1920s, then there were fanzine editors all over the country. But even if there were, they played no part in the development of fandom, and therefore zine history. Without this connection to fandom, and however fanzine-like these zines before fandom might have been, they necessarily fall into the “mundane” or “paleo-fanzine” category.

Perhaps, then, wondering “what was the first zine?” is not the right question to ask. Perhaps the question should rather be: “when did zine culture first emerged?” Focusing solely on the fanzine form, its referent, without taking into account any other aspect of a historical definition of “(fan)zine” (either its signifier or its signified), we are bound to fall into a regression ad infinitum, ultimately including all the history of amateur publishing, not unlike revisionist histories taking only signifieds into account.

The anonymous author of Fancyclopedia 3’s article frames the problem unambiguously:

Our goal here is not to demonstrate that fanzines are millennia old with the earliest example having been found in Egypt with an excited article by Mentuhotep I responding to a dismissive [letter of comments] by Gilgamesh on the Book of the Dead […] We are interested in locating the start of a continuous, connected fannish tradition. (Fancyclopedia 3: “What Was the First Fanzine?”)

The emergence of organized fandom was a long process that unfolded over a number of years. The most prudent estimates range from between January 1932 with the first publication of The Time Traveller all the way to July 1939 with the First World Science Fiction Convention in New York (Gabilliet, 2010: 280). The Time Traveller might not have been the first fanzine. It was, however, for most fans in the 1930s, the earliest example of what they were doing.

Faced with the alternative of two unsatisfactory origins stories—one starting in 1940 with the first use of the “fanzine” signifier, another going back to the Ancient Egyptians and cave paintings in
search of cheap legitimacy—it is necessary to imagine a third way. This history would be one not of zines but of zine culture. Recasting zines in their context thus opens up a whole new series of questions regarding the definition of “(fan)zine,” bringing previously ignored forms of zine politics into the picture. And this history begins here, in the first half of the 1930s, as many publications begin to circulate throughout the United States, as clubs and groups forms, and as zine culture is slowly moving towards its first phase of structuration.

1.2. A History of Zine Culture

It is unclear when the phrase “zine culture” was first coined. Mike Gunderloy—as founder of Factsheet Five, probably the best positioned to provide a general overview of zine culture in the 1980s—preferred the concepts of “network” or “world” to describe the cultural environment within which zines circulated (Gunderloy, 1982a: 1; Gunderloy & Janice, 1992). In his 1997 seminal study, Duncombe for his part included zines in a larger “alternative culture” (Duncombe, 1997). In the 1990s “fanzine culture” was sometimes used in scholarship, but mostly in relation to a specific corpus. Richard Haynes’s study of English soccer fanzines was thus subtitled “The Rise of Football Fanzine Culture” (Haynes, 1995). Later in the decade, the Canadian magazine Broken Pencil, a contemporary heir of Factsheet Five, was using the subtitle “Zine culture in Canada and the world” starting with issue 10, in the fall of 1999. In academia, Anna Poletti is to my knowledge the first to use the phrase, in her 2008 book Intimate Ephemera, subtitled “Reading Young Lives in Australian Zine Culture.” By now, the phrase “zine culture” is commonly in use within Zine Studies to refer to the specific context

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15 Poletti is also, incidentally, the first to use “Zine Studies,” explicitly inscribing her work in a larger collective research effort engaging with zines and zine culture (Poletti, 2008: 12). This commitment to Zine Studies was then picked up by Janice Radway (2011), followed by Buchanan in her 2018 study of Riot Grrrl zines.
in which zines are produced, circulated, and valued (see for example Kempson, 2015; 2018; Douglas & Poletti, 2016; Chidgey, 2020).

As for zine culture’s signified, we have already seen how, in the 1930s and 1940s, fanzines and fandom were consubstantial—fanzines being defined by their circulation within fandom and fandom being in large part structured by the circulation of fanzines. In these years, and up until the diversification of the medium in the 1950s and 1960s, we can consider that fandom and zine culture were indistinguishable. This early zine culture grounded in fandom, with the science fiction fanzine serving as the dominant form of zine publishing, was then progressively replaced from the mid-1960s to the turn of the 1970s and 1980s by a different type of zine culture, based on the punk subculture. The prototypical zine embodying this major turn was, of course, the punk zine, followed by an intense diversification of post-punk zine genres (Subcultures Network, 2018). Starting in the 1990s, Riot Grrrl carried this logic through to the 2000s and beyond (Marcus, 2010; Labry. 2015; Buchanan, 2018).

Already in the 1990s, however, a different relationship to zine publishing began to emerge, slowly translating into a new period in zine culture’s history. The recasting of the “fanzine” category into the shorter “zine” (Atton, 2002: 54) indicated that zines were starting to foster their own, relatively autonomous subculture-like cultural environment.

With the help of cross-pollinating institutions like Factsheet Five, zines began to slip their moorings as fanzines of their host cultures and take their position under a wider umbrella as zines qua zines. To zine writers and readers it seemed as if “a true subculture is forming, one that crosses a number of boundaries,” as described William Peschel in a personal letter to Mike [Gunderloy] […] This conglomeration of disparate publications and publishers developed certain traits indicative of a community: a shared lingo that appears in a glossary for the first time in the thirteenth issue of Factsheet Five; a Who’s Who?, Jim Romenesko’s Obscure, which gives community news on the zine world and refers to a species known as “notable zinesters”; and even a philanthropist: Tim Yohannan, the editor of MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL, which distributes its annual costs and revenues among zine writers and others undertaking similar projects. (Duncombe, 1997: 51)
Contemporary zine culture seems to have operated yet another shift from the one described by Duncombe at the end of the 1990s. The zine culture I know from my involvement in Montreal’s zine scene, through reading American zines and studies about them, and through my experience on the field in France, seems characterized by a greater integration to the cultural field. A simple look at any recent issue of *Broken Pencil* shows well that zine makers are artists, writers, editors, publishers, and designers often working on both sides of the “underground/mainstream” divide. This situation is reinforced by an institutional configuration that both contrasts with and extends the legacy of the zine culture of the previous decades: large zine festivals where all genres are represented, zine libraries and archives, a multiplication of publishers whose output alternates between zines and more conventional books and magazines, printers and workspaces dedicated to zines, and even prizes and awards for zine makers. The development of Zine Studies can, of course, be added as another important trait distinguishing contemporary zine culture from previous periods.

Most of these institutions being at least in part deployed at a local level, the concept of “scene,” in use both in zine culture and in academia, is perhaps best suited to describe the way contemporary zine culture is organized. Whereas zine practices could be understood as the referent of the “(fan)zine” sign, zine scenes are perhaps the referents of the more abstract, all-encompassing concept of “zine culture.”

1.2.1. Zine Scenes: Building Blocks of Zine Culture

Stemming from studies of popular music, the concept of scene has been theorized to account for both the local appropriation and the wider dissemination of cultural practices (Straw, 1991: 375). It was specifically designed to make sense of the evolution of subcultures such as punk passed their initial, explosive phase.
In this perspective, scenes are considered as local spaces,

made of specific artistic and social activities, but also of cultural objects dynamically put in circulation. The “scene” approach emphasizes and renews the study of the relational and material dimensions of culture. It thus introduces various kinds of phenomena into the analysis: technological, mediatic, institutional, expressive. Above all, the model highlights moments of effervescence and significant places influencing or structuring the urban space surrounding, and sometimes in the margins of, sites of instituted artistic creation and dissemination (Jacob, n. d.: 5).

The “scene perspective” thus highlights the place of zine culture within (inter)national cultural activity, while accounting for its rooting in varying local contexts. Bennett and Peterson provide further refining of the concept by making a useful distinction between three aspects of cultural scenes:

The first, local scene, corresponds most closely with the original notion of a scene as clustered around a specific geographic focus. The second, translocal scene, refers to widely scattered local scenes drawn into regular communication around a distinctive form of music and lifestyle. The third, virtual scene, is a newly emergent formation in which people scattered across great physical spaces create the sense of a scene via fanzines and, increasingly, through the Internet. (Bennett & Peterson, 2004: 6–7)

At the local level, most scenes share the characteristics highlighted by Jacob. In their own individual way, zine scenes are constituted of specific activities (zine making and other zine-related activities) and objects put into circulation (zines, discourses about zines). They are structured by local institutions—in most cases regular events, places of gathering, zine collections—inscribed into the urban cultural life. At the translocal level, these scenes are interconnected negotiating their place in the margins of the broader national or international cultural field. If local scenes are always characterized by a certain appropriation of a larger, often global cultural phenomenon broadcast by the cultural industries (Bennett & Peterson, 2004: 7), it is at the translocal level that they develop the institutional backdrop from which they acquire their characteristic aspect.

16 “Les scènes sont constituées bien sûr d’activités artistiques et sociales particulières, mais aussi d’objets culturels singuliers, transmis de façon vivante et sans cesse mis en circulation. Le modèle souligne et renouvelle l’étude des dimensions relationnelles et matérielles de la culture et fait ainsi entrer dans l’analyse des phénomènes de divers ordres : technologique, médiatique, institutionnel, expressif. Le modèle nous permet surtout de penser des moments d’effervescence et les lieux significatifs qui rayonnent ou qui ont un effet structurant dans l’espace urbain, autour, et parfois en marge des lieux institués de la création et de la diffusion artistique.” (My Translation)
The virtual dimension of scenes is perhaps harder to comprehend. Bennett and Peterson use it to account for the rise of internet-based global “scene-like” configurations, which necessitates lesser institutional structure than their local and translocal counterparts. They also consider the circulation of zines through mail, the main means of distribution before the rise of zine fairs and festivals in the 1990s and 2000s, as fostering such virtual communities:

Although the concept of virtual scene has been highlighted by the advent of the Internet, fanzines (Duncombe, 1997) and other forms of niche media (Thornton, 1995) have long served as an important resource for fans of particular genres of music, offering a channel of communication, for example, for the exchange of information about their favorite performers, performances, production techniques, and so on. (Bennett & Peterson, 2004: 11)

Although Bennett and Peterson are mostly interested in the work of music zines not going further back than the 1980s, similar remarks have been made concerning other genres, including science fiction and comics: “[Science fiction and comic fanzines] also functioned as virtual communities, bringing together fans geographically and socially distant from one another.” (Atton, 2002: 56)

In a context in which fanzines served as one of the few institutions on which fans could rely, early fandom-based zine culture often took the form of such a virtual scene. As local clubs and national distribution networks and conventions began to form, this virtual scene coexisted alongside more translocalized configurations. In later zine culture, metazines like Factsheet Five, today in large part replaced by social media, contributed to this virtual scene life, complemented by translocal scene activities. We can therefore consider virtual scenes as “prelocal” or “paralocal” scenes. To a certain extent, any form of organized cultural production will ultimately, through networks of distribution, create scene-like effects, foster a community, and imply forms of socialization. When these networks acquire a certain level of organization and structure, they become embodied as scenes, generating more intensive interaction, multiplying occasions to meet for their participants, and rooting the culture locally and translocally (Silver et al., 2010).
The notion of “zine scenes” (local, translocal, or virtual) has many advantages for the study of zine culture. First, it highlights the configuration of zine culture and locates zine making in its material and institutional context. It opens the analysis to a wider range of actors, whereas zine makers have often been the main focus of zine scholarship. Moreover, it can help make sense of the extreme diversity of zine culture, not only historically but also across geographical and cultural space. Every zine scene has its own history, its own particular organization, and its own way to appropriate and actualize zine culture at the local level. Through translocal and virtual connections, networked scenes are the actual fabric of zine culture.

1.2.2. Genres and Zine History

The history of zine genres is an illustration of how activity at the local level leaves traces and ultimately contributes to the evolution of zine culture at a broader scale. It also, incidentally, illustrates the material dimension of zine history, beyond its portrayal in historiography. The steady production of zines—as it adapts to changing circumstances, struggles within the culture, revisions and redefinitions of the medium, as well as shifts in dominant forms and aesthetics—constantly redefines zines and the culture. The divisions and subdivisions into genres highlight this process of zine history in the making.

At every stage of zine history, there were a large number of different zine genres. Early fandom-based zine culture already had its panoply of genres, defined by various overlapping distinctions. The *Fancyclopedia 3* “Fanzine” page lists no less than 18 different genres. Some are defined by their subject matter: “adzines” for advertisements; “filkzines” for fan folk songs, “genzines” for general content, “letterzines” for republished letters of comment, “newszines” for fan news, “reviewzines” for zine reviews, “individzines” for personal zines filled with “what ever it occurs the editor to include.”
Another category of genres describes different forms of publications and their material aspect: “cardzines” printed on postcards, “crudzines” of poor quality, or “short-shots” of small size and limited circulation. Finally, a whole subset of genres are defined by the organization of their production. “Clubzines,” produced by fan clubs, are often referred to as the earliest genre of fanzines ever published (Bristol, 1944: 33). Another example is given by “apazines,” circulated in Amateur Press Associations, or “bidzines,” and other publications related to the organizing of science fiction conventions.

The origins of these genres differ. Some were inherited from the very necessities of early zine publishing. The fact that the first fanzines were the product of clubs probably has to do with the difficulty of gathering the necessary resources—money to cover the costs of materials, equipment to produce copies—or organizing the publishing process, be it to gather the texts and illustrations, to duplicate the fanzines, or to distribute them. Clubs also guaranteed a readership for these early fanzines, also used as club organs providing essential information to its members.

Genres are also born the “natural” way so to speak, as is the case of letterzines. The first known letterzine was *Voice of Imagination*, first published in January 1939 as a follow up to *Imagination!*, one of the most important early fanzines of the Los Angeles scene. The former started as a letter column section of the latter. When *Imagination!* ceased publication, the “Voice of Imagination” section had become the most important part of the zine. Forrest Ackerman thus decided to keep publishing the section independently, creating a new genre of fanzine.

Other genres originate from deliberate innovations. Cardzines, short-shots and individzines are examples of genres it is safe to assume were invented by a single zine maker who was then emulated by others. These innovations are, of course, the product of circumstances. Cardzines, for example, took advantage of lower pricing and faster mailing for postcards, and the idea was immediately picked
up on by other fans. The rise of newszines tells a similar story. The first newszine, *Science Fiction News Letter*, was created by Dick Wilson in December 1937. For months, it served as the only source of regular news on fandom. Wilson progressively drew closer to a group of fans, the Futurians, known in fandom for their far-left politics and their antagonizing attitude. Not long after, James Taurasi, part of a growing number of fans opposed to the Futurians, started publishing *Fantasy News* (starting in June 1938), in a deliberate attempt to counteract Wilson’s monopoly on fan information.

The example of newszines also shows how conflict can foster the creation of new genres. Bidzines are a similar case. The first science fiction conventions were at the centre of heated quarrels between fans as to by whom, where and how they would be organized. Bidzines were the product of this context. Their editors would announce a year and a location for a forthcoming convention, placing a “bid” on their own club as host organization. Other clubs would then contest these bids by offering their own location. The pages of early zines are thus filled with convention projects that never materialized, fandom not being at that time big enough to sustain two conventions being held simultaneously in different cities.

Fast-forward several decades and the genre classifications of science fiction fanzines almost disappeared from zine culture. In *Notes from Underground*, Duncombe provides a “Taxonomy” of 15 zine categories to illustrate the diversity of zine publishing in his time (Duncombe, 1997: 9–13). None of the categories used in science fiction fandom appear in this classification. In fact, they are all condensed in a single category, “fanzine,” which also gathers most zine genres created before the 1980s, sorted by fandom: science fiction, music, sports, television and film, as well as “etc.” This latter subcategory then includes a vast array of “fandoms,” illustrating the profound discontinuity separating the zine culture of the time from its predecessors: “fans of household items, mass transit systems, board games, and what-have-you all put out zines”. The other categories illustrate this disconnect further: zines, perzines, “scene zines” (akin to fandom’s newszines), network zines or metazines.
(Factsheet Five being the prime example), fringe culture zines, literary zines, art zines, and so on. The list ends half-jokingly with “the rest” — “a large category”—hinting at the incredible diversification of zine publishing since the 1980s.

The devolution of all the genres established within fandom to the single “fanzine” genre decades later shows how predominant forms and categories rise and fall as zine history progresses. Science fiction fanzines, once encompassing all zine production, were decentered at the time of Duncombe’s work on zine culture, becoming a mere subcategory of the catch-all “fanzine” within the even larger “zine” category. Duncombe’s categorization itself bears the mark of his time, characterized by the subcultural legacy of punk zines and the major reworking of the zine category led by Gunderloy and his Factsheet Five. In this context, “perzines” (or autobiographical zines) are just one genre among others, and this despite Duncombe already noting that “Emphasis on the personal […] is a central ethic of all zines” (Duncombe, 1997: 26), something that was far from self-evident in earlier stages of zine history.

A decade later, as the predominant forms of Duncombe’s time were already in sharp decline, Poletti (2008) notes the predominance of perzines in zine culture, an observation relayed by Piepmeier (2009) and Buchanan (2018). This displaced some of the key ideological elements, introduced by punk zines, at the heart of Duncombe’s study—DIY ethics, political radicalism, a fierce opposition to the “mainstream”—in favour of others, already noted by Duncombe but having gained a central status in the meantime: authenticity, intimacy, identification, community. Poletti and Piepmeier note how zines of the 2000s display more diverse and nuanced forms of writing, notably regarding autobiographical narrative (Poletti, 2008: 32-24; Piepmeier, 2009: 123–126). Likewise, the rise of perzines to predominance during the 2000s marginalized genres that were considered central in Duncombe’s time. These once-predominant genres, like science fiction fanzines, have not disappeared from
contemporary zine culture. They, rather, permeate into contemporary zine culture as traces and symbols of the past.

Zine makers are not only dealing with contemporary forms and recent changes in zine making practices. They are also strongly influenced by the accumulation of forms and genres. There is an inertia to zine history, among other things in the representations of what zines are or should be. A perfect example of such inertia is provided by the recourse to etymology in defining “(fan)zine” in a context such as France, where the use of “zine” never supplanted that of “fanzine.” Referring to a purportedly fundamental connection between zine making and a “fan” attitude, some do not hesitate to disqualify large portions of contemporary zine production, on the basis that they show no trace of fandom nor of the amateurism typical of fans. For example: “Even when limited to 10 copies and resolutely rare, zines do not claim to the status of art objects; their anchorage is in the press, and as such excludes artists’ books. Artists’ zines, which are published rather massively these days, thus appear as so many contradictions or appropriations.” (Rannou, 2017: 22)

Consequently, some publications showing traces of fan activity are, in France, considered as “fanzines,” even as they would not be considered as such in other countries. Rannou’s own periodical comics fanzine, Gorgonzola, topping at almost 200 pages, and bound as a paperback book, would easily be denied zine status in the American context today. Even in France, concurrent definitions of “(fan)zine” insist on the format, smaller size and stapled binding for instance, as an important

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17 The shift from “fanzine” to “zine” has also not been completely embraced in the United Kingdom, where both terms often coexist. Examples in zine scholarship include Teal Triggs’s *Fanzines. The DIY Revolution* (2010), and The Subcultural Network’s *Ripped, Torn and Cut. Pop, Politics and Punk Fanzines from 1976* (2019). Despite their use of the “fanzine” rather than “zine” signifier, both mostly focus on punk and post-punk publications. Even to this day in the United States, “fanzine” is still sometimes used to refer to recent publications that have nothing to do with fandom. A notable example is Peter Rehberg’s recent monography *Hipster Porn: Queer and Affective Sexualities in the Fanzine Butt* (2022). It should, in passing, be noted that *Butt* (2001–2011) bore the mention “magazine” rather than “fanzine” (see van Bennekom & Jonkers, 2006) although its circulation mostly limited to gay circles is undeniable.

18 “Même à dix exemplaires et s’assumant rare, le fanzine ne se revendique pas objet d’art, son ancrage est encore une fois dans la presse et exclut donc le livre d’art. Les “fanzines d’artistes” qui sont publiés assez massivement ces dernières années apparaissent donc comme autant de contresens, ou de récupération.” (My translation)
criterion. This is often the case, as it happens, in art zine circles, where zines are considered in relation with a wide range of printed art and artists’ publications. The use of the signifier “artzine” and the greater internationalization of the French art zine scene might have contributed to make possible such a framing.

By paying attention to the conditions of emergence of zine genres and classifications, we can see how much internal conflict over definitions contribute to shape zine culture and its history. The history of zine culture is a history of discontinuities, and predominant forms and practices have come and gone. Yet, like all history of cultural production, it is also a cumulative history, its current state being the product of its past, as much as of the context it finds itself in, in the present.

If changes in genres and zine making practices can be considered apolitically as the result of individual preferences (although these can also be considered on a more political footing), changes imposed on zine culture necessarily have a political component, even when they focus on aesthetic matters. This is because zine culture, as a social and cultural space, is the site of ever-present debates and conflicts over the meaning of “(fan)zine,” the different forms they might take, and the broader orientations of the culture itself. Chantal Mouffe provides the theoretical tools needed to frame zine culture as such a site of political activity. For Mouffe, politics can be defined as “the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality” (Mouffe, 2005: 9). Transposed to the context of zine culture, we could frame zine politics as the area of activity concerned with the organization and the orientation of the culture, its actors, its institutions. Debates over the many definitions of “(fan)zine” are, of course, an important site of this internal political activity specific to zine culture.

Pierre Bourdieu has made of conflicts over definitions a central aspect of his sociology of art and literature. Alluding to the inherent conflictuality opposing actors of the cultural field, he thus notes:
Internal struggles [...] inevitably take the form of conflicts over definition, in the proper sense of the term. Each is trying to impose the boundaries of the field most favourable to their interests or—which amounts to the same thing—the best definition of conditions of true membership of the field (Bourdieu, 1996: 223. Emphasis in the original)

In periods of crisis, these conflicts over definition can be of the utmost importance, touching upon the very survival of a given field. The reason for this is that definitions are not simply ways to frame existing objects and practices, but also frameworks to orient them, and to direct future action and production.

1.2.3. E-zines and the “Death of Zines”

The short history of “e-zines”—short for “electronic zines”—offers a patent example of the struggles for definition, and their ultimate consequences for zine making practices, and zine culture as a whole. It also illustrates how a wide range of actors contribute—through their debates and conflicts over matters of definition—to the creation and actualization of zine culture.

In the 1980s, interest in informatics and the burgeoning of the internet was strong in zine culture. In many ways, the zine culture of the time compares to an “analogue” equivalent to today’s social media, a parallel that has not gone unnoticed by zine scholars19. Mike Gunderloy, for instance, is not only known as the founder of Factsheet Five, but also as a programmer and early internet enthusiast. After turning his back on zine culture in the early 1990s, he published many books popularizing programming, and was a prolific blogger covering computing-related topics. His personal blog A Fresh Cup was active until 2020 (Gunderloy, n.d.). He strongly insisted on the possible connections to be made between the networked zine community and the utopian promises of early internet culture. His

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19 See for example Duncombe’s afterword for the 2008 edition of Notes from Underground (209–212); and Buchanan, 2018: 167–173.
own interest in both science fiction and anarchism might have contributed to this. The first issue of Factsheet Five published, pell-mell, zine reviews and bulletin board addresses, a type of computer server network precursor to the web (Gunderloy, 1982b).

Enthusiasm for “e-zines” was notable in zine culture in the 1990s, although some zinesters already opposed the transition to digital publishing (Wright, 2001: 157–158). This early resistance to digital media was bound to the e-zine category disregarding distinctions important to zine makers, as it was used to include personal websites, online professional newspapers and magazines, blogs, and digitized paper zines almost indiscriminately (Gill, 1999). By the end of the decade, online publishing progressively became understood as an alternative to, a replacement of, or perhaps as a remedy to the ills of a stagnating zine culture.

During this period, pessimistic diagnoses of the state of zine culture abounded. Two noteworthy essays proclaimed the death of zines. The first, authored by John Marr (author of true crime zine Murder Can Be Fun) was titled “Zines Are Dead,” and published in the December 1999 issue of Bad Subjects, an e-zine published on eServer.org, an open access electronic publishing cooperative based in Berkeley, California. The second, published a few months later in the spring of 2000 issue of Broken Pencil, was authored by Chris Yorke (from the perzine Gypsy Times) and titled “Zines Are Dead: The Six Deadly Sins That Killed Zinery.”

In “Six Deadly Sins,” Yorke presents a timeline of the decade, emphasizing the crisis he considers to be plaguing zine making. According to him, a handful of years have seen a full-blown zine revolution — “what can only be thought as a fundamental revolution in the consciousness of those involved”—followed by an abrupt decline in relevance: “I saw it begin in 94, boom in 95–96, and trail off in 97–98. These days […] there’s not a hell of a lot worth looking at.” (Yorke, 2000: 18) Marr seems to agree with this periodization, at least when it comes to the beginning of the crisis. He has
the “Great Zine Explosion” of the 1980s, fuelled by *Factsheet Five*, followed by the “Great Zine Crash of 1997”:

Years of steady growth in the zine scene reached a peak. Two major anthologies of zine writing came out, accompanied by a flock of other zine related books. Media attention peaked. And then: nothing. It’s been a downhill ever since. Most of the zine books tanked. All those breathless feature writers who popularized zines are expending their adjectives on the latest dotcom IPO. (Marr, 1999)

For neither of these writers is the rise of digital publishing or general enthusiasm for the web the sole culprits. Of Yorke’s six “deadly sins” (complexity, unfeasibility, distractibility, instability, futility, and anxiety), only a couple seem to be related to the broader crisis in publishing. The rest, the majority, are existential crises internal to zine culture. The original spirit of zine publishing (embodied by what he considers its six “virtues”: idealism, community, hope, simplicity, determination, and purpose) has been corrupted, he argues, as the culture progressively closed in on itself. If Marr recognizes that the crisis seems to extend to mainstream publishing as well, and that the rise of digital publishing has a part to play in it, he also considers the decline affecting zine culture to be rooted in its own resignation. For both Marr and Yorke then, digital publishing is not so much a cause of zine culture’s “fin de siècle” crisis, but a credible alternative spared from its ills and failures. “The quirky spirit of zines hasn’t died,” Marr claims, “It’s just migrated to the web.”

A response to this pessimistic outlook on zines coupled with an optimism for online publishing came throughout the 2000s, and profoundly transformed recent zine history. In 2005, Jenna Freedman, zine collection librarian at Barnard College in New York City, published an article in *Counterpoise*, a journal edited by librarians, focusing on “marginalized publications” and topics

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20 It is interesting to note that a parallel crisis affected science fiction fanzines at the same time. Two pages of the fan wiki Fanlore are dedicated to this: “Fandom and the Internet,” and “Zines and the Internet.” A decline in science fiction zine production is noted in the late 1990s, accentuated in the 2000s. Unlike the rest of zine culture, however, fan publishing massively migrated online, relinquishing zines: “By 2010,” the anonymous author of the page claims, “much of online fandom had adopted a hostile, almost dismissive attitude towards print fanzines.” (Fanlore: “Zines and the Internet”)
disregarded in public debate. In “Zines Are Not Blogs,” she details a point-by-point comparison between zines and blogs, touching upon production (self-publishing, print run, motives), circulation (relation to the mainstream, budget and accessibility, portability, readership), and the values of zine culture (community, relationship to time and change, interactivity) (Freedman, 2005). Freedman defends not only the specificity but also the superiority of zines over blogs, her only concession being over the question of interactivity. Zines, according to her, allow for a greater freedom of speech, a more intimate contact between readers and creators, and foster a more active cultural and political community than blogs could ever do.

In retrospect, Freedman’s text attests of a period of transition: if, on the one hand, she defends the superiority of zines over digital publishing, she does it in terms that will soon become obsolete. Zines, Freedman’s argument goes, are superior to blogs as means of communication. For later commentators picking up on her ideas, it is the materiality, the quality of zines as artefacts, rather than their qualities as means of communication, that define their superiority over digital media.

Zine Studies was an important site for the elaboration of this new understanding of zines. In her 2008 study of Australian perzine culture, Poletti parallels perzines and quilts. Both quilting and zine making, she argues, rely on the re-use and collage of existing materials. Following scholarship on quilting, she also notes that both zines and quilts are overlooked “autobiographical” documents of women’s history (Poletti, 2008: 54–56). By comparing zines to quilts, contra their association with other forms of “alternative” or “new” media like blogs and online publishing, Poletti emphasizes the material dimension of zine making.

A similar emphasis on materiality is at the crux of Piepmeier’s feminist study of zines. For Piepmeier, zines foster “embodied communities”: “A piece of paper bears the marks of the body that created it as well as carrying other sensory information […] to the reader. The paper, then, is a nexus,
a technology that mediates the connections not just of ‘people’ but of bodies.” (Piepmeier, 2009: 63)

Piepmeier does not reject zines as means of communication entirely. She considers that the material dimension of zines conveys “sensory information” that is both essential to zine culture and foreign to digital media.

Piepmeier and Poletti are, of course, not the only ones to have perceived this change. Piepmeier appropriately notes that:

Although blogs and zines are often conflated, zine creators know that the material matters, and they repeatedly identify zines as a paper medium. Zine World, one of the major zine directories, argues “Zines are different from e-zines, which are ‘zines’ published on the internet, via personal webpages or email lists… There are significant differences between the two genres, and we choose to retain the distinction. When Zine World says ‘zine,’ we mean something on paper. We only review zines.” [“What’s a Zine?”, Zine World 21, May/June 2004:2] Indeed, this is a point that zinesters make repeatedly.” (Piepmeier, 2009: 63)

Conclusion

When looking for a way to frame zine culture in his 1973 study, Fredric Wertham used the phrase “A Special Form of Communication” (Wertham, 1973). This was not a controversial take on zine culture, far from it. It simply stated the obvious. Important transformations in the media environment over the three following decades, however, made paper and materiality, not communication, the most distinctive features of zines. Up to the point of, perhaps, putting into question the role of zines as a means of communication altogether, privileging its reality as artefact. As Zaytseva notes: “The transformations of fanzines in the digital epoch illustrate a capital shift of the whole system of communication […] as well as that of the place fanzines occupy within it, giving birth to some brand-new forms of symbiosis between digital communications and artefact-zines.” (Zaytseva, 2018: 45)

As the internet slowly replaced printed media as the easiest, cheapest, most accessible means of communication, zine culture faced a crisis. The result was, despite chronicles of a death foretold, not
the demise of zine culture but its transformation from a culture of communication to a culture of craft and printed arts. To use Zaytseva’s terminology, the zine-as-medium was replaced by the zine-as-artefact.

It is nowadays considered obvious that zines are and have always been printed publications. As such, they are considered at the very least distinct from digital culture and at the most a form of resistance against it. The fall of 2020 issue of Broken Pencil—eloquently titled “Can Zines Save Democracy? Analog activism in the age of the digital dystopia”—ran a whole special feature on how zines help fight digital surveillance and algorithmic discipline. Almost four decades after the initial publication of Gunderloy’s Factsheet Five, zines and digital publishing had become so clearly distinct that one could be thought of as a tool to be used against the excesses of the other. In the meantime, zines were transformed, turned from a privileged means of communication for fandoms and subcultures, to a polyvalent medium for printed arts.

This transition was by no means inevitable. Zines have always been a printed medium. Until digital publishing truly boomed, however, they were never really thought of as such, and the potential for uncensored, decentralized, community-level communication was the privileged criterium from which zines were valued and appreciated. Had zinesters been willing to transition to e-zines and abandon paper, this might have remained so. At a time when actors of zine culture had a choice to make—paper or communication—they chose paper. This was far from inevitable. It was the result of internal debate and conflict, involving a wide range of actors, from zine makers embracing or resisting online publishing, to zine librarians defending the relevance of paper zines, to scholars adapting their conceptual frameworks to the evolution of zine making practices. The result was a thorough redefinition of zine culture, centred around the material and artistic value of zines rather than their potential for communication.
The case of e-zines and the shift they brought about in how zines are defined show how, while negotiating circumstances beyond their control, actors of zine culture collectively shape the medium. This work is by no means carried out harmoniously. It is rather the result of conflict. Between those who foretold the death of zines and those who considered that zines had nothing to do with digital media, only one side could prevail. It turned out to be those who argued against e-zines, those who excluded digital publishing from their definition of “(fan)zine.” The effect of their victory had major retroactive effects on zine culture, reframing its history as a history of alternative printed art.

This of course illustrates how definitions of “(fan)zine” are embodied in the medium itself. Problems of definitions are not merely descriptive but can have powerful feedback effects on practice. But it also shows how limited the approaches focused on the “(fan)zine” signifier or its signifieds at a given time can be. “(Fan)zine” is not a stable category and it has never been. It evolved significantly throughout zine history, and varies greatly at a given time and place. Without, on the one hand, accounting for the referent, understood as zines and zine making practices and, on the other, including the context of zine culture as part of the analysis, a thorough and methodical understanding of zines seems impossible. With the tools elaborated in this chapter in hand, however, it becomes easier to engage with the cases that follow spanning across genres, time, and space.
On July 2, 1939, Manhattan’s Caravan Hall opened its doors to over a hundred science fiction fans for the First World Science Fiction Convention (abbreviated NYCON today). Around noon on the first day, members of a prominent fan organization called the Futurians presented themselves at the entrance. As they walked out of the elevator towards the main room, Cyril Kornbluth, Donald A. Wollheim, Frederik Pohl, Robert Lowndes and Jack Gillespie were intercepted by James Taurasi, co-organizer of the event, soon joined by his colleague Sam Moskowitz. Anticipating confrontation, the organizers had pre-emptively called the police and warned the superintendents of the building. After a long argument (which, depending on the sources, may or may not have escalated to physical violence), it was decided that the troublesome fans, together with their fellow Futurian John B. Michel, would be barred from entry. Disgruntled, the excluded attendees settled for a parallel meeting of their own, in a cafeteria across the street. For the duration of the Convention, fans would thus travel back and forth between the main event and this “conference of the excluded.” Over the next two days, other Futurians allowed in would make repeated attempts to convince the organizers to reverse their decision, unsuccessfully. Minor efforts to disturb the main event were made, but they were also unfruitful.

Explanations given to justify the exclusion mirrored the conflict opposing the Futurians to New Fandom, the fan organization in charge of the Convention. According to Wollheim, leader of the Futurians, the decision was made well in advance, alleged threats to the smooth running of the event being mere excuses (Knight, 1977: 40). As for Moskowitz, he justified his decision based on the hostile attitude of the excluded. As proof, he pointed to seditious pamphlets calling to disrupt the event, found hidden behind a radiator in the Hall’s lobby. One pamphlet was indeed found and seized. Titled
A Warning, it attacked the organizing committee for its undemocratic practices, denouncing it as a dictatorial clique who had coopted the Convention to impose on fandom its own agenda. Erroneously attributed to John B. Michel, the leading political theorist of the Futurians, the pamphlet was initiated by David Kyle, ironically one of the few Futurians to be let in. Kyle’s tone was no less than seditious. It portrayed the Convention as a “loaded weapon” in the hands of the organizers, “aimed at their critics,” potentially “used to blast all fandom.” A Warning called for attendees to “be on the alert” and “be on your guard,” to stand by ready to intervene (Kyle, 1939: 1; 3).

The fact that New Fandom and the Futurians did have opposing agendas for fandom was well known to everyone involved. Members of both organizations had clashed repeatedly for the better part of the previous two years. They were in contradiction on about every single issue of the day. The “Exclusion Act” (as it came to be known in fan history) summed years of in-fighting within the New York scene. It crystallized the dynamic and underlying tensions of early zine culture: conflict over means of organization, opposing visions of fandom, but also antagonistic political ideologies. The pamphlets seized by the organizers—A Warning being only one of them—were considered by Moskowitz as communist propaganda, a common (and not entirely unjustified) accusation laid out against the Futurians (Moskowitz, 1974: 216). Coming from the Futurians, accusations of undemocratic and dictatorial attitudes from the part of New Fandom also had clear ideological undertones. The Futurians accused New Fandom of unrightfully dominating fandom, of course, but also of being ideologically so conservative as to border on fascism (also not entirely undeservedly).

The 1930s were indeed a very politically charged decade. Early fans and zine makers have not only witnessed, but also took part in the political clashes of their time. After all, many of them had personal ties to Europe, as first- or second-generation immigrants. Some were also Jewish. Others, on the other hand, had views that reflected the long tradition of American racism and white supremacy. This political context was reflected in the attitudes of fans and the energies they readily invested in
fandom during the 1930s and 1940s. Controlling a club, publishing a fanzine, organizing a nation-wide fan gathering, and retelling the story afterwards, were of paramount importance to them. Starting in the mid-1930s, organizations of all sorts proliferated, illustrating this strong will of gaining the status of “Big Name Fan” (Warner, 1969: xix). Considered as the latest effort to jostle their way on top of fandom, the organizing of the First World Convention itself was only a means to an end in this quest to impose one set of views to the fan community.

This chapter is an attempt at retrieving the intense activity of early zine culture. It focuses on the actors, the events, and the general context in which the first zines were created, exchanged, and fought over. My aim will be to highlight the basis on which zine culture was founded, and to retrieve the complicated political tensions that existed at the time. To do so, I will rely on methods developed by historians. First, I will present a prosopography—or collective biography—of the Futurians, locating their life histories within the broader contexts of fandom and the society of their time. Then, I will present a narrative account of the events leading up to the Exclusion Act of 1939, and of the fallout that ensued for the collective. Finally, I will turn to institutional analysis and underline the pivotal role the Futurians played—sometimes at their own expense—in the founding of zine culture. As I hope to make apparent, the context in which zine culture was founded and instituted, of which the Futurians were among the leading actors, established precedents that would in part determine the course of zine history for decades to come.

2.1. A Summary Prosopography

The mass of information available on fan history makes early zine culture the most documented period of zine history. A remarkable proportion of the primary sources—the zines—have been
preserved and made available online through projects such as Fanac.org, a community-based archive of fanzines and fan-related materials.

Moreover, there is a wealth of writing and secondary sources available on the period, retelling in rich details the period’s events of importance. Early zine culture and fandom is also a relatively modest phenomenon, gathering no more than a couple of hundreds of actors across a rudimentary network of interconnected local scenes. Combined, these two factors make the 1930s and 1940s the period of choice for an in-depth study of a population of zine makers and enthusiasts. For example, Fanac.org’s digital collection of fanzines holds well over 2,000 issues for the 1934–1945 period, of a grand total of 20,634 reaching up to this day. Looking at Pavlat and Evans’ *Fanzine Index* (1952), an almost exhaustive bibliography of fanzines published from the publication of *The Comet* in 1930 to 1952, I estimate it holds references for 7,100 separate zine issues. The bibliographical information and the quantity of zines available would make a large scale and extensive content analysis possible for the science fiction fanzine corpus, something that would be impossible with any other zine corpus given the resources currently available. In what follows, however, I will modestly attempt a summary prosopography of the Futurians.

Prosopography derives its name from “prosopopoeia,” a figure of speech in which one speaks as another person, an object, an abstraction, or a group. In the discipline of history, prosopography is thus the name given to the biography of groups:

Prosopography is concerned with certain groups of people sharing certain common characteristics. The group is analysed through the study of its constituent parts, the different people who make up the set. So, at the heart of all prosopography lies the issue of identity, that is, the individualization of the separate persons in a mass of data relating to a group or groups (Keats-Rohan, 2007: 151).

In a prosopography, the group studied is approached through two lenses: through the relation between the group and its constitutive members, and through the place of the group within the population. In the following section, I will first present the actors of the Futurian story. I will then use
a series of indicators—age, gender and sexuality, social class and education, race and cultural background—to draw a general picture of the collective, insisting as much as possible on the individuals and on the broader fandom and society they were a part of.

2.1.1. The Actors

Damon Knight (1977: ix)—literary critic, member of the Futurians, and author of the only history of the collective available—provides a list of the main “characters” of the Futurian story:

Asimov, Isaac  
Balter, Elsie  
Leslie Perri (a.k.a. Doris Baumgardt)  
Blish, James  
Burford, Daniel  
Cohen, Chester  
Cohen, Rosalind  
Dirk Wylie (a.k.a. Harry Dockweiler)  
Gillespie, Jack  
Gould, Jessica  
Kidd, Virginia  
Knight, Damon  
Kornbluth, Cyril  
Kyle, David A.  
Lowndes, Robert W.  
Merril, Judith (a.k.a. Zissman)  
Michel, John B.  
Pohl, Frederik  
Shaw, Larry T.  
Wilson, Richard  
Wollheim, Donald A.

Based on other sources—Speer (1939), Moskowitz (1974), Warner (1969), Knight (1977), and Fancyclopedia 3—we can add the following as additional actors:

Byers, Mary  
Kubiltus, Walter  
Rubinson, Jack (a.k.a. Robins)  
Woodard, Wayne (a.k.a. Hannes Bok)  
Leventman, Herman  
Sterling, Kenneth  
Thompson, Robert G.  
Belknap, Frank  
Jameson, Vida  
Castown, Rudolph  
Studley, Robert  
Gnaedinger, Mary  
Hall, Barbara
The central figures of the collective called themselves the “Quadrumvirs.” They were Donald A. Wollheim, John B. Michel, Frederik Pohl, and Robert W. Lowndes. They were the founders of the collective and played a central part in its history until its dissolution in 1945. Around this centre, we can identify two layers of secondary actors: a closer ring of active Futurians, and a more distant and looser network of actors periodically involved in the collective’s activities. This configuration was by no means stable over time. Around the time the Futurians made their first appearance as a collective to the rest of fandom, in 1937–1938, Moskowitz identified Jack Rubinson, Harry Dockweiler and Chester Cohen as close accomplices to the Quadrihumvir (Moskowitz, 1974: 142). In 1940–1941, the Futurians engaged in communal living and developed fully into the more organic collective they were later better known for. Knight mentions, in addition to Wollheim, Michel, Pohl, Lowndes, Dockweiler and Cohen, Cyril Kornbluth, Isaac Asimov and Richard Wilson, as well as female fans: Elsie Balter, Doris Baumgardt, Rosalind Cohen and Jessica Gould (Knight, 1977: 52). In 1945, the year the collective broke off, Judith Merril, Virginia Kidd and James Blish, together with Michel, Lowndes and Wollheim, were core members, the others, including fourth Quadrihumvir Frederick Pohl, having been either excluded from the collective or absent while serving in the war (Pohl-Weary & Merril, 2002: 43).

The head of the collective, Donald A. Wollheim was born in 1914, making him the oldest with the exception of Elsie Balter (born in 1910), who became his wife in 1943. Born in a non-religious Jewish family, Wollheim was also of higher social origin than most Futurians, his father being a successful doctor and owning a four-story apartment building in the upper-class area of East 79th Street, in Manhattan (Knight, 1977: 4). Wollheim is said to have started reading science fiction with the first issues of Amazing Stories in 1926 (Fancyclopedia 3: “Donald A. Wollheim”), and to have published his first letter of comment in that same magazine in November 1930 (ISFDB: “Chronological Bibliography: Donald A. Wollheim”). He became an active fan around 1933 and published his first story in a professional magazine in January 1934. After the Futurians split in 1945,
he became known as one of the most successful editors of science fiction, notably as cofounder with Elsie of DAW books, “the first publishing company ever devoted exclusively to science fiction and fantasy” (Astra Publishing House, 2023).

**Frederik Pohl** was born in 1919 to a German father and a mother of Irish descent. His father was a clerk and travelling salesman described as a “wildcat investor” (Knight, 1977: 58). He abandoned the young Frederik to his mother, who worked as a secretary. Pohl’s family from his mother’s side could be described as culturally and economically middle-class, although severely affected by the Depression (Pohl, 1983: 15). Pohl was introduced to science fiction through *Science Wonder Stories Quarterly* in 1930, and became an active fan in 1934–1935, taking part in the first meeting of the Brooklyn chapter of the Science Fiction League (SFL) in January 1935 (Pohl, 1983: 38–39). Pohl was later known as a prominent literary agent, editor, and author.

**John B. Michel** is today the least known of the Quadrumvirs. In the 1930s and 1940s, however, he was by and large considered the most promising writer and theoretician of the group (Pohl-Weary & Merril, 2002: 44). Born in 1917, his credentials in fandom were well established as early as 1932, when he won a short story contest put forth by *Wonder Stories* (ISFDB: “Title: The Menace from Mercury”). His mother was Irish. His father, a Jew converted to Catholicism, worked in the art department of a Woolworth’s store in Brooklyn (Knight, 1977: 58). Through his father’s job, Michel had access to printing equipment. He produced screen-printed covers for many fanzines, and even owned a portable small-sized letterpress he used to print cardzines (Pohl, 1983: 90). Michel was a member of the International Scientific Association (ISA) and edited their fanzine, *The International Observer*, in 1934. He was also already a member of the Flatbush Branch of the Young Communist League (YCL) when he met Wollheim and Pohl in 1935.
Robert A. Lowndes was born in 1916. His mother died in the influenza epidemic of 1918–1919; his father, an electrician by profession, left him in the care of relatives at an early age, until he remarried years later (Knight, 1977: 9). Not able to count on the support of his family, he lived in greater poverty than other Futurians, being periodically homeless in 1937–1938 (Knight, 1977: 9). Lowndes was a dedicated reader of science fiction since the early days of Amazing Stories in 1926. He joined the Brooklyn chapter of the Science Fiction League in 1935 (Dikty, 1940: 9), where he published with Pohl the club’s fanzine, The Brooklyn Reporter (Pohl, 1983: 39). Although less known than his peers Wollheim and Pohl, Lowndes later made himself a name as an influential pulp magazine editor with Columbia Publications. As a fan, an editor, and a writer, his literary interest touched a wider range of genres including fantasy, horror, western, and sports fiction.

Cyril Kornbluth was born in 1923 in a non-religious Jewish family. His father was a legal clerk (Rich, 2010: 16). Kornbluth died young, but he was one of the most talented writers of his generation, anticipating some of the literary experiments of the “New Wave” of the 1960s (Rich, 2010: 360).

Dirk Wylie (a.k.a. Harry Dockweiler) was born in 1919 to a “Jack-of-all-trades” father (Knight, 1977: 58). He was introduced to fandom and the Futurians by Pohl, who he knew from high school, in 1935/1936 (Pohl, 1983: 32). He was later known as a science fiction writer and notably for his collaborative work with Pohl and Kornbluth (Fancyclopedia 3: “Dirk Wylie”). Both Kornbluth and Dockweiler became central members of the Futurians at the beginning of the 1940s.

Isaac Asimov is probably the best-known American science fiction author from this period. Born in 1920 to Jewish parents in Russia, he moved to the United States in 1923. He was a regular but somewhat distant member of the collective. He published his first story in a magazine in 1939 and was afterwards a prolific professional writer (Asimov, 1972: 11).
Leslie Perri (a.k.a. Doris Baumgardt) was born in 1920. She was introduced by Pohl to the other Futurians (Pohl, 1983: 86). She, in turn, introduced most of the early female members to the collective: Rosalind Cohen, Elsie Balter, and Jessica Gould (Knight, 1977: 32–33; 56; 99). Perri was an art student at the time (Pohl, 1983: 115) and came from a middle-class family. Pohl and she married in 1940.

Judith Merrill was born in 1923 into a prominent Philadelphia Jewish family. Her paternal grandfather was the Great Rabbi of Philadelphia, and her parents were involved in the socialist zionist movement (Pohl-Weary & Merrill, 2002: 14; 18). An ardent Trotskyist in the late 1930s and 1940s, she only joined the Futurians belatedly in 1945. Merrill nevertheless quickly gained an important status in the collective and was at the centre of the conflict that led to its dissolution the same year. She remained an activist her whole life and is now considered a pioneer of feminist science fiction.

Born in 1921, James Blish was more literarily-inclined than most other Futurians. His parents, both of long New England ancestry, were well educated and middle-class. A devoted Lovecraftian and admirer of Ezra Pound, Blish generally fell at odds politically with other members of the collective. He joined the Futurians in 1938 but was in and out of New York, and therefore the collective, from 1938 to 1945 (Ketterer, 1987: 8).

2.1.2. On Some Indicators

The data needed to sketch a prosopography of the Futurians is provided by different sources. Fanzines and other primary sources can be found on Fanac.org. The Fancyclopedia project is also an important source of information. First published as a fanzine in 1944 by Jack Speer (now identified as Fancyclopedia 1), revised in 1959 (Fancyclopedia 2; Eney, 1959), it is now a Wikipedia-like online project gathering over 68,000 active pages (Fancyclopedia 3). Scans of the two previous versions, together with
a later addition of entries edited out—*The Rejected Canon* (Speer & Eney, 1962)—are available on Fanac.org. There are *Fancyclopedia 3* pages dedicated to most members of the Futurians, as well as most actors of early fandom, major events, fan organizations, and so forth. The prosopography presented here would not have been possible without this essential resource.

As for the broader context, I have had recourse to two main sources. The United States Census Bureau provides exhaustive and accessible information on the American population. The censuses of 1930 and 1940 have been particularly useful to offer a broad picture of the world the Futurians lived in. Data regarding fandom demanded more attention. The most convenient point of reference I could find was the list of attendees of NYCON, a major theatre of the Futurian story. Based on a guest book and other first-hand accounts, fan scholars have produced a list of 159 attendees. Contemporary fan historian Andy Hooper has undertaken the impressive work of writing a “Biographical Directory of the 1939 Worldcon,” writing a short biography for every name found on that list. His work was published in the two most recent issues of the science fiction fanzine *Chunga* (Hooper et al., 2017: 4–23; 2019: 32–47). As of this day, Hooper’s work has not been fully completed, biographies of the last third of the attendees being expected to appear in the coming issue of the fanzine. Using *Fancyclopedia 3*, it was possible to fill in most of the gaps with at least rudimentary information. Of the 159 attendees identified, 121 of them were fans, the rest being professionals or accompanying relatives. Data is available for 89 of them. Estimates of the total number of fans in the late 1930s generally average around 200 (Del Rey, 1979: 139; Warner, 1969: 24). It must also be noted that not all fans were zine editors. Collectors and club members formed an important contingent of fans who did not necessarily publish fanzines.

A survey in 1937 showed that there were about 30 such publishers [of fan magazines], whose usual circulation ran from 20 to 35 copies […]. There was a great deal of variation in what was considered a publication; in some cases, a single sheet of paper would suffice, while more ambitious members might run off twenty pages of copy for a mailing. (Del Rey, 1979: 76)
The Convention being held in New York, we must weigh in the over-representation of fans located on the East Coast, many important fans of the West Coast and the Midwest being absent, not to mention lesser-known fans who would have slipped out of the record. With all this in mind, however, the list NYCON attendees represents the largest and most documented sample of the fan population at the end of the 1930s, and an exceptional entry into the actors of early zine culture. The data available suggests that around 45% of the estimated total fan population attended the Convention.

In the analysis below, I consider a range of indicators to draw a portrait of the Futurians. The choice of indicators was established based on their relevance for both fandom and broader zine history. Some were explicitly referred to as having an impact on individual experience in fandom. Age and gender, for instance, were often considered in first-hand accounts as having an influence on fan interactions and the overall distribution of power within fandom. I decided to include social class and ethnicity for their importance for later debates and conflicts within zine culture.

Age

Age provides an interesting point of entry into our group. The average year of birth of the Futurians was 1919, the median 1920. Born in 1910 and 1914 respectively, “the Wollies” (Fancyclopedia 3: “Elsie Wollheim”)—Elsie Balter and Donald Wollheim—stood out as significantly older than the rest. Their age undoubtedly provided them a form of “natural” authority both within the collective and general fandom. By comparison, the youngest Futurians were Larry Shaw (born in 1924), and Kornbluth, Merril and Bob Studley (all born in 1923). The Quadrumvirs were older on average: Lowndes was born in 1916, Michel in 1917, while Pohl, the youngest of the four, was born on the average year of 1919. It is interesting to note that the female members of the collective were on average older than their male counterparts, Merril being here (as often the case) the exception.
The average fan attending NYCON was born in 1918; the median age of birth was 1920. The youngest fan present was Milton Lesser, born in 1928, and the oldest Morojo (a.k.a. Myrtle Rebecca Douglas), born in 1904. Morojo and Forrest J. Ackerman (born in 1916) were a couple and played in Los Angeles a role akin to the one played by the Wollies in New York. Sykora, one of the leaders of New Fandom, was born in 1913, and thus also considerably older than the average fan.

Downstream, the year of passing and average lifespan also depict an interesting picture. The average lifespan of the Futurians was 70–71, the average year of passing being 1989–1990. David Kyle lived the longest, passing in 2016. He was also among the few actors of early fandom to be active throughout his entire life, “making his fannish career among the longest ever” (Fancyclopedia 3: “David A. Kyle”). The average lifespan of NYCON fan attendees was 74 years old, the average year of passing 1992. According to a Congressional Research Service Report, life expectancy at birth in the U.S. was of 56.4 years in 1919–1921 and 59.2 years in 1929–1931 (Shrestha, 2005: 6) Actors of early zine culture were thus fortunate enough to enjoy significantly longer lives than the average population. This can, of course, be related to other factors including social class and ethnicity.

Pohl’s rendition of his first meeting with Wollheim and Michel shows unambiguously how age difference could be perceived within fandom, especially for younger fans:

To fourteen-year-old me they were immensely impressive high-powered types […] They were both smart as hell. Not only that. They were far more mature than the rest of us […] Johnny was a year or two older than I, and Donald a year or two older than that. (He had to be all of nineteen.) But the real clincher, the thing that elevated both of them to at least veneration, if not actual sanctity, was that they both had actually been paid for work published in a professional science-fiction magazine. (Pohl, 1983: 41–42)

Bourdieu notes how seniority can be an important source of symbolic capital. Newcomers, without credentials if not younger in age, have to face well-positioned actors able to point at their own curricula as support for their legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1996: 146–154). Albeit in different terms, a similar dynamic can be observed in early fandom. Fan Thadeus Dikty, author of the fanzine *Who’s Who in Fandom,*
reflects this by systematically mentioning indicators of seniority to illustrate the degree of prominence of individual fans: first science fiction story read, first fanzine published, first membership to a fan organization, first contribution to a professional magazine (Dikty, 1940).

Quick and intense involvement could, in some cases, promote younger and later fans to the higher echelons of fandom. Sam Moskowitz (born in 1920) is a good example, as a founder of New Fandom and co-organizer of the First World Convention. This was, however, the exception rather than the norm. The fact that fandom and zine culture were, in the 1930s, recent phenomena played a role by providing an objective limit to seniority. A considerable number of fans were active since the very beginning of organized fandom. Newcomers like Moskowitz, who began his active fan career in 1936, had to “compete” against fans like Wollheim, whose credentials dated all the way back to the first issues of *Amazing Stories* in 1926, a time many considered almost prehistoric.

*Gender and Sexuality*

The Futurians were known to be fandom’s first and only mixed gender fan group. Of the 21 more central members of the collective cited by Knight, six were women (28.6%). Estimates given for general fandom in the 1930s and 1940s usually stand between 9 and 11% of female fans (Warner, 1969: 26; Del Rey 1979: 139). These figures are confirmed by the data available for the attendees of NYCON, with 9% of the fans present being female.

Sexuality played an important role in the gender relations between Futurians. Dating and intermarriage was common. Leslie Perri and Frederik Pohl married in 1940. Jessica Gould and Dick Wilson were married in 1941–1944; Wilson later remarried with Perri in 1950. Mary Byers and Cyril Kornbluth married in 1943. Elsie Balter dated Chester Cohen before marrying Donald Wollheim in 1943. Rosalind Cohen dated Lowndes before marrying Dirk Wylie in 1942. Merril dated Michel in
1945, their split leading to the break of the collective later that same year. Virginia Kidd and James Blish married in 1947. Commenting on the endogamous practices of the Futurians, Pohl noted: “We did everything collectively, as you can see” (Pohl, 1978: 87).

Despite this, attitudes towards sexuality within the collective varied a lot, reflecting the extremes of the period between the Roaring Twenties and the conservative fifties. This was the source of tensions within the group. Knight recalls:

Wollheim was a strict monogamist who vehemently disapproved of premarital sex or cohabitation […] Kornbluth, like the rest of us, saw nothing wrong with cohabitation, but he condemned adultery, and he also disapproved of telling dirty jokes in mixed company. This was a cause of friction with Asimov, who was always bawdy whether women were present or not […] Cohen and Burford frequented prostitutes; they made Saturday night visits to Harlem, and took me along once or twice; this was considered low behavior by the others. (Knight, 1977: 118–119)

Futurian sexual openness, however, remained confined within the boundaries of heteronormativity. Pohl remembers an instance when a male member of the collective (without naming him) made “some sort of ambiguous approach to another,” being met with “such revulsion and horror that he cravenly crept back into line”; “We were tolerant of diversity, but not that much diversity.” (Pohl, 1983: 81) Gender identifications and sexual practices generally considered as “deviant” in society were thus kept secret within the fan community. It is interesting to note in this regard that later in the fifties and sixties, Wollheim was very involved in the cross-dressing community, notably at the Casa Susanna in the Catskills. This was revealed in a 2022 documentary by Sébastien Lifshitz. Wollheim was also posthumously identified as the author of A Year Among the Girls behind the pen name Darrell G. Raynor (1968), a rare autobiographical account from the leader of the collective, focused on his experience within that community.

In more than one way, the Futurians’ relationship to gender and sexuality foreshadowed later developments in zine politics, while remaining caught up in their own era. As a gender mixed collective in a predominantly masculine culture, as a space of sexual freedom in a rather conservative
environment, but also by its sexist and homophobic blind spots, the dynamics within the Futurians are strikingly similar to those found in punk and post-punk circles almost half a century later.

**Social Class and Education**

The members of the Futurians did not claim a homogenous social and ethnic background. In terms of social class, Knight describes them as coming from “mixed urban backgrounds, mostly lower middle class.” (Knight, 1977: 58) Most of them later worked in the publishing industry as professional writers, publishers, literary agents, or editors. In some cases, this meant the reproduction of the social class they inherited from their parents. Wollheim, Blish and Merril were of higher social backgrounds, and all had rather successful careers in publishing. Wollheim was of bourgeois origins and had one of the most successful careers among his peers. Knight described him in the 1970s as a “relaxed and self-assured […] member of the bourgeoisie which he formerly blamed for the ills of mankind” (Knight, 1977: 247). Others had upward trajectories. Asimov and Lowndes were of modest social origins and successfully integrated a higher class. Mary Byers and John B. Michel, on the other hand, never succeeded in emancipating themselves from their working-class background. Their biographies reveal the challenges to achieving upward social mobility.

A look at education complicates these general assumptions. Access to higher education was rarer in the first half of the 20th century. According to data from the 1940 census, 4.6% of the American population had finished college, a proportion reaching 5.7% for the urban population (USDOC, 1942). For comparison, the proportion of the population aged 25 and older who had completed an advanced degree in 2020 was at 12.7% nationally and reached 16.5% in the state of New York (Statista, 2023). According to Knight, “Of the male core members, only Asimov ever finished college […] Many of the others did not even finish high school; they were all bright and capable, but they were erratically
self-educated” (Knight, 1977: 53). It should not be understood that they had absolutely no contact with higher education. Many of them attended college without graduating, and others shared in their friends’ conversations and readings.21

In this, the Futurians and early science fiction fans fit the description of what Bourdieu calls “new-style autodidacts.” The spread of higher education in the 20th century saw the development of a small class of intellectual workers whose level of diplomas did not match their capabilities. Unlike the traditional self-taught who entertain a kind of deference towards certified specialists, these new autodidacts, according to Bourdieu, “have often kept a place in the educational system up to a relatively high level and in the course of this long, ill-rewarded association have acquired a relation to legitimate culture that is at once ‘liberated’ and disabused, familiar and disenchanted,” leading them to “intense and passionate investments” in areas “disclaimed or abandoned by the educational system.” (1984: 84) Like many other successful fans, the Futurians match this description perfectly. Most of them had much higher cultural, and even economic ambitions than their parents could aspire to. Being relatively privileged but not to the point of expecting to inherit predetermined positions, they had to fight their way in a society shaped by the double crisis of the Depression and the War. They succeeded by investing in somewhat marginal cultural practices—pulp magazines, genre fiction, self-publishing—a source of cultural capital at their reach.

21 See for instance this commentary from Pohl: “Sometimes people ask me what my scientific background is, and I have worked out an answer. I point to my friend Isaac Asimov, who is about the same age as I am. We met when we were both still in high school. I dropped out without graduating, and most of what I have learned I have picked up catch-as-catch-can. While Isaac did graduate from high school, and went on to college, and got a bachelor’s degree, and then a master’s degree, and then a doctorate, and finally became a professor. And that proves that, when the will to learn is present, obstacles can be overcome; because when you come right down to it, Isaac knows as much science as I do.” (Pohl, 1983: 228)
Race and Ethnic Background

When it comes to cultural background and ethnicity, early zine culture was unmistakably and unquestionably white. Moskowitz tells the story of Warren Fitzgerald, “the first and last colored man ever actively to engage in the activities of science fiction fandom.” (Moskowitz, 1974: 10) His short-lived trajectory in fandom illustrates the racial dynamics at play at the time. Fitzgerald was the founding president of the Scienceers, the first fan organization ever to meet on a regular basis (Fancyclopedia 3: “Warren Fitzgerald”). Yet, he is said to have started to lose interest in fandom not too long after founding the club, leaving fandom in 1930, never to return. Despite being a key actor of fan history and holding a considerable position in early fandom, the first and then only Black fan was also the first to “gafiate.” This raises legitimate questions as to the open mindedness of fans, and their presumed openness to racial and cultural difference.

Although all white, the Futurians came from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Many were first- or second-generation immigrants: Asimov was born in Russia and so was Merril’s father; Pohl’s father came from Germany; Walter Kubilius was from Lithuania. The German language was sufficiently known among the Futurians to appear in many of the zines they published. Many members of the collective were also Jewish or had Jewish origins: Asimov, Rosalind and Chester Cohen, Kornbluth, Merril, Michel, the Wollies. James Blish and Dick Wilson all claimed a degree of Jewish heritage, although Wilson’s claim was deemed controversial (Knight, 1977: 151; 69). Reminiscing about the activities of his youth, Pohl notes that “Most of the interesting science-fiction fans and writers I was meeting were […] Jewish, but not working at it, and it was the same in the YCL.” (Pohl, 1983: 70).

22 To gafiate is fan slang for quitting fandom. It stems from GAFIA, for Going Away From It All. According to Warner, the expression first referred to the opposite, meaning leaving the mundane world behind (Warner, 1969: xx).
The racial politics of early zine culture were far from not consensual. This is manifest in a debate over racism in 1944. That summer, a fanzine titled *Black & White* was circulated, presenting the opposing views of two fans: Forrest Ackerman and Jack Speer. Speer, who had been a self-proclaimed fascist since the 1930s, defended shockingly violent positions, claiming the intellectual superiority of Whites over Blacks, celebrating segregation, and even deploring the absence of eugenics laws in the United States (Speer, 1944: 5–7). Speer’s views were considered abhorrent by almost everyone intervening in the debate (Fancyclopedia 3: “Black & White”). The country was, after all, at war against fascists powers in Europe and Asia. Yet, when in the wake of the controversy an amendment for the Fantasy Amateur Press Association’s constitution was suggested to expel members holding such racist views, it was voted down 19 to 18, the opponents of the motion claiming to defend “free speech” and the organization’s neutrality on political matters.

The way race and racism played out in fandom seem to have mirrored attitudes in professional publishing. John Campbell, by far the leading editor in science fiction publishing at the time, was known for his reactionary views on the question:

I have no doubt that he was always a little embarrassed by people who didn’t have the sense to be born white, male, and Protestant. Like most WASPs of his generation, he was brought up to believe that blacks were shiftless and Jews kind of comical […] So he invited his Jewish writers to conceal that blemish. When I sold him Milt Rothman’s first story, he laid it on the line. “The best names,” John declared,’ are Scottish or English. That’s true for characters and for bylines. It has nothing to do with prejudice. They sound better.’ It was not just for Milt that he insisted on that. It is only because Isaac Asimov and Stanley G. Weinbaum were first published elsewhere that we don’t know them now as, maybe, Tam MacIssacs and S. G. Macbeth. (Pohl, 1983: 96)

Although a great number of fans fell between the cracks of this targeted audience, fandom as a whole did not diverge much from WASP hegemony.

What is true for race and racism is also true for all the indicators used in this summary prosopography. Early zine culture was in large part shaped by the pulp magazine industry that
provided it its raw material. Like any cultural industry, pulp magazines were targeted at specific audiences. In the case of science fiction magazines, this audience was presumed to be young, male, White Protestants of the growing middle-class. The proposographical survey illustrates how the make up of fandom was deeply determined by this targeting, but also how it could claim some agency, notably by attracting Jews and young women, demographics explicitly left out by magazine publishers.

Duncombe offers, some sixty years after the birth of organized fandom, a portrait of the zine maker population of his own time: “It is white, middle-class culture—and its discontents—that informs zines and underground culture.” Most zinesters, he observed, were “young and the children of professionals, culturally if not financially middle-class White and raised in a relatively privileged position within the dominant culture,” yet “embracing […] unpopular musical and literary tastes, transgressive ideas about sexuality, unorthodox artistic sensibilities, and a politics resolutely outside the status quo” (Duncombe, 1997: 8).

As we have hinted at already, the Futurians were distinctive among fans for their strong ideological and political commitments. As with their creative output, their political affiliations reflected their status as serious and ambitious autodidacts. Many Futurians found positions as leaders within the Young Communist League in the same way as they did in fandom. The trajectory of the collective can thus be understood as an attempt to bridge science fandom and revolutionary politics, an attempt that ultimately failed as their influence waned in the aftermath of the Exclusion Act of 1939.

2.2. The Events

The history of the Futurians is, in a sense, a history of losers. Ultimately, it is the vision of their adversaries in New Fandom that prevailed. This fact is strongly reflected in fan historiography, most of which has been written by fans actively opposed to the collective.
The first history of fandom was *Up to Now. A History of Fandom as Jack Speer Sees It*, published in 1940. Despite playing no active role in the Exclusion Act, Speer was described as the Futurians’ “chief antagonist” (Knight, 1977: 17). His historical account was published at the peak of the showdown opposing the Futurians to New Fandom, and focused so much on the conflict that it has been considered an indirect biography of Wollheim (Fancyclopedia 3: “Donald A. Wollheim”). Speer is incidentally the instigator of the Fancyclopedia project, one of the few other contemporary secondary sources on fandom at the time.

Speer set the tone for subsequent fan historiography. When, decades later, more serious and systematic attempts atfan history began to take form, they followed suit in his emphasis on conflict and internal politics. The second fan historian, and by far the most influential, also happened to be a leading figure of the anti-Futurian camp: Sam Moskowitz. Moskowitz’s *The Immortal Storm*, a history of fandom in the 1930s, was first serialized from 1945 to 1952 in a fanzine titled *Fantasy Commentator*, and has been republished in book form. This work is so thorough that it is, regarding some events, the only remaining source available. Although focusing heavily on the Futurians, his account is, of course, particularly biased.

Moskowitz’s history was picked up on by another fan historian, Harry Warner. Warner wrote two massive volumes of fan history focussing on fandom in the 1940s (*All Our Yesterdays*, 1969) and the 1950s (*A Wealth of Fable*, 1992; first published in 1976–1977). His work can be described as a reaction to Speer and Moskowitz. Although never having been directly involved in fan feuds, Warner was still generally unfavourable to the Futurians. Nicknamed the “Hermit of Hagerstown,” he almost never took part in fan gatherings, and was antipathetic to quarrels and in-fighting. His apparent neutrality on political matters made him oppose the Futurians who, precisely, attempted to politicize fandom.
The one fan history that focuses on the Futurians from an insider’s perspective is Damon Knight’s *The Futurians* (1977). Knight’s book has the advantage of relying heavily on first-hand accounts, including interviews with members of the collective conducted some 20 years after the facts. In addition to this work, many key figures of the Futurians have been the subject of biographies and autobiographies: Isaac Asimov (1972; 1979; 1995), Frederik Pohl (1983), James Blish (Ketterer, 1987), Judith Merril (Pohl-Weary & Merril, 2002), Cyril Kornbluth (Rich, 2010). Most of them, now considered major figures of modern science fiction, have been rather evasive about their fan past, and particularly regarding its political dimension. It is interesting to note in this sense that, of the four Futurian “Quadrumvirs,” only Pohl has published his memoirs.

Using the digitized fanzine collection available online on Fanac.org, I have surveyed between 200 and 400 Futurian zine issues published between 1934 and 1945; the number varying greatly depending on how we define membership to the collective. These primary sources were used to complement, as much as possible, the gaps left behind by the available literature on the Futurians.

2.2.1. Formation

The history of the Futurians begins with a campaign led against Hugo Gernsback and his meddling in fandom. It starts with Wollheim publishing his first short story, titled “The Man from Ariel,” in the January 1934 issue of *Wonder Stories*, a magazine owned by Gernsback. A year later and still being owed a portion of his dues for the story, Wollheim decided to put pressure on Gernsback. His first action was to air his grievances in the April 1935 issue of the *Terrestrial Fantascience Guild Bulletin* (better known under its later title *The Phantagraph*), the official organ of the International SF Guild, a New York fan club he had joined in the spring of 1934. In an article, Wollheim claimed to have contacted several authors, who had also confirmed never having been paid in full for their work
Still receiving only evasive answers from Gernsback, Wollheim went a step further and reached out to fellow fans to organize a smear campaign against Gernsback, *Wonder Stories*, and the Science Fiction League (SFL), a national organization of local clubs created by Gernsback in May 1934 (Moskowitz, 1974: 32).

Gernsback’s attitude was typical of a certain era in magazine publishing. He was involved in publishing since the 1900s. Before launching *Amazing Stories* in 1926—the first magazine ever to be entirely dedicated to science fiction—his attention was directed to amateur radio. He published *Modern Electrics* starting in 1908, considered to be the world’s first magazine about electronics and radio, followed by *The Electrical Experimenter* in 1913. These early pulps focused on science and technology. Gernsback occasionally published science fiction stories in them, including his own *Ralph 124C 41+*, serialized in 1911–1912.

The economic context was favourable to adventurous businessmen like Gernsback who managed to put magazines on the newsstands with very little initial capital, cutting expenses wherever possible, multiplying strategies to sell paper to a seemingly ever-growing audience. The economic turmoil of the 1930s and early 1940s only made things worse:

In the late thirties and early forties the pulp magazine field was so volatile and the printers were so anxious to keep their presses running that it was possible to go into business as a pulp publisher on a shoestring, with credit advanced by printers or distributors. Most publishers who did so were essentially gamblers who spread themselves as thin as they possibly could, and, like Gernsback, paid authors only as a last resort. (Knight, 1977: 86)

The creation of clubs was a way to build loyalty from readers, in the hope of extending the short lifespan of a magazine. Although the clubs created by Gernsback no doubt reflected his own personal interest in science and science fiction, their primary function nevertheless remained economic. In 1909, Gernsback founded the Wireless Association of America, in part to build loyalty in the

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23 Digital copies of nearly all issues of *Amazing Stories* are available in the Internet Archive.
readership of his publishing enterprise. This same logic probably inspired the creation of the Science Fiction League some 25 years later.

Being a member of both the Terrestrial Fantascience Guild and the SFL, Wollheim held a strategic position that he could use as leverage against Gernsback: he could take part in local SFL chapters meetings and stir trouble. In a meeting of the New York chapter, Wollheim found accomplices in Will Sykora and John B. Michel, who, like Wollheim, also happened to be members of another club, the International Scientific Association (ISA)\(^{24}\). Michel oversaw the editing the ISA’s fanzine, *The International Observer*, and Sykora acted as club president. Soon, Wollheim, Michel and Sykora were publishing articles against Gernsback in the *Terrestrial Fantascience Guild Bulletin* and *The International Observer*, attending SFL meetings whenever they could, converting fans to their cause when possible, and sabotaging the clubs when meeting resistance.

Gernsback was suddenly quicker to react. He formally expelled Wollheim, Michel, and Sykora from the SFL, arguing that being member of two separate fan organizations was against the rules of the League. Their exclusion was published in the September 1935 issue of *Wonder Stories*. This did not discourage Wollheim and his accomplices, however, as they continued to use the resources of the International Scientific Association to wage war against the Science Fiction League. What followed has been dubbed, in fan history, the “ISA-SFL Clash” (see Fancyclopedia 3). Pohl, who joined the group in the fall of 1935 after the group had visited the Brooklyn chapter of the SFL he was a member of, remembers:

Don Wollheim was the leader of our junta and the planner of our coups, but we were at the least his kitchen cabinet, Johnny Michel, and a little later Bob Lowndes, and I, and we four marched from Brooklyn to the sea, leaving a wide scar of burned-out clubs behind us […] 1934 was the year of the BSFL [Brooklyn chapter of the SFL]. 1935 was the year of the ENYSFL [East New York chapter of the SFL], later the

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\(^{24}\) The ISA was one of the oldest fan organizations, being the successor of the Science Correspondence Club, of which *The Comet/Cosmology* was the club organ.
ILSF [Independent League for Science Fiction, seceded from the ENYSFL]. 1936 was the year of the ICSC [International Cosmos Science Club], later the NYB-ISA [New York Branch of the ISA]. By 1937 we had got tired of initials, and of laying our cuckoos’ eggs in other people’s nests, and we formed The Futurians. (Pohl, 1983: 58–59)

Every step of the way, their ranks kept growing. They met Kyle and Levantman in a ENYSFL meeting in January 1936, and with their support, dissolved the chapter and reorganized it into the ILSF. Kublius followed the next year, this time from the ISA, of which most of the to-be Futurians were still members. From the ranks of the Queens, Washington Heights, and Flushing chapters of the SFL were eventually drawn Cyril Kornbluth (in the Summer of 1937), Jack Gillespie and Richard Wilson (in March/April 1938), and Dan Burford (in May 1938).

By then, the group led by Wollheim had won their cause. Gernsback sold Wonder Stories in April 1936 and quit science fiction publishing, not to return until much later, in 1952. It is unclear whether the campaign led by Wollheim played any role in Gernsback’s decision. Speer attributes responsibility to Wollheim et al., but his accounts of the events tend to overplay the negative impact Wollheim would have had on fandom (Fancyclopedia 3: “Up to Now: The ISA-SFL Clash”), Moskowitz, on the other hand, explains Gernsback’s decision in strictly economic terms (Moskowitz, 1974: 52–53). In any case, Wollheim had now not only found himself a group, but he had also successfully challenged the professionals’ influence on fan activities, effectively paralyzing the SFL and damaging Gernsback’s reputation among fans.

The ISA-SFL Clash set the tone for the fan feuds to come. By 1937, it had become common practice to write derogatory fanzine articles against opponents and to create clubs to undermine and attack rival organizations. Physical force had also been used to shut down meetings (Moskowitz, 1974: 50). This certainly polarized fandom. Not long after Gernsback sold Wonder Stories, Sykora split from Wollheim and Michel, and eventually joined James Taurasi and Sam Moskowitz to form New
Fandom, conceived as a rival arch-organization to oppose Wollheim’s influence. In the meantime, of course, the Futurians had become a distinctive and influential force within fandom.

2.2.2. Michelism

The political inclinations of the Futurians made their first spectacular entry in fandom during the Third Eastern Convention, held in Philadelphia on October 30, 1937. Moskowitz retells the event in detail (1974: 116–121). In front of an assembly of 30 to 40 fans, half of them coming from the New York area, Wollheim rose to read a speech prepared by Michel. The speech opened by painting a general, and unfavourable, picture of science fiction: despite their superior intelligence, their ability to envision alternative futures and their capacity to organize, science fiction fans remained “escapists” unaware or ignoring of the world they lived in.

Come out of your secure cubbyholes of clubrooms and laboratories and meeting places and look at the world before you. It is swiftly sinking in darkness and chaos [...] As idealists we cannot refuse to accept the challenge of the future [...] Today we are face to face, FACE TO FACE, I repeat, with the choice: CIVILIZATION or BARBARISM—reason or ignorance. As idealists, as visionaries, we cannot retreat before this challenge. We must accept it and carry the battle into the enemy’s camp. (Fancyclopedia 3: “Mutation or Death!”)\(^{25}\)

Already in late 1937, fascism had left its mark on world politics. Japan was occupying Manchuria, Italy had invaded Ethiopia, the Spanish Civil War was raging, and Nazi Germany was flexing its military muscles in the Rhineland and Guernica. Left-leaning fans felt they ought to do something and tried to mobilize their peers. John Baltadonis of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society, sponsor of the Convention, renders it as such in the club’s fanzine: “After a flowery introduction condemning the world at large of today and pleading for a communistic Utopia, the speech put forth the motion

\(^{25}\) Later published as a fanzine titled *Mutation or Death!*, the speech is now available in its entirety on Fancyclopedia 3.
that “this, the third S-F Convention should go on record as being for the realization of the ideas and ideals of a Utopian civilization [“].” (Baltadonis, 1937: 3)

The long and heated debate that ensued quickly devolved towards the question of the feasibility of a global state, followed by a vote. According to Fancyclopedia 3, the votes cast followed strict Futurian/Non-Futurian lines. Moskowitz paints a more complex picture, less favourable to the Futurians, of course. According to him, Kyle voted against despite being part of the pro-Michelist faction, and it would be unclear whether Pohl and Dockweiler even assisted to the speech at all. He also claims that he and Taurasi supported the motion, out of confusion and general disinterest in the proceeding (Moskowitz, 1974: 120). All sources agree on the numbers, which were transcribed in the proceedings: the resolution was beaten 12 to 8. It was becoming clear that the success of the campaign against Gernsback did not guarantee Wollheim and Michel enough support to push their political agenda.

This agenda was mostly influenced by Michel, who had been a member of the Flatbush Branch of the Young Communist League (YCL) for several years, and who had successfully converted his new friends (Pohl, 1983: 75). Although they adapted their discourse depending on the context and the audience, the “Michelists” were first strongly influenced by the Communist Party’s official line. The clearest explanation of Michelism can undoubtedly be found in the pages of the Nova Terrae, the official organ of a British chapter of the SFL. Addressing a foreign audience unaware of the fan feuds in New York, Wollheim explains in minute detail his group’s ideology:

Michelism derives its name in honour of John B. Michel of Brooklyn who was the first amongst us to state clearly the new concept. We define it as follows: […] Michelism believes that science-fiction is a force; a force acting through the medium of speculative and prophetic fiction upon the minds of idealist youth; that logical science-fiction inevitably points to the necessity for socialism, the advance of science fiction, and the world-state; and that these aims, created by science-fictional idealizing, can best be reached through adherence to the programme of the
Communist International. Michelism is the theory of science-fiction Action. (Wollheim, 1938a: 12–14)

Similar declarations of principle were published in many fanzines across the United States and the United Kingdom, forcing a debate and pressing fans to pick sides.

As time passed, the ideological content of Michelism adapted to its reception in fandom, including within the group. The Los Angeles-based fanzine *Imagination!* was the earliest site of heated controversy. The club behind it, the Los Angeles chapter of the SFL, had been since its creation in October 1934 a hotbed of Utopian thinking. Some of its prominent members, Forrest Ackerman and Morojo (a.k.a. Myrtle Rebecca Douglas), were Esperanto enthusiasts, writing texts and whole fanzine issues in that language and defending the idea of a World State unified by a single language. Their ideological affinities were compatible with the Utopian views of Wollheim and Michel, as were those of technocrats, “esperantists,” and various socialists populating early fandom (Moskowitz, 1974: 137). On the other hand, an important fringe of the LASFL sharply opposed Michelism. T. Bruce Yerke, first editor of *Imagination!*, published “A Reply to Michelism” in the 7th issue (Yerke, 1938), which was then picked up by Wollheim in the following issue (1939). The most bitter critic of Michelism in the club was Erick Freyor (a.k.a. Frederick Shroyer):

Michelism teaches worldfellowship I am told. Wordfellowship! Bleach for me, Wollheim, all Negros & other colored races til they be white as I. Uproot all religiousuperstitions, the product of ages, in minds of the little yellow brethren, hotentots &c, until they believe as I. Convince all races that their nationalisticredos are wrong & that they should adopt mine. When you have finish with the Augean stables, Wollheim… I shan’t join you for I shall be no more! The sun will have died [illegible] age & earth will be cosmic dust in the eyes of Lovecraft’s Gods! (Freyor, 1938: 7; emphasis and spelling as is in original).

A considerable number of fans like Shroyer aligned with the far-right, notably within the group gathered around H. P. Lovecraft, who despite some vagaries in his positioning seemed to generally favour fascism over other political ideologies (Lévy, 1970; Joshi, 2014: 99–104). Others like Speer were

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26 Morojo’s nickname, as well as her fellow fan and cousin's Pogo, was derived from her initials in Esperanto.
also self-declared fascists, despite having no connection with the Lovecraftian circle. Later, when the tensions with New Fandom were at their peak, the Futurians invented nicknames for the three “Triumvirs” at the head of the organization: Moskowitz was “De Fuhrer of Newark Swamps,” Taurasi was “Il Duce of Flushing Flats,” and Sykora “The Mikado of Long Island City” (Fancyclopedia 3: “Il Duce of Flushing Flats”). Despite these slurs, the Triumvirs were more leaning towards traditional conservatism than fascism, although the international context obviously made conservatives rather suspicious for communists like Wollheim and his acolytes. Even Blish, a loose member of the Futurians, considered himself a “book Fascist,” meaning he agreed with the ideas on paper but considered them inapplicable in reality (Knight, 1977: 155).

The influence of world politics the Futurians is made particularly visible by the various shifts in positioning of the Communist Party as it followed the twists and turns of Soviet diplomacy: its antifascist policy shifted abruptly in favour of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of non-aggression of August 1939, only to return in force with the Nazi invasion of June 1941, incidentally making the Soviet Union an ally of the United States after Pearl Harbor at the end of the same year. In the making, communism lost its grip on many intellectuals in the West, as it did in fandom. As Pohl puts it: “I could not change my head to keep pace with the slogans.” (Pohl, 1983: 106)

That being said, the strongest opposition to Michelism was not strictly ideological in character, as much as grounded in a care to defend the political neutrality of science fiction and fandom. This showed in the reaction against the “Mutation or Death” speech in Philadelphia, as much as in later debates over the Michelist doctrine (Moskowitz, 1974: 118–119; Fancyclopedia 3: “Up to Now: Later

27 “Others in Wollheim’s circle were indifferent or hostile to Communism. David A. Kyle, who lived with his family in Monticello, was brought up as a Republican, and although he enjoyed playing at being a Bolshevik—wearing a red hat and marching in the May Day parade—he never took it seriously. Richard Wilson, who lived in Richmond Hill, also came from a Republican family.” (Knight, 1977: 16)
Development of Michelism”). This growing opposition against further politicization of fandom would be the leverage that would propel the anti-Michelist camp to national prominence.

New Fandom was created by Moskowitz in the midst of the long debate sparked by the “Mutation or Death” speech. The new organization was formed almost overnight by merging several clubs and publications, in a deliberate effort of exert “supremacy” over fandom, in Moskowitz’s own words (Moskowitz, 1974: 188). The plan was clear right from the start: position New Fandom as the main organizer of the First World Convention, then less than a year away. Moskowitz brought in his own baggage, composed of the two well-circulated fanzines he edited (Helios and Fantasy Review), as well as his Manuscript Bureau, an organization acting as an agency for fanzine content, directing fan writers to fanzine editors (Moskowitz, 1974: 108). To these were added Taurasi’s Fantasy News, the up-and-coming newszine published to challenge Wilson’s Science Fiction News Letter, as well as the whole roster of the Science Fiction Advancement Association, a club based in San Francisco publishing Tesseract. The merger provided New Fandom with the biggest cumulated membership of all fandom:

By the alchemical process of the above mergers, New Fandom gained as automatic members all active and inactive participants in the SFAA and subscribers to Tesseract, Helios and Fantasy Review as well. The total came to approximately 125—a staggering total for an organization in those days. Ironically, too, it included Wollheim and Wilson (unbeknownst to themselves), arch-enemies of New Fandom’s founders. (Moskowitz, 1974: 181)

The Futurians reacted to this strengthened opposition by toning down their rhetoric, relegating politics and the defense of progressive values to the background.

The Futurian Constitution, as amended in January 1943 (reproduced in Balter Wollheim, 1944: 7-8), read that “When pressed for a definition of the term ‘Futurian’ members shall define it as ‘one holding a dynamic conception of the future’” a significantly tamer proposition when compared to the declarations made only a few years earlier.
It is fair to say that, despite writing the order of the day at the turn of the 1930s and 1940s, the Futurians had failed in their attempt to mobilize fandom towards revolutionary aims. As Moskowitz and his partners were now in charge of organizing the World Convention, it was becoming clear that Wollheim and the Futurians were losing their cause.

2.2.3. Consolidation

Wollheim and Michel had been the first to raise the idea of a World Science Fiction Convention, to be held in parallel of the New York World’s Fair of 1939 (Pohl, 1983: 101). After about a year, no serious preparations had been made, and Futurian influence was in sharp decline. Their aggressive attitude and their clunky attempt at converting fandom to the Communist revolution had awarded them many enemies in fan circles. Their scorched-earth policy towards rival clubs had also let them without a clear institutional footing. Now that the Convention had been snatched out of their hands, the only fan organization they still had under their influence was the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (FAPA).

The FAPA was created in early 1937 under the impetus of Wollheim, Michel and Pohl. The idea behind it was taken from similar associations whose existence dates back to the 19th century. Warner describes it simply as “a group whose members bulk-mail a specified number of copies of their fanzines to an official who distributes them in bundles to the entire membership at stated intervals” (Warner, 1969: xix). Lovecraft successively served as president of two of the most important APAs, the National (founded in 1876) and the United (founded in 1895) (Joshi, 2001: 87; 163; Coavoux, 2015: para. 22). Through contacts with the Lovecraftian circle, Wollheim and Pohl became members of the National and the United in 1936, on which they modelled the constitution of the FAPA in 1937.
The organization quickly became a prominent force in fandom, inciting most Big Name Fans to join its limited roster of 50 members.

Following the Exclusion Act, Wollheim announced a temporary withdrawal from fan activity (Moskowitz, 1974: 192–193), thus acknowledging the failed attempt at spread Michelism in fandom. The Futurians’ involvement in general fandom remained important, but steadily decreased from the peak it had attained before the Convention. The collective was, however, more active than ever. It redirected inwards its frustrated efforts at changing fandom. Communal living played a major part in this shift. From 1939 until well into 1945–1946, “Futurian Houses” became the centre of the life of the collective: the Futurian House (August 1939-October 1939), The Ivory Tower (October 1939-October 1940), the Prime Base (November 1940-February 1941), the Futurian Embassy (February 1941-Fall of 1941), the Raven’s Roost and the Futurian Fortress (Fall 1941–1943), Bitch Haven, the Cell, Parallax (Eney, 1959: 74–75; Knight, 1977: 155–156). These experiments embodied the Futurian experience, if not as fans, as friends, lovers, and aspiring professionals: “The Futurians had begun to recognize themselves as a group of talented would-be writers and editors. Their formal meetings grew more infrequent; the Futurians became an extended family.” (Knight, 1977: 52) The Futurian Constitution attested of this organic character of the collective. It describes the Society as “an amorphous collection of individuals bound together by ties of varying magnitude of social, literary, artistic, or science-fiction and fantasy implications.” It was “considered to be in permanent session broken only by periods of recess at such times when there is no sizeable number of Futurians in the same place at the same time.” (Balter Wollheim, 1944: 7–8) Futurians were still publishing fanzines
frenetically, but they were mostly circulated within the collective, and sometimes even confined to the publicity of the time’s Futurian House.28

For many, this looser structure created a sense of belonging. For others, however, it also highlighted divergences. Displacing their attention inward also had the unfortunate side effect of accentuating conflict within the collective:

a coolness had begun to make itself felt between the two strongest personalities in the Futurian Society, Wollheim and Pohl. Each had his supporters and friends: Wollheim’s were Lowndes, Elsie, Michel, Kornbluth and me; Pohl’s were his wife Doris, Dick and Jessica Wilson, Rosalind and Harry Dockweiler, Dave Kyle, and Jack Gillespie (Knight, 1977: 109–110)

Tensions between what was becoming two factions arose over the course of action to take regarding the collective’s place in fandom. It was clear that Wollheim wanted less, not more to do with fandom. As for Pohl, he was devising, as early as March 1939, plans to create a Futurian Federation of the World that would make yet another attempt at dominating and politicizing fandom (Knight, 1977: 37). The Federation project never really materialized, but Pohl hung on to it. In 1941, he and Gillespie published a new fanzine to promote their planned organization, Futurian Review, and claimed it to be the official organ of the collective. They were officially censured by the opposing faction (Warner, 1969: 218). According to Knight, tensions ran deeper than political disagreements, and illustrated a larger change in the lives of the group’s members. Some, including Pohl, were becoming “filthy pros”29: “I think the main difference we saw between our groups and Pohl’s was that we were still essentially bohemians—not regularly employed, poor, and (except for Wollheim) without women. All the members of Pohl’s group except Gillespie and Kyle were married, employed, and relatively prosperous.” (Knight, 1977: 109–110)

28 “the Futurians began putting up one-page wall newspapers in the Ivory Tower every few days, each with a different title, e.g., The Futurian Fanfare, Ivory Tower, Nichi-Nichi and Asabi Shimban, The Ivory Tower Evening Messenger and Futurian Beobachter, The Ivory Tower Associated Daily Bungle and Wool-Gatherer.” (Knight, 1977: 66)

29 “Semi-affectionate term for someone who makes money from science fiction.” (Warner, 1969: xx)
Pohl had started his amateur literary agenting already in 1937, trying to sell stories from fellow Futurians as well as his own, often under pseudonyms (Pohl, 1983: 90–91). In October 1939, he was hired by Popular Publications to edit not one but two science fiction magazines (Knight, 1977: 45–46). The counterpart to this exceptional promotion (at only 19 years old) would be that he would have to fill their pages with little-to-no budget. In 1939–1940, Pohl’s magazines published 15 stories by Futurians, many of them collective efforts involving Pohl, Kornbluth, Wilson and Dirk Wylie in various combinations. “Futurian collaborations became,” according to Knight, “a way of life.” (Knight, 1977: 46–47). This intensified when Lowndes became editor of Columbia’s Future Fiction in November 1940, and Wollheim in turn began his career as professional editor in early 1941 for Stirring Science Stories (Knight, 1977: 87; 91).

By the end of 1942, the Futurians had written and published a hundred and twenty-nine science fiction stories, nearly all in Futurian magazines. Most of these were collaborations, and nearly all were published under pseudonyms. By the end of 1943, the Futurians had lost all their s.f. magazines; but at their zenith they had controlled more than half the magazines in the field. (Knight, 1977: 136)

Wilson started to work as copy editor for Fairchild Publications around August 1940 (Knight, 1977: 70). As for the writing, Asimov and Kornbluth were practically earning enough to make a living, although both kept side jobs. In short, the publishing field had replaced fandom as Futurians’ main playground. Had the war not cut their momentum, they might have succeeded in professional publishing what they had failed to do in fandom some years earlier.

2.2.4. Dissolution of the Group

The war deeply perturbed the lives of the Futurians. From 1942 on, Asimov, Pohl, Kornbluth, Leventman, Rubinson, Wilson, Blish and Dirk Wylie either volunteered or were drafted in the army and related military programs (Asimov, 1979: 356; Pohl, 1983: 143; Rich, 2010: 109–111;
Fancyclopedia 3: “Dick Wilson”; Ketterer, 1987: 8; Pohl, 1983: 131). Many did not return to fandom or science fiction. Jack Gillespie, for example, enrolled in the Merchant Marine to avoid the draft, and stayed there long after the war was over: “Pohl blamed the Merchant Marine for Gillespie’s choice of work, writing that the unintellectual environment that Gillespie experienced there for so many years was one he could not get out of mentally, even after he had physically left.” (Swartz, 2017) Furthermore, two members of the collective can be considered indirect casualties of the war: Dirk Wylie and Cyril Kornbluth. Dirk Wylie was injured during training in 1942 by falling from a jeep, developed a perineal abscess as a following, and died of tuberculosis of the spine in 1948. According to Knight, “It is not clear whether this had anything to do with his jeep accident, but Rosalind’s uncle, a lawyer, succeeded in getting him a small pension.” (Knight, 1977: 186) As for Kornbluth, he came back from the Battle of the Bulge physically diminished, and died of a heart attack at only 34, in 1958 (Knight, 1977: 214–215).

When, in late 1944 and early 1945, the last round of newcomers arrived in New York and joined the Futurians—Judith Merril, Virginia Kidd, and James Blish, returning after years of absence—the collective was but the shadow of what it once had been. The Futurian Houses were now split apart—Lowndes and Blish lived in “Blowndsh” (Knight, 1977: 153), Merril and Kidd in “Parallax” (Knight, 1977: 155), Michel and Shaw in “Station X” (Eney, 1959: 75), and Knight and Chester Cohen in “Nome” (Knight, 1977: 123). Wollheim had moved in with Elsie after they married some years earlier. The others were serving abroad.

Since the first Futurian House in the Fall of 1939, the collective was defined as much by the friendship uniting its members than by their views on politics, fandom or science fiction. It should thus come as no surprise that the crisis that triggered its explosion was both relational and political. In fact, both aspects were so intertwined that it is almost impossible to establish which prevailed over the other.
Ten years after meeting each other at the beginning of Wollheim’s campaign against Gernsback, Wollheim and Michel remained the closest of friends and the most loyal allies. They were, together with Elsie, members of the Communist Party, and the last ones to adhere to the Stalinist line. The collective, however, now hosted a greater diversity of political affiliations. Merril was an active Trotskyist and very critical of the Communist Party; Blish, the self-described “book fascist” was back in New York. The political situation within the collective was tense, to say the least. Living with Kidd in “Parallax,” Merril had all the occasions to clash with Blish. She was herself dating Michel, whose loyalty to the Communist Party and its Stalinist line was as strong as his unwavering friendship with Wollheim.

One fateful day of September 1945, Michel decided to break up with Merril. Although he denied it until decades later, it was believed by Merril and the other Futurians that Wollheim had pressured Michel into doing it. He would have had more than enough reasons. Wollheim could not stand Blish’s fascist views and disapproved of Michel spending so much time with him. He also frowned on adultery, and repeatedly reminded their friends that Merril was a married woman. Merril was also, incidentally, a Trotskyist deviationist, which was not to Wollheim’s liking either. In any event, Michel, accompanied by his roommate Shaw for moral support, walked to Parallax. When he left to go home, he and Merril had split. What he had not foreseen, however, is that Shaw would not follow him back. Outraged at what he had done, suspecting that Wollheim was behind all this, Shaw, Merril and Kidd devised a response. They gathered other Futurians—Knight and Chester Cohen—to publish a fanzine announcing that Michel and the Wollies were ousted from the collective. In X’ [prime], subtitled Official Organ of the Futurian Society of New York, they declared the three “unfit for membership in a group whose primary basis is friendship,” decried “the fanatical nature of their convictions” and their “morbid fear of any opposing political viewpoint,” singling out Wollheim as “the center of infection
among the Futurians.” (Shaw et al., 1945) The fanzine was mimed on September 19, 1945, Lowndes and Blish added their signature to the authors’, and it was circulated the following day.

Wollheim’s answer came a few weeks later, and it was not what the signatories had expected. He was suing them in the Supreme Court of the State of New York demanding $25,000 in damages for harm to his professional reputation. The case was eventually dismissed, but not before it cost the group $700 in lawyers’ fees. The blow was fatal to the collective: “The Futurian Society was not officially dissolved, but it never met formally again, and there was a tacit understanding after a few months that it was dead.” (Knight, 1977: 176)

Although members remained closed friends and associates, meeting informally and sometimes formally throughout the next decades, the Futurian Society would not survive Wollheim’s dramatic exit. What had begun with his obstinate campaign against Gernsback in 1935 was ending with this bitter blow struck at his own collective. In some way, the Futurians were born again under a different name in 1947, when the Hydra Club was formed. The initial members included Pohl, Kyle, and Merril, with Asimov and Knight joining them later. Hydra was, however, not a fan club, but “An organization of Professional Science-Fiction Writers, Artists and Editors” (Fancyclopedia 3: “Hydra Club”). Futurians had started to leave fandom as early as 1939, turning their attention to professional science fiction publishing. With Wollheim’s lawsuit in the fall of 1945 and the dissolution of the collective that followed, its last members effectively walked out of zine history. In the meantime, they had played a seminal part in the birth of fandom and zine culture.

2.3. Institutions of Fandom

The level of formality of fan activities in the 1930s can be surprising. If the Futurians eventually distinguished themselves from other fan organizations by the informal and organic character of the
collective, most fan organizations respected strict procedure. Constitutions were written, meeting proceedings transcribed, elections held. Asimov, attendee of the first meeting of the Futurian Society in September 1938, provides a telling example: “We enjoyed a three-hour session of strict parliamentary discipline. You know, motions, and amendments, and votes, and objections, and so on.” (Asimov, 1979: 212) This was by no means an exception, or something fandom had grown into as the decade progressed. This attitude was established early with the first clubs at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, and expanded across all new fan organizations as they were founded. Club meetings and conventions were carefully organized following Robert’s Rules of Order (Pohl, 1983: 40); conventions followed pre-established agendas and the proceedings were published in fanzines; the FAPA held elections under close surveillance of their members. In general, fan organizations collected dues, published their activities through an official organ, and expected their members to be responsive.

Where could fans, mostly teenagers, get this highly developed organizational culture? And, perhaps more importantly, why abide to such level of formality in the first place?

2.3.1. Sources of Fan Organizing

An easy answer is provided by the narrative of early zine history provided in Zine Studies. Following Duncombe, early zine culture would have had two tributary sources: readers’ letters of comments published in the pages of Gernsback’s Amazing Stories on the one hand, and the Amateur Press Association movement on the other (Duncombe, 1997: 49–50; 107–108). There is, of course, some truth to it, and it might in part identify a model of organization the first fan clubs followed. The two earliest fan organizations—The Science Correspondence Club (SCC, later renamed the ISA), and the Scienceers—were both founded following correspondence between readers of Amazing. Their

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30 Duncombe cites Rau’s paper “From APA to Zines” (1994), which highlighted both Gernsback and APAs as tributaries of early zine culture, as “the only history of zines I’ve found” (Duncombe, 1997: 49).
creation was directly encouraged by Gernsback, who regularly published letters bringing up the idea of a club throughout 1928. He was also got involved in the clubs’ activities early on.

An interesting characteristic of these early fan clubs was their focus on amateur science, and only secondarily on fiction. They conducted home-made scientific experiments, and their publications were mostly dedicated to the popularization of science, only including a science fiction story every now and then, for illustration purposes. In this, they were like the radio amateur clubs Gernsback had already founded in the 1910s, and both might have had the same organizational structure. The official story found in Zine Studies has early fans “talking back to the stories written for them” and making “demands upon consumer culture” (Duncombe, 1997: 108; emphasis in original). Despite all the intentions of early fans, their first organizations were part of a commercial scheme imagined by publishers like Gernsback to build a consumer base.

This business model was common in the early 20th century. In the 1910s, major film studios in Hollywood either published themselves or endorsed the publication of “fan magazines” like Vitagraph Studios’ Motion Picture Magazine (founded in 1911). Not produced by fans but for them, these movie fan magazines had little to do with later “fanzines,” and were described as “Popular culture’s pulp fiction for women,” in contrast to magazines like science fiction pulps, aimed at a young male audience. By the turn of the 1910s and 1920s, their circulation neared a million, with Motion Picture, the most popular of them, reaching 400,000 (Bordwell, 1985: 99). Studios also encouraged the creation of “official fan clubs,” another great way to build loyalty from their customers. Alexander Walker notes that “A census taken in August 1934 revealed 535 official fan clubs with a membership of 750,000.” (Walker, 1970: 250) The formula was out there, and all Gernsback had to do is apply it to science fiction. Unlike Hollywood fandom, science fiction fans quickly put out their own, independent clubs and associations, however, and this made a world of difference.
When it comes to the Amateur Press Associations, the picture is less clear. The influence of Lovecraft and his circle, present in both fandom and APA circles, was significant on fans. Had he not died prematurely in early 1937, his influence might have permitted stronger ties between both movements. The Lovecraftians remained, however, a relatively small fringe within fandom, limited to the most literary-inclined fans and privileging what was later identified as fantasy or horror over science fiction. When Futurians got involved in APAs, it never really clicked, and they soon resorted to create parallel structures for science fiction fandom (Pohl, 1983: 61). Ultimately, the existing APAs were frowned upon as “mundane” by most fans.

Youth culture of at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries provides a more satisfactory explanation of the origins of the organizational culture typical of early fandom. Social reformers of the Progressive Era (1896–1917) were alerted by the many problems facing youth in a context of rapid urbanization, massive immigration (mostly from European countries), and general disruption of traditional forms of social life. Jane Addams, author of the 1909 classic *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*, advocated for sane and organized leisure activities for the youth, deemed endangered by the immorality urban life. The city as a corruptor of youth—and particularly in contact with a young, rootless, immigrant population—was a common theme in social criticism at the time. Youth organizations were founded by philanthropists worried of the moral condition of youth, and of young boys most urgently. The YMCA, founded in 1844 in London but soon establishing Associations in the United States, is perhaps the most notorious of them.

Closer to the protagonists of our story, the Scouting Movement, also launched in England, in 1908, led to the creation of the Boy Scouts of America in 1910, and the Girl Scouts of the USA in 1912. Mentions of the Boy Scouts abound in early fanzines. Many fans were Boy Scouts, including

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31 Orphaned and his situation worsened by the Depression, Lowndes “starved in the YMCA in Stamford for a few months” in 1937, according to Knight (1977: 9).
Futurians Pohl and Wilson, as well as the anti-Michelst Lovecraftian Freyor, who happened to be a Patrol Leader. The structure of the Scout Movement—a network of relatively independent but interconnected local units gathered under the same umbrella structure and following the same rules—is oddly similar to that of larger fan organizations like the Science Fiction League. Gernsback even prepared little SFL lapel buttons bearing the League's emblem of a flying space rocket when he launched the organization in May 1934, clearly echoing Boy Scouts’ badges (Moskowitz, 1974: 32). An important part of Boy Scout life was the publishing of a journal for the local chapter. Before publishing his Science Fiction News Letter, Wilson edited one of such journals, titled Tattoo, and even used it to publish one of his science fiction stories, “Glimpses into the Future” (Taurasi, 1938).

Most political parties had also great interests for the youth, organizing parallel youth wings—the Communist Party’s Young Communist League being only the most infamous. There again, we find the same key elements: local chapters, broader umbrella organization, local journal. While active in the Flatbush branch of the YCL, Michel, Pohl and Wollheim were in charge of the local publication, the Flatbush Artery. The fanzines they published during the same period were, of course, very similar to these political pamphlets. Beyond their task of directing young blood to their parent organization, youth wings often served as youth organizations in their own right, hosting all sorts of social gatherings and events.

Fans could draw on this rich institutional landscape the inspiration and the means to build their own, independent organizations. If fandom eventually developed its institutions, with their unique codes and traditions, there is no doubt that the decades of obsession with youth decadence and

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32 It is important to note that these pamphlets were not considered as fanzines by their makers. Even if their editors tried to bridge the gap between their activities in the YCL and fandom, they considered communist pamphlets and fanzines as two separate kinds of publications. The only reason issues of The Flatbush Artery are even archived on Fanac.org is the otherwise important role their editors played in fan history.
idleness had produced, by the 1920s and 1930s a veritable culture of organization that permeated deep into the social life of youth.

2.3.2. Instituting Early Zine Culture

The history of early zine culture is one of clashes, but also of foundations. Throughout their many feuds, fans founded and destroyed organizations of varying scope and purposes. This accumulation of what we could call experiments with institutions provided the backbone for the later development of zine culture. The decade between the creation of the first clubs in 1928–1929 and the organization of the First World Convention in 1939 was driven by a series of acts of foundation—clubs and their clubzines, independent zines, clubs of clubs like the SFL, factions within and across clubs like the Futurians, conventions, Amateur Press Associations like the FAPA, fan literary agencies, and proto-publishing enterprises accumulated and succeeded to one another. These can be understood as many attempts by fans to extend and exert their influence on fandom, to “unite” fandom under one single banner: their own.

Foucault used the concept of apparatus (“dispositif”) to emphasize the power dynamics presiding over the creation of institutions. An apparatus, he pointed out, is created in response “to an urgent need, and thus has “a dominant strategic function.” (Foucault, 1980: 194–195, emphasis in original). The cascade of fan organizations created in the 1930s illustrate this deeply strategic function of institutions. Gernsback pushed for the creation of the first fan clubs, and later of the first national and international fan organization, in the hope of securing a readership for his magazines. Taurasi published his *Fantasy News* to challenge Wilson’s monopoly on news within fandom with his *Science Fiction News Letter*. Moskowitz created New Fandom to wrest the organization of the First World Convention out of Futurian hands and to contain their influence. These institutions were, of course, dedicated to serving
fans and fandom. But they were meant to do it in the way imagined by their creators, often in opposition to competing views.

Once created, however, institutions gain a life of their own. For Foucault, an apparatus necessarily engenders unexpected situations to which it must then react and adapt. Furthermore, it is often reinvested with new strategic functions as circumstances change. Although marked by the circumstances and strategic intentions of their creators, they are constantly repurposed and redefined. Nothing illustrates this process better than the role the Science Fiction League played in Wollheim’s campaign against Gernsback. Once created, the SFL became an important site of power in fandom and was thus mobilized as such by fans struggling against each other, or against the influence of professionals on fandom. Initially designed to build readership, it then became a great weapon in the hands of Wollheim to be used against its founder.

In the long run, the Futurians lost almost all the fights they fought in fandom. If Gernsback’s influence was effectively pushed back in 1936, New Fandom reinstituted collaboration with the pros as common practice starting with the World Convention in 1939. The Futurian attempt at politicizing fandom never really recovered from the first setback they suffered after the vote against the “Mutation or Death” speech. On the other hand, their adversaries were not fully successful either. Although it did survive the departure of Gernsback, the Science Fiction League eventually waned, and dissolved in 1941 (Fancyclopedia 3: “Science Fiction League”). The lack of support from a guiding figure like Gernsback and the organizational backing of his magazines had the best of it. The relationship between fans and pros reached an unprecedented high point with the First World Convention but it never really became the kind of symbiosis New Fandom thought it would. Most of fandom remained, in the end, independent, if not by rejection of professional presence in fandom, simply because it had developed its own rules for its own games. As for political debates within fandom, they did not disappear with the Futurians. If the 1950s were indeed a far tamer decade than the 1930s and 1940s
had been, the 1960s saw fan feuds returning in force (Straw, 2013: 20). The “New Wave” of science fiction in the 1960s brought its fair share of politicization, including an emphasis on gender and sexual politics that has been part of fandom ever since (Latham, 2006).

In fact, the mark the Futurians have left on fandom might be better understood, if not through the views they failed to impose, through the many structuring and existential questions they posed. The fan/pro dynamic or the politicization of fandom are not questions that can be solved once and for all. They were activated by the Futurians and transmitted through generations of fans and zinesters up to this day, albeit in new guises. After all, the question of fan/pro relations in fandom is strikingly similar to the alternative/mainstream dichotomy that was at the heart of later zine culture, in the 1980s and 1990s.

We touch here upon a different meaning of institution: not as an organization or established practice, but as a process, the action of instituting. In their race for prominence in fandom, Futurians and others founded institutions in the first sense, of course. Many of them are still active today, working on the basic principles that were established in the 1930s. Conventions are still organized the same way, clubs like the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society are still running, and the Fantasy Amateur Press Association has famously become “Where Old Fans Go to Die” (Fancyclopedia 3: “FAPA”). But they also instituted fandom in the second sense: they established it as a distinct culture, with its customs, its referents, its key issues. And this is perhaps their most important legacy.

The two aspects of “institution”—as a process of foundation, and as the instances embodying this process—are of course not separate. We can see the foundation of specific institutions like clubs and conventions as the driving force behind the broader process of institution. As organizations were founded, merged and dissolved, amendments passed, elections won, precedents established through feuds, fandom and zine culture have evolved and were consolidated. After an intense period of conflict
opposing rival factions in the 1930s and early 1940s, fandom has stabilized around a series of organizations and instituted practices in the 1940s and 1950s. It had become a necessary part of science fiction and was already starting to develop into specialized sub fandoms following genres (fantasy, horror) and, eventually, mediums (comics, cinema, television). These developments were predicated on an accumulation of precedents going all the way back to Wollheim’s campaign against Gernsback.

Conclusion

It is worth considering in more details the culture instituted by early fans, as it provided the basis from which later zine culture grew and flourished. Early fandom had a lasting influence on the zine making population, on prevalent forms of socialization for its actors, and on internal debates within the culture. To some degree, all of these can be related to the complex relationship between fans and professionals in science fiction publishing.

The population of early fandom was in large part determined by the marketing strategies of science fiction pulp magazines. The influence of Gernsback on zine history is massive on that regard. His magazines, soon followed by competitors, were aimed at a young, WASP, male audience. As the prosopography of the Futurians, and comparisons with general fandom has shown, this audience matched with the fan population, some differences notwithstanding. While fandom might have eventually developed its own independent institutions and renegotiated its relationship with the pros on different terms, it is this population inherited from targeted marketing that was instituted as the main population of fans in the process. And it would remain the same until much later, in the 1970s, when another targeted audience, housewives watching television programs like *Star Trek*, would suddenly shift the gender balance in fandom.
Interestingly, the population of early fans, that we can characterize with Bourdieu as “new-style autodidacts,” seems to keep this structuring attribute despite becoming more diverse over the generations. The gender, race, and perhaps to a lesser extent social class of origin of these “autodidacts” might have changed, they still seem to constitute the bulk of the zine makers and readers to this day. In the aftermath of the local revolution sparked by Riot Grrrl in the 1990s, the contemporary zine population is clearly not as male-dominated as it once was. It is still mostly white, although this has also been challenged vigorously and is changing rapidly. It still appears, however, to be mostly middle-class economically and culturally, and characterized by the same disjunction between high talent and low recognition, high ambitions and expectations, and low rewards and status.

Last but not least, early fandom instituted internal debates that would come back under one form or another throughout zine history. The question of zine culture’s independence from professionals, of the place of politics, and of what political ideologies should prevail run through the entire history of zine culture. In this sense, the showdown opposing the Futurians and New Fandom has been re-enacted countless times since the 1930s, every time in a different context by different zine makers, every time with a different outcome. If political ideologies are often considered to have been introduced to zine culture by the punks in the 1970s (for example Atton, 2002: 56–57), it is important to note that punk zines were not spontaneously self-generated but built on an existing tradition that dates back to the 1930s.
Chapter 3  Punk and Zine Ideologies

The corpus of punk zines is intimidating. Not only is it massive, but it has generated an overwhelming literature. Punk zines and the zines published in their wake are among the most studied in Zine Studies (Hays, 2020: 11–12). The punk subculture is also one of the first and most researched subculture (Huq, 2012; Wright, 2020). Punk zines capture the imagination of zine makers to this day. Despite having known predecessors in fandom, they are identified as constituting the zine tradition. This “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992) builds on an idea put forward by the first punks, who claimed to mark a “year zero” of youth culture and politics (Worley, 2017: 49; Wright, 2020: 3). The publication of Mark Perry’s Sniffin’ Glue in 1976, often referred to as the first and most influential punk zine (Sabin & Triggs, 2001; Worley, 2020: 17–18).33

The punk tradition touches upon every aspect of zine culture. It is aesthetic, echoed in the techniques and styles considered typical of zine making—“cut-n-past letterforms, photocopied and collaged images, hand-scrawled and typewritten texts” (Triggs, 2006: 69). It also defines the politics most commonly associated with zine culture. Punk zine makers are often considered the first in zine history to have “transcended their ‘fan’ prefix” and repurpose zines as a form of “alternative media through which dissenting voices and formative political opinions could be expressed and discussed” (Worley, 2015: 78–80).

33 The New York-based Punk magazine, edited by John Holmstrom from 1975 to 1979 (republished in Holmstrom, 2012), is less frequently cited, probably because of its more professional production. It was nevertheless influential, especially through its comics and photo comics aesthetically marked by the countercultural “underground comix” movement. Punk was closely associated with the “CBGB scene” at the epicentre of early punk in New York (notable regulars included the Ramones and Patti Smith, but also the older Lou Reed, as well as the New York Dolls, managed by Malcolm McLaren the year before he took on The Sex Pistols). It can be considered as one of the many “missing links” tying punk to its cultural and political predecessors.
When replaced in the broader picture of zine history, there is no doubt that this tradition is rife with exaggeration. We have seen in the previous chapter how early science fiction fandom largely contributed to define the medium and the culture, from its modes of operation to its relationship with the cultural industries, to its politics and its demographics. There is no denying, however, that punk and post-punk zines did also leave their permanent mark on zine history, profoundly redefining the medium, and setting the bases for the ideological discourses still prevalent in zine culture today. This chapter is an attempt to retrieve the series of appropriations, actualizations, feedback, and radical critiques that tie the recent ideological configuration of zine culture to the turn initiated by early punk zines. It will focus on the elaboration of an influential ideological current—anarcho-punk—and on the way it was picked up on by a series of movements within the punk subculture: Homo/Queercore, Riot Grrrl, and Race Riot. To do so, I privilege the conceptual approach to political ideologies developed by the British political theorist Michael Freeden. After introducing the context of the punk “first wave” in which anarcho-punk was developed, I will therefore outline a detailed analysis of the anarcho-punk ideology and illustrate how it served as the backdrop on which punk zine politics was later developed. Ultimately, I hope to show that, from their anarcho-punk point of departure, the political ideologies circulated and debated in punk zines eventually led to the formation of a distinctive “zine ideology” informing contemporary zine politics.

3.1. The Punk Origins Story

In many ways, anarcho-punk was already a reaction against the “first wave” of punk that had swarmed from the United Kingdom in 1976–1979 (Sabin, 2002: 3; Crossley, 2015: 12). This fact is often obscured by a tradition that sees in the Sex Pistols and the punk zine Sniffin’ Glue the origin of later, more politicized, iterations of the punk subculture. After the sudden rise to popularity of bands
like The Clash and The Sex Pistols in the United Kingdom, and The Ramones in the United States, fans, “ignored by and critical of the mainstream music press, started printing fanzines about their music and cultural scene” (Duncombe, 1997: 7). *Sniffin’ Glue* is, of course, the prototypical case at hand. Cheaply photocopied and stapled in the top-left corner, its success is generally attributed to the injunction contained in the editorial of the fifth issue, dated of November 1976: “All you kids out there who read ‘SG,’ don’t be satisfied with what we write. Go out and start your own fanzines […] flood the market with punk-writing!” (Perry, 2009: n.p.; emphasis and spelling in original) By 1977, similar publications were multiplying across the country, *Ripped and Torn, 48 Thrills, Chainsaw, Jolt,* and *Sideburns* being notable examples (Worley, 2015: 77–78). These zines are deemed the very embodiment of the “Do It Yourself” (DIY) ethos characteristic of the early punk bands whose music they commented and complemented (Triggs, 2006: 70).

This origins story poses a series of problems. First, it ignores the fact that, despite their aesthetic proposition, the young stars of this first punk wave were far from amateurs. The career of the Sex Pistols has been the object of much romanticizing. When compared to later anarcho-punk standards, the Pistols are better described as an aesthetically innovative and morally offensive boy band. The band was surrounded by managers, conceptors, and designers. Malcolm McLaren, Jamie Reid, and Vivienne Westwood thoughtfully defined their aesthetic and fashioned their public appearances, incidentally promoting McLaren’s and Westwood’s own London boutique, SEX. McLaren took charge of choosing the band members—introducing the lead singer, Johnny Rotten, a.k.a. John Lydon, to the rest of the group, dismissing the original bass guitar player Glen Matlock and replacing him with Sid Vicious, a.k.a. Simon John Ritchie. Together with Reid, McLaren incorporated Situationist tropes to the band’s discourse and visuals (Vermorel & Vermorel, 1987: 222). It should also be noted

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34 This sentiment is shared by Penny Rimbaud of Crass: “let’s face it, the Pistols were no more than the Spice Girls of their day, glitzy, cheap and, dare I say it, downright crass” (Rimbaud, 2015: 12).
that, albeit unpeacefully, the Sex Pistols were signed to a major label, EMI, only months after starting to perform regularly.

Second, however radical, the dissent embodied by early punk was not understood by most of its participants as a political statement inasmuch as an ethos and an aesthetic. Crossley strongly insists on this point:

the definition of punk as political certainly shaped its later manifestations both in the UK and perhaps more especially overseas. However, as we have seen, some of punk’s most prominent pioneers were resistant to the idea that what they were doing was political. They did not define punk, from the inside, as political phenomenon. Rather, they perceived their activities to be about making exciting music and having fun. Even their non-conformism, as they understood it, was an existential and aesthetic rather than a political statement [...] We might dispute such distinctions and definitions, particularly given the extensive work in sociology on identity politics and “new social movements” which operate outside of conventional definitions of politics but we must be mindful of them if we believe that it is important to remain faithful to social actors’ own intersubjective definitions of their activity in our explanations. Punk or at least certain strands of it became political in my view. It was political in its consequences. But most of its pioneers did not regard themselves to be involved in a political project and their motivations and situational and self-definitions (at the very beginning of punk) were not political in anything but the widest and vaguest sense of the word. (Crossley, 2015: 54)

Crossley’s comment applies to zines as much as to the music. Zines played an active role in the creation and dissemination of punk as a subculture. As early as 1979, Hebdige saw punk zines as part of the chain of “homological relations” defining the punk “style” (Hebdige, 2012: 114). Music journalist and punk historian John Savage, himself a former punk zine maker (London’s Outrage, 1976), would even note in a diary entry dated October 9, 1977: “Fanzines are the perfect expression—cheaper, more instant than records. Maybe THE medium.” (Savage, 1993: 401) That being said, early punk zines like Sniffin’ Glue were a far stretch from the later punk zines. To begin with, they were modelled on similar music zines circulating at the time outside punk circles. As Perry himself noted years later: “All that stuff about Glue being the first fanzine is crap. Brian Hogg’s Bam Balam, which was all about sixties music, was in its fourth issue by then: it showed that you could do a magazine
and you didn’t have to be glossy. Also Rock On used to carry Country and Rock’n’Roll fanzines” (Quoted in Savage, 199: 201). Although only 100 copies were printed for its first issue, Sniffin’ Glue quickly became a widely circulated, professionally printed publication. The last issue, released a year after the first, September 1977, was printed in offset and had a print run of 20,000. As for its contents, it was in large part focused on music, and only barely touched upon political issues, most often with derision. By its visuals and its spirit, it was quickly emulated by a large number of zine makers.

The distinctive political approach often attributed to punk, however, only came some years later, in the doldrums of the first punk wave that ended with the grotesque death of the Sex Pistols’ Sid Vicious in 1979. Tony Drayton—editor of Ripped and Torn (1976–1979) and then Kill Your Pet Puppy (1979–1984), two zines playing a major role in the development of the anarcho-punk ideology and network—remembers the beginning of the 1980s more as a new beginning than a continuation:

[Early 1980s. A new punk scene is developing from the Wapping Anarchy Centre, by which time I am producing the fanzine Kill Your Pet Puppy. Now I find myself in the same position as Mark Perry in 1976, with people wanting to write for me about how they feel about what is happening to them. I say to them what he said to me, “go and make your own fanzine.” By coincidence or influence, the great anarcho-punk fanzine industry erupts (Drayton, 2018a: xv).]

Taking up the most emblematic slogans of the first wave—the Sex Pistols “Anarchy in the U.K.” and “No Future” most notably—35—a nebula of musicians, artists, and activists gathered around the British punk band Crass laid down the basis of a more substantial approach to punk politics. At the heart of this shift was a multipronged mediatic and rhetorical strategy mobilizing songs, leaflets, graffiti campaigns, live music and art performances, books, and, of course, zines.

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35 “When in 1977 the Sex Pistols harped on about anarchy in the UK, it became pretty obvious to me that their interest was not in revolution but in their bank balance. Anarchists on EMI? I think not. We saw Johnny Rotten’s ‘no future’ rantings as a challenge. We believed that there was a future if we were prepared to fight for it, and fight for it we did.” (Rimbaud, 2015: 1–2)
3.2. Crass and the Anarcho-Punk Morphology

Despite its central importance in early punk history, Crass (1977–1984) does not match description of a typical punk band. Its members were significantly older than their peers, old enough to have been active in the hippy movement and in avant-garde artistic circles before embracing punk in the middle of the 1970s. Penny Rimbaud (a.k.a. Jeremy Ratter), and Gee Vaucher—main lyricist and main visual artist of the band respectively—set up the Dial House in 1967, an “open house” commune in the periphery of London, in Essex. Rimbaud and Vaucher were, in 1968–1972, members of the EXIT collective, an avant-garde performance group who notably collaborated with FLUXUS (Vaucher, 1999: 6). Together with Wally Hope (a.k.a. Philip Russel), Rimbaud co-organized the first edition of the Stonehenge Free Festival in 1974, an emblematic event for the British hippy movement. Whereas, in 1976, McLaren urged young punks to “call all hippies boring old farts, and set light to them” (quoted in Cross, 2010: 4), Crass in contrast insisted on the idea that punk inherited directly from the hippy movement. For Penny Rimbaud, “the anarcho-punk movement was not a beginning as much as a continuation. Before that there’d been the hippies, the beats, the bohemians, right back to the beginnings of human consciousness.” (Rimbaud, 2015: 4) Part of this heritage was, of course, the anarchist tradition, which Crass integrated in both its discourses and its action.

As a political ideology, “socialist anarchism” is notoriously difficult to approach from an analytical point of view. Anarchists have long defied any attempts at delineating their ideology to provide a single, or even a limited number of definitions. The conceptual approach developed by Freeden, better understood as an attempt to account for the variability and relative indeterminacy of political

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36 The term is used to distinguish what is commonly referred to as anarchism from “individualist/capitalist” anarchism and libertarianism. As Franks notes, however, these two “currents” are better described as two distinct ideologies altogether: “The fact that both versions share a core concept of ‘anti-statism’, which is often advanced as the ground for assuming a commonality between them […] is insufficient to produce a shared identity. This apparently critical core feature is not sufficient because the surrounding principles, theoretical canons, and institutional forms are distinct, such that the concept of state-rejection is interpreted differently despite the initial similarity in nomenclature.” (Franks, 2013: 388) I will use “anarchism” to refer to “socialist anarchism” in what follows.
ideologies rather than to contain them in clearly defined but abstract frameworks, is for this reason particularly adapted to the study of anarchism (Franks, Jun & Williams, 2018: 3–4).

Several attempts have been made to characterize the ideological morphology of anarchism. Depending on their scope (historical or ideological), they have offered different accounts of the anarchist morphology (see for example Freeden, 1996: 312; Windpassinger, 2012: 57; Franks, 2013; Franks, Jun & Williams, 2018: 7–8). For my part, I have decided to narrow my focus to the formulation offered within British anarcho-punk circles gathered around Crass, as it is the strand of anarchism that has had the most significant impact on punk zine politics. This is not to say that this is the only version of anarchism in zine culture, then or since. However, Crass’s version of anarcho-punk became so prevalent at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s that it can be considered the dominant ideological current presiding over the creation of a distinctive punk zine public, laying the groundwork for the further development of both punk and zine politics up to the 2000s.

Freeden’s conceptual approach defines political ideologies as assemblages of essentially contestable concepts, organized by a sense of priority, and geared towards political action (Freeden, 1996: 54; 76–77; 88). This definition is built on three assumptions. First, political concepts are essentially contestable (Gallie, 1955). That is to say that their definition is inevitably subject to debate and indetermination. Concepts at the heart of political ideologies such as freedom, equality, justice are characterized by the many potentially contradictory meanings they see themselves attributed. By grouping and ordering these concepts together, ideologies “decontest” them: defining them, attributing them specific and relatively stable meanings among a large spectrum of possibilities.

Second, the concepts forming the backbone of a political ideology are organized in a hierarchy based on an order of priority assigned to them. Every ideology is thus composed of core, adjacent, and peripheral concepts. Core concepts are essential components of a given ideology. Without one of
its core concepts, or when a core concept is decontested in a strongly divergent way, a discourse cannot claim to belong to the same ideological family. Freeden identifies three core concepts to anarchism:

[first,] antagonism to power, culminating in the desire to annihilate it (power is decontested as centralized and hierarchical and manifested above all, though not exclusively, in the state); second, a belief in liberty, decontested as spontaneous voluntarism; third, the postulation of natural human harmony (Freeden, 1996: 312).

All the members of the extended ideological family of anarchism are linked by these core concepts, although their way of decontesting them may vary significantly. These variations can be based, internally, on how they are positioned within the anarchist ideological morphology or, externally, by historical, cultural, or even linguistic factors.

Individual core concepts are not unique to a given ideology. Most political disagreement revolves around how the same concepts are defined and employed, rather than on the choice of the right concept. Historically, anarchism has positioned itself at the confluence of several, often antagonistic, ideological families, most notably various forms of socialism and liberalism (Freeden, 1996: 311). The core concepts shared with other ideological traditions are, however, decontested in ways divergent enough so to clearly distinguish their use as anarchist.

Core concepts are an essential but insufficient defining characteristic of political ideologies. No ideology can be reduced to its core concepts. They rely on adjacent and peripheral concepts to refine their core and give it more substance. These adjacent concepts fulfill many functions, including reinforcing the connections between core concepts and bringing ideologies closer to the complex reality of the political world. Typical anarchist adjacent concepts include “organization” and “horizontalism,” “prefiguration” and “direct action,” “micropolitics,” “revolution” and “anticapitalism” (Franks, Jun & Williams, 2018: 7–8). These adjacent concepts are often the object of debate between anarchists as they are more closely related to strategies and action.
Like adjacent concepts, only to a greater extent, peripheral concepts are particularly subject to change as they are often tied to a specific historical, geographical or cultural context. Windpassinger usefully notes that peripheral concepts “constitute the concrete engagements with topical issues.” (Windpassigner, 2012: 50). As such, they are better understood as specific positions and claims, causes adopted, or strategies employed, rather than as “concepts” proper. Because of its commitment to oppose all forms of oppression—entailed in its decontestation of the core concepts of “liberty” and “antagonism to power”—the anarchist conceptual periphery has been occupied by a comparatively large number of notions, giving rise to what some call “adjectival anarchism” (Franks, 2013: 400), of which anarcho-punk is an example. This illustrates how adjacent and peripheral concepts, being more closely tied to the reality of politics, can come to define the political identity of political actors more fundamentally than the more abstract concepts defining an ideology’s core.

Crass spread its political message in their songs, of course, but also across any platform within its reach. The visuals created by Vaucher and included on and in the sleeves of the band’s records were famous for their translation, in images and design, of the explicit political messages put forth by the band. The songs’ lyrics echoed writings in pamphlets and books, interviews and contributions to a wide range of zines such as City Fun, Acts of Defiance, Scum, and Toxic Grafiti. Vaucher edited her own art “newspaper,” International Anthem, in which she further developed the visuals associated with the band

The closest thing to a Crass manifesto was published as part of a collection of three essays included with the 1982 record, Christ — The Album, titled A Series of Shock Slogans and Mindless Token Tantrums. Later republished separately, Penny Rimbaud’s The Last of the Hippies is presented as a

37 Together with McLaren, Westwood, and Reid, as well as Black Flag’s Raymond Pettibon, Vaucher and Rimbaud can rightly be counted as among the artists having contributed the most to the visual identity of punk. Vaucher’s paintings, collages, and designs were reproduced countless times. The stencilled lettering used for Crass’s album covers, posters and flyers is still largely used in punk imagery to this day. (Lefebvre, 2017: 7; Bestley & Binns, 2018: 131).
theoretical exploration of “the individual and their basic right to freedom and peace,” as much as a pocket history of the peace movement from its roots in “beat culture” of the late 50s to the “punk explosion” of 77. Woven into this history is the story of Wally Hope, a visionary anarcho-mystic whose untimely death as a result of a brutal treatment in a psychiatric hospital becomes symbolic of the death of hippy “love and peace” and the birth of punks’ raw anger (Crass, 1982).

The first core concept coming to the fore when reading this document is “the System,” related to the core anarchist concept of “power,” typically decontested as to encompass opposition to both capitalism and the state (Windpassinger, 2012: 62). Essentially expansive, the System includes for Crass a wide range of social and cultural institutions: the family, schools, wage labour, the law, prisons, hospitals (with an emphasis on psychiatric institutions), religion, and tradition (Rimbaud, 2015: 94). Adjacent to this first core concept, we find the coupled notions of authority and oppression, whose decontestations are closely intertwined. The System is, thus, understood as a wide-ranging source of multifaceted oppression, rooted in the exercise of authority upon the individual.

The adjacent concepts of authority and oppression illustrate two important aspects of Crass’s anarcho-punk ideology. First, the oppressive nature of the System is not restricted to its constitutive institutions. It is, rather, considered to permeate the whole social fabric down to the individual experience. In this sense, the fight against oppression is understood as two-pronged: a large-scale collective struggle against institutions on the one hand, and a “micropolitical” individual struggle against behaviour patterns and internalized misconceptions on the other. As encompassing as the System is, the fight against it must take place on a variety of battlegrounds, and address all forms of oppression, even the most private and intimate. In short, anarcho-punks are wary of not reproducing the System’s values and practices within the alternative spaces they create. The Hippy experiment, and its failure, is on this point essential. Whereas the hippies contented themselves with creating pockets of freedom, anarcho-punks assert the necessity of tackling the System: “Desire for change had to be
coupled with the desire to work for it. If it was worth opposing the System, it was worth opposing totally. It was no longer good enough to take what I wanted and to reject the rest. It was time to get into the streets and fight back.” (Rimbaud, 2015: 116)

Second, despite some explicit propositions and positive actions, anarcho-punk builds heavily on negative decontestations. It is “anti-System,” “anti-capitalist,” “anti-authority,” and “anti-oppression” in its multiple forms. “Of necessity,” according to Cross, “much of anarcho-punk’s political identity was defined in oppositional terms.” (Cross, 2004: 9) This is not an exclusive feature of anarchism, and the nihilistic or “post-modern” connotations that can be assigned to such negative definitions should not be overstated. The liberal core, of which anarchism draws heavily on this point, emphasizes the defense of individual freedom and of negative rights, decontested as the absence of constraints on the rational individual (Franks, 2013: 389). By radicalizing the negative decontestations found in liberalism and socialism (anti-capitalism), anarchism positions itself as a fundamentally critical ideology.

The second concept forming the anarcho-punk core is the concept of liberty, decontested, negatively as the lifting of constraints on the individual (not exclusively the “rational” individual, unlike in liberal tradition) and, positively, as a form of creative and spontaneous voluntarism. This positive dimension of liberty is particularly important for anarcho-punks, as they often simultaneously acted as musicians, artists, activists, and propagandists. Another important adjacent concept, emphasis on communication, is also connected to this conceptual nexus tying liberty, creativity, and self-actualization. Ensues a large number of political, artistic and rhetorical strategies, transposing and embodying anarcho-punk principles on a wide range of mediums: “We must write songs and poetry, make records, magazines, books, films and videos, spray messages in graffiti and attempt to gain access to all forms of media so that our voice can be heard.” (Rimbaud, 2015: 82). This multipronged strategy characterizes a necessity to challenge power by exposing it. According to Cross, much of the anarcho-punk strategy was thus aimed at “exposing the social relations of power, ownership and wealth”
through “language, imagery and song” (Cross, 2004:8). Reflecting this, Crass’s songs were often more politically explicit than the essays they published, and their essays more exploratory in form than their songs and other creative output.

Crass’s relationship to more traditional forms of activism attests to a similar approach. The best example is the Stop the City campaign of 1983–1984, co-organized by Crass, and aimed at shutting down London’s financial district to “to protest ‘against war, exploitation and profit’ and to ‘celebrate life,’” (Cross, 2004: 12). The demonstrations drew on the anarchist tradition of direct action—another key peripheral notion and strategy (Jeppesen, 2012)—and have been considered a source of inspiration for later anarchist activism, including the Reclaim the Streets movement and the anti-globalist protests of the turn of the 1990s and 2000s (Rimbaud, 2015: 12). Yet, Stop the City was framed as an artistic performance. Thrilled by its success, Crass called it “the best gig of the year,” illustrating the continuum on which it situated art and political action. This no doubt contributed to feed the tensions with the more “traditional” segments of the anarchist movement, who tended to have a more restricted understanding of political activism.

Following a similar logic, anarcho-punks embraced a large set of peripheral causes. Crass is particularly known for its strong commitment to the peace movement, to the point of sometimes equating anarchism and pacifism.

In Crass’s original lexicon, anarchism and pacifism were seen as synonymous and symbiotic. Around the calls for “anarchy, peace and freedom,” anarcho-punk’s varied political impulses pushed the movement in diverse directions. Anti-militarism, and in particular, opposition to the nuclear arms race, remained definitional concerns throughout. But anti-war cries did not exhaust the anarcho-punk remit. The movement engaged—sometimes more successfully than others—with feminist, atheist, anti-capitalist and eco-politics. (Cross, 2004: 7)

Other important anarcho-punk causes of the time included animal rights and feminism. A band like Flux of Pink Indians, close to Crass and later developing its own subcultural institutional networks, emphasized animal rights and veganism, causes that spread considerably within punk culture.
throughout the 1980s and 1990s, notably through the “straight edge” movement (Kuhn, 2010). The Poison Girls, another band with which Crass collaborated closely, emphasized feminism across a large number of platforms, including its own zine, *The Impossible Dream*, published from 1980 to 1986 by the band’s drummer Lance d’Boyle. From a conceptual standpoint, causes like pacifism, veganism and feminism hold a peripheral position in the anarcho-punk ideological morphology. This is not, of course, to mean that they are considered less important. In fact, they often take centre stage in anarcho-punk activism. They remain, however, peripheral in the sense that the following of anarchist principles and abiding by the concepts at the core of the anarcho-punk ideology are systematically considered as necessary conditions to properly engage in these struggles.

Be it through predominantly artistic or political means, Crass favoured a form of “prefigurative politics”—an important concept traversing all anarcho-punk peripheral causes (Windpassinger, 2012: 55). Specifically, this prefiguration implies a matching of means to ends (ends should never justify means), and an emphasis of the role of the oppressed in their struggle to free themselves from oppression (Franks, 2013: 390). In the anarcho-punk morphology, this idea is related to the DIY principles already appropriated by punks during the zine explosion of the first wave (Worley, 2015: 77). It is also at the level of prefigurative action that we find most of the positive propositions put forward by Crass. Typical examples touch upon housing (squats, housing cooperatives, communes, tenants’ associations), food self-sufficiency (gardening), alternative healthcare (health groups, alternative medicine, herbs), education (information and community centres, free schools), and labour (skill sharing and “work banks”) (Rimbaud, 2015: 84–86).

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38 Ferrell locates the origins of punk DIY in very practical, rather than ideological imperatives: “British punks apparently appropriated the notion of ‘DIY’ from British hardware stores, which are often designated as ‘DIY’ or ‘Do It Yourself’ stores” (Ferrell, 1996: 198, endnote 7).
Human nature is a concept found in the adjacency of almost every political ideology (Freeden, 1996: 76). It features near the anarcho-punk core, decontested as fundamentally good and harmonious. The System and all actual, existing social relations are measured against this backdrop. The violence inherent to the present order thus make apparent its unnatural and illegitimate character. Consequently, the anarcho-punk struggle against the System is considered as a form of restoration of human nature:

We are born free, but almost immediately we are subjected to conditioning in preparation for a life of slavery within the System. We are moulded by our parents, teachers, preachers and bosses to conform to what they want from us rather than to our own natural and unique desires. Anarchists believe that those natural desires for peaceful and cooperative lives are denied us because they do not serve the requirements of the ruling classes. (Rimbaud, 2015: 75)

This postulate was, of course, shared by the hippies before the punks and can be traced all the way back to Rousseau and his *Social Contract* — “Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” (Rousseau, 2002: 156).

Of the many adjacent concepts found in its morphology, truth seems to have an essential function in Crass’s anarcho-punk, as it ties its core concepts together. The contrast between the postulated natural harmony and the actual social, cultural and political order—in which spontaneous expression, creativity, and authenticity are repressed—leads to an interpretation of the world as a web of lies, and of the anarcho-punk struggle as a way to uncover and defend the truth:

Within this world, respectable people, smart and secure, work day in and day out to maintain the lie. They know about the abuse and cruelty, they know about the dishonesty and corruption, they know about the complete falsity of the reality in which they live, but they daren’t turn against it because, having invested so much of their lives in it, they would be turning against themselves. So they remain silent. They are the silent, violent, majority. Beneath the glossy surfaces [...] of wealth and security, of power and glory, they are the real fascists. They know, but they remain silent. (Rimbaud, 2015: 90)

This characterization of the majority as “violent” and “fascist” highlights a fundamental contradiction at play in the anarcho-punk ideology, opposing a “true” and a “false” version of the people. The
oppression of the System is universal and enslaves everyone. “We, the people,” a phrase sometimes used by Penny Rimbaud in his writing to characterize “the millions upon millions,” is therefore opposed to a small clique, the “handful of ruling elites who own all the wealth, the land, and who have all the control.” (Rimbaud 2015: 51) This contradiction runs deep in the anarcho-punk morphology. It manifests itself in the great tension inherent to having the status of prominent artist, community leader, and intellectual, while being committed to fight against hierarchies and all forms of authority without compromise. However we look at the problem, one needs some sort of high vantage point—to be it grounded in universal principles—to diagnose a state of alienation for entire swaths of the population.

Crass mobilized two strategies to assuage this fundamental tension. First were the various attempts at diverting attention away from their personas, and to complicate their messages to discourage audiences from embracing them uncritically. They usually did not sign their contributions and emphasized the work of other participants of the movement. The band’s live performances were designed as “barrages of contradictions”: “We try and challenge people on every ground we can. The appearance is fascist. We wear black. The symbol [the Crass logo] which hangs behind us looks like a mishmash of different flags… The audience don’t get a neat little package they can swallow down and walk away from.”39 Another strategy, arguably more efficient, was to dilute their authority in increasingly wide and diverse political and artistic networks. This way, the gap between “we the living”40 and “the violent, silent majority” could at least be partially bridged by an open network of like-minded anarcho-punks.

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40 Characterization of anarcho-punks as “the living” and the rest of the population as “the dead” is found in the first issue of The Impossible Dream: “The living search for the living among the dead and the living know who the living are.” (d’Boyle, 1980: n.p.)
We touch here upon one key characteristic of political ideologies according to Freeden. One of the main functions of political ideologies is to link a vision of the world based on values and preferences to forms of political activity, to “guide political conduct” (Freeden, 1996: 6).

The political sphere is primarily characterized by decision-making, and decision-making is an important form of decontesting a range of potential alternatives. Thus, while the very nature of political concepts lies in their essential contestability, the very nature of the political process is to arrive at binding decisions that determine the priority of one course of action over another […] Ideologies serve as the bridging mechanism between contestability and determinacy, converting the inevitable variety of options into the monolithic certainty which is the unavoidable feature of a political decision, and which is the basis of the forging of a political identity. (Freeden, 1996: 76–77)

As a group, Crass built on and enriched an extensive alternative institutional network of which the Dial House served as a strategic centre. Already before Crass formed as a band, the Dial House was home to Exitstentil Press, a DIY publisher operated by Penny Rimbaud and Gee Vaucher. In 1978, after encountering a form of censorship before the release of their first album The Feeding of the 5000, the band established Crass records, from then on publishing their own and other anarcho-punk records. Anarcho-punk shows often took place outside the mainstream music circuit and were organized by amateur promoters. Crass produced their own material themselves, printing all the posters, sleeves, flyers, and other written material. The intensity and range of their commitment to the culture quickly positioned them at the centre of a considerable movement: “Crass served as the organizational catalyst for anarcho-punk recording, their house opened up to constant streams of visitors, and they serviced the fanzine network through the endless supply of interviews.” (Cross, 2010:6) In this sense, the fact that Crass did not publish its own fanzines, but rather encouraged others to publish their own, is significant. Looking at anarcho-punk zines of the time, one can but note that

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41 Vaucher and Existencil Press still took part in zine-related events in the United Kingdom and abroad until recently.
42 Workers at the pressing plant in Ireland had refused to print the record in protest of the blasphemous lyrics of the first song of the album, “Asylum.” The album was eventually released without the song, replaced with a two-minute-long track of silence titled “The Sound of Free Speech” (Berger, 2006: 116–117).
Crass is omnipresent. The band accepted interviews with even the remotest zine editor. At the end of the band’s career in 1984, Crass had contributed to the rise of a punk counterpublic, in which zines played an instrumental role in the dissemination and development of various strands of anarchist-based political ideologies.

3.3. A Punk Counterpublic

The networks fostered by punk zines, bands, venues, music labels, and coverage by mainstream media crystallized into translocal scenes in the last years of the 1970s. As the circulation of zines and other forms of self-publishing intensified, this led to the creation of a veritable punk public sphere where the specifics of the punk culture—its music, but also its politics—were discussed (Crossley, 2015: 54; Worley, 2015).

The concept of “counterpublic,” developed by the feminist political theorist Nancy Fraser, best describes the nature of this punk public sphere: a “parallel discursive arena” in which participants “invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.” (Fraser, 1990: 67). As much as this counterpublic was aimed at outward political change in its struggle for a large array of anarcho-punk causes, it also established, inward, internal political dynamics of which punks and affiliated activists became the leading actors. The existence of this counterpublic was the most important contribution of the generation of early punks, and profoundly impacted the further development of punk zine politics.

Once created, the autonomy of this space had to be ardently defended against external intrusions. Its independence from external influences—political, cultural, or otherwise—was constantly discussed and evaluated. The major political turmoil of the turn of the 1970s and 1980s was a central stake of
the debates and clashes taking place within the punk counterpublic. Zines of the time attest of this constant collective conversation over the role the music industry and political parties should play in punk culture, and whether collaboration with these external instances should be tolerated or not.

The heated debate over the presence of the Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP) on the far-left and the National Front (NF) on the far-right, is particularly illustrative of this. Tensions were already high over political orientations during the first punk wave (Worley, 2015: 78). In the United Kingdom in particular, political organizations soon jumped in, trying to capitalize on the dynamism of the movement. To oppose the politics of the far-right National Front and its appeal on a part of the youth, Rock Against Racism (RAR) was founded in 1976 in London. In 1978, RAR organization joined forces with the Anti-Nazi League, a subsidiary of the Trotskyist-leaning SWP. Together, they organized a series of Carnivals Against Racism. The movement quickly spread and local chapters of RAR were founded across the country. The organization also published its own magazine, *Temporary Hoarding*, emulating the aesthetics of early punk zines to appeal to their audience. The same year, the National Front retaliated by launching Rock Against Communism with a first concert in Leeds, inviting overtly neo-Nazi and fascist bands as their main acts.

Within local scenes, fights opposing far-left and far-right punks multiplied. In one memorable instance in September 1979, a show from Crass and Poison Girls in London’s Conway Hall was interrupted by a particularly bloody confrontation between neo-Nazi skinheads and far-left punks, joined by SWP members (Berger, 2009:146–147). Crass caused a surprise by fiercely denouncing both sides. Over the following months, the band released a series of singles addressing the matter, including “Rival Tribal Rebel Revel,” published as a flexi disc given away with the fifth issue of the zine Toxic Grafity [sic] (Diboll, 2018: 201; Berger, 2009: 150). They also explained themselves directly in zines, including Tony Drayton’s *Kill Your Pet Puppy*. 
both the left and the right has exploited and misused the energy of music and made it into a political battlefield […]. At its start punk was a cry for anarchy and freedom, it was individuals doing their own thing, then the organized left moved in with RAR and what had once been OUR playground became THEIR battlefield […] who cares a fuck about Marx, Hitler, Stalin, the whole fucking lot of them? (Crass & Poison Girls, 1980: 14–15)

Given the band’s clear far-left tendencies, Crass’s argument created a shockwave. Their take on socialist and communist punks—gathering them under the “Rock Against Racism” umbrella—was considered unnecessarily severe. The force with which they condemned the use of violence against far-right punks for being anti-pacifist and counterproductive was, moreover, understood by some as a complete betrayal of anarchist ideals (Berger, 2009: 149).

The point Crass was attempting to make, however, made its way through. Beyond political affiliations, they attempted—not un成功fully—to secure for punk an independence from political organizations. If anarcho-punk ought to be political, Crass argued, it had to be from the bottom up. Attempts at co-opting the movement had to be fiercely opposed, be they coming from the music industry or political parties, and however noble the causes adopted by the intruders were.

However controversial, Crass’s position ultimately prevailed. A comparison with skinhead culture—likewise under the radar of political organizations, although from the opposite end of the political spectrum—is instructive here. The “first wave” of the skinhead movement had started at the end of the 1960s as a biracial crossover of two subcultures: the Jamaican-British Rude Boys meeting the lower-class elements of the generally White and middle-class Mods (Brown, 2004: 157). Fading at the beginning of the 1970s, the skinhead movement was rejuvenated at the end of the decade under the impulse of “street punk,” a movement parallel to anarcho-punk claiming working-class allegiances, and best represented by second wave punk bands such as Sham 69. This second skinhead wave developed its own musical style—Oi! —and its own political language, resembling at first the anti-establishment and anti-System discourse of anarcho-punk (Lescop, 2012: 136). In only a few years,
however, the movement was co-opted by the National Front, who promoted it to the status of “official culture” of its young supporters, encouraging youth to attend to Oi! concerts (Lescop, 2012: 137). Instead of resisting this influence, the movement embraced it. Ian Stuart Donaldson, leader of the Oi! band Screwdriver, actively sought to enlist his fans to the National Front, and co-founded Rock Against Communism. Pockets of resistance remained. Proof of this is the existence of anti-racist or far-left groups like the Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice (SHARP, founded in 1987) or the Red and Anarchist Skinheads (RASH, founded in 1993). In most scenes, however, they were few and overwhelmed. The skinhead subculture has since then paid a heavy price for not successfully resisting political co-optation, a price that punk, encouraged by anarchist values of liberty and autonomy, never had to pay this dearly.

As anarcho-punks were fiercely debating in zines the orientations their movement should take, their networks were spreading translocally across the Atlantic. Much can be said about the international development and circulation of punk, and its dual emergence in the United States and the United Kingdom. This is true for punk as much as for the subcultural and countercultural movements that preceded it since the 1950s, as the positioning of anarcho-punk as heir of the American-born Beat and Hippy movements epitomizes. In fact, the co-development of subcultures in the United Kingdom and the United States is best described as a “pendulum,” each side building on and inspiring the other (Cooper & Cooper, 1993; Lentini, 2003). These trans-Atlantic transfers were duly recorded in the zines of the time. Mark Perry made extensive coverage of New York bands in his Sniffin’ Glue, The Ramones and Blue Oyster Cult making the cover of the first issue of the zine. Around the same time, Trouser Press, founded as a music fanzine in New York in 1974, fashioned itself as “America’s Only British Rock Magazine” and extensively covered the London scene, while V. Vale celebrated The Clash and The Sex Pistols from San Francisco in his Search and Destroy (1977–1979).
As Crass’s version of anarcho-punk was in full swing in the United Kingdom, the United States saw the rise of its own blend of anarchism and punk. According to Tim Gosling, the differences between the development of the movement in both countries are better explained by a presumably higher ideological “compatibility” of anarcho-punk with the dominant political culture in the United States:

The values of mainstream society in the United States are based upon an idealized form of rebellion—a freedom that is possible only through responsibility, the Protestant work ethic, and the bourgeois values that this inspires […] Both individually and collectively [American anarcho-punks] appear to be socialized to expect to be able to exploit opportunities within the commercial world to advance their own distinctive goals […] For the U.K. scene, operating commercial companies was at best a necessary evil, to be engaged in only because it was impossible or even more objectionable to work with the established industry. (Gosling, 2004: 175–177)

In short, the dominant ideology in the American context was more favourable to the development of punk, even in its most radical iterations. This phenomenon is not restricted to music-based subcultures and was observed in the alternative press as well (Hamilton & Atton, 2001), which was starting to converge with zine culture at the precise same time, notably under the impetus of zines like Mike Gunderloy’s Factsheet Five, or its closest punk equivalent, MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL (MRR).

Started as a radio show in Berkeley in 1977, the first issue of MRR as a zine was published in 1982, as a companion to a music compilation that played an important role in the renewal of early punk on the American West Coast: Not So Quiet on the Western Front. Its founder and editor, Tim Yohannan, quickly became an influential and controversial figure in the subculture, frequently criticized for his uncompromising attitude. To this day, MRR only reviews and interviews bands that

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43 We touch here upon a dimension of political ideologies that falls outside Freedon’s focus: ideology (in the singular) as a form of dominant thinking, as per the Marxist tradition (see Eagleton, 1991 for a well-rounded survey). The characterization of ideology, in the Marxist sense, as the dominant ideology (in Freedon’s sense) can help bridge the gap between both approaches. Freedon himself notes that liberalism has been, since the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries and with a few brief interruptions, the dominant ideology in the Western or “developed” world (Freedon & Stears, 2013: 329). Susen (2014, 2016) offers a compelling synthesis of the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltansi regarding the notion of dominant ideology understood in similar terms.
are not signed by major labels or exclusively distributed by major distributors (MRR, 2023). It almost never interviewed the same band twice, privileging emerging artists over the well-established. It also has always had a strong commitment to radical politics and presented itself (and the punk subculture it represented) as anti-capitalist. Born in 1945, Yohannan himself was, not unlike the members of Crass, old enough to have been active in the political movements of the 1960s. He was also a declared communist, although he was never hostile to anarchist views, and the latter eventually prevailed in the pages of MRR (Taylor, 2011).

The zine quickly became influential in the burgeoning Hardcore movement, typical of the punk “second wave” in the United States. Through its “Scene Reports” section, contributors from across the world could highlight the work of local bands and zine publishers, actively contributing to make punk a global, translocal phenomenon. MRR’s record archive is the most exhaustive punk music collection in the world. Every issue also included many zine reviews. Despite its scale, however, MRR has always remained a non-professional enterprise. Its “shitworkers”—affectionate nickname given to the volunteers keeping the zine running (Duncombe, 1997: 12)—were never paid. Even Yohannan himself kept a side job for the entirely of his tenure, until his passing in 1998. MRR is unique in zine history, not only for its major role in the lasting development of punk and zine culture, but also for being one of the rare cases of a community-based zine institution to outlive its founder. It is still active to this day, although exclusively online since 2019, and still holds a place of choice in international punk culture. Through its own readers’ columns as much as its extensive zine reviews, MRR is the very embodiment of the international punk counterpublic sphere.
3.4. Furthering Punk Zine Politics

Throughout the following decades, a series of movements picked up on punk zine politics where the anarcho-punk movement had left it. Homo/Queercore, Riot Grrrl, and Race Riot were clearly the most impactful. Each in their own way, these movements were an assault on the hypocrisy and inconsistencies of punk politics as much as attempts to change the broader world. Not unlike anarcho-punk before them, these three movements took punk’s ambitious aesthetic, ethical, and political program at its own word, pitting punks against their own idealized vision of themselves. Inclusivity and oppression within punk culture were at the heart of their demands, the two first focusing on sexuality and gender, the third on race and racism. The ideological and institutional configuration deployed at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s by anarcho-punk was all at once the starting point, the stakes, and the object of the critique for these three movements.

3.4.1. Homo/Queercore

Homocore (later recast as Queercore) first appeared somewhere during the first half of the 1980s in the Toronto scene. At the centre of the nexus which eventually lead to an international movement within punk were artists and activist G. B. Jones, Candy Parker, and Bruce LaBruce. Together, they formed the New Lavender Panthers and published the zine *J.D.s*—for “juvenile delinquents”—from 1985 to 1991. The zine is largely hailed as the first Homo/Queercore zine, sparking the movement; “as close as queercore may have come to a defining document.” (Warfield et al., 2021: 164)

The origins of the movement go back further in the early 1980s. G.B. Jones’s band, the influential feminist punk art band Fifth Column, started around 1980–1981. The band relied exclusively on DIY networks and self-production for its releases. Together with Caroline Azar, lead singer of Fifth Column, Candy Parker published *Hide*, a multimedia publication joining a zine to an audio cassette
compilation. Fifth Column released its first songs through the zine (ZineWiki: “Hide”). In 1984, Parker started Dr. Smith, a feminist and punk serial zine with clear affinities with LGBT culture and politics. The zine is an early example of what would soon become the trademark of Homo/Queercore and subsequent movements. It included a mix of materials including comics (and photo comics in the tradition of Punk magazine), DIY information and instructions (a how-to guide to film making), music-related content, interviews, political essays, and visual art. Its written content was notable for its provocateur tone, drawing from the most scandalous elements of subcultural history. Like Hide before it and J.D.s in its wake, Dr. Smith made creative use of the copy machine and emphasized visual art. It laid out some of the basic rhetorical elements later picked up by many punk zine makers.

Not unlike anarcho-punk, Homo/Queercore operated a return to a perceived origin of the punk movement, considered to have been lost along the way. Berger reminds us that despite what it had become in the 1980s, early punk was open and diversified in terms of gender and sexuality. Developments both in the United States and the United Kingdom contributed to homogenize punk expression and reinforce the already existing predominance of white, cis, and hetero males:

Punk itself had gone from being a decidedly non-macho, gay and woman-friendly movement to a place where men strutted around in big boots, leather jackets and Mohicans in a barely related parody of what they thought punk was originally about [...] many of the original punks—often gay disco regulars, whatever their sexuality—had scuttled off in disgust at this sea change (Berger, 2009: 197–198).

44 By way of its title, Dr. Smith, a nod to the character from the American science fiction television series Lost in Space (1965–1968), the zine also taps into the older tradition of science fiction and media fandom. Bruce Labruce described the character as “everything that you’d ever want to be as homosexual; he was pompous, theatrical, sarcastic, devious, conniving and criminal, but also a resourceful, witty, and imperious dandy. And he was a huge influence on me. He’s a good example of a character who just doesn’t fit in anywhere.” (quoted in Warfield et al., 2021: 70)

45 See for example, a review of Valerie Solanas’s S.C.U.M. Manifesto, in which Parker formulates a critique of the “hypocrisy of the ‘(Free) Love Generation’” reminiscent of Crass: “For the men it was the time of the ‘sexual revolution,’ for the women it was barefoot & pregnant as usual.” (Parker, 1984: 12)

46 Berger also notes that the Roxy Club, the focal place of gathering for London’s early punk scene, “had originally been a gay/transvestite club called Chaguaaramas, a sometime hangout of the Bromley Contingent [name given in the press to early Sex Pistols fans] and other early punks.” (Berger, 2009: 88)
To counter this tendency, the New Lavender Panthers suggested a return to origins. One way of doing this was to turn to the etymology of the term “punk.” They were all too happy to remind everyone that the slur reappropriated by the previous generation had its origins in gay culture: “punk (pŭngk) n. Slang. a. An inexperienced or callow youth. b. A young tough. c. A passive homosexual; catamite” (Labruce & Jones, 1985/1986: cover page). In a similar fashion, they emphasized how the gender and sexual identities of early punks were much more fluid than what they had become in the 1980s. The 7th issue of J.D.s thus reprinted a photograph of Sid Vicious from the Sex Pistols, in bed with band road manager Nils Stevenson. Under the title “All punks are gay.” Jones and Labruce asked, with irony, “Who would have thought that a mere decade after Sid and Nils did it, homopunk would finally catch on?” (Labruce & Jones, 1990: 13)

Key to the Homo/Queercore approach was its positioning, “caught in the cracks between gay and punk” (Warfield et al., 2021: 27), a positioning not unlike that of Crass against the punk “first wave.” In their attempt to tilt the sex balance the other way, the actors of early Homo/Queercore returned to anarchist basics, albeit unorthodox ones, to find leverage against both the gay and punk cultures of their time. This positioning of “outsiders among outsiders,” at the margin of the margin, became the vantage point from which Homo/Queercore could criticize both the punk and gay cultures of their time; it was the backdrop against which the movement could spread.

This positioning was so important for the movement that it can easily be considered a key peripheral notion of the Homo/Queercore ideology. It was as a vantage point from which queer punks could pit gay and punk cultures against one another, using one to sharpen the blunted edge of the other, and reciprocally:

The homosexual subculture provides a perfect example of co-option. Presented with a facile freedom that offers gay bars, discos, and fashion within a “gay ghetto,” radical options sanctioned by and contained within normalcy becomes the only concession to liberation. Society has long recognized “punk” as a viable commodity to be copied,
incorporated and sensationalized. Although not yet “ghettoized” to the extent of gay culture (maintaining a more nomadic edge), punks must constantly be wary of society’s attempts to reduce their protest merely to fashion, the representation of the “radical” as “hip” new product to be consumed. One way to avoid such co-option is to present a movement that refuses to conform to the standards of sexual decency and moral conduct expected of even the most rebellious of youths. (Jones and Labruce, 1989: 52)

In a sense, Homo/Queercore was framed by the New Lavender Party as the culmination of punk and anarchism: less unwittingly normative than the punk subculture, more radical politically and aesthetically. This rhetoric was spread across zines with the avowed intention of beating punk at its own game. *J.D.s* was notorious among queer punks of its time for its Homocore music compilation cassettes and “hit parades” lists. The zine also published letters of comments, as well as reviewed and indexed other zines as the movement grew. A few years after the first publication of *J.D.s*, things really got started. In September 1988, after attending the Anarchist Survival Gathering in Toronto in July specifically to meet the New Lavender Party in the flesh, San Francisco-based Tom Jennings published the first issue of *Homocore* (1988–1991). *Homocore* drew extensively from *J.D.s*, reproducing some of its materials (notably Candy Parker’s comics), and crowned the zine from Toronto “the first and coolest Homocore zine” (Jennings, 1988: 4).

In 1989 Bruce Labruce and G. B. Jones signed a feature article in the April edition of *MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL* (issue 71) titled “Don’t Be Gay or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Fuck Punk up the Ass.” This column, together with a review of *Homocore* in the same issue of *MRR*, marked the breaking out of the movement in the open (Spencer, 2005: 277). The same year, in Minneapolis, Larry-Bob Roberts published the first issue of *Holy Titclamps* (1989–2003), the review section of which became the standalone review zine *Queer Zine Explosion*. Published until issue 21 in 2009, it was the

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47 Spencer erroneously cites the “Don’t Be Gay” feature article as having been published in the February 1989 issue of *MRR*, instead of April 1989.

*J.D.s* and other Homo/Queercore zines clearly tapped into anarcho-punk. A piece from Mark Dreher of San Diego published in the fifth issue of *J.D.s* titled “Hitler was right; homosexuals ARE enemies of the state!” built on the rhetoric and ideological morphology developed by Crass and others. Dreher’s provocative argument went as such:

> The state is slavery, drudgery, boredom; the killing machine. Homosexuals, when they let themselves, are free and happy and daring and radical and gay. The two concepts are opposite. I want to see homosexuals fucking in the street! Wildly fucking and sucking like there’s no tomorrow! No more pain; no more money. No more work and no more cops. Just sex and paradise [...] Fuck what the people think or say—Fuck in the streets and be happy. (Dreher, 1989: 42)

We find here the anarcho-punk ideology implicitly tied together with gay sex and homosexual identity. The state, a major component of the anarcho-punk core concept of the System, is here challenged by gay and punk sexual freedom. Given that they allow themselves to be truly free, homosexuals can challenge both the state and social conventions. The three core concepts of anarcho-punk—antagonism to power, liberty as spontaneous voluntarism, and natural human harmony—are here decontexted in relation with homosexuality, making gay sex both a challenge to power, and an expression of freedom and a promise of harmonious social relations.

Like anarcho-punk before it, Homo/Queercore’s critique also emphasized continuity. One area where this was the most salient was in G. B. Jones’s art, as both an appropriation and a commentary on classics of gay art. In a series of drawings wittily titled “Tom Girls,” she takes on the work of Tom of Finland, transposing his style to the depiction of butch women. These drawings were

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48 Although considerably smaller in size, *Queer Zine Explosion* has been justifiably considered as the queer *Factsheet Five*. Roberts was, incidentally, in charge of the “queer zines” section of *Factsheet Five* during the 1990s.
published in the pages of *J.D.s* starting with the first issue in 1985. Here Jones perfectly locates in visual terms Homo/Queercore within its political horizon: punk, anarchism, feminism, and the LGBT movement. The first “Tom Girls” series shows two women bikers attacking a motorcycle policewoman. After tying her up to a tree, partially undressing her, whipping her butt with her own belt, they use her own pants to make a sign saying, “I am a fascist pig,” before roaring away on her stolen motorbike. (Labruce & Jones, 1985: 19–21) In the second series, published in the second issue of *J.D.s*, Jones represents muscular punk women in tight-fitting t-shirts posing in enticing and suggestive poses as they are getting tattooed (Labruce & Jones, 1985/1986: 9–10). Jones reflects on her approach years later:

> I was interested in certain issues that I don’t think many people may have picked up on in the work, ideas about authority figures, power, obviously, and the abuse of power, and gender roles as they pertain to both sexes. [...] I thought it would be interesting to compare the effects that [style] has if you were familiar with Tom of Finland and you’d be able to compare the effect of women in those positions of authority versus the men. But then I always try to change the narrative, I don’t go in the same direction. He is totally: “Cops are great, they’re really hot, we all want to have sex with them.” In my work it’s more like “Cops are fascist pigs and we’re going to tie them up and beat them and then drive away (Sasha, 2005).

In Jones’s work, Homo/Queercore inherits visually from both gay and feminist art, but is also at odds with both. This form of critical continuity, of inheritance with more than a pinch of salt, will also be characteristic of Riot Grrrl and, to some extent, of Race Riot down the line.

Despite its historical influence, the Homo/Queercore movement was limited in scope. All in all, there were perhaps up to a couple of hundred zine issues published throughout the movement’s short history. It played, however, an essential role of relay between the anarcho-punk generation of the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, and the Riot Grrrl and Race Riot movements that animated the 1990s and early 2000s. It set the tone, the rhetoric, and some of the most impactful strategies used by its successors. As Homo/Queercore made its introduction into the punk counterpublic in 1989, its main
animators immediately gave the impression of a large, full-scale movement. Embarking queer punks from across Canada and the United States, the New Lavender Party almost single-handedly created a movement out of pure bluff, inflating their numbers, using pseudonyms, creating new collectives and bands. Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill, perhaps the single most influential figure of the Riot Grrrl movement, notes:

We didn’t really know how big the scene in Toronto was, with J.D.s and G.B., but I did know that G.B. was multifaceted—she was making films, she was making zines, she was in a band […] I really related to her on that level, trying to create a scene. Later on, when I did one of the only mainstream-press interviews I did, for the LA Weekly, and I was asked about riot grrrl—we’d had just two meetings, in Washington, D.C., but I was like, Riot grrrl is all over the country; there are meetings happening everywhere—Minneapolis, Chicago, LA—I just made up a bunch of places and I was like, Yeah, there are meetings all over, we started this thing, and it’s totally a phenomenon. And then it became a phenomenon, because I said it was. That article came out and then girls started looking for the meetings. And I remember having the feeling that that was what the girls in Toronto were doing. They were, like, five people but they made it seem like it was so huge. (Kathleen Hanna in Warfield et al., 2021: 24)

3.4.2. Riot Grrrl

The transition between Homo/Queercore and Riot Grrrl was an almost seamless one. According to G. B. Jones, ‘Queercore and Riot Grrrl were almost synonymous in the early ’90s for a certain period of time.’ (Warfield et al., 2021: 95) A need for a feminist movement within punk was already felt in the mid-1980s, and Homo/Queercore already addressed some of it.

In June 1988, MRR published an issue touching upon gender relations and problems of sexism in various scenes. The portrait was disastrous. The issue opened on a false start with a debate opposing a reader to Tim Yohannan about female representation in MMR. It then gave voice to many female punks in scenes across the United States. Among the contributions was the transcription of a series of parallel group discussions held in D.C. over sexism—one with female and the other with male—
showing how, despite being an ‘alternative scene,’ the D.C. punk milieu was ridden with “certain vestiges of the ‘normal’ world’s fucked up sexism” (MRR, 1988: 55). Only a couple of years later, the D.C. scene would be the starting point of a punk feminist revolution that would spread across the world.

The second issue of Bikini Kill’s self-titled zine, published in late 1991, gives an insider account of how the Riot Grrrl movement started:

'Once upon a time …' last spring ('91), Molly and Allison (Girl Germs, Bratmobile) went to Washington, D.C., shook things up and got shook up, and connected with this radsoulisister Jen Smith who wanted to start this girl network and fanzine called Girl Riot. (This was also inspired by the Cinco de Mayo riots occurring in her neighborhood at the time.) So that summer a bunch of us Olympia kids (Bratmobile and Bikini Kill) lived in D.C. to make something happen with our friends there. Tobi (Bikini Kill, Jigsa) had been talking about doing weekly zines in the spirit of angry grrrl zine-scene, and then one restless night, Molly made this little fanzine stating events in the girl lives of the Oly-D.C. scene connection—and Riot Grrrl was born. Kathleen (Bikini Kill) took it a step further in that she wanted to have weekly D.C. grrrl meetings too, to connect with and see what’s up with the grrrls in D.C. With alot of effort and organizing on the part of Kathleen and other D.C. and Oly grrrls, weekly Riot Grrrl meetings started happening at the Positive Force house. It was great, like 20 girls came and we talked about female scene input (or lack of it) and how we could support each other, etc. And the fanzines kept coming out each week with certain contributors like Jen Smith, Kathleen, Molly, Allison, Tobi, Tiffany, Christina, Ne Sk8 Rock and Billy. And the coolest thing is that even though many of us went back to Olympia, the meetings and zines are still happening. (Soon Bikini Kill are moving to D.C. and Molly and Allison will be back and forth between Olympia and D.C. til forever.) (Bikini Kill, 1991: n. p.)

Riot grrrls quickly organized themselves nationally, forming local chapters and establishing translocal networks (Schilt, 2004). In the summer of 1992, the first Riot Grrrl Convention, part music festival part political gathering, was held in D.C. The following years, bands, local chapters, and zines swarmed across the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada before reaching other countries. Once launched, the movement could not be stopped. By the middle of the decade, most of its

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49 An anecdote retold by Downes illustrates how terrible the situation had become in the early 1990s. According to her, the straightedge position against sex had “culminated in boys-only spaces, as the ‘no girls allowed’ signs visible in the Dischord house in the punk documentary Another State of Mind suggest” (Downes, 2007: 16).
instigators—the “canonical trinity of Riot Grrrl-associated bands”: Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, and Heavens to Betsy (Marcus, 2010: 94)—had already either disbanded or were on hiatus. Riot Grrrl carried on through the work of a second generation of musicians, activists, and zine makers: by 1994, “Riot Grrrl as a whole was practically self-perpetuating” (Marcus, 2010: 313). In fact, the movement was so successful that the label was used almost indiscriminately to characterize female punks and young feminists (Schilt, 2005: 55, endnote 6). Throughout the 2000s, several initiatives replicated the Riot Grrrl spirit. In 2000, the first Ladyfest was organized in Olympia, emulating Riot Grrrl conventions and gathering some of the original riot grrrls (D’Angelica, 2009: 102–107). The festival quickly snowballed and similar events were organized in multiple cities across the world in the following years (Grassroots Feminism, 2014). Starting in 2001, Girls Rock Camps also quickly mushroomed, from the first in Portland, Oregon to over 50 different locations in North America, Europe (chiefly the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, Germany, Austria, Iceland), South America (Brazil) and Asia (Japan) (Labry, 2015: 169).

The circulation of zines was particularly important for the success of the movement. In 1992, Erika Reinstein and May Summer set up Riot Grrrl Press. The zine distro soon became the main source of information on the movement and a catalyst for its dissemination. The functioning of the Press was simple: a single copy of a zine was sent to the girls in charge, who would then add it to a catalogue circulated by mail. When a zine was requested, the copy would be used to make duplicates to be sent to the buyer. This way, unless something happened to the original copy (which was, of course, itself a copy of a master), no zine would be out of stock, and new copies could be produced on demand. The Riot Grrrl Press model proved extremely effective:

as more girls became involved in the production of zines, girl-run zine distribution networks emerged that allowed zines produced in Olympia and D.C. to travel beyond these local scenes to interested readers across the country. With this increase in informational access to a once local scene, Riot Grrrl became both translocal, as Riot Grrrl chapters related only in ideology to the Olympia and D.C. chapters sprang up
across the country, and virtual, as discussions about the music and politics of Riot Grrrl began to travel across a complex zine network (Schilt, 2004: 115–116).

About a decade later, at the beginning of the 2000s, Austrian feminist zine researcher Elke Zobl mapped a network of Riot Grrrl zine distros spanning across five continents and 18 different countries. About half of them were in non-English-speaking countries (Zobl, 2004: 159).

This success was propelled by a strategic use of zine publishing. In 1992, Riot Grrrl was suddenly under intense scrutiny by the mainstream media. Calls for interviews and outrageous magazine articles multiplied. A strong feeling of misrepresentation led Bikini Kill and other prominent Riot Grrrl bands to call for a “media blackout” policy (Labry, 2015: 97). Reinstein justifies the call in the introduction of the second issue of her Fantastic Fanzine, in 1992:

BECAUSE we girls want to create mediums that speak to US. We are tired of boy band after boy band, boy zine after boy zine, boy punk after boy punk […] BECAUSE in every form of media I see us/myself slapped, decapitated, laughed at, trivialized, pushed, ignored, stereotyped, kicked, scorned, molested, silenced, invalidated […] BECAUSE every time we pick up a pen, or an instrument, or get anything done, we are creating the revolution. We ARE the revolution51. (Reinstein, 1992: 1)

Although never completely respected and never really enforced, the media blackout succeeded in one thing: making zines an emblem of the movement. Ideologically, Riot Grrrl of course drew heavily from previous movements. Riot grrrls reinvested the bivalent political positioning of Homo/Queercore, turning feminism against punk and reciprocally. Corin Tucker of Heavens to Bestsy and the Channel Seven zine, that she co-edited with Erika Reinstein, insists on this: “For me what Riot Grrrl meant was a way of making punk rock more feminist, because really (alternative music) was

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50 There are still online distros functioning on the principle established by the Riot Grrrl Press. TheEscapistArtist, for example, offered until recently copies of Riot Grrrl zines, sold at cost on Etsy. The zines are copies of copies of copies of copies, sometimes to the point of being illegible.

51 The form taken by Reinstein's intervention, with the anaphoric “BECAUSE,” was first used in Kathleen Hanna's Riot Grrrl manifesto (see below) and became a trope of Riot Grrrl rhetoric. It was reproduced in countless zines, especially during the first years of the movement.
like this boy’s club for the most part. But also a way of making academic feminism more punk rock or more DIY” (quoted in Downes 2007: 27).

Unlike its predecessors, however, Riot Grrrl decentered anarchism to replace it with feminism in its ideological morphology. From the perspective of Freeden’s conceptual analysis, feminism is structured by three core concepts. First, the centrality of sex and/or gender in politics or, as Chambers puts it, the “entrenchment of gender”: “gender is a significant social cleavage, one that is enduring and has endured.” (Chambers, 2013: 568). Second, and deriving from the first, the idea that gender difference is not neutral but generates inequality, and must therefore be transformed (Freeden, 1996: 492) Although characterizations of this power relationship greatly vary from one current of feminism to the other, the concept of “patriarchy” is commonly used to decontest this core idea, to the point of being itself sometimes considered core to the feminist morphology (Windpassinger, 2012: 71; Chambers, 2013: 568). Patriarchy is certainly a central concept of Riot Grrrl. Finally, we find at the feminist core the idea that conventional (non-feminist) politics are restrictive in their omission of sex/gender. Often decontested with the phrase “the personal is political”—coined in the 1969 pamphlet bearing this title (Hanisch, 2006)—, this third core concept illustrates the critical nature of feminism. One of the most important contributions of feminism to modern political thought is, from this perspective, the overhaul of existing political language or, put differently, its critical re-reading of other ideologies (chiefly liberalism and socialism) to highlight their blind spots and shortcomings (Freeden, 1996: 488–492). In addition to these three core concepts, the adjacent concepts of equality and difference are of crucial importance. In fact, differences in the way these two concepts are decontested often distinguish different feminist schools of thought.

Riot Grrrl must, of course, be understood within the context of punk and zine culture, a fact sometimes obscured by the way it was framed in feminist studies (Buchanan, 2018: 26–27). The roots of the movement, however, are as much in punk as in feminist activism. Piepmeier has shown how
Riot Grrrl zines drew from a long tradition of feminist publishing going all the way back to the Suffragettes, and even earlier forms of women rights activism (Piepmeier, 2009: 29–35). More to the point, there are clear overlaps between feminist activist circles and early Riot Grrrl networks. As she was forming Bikini Kill with Tobi Vail, Kathleen Hanna was working in a domestic violence shelter, and deliberately built on that experience to inform the intervention she wanted to make in punk culture (Marcus, 2010: 38–39). The Riot Grrrl weekly meeting groups that formed the institutional backbone of the movement in its beginning, was explicitly modeled on radical feminist consciousness-raising groups dating back to the 1970s (Marcus, 2010: 119). Early riot grrrls were in fact well versed in feminist theory and in the history of feminist struggles. Many had attended women’s studies courses in college or university, and some like Tobi Vail of Bikini Kill and Jigsaw were well read in the most recent developments of feminist thought, including Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble, published as the movement was taking form (Marcus, 2010: 47). Texts published in Riot Grrrl zines often referred to feminist literature, presenting reading lists alongside music recommendations (i.e. in Riot Grrrl 7: Meghan, 1992: 18–19).

Feminism was already featured in the anarcho-punk morphology as a peripheral struggle. Despite being the focus of the art and activism for some, the way feminism was understood by anarcho-punks illustrates this peripheral status, as it was positioned alongside long lists of causes. Thus, in the second issue of The Impossible Dream:

Second, the feminism of anarcho-punk was mostly aimed at external causes and avoided almost any criticism of sexism within punk scenes. Even zines such as Brass Lip, entirely dedicated to women in punk with the avowed objective of countering male overrepresentation in the culture, remained mostly focused on sexism outside the subculture\(^{52}\). Lesley Woods of Au Pairs wrote an essay title “Roxex” for the zine, framing punk as a feminist attack on rock and the music industry (Woods, 1979: 17). Interviewees from the all-female band The Raincoats even suggested that most male punks were anti-sexist, to the point of making involvement in the Women’s Movement irrelevant for some (Klassen, 1979b: 7).

Riot Grrrl, on the contrary, centered its feminist intervention on the punk scene. This was notably done by centering personal experience, something that was until then often left aside, in favor of a more outward look on feminist issues\(^{53}\). Kathleen Hanna’s oft-cited manifesto of 1991 insists particularly on the necessity of an inward look into punk, and even riot grrrls themselves, to combat sexism:

BECAUSE viewing our work as being connected to our girlfriends-politics-real lives is essential if we are gonna figure out how [what] we are doing impacts, reflects, perpetuates, or DISRUPTS the status quo […]

BECAUSE we know that life is much more than physical survival and are patently aware that the punk rock “you can do anything” idea is crucial to the coming angry grrrl rock revolution which seeks to save the psychic and cultural lives of girls and women everywhere, according to their own terms, not ours […]

BECAUSE doing/reading/seeing/hearing cool things that validate and challenge us can help us gain the strength and sense of community that we need in order to figure out how bullshit like racism, able-bodieism, ageism, speciesism, classism, thinism, sexism, anti-semitism and heterosexism figures in our own lives […]

BECAUSE I believe with my wholeheartmindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will change the world for real. (Hanna, 1991).

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\(^{52}\) Brass Lip is cited as a typical example of early punk feminist zine (Worley, 2015: 176).

\(^{53}\) See for example this comment from Lesley Woods: “Our songs are about everyday experience […] but they’re not personal. They’re everybody’s experience as well” (Brass Lip, 1979a: 11).
Echoing the voice of many other participants in the burgeoning movement, Hanna gathered in a chain of equivalences female friendship, politics, and daily life, hyphenating “girlfriends-politics-real lives.” Moreover, the critical stance characteristic of feminism, finding politics in places where it is often denied, is turned reflexively against her own community. Riot Grrrl must “challenge us,” “help us […] figure out” how oppressions figure “in our own lives.” Anarcho-punk feminism was directed at the world; Riot Grrrl put personal experiences and punk scenes under the spotlight. Self-reflexive criticism, most often directed at male participants within punk scenes rather than at sexist behaviour in the broader social world, was for Riot Grrrl the precondition, the launching pad from which it could bring about substantial change.

Despite sharing feminist references, strategies, and channels of communication built through zine distribution networks, Riot Grrrl was never an ideologically homogenous movement. It was, in fact, far more diverse on that level than previous political movements within punk culture. One of the major contributions of Riot Grrrl to feminist activism, from that perspective, not its elaborate ideological discourse, but its rhetorical embrace of plurality, fluidity, paradox, and contradiction. The concept of contradiction can be considered the most important adjacent concept of Riot Grrrl’s feminism and is found not only in the diversity of zines published, but also within the discourse and positioning of individual participants. Unlike Crass’s “barrage of contradiction” aimed at their audience to incite them to think for themselves, the Riot Grrrl emphasis on contradiction was considered a reflection of the movement and its participants: “I AM A WALKING TALKING CONTRADICTION BECAUSE I LIVE IN A WORLD THAT TELLS ME I DON’T EXIST AND I REFUSE TO BELIEVE THIS […] YOUR LOGIC IS KILLING ME BECAUSE THE ONLY WAY I CAN EXIST IS THRU CONTRADICTION” (Bikini Kill, 1991: n.p.). Embracing contradiction in this way was a powerful ideological and rhetorical strategy. It meant that the movement could have a much wider reach than its predecessors. Every participant was considered on an equal footing with the
others, and every claim to define the movement or its orientations welcomed. All riot grrrls were, in theory, authorized to speak for the movement at any time and without need for the others’ approval. For a large part, this evacuated the at times stale discussions typical of anarchist circles that had plagued anarcho-punk a decade prior. On the downside, it induced a strong centrifugal momentum, putting the movement at risk of crumbling or losing its substance and purpose.

Additional strategies had to be deployed to maintain some sort of cohesion. A particularly important was the promotion of “girl love,” a constantly reiterated and de-complexified form of solidarity uniting all girls. If, on the one hand, every riot grrrl was assumed different, on the other, the movement’s unity was postulated and constantly restated. These answers to the question “What Is Girl Power” given in a zine titled *Supergirl* are a patent example of this articulation:

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feeling okay about being a girl—not left out or inferior
promoting girl love. It really is a good and wonderful kind of sisterhood-friendship.
Don’t talk to me about school sororities; I know a different kind of sorority and we
don’t tolerate any kind of “pledge week,” thank you, and we don’t set rules for each
other or leave anyone out […]
GIRL POWER = GIRL LOVE = RESPECT = ENCOURAGEMENT = STRONG SELF
IMAGE = DESIRE TO TEAR DOWN THE RULES = GIRL POWER
= XOXOXOXOX = REVOLUTION
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Like Crass’s anarchism, the feminism of Riot Grrrl was complemented with a series of peripheral engagements against various oppressions as listed in Hanna’s manifesto. This approach can, however, be contrasted with the extension of the anarcho-punk struggle against the System. For Riot Grrrl, engagement in peripheral causes drew on the self-reflexive turn towards internal criticism and was aimed at a greater inclusivity for the punk subculture. Like its approach to the feminist struggle,

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54 Steve Ignorant, lead signer of Crass, remembers scornfully his experience with the activists at the Anarchist Centre in Wapping: “I fucking hated it […] all sitting in a circle with chairs drawn up talking about Bakunin. This ain’t go to the bar, have a beer, natter about this and that than maybe watch an anarchist film or something. No, it was this full-on… I didn’t like the way they spoke.” Berger adds: “The coming together of all the disparate punks under the equally disparate flag of anarchism was largely unsatisfactory. Cliques and factions quickly developed and the place could have won awards for how unfriendly many of its visitors were.” (Berger, 2009: 192)
peripheral Riot Grrrl causes were understood as internal struggles taking place “in our own lives.” This approach, building on explicit references to intersectionality in feminist theory, can be found in important zines such as Nomy Lamm’s *I’m so Fucking Beautiful*, engaging with fatphobia/thinism and disability/ableism, or Erika Reinstein’s *Fantastic Fanzine*, which addressed class issues. Racism also features in a wide range of zines associated with Riot Grrrl, including Sabrina Margarita Alcantara-Tan’s *Bamboo Girl* and, less fortunately, Erika Reinstein’s *Fantastic Fanzine*.

Beyond its feminism, the most important contribution of Riot Grrrl to punk zine politics might be this reflexive turn. Furthermore, Riot Grrrl succeeded in turning this inward criticism into action, effectively tilting the gender balance within punk, and zine culture beyond it. Not content with simply addressing and denouncing sexism, the movement led to the creation of a large number of feminist punk bands, increasing female representation in the culture. Through the zines they published and the scene institutions they created—Riot Grrrl meetings, the Riot Grrrl Press, Conventions, up to Ladyfests, and Girls Rock Camps—the actors of the movement profoundly transformed their own cultural and political environment. For the peripheral struggles it embraced like anti-racism, however, the second, necessary step towards practice was never fully taken. For what retrospectively appears as obvious reasons, it seemed much easier for white, mostly middle-class riot grrrls to criticize their male peers than to examine their own racist or class-based biases and exclusionary practices. Race Riot, sparked within the ranks of Riot Grrrl in the mid-1990s, addressed this major failure of the movement.

3.4.3. Race Riot

As Kathleen Hanna’s influential “Riot Grrrl Manifesto” illustrates, racism was to be counted among the preoccupations of Riot Grrrl almost from the beginning. Artists of colour were in the Homo/Queercore orbit already in the 1980s. Vaginal Davis, who published zines as early as the early-
to-mid 1970s, is often cited as an important precursor (Warfield, 2021: 12; Larry-bob, 2023). She also contributed to many Homo/Queercore zines later in the 1980s and 1990s, including *J.D.s*. As the Riot Grrrl movement progressed, once peripheral causes came to feature more and more prominently in zines. This meant some exposure for zinesters of colour. Mimi Thi Nguyen’s *Slant/Slander* (started in 1991–1992), Sabrina Margarita Alcantara-Tan’s *Bamboo Girl* (started in 1995), and Akiko Carter’ *Evacuation Day* are often cited as examples. Contributions by riots grrrls of colour to zines edited by white zine makers also grew more frequent throughout the 1990s.

The place of zinesters of colour in the movement has nevertheless always been somewhat an uneasy question. If some local chapters—notably in California—were more racially diverse, the mostly white scenes of Olympia and D.C. still weighed heavier, as they still do in Riot Grrrl historiography today (Nguyen, 2012: 188). On several occasions, white riot grrrls seemed uneasy with both the presence and absence of girls of colour in the movement. During the first Riot Grrrl Convention in 1992, and again during the second one the next year, anti-racist workshops turned out disastrously with participants of colour leaving in anger as their white peers monopolized speaking time and attention over the question of “white guilt” (Marcus, 2010: 250-251). This attitude was also reflected in the way race and racism were discussed in zines, in which white riot grrrls uneasily tried to find their way around accusations of racism by writing pages upon pages of personal accounts and reflections.

It is against this tense backdrop that a controversy was sparked, opposing Erika Reinstein to Mimi Thi Nguyen and others, described as “the most controversial discussion of race in zines” (Buchanan, 2018: 152). Reinstein was one of the most important figures of early Riot Grrrl. As Marcus notes,

> At the winter of 1991-92, Riot Grrrl in D.C. was not much more than Erika talking about it at shows, inviting girls to come to a meeting and air out whatever was on their minds. Many such meetings consisted of Erika sitting in the Positive Force living room by herself, waiting for people to show up, or talking with her two good friends from high school, May Summer and Joanna Burgess. (Marcus, 2010: 107)
Nguyen, on the other hand, was an important participant in San Francisco’s scene. She started publishing zines early in the 1990s. After a few years, she decided to put together compilation zines that would gather the contributions of people of colour in the hope of creating a support network within punk circles (Vale & Nguyen, 1997: 56). The publication of the first of these projects, *Evolution of a Race Riot* in 1997, is considered the starting point of Race Riot.

The spark of the Reinstein/Nguyen controversy came with the publication of two zines co-edited by Reinstein addressing at length issues of race and racism: *Fantastic Fanzine* 6 in 1995 (with May Summer) and *Wrecking Ball* 3 in 1996 (with Mary Fondriest). Similar arguments were made by Reinstein in both zines: having recently discovered that one of her ancestors might have been Ethiopian, Reinstein questioned the extent to which she could consider herself as “white.” Having been raised as a white girl, she argued, amounted to internalized racism on the part of her parents. For that reason, she considered that racism and white supremacy had had a strong impact on her life:

> So, I have mixed heritage, which basically means that I’m Irish, Scottish, Newfoundlandish, and euro/African Jew. This has been a total issue for me recently, especially because a relative of mine (on the Jew side) basically forced me to confront being Jewish and African. And the thing is, I still have white skin privilege and I’m not gonna change that because I’m acknowledging my full race identity, at the same time it’s important for me to not whitewash my history like most of my family has done to reach the white American dream. But I’m not going to choose an identity like white or non-white because I am fully both. (Reinstein, 1995: 3–4)

Reinstein might have been motivated by a genuine existential interrogation about race and how it played out in her life. She had spent the better part of the previous three years coming to terms with her working-class background in her zines. Her approach to race was not fundamentally different from other explorations of identity found in Riot Grrrl zines. For Nguyen, however, this was precisely the problem.

Responses were published, notably in Nguyen’s *Slant* 5 and Alcantara-Tan’s *Bamboo Girl*. Nguyen wrote: “As part of her racial privilege, Erika can ‘choose’ to be black without having to deal with either
its realities or damaging consequences in a white supremacist society” (1997: 18). Years later, unpacking Reinstein’s argument as a typical example of racism within Riot Grrrl, Nguyen noted how Reinstein’s attitude towards race not only negated the social and historical experience of racism, but also was essentially aimed at “getting better,” thus necessarily excluding people of colour from any considerations of racism:

While furthering her own progress toward greater virtue (no other consequence is claimed), this story radically estranges the phenomenology of historical violence, and eliminates the necessity for others to be addressed at all! This fantasy of referential self-enclosure, published as an interview called “We are family” in the collaborative zine *Wrecking Ball*, was secured through the sharing of race as a *property* that then enhances a transgressive whiteness through a disturbing investment not just in an experience of intimacy, but also in its ownership. (Nguyen, 2012: 183)

Nguyen’s argument amounted to a radical critique of Riot Grrrl. We have seen how emphasis on “girl love” was a keystone to the Riot Grrrl feminist morphology, allowing to put on hold the necessary decontestation of the adjacent concepts of equality and difference. Possible internal conflicts as to what constituted the nature of gender difference, the path towards gender equality, and even the nature of that goal, were evacuated by positing a community of intimacies. This allowed for ideological contradictions, an element that Nguyen herself considers a major contribution to her own political outlook (Nguyen, 1998: 6). However, the emphasis on “girl love” and intimate connection excluded the possibility of real difference, notably related to the experience of oppression. Nguyen notes how, once the assumption of shared experience was lifted, the suspended decontestation of “difference” immediately returned, troubling the whole Riot Grrrl ideological morphology:

the assumption of safety is all too often an assumption of sameness, and that sameness in Riot Grrrl—and in other feminist spaces—depended upon a transcendent “girl love” that acknowledged difference but only so far […] It was assumed that Riot Grrrl was, for once, for the first time, a level playing field for all women involved, regardless or in spite of differences of class or race. But what became painfully clear, for those of us in the midst of the fray, was this: that the central issue was not one of merely acknowledging difference, but how and which differences were recognized and duly engaged. (Nguyen, 2000: 19)
The controversy opposing Reinstein and Nguyen endured well after its initial spark. Nguyen published *Evolution of a Race Riot* in 1997, gathering contributions from people of colour (not necessarily female or punk) addressing the racism they had to endure within their communities. This was followed by two other major compilation zines, each topping around a hundred pages: *How to Stage a Coup*, edited in 2000 by Helen Luu, and a follow up to *Evolution* published by Nguyen in 2001. Gathering dozens of contributions from zinesters of colour, these zines cemented the first Race Riot movement. Reinstein never retracted. After a couple of years, she left the scene. The Riot Grrrl Press, that she founded and ran, ceased its operations in 1998. As for Nguyen, she had already turned her back on punk and Riot Grrrl even before publishing *Evolution* in 1997. In fact, transitioning away from the subculture was key to her approach in the first place:

We’ve [together with Iraya Robles of San Francisco multiracial queercore and Riot Grrrl band Sta-Prest] had long conversations and found that we had both gone through similar processes of “decolonization” as we became progressively more aware of our problems with the punk scene. We realized that our identification with punk was only partial, and that there was a lot of contradiction and loss involved for us as queer-identified “coloured” girls. We entered that “ex-punker subcultural limbo,” and are now trying to define who our ideal audience would be. It’s a kind of balancing act, doing this compilation zine for kids of colour, *Race Riot*, and then airing my personal frustration in my other zine, *Slant.*” (Vale & Nguyen, 1997: 56; emphasis in original)

Unlike anarcho-punk, Homo/Queercore or Riot Grrrl, Race Riot only had a limited success. Many reasons can explain this, some related to the broader context, others to internal political dynamics within the punk counterpublic. As I have attempted to show, the success of Crass’s anarcho-punk was in large part predicated on its ability to secure a form of independence for the punk subculture, effectively leading to the creation of a rich counterpublic within which zines allowed space

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55 Nguyen and others mention another zine distro close to the Riot Grrrl movement, Pander Zine Distro, founded in 1995 and operated by Ericka Bailie-Bryne until 2005, as a rare source for zines by people of colour (see Nguyen, 2012: 194, endnote 54). This is also a rare case of Race Riot-affiliated institution beyond the compilation zines themselves. A tribute zine, titled *Pander Mafia, 20th Anniversary* was published in 2015, gathering contributions from many zine makers involved in Race Riot.
to discuss and debate the politics of the movement. As Homo/Queercore and Riot Grrrl emerged, this counterpublic was solid enough to sustain frontal criticism, challenging the latent, and sometimes blatant, homophobia and sexism within punk. In a sense, the success of both movements built on this inward criticism, as it encouraged changes in practices that eventually led to a significant makeover of the zine maker population, if not of punk itself. In contrast, Race Riot was never able to develop networks comparable in scale to those of its predecessors. After a coming to the fore at the turn of the 1990s and 2000s, most actors of the movement had left punk less than a decade later.

The successes of anarcho-punk, Homo/Queercore and Riot Grrrl were, of course, not only due to their internal dynamism. They all profited from the conjuncture they found themselves in. Despite being so critical of it, anarcho-punk could draw from the aftershock of the punk “first wave,” and the widespread interest in punk music, up to the upper echelons of the music industry. As for Homo/Queercore and Riot Grrrl, they could rely on strong connections with the art field and academia, both as input and catalyst. Riot Grrrl in particular was quickly associated with an increase of interest in feminism in the mainstream, soon to be labelled the “third wave” (Walker, 1992), and the movement is generally regarded today for its contribution to contemporary feminist thought and activism (Piepmeier, 2009: 23-55; Buchanan, 2018: xxii). Race Riot could not build on such strong external supports. Its critique of racial colour blindness was only beginning to find its way in the mainstream, and anti-racist academia significantly lagged behind its white feminist counterpart. It comes as no surprise, then, that its protagonists privileged their commitment to the anti-racist cause to their involvement in a subculture which was, all things considered, not better, and sometimes even worse, than the mainstream society it so vocally opposed.

Race Riot did leave a mark in punk and zine history, however. After all, despite being often considered “ephemeral,” self-made records and zines can be surprisingly enduring. A “second wave” of race rioters did emerge. If it could not count on the presence of their foremothers and forefathers
in their own scene, they still could profit from the traces they had left and the precedents they had established. Osa Atoe, author of the influential *Shotgun Seamstress* and perhaps the best known representant of this “second generation” of race rioters wrote, in a June 2009 untitled column for *Maximum RocknRoll*:

> the only thing I can assume is that it really was that bad for the POC punks who came before me. As far as my experience goes, I can definitely say that the pros of being a black punk outweighed the cons. But ten or fifteen years ago, that wasn’t the case, and it may not be the case for many punks of color today, depending on a number of factors, including what part of the country they’re in. The people who paved the way for us did so and then moved on because they couldn’t stand it anymore […] I wonder what the expectations were of those punks of color who left punk rock. What did they envision for punk kids of color in years to come? Even though the fact that they left the scene is pretty much a sure sign of their pessimistic cynicism, I’d still like to believe that their intention was to leave the scene better than they found it. What was the point of putting out zines like *Race Riot* and *How to Stage a Coup*, if not to try to spawn some kind of change in the punk scene? Well here we are! The change (I hope) they wished to see in the world! People of color punks, empowered by the words and deeds of those who came before us, building community with each other, and ready to fuck shit up. (Atoe, 2009: 30)

Zine culture today is definitely more racially diverse than it was at the turn of the 1990s and 2000s. Although perhaps not to the extent of Queer/Homocore and Riot Grrrl, Race Riot did have an impact on the zine maker population. This might not be as true for punk as it is for zine culture, but perhaps this was exactly the point of Race Riot after all: not to liberate or absolve white punks from their internalized racism, but to carve out a space in the underground for people of colour, and provide a basis for radical anti-racist politics.

Conclusion

In a way, it can also be said that the four movements highlighted in this chapter all failed in the objectives they set for themselves. Their ambitions were, it is true, particularly grand. Through involvement in punk and zine publishing, they all aimed at social and cultural revolutions way beyond
the confines of their own subculture. Anarcho-punks wanted to bring down the System. The members of Crass hoped to create a model that could be emulated by others and, from there, little by little, create a worldwide network of punk and anarchist collectives. But the anarcho-punk bands that followed in their wake quickly devolved into mere parodies, more in keeping with the word than the spirit of the movement’s inceptors. For Steve Ignorant: “The bands that came after Crass out-Crassed Crass [...] They became even more politically correct. And I didn’t like a lot of those bands that came out because they were parodies of what we were doing.” (quoted in Berger, 2006: 192). This echoes comments from Bruce LaBruece, for whom Homo/Queercore was well dead in 1995: “when it becomes an international phenomenon or something, and people start referring to your imaginary creation as “legendary” and “important,” it’s time to deliver the telegram proclaiming that your blonde-eyed, blue-haired son is dead. It’s time to move on to the next game.” (Labruce, 1995: 197–198). It also echoes Tobi Vail’s own comment on her Jigsaw 5, published in 1992–1993, less than two years after the inception of Riot Grrrl:

[In Jigsaw 5] I say that I do not identify as a riot grrrl anymore and say some kind of insulting sounding stuff about “well intentioned hopelessly enthusiastic isolated young girls who still feel that label is meaningful to them.” Looking back on this now, it sounds really harsh! But I am me and I can remember writing it and I know what I meant at the time. I was ready to give it up and start something new! I wanted to move things forward. I thought that it had become meaningless and that we needed to start the next era (Vail, 2010a).

The “failure” of the first generation of race rioters must be understood in this context. The legacy of punk zine politics has never corresponded with the expected outcomes and the objectives it was aimed at. Still, it lives on somehow. As Atoe’s comments illustrate perfectly, people might come and go, but the zines have remained, and the ideas they conveyed still circulate long after they were published.56

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56 “it turns out that fanzines are not ephemeral art after all, they actually last forever!” (Vail, 2010a).
The punk subculture remains by and large associated with the far-left end of the ideological spectrum more than four decades after the instigation of anarcho-punk. The successive waves of self-reflexive criticism—Homo/Queercore, Riot Grrrl, Race Riot—have refined its politics, and adapted it to the problems faced by newer generations of punk. What becomes apparent when considering the history of political ideologies and their impact in punk zines since the 1970s is that their greatest legacy is not necessarily to be found in the punk subculture but in the zine culture that stemmed from it. As Radway puts it, if Riot Grrrl zines had an afterlife, it is in part through the fact that “zines produced more zinesters” (Radway, 2011: 148).

Feminist zine scholar Red Chidgey notes that Riot Grrrl, together with Homo/Queercore, largely contributed to transform zine culture—until then a “male-dominated and straight (white) subculture”—into a gender and sexually diverse environment: “The ‘angry grrrl’ and homocore zines of the late 1980s and early 1990s […] marked a crucial turning point in fanzine history, with a rise in LGBTQ and girls authors taking their place and disrupting the usual order of things” (Chidgey, 2007: 116). It is perhaps overly enthusiastic to present this shift as having happened overnight. Duncombe, writing in the midst of this importance transformation, could after all still identify the average zinester as a white, middle-class, male, and dedicate only a small portion of his study of zine culture to Riot Grrrl (Duncombe, 1997: 8; 65–70). If the shift was indeed sparked at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, it was not effectively in place until at least a decade later, if not two in some places. In my own scene in Montreal, I traced it back to the 2000s (Legendre, 2022: 116). Zine culture today does however correspond in large part to the Homo/Queercore and Riot Grrrl ideal when it comes to gender and sexuality. Contemporary zine scenes are not predominantly male and cis-hetero anymore, and they are less and less white as well.

Zine culture is also where the punk and post-punk political ideologies seem to have acquired their fullest extension. The period covered by this chapter also corresponds to the development on of kind
of zine-specific ideology inheriting heavily from the punk subculture but pushing it in different directions. Mike Gunderloy was, here again, one of the most influential zine ideologues. He strongly defended the idea of the zine medium as enacting in practice the theoretical ideal of freedom of speech. Zine culture was, for Gunderloy, a place where every topic could be addressed by everyone caring enough to publish a zine about it: “This is where the action is, where information (and disinformation) is free, where things are happening, […] where millions of facts, near-facts, rumors, suspicions and downright lies are available to anyone who cares to look for them […] For better or worse, self-publishing means we all get a voice.” (Gunderloy, 1990: 59-60) Gunderloy’s views were, of course, connected to his devoted commitment to anarchism.

Fast-forward a decade or two, and this zine ideology had evolved to frame zine culture as, if not as a place where everyone is free to expressed themselves, as one where the excluded and the marginalized are welcomed and could share their personal experiences. Anne Elizabeth Moore, who served as editor of Punk Planet (1994–2007), offers in 2007 one of the earliest formulations of this new zine ideology:

Zines are created by prisoners, young girls, people with emotional and physical disabilities, queers, geeks, non-native speakers of English, survivors of sexual assault, radical offspring of conservative politicians, homeschoolers, members of the military, Native Americans, sexworkers, and anyone else who has ever felt that the voices speaking for them in the larger culture weren’t conveying their stories. (Moore, 2006)

This understanding of zines is so ingrained now that it is taken for granted, and even used to revision zine history. It has permeated into Zine Studies through the work of Piepmeier (2009), Licona (2012), and Guerra & Quintela (2020; 2021). It even informs the work of zine librarians (Fox et al., 2018). Despite being relatively recent, or at least more recent than it is commonly thought, this zine ideology can be traced all the way back to the anarcho-punk zines of the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. It shares the same dedication to fight all forms of oppression. It also builds on the successive contributions of Homo/Queercore, Riot Grrrl, and Race Riot to punk zine politics in their quest to radicalize and hold
accountable zine publishing and turn the focus inward to address issues within the zine community itself. In short, the contemporary zine ideology is undoubtedly where punk zine politics lives on.
Chapter 4  French Zines and the Case against Stu Mead

In 2022–2023, I spent over four months in France and Belgium. I took part in a dozen zine-related events of varying scope in Paris, Marseille, Bordeaux, Brussels, and Poitiers. I visited bookstores and zine distros, libraries and archives, and met over a hundred actors of zine culture: zine makers and publishers, printers, archivists and librarians, scholars, festival organizers, often many or all at once. Their work spanned genres ranging from music and punk zines to queer, feminist, and activist zines, literary and autobiographical zines, anime and manga zines, comics zines, and graphzines.

My initial intention was to study the institutional configuration of French zine culture. I had attended zine festivals in France and Belgium some years prior. Discussing with zine makers at their stands, I had started to realize that French zine culture was organized at the national, and even international level including French speaking parts of Belgium and Switzerland, in ways very different than what I knew from my own scene in Montreal. Whereas Quebec’s zine culture was strongly centralized in Montreal, in France it seemed spread across many cities each with their own local institutions and events. Moreover, local festivals appeared to be coordinated so that zine makers would tour across the country, attending one festival after the other. If Paris held an important place in this national circuit, it was far from the centre Montreal could claim to be in Quebec. The biggest French zine collection, in fact perhaps the biggest in the world, was in the small town of Poitiers; Le Dernier Cri, one of the most well-known publishers of graphzines, was established in Marseille.

I knew graphzines should feature in any comparative study of French zine culture. A dominant genre in recent French zine history, graphzines had to my knowledge barely any equivalent in North America. These colourful screen-printed zines, made of images presented in a non-narrative order,
without text and sometimes even without title or mention of author, were distinct from other zines, often larger in size, more costly, and akin to artists’ books. The more striking, however, was their aesthetics. Graphzines are brutal. Their images are shocking, violent, often sexually explicit; they are impulsive and drenched with primal drives.

It quickly became apparent that the French context posed a series of very interesting questions to the way zine culture was understood in Zine Studies. It had a distinctively French character that challenged common assumptions about how zine culture was disseminated internationally. It was well-organized, remarkably dynamic and seemed to have a history of its own. More importantly, French zine culture seemed to have a different relationship to politics and the state than could be found in North American scenes.

I became increasingly familiar with graphzines and Le Dernier Cri throughout my field trip. I met some of the most famous artists it published, came across their graphzines in festivals and bookstores, and learned more about the publisher’s history. Its current situation was on everybody’s lips. The reason for this was the resurgence of a lawsuit filed in 2015. That year, a large public controversy was sparked following an exhibition titled Berlinhard, presenting the work of Berlin-based artists Reinhard Scheibner and Stu Mead. Set up in a corner of Le Dernier Cri’s workspace, the exhibition was restricted to visitors over 18. Despite the precautions, the show, and in particular Mead’s work, attracted a lot of unwanted attention. And perhaps for good reason: Mead’s preferred subjects are, after all, controversial by essence: young women and girls involved in all sorts of sexual acts, many of which would be considered perverted and deviant.

Born in Iowa in 1955, Mead graduated from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 1987, making him the oldest among his classmates. Suffering since his birth from arthrogryposis, a condition affecting his joints and muscles, he always was an outcast. As a student, Mead immediately showed
talent, his work drawing heavily on European modernist art. According to Ivan Mečl, editor of an anthology of Mead’s work with the Czech publisher Divus, “The first decade of his career can be seen as a short history of modern painting and the application of avant-garde thoughts” (Mečl, 2016). After his studies, Mead started publishing his work in zines, earning him a reputation in underground circles: Artipolice starting in the late 1980s, and eventually Man Bag, which he co-edited with Frank Gaard, former professor at the same College of Art and Design.

Meeting with Gaard and his companions proved to be decisive for Mead. He had been drawing sexually explicit drawings in personal sketchbooks for years without ever thinking of showing them to anyone, let alone developing them into artworks in their own right (Mead, 2017). Zines, with their semi-private and semi-public circulation, were the vehicle of choice for Mead’s obsessions. It is in the pages of Man Bag that Mead’s work acquired its recognizable characteristics. Some years after the publishing of the first issue in 1991, Mead reflects on this evolution:

During the last few years my fondness for drawing girls under 15 has blossomed into a preoccupation. When I was in my teens and 20s I drew little girls with blond hair and pigtails, sweet, sort of quirky images. These girls were usually somewhat rowdy, doing mischievous things. I identified with them. They were a female version of myself. Now in my late 30s these girls have become objects of desire. No longer so innocent. But the little girls I now draw still represent me in some way. The picture (above) of a girl bent over a chair while her dog licks honey off her vagina would be more honest if the child were a thin little crippled boy thrusting forth his tiny spear. But I don’t want to draw that scene. I’d rather see a girl in a frilly dress, her tresses flowing around her face. Making images of women and girls is a way of making myself beautiful by making something beautiful. In my family, the pinnacle of beauty was female beauty. My dad, mom, and sister were preoccupied with perfection and I knew that I was really far from that, being physically deformed. So there’s a connection, me fantasizing myself being perfect, and visualizing that perfection being female. (Stu Mead in Mead & Gaard, 1994, n.p.)

In the 1990s, Mead made a quick transition from sketches and drawings to oil paintings, a technique he has privileged in his work ever since. The publishing of a “remixed” version of Man Bag by Le Dernier Cri in 1999 illustrates this transition: offset printed colour reproductions of Mead’s paintings were added to the original Man Bag drawings, sometimes presenting original sketches and
reproductions of the reworked paintings side by side. From that point on, however, Mead has been stubbornly digging the same furrow. Despite some minor inflections—darker colours, a variation in silhouettes, cartoonish accents, the inclusion of portraits, and perhaps a slight tempering of his approach of sexually explicit subjects—his work has been persistently the same. The 2015 Berlinhard exhibition with Le Dernier Cri presented pieces in a style Mead had already fully developed in the 1990s.

On August 29 of that year, a petition was launched on Change.org. It denounced the “pro-pedophile” artworks, claimed that “authorizing them amounts to condoning unacceptable and deviant practices,” and asked for the artist to be banned from exhibiting their work in France (henri de provence, 2015)57. The petition was hastily made to say the least. It provided very little detail about the artworks in question and contained significant errors. It included a number of spelling mistakes. More importantly, it confused the title of the exhibition for the name of one of the artists exhibited, titling: “Pour que les deux artistes (Stu mead & Berlinhart [sic]) soient interdits en France !” The timing was also unadvised, as the petition was published after the end of the exhibition. It is reasonable to assume from that fact that the detractors did not have the opportunity to visit the exhibition. The petition nevertheless quickly garnered large support, reaching over 24,000 signatures. A quick look at the comments left by its supporters left little doubt as to their political motivations. Two days later, on August 31st, a counter petition was started on Change.org, arguing in favour of freedom of speech and opposing any form of censorship of the arts. This counterpetition was supported by important figures of the French cultural field, including Virginie Despentes, well-known feminist author and later member of the Goncourt academy, who circulated it on social media (Despentes, 2015). Despite this

57 “Ces œuvres sont exposés aux yeux de tous alors qu’elles sont pro-pédophile, les autoriser revient à tolérer ces pratiques déviantes inacceptables.” [sic] (My translation)
support, it only reached a fraction of the support of the original petition, topping out at over 6,000 signatures.

At this point, far-right online networks had already mobilized against the exhibition, putting considerable heat on Le Dernier Cri. Websites associated with the French “fachosphere” relayed the information on the exhibition (Sénécat, 2015). Death threats directed at Mead and Le Dernier Cri multiplied. The buzz quickly reached politicians, in particular members of the far-right party Front national (whitewashed as Rassemblement national in 2018), keen to capitalize on any issue of the day. The political context was particularly favourable to amplification: regional elections were only a few months away, and the party was expected to make historical gains. On September 9th, Stéphane Ravier, Front national mayor of Marseille’s 7th Arrondissement, organized a gathering not far from the premises of Le Dernier Cri’s workspace, asking for the “temporary interruption of all public subsidies” without which it could not operate, and promising, if elected, to force “cultural associations to ban child pornography as a prerequisite for applying and obtaining of subsidies from local governments.” (Harounyan, 2015) Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, niece of the party leader Marine Le Pen and candidate for Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur region where Marseille is located, addressed the issue of art subsidies in her campaign speeches. In response, L’Observatoire de la liberté de création, a subsidiary organization of the non-profit Ligue des droits de l’Homme, published a press release on December 3rd, denouncing attempts at censorship and the instrumentalization from the far-right of legitimate debates within the art field (OLC, 2015). Although not citing the Mead case specifically, it strongly denounced the Front national and its attack on artists and their freedom of creation.

58 « Mercredi, Ravier réunit une petite centaine de personnes devant l’institution, demandant “la suspension provisoire de toute subvention publique à la Friche” et promettant, si son parti est élu, la mise en place d’un “cahier des charges engageant les associations culturelles à bannir la pédopornographie, préalable à la demande et à l’obtention de subventions des collectivités territoriales” » (my translation).
By the end of the year, the controversy was brought to the courts by Innocence en danger, an international non-profit organization founded in 2000 with the aim of protecting children against all forms of violence, and sexual violence in particular (Sellier, 2023). According to people I met, the lawsuit was not more carefully thought out than the petition that preceded it, the evidence presented consisting mostly of photographs circulated online in a positive review of the exhibition from a daily newspaper. Despite generating so much debate, the Berlinhard story was all but forgotten a few months later. The Front national underperformed in the elections (this time around), and the lawsuit was considered so botched that it would most likely be dismissed. It thus caused a general surprise and indignation in zine circles when the case was revived in 2022. Le Dernier Cri was summoned by the judges, and finally charged under section 227-23 of the penal code:

To capture, record or transmit an image or representation of a minor for the purpose of dissemination, when this image or representation presents a pornographic character, is punishable by five years’ imprisonment and €75,000 in fine [...] To offer, make available or distribute such an image or representation, by any means whatsoever, to import or export it, or causing it to be imported or exported, is punishable by the same penalties. (Légifrance, 2021)

Simply put, Le Dernier Cri found itself potentially facing dissolution as a publisher.

I had not heard of the lawsuit before the start of my field research trip in May 2022. As I was discovering French zine culture, visiting fairs and bookstores, reading zines and talking with zine makers, the details of the case progressively fell into place. Almost everyone was discussing it, raising this or that detail, adding their grain of salt. Most sided with Le Dernier Cri and denounced the lawsuit as a gross attempt at censorship from the far-right. Some, however, hinted at another truth: maybe Le Dernier Cri and the generation of graphzine artists it represented could not keep up with the times?

59 « Le fait, en vue de sa diffusion, de fixer, d’enregistrer ou de transmettre l’image ou la représentation d’un mineur lorsque cette image ou cette représentation présente un caractère pornographique est puni de cinq ans d’emprisonnement et de 75 000 euros d’amende [...] Le fait d’offrir, de rendre disponible ou de diffuser une telle image ou représentation, par quelque moyen que ce soit, de l’importer ou de l’exporter, de la faire importer ou de la faire exporter, est puni des mêmes peines. »
It is true that most of the zines I was discovering on the stalls of festivals showed a definitive continuity with works from the previous generation. The visual element remained strong; sex was also still omnipresent. The style and the approach, however, the artistic references and the networks, seemed to have shifted to a younger generation, less inclined to provocation, and more influenced by queer and feminist activism.

The lawsuit pressed against Le Dernier Cri and Stu Mead illustrates the peculiarity of French zine culture. It reflects the distinctive path it has taken since the 1970s, and important deviations with similar developments elsewhere. Zines have, in France, given rise to a visual culture profoundly marked by avant-garde and modernist art, punk ethics, provocation, and a strong anti-professional attitude that, paradoxically, secured them a place in art history decades before their British or North American counterparts. Graphzines are, from that perspective, early precursors of the most recent shift in zine history. On the other hand, counterparts to the Homo/Queercore, Riot Grrrl, and Race Riot revolutions did not happen in France until recently. French zine scenes are, in comparison with other scenes internationally, still predominantly male, cis-hetero, and white spaces.

This chapter engages with a series of questions for Zine Studies raised by the form zine culture has taken in France. Through the case against Stu Mead and Le Dernier Cri, it touches on a series of aspects that seem unique to French zine culture. First, I will highlight key moments in French zine history, leading to the rise of graphzines at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, and the creation of Le Dernier Cri a decade later. As we will see, this history is characterized by the importation and progressive appropriation of zine culture within the French national cultural context. Second, I will engage with the question of state funding of the arts, and how it plays out for French zine makers. Although mostly indirect, state funding plays a determining role in the current configuration of French zine culture. Finally, I will engage with the question of censorship, focussing on legal and political, but also economic, and specifically cultural or artistic forms of censorship. Throughout, I hope to illustrate
how “conventional” political questions pertaining to laws, policies, and national politics can impact zine culture in ways often overlooked in scholarship.

4.1. National Culture

The relationship between zines and the national cultural context within which they are produced and circulated can be hard to assess. It barely figures in zine scholarship. Elke Zobl, one of few zine scholars to give attention to international zine networks, identified and rightly criticized the “(white) Anglo-American viewpoint” prevailing in Zine Studies (Zobl, 2009: 2). Her efforts to counteract this bias have, however, mostly been aimed at highlighting the translocal spread of zine networks, without paying much attention to how it is affected by national cultural differences. Of the specifics of the development of zine culture in this or that country, in relation to other forms of local or national publishing, communication and cultural production, almost nothing is known. On the other hand, the Anglo-American hegemony on zine culture is everywhere visible in French zine history. The contrast between zines as an Anglo-American export, and the cultural context to which they have been imported, is perhaps made clearer in France than elsewhere by the considerable resources invested by the state in the French cultural field.

The concept of cultural field was developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and is understood as the social space inhabited by cultural producers: visual artists, writers, comics artists, film makers, academics, etc. Bernard Lahire, working in Bourdieu’s wake, has synthesized better than anyone else the key characteristics of fields (Lahire, 2015: 66–67). Fields are i) microcosms within the social (national) space. They are ii) structured around their own rules and specific stakes. They are iii) spaces of interrelated positions, iv) traversed by struggles between agents holding different positions within them. Those struggles v) are related to the question of legitimacy and the possibility to redefine
the rules of the game specific to the field. This legitimacy vi) is itself unevenly distributed; there are “dominant” and “dominated” actors within the field. This uneven distribution vii) determines a field’s structure; power relationships give it its shape. Field actors viii) use strategies than can only be understood when related to their position within the field. Important strategies ix) include strategies of conservation privileged by established actors, and strategies of subversion of the existing hierarchies within the field, privileged by newcomers and dominated actors. Although struggling, x) a given field’s actors minimally share a common interest in the existence of the field. Every field xi) is also relatively or partly autonomous, meaning that its internal struggles are governed by an internal logic, but that the outcome of external struggles (related to economic, social, or political factors) also weigh heavily on its internal dynamics. More specifically related to the cultural field, we can note that it is subdivided into specialized fields: the literary field, the field of art, the field of comics, etc. Accordingly, each of these fields has its own internal dynamic, its own history, and its own stakes.

Contemporary zine makers are actors in the cultural field. Their subordinate status within that field accounts for how, even tacitly, they privilege strategies of subversion, disrespectful of common practice and established actors. Still, their practice is profoundly determined by the dynamic of the cultural field, the centre around which the margins inhabited by zine culture gravitate. Tanguy Habrand, focusing in particular on the publishing field, notes how

As the official space for the public dissemination of books, the publishing institution is the core around which other worlds gravitate, subject to its attraction. These worlds are not necessarily guided by a concern to tend towards the dominant model of their universe, whose codes they may not only ignore, but also contest their authority to organize the said universe. Nonetheless, from the point of view of the publishing institution, these worlds remain contested spaces insofar as they do not respect the norms it enacts. This lack of loyalty is heavily punished, as non-compliant actors cannot enjoy the benefits of the profession, given they even want to, unless the institution has some interest in integrating them: difficult access to subsidies, but also
to critique, prizes—in other words, to all forms of legitimization by a recognized third party within the institution. (Habrand, 2016: 9)

Cultural policies, decided at the national level, effectively produce a cultural “universe” that ultimately determine the conditions of existence of zine culture at the local and translocal level.

4.1.1. French Zine History

French zine culture illustrates this paradoxical appropriation of a global, and often anti-nationalist cultural and political object in terms often determined by the national cultural context. Be it from its fandom or its subcultural sources, zine culture continues to reflect the global hegemony of American, and to a lesser extent British cultural production.

Beginnings

The first zines to be published on the European continent were Alpha, clubzine of the Antwerp Science Fiction Fan Club (1953–1957) and Andromeda, of the Science Fiction Club Deutschland (first published in 1955, still active today). Both were directly influenced by Anglo-American fandom, which they probably came to know through fans serving in overseas military bases established in the aftermath of the war (Fancyclopedia 3: “Alpha”). Like their American and British counterparts, early European zines were hectographed or mimeographed. They also published texts in English and had well-known American and British contributors. The Science Fiction Club Deutschland’s roster, published in the first issue of Andromeda, includes well-known names of the American science fiction

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60 “Espace officiel de la diffusion publique du livre, l’institution éditoriale est ce noyau autour duquel gravitent des mondes soumis à son attraction. Ces mondes ne sont pas nécessairement guidés par le souci de tendre vers le modèle dominant de leur univers dont ils peuvent non seulement méconnaître les codes, mais aussi contester le droit de légiférer au sein de leurs univers. Ils n’en restent pas moins, du point de vue de l’institution éditoriale, des espaces contestés en ce qu’ils ne respectent pas les normes qu’elle édicte. Cette absence de loyauté est lourdement sanctionnée puisque les acteurs en situation de déviance ne peuvent jouir, pour autant qu’ils le veuillent et à moins que l’institution ne trouve un certain intérêt à les intégrer, des avantages de la profession : difficulté d’accès aux aides à l’édition, mais aussi à la critique, aux prix, soit à toutes les formes de légitimation par un tiers reconnu au sein de l’institution.” (My translation)
community: Forrest J. Ackerman, James Taurasi, and even Hugo Gernsback, only recently returned to science fiction publishing after almost two decades of absence (Ernsting, 1955: 10)\(^\text{61}\).

The first publication to label itself “fanzine” in the French language was Pierre Versins’ *Ailleurs* (1957–1963), published from Lausanne in Switzerland. Not unlike the first American fanzines, *Ailleurs* relied on a professional science fiction magazine titled *Fiction* (1953–1990), a French imprint of the American *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* (founded in 1949, still active today)\(^\text{62}\), and the first, and for extended periods of time, the only science fiction magazine to be published in France (Bréan, 2012: para. 7).

Already in the 1930s, there were some contacts between French fans and American fandom. Richard Wilson’s *Science Fiction News Letter* announced, in its 55\(^\text{th}\) issue in December 1938, the plans of a French fan named Georges Gallet to publish a professional science fiction magazine in France. In the 63\(^\text{rd}\) issue, in January 1939, Gallet was given a whole section of the *News Letter* detailing his plan. The ambitious project was given up after the outbreak of war with Germany later that year. Another candidate for first French fanzine status could be the trilingual *Ouranos* (1952–1954), publishing texts in English, French and Esperanto from both sides of the English Channel by Eric Biddle, based in

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\(^{61}\) Ackerman was even elected honorary president of the Club during the first German science fiction convention, held in Frankfurt am Main on September 14–16, 1957 (Ernsting, 1957: 2-3). The Club’s creation was funded by Ackerman, through the Alden Lorrain Ackerman Fund, a fund set up by Ackerman in memory of his younger brother, killed in action during the Battle of the Bulge (Eisfeld, 1958: 11).

Eisfeld notes, in passing, that German fandom was centralized around the Club early on, a situation not unrelated to its development in conjunction with American fandom, American fans having understandably no interest in membership in various German clubs, thus providing the Science Fiction Club Deutschland an unsurpassable status. Gindorf offers in the fanzine *The Bug Eye* an update on German fandom in 1960, marked notably by the creation of a rival Central European federation, Eurotopia (Gindorf, 1960).

\(^{62}\) The practice of publishing foreign editions was not rare for major American magazines at the time. In addition to the French edition, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* was also published, under a different title and with translated contents when needed, in the United Kingdom (starting in 1953), in Italy, Australia and Argentina (starting in 1954), or in Japan (starting in 1960). Considering the role of professional popular fiction magazines for the development of fanzine culture, this international rock bed provides a partial explanation for the great similarities found in zine history internationally. Other important factors include the attractiveness of American culture in the postwar context, and the fact that some active American fans were living in Europe because their fathers were posted to American military bases on the continent.
London, and Marc Thirouin, based in the Parisian suburb of Bondy (Lagrange, 2016). Focusing on the study of flying saucers, the small-sized mimeographed publication was labelled “bulletin,” but was considered “a fanzine of a kind” by the editors of Alpha (Vendelmans & Jansen, 1956: 1).

From the “signifieds” point of view, there are two notable French and European additions to the zine origins story: trench newspapers published as early as 1914 (Tubergue, 1999) and student newspapers of the post-Second World War period (Bantigny, 2014). In both cases, the “zine” or “fanzine” labels would be attributed only retrospectively. That said, they are sometimes considered as authentic zines by zine librarians. La Petite Fanzinothèque Belge, located in Brussels, includes a number self-published newspapers produced from the trenches of the First World War in its zine collection, while La Fanzinothèque, located in Poitiers, was born out of a project aimed at valorizing and preserving student newspapers at the end of the 1980s. Finally, publications dedicated to the study of film—still then a subject deemed unworthy of academic scholarship—have also been considered as early examples of what would later become French zines. Raccords (1950–1951), was published by Gilles Jacob, later president of the Cannes film festival (2001–2014), which is considered one of the earliest examples of fan-made media in French history (Étienne, 2022: 75).

**French Fandom**

European zine culture is thus an unmistakenly international phenomenon, even before its appropriation at the local and national level. In France, this phenomenon is redoubled by the international spread of the French language and culture. Ailleurs was published from Lausanne in Switzerland. When it ceased publication in 1963, its role as main rallying point for European French-speaking fandom was taken up by Jacqueline Osterrath’s Lunatique (1963–1973), published from Saßmannshausen in Germany. A year later, Jean-Pierre Fontana started publishing Mercury (1964–
1967), the first publication bearing the “fanzine” label to be published in France. If, in the meantime, amateur and small-circulation literary magazines would increasingly include science fiction and fantasy (Planque, 1996a; 1996b; 1996c), these would not be labelled as “fanzines” but rather as “revues littéraires,” claiming status equal to highbrow literary magazines. The international character of French culture was not, of course, limited to European connections, especially in the 1950s and early 1960s. This is exemplified by fanzines such as Claude Dumont’s *Lumen* (1962-1965), first published from Niger, where Dumont was stationed with the French military before moving to Belgium (le Busy & Dumont, 2001). Similarly, the first science fiction fanzine to be published in Quebec in French, *Requiem* (starting in 1974), was published by Norbert Spehner, who was already active in French fandom before moving to Quebec in 1968.

The first real signs of a specifically French zine culture started to appear in the 1960s, in the burgeoning comics fandom. (An organized comics fandom did not appear in the United States or United Kingdom before the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, contemporary to similar developments in France.) As with science fiction fanzines, the spark for comics fanzines came from the pages of *Fiction*. Following a debate on the “Golden Age” of American comics started by a column from the Swiss Pierre Strinati in issue 92, in July 1961, the first French comics fan club was created (the “Club des bandes dessinées,” later renamed “Centre d’études des littératures d’expression graphique”). This lead to the publication of the club’s organ, *Giff Wiff* in June 1962 (Gabilliet, 2016: 140–141). Although playing a major role in the history of both French comics and fandom, *Giff Wiff* hardly counts as a fanzine. Its editors were for the most part active professionals in the field of publishing. Some of the most important members of the Club were working for *Fiction*: Alain Doremieux was both editor-in-

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63 This is another sign attesting of European zine culture as an Anglo-American import: once (fan)zines were introduced, zine culture developed at an accelerated pace and quickly caught up with contemporary developments in the Anglosphere. The first French language science fiction fanzines were published in 1957–1964, the first comics fanzines in 1962–1971, the first punk fanzines in 1975–1978.
chief of *Fiction* and secretary of the Club, Jean-Claude Forest was both illustrator for *Fiction* and art director for *Giff Wiff*, and François Lacassin was acting director of the Club and working as editor for four professional magazines, including *Fiction* (Lacassin, 1962: 3). This level of exchanges between zines and professional publishing was much more common trend in early French zine history then in the Anglosphere. Although short-lived (1962–1967), *Giff Wiff* and the Club gathered some of the most important European intellectual figures of the second half of the 20th century, including Umberto Eco, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Chris Marker, Edgar Morin, Alain Resnais, and Alain Robbe-Grillet. *Giff Wiff* was almost entirely focused on the “Golden Age” of American comics, a period that its founders had known, through translations, as kids in the 1930s and 1940s (Gabilliet, 2016: 141). From that starting point, the rise of French comics fandom can be understood as a step-by-step evolution. Along the way, fan publications shifted from the serious and ambitious “revues d’études” (or highbrow and study magazine) to fanzines closer to those published in science fiction fandom.

In response to the CELEG’s nostalgia, a rival organization was created in 1964 under the name “Société civile d’études et de recherche des littératures dessinées” (SOCERLID). Its publication, *Phénix*, premiered in 1966, emphasizing contemporary American comics, including innovative “underground comix” (Gabilliet, 2010: 106). *Phénix* innovated, among other things, by including previously unpublished comics made by its own editor, Claude Moliterni. It soon became common practice for editors to publish their comics in their own fanzines. In 1969, Jacques Glénat-Guttin (later founder of Glénat Editions) published the first issue of *Schtroumpf*. The first French comics fanzine to be published by a single editor instead of as a clubzine, it was also the first comics-related publication in France to bear the label “fanzine.” (Rannou, 2017: 42) Each issue was dedicated to living comics artists, giving pride of place to French and Belgian creators. *Schtroumpf* established a standard for self-published fanzines focusing on comics studies. It did not remain a fanzine for long, however. Its title was changed the next year to *Les Cahiers de la bande dessinée*, and the publication turned into a fully
professionalized “revue.” In response perhaps to the overly serious attitude and professionalizing tendencies of Glénat-Guttin, Sylvain Insergueix published *Falatoff*, privileging younger artists and formal experimentation over the monographic approach of *Les Cahiers*, each issue being dedicated to the in-depth study of a single comic artist (Bocquet, 2013: 67). Inaugurating a “mixed” model—half commentary, half previously unpublished creation—*Falatoff* would quickly catch up and be emulated, giving rise to nationwide comics zine production (Rannou, 2017: 49; Bocquet, 2013: 22). Unlike its predecessors, *Falatoff* never professionalized, choosing to stay in the margins until its last issue in 1977.

What started, with *Giff Wiff*, as a very official fan club aimed at legitimizing comics quickly evolved into projects like *Falatoff*, dedicated to the underground and the margins of the consolidating field of comics. Marginality and zine making had become a choice.

Overall, the history of French science fiction and comics fanzines shows similarities, but also striking differences with the development of fandom in the United States some decades earlier. Whereas French science fiction fanzines illustrated an early deployment into translocal scenes not unlike that of American fandom, comics fandom quickly developed into a distinctively French, or at least European phenomenon. The first science fiction fanzines published in French closely imitated their Anglo-American counterparts—this was even true for professional magazines such as *Fiction*, which extensively relied on materials translated from English to French. Comics fandom, however, instigated a major shift. Despite being focused on American comics, even the first comics fan publiciations emerged in total independence from similar developments in the United States around the same time (Schelly, 2003). Moreover, the development of “revues,” and eventually fanzines, largely contributed to the constitution and consolidation of the French field of comics, in the beginning of the 1970s (Boltanski, 2014). In parallel with a typical translocal dissemination, French comics zines illustrated a form of “nationalization” of zine culture, understood not necessarily as a recognition of
zines at the national level, but as the appropriation of zine culture within the specific parameters of French national culture and its history.

Punk Zines in France

The quick appropriation of punk in France in the second half of the 1970s shows how much comics fandom had done in the 1960s and 1970s to root zine culture nationally. The first French music zines were published around the middle of the 1960s. Like the science fiction fanzines before them, they were closely tied to their American or British peers. The earliest of such fanzines I could find is Crazy Legs Magazine, official organ of the Chuck Berry Official Fan Club in France; the first issue probably published in 1965 (Dumonteil, 2016). Similar fanzines dedicated to early rock stars such as Gene Vincent or Buddy Holly were also published throughout the second half of the 1960s.

The history of punk zines in France contrasts greatly with their beginnings in the United Kingdom and the United States:

The key 1976 documents are Punk (U.S.), Rock News (France), and Sniffin’ Glue (U.K.). They all vary: Punk is blackly humorous, in the cartoon tradition; Rock News is glossy, with fascinating photographs and careful documentation of the Sex Pistols before almost any of the British press wrote about them; while Sniffin’ Glue sets up Mark Perry as the über-fan (Savage, 2013: 5)

Unlike in the United Kingdom, punk had a positive early reception in the French mainstream press, the reticence of established popular music magazines like Rock & Folk or Best contrasting with the open-mindedness of a well-established countercultural and left-wing press. In London the best coverage of the punk “first wave” was found in the pages of Mark Perry’s Sniffin’ Glue and other early punk zines it inspired; in Paris, punk was received enthusiastically in the pages of the comics magazine
Métal Hurlant (1975–1987), and the daily newspaper Libération, founded by a group of far-left intellectuals including Jean-Paul Sartre only a few years earlier in 1972 (Étienne, 2016: 40). The subversive and shocking aesthetic of punk also had its predecessors in France, particularly in the comics and satirical press, where the 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of monthly periodicals such as Hara-Kiri (1960–1989) and Charlie mensuel (1969–1986) where sex, dark humour, formal experimentations, and immoral provocations prevailed. The existence of such a press in the mainstream is something that subversive artists could refer to, to justify and legitimize their practice.

Perhaps because of this positive mainstream reception and the subsequent lack of need, French punk zines did not develop to a scale comparable to their British and American counterparts until later, during the “second wave” of the 1980s (Étienne, 2016: 58). If anything, the real French equivalent to the Sex Pistols was not to be found in the music, but in visual arts: the Bazooka group and the duo behind Elles sont de sortie. As Hervé Zénouda, former drummer of the early Parisian punk band The Stinky Toys (1976–1979), suggests:

The visual contribution of these two collectives to the Parisian punk movement appears quite specific. While images were also prevalent in English punk (with the contributions of Malcolm McLaren, Vivienne Westwood and Jamie Reid), they were not independent productions and seemed to be mostly oriented towards marketing purposes (the bands’ look, records sleeves, posters, etc.). Conversely, collectives like Bazooka and Elles sont de sortie fed directly from the zeitgeist and contributed to the emergence of a powerful and autonomous punk creative output. Organized in groups akin to rock bands, these visual artists were all music connoisseurs and drew their inspiration from punk rock; their graphic works and their slogan-like detournements considerably fed our imaginations. Bazooka expressed what we felt most acutely. In my opinion, we might even consider, without overstating the case, that the group that best embodied the spirit of punk during this time in France—art

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64 Despite being a conventional professional comics magazine, the aesthetic approach championed by Métal Hurlant clearly positioned it favourably regarding punk. It is sometimes even included in histories of French punk publishing, for example in Punk Press (Bernière & Primois, 2013), alongside more specifically punk zines like Rock News and photographzines like Elles sont de sortie.

65 This is true up to this day. For instance, Hara-Kiri was cited in social media publications related to the Berlinhard exhibition as a source of inspiration for both Mead and Scheibner.
form notwithstanding—was the graphic design collective Bazooka. (Zénouda, 2016: 26)

The short-lived but explosive career of Bazooka is particularly illustrative of the unique configuration zine culture was to take in France at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, foreshadowing the rise of graphzines. After meeting at the Beaux-Arts in Paris, the members of Bazooka—Olivia Clavel (a.k.a. Electric Clito), Christian Chapiron (a.k.a. Kiki Picasso), Jean-Louis Dupré (a.k.a. Loulou Picasso), Philippe Renault (a.k.a. Lulu Larsen), Bernard Vidal (a.k.a. Bananar), and Jean Rouzaud, in addition to the occasional participation of Philippe Bailly (a.k.a. Ti5 Dur)—banded together in 1974, publishing their first self-published work, Joli Cadeau pour toi, in December of that year. Throughout 1976 and 1977, the collective published in different formats, including books and magazines. After working as illustrators with Libération for a period of six months, the collective was given complete carte blanche for a monthly supplement, Un regard moderne. Averaging 10,000 in circulation and distributed through newsstands nationally, it ran for six issues starting in February 1978 (Hoyer, 2013).

Plagued by internal tensions over their sudden mainstream success and a conflicted relationship with Libération, the collective split the same year.

In the meantime, Elles sont de sortie, a duo formed of Bruno Richard and Pascal Doury, was formed in 1977. Publishing continuously for 58 issues until the untimely death of Doury in 2001, the duo’s career accompanied the rise of an extensive network of bookstores, small publishers, and artists, setting the foundations of a distinctive scene. A handful of local institutions played a determining role in the formation of this scene.
in the creation and lasting of what was becoming the French graphzine network. Among them, the bookstore Un Regard Moderne, named after the work of Bazooka. Its bookseller, Jacques Noël, might have been the most influential figure of graphzine history. Graphzine artist and publisher Dominique Leblanc (Model-Peltex) describes the bookstore:

you would find a bewildering capharnaum of vintage erotic magazines, more or less artistic sadomasochistic photographs, art books by unknown artists, zines without content nor form, and the unlikely foreign gold nugget of a publication […] At Noël’s, it was like in Gaston Lagaffe’s library. You had to pull in your stomach to squeeze through the narrow passages, there were more books than empty spaces […] Noël was the Abbé Pierre of graphic artists from the beginning. Who hasn’t found refuge, consolation and, above all, a tiny bit of recognition there? (Leblanc, 2019)\(^67\)

While the Bazooka group set the tone and the aesthetic horizon for the coming generation of graphzine artists, Elles sont de sortie pushed further, experimenting with various forms and supports (Néret, 2019a: 14). The publications of Doury and Richard were incredibly diverse in formats (from the “minizine” A6 to the comics album-sized A4 and bigger), length (anywhere between 8 to over 400 pages), circulation (from 100 to 5000), and techniques (offset, photocopy, screen printing). Their publications were in turn self-published or in collaboration with a panoply of publishers: from established alternative comics publishers like Futuropolis\(^68\) and Les Humanoïdes Associés (publisher of the comics magazine Métal Hurlant), to underground and graphzine publishers like the Association Pour Adultes Avec Réserve (APAAR). The numbering of issues was indifferent, such that self-published zines seem indistinguishable from published books, magazines, newspapers. Although visual arts predominated (drawings and, to a lesser extent, photography and collages), some issues of

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\(^67\) “on trouvait un capharnaüm invraisemblable de revues érotiques vintage, de photographies sado-masos plus ou moins artistiques, de livres d'art d'artistes inconnus, de fanzines sans fond ni forme, de publications étrangères improbables que l'on baptisait pépites […] Chez Noël, c'était un peu comme dans la bibliothèque confiée à Gaston Lagaffe. il fallait rentrer le ventre pour se faufiler dans des passages étroits, il y avait autant de pleins que de vides, voire plus […] Noël, c'était l'abbé Pierre des graphzineurs, depuis le début. Qui n'y a pas trouvé refuge, consolation, et surtout un rien de reconnaissance ?” (My translation)

\(^68\) Futuropolis, created in 1974, was known for its “bande dessinée d’auteur,” precursor of today’s graphic novels. Its selling to Gallimard in 1988 is often considered as having encouraged the creation of L’Association in 1990 (Habrand in Dejasse et al., 2011: 11).
Elles sont de sortie, like Richard’s Journal Sale Tome II, edited by the literary publisher Balland, were entirely written. In short, the work of Elles sont de sortie is particularly eclectic, and deliberately subverting and reimagining the conventions of publishing. The Bazooka group may be compared to the Sex Pistols and their full-scale assault on the British public sphere. Despite its less overtly political approach and its closer ties to the field of art, Elles sont de sortie anticipates the subsequent constitution of punk and postpunk networks driven by anarcho-punk bands like Crass.

4.1.2. Graphzines and Le Dernier Cri

No other single publisher has contributed more to establish graphzines as a dominant genre in French zine culture than Le Dernier Cri (Leblanc, 2019). Pakito Bolino’s own work, aesthetically at the crossroads of cartoons, punk, Art brut (or “outsider art”)\(^{69}\), and artists’ publications, largely contributed to set the tone for graphzines to come, a style that aesthetically dominated French zine culture for at least a decade from about the middle of the 1990s on. It is worth examining Bolino’s creative output to better understand his practice as a publisher, and therefore his place in French zine history\(^{70}\). Bolino studied at the Beaux Arts of Angoulême in the middle of the 1980s. His early work is heavily influenced by Marc Caro and, through him, the work of German modernist artists: the expressionist Ludwig Kirchner, the New Objectivist Otto Dix, and the satirical “cartoon” artist George Grosz (Néret, 2019b). During his student years, Bolino’s production focused on linocuts that he published with other students as part of the collective Les Amis: a dozen graphzine-like

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\(^{69}\) Outsider art in France has been particularly influenced by the work of the artist and theoretician Jean Dubuffet, who defined the notion of art brut as “the art of the mad and that of marginals of all kinds: prisoners, recluses, mystics, anarchists or rebels.” (Danchin, 1995: 10)

\(^{70}\) See Heilmann (n.d.) for a bibliography of Bolino’s work, as close to exhaustive as can be.
publications from 1986 to 1989. Around the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, Bolino left linocut behind in favour of ink pen drawings.

Meanwhile, Bolino was introduced to the Parisian graphzine scene, notably through contributions to APAAR, headed by Frédéric de Broutelles, who published works from former members of the Bazooka group (Ti5Dur and Olivia Clavel), by Doury and Richard of Elles sont de sortie, and by the American punk comics artist Gary Panter, a major source of inspiration for many French graphzine artists (Néret, 2019a: 34–35). The beginning of the 1990s marked the introduction of new references for Bolino. His drawings grew closer to popular culture, notably manga, through the discovery of the 1970s Heta-Uma movement (Néret, 2019a: 43). Around the same time, he made a decisive encounter with art brut (Tran, 1999). Le Dernier Cri was the first and for a long time the only alternative publisher in France to publish the work of outsider artists (Dejasse, 2020: 102). Bolino’s crossing paths with Raymond Reynaud, an artist and cultural animator whose work for art brut had been endorsed by Dubuffet (2005), was particularly fruitful. Starting in 1994 until his death in 2007, Reynaud published in a dozen of collective publications edited by Bolino, as well as the single-authored graphzine La Danse Macabre des 7 Péchés Capitaux. Like many art brut artists, Bolino was a compulsive creator, completing a drawing almost daily (Néret, 2019b). These drawings attest of a creative urgency fitting to the cultural background within which Bolino evolved, at the crossing of early 20th century modernism, punk, and art brut. His production is plethoric, to say the least: over 40 single-authored

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71 Panter, first known for his work as illustrator with the Los Angeles punk band The Germs, is considered as an essential link between the countercultural “underground comix” movement of the 1960s and later punk art of the 1970s. This speaks to the fact that the manifestly French character of graphzines should not obscure their American influences. Richard and Panter, for instance, have both mentioned owing a lot to each other’s work. The name “graphzine” itself is said to have been a reference to the American comics magazine Raw, which was subtitled “The graphix magazine” (Bourgoin, 2019: 11).

72 It is important to note that the rising popularity of manga and anime in France at the end of the 1980s generated an intense public debate that eventually led to a sharp decline in manga circulation at the beginning of the 1990s (Ya-CheChe-Chan, 2023). Japanese comics and anime were considered a threat to the national production and blamed for encouraging youth violence. In this context, manga acquired in France a veneer of radicalism it did not have in other countries.
graphzines and books of various lengths, and a countless number of contributions to collective publications.

According to art scholar and graphzine specialist Xavier-Gilles Néret, Bolino’s practice marks a turn around 2008, as the artist was working on his *Spermanga*, published by L’Association, a rare collaboration with another publisher. From that point on, Bolino systematically produced collages that he then redrew with an ink pen, obscuring, dirtying, crushing the images. The artist likened his treatment of images to a form of live musical performance: “When I draw, it’s a bit like plugging an effect pedal into a guitar, or like plugging a saturation pedal into a photocopier […] I don’t just *détourner* the images, I destroy them, it’s a destructive *détournement*, as if they’d been run through a bad photocopier. I’m a bad photocopier.” (Quoted in Néret, 2019b: n.p.)

In many ways, Bolino’s practice as an artist—plethoric, disruptive, and akin to a live perform—is reflected in his work as publisher of *Le Dernier Cri*. His publishing house and screen printing workshop *Le Dernier Cri* has published close to 500 different titles over the last 30 years, some of them gathering the contributions of hundreds of artists across the world. Most importantly, none has been reissued or reprinted; when a graphzine is done, it is time to make another. Bolino cofounded *Le Dernier Cri* with his then partner Caroline Sury, a master artist, screen printer and publisher in her own right. The idea of a graphzine workshop where he could print work of his own and of other artists came to Bolino while visiting Henriette Valium, one of the most influential artists of Quebec’s

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73 “Quand je dessine, c’est un peu comme brancher une pédale d’effet sur une guitare, ou comme si je branchais une pédale de saturation sur une photocopieuse […] Moi, je ne détourne pas seulement les images, je les détruis, c’est un détournement destructeur, comme si elles étaient passées dans un mauvais photocopieur. Je suis un mauvais photocopieur.” (My translation)

74 Sury published an imposing number of works with *Le Dernier Cri* and other graphzine publishers, as well as contributions to many collectives. Her work mostly focuses on autobiographical comics with a particularly distinctive style in drawing. She published *Bébé 2000* (2006) and *Cou tordu* (2010) with L’Association, two graphic novels set during her involvement with *Le Dernier Cri*. More recently, she developed a practice around “paper sculptures” made of sheets of paper using scissors, reproduced in print. She is also behind the Éditions La Gangue, with which she published the work of female illustrators in beautiful graphzines.
zine history, in Montreal (Tessier, 2021; Legendre, 2022: 119–120). Valium’s workspace, set in his own apartment, had shown Bolino just what he needed: a workspace that would be an integral part of his own life (Néret, 2019a: 90–92)\(^5\). After some peregrinations in the Paris area, Bolino and Sury established themselves in 1993 in the Centre Autonome d’Expérimentation Sociale (CAES), a social and political squat in Ris-Orangis, south-east of Paris. There, they could lay their hands on abandoned screen printing equipment and a massive stack of leftover kraft paper, screens and ink. What at first appeared to be a perfect place for Le Dernier Cri turned out differently, however. Following clashes with other occupants of the squat, as well as a more difficult than anticipated integration to the Paris graphzine scene, the couple relocated to Bolino’s native south, establishing their workspace in the then still embryonic Friche La Belle de Mai, where it is still located to this day.

The publishing history of Le Dernier Cri can be divided into three distinct periods, each represented by a different series of collective works. The first period corresponds to the time in Ris-Orangis. It is marked by the publication of ten issues of a periodical graphzine titled *Le Dernier Cri*. The large A3 graphzines, hastily screen-printed on poor quality kraft paper, gathered the work of prominent artists of this generation: Stéphane Blanquet (who later became Bolino’s rival), Henriette Valium, Kerozen, Pierre La Police, Frédéric Poincet, Blexbolex, Y5/P5, as well as art brut artists like Reynaud. The publications of this period became increasingly masterful and ambitious, reaching a summit with *Le Dernier Cri* 10 in June/July 1995, one of the last publications before relocation to Marseille the next fall (Bolino, 1998: 92). This last issue reached over 90 pages printed in up to five colours, presented in five different booklets gathered in a screen-printed portfolio. Over 50 artists took part in the project—including foreigners from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Denmark, and Japan—attesting to an already well-established translocal network. The

\(^{5}\) A public conversation between Pakito Bolino, Henriette Valium, Caro Caron, and Louis Rastelli offers an in-depth look into this early France-Quebec graphzine connection (arcmtl, 2021).
graphzine also bears the mark of the increasing tensions between its artistic leanings and the political
and social activism that predominated at the CAES. *Le Dernier Cri* 10 was published in three different
versions, sold at decreasing prices based on their length and the quality of the paper they were printed
on: “Those who know the value of screen printing will laugh once again, and the others will cry
themselves [sic] that it’s a scam, but absolutely…” (Bolino et al., 1995: back cover page)\(^{76}\).

Resettling in Marseille inaugurated a second period for *Le Dernier Cri*, marked by the publication
of another collective periodical titled *Hôpital Brut*. This time, the ambitions of the publisher were truly
untampered. The first issue already reached 128 pages, the fourth around 200, the tenth and last over
300. To sustain this kind of production, the rhythm of publishing decreased considerably: the first
issue of *Hôpital Brut* was released in early 1997, the last in 2014. Printing also had to be adapted, each
issue being composed of a variety of techniques, mostly offset with screen-printed additions. This
period is perhaps the apex of *Le Dernier Cri* as a graphzine publisher. As it became an international
reference, to the point of embodying the graphzine genre. Issues of *Hôpital Brut* are better described
as state-of-the-art surveys of international underground graphic arts. *Le Dernier Cri* had become a
“school” both figuratively and literally. An increasing number of young artists and printers populated
its workspace, serving as interns to learn screen printing from Bolino, one of the most renowned
practitioners in the world. It is interesting to note that although graphzines are commonly described
as “without text” (i.e., Gatto, 1998: 19; Fauchereau, 2009) or making use of text for its visual aspect
rather than to convey meaning (Néret, 2019a: 7)\(^{77}\), the graphzines of *Le Dernier Cri* only belatedly

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\(^{76}\) “Le coût de la matière étant pas donné : \(\approx 200\) ex kraft + bô papier (92 p) version chère ? \(\approx 100\) ex bô papier (52 p)
moins chère ? \(\approx 100\) ex sur kraft (44 pages) la moins chère ? Ceux qui connaisse la valeur sérigraphique vont une fois de
plus rigoler et les autres se pleurer que c’est l’arnaque mais tout à fait…” (My translation)

\(^{77}\) “un texte n’est pas seulement un instrument de communication de messages ou d’informations […] Dans un graphzine
digne de ce nom, les textes éventuels, de différentes longueurs, sont graphiquement intégrés aux images, ou interagissent
avec elles, au point de faire eux-mêmes image, par leur dimension calli/typographique.” (My translation)
excluded written elements. Up until *Hôpital Brut 5/6*, published in 2001, contributions included poetry—earlier issues even included essays and interviews—as well as conventional comics with speech bubbles and panels. It is only later, throughout the 2000s and 2010s as the publisher acquired some reputation in the international field of art, that its publications excluded text altogether. This shift is perhaps better illustrated by Bolino’s own definition of “graphzine”:

> The difference as I see it between zines and graphzines [...] is that with zines, you photocopy and reprint as many as you like, the information circulates. For graphzines the print run is the original artwork. So instead of having your original costing €5,000, it might cost €50 because there are 100 of them. But in fact, the graphzine is the entire print run. (in Bessi et al., 2022: 27:07–28:00)

The publication of the last issue of *Hôpital Brut* in 2014 concluded another period in the history of Le Dernier Cri. In 2009, Bolino and Sury split, Bolino becoming the only hand at the wheel. At the beginning of the 2010s, La Friche launched a major renovation project and Le Dernier Cri relocated within the complex, adding space for exhibitions but at an increased rent. Starting in 2012, Le Dernier Cri thus started to organize small exhibitions in its new workspace. Titled “Mauvais Œil”, the series came to replace periodical publications such as *Le Dernier Cri* and *Hôpital Brut* as a vehicle for Bolino’s editorial line, highlighting the works of marginals, amateurs, young artists—anyone with a visually radical and unique perspective on life and art:

> I love [...] artists with their own world [“artistes à monde”]. Those who create a world, only one world from the start, their world. They have only one style [...] I love *art brut* because at least it’s pure. Style is a disease; art is a disease. There may be an evolution, perhaps, but in fact it’s always the same thing. And these are often the people who really draw. They bring out the best of themselves and, despite any

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78 “La différence, pour moi, qu’il pourrait y avoir entre le fanzine et le graphzine [...] c’est que le fanzine tu peux le réimprimer en photocopie tant que tu veux, tu as une information qui circule. Le graphzine, c’est le tirage de ton livre qui fait l’original. Donc ton original, au lieu qu’il coûte 5000 €, et bien il coûtera peut-être 50 € parce qu’il en a 100, quoi. Mais en fait, le graphzine, c’est tout le tirage.” (My translation)

79 It should be noted that Bolino seems to always have been the main voice behind Le Dernier Cri. In *Le Dernier Cri* 10, he is credited as the main editor and driving force — “Director of Dirty Brain and Motor Muscle”; “Directeur du cerveau sale et muscle moteur” (Bolino et al., 1995: inside back cover, my translation) —, and Sury as “Left hand and right lung” (“Bras gauche et poumon droit”, my translation), at par with graphzine artist Kérozène with whom the duo collaborated for that issue. Unlike Bolino, Sury continued to publish her work with other publishers as well, including Stéphane Blanquet’s Chacal puant, and the alternative comics publishers Les Requins Marteaux and L’Association.
outside influences, you always recognize the person behind the work. My favourite artists are those who are imprisoned in their style. (quoted in Néret, 2019b: n.p.)

Stu Mead is undoubtedly one of these “artistes à monde” trapped into their own world, as the Berlinhard exhibition, 23rd edition of the Mauvais Œil series, amply illustrated.

It is hard to grasp what exactly constitutes a national cultural tradition. The history of French zine culture nevertheless shows some clear signs of appropriation, adaptation, and translation of the zine medium—an Anglo-American import—into clearly distinct forms and categories. As Le Dernier Cri was carving itself a place of choice in French zine culture in the 1990s, it was becoming clear that something had changed. Photocopied zines circulating information on science fiction, comics, or music as seen elsewhere were being replaced by large format, screen-printed graphzines showcasing the work of underground artists as the predominant form of zine publishing. In the process, French zine culture was building unprecedented ties within the field of cultural production, particularly to the fields of comics and art. This multiplied the possibilities of encounter with the state.

4.2. State Funding of the Arts

Zines do not generally figure in cultural policies. Typically, actors of zine culture take advantage of loopholes and grey areas and are never directly addressed by policy makers. Their contact with state intervention in culture is usually indirect, mediated by long chains of delegation.

In common representations, the state is referred to as a single body composed of a clear hierarchy of positions, each with their own powers and obligations. This simplified understanding of the state—

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80 “J’aime […] les artistes à monde. Ceux qui, depuis le début, ne font qu’un seul monde, leur monde. Ils n’ont qu’un style […] J’aime l’art brut, parce qu’au moins c’est pur. Un style, c’est la maladie ; l’art, c’est la maladie. Il peut y avoir une évolution, peut-être, mais en fait c’est tout le temps la même chose. Et ça, souvent, ce sont des gens qui dessinent. Ils sortent ce qu’il y a à sortir d’eux-mêmes et, malgré les éventuelles influences extérieures, tu reconnais toujours la personne dans le trait. Les gens que je préfère, dans l’art, ce sont ceux qui n’ont qu’un style, qui sont enfermés dans leur style.” (My translation)
assimilating it to a clearly delimited organization, usually contrasted with an equally simplified understanding of private actors and organizations—fails to account for the high complexity of state intervention. In effect, most state intervention is made by actors or institutions that are not readily considered part of the state itself (Bourdieu, 2014: 12). Forms of delegation of state intervention are essential to the way art and culture are funded.

In most industrialized societies, there are, broadly speaking, two main sources of funding for the arts: public and private. In European countries, public funding predominates; France is, historically, a prototypical case on this regard. In North America—and particularly in the United States—private sponsors are the main funding bodies, even though there are public institutions in charge of culture. The distinction between public funding and private sponsorship is blurred, however, when we factor in state incentives for private philanthropy. Mediated forms of provisions like land grants, tax exemptions and deductions are often as key elements of a national cultural policy (Rosenstein, 2018; Carroll, 1987: 22). As Stanley Katz, historian of American philanthropy, noted in 1984, two decades after the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities in 1965, “the interconnections between public and private are so complex and so intimate that it makes little sense to try to polarise our understanding of the policy-making process.” (Quoted in van den Bosch, 1997: 306)

In a very real sense, private sponsors act as delegates of state intervention in the arts, directing the public funds towards creators and cultural institutions. Despite its marginal status within the cultural field, zine culture is not entirely kept out of this dynamic. A good example is given by the New York-based Printed Matter Inc. One of the most important mediators linking American zine culture to the field of art, zines feature importantly on the shelves of the two Printed Matter bookstores, in its output as a publisher, and on the stalls of the New York and Los Angeles Art Book
Fair it organizes annually. The list of its financial supporters available on its website features private foundations of various importance (Printed Matter, 2023).

4.2.1. Cultural Policy in France

Unlike the United States, France has a long history of cultural policy built on direct intervention, leaving a lesser role to third parties. Céline Romainville provides a synthetic account of this history. Since the beginning of the 20th century, there have been a succession of four distinct approaches:

The objective of art policies of the 19th and early 20th centuries was the creation of a shared cultural identity through the “imagination” of a national community sublimated by the artistic achievements and common heritage of that community. From the early 1950s onwards, the idea of promoting the widest access to artworks to the most people became an integral component of cultural policy. Concretely, this translated into a policy that supported artistic institutions as suppliers of access to artworks. Starting in the late 1960s, a critique of consumer society and “mass” culture, inspired notably by the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, led to the development of a new paradigm. Cultural democracy, reorienting cultural policy towards sociocultural action, was elaborated through notions such as “cultural activities” and the recognition of a wider range of cultural forms. Finally, since the 1980s, economic and cultural development gradually became the new objective of cultural policy. The aim was now to stimulate national cultural production and the work of creators, while promoting cultural diversity, multiculturalism, and international cooperation. (Romainville, 2016: 54)

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81 « L’objectif assigné aux politiques artistiques du XIXe et du début du XXe siècle est la création d’une identité culturelle commune par l’imagination d’une communauté nationale sublimée par les réalisations artistiques et le patrimoine commun de ladite communauté. Dès le début des années 1950, l’idée de “promouvoir [la] fréquentation par le plus grand nombre” des œuvres considérées comme étant exceptionnelles s’impose dans les politiques culturelles. Cet objectif s’est concrètement traduit dans une politique de soutien à l’offre artistique et aux enceintes institutionnalisées de sa diffusion. À partir de la fin des années 1960, une critique de la société de consommation et de la culture de “masse”, émanant notamment des philosophes de l’École de Francfort, a abouti à l’élaboration d’un nouveau paradigme des politiques culturelles. La démocratie culturelle, reconfigurant l’action artistique vers une action socioculturelle, se construit autour des notions d’animation et de reconnaissance d’une diversité de formes culturelles. Enfin, à partir des années 1980, le développement économique et culturel s’est progressivement imposé comme le nouvel objectif des politiques culturelles. Il s’agit de stimuler la création nationale et l’économie créative tout en promouvant la diversité culturelle, le multiculturalisme, et la coopération internationale. » (My translation)
This history can be read many ways. It first illustrates a shift of attention from the past to the present. The objects of cultural policy, the artworks, were initially understood as the heritage of the past and the expression of the national “genius” and prestige. Throughout the century, the focus shifted from national art history to contemporary production, and the progressive integration of “culture workers” to the national economy (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2020). In parallel, the social and economic status of artists greatly evolved. As the comics artist, theoretician, and zine maker L.L. de Mars notes: “In the 1950s and 1960s the artist is still a grand bourgeois, whilst today they are almost all on social welfare. There has been an astonishing turnaround” (L.L. de Mars & Picasso, 2004: 22). Despite its brash tone, this assertion illustrates a perceived shift in the artist population by some artists themselves. It is certainly true for the French zine maker population, who seems to live on a shoestring negotiating a precarious economic situation.

Focusing on art production, we can also note an increasing diversification and de-hierarchization. As policies evolved, fine arts gave way to a much wider range of cultural activities. This has to be understood in the context of the increasing influence of American cultural industries in France and Europe. Facing fast-changing cultural habits, the French state decided to support cultural industries previously ignored by policy makers: film, television, music, and publishing. (Romainville, 2016: 66) Narrowly defined “art” category was replaced by the broader and more flexible “culture” in policy

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82 An additional distinction between North America and European countries should be noted here. The 20th century is rightly considered pivotal in American history, effectively making the country the hegemonic economic, political, and cultural force in the world. Yet, it was comparatively eventless when compared to European countries. France, for example, has undergone significant and chaotic political changes over the period covered in this thesis, including a succession of constitutions (3rd Republic, Nazi occupation and Vichy in 1940–1945, 4th Republic, and finally promulgation of the 5th Republic in 1958. In parallel, the Second World War was followed by the dismantlement of the French colonial empire in a series of wars of independence in Southeast Asia, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, in 1954–1962. This political turmoil had, obviously, repercussions in cultural production, noted among others by Sapiro, 2010.

83 “Dans les années 50/60, l’artiste, c’est encore un grand bourgeois, et aujourd’hui ils sont presque tous RMIstes [Revenu minimum d’insertion], il y a eu un basculement social incroyable.” (My translation)
vocabulary. This also impacted sites of culture, the focus shifting from the temple of the museum to more mundane cultural centres.

One last important element can be highlighted in this history: the tension between the avowed centralization of earlier policies, and a more decentralized approach that progressively came to replace it. Figures from 2022 show the breakdown of the current annual public budget for culture in France: for €4.1 billion spent by the Ministry of Culture at the national level, up to €8.7 billion were spent on cultural expenditures by lower levels of government, 80% of which by city governments alone (Schreiber, 2022: 22). Of this sum, 51% was allocated to cultural activities and contemporary production, and 38% to “heritage,” that is the conservation and promotion of historical artworks and monuments. If Paris remains the centre of French culture, regional centres thus also developed, sometimes specializing around events of international scope: the Cannes Film Festival, the Avignon Festival for theatre, and the Angoulême International Comics Festival being perfect examples.

Politically and ideologically, decentralization implied diversification and the inclusion of more dissident voices, a phenomenon fuelled by the outcomes of the events of May 1968 (Romainville, 2016: 61).

This decentralization has allowed actors of French zine culture to gain access to public funds. Many zine-related workspaces, events, and places of gathering are today funded through public funds allocated by city governments. In most cases, these funds are project-based and do not cover regular operations. Funding for projects can be redirected, however, and it is not rare for events to be organized in order to acquire funds that will then be sparingly spent throughout the year. This attitude of redirecting allocated funds is deeply engrained. Perhaps the most important—although indirect—

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84 By way of comparison, we can also note that at the national level, €1.9 billion were allocated in tax provisions to private sponsors. Private donations for the arts and culture are, in France, subject to tax deductions for up to 60%, and have been steadily increasing over the last three decades.
form of public funding to French zine culture is hence granted by various forms of social welfare. During my field trip, I was astonished by the number of zinesters living off social welfare, cutting expenses by every means possible to support a full-time activity in zine culture. Without these indirect subsidies, there is no doubt that many festivals, distribution centres, workspaces, publishers, and artists would not have the means or the free time necessary to sustain their activities. Stu Mead himself has been benefiting from a similar indirect state subsidy, in the form of a government pension for people with disabilities (LDC & Mead, 1999: 6).

4.2.2. La Friche La Belle de Mai

The founders of La Friche La Belle de Mai, the cultural complex in which Le Dernier Cri is located, explicitly claimed their part in the history of French cultural policies. For one of them, Philippe Foulquié, the project was predicated on the decentralization that oriented cultural policy when the project was started at the beginning of the 1990s:

decentralization opened the floodgates. All of a sudden, local elected officials, local operators and local artists wanted to exist, to get involved in the community, without having to go through the Ministry. That’s why I call this period “political” [...] it’s political in the sense that we start again from scratch, at the level of the territory, to rebuild a legitimacy of intervention (quoted in Lextrait, 2017: 41)85.

The feeling of entering La Friche for the first time is hard to describe. The first impression is one of sheer immensity. Located in the working-class neighbourhood of La Belle de Mai near the centre of Marseille, the complex used to host the SEITA—the Société d'exploitation industrielle des tabacs et des allumettes—a state-owned tobacco factory. In 1990, after almost a century and a half of

85 “la décentralisation qui a ouvert les vannes. Tout à coup, des élus locaux, des opérateurs locaux, des artistes locaux ont eu envie d’exister, de s’insérer dans les affaires de la Cité, sans passer par l’avis du ministère. C’est pour ça que cette période, je l’appelle “politique” [...] c’est de la politique dans le sens où on reprend les choses à zéro, au niveau du territoire, pour reconstruire une légitimité d’intervention” (my translation).
operation, the factory closed its doors, leaving a complex totalling 120,000 m\(^2\) abandoned. In 1992, the founders of La Friche—French for industrial brownfield—started occupying and converting the premises into what was to become the country’s largest cultural centre.

The place is a massive maze. There are over 60 collectives, associations and businesses operating on the site. It includes two theatres, a concert hall and a massive multipurpose open space, a café and a restaurant, a kindergarten, an acting school complex (hosting the École régionale d’acteurs de Cannes-Marseille and the Institut supérieur des techniques du spectacle d’Avignon), a radio station and recording studio, countless exhibition spaces, a community garden, a skatepark and an outdoor playground, an 8,000 m\(^2\) rooftop terrace, and an off-location arthouse movie theatre located in the centre of La Belle de Mai.

La Friche is part of a network of similar cultural complexes established since the turn of the 1970s and 1980s across Western Europe in the wake of deindustrialization (Vanhamme & Loubon, 2001). Le Confort moderne in Poitiers—hosting La Fanzinothèque, the biggest zine collection in France and one of the biggest in the world—is another important example in the French context. A survey conducted by Agathe Gallo, who toured for a year across France in 2022–2023 in a van converted into a mobile recording studio, counted at least 45 of such sites. These places range from the squatted disaffected factory or industrial area to state-sponsored initiatives like La Friche La Belle de Mai.

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86 The industries of Marseille were thoroughly integrated into the French colonial system: the primary resources and the workforce came from the colonies, and a significant portion of the manufactured goods were for the colonial market. The neighbourhood of La Belle de Mai, adjacent to the main train station and not far from the port, was born from the influx of migrants coming from the colonies, as well as from neighbouring Italy. The deindustrialization of the city and the site of La Friche is directly connected to decolonization as well, beginning in the immediate afterwar, reaching its peak at the beginning of the 1960s, and informally extending well into the 1970s. Following this timeline, the SEITA tobacco factory decreased in size and production starting in the 1960s, only to close permanently at the dawn of the 1990s (Abouchar, 2021).

87 Gallo recorded an episode of her podcast, *La Halte*, in every one of them she visited (Gallo, 2023).
La Friche was never a squat proper. Its creation in 1992 by Philippe Foulquié and Alain Fourneau was supported by the active participation of Christian Poitevin, poet and postal artist also known as Julien Blaine, then newly elected as Marseille’s deputy mayor for culture. The site being derelict but owned by the state, the young association Système Friche Théâtre, founded in 1990, was offered the immense site by the city of Marseille, as of a greater strategy to repurpose the its industrial estate.

Artist-run workspaces quickly multiplied in these pseudo-squats. Poitevin remembers:

We counted the number of European artists who had settled here between 1989 and 1995. It was astonishing. It went so far that one day Jeanne Laffitte, deputy mayor for tourism, told me: "That’s enough! You can’t push open a door in a deserted part of Marseille anymore without being welcomed by artist saying, “Come in!” (in Rof et al., 2022: n.p.)

In 2008, Marseille was elected European capital of culture for the year 2013. In the wake of this, La Friche was allocated €30 million to thoroughly renovate the site, starting in 2010 (Lextrait, 2017: 51). These changes not only helped modernize the infrastructures for artistic production and outreach, but also contributed to better integrate the complex in the neighbourhood. The relocation of Le Dernier Cri in its current workspace was part of this larger transformation of the complex. Conversely, the renovations pushed La Friche farther away from its quasi-squat early years. The people I had the chance to meet there often referred to the renovations as a before-and-after moment. The word people repeatedly used to describe the site as it was in the 1990s and 2000s was “open”: no gates, no security, and even in some cases no doors or no locks on workspaces, and everybody welcomed at any time of the day. Although technically not squats, the premises strongly resembled them—until the major construction works of 2010–2013. For many, it is as if there had been two different Fiches.

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88 Poitevin has, incidentally, collaborated with Elles sont de sortie in the early 1980s under the pseudonym Julien Blaine.

From its inception, La Friche was heavily dependent on public funds and it remains an integral part of Marseille's cultural ecosystem. For the most part, the state subsidies it benefited from have been “in kind.” The most important is the free use of the site and its buildings through a long-term free lease. To this major subsidy are added the indirect subsidy of revenues generated by the rental of spaces to occupants such as Le Dernier Cri. La Friche also benefits from additional subsidies covering a part of its day-to-day business, supplemented with the sale of goods and services. All in all, the annual budget of La Friche in 2022 was €9,274,000, of which €4,309,000 directly came from public funding (La Friche, 2023). Although significant, the funds allocated to La Friche only represent a small portion of the city’s yearly cultural expenses, as noted by Poitevin:

First of all, you should know that the opera alone amounts to 50% of the subsidies for culture […] when I arrived at the townhall, culture accounted for 3.5% of the annual budget. When I left [in 1995], it was 8.2%. That leaves margin for maneuver. And La Friche was the structure that drew the most from the margins. But compared to the opera, it’s nothing significant (Rof et al., 2022: n.p.).

Despite its considerable size for zine standards, Le Dernier Cri’s workspace can seem underwhelming within La Friche. Once passed the entrance door, however, the space is impressive: equipped with massive semi-automated screen printing machines, filled to the ceiling with graphzines, prints, and posters produced over the decades. Its modest exhibition space is also used as graphzine distro, selling books and zines from artists from around the world. Bolino, the only regular employee, can be found there almost everyday, usually working with interns or volunteers.

Le Dernier Cri is one of the oldest occupants of the complex. Through the bigger organization, it benefits from the infrastructures, regularly organizing larger exhibitions in the spaces of La Tour, the part of La Friche in which it is located. This is where it hosts its own yearly zine festival, Vendetta,

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90 « Déjà, il faut savoir que l’opéra prend 50% des subventions culturelles […] quand j’arrive à la mairie, la culture pèse 3,5% du budget annuel. Quand je m’en vais, elle atteint 8,2%. Cela laisse de la marge. Et la Friche, c’est la structure qui pompait le plus dans les marges. Mais à côté de l’opéra, cela n’a rien à voir. » (My translation)
since 2013. As a non-profit (“association loi 1901”)\textsuperscript{91}, Le Dernier is eligible to project-based subsidies, and the contact with other occupants of La Friche allows for fruitful collaborations. Le Dernier Cri is therefore as dependent on various forms of state support of the arts as the broader Friche.

The relationship between La Friche and its occupants like Le Dernier Cri illustrates the complexity of state intervention, especially when taking into consideration the trickle down of state authority it implies. The graphzine publisher is dependent on the cultural complex hosting its workspace, which is in turn dependent on public subsidies, making La Friche a crucial intermediary of state intervention. Despite being a relatively marginal partner, Le Dernier Cri is also one of the historical pillars of La Friche. Bolino has been on the board of directors several times since the 1990s and is a shareholder of its parent cooperative company (Lextrait, 2017: 113). This interdependency of the complex and the organizations inhabiting it makes La Friche a likely political target, as was supposed by Bolino who considered that the attacks against Le Dernier Cri and Stu Mead were also aimed at La Friche and its unique position in the city’s cultural life:

A party like the Front National was looking for polemics on the internet and decided to use their fascist methods against us. They wanted to attack a system like La Friche and they found a pretext, a small exhibition from Stu Mead […] La Friche allows us to produce transgressive artworks, but above all it’s a place where things and people mix together. For these fundamentalist reactionaries, such a place must not exist. (quoted in Lextrait, 2017: 111)

The interests of both organizations do not always align with one another, however. Le Dernier Cri was and still is faithful to the more subversive and subcultural beginnings of the project, and definitely sides more with the squatter end of the “friches” spectrum, and this despite Bolino’s own

\textsuperscript{91} The 1901 law providing the framework for non-profits in France includes obligations such as having a legally accountable director and administrator, and being officially declared to the local government. Membership of “associations 1901” is also restricted to people over 16. As graphzine publisher Dominique Leblanc rightly notes, however, this framework is probably better understood as a legal façade than as an accurate description of the actual mode of operation (Leblanc & Duvivier, 2019).
fraught personal history with squats. The internal hierarchies of La Friche also tend to marginalize further the graphzine publisher. From the beginning, the ambition of the complex has been to offer a space for experimental, demanding avant-garde art. Its position in the working-class neighbourhood of La Belle de Mai has, by default, given the project a social and political horizon, but its main allegiance has always been to the restricted public of high art. Due to its considerable size, La Friche is an important player in the cultural life of Marseille. Its ties to the city administration run deep. The decisions of the directors—Philippe Foulquié holding the position from 1990 to 2011—reflect their position as relays of state authority and crucial actors of cultural policy. The radical, dissenting and readily controversial work of Bolino and the artists published and exhibited by Le Dernier Cri does have a place in La Friche, but it is one that must be continually negotiated, and the cultural complex’s intricate relationship with the state can weigh heavily in this negotiation. The controversy surrounding the exhibition of Stu Mead’s work illustrates the complexity of this situation, the access to public funding through La Friche paradoxically guaranteeing Le Dernier Cri’s artistic freedom, while exposing it to political censorship.

4.3. Censorship

Censorship is probably the stereotypical form of state intervention in the arts. It is also a remarkable synthesis, touching upon and drawing from the cultural and economic dimensions covered

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92 “Today it’s perhaps harder than before the transformation: there was, in my opinion, more centrality with the courtyard as it was before. I think artists used to cross paths more […] our village has lost the intimacy that used to bring us together.” (In Lextrait, 2017: 113)

“Aujourd’hui c’est peut-être plus difficile qu’avant la transformation : je trouve qu’il y avait plus de centralité avec la cour. Je crois que les artistes se croisaient plus […] notre village a perdu l’intimité qui nous rapprochait.” (My translation)

That being said, Bolino, who started in a squat, has also been critical of the prevalent attitude opposing the art economy, even at the smaller scale of a zine publisher (in Lextrait, 2017: 108).

93 Sociologist Claire Duport discusses this tension and how it played out in the history of La Friche on the France Culture podcast *Esprit des lieux* with Matthieu Poitevin—the architect who signed the plans of the “new” Friche—and Philippe Foulquié (Abouchar, 2022).
in this chapter so far. The lawsuit against Le Dernier Cri shows the extent of state intervention in cultural practices as underground and marginal as zine making can be.

As Becker aptly notes, states ultimately have the power to encourage, tolerate, or repress the work of artists, non-intervention being itself a tacit form of state action (Becker, 1982: 165). Like funding of the arts, forms of censorship are not limited to the government itself but are most often outsourced to third parties and carried out by private actors whose claims and demands can then be supported by state authority. In fact, in liberal democracies, state officials only rarely initiate censorship. This task is rather carried out by third parties, such as the Innocence en danger non-profit in the case against Le Dernier Cri. This power to request state intervention makes of any individual or organization a potential actor of state-sponsored censorship. It should be added that in many cases, the simple threat of legal sanction posed by the filing of a complaint is enough to effectively quash a given work. The $25,000 libel lawsuit filed by Wollheim against the other Futurians, ultimately leading to the dissolution of the collective, is a clear example.

Furthermore, censorship, or the possibility thereof, is easily internalized by creators:

Whatever form of censorship a society practices—whether it is openly political or exercised in the name of good taste and the protection of children—it becomes, like all the other regular activities conventionalized in an art world, an enormous constraint internalized by most participants, who thus do not even experience it as a constraint. (Becker, 1982: 190)

4.3.1. Forms of Censorship

Forms of censorship go far beyond the legal and the political—the forms immediately recognizable and attributable to state intervention. Indirect and less apparent forms of censorship include economic, moral, as well as cultural and artistic.
Censorship in all its forms has loomed over the work of Stu Mead since he started publishing his sexually explicit drawings in the late 1980s. It has affected his practice in significant ways. When Mead met Gaard and started publishing in *Artpolice*, Gaard had only recently been fired from his professor position at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. His role as editor of *Artpolice* and the fact that some of his students published in the zine were not unrelated to his dismissal. Not long after, Mead himself felt the noose tighten around him. To publish drawings, it was common for artists to have them printed on transparent slides that would then be added to the layout of the publication. Once, the printer Mead contacted to make slides of his drawings called the police, who then paid a visit to his apartment. Mead was able to eventually retrieve the drawings and the slides, but not before having to hire a lawyer: “That whole thing shook me up. I had for so long remained in a bubble of artists and other creative people, but I had never dealt with the general public until that time, and it awakened me to the fact that my paintings were completely unacceptable for most people.” (Mead, 2017: n. p.)

Not long after, one of Mead’s paintings was intercepted by border agents as it was transported for a show abroad. Despite being allowed to go through, this was another reminder of the precarious situation his work put him in. As time passed, the situation only worsened. As Ghazi Barakat noted in the introduction of Mead’s contribution to the second volume of the *Apocalypse Culture* anthology in 2000, “It is now possible for the U.S. government to send an artist to prison for a painting or drawing that portrays a person under 18 years of age in a sexual manner.” (Barakat, 2000: incipit)

These encounters with the authorities illustrate yet another important aspect of state intervention that has been touched upon only in passing in this chapter: the arbitrariness in the decisions of state actors. The police in particular has an incredible discretionary power in its application of state sanction. The idea that the police know the laws and blindly apply them is a fiction that contributes to the image of the state as being “above” the social conflicts it arbitrates. In practice, the police is often not particularly knowledgeable of the law, relies on its own “common sense,” and disposes of a substantial agency regarding its decision to intervene. In many cases, it considers laws as “tools” at its disposal rather than rules to be applied uniformly. This is by no means accidental but rather an essential component of policing (Foucault, 2010: 311-361).
of legal repression, and the general context of the neo-Conservatives’ rise to power, might not have been foreign to Mead’s decision to move permanently to Berlin that very year.

Despite being arguably more permissive regarding artistic creation, moving to Europe did not mark the end of troubles for Mead. The first major incident occurred in 2004 and presages the 2015 lawsuit. A group exhibition titled *When Love Turns Poison* at Berlin’s Kunstraum Bethanien was at the centre of a major controversy. Bethanien is a cultural centre not unlike La Friche, established in an abandoned Deaconess hospital and funded by the Berlin city government. The spark was ignited when Andreas Roy, a well-known religious fanatic and activist, profited from the media exposure from the public opening to damage approximately 20 of the works on display, shutting down the show temporarily. Mead’s “First Communion” was destroyed, a comparatively tame painting of Jesus giving the Eucharist to two little girls, one of them eagerly pulling on his robe. A public controversy ensued, and a lawsuit filed by the high-profile lawyer Hanns-Eckhart Plöger against Cornelia Reinauer, then district mayor and head of cultural affairs of Kreuztberg-Friedrichshain, main state sponsor of Bethanien. The conservative child protection association Wildwasser publicly denounced the show, condemning its alleged promotion of child abuse. Ultimately, the show was reopened with added explanatory panels. Reinauer issued a public statement defending the artists’ right, and even duty, to challenge self-righteous morality by engaging with subjects considered immoral or distasteful. She went as far as to denounce the attempts at censorship as reminiscent of Nazi era assaults on “degenerate art.” (Kirves, 2004) The lawsuit against her was never carried through.

Controversies like this illustrate that, in the context of liberal democratic societies, most forms of censorship aim to restrain the distribution and the promotion of works, rather than their production. Despite the Berlin and Marseille controversies revolving largely around the moral and aesthetic value of Mead’s work, and although motivated by political or moral concerns, the looming threat of legal censorship was by nature economic. In both cases, censorship specifically targeted publicly funded
institutions. The question of the allocation of public funds was at the centre of both controversies. The character of Mead’s art, judged to be morally reprehensible and aesthetically dubious, was, of course, seized by its accusers. But ultimately, it is the allocation of public funds for the distribution of his works that made it a target of legal action. Inasmuch as most zine-related activities are not directly funded by the state and fall in the cracks of established distribution channels, most zine makers are relatively protected from such attempts.

In the United States, the creation of the Comics Code Authority in 1954, undoubtedly the most important case of economic censorship related to zine history, showed how censorship can in fact encourage zine production. Typical of American cultural industries in the postwar context, the Comics Code was an attempt from the major publishers, backed by a senatorial commission, to steer clear of mounting public criticism over the morality of comics’ contents. Specialists—including psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, who later came to play an unlikely role in zine history as the author of the first academic monography on zines—claimed that the contents of comics encouraged juvenile delinquency, idleness, violence, sexual promiscuity, and intellectual degeneration (Wertham, 1954; Beaty, 2005). The Comics Code Authority’s seal of approval, visible on the covers of comic books until 2011, guaranteed customers of the moral quality of a comic book’s contents, strongly impacting their distribution (Gabilliet, 2020: 72). Most sellers were not willing to take the economic risk implied in the selling of comics to a limited audience. Fashioning itself as a form of self-censorship from within the industry, the Comics Code promoted the most powerful publishers to the position of “competitor censors,” such that state intervention came to reinforce an oligopoly that greatly contributed to standardize comics production (Kidman, 2015: 33). This pushed artists and publishers in the margins of the publishing field, fuelling zine publishing:

The first comic books to escape the constraints of the Comics Code came from outside the industry in the form of underground comics. Underground comics were the products of the counterculture that flourished in America in the late 1960s and
1970s. They were first published in the underground press and then moved to “fanzines,” small-circulation fan magazines produced by amateur cartoonists (Nyberg, 1994: 527–528)

Freed from the pressure of reaching for the broadest audience, a whole new generation of underground comics artists could push their art further in the prohibited direction (Gardner, 2017). Robert Crumb, often cited by graphzine artists including Mead as a major inspiration, was among them.95

The development of underground comics in the United States is a patent example of how economic forms of censorship are internalized by the actors of the cultural field. This might, for example, take the form of audience targeting, inflecting the production to adapt works to their intended reception, from narrow niches to the broadest public (Bourdieu, 1993: 83–85). The question of a work’s “accessibility,” often discussed in terms of aesthetics or scholarly prerequisites, can also be understood economically or in terms of availability in relationship with its prospective audience(s): accessible (or not) for whom? This form of audience-based internalized censorship has also cultural and specifically artistic foundations. The internal dynamics of the cultural field themselves entail a form of control—imposed or self-inflicted—according to the field’s own values, criteria, and implicit conventions. This form of specifically artistic or cultural censorship is, in fact, one of the main inner workings of any field of cultural production:

each new entrant must reckon with the established order in the field, with the rule of the game immanent in the game, and knowledge and recognition (illusio) of the game are tacitly imposed on all who take part in it […] Like a language, this code acts both as a censor, by the possible it excludes in fact or by right, and a means of expression enclosing within defined limits the possibilities of infinite invention it provides; it functions as a historically situated and dated system of schemas of perception, appreciation and expression which define the social conditions of possibility—and, by the same token, the limits—of the production and circulation of cultural works, and which exist both in an objectified state, in the structures constitutive of the field,

95 “ever since I was 15 years old, I had been a big fan of Robert Crumb and the underground comics of the late ’60s.” (Mead, 2017: n.p.)
and in an incorporated state, in the mental structures and dispositions constitutive of the habitus. (Bourdieu, 1996: 270)

By choosing the margins, zine makers effectively disengage from the cultural field, alleviating the most severe forms of self-censorship.

4.3.2. Counter Strategies

Zine culture offers a relaxation from the values—moral and aesthetic—of the more legitimated spheres of the cultural field. When compared to more recognized and valued publications or artworks, zines can easily appear as being off anachronistic and of poor taste. The DIY ethics prevalent in zine culture lowers barriers to participation. What would elsewhere be considered distasteful or unacceptable—for whatever reason, aesthetic, moral, or else—can, and does, circulate more freely in zines. In fact, being rejected from the more privileged and legitimate spheres of the cultural field is sometimes worn as a badge of honour by zinesters who celebrate zine openness against the self-serving games played by more integrated artists. From that perspective, the very immorality of Mead’s work can be understood as a claim to his autonomy as an artist, an attitude that has long prevailed in literary and art history. This is what Néret understands as the decidedly unassimilable character of Mead’s work for any cultural institution: “there’s no doubt that Stu Mead’s work will long remain irrecuperable—such is its outstanding greatness.” (Néret, 2019a: 70) This “right” to poor taste was fought for by generations of zine makers: “Labeled losers by mainstream society, zinesters write to one another, glorifying their loserdom, and in the process making this negative label a positive one.”

96 “as witnessed by the trials mounted against them, whose serious side should not be underestimated, the proponents of ‘pure art’ go much further than their apparently more radical fellow-travelers: aesthetic detachment—constituting, as we shall see, the veritable principle of the symbolic revolution they are carrying out—leads them to break with the moral conformism of bourgeois art without falling into that other form of ethical complacency illustrated by the proponents of ‘social art’” (Bourdieu, 1996: 75–76).
The “artistic” value of zines is thus in tension with more zine-specific values, including sincerity/authenticity, social relationships (friendships), and community.

This is particularly visible in Man Bag, the zine that launched Mead’s career as an artist. One of the most striking aspects of Man Bag is the idiosyncratic type of community it fostered. Reading through the six issues, it becomes increasingly clear that the zine makers, and especially Gaard, developed a close relationship with the zine’s readership. As he recounted in detail his most memorable sexual experiences and explored his fantasies in stream-of-consciousness-like writing, it was received by an active audience who would sometimes directly interact with him:

I had a new girlfriend, and one day when I was leaving her apartment she said, “When do I get to piss on you?” It was unforgettable, and so I repeat it here once again to make the point that when you get what you want, you come back for more. Of course, I did wonder how she knew that I liked golden showers. My suspicion is that she had read about it in Man Bag […] that was the point of Man Bag—that we gave something unique to our readers and we were rewarded modestly for our true confessions, to be sure. (Gaard, 2017: n.p.)

A sex community not unlike those common in feminist and queer zine circles started to develop, encouraged by the confessional nature of Gaard’s writing. In fact, Gaard’s memories are strangely reminiscent of Piepmeier’s celebration of the embodied communities fostered by the feminist zines produced at around the same time as Man Bag was being published: “The embodied community of the zine world is intimate rather than extensive, and linked to the body rather than simply to an imagined other. The materiality of zines creates community that is embodied because it activates bodily experiences such as pleasure, affection, allegiance, and vulnerability.” (Piepmeier, 2009: 79)

It is worth situating Man Bag in this context. The first two issues were reviewed in Factsheet Five’s “Sex” category—in issues 46 (1992) and 48 (1993)—together with one or two dozen zines in the same vein, ranging from the defense of sexual rights to the promotion of sexual violence and abuse. Noteworthy is the mention, in the heading of the section, of age statement requirements for the purchase of sexually explicit zines through the mail: “help the publisher avoid legal hassles associated
with distributing sexually explicit materials […] under the increasingly fascistic political climate, it might be illegal to merely possess, let alone order or publish some of these zines.” (Factsheet Five # 46, 1992:7; 31) Based on the reviews—generally disapproving—we can see that Man Bag was neither the most distasteful nor the most disapproved zine in its category. One notable example was Uncommon Desires Newsletter, “A serious discussion on the sexual rights of minors, the attraction adults (both men and women) have towards minors, and the draconian laws against, and persecutions of people who express these desires,” the review of which is followed by this statement:

Like all publications which explore these topics, UDN was read, reviewed and then destroyed […] We here at Factsheet Five do not encourage or advocate the production or distribution of any materials which run afoul of U.S. law. We also don’t believe this publication contradicts such laws. Readers should keep in mind that our reviews do not necessarily constitute an endorsement of the ideas contained in the publications. (Friedman, 1993: 39)

At least, Gaard and Mead were artists; they channelled their impulses through creative means. Perhaps more importantly, they fully acknowledged being perverts, and never tried to inspire pity or sought absolution.

Key to the strategy employed by many zinesters is the multiplication of outlets for their production. Mead and Le Dernier Cri are exemplary in this regard, positioning themselves at the crossing of three different markets, each with their own specific logics: the book chain, the art market, and zine culture. Le Dernier Cri’s graphzines are sold on the shelves of bookstores specializing in zines and artists’ publications across the world. The publisher has also established its own international network of artists and buyers, its online shop tapping into a niche of the art market. Finally, through its own festival and other similar events, it is part of a circuit of zine fairs and festivals across France and Europe, even reaching Quebec, as we have seen.

Although they can be considered as moderately expensive for zine standards, Le Dernier Cri’s graphzines are overall reasonably priced, and even cheap compared to artworks and artists’ books of
their standing. Its graphzines and prints are sold the same flat price, the reputation of the artists behind them notwithstanding. The works are never repriced either, making the older progressively more affordable as time passes. The economic strategy of Le Dernier Cri thus positions it advantageously, most importantly allowing the publisher to produce without thinking too much about its intended audience. Circulation and affordability are privileged over profit and prestige, alleviating the internalized economic censorship imposed on actors of the mainstream cultural field.97

Similar goals are achieved by establishing translocal connections. Generally speaking, the level of international reach for a given form of cultural production or activity can be understood in three ways, indicating a certain degree of autonomy, a leverage used to gain more autonomy within the field of cultural production, and a political tool to circumvent attempts at legal censorship and repression (Casanova, 2004: 413–414). It is not by chance that subversive artists and publishers like Mead and Le Dernier Cri are better known in small circles stretching internationally than in their own local scene or national field. Laws only apply within the borders of the state, and national cultural fields tend to evolve following parallel but separate paths. Individual actors and organizations are, on the other hand, mobile. At odds with the prevalent tastes and preferences, subject to legal censorship, and struggling to find a market for their output, zinesters can gather through international networks the necessary numbers and infrastructure to sustain their practice. Even before moving to Berlin, Mead’s works were more circulated in Europe than in his home country. In such a case, it is the transitive and fluid character of a zine economy ungoverned by the standards of conventional publishing and art distribution that plays an instrumental role. Mead recalls:

I had visited Paris in 1994, bringing with me copies of Man Bag and Artpolice. Someone had recommended that I go to a bookshop called Un Regard Moderne, [...] I was hoping that he [Jacques Noël] would take a few copies on consignment, but instead

97 “The pictures are pretty much done without anyone in mind as an audience. When I do them, I strive towards forgetting who else would see them, so that I can pour myself into the picture. It’s always about me. Either I’m the male figure in the picture or it’s me voyeuring into a scene with females in it.” (Cerio & Mead, 1997)
he bought several copies from me on the spot. A few months later, Pakito Bolino bought copies of *Man Bag*. Le Dernier Cri produced the first compilation of the zine in 1999 (Mead, 2017: n. p.)

Through Le Dernier Cri’s publications, Mead was then introduced to the European graphzine translocal network, eventually publishing his work in Paris (Timeless), Berlin (Bongoût/Re: Surgo) and Brussels (E²/Sterput).

**Conclusion**

What is the real meaning of Mead’s work? For Bolino and Le Dernier Cri, Mead’s work is an argument in favour of freedom of creation, for the struggle of artists challenging the “visual totalitarianism” of contemporary culture. For graphzine historian Xavier-Gilles Néret, as we have seen, the radical immorality of Mead’s work is a claim for autonomy, a challenge to the co-opting instances of the field of art. Others consider it a form of “graphic terrorism” that threatens to destroy the world (Néret, 2019b). For Innocence en danger and Mead’s far-right accusers, it is a symbol of moral decadence, a sign of the corruption of the state and of the delusions of a parasitic artistic class. From their perspective, Mead’s work is not art—“a so-called cultural exhibition” (Innocence en Danger, 2015)—but pornography, a license to pedophiles and an incitement to child abuse.

Mead’s characterization of his own work has changed to the point of contradicting itself over the years. One thing that’s always been clear, however, is that his intention was never to incite or glamorize child abuse:

As early as 1995 […] I was publicly separating myself from pedophiles. And in 2019, in *Nymphia Stummadiana* [published by E²/Sterput], I said, “In our time, the word ‘pedophilia’ is defined as the adult desire to sexually abuse children. Of course, adults must be prohibited from harming children in any way, including by imposing their adult sexuality.” My position has not changed. (quoted in Néret, 2023: 60)

98 Note also this early comment: “Growing up disabled, I know what it’s like to have a rough time of it as a kid. For me to impose sexuality on a kid would be impossible to do. But I do think I am a pervert.” (in Cerio & Mead, 1997)
For some others, like Frédéric Poincet—himself a graphzine artist published by Le Dernier Cri—Mead’s work is paradoxically too cerebral, not embodied enough. The finish of his paintings, almost neoclassical, is said to hide and hamper desire more than exhibit and incite it: “As if expressing one’s obsessions otherwise than in this cold-hearted manner were indecent” (Delmas & Poincet, 2018). Mead himself seems to agree in part with Poincet, when saying that, contrary to the United States, people in Europe were “more willing to accept the fact that fantasies are something that happens in the head; you can have ideas that you won’t realize in reality” (LDC & Mead, 1999: 6).

Some have even suggested feminist interpretations. Cornelia Reinauer, when targeted by lawsuit in the Kunstraum Bethanien controversy in 2004, insisted in her defense of Mead that the girls he represented were never helpless or defenseless, but, on the contrary, self-confident young women who would “vigorously slap the fingers of anyone who would dare approach them.” (In Kirves, 2004) For the Czech radical feminist artist Lenka Klodová, “Stu’s pictures are an authentic depiction of that rare moment when a girl discovers her power,” adding, as she discovered his work with the 1999 reedition of Man Bag by Le Dernier Cri, “Looking at those comics, I felt as if I had drawn them myself” (Klodová, 2016: 3). This certainly seems a far-fetched interpretation. Despite some women having played major roles in French zine history (Jacqueline Osterrath, Olivia Clavel, Caroline Sury), French zine culture appears to lag “behind” North American or even other European zine cultures when it comes to the place of feminism and female representation. Zobl’s 2004 survey does not include Riot.

99 “On voit souvent dans la production graphique underground des étalages de fantasmes sexuels mais d’une façon très mentale, et peu charnelle. Comme si exprimer ses obsessions autrement que d’une manière froide était indécent […] J’adore le dessin de Stu Mead ou de Toshio Saeki, mais comme tu le dis ; c’est très mental.

100 « Ici, la sexualité n’est pas considérée comme quelque chose de cérébral. Les gens ont de plus en plus peur d’être hors-norme. Il me semble qu’en Europe on accepte plus facilement le fait que les fantasmes se passent plus dans la tête ; tu peux avoir des idées que tu ne réaliseras pas dans la réalité. Chez nous il n’y a aucune distinction à ce niveau là… » (My translation)

101 „Die kritisierten Arbeiten von Stu Mead thematisieren die Probleme und Phantasien von Halbwüchsigen, ohne sie an irgendeiner Stelle als hilf- oder wehrlose Personen darzustellen, sondern im Gegenteil als selbstbewusste eigenständige junge Menschen, die eher ausstrahlen, dass sie jedem kräftig auf die Finger hauen werden, der sich ihnen nähert.“ (My translation)
Grrrl zine distros in France, Belgium, or Switzerland. It includes, however, many other European countries: Finland, Germany, Holland, Italy, Poland, Sweden (Zobl, 2004: 159). The Riot Grrrl revolution only belatedly caught on in France, probably not before the first Ladyfests were organized there in 2003 (Labry, 2010; Barrière, 2020). This is not to say that French feminism has not been an important and dynamic movement; it has been for a very long time and continues to be. However, its influence on zine culture seems to be only recent and to generate conflict opposing a younger, less male-dominated and more feminist generation to their predecessors, often associated with graphzines (Parzonko, 2023: 89).

What do I think about it? I must admit I am not too sure. What I am sure of, however, is that, from the perspective of zine research, it is more fruitful to account for the multiplicity of points of view than to side with one or the other. Mead’s work seems to arouse and trigger the fears and fantasies of anyone it comes across. Tapping into the strongest of taboos, it is a remarkable indicator. Its circulation, and the reactions it begets, reveal the attitudes and values—aesthetic, ethical, political—guiding the appreciation and evaluation of zines. As artworks, the meaning of Mead’s work is, for all intents and purposes, irrelevant. Artworks do not “mean” in the same way as communication and messages do. As Deleuze bluntly puts it: “What does a work of art have to do with communication? Nothing […] The work of art contains absolutely no information whatsoever.” (Deleuze, 1987: n.p.)

This seems to be the conception underlying the writing of a contributor to Libération who paraphrased Magritte to address the Stu Mead case: “This is not a little girl” (Anon., 2020).

102 « Quel est le rapport de l’œuvre d’art avec la communication ? Aucun […] l’œuvre d’art n’est pas un instrument de communication. L’œuvre d’art n’a rien à faire avec la communication. L’œuvre d’art ne contient strictement pas la moindre information. » (My translation)

103 « Ceci n’est pas une petite fille » (my translation)
This distinction between art and communication is at the heart of the Observatoire de la liberté de création’s defense of artists like Mead, prosecuted under articles 227–23 and 227–24 of the French penal code. According to the Observatoire’s manifesto, published in 2003,

A work of art, whether through words, sounds or images, is necessarily in the order of representation. By its very nature, it therefore imposes a distancing and should not be confused with reality. This is why artists are free to disturb, provoke, and even scandalize. And this is also why the work of artists […] cannot, in legal terms, be treated as argumentative discourse, whether it be scientific, political, or journalistic (OLC, 2003).104

In the context in which Stu Mead first developed his art—American zine culture of the 1980s and 1990s—it was generally understood that, beyond anything, zines were a means of communication. This idea still has exceptional currency in zine scholarship today105. Yet, the recent decades have seen a shift in zine production from communication to art, a shift that the work of Stu Mead—from Artpolice and Man Bag to his oil paintings—amply illustrates.

Mead, Le Dernier Cri, and the broader context of French zine culture highlights a series of questions often obscured in Zine Studies, which has been too focused on American zine culture of the 1990s. First is this shift towards a new paradigm, bringing zines closer to the cultural field, notably the field of art. French graphzines are perhaps the first manifestation of this shift in international zine culture. As early as the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, collectives like Elles sont de sortie published zines that, although clearly inspired by punk, had almost nothing to do with the punk zines multiplying at that time in the United Kingdom and the United States. Drawing from these zines, graphzines pushed further in the direction of art, getting progressively rid of any traces of communication. Graphzine

104 « L’œuvre d’art, qu’elle travaille les mots, les sons ou les images, est toujours de l’ordre de la représentation. Elle impose donc par nature une distanciation qui permet de l’accueillir sans la confondre avec la réalité. C’est pourquoi l’artiste est libre de déranger, de provoquer, voire de faire scandale. Et c’est pourquoi son œuvre jouit d’un statut exceptionnel, et ne saurait, sur le plan juridique, faire l’objet du même traitement que le discours qui argumente, qu’il soit scientifique, politique ou journalistique » (my translation).

This argument is developed in full, specifically in relation to the Stu Mead case by lawyer Agnès Tricoire, regular collaborator to the Observatoire de la liberté de création (Paulré, 2023).

105 For recent examples, see Buchanan, 2018 and Guerra & Quintela, 2021.
artist Blex Bolex explains the difference as he sees it: “Graphzines are avowed performances in their production, as much as zines can be in the quality (questionable or not) of their subject matter […] One can imagine zines about graphzines (and there are some) but the opposite cannot be.” (Quoted in Tuset-Anrès, 2018: 61)\textsuperscript{106}

Second, French zine culture shows signs of remarkable adaption to the broader national cultural context in which it has developed. It is profoundly influenced by the configuration of the French cultural field: the important place given to comics and publishing, its strong reliance on state funding, its willingness to “nationalize” foreign, and in particular American cultural influences. It is furthermore organized at a scale that mirrors the dissemination of the French cultural influence in Europe: French zines are published almost exclusively in French, and circulated into an integrated network of translocal scenes extending into French-speaking parts of Belgium and Switzerland. This might be attributable to the early spread of art zines through graphzines, or by some “French exceptionalism” regarding culture. It seems likely, however, that similar divergences and forms of national appropriation of zine culture could be observed in other countries as well, given that we take the care needed to see them.

Third, parallel to this “nationalization” of zine culture, French zine politics is also affected by forms of political intervention usually reserved to more “mainstream” or legitimate cultural activities and production. In many ways, zine culture provides a negative image of cultural policies in place, the main sources of funding for the arts, and the legal restrictions of freedom of speech and creation. Most zines fall through the cracks of state intervention. Their way of adapting to their cultural context

\textsuperscript{106} « Le graphzine est de l’ordre de la performance déclarée dans sa production, autant que le fanzine peut l’être dans la qualité (discutable ou non) de son propos. Le graphzine peut se passer de tout propos, le fanzine, non […] on peut imaginer des fanzines qui parlent de graphzines (et il en existe), l’inverse d’existe pas. » (My translation)
illustrates the extent of state intervention in matters of culture. French zines might offer a way to draw a loose but real connection between zine culture and politics at the national level.

There was, in the summer of 2022, an end-of-cycle atmosphere surrounding Le Dernier Cri and the whole genre it came to represent. The threats from the far-right and the lawsuit—still pending after the trial being postponed to an unknown date yet again in the Spring of 2023—seemed to coincide with a sense that a part of zine culture was ready to turn their back on this older generation of graphzine artists and publishers. Anticipation of the verdict was obsessive and grueling; Le Dernier Cri was sending parts of its stock and archives to places like La Fanzinothèque, expecting police searches or a new prosecution. Growing criticisms of the work of artists like Mead, although mostly half-spoken, suggested that maybe graphzine artists and publishers were losing touch with the broader zine community. More importantly, younger zine makers simply did not seem to care too much about graphzines, understood to be—aesthetically if not ethically or politically—an older genre of art zines. This is perhaps the greatest irony of the case against Mead, and what it tells us of the status of graphzines in French zine culture today: neither unacceptable nor subversive, but simply, perhaps, the outdated precursors of contemporary zine culture.
Chapter 5  The Teal Triggs Affair

On August 24, 2010, American zinester Ramsey Beyer—author of the zines *List* and *everydaypants* and then co-organizer of the Chicago Zine Fest—posted on We Make Zines (WMZ), a social networking website “for zinesters—writers and readers” (WMZ, 2008). Titled “how do y’all feel about this?” the discussion thread opened with a copy-pasted email Beyer had just received from Teal Triggs, a British scholar:

Dear Ramsey
I am currently completing a book called FANZINES (Thames & Hudson) and have included the cover of *List*/*Goodbye, Baltimore*, no. 12 (fall 2008), fully credited in the book.
My book looks at the history of fanzines in a general overview of UK and USA-based self-publishing. As a good example of an interesting contemporary personal zine it would be remiss not to include it in any history of fanzines. The book is due out in September and I hope this will establish the importance of this form of self-publishing.
I do hope this is okay.
Yours sincerely,
Prof Teal Triggs
University of the Arts London
(ramsey everydaypants on August 24, 2010 at 6:11 pm)

Beyer was not the only one to receive such an email. Many others were sent around the same time to other zinesters whose work had been reproduced in the book. Those emails were sent only a few weeks away from the book launch, planned for September 20 (Mak, 2010).

Teal Triggs is Professor at the London Royal College of Art and specializes in graphic design history, with a particular focus on self-publishing practices and feminism. As a zine scholar, she has been active in British zine scenes since the mid-1990s, publishing articles and books on zines and

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107 References to the discussion thread will be noted indicating the author, the date and the time of the day. We Make Zines has been offline since February 2021. As I am writing this, the last signs of activity from the website’s social media were dated of April 2021, leaving little hope as to its return. Unfortunately, only about 3/5 of the discussion thread have been archived on Internet Archive’s WayBack Machine (everydaypants, 2017).
graphic design. In 2001, she co-edited with Roger Sabin an important early collection of essays on zines and alternative comics titled *Below Critical Rader* and aimed at making “a few bleeping sounds on the monitor” of the mainstream (Sabin & Triggs, 2001: 5). Her Ph.D. dissertation (Triggs, 2004) engaged with the politics and aesthetics of British punk and Riot Grrrl zines, consolidating her place as one of the leading British zine scholars, perhaps on par only with Chris Atton. As professor at the London College of Communication, she continued to publish articles on the topic (Triggs, 2006). The publication of *Fanzines* in 2010 thus appeared as a logical step in an already well-established academic career focused on the study of zines and zine culture.

From the perspective of people active on WMZ, however, the situation appeared completely different. Most of them were Americans; they had not heard of Triggs before and were generally unaware of her credentials in British zine culture. The surprise email sparked a series of interrogations about the book and its author. How many zine makers were thus contacted? Why contact them so late? Given the timing, it appeared to some that the book was already printed before Triggs emailed them, a fact that Triggs seemed to vaguely confirm when some asked her to make modifications to how their work was credited.

What ensued was a long and at times heated debate within the zine community that quickly spread to other platforms, and that was later called the “Teal Triggs Affair” (Lymn, 2014: 49). Some zine makers strongly opposed Triggs and the book, leading a campaign across many platforms: zines, zine-related magazines, podcasts, websites and blogs. Others sided with Triggs, or at least downplayed her opponents’ arguments. Both drew from their vision of what zine culture was and ought to be in order to support their interventions.

From the researcher’s point of view, the Teal Triggs Affair is an entry of choice into the politics of contemporary zine culture. It brings to the fore not only the place zine scholars and Zine Studies
have come to play but also more fundamental questions regarding who is authorized and legitimate to act as a representative of the culture. Further, it illustrates the complex institutional configuration of contemporary zine culture, in which a range of actors take part alongside zine makers. After exploring thoroughly the details of the Affair building on a historical and sociological theory of affairs developed by Bolstanski and Claverie, this chapter will touch upon the complex topic of political representation in zine culture. This will then lead me to a closer look into the institutional configuration of contemporary zine culture, and in particular the increasing role librarians and scholars have acquired over the last three decades. With this in hand, I will conclude by laying out my own idea of what academics can bring to zine culture.

5.1. The Details of the Affair

In early March of 2011, months after the *Fanzines* book was released, Alex Wrekk and Derek Neuland made an episode on the Affair for their podcast, *Nobody Cares About Your Stupid Zine Podcast* (Wrekk & Neuland, 2011). They interviewed what had then become leading figures of the anti-Triggs camp: Beyer, who had started the We Make Zines thread; Amber Forrester, a zinester based in Montreal (*Fight Boredom, Culture Slut*); and Jerianne Thompson, zine librarian, editor and publisher of *Zine World*, an important magazine dedicated to zines and zine culture.

Wrekk herself was a prominent voice in the anti-Triggs camp. She has been publishing zines since the 1990s, engaging with topics such as identity, punk culture, DIY ethics, environmental issues, and feminism (Buchanan, 2009: 110–138). With 34 issues since 1997, her serial *Brainscan* is one of the most influential perzine of the last decades. Playing an active role in the scene of Portland, Oregon, she participated in the organization of the Portland Zine Symposium, one of the longest running-zine festivals, which started in 2001. Wrekk was also involved in Microcosm Publishing until 2006, a major
publisher and distributor of zines and zine-related books. Her zine/little book *Stolen Sharpie Revolution*, first published in 2002 and reedited five times since, is a definite reference and one of the most circulated publications on zines and zine making. It has established its author as a leading figure of zine culture in the United States and internationally.

Amber Forrester first came forward in the Affair when her sister, Maranda Elizabeth, wrote on the WMZ thread to note how Triggs had miscredited her work in the book. The problem was that Triggs had used her old name as included in the copy of the zine she credited, and this after both sisters had gone through years of legal trouble and paperwork to change it (Maranda Elizabeth on August 25, 2010 at 8:17 am). Forrester then took an active part in the WMZ thread and posted several times on her personal blog on the matter (Forrester, 2010a; 2010b; 2010c). In December 2010, Forrester put the *Fanzines by Teal Triggs* website online in an effort to consolidate the opposition against Triggs. The website gathered information about the book: the zines featured in it without permission, the factual errors it contained, and the articles, blog posts, as well as other materials related to the controversy. It also included a “What You Can Do” section encouraging people to write about the book, review it negatively on online shopping platforms, or write directly to Triggs or the publisher to air their grievances. Instructions to get a free contributor’s copy of the book from the publisher were also provided.

After discussing the Affair at length in the We Make Zines thread, Jerianne Thompson decided to take the matter further. Her role as zine librarian and editor of *Zine World* positioned her strategically. After unfruitfully requesting more information from Triggs via email, Thompson turned to the *Zine World* blog, in addition to actively contributing to the WMZ discussion. Later, in February, she published a column on the Affair in the 30th issue of *Zine World*, titled “Why I’m Mad About the New Fanzines Book.” The column gave an update on the controversy for those who might not have followed the WMZ discussion. Thompson noted the actions taken by Wrekk, Forrester and others,
including old-time riot grrrl zinester Tobi Vail, who published on the matter in her zine turned blog *Jigsaw* (Vail, 2010b). She summed up the most important criticism levelled against Triggs and Thames and Hudson: the disrespect both had shown to zine makers, the copyright issues raised, the zine ethics regarding republication, the matter of zines’ exposure beyond the intimacy of zine culture, and the overall credibility and authority of zine scholars such as Triggs. In short, Thompson’s account shows how the incident had developed into a full-blown affair.

French sociologist Luc Boltanski and historian Élisabeth Claverie highlight the defining elements of a typical affair. The Teal Triggs Affair matches their description perfectly:

> These scenarios almost always include the same elements: accusations, justifications, criticisms, the production of evidence, the development of a plurality of incompatible narratives, the exposure of hidden and base motives, an ascension into generality, […] an appeal to public opinion and popular verdict, and a feverish quest for support and backing (Boltanski & Claverie, 2007: 403–404).\(^{108}\)

What started as a series of personal grievances quickly evolved into a larger debate touching upon the fundamental values of the zine community. The initial appeal from Beyer unmistakably addressed the zine public, if only by the title she chose for the discussion thread: “how do y’all feel about this?” As it became understood that many zine makers had received the same email from Triggs, the question of individual reparations evolved into larger, collective, and more fundamental questions. The public character of the discussion (public by zine standards, that is) also incited an increasing number of participants to get involved. The cause, raised by those immediately affected by Triggs’s actions, was picked up by regular participants in WMZ discussions, zine enthusiasts, and actors of various horizons. In the process, the grievances aired turned from individual to collective, appealing to increasingly fundamental values and principles.

\(^{108}\) « Ces intrigues souvent très longues […] comportent presque toujours des traits similaires : des accusations, des justifications, des critiques, le déroulement de preuves, le développement d’une pluralité de récits incompatibles, le dévoilement de motifs cachés et bas, un effort de montée en généralité […] un appel au jugement de l’opinion publique – au verdict populaire –, une quête fébrile de soutiens et d’appuis » (my translation)
Discussions over copyrights illustrated this perfectly. Participants were quick to suggest legal action to claim royalties:

[This is] Not just bad form, but probably illegal. I don’t know how far you want to take it, but at the very least I’d contact the publisher and let them know that she’s reproducing material without permission. How does someone get as far as publishing a book and not know Copyright 101? :/ (Erica S. on August 24, 2010 at 8:28 pm)

A few days later, the conversation had moved from individual compensations and the status of copyrights in zine culture, to the prevailing ethics regarding republications of zine contents. Whether it was illegal or not, it was pointed out that Triggs’s practices were at odds with fundamental zine ethics: “she must have known that her approach (of taking first and asking for forgiveness later) would have been viewed by zine publishers as impolite and unethical at the very least,” wrote Jerianne Thompson (September 4, 2010 at 6:58 am). Such an “upward trend towards generalization” is, for Bolstanski and Claverie, an essential component of any successful affair: “A successful affair is considered a ‘collective’ one. When an affair fails, it is dismissed as personal, psychological, if not psychiatric.” (Boltanski & Claverie, 2007: 408)

As the scope of the debate broadened, however, some participants started to oppose the campaign against Triggs that seemed to take form. It quickly became clear that the opposing sides had diverging visions of zine culture. These divergences were heightened by the demographics of both camps. Zinesters in the anti-Triggs camp were generally younger than their adversaries, or at least appeared to be. Two prominent voices downplaying the campaign against Triggs—James N. Dawson and Dan 10things—insisted on their age and the “new ways” the anti-Triggs camp seemed to embody:

Everything seems so much more restrictive, “Mother May I”, these days. (James N. Dawson on August 26, 2010 at 6:19 pm)

Why should old-time zinesters; old fossils like Lisa and I, have to submit to your “default position” of “getting permission first” in so many things. I think the OLD

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109 “Quand une affaire réussit, elle est alors qualifiée de ‘collective’. Quand elle échoue, elle est repoussée vers l’individuel et le psychologique, voire le psychiatrique. » (My translation)
default position of having the restrictions being clearly stated is just as good, if not better. (James N. Dawson on August 29, 2010 at 9:57 am)

I think in the '80s and '90s we had a pretty different attitude towards this stuff. Many of the zine books that came out in those times didn’t notify the zines ahead of time and no one really complained about it. It just goes to show how attitudes in the zine community change over time. (Dan 10things on December 27, 2010 at 5:02 pm)

This difference was perhaps heightened by Triggs’ approach. It was discovered that the scholar did contact many zinesters in advance to ask for permission to reproduce their materials. When Forrester and others compiled the list of those who had not been contacted, they realized that most of them were younger, less established zine makers. On the other hand, most of those who had been contacted, were well established authors and artists, sometimes with careers in the mainstream.

According to Forrester, this was not by chance:

The people who write zines that she’s asked for permission are generally people who have been making zines for a long time, who are professional writers outside of zines—for example people who have put together books since then […] She contacted the people that she thought could cause trouble I think, and decided that the rest of us zinesters didn’t deserve to know, or didn’t deserve to put our say in it. I think it shows that she does see us on some sort of lower scale than other writers (in Wrekk & Neuland, 2011: 14:20–14:55).

This generational gap overlapped with a gender one. One of the most striking differences between the zine culture of the 1990s and that of the 2010s was, of course, the mark left by the Riot Grrrl movement. The generational gap highlighted by the Affair necessarily implied a second one, based on gender politics. Most opponents to the campaign against Triggs happened to be men, while the most vocal members of the anti-Triggs camp were not. This connection between old-fashioned attitudes, age, and gender was remarked with irony by Forrester:

I like the way these dudes are all THAT’S NOT HOW WE DID IT IN THE 90S and FUCK COPYRIGHT FUCK THE MAINSTREAM, yet expect us to be thankful to have been misrepresented in a book cashing in on the current 90s trend, being sold at Chapters and Amazon, and even hipster outlets like Urban Outfitters and Mod Cloth. Um, what? (Amber/Culture Slut, quoted by whatpeoplearethinking on January 2, 2011 at 4:37)
The opposition between both camps thus highlighted deeper fault lines within the community. This is perhaps one of the key characteristics of affairs like the Teal Triggs Affair: their tendency to uncover and reactivate underlying tensions and divides. Affairs reveal, like a chemical agent developing a photograph, not only the values but also the hidden fault lines within the community.

5.2. Zine Scholars, Legitimacy, and Representation

It is impossible to understand the backdrop against which the Teal Triggs Affair unfolded without understanding the recent development of Zine Studies as an increasingly self-conscious and codified field of scholarship. Since the publication of Duncombe’s *Notes from Underground* in 1997, academic studies on zines and zine culture have multiplied. Given the mark left by Duncombe’s work on this literature, it is worth examining its lasting effects.

The success of Duncombe’s work can no doubt in part be attributed to its way of approaching zine culture. One point emphasized throughout *Notes from Underground* is the importance of direct contact with the culture. Methodologically, Duncombe mobilized his own experience with the New York scene, relying extensively on interviews, correspondence, and participant observation. According to Janice Radway, who proposed some of the most interesting reflections on the history of Zine Studies as an emerging area of scholarship, “Duncombe’s book deserves its reputation in part because of his complex history as former punk band member, political activist, zinester, and academic […] The tension between these various subject positions makes *Notes* uniquely generative for those following in its wake.” (Radway, 2011: 142)

Given the ubiquitous presence of Duncombe’s work in zine scholarship up to this day, it should come as no surprise that direct contact with zine makers has almost become a necessary condition for establishing the legitimacy of a zine researcher. This ‘by and for’ principle, a companion of the Do-It-
Yourself ethics central to zine culture (Duncombe, 1997:2), has governed Zine Studies ever since. A good illustration of this is the fact that it has become a routine exercise for zine scholars to disclose their personal connection to zine making—or lack thereof—in their writing. Even those without proper zine making credentials feel the need to inform their readers. Thus Radway herself, who writes: “Although I have never been a zinester, I became interested in them around the time Duncombe was writing his dissertation and his book. My interest developed because the daughter of a friend became involved in Riot Grrrl and the zine-ing that emerged around it.” (Radway, 2011: 143)

Zines have, of course, been both objects and subjects of knowledge production since they first appeared in the 1930s. Most early fan activities—collecting and trading science fiction-related materials, organizing into clubs, looking for rare editions of science fiction stories, gathering complete series of magazines, producing bibliographies and biographies of writers and fans, comparing characters, stories, authors, and styles—amounted to the same kind of activity as routinely practiced by scholars (Boltanski, 2014: 286). Zines themselves quickly became objects of fans’ attention. As early as the 1930s and 1940s, many zines included proto studies in the form of bibliographies, critiques, and histories. This is what Radway calls an “endogenous research apparatus”:

This literature appeared in compilations and anthologies, in analytic articles published in the alternative press, in books written by zinesters yet published by mainstream presses, and in online materials […] Together, these venues function as an indigenous research apparatus, a method of community self-definition, a kind of boosterism and subcultural cheerleading, a recruitment tool, and a critical review literature on the do-it-yourself world of underground communication. Often this literature contests the authority of academic expertise about zines. It acts on, further enables, and thus perpetuates the networking and community formation at the heart of zine-ing. (Radway, 2011: 144)

Radway’s preferred phrase is “indigenous research apparatus.” To avoid unnecessary confusion with indigenous research, I prefer the term “endogenous,” also used in the context of zine research by Bréan (2012). I should also note that in her article, Radway focuses exclusively on a zine corpus from the 1980s and 1990s, thus ignoring the importance endogenous research produced within fandom. Bréan closes this gap. In a similar vein, Baker & Cantillon have developed the idea of zines being used as community archives by marginalized communities (2022).
This endogenous research should not only be understood as a precursor to academic Zine Studies. It has remained an important component of zine culture to this day. The Teal Triggs Affair, as it unfolded on a wide range of platforms, showed how the practice of commenting, documenting, and making sense of zine culture by its own participants has not been made obsolete by the rise of academic Zine Studies; quite the contrary. The Affair illustrated how this endogenous research apparatus does not only coexist with but can also rival the work of zine scholars.

The “by and for” ideal for zine scholarship set by Duncombe was, of course, strongly tied to his emphasis on zine politics. Further academic Zine Studies following in his wake has been understood through the same political lens. Research engaging with zines—endogenous or academic—has been portrayed as inherently political, reflecting the political inclinations of zine culture. This is sometimes considered proof of the symbiotic relationship between zine makers and scholars. For Radway, one could argue that this literature [Zine Studies] is in practice itself a political intervention, an effort to import zines into new social and institutional venues, to extent their lives and augment their rhetorical effects, to garner for them a new, perhaps larger audience capable of extending and building on their radical claims. In fact, I would argue that the indigenous research apparatus I mentioned earlier, the archives and collections and the librarian- and teacher-generated literature that supports them, and the academic literature are political acts that are themselves effects of zine-ing. (Radway, 2011: 145)

The legitimacy of academic Zine Studies was built on this alleged strong tie with zine making. Zine scholars were understood to be zine makers, in turn making zines and studying them in academia. This idea was accompanied by the goal of keeping the spirit of zines alive even when transplanted into academia.

In light of the Teal Triggs Affair, we must question Radway’s claim that the studies produced by zine scholars are “effects of zine-ing.” The idea of zine scholarship as a direct product of zine making provides a pacified picture of relationships potentially fraught with conflict. Zine academics might have been active zine makers before donning the academic hat. However, many zine makers remain
skeptical of academics’ intentions, to say the least. Moreover, for practical reasons, the input of zine makers in research is in most cases limited. The evolution of zine scholarship over the last two decades has intensified this discrepancy, as scholars’ attention has remained predominantly focused on zines from the 1990s, Riot Grrrl zines in particular (Hays, 2020: 14). While there are rare examples of actors of 1990s zine culture moving to academia to reflect on their own history (for instance: Wolfe, 2017), most contemporary zine scholars work on corpuses they were never directly involved in the creation of.

Already in the mid-1990s, and unbeknownst to this idea of zine scholarship emerging unmediated and straight from zine making practices themselves, Duncombe reflected on his odd positioning as a zine scholar, caught between zine culture and academia. His introduction to Notes from Underground is rather clear in this regard:

> Some readers will no doubt be disappointed—while others, I’m sure, will be thrilled—that in the pages that follow I engage more with the world of zines and less with the words of academics […] Some might also find the structure of this book unorthodox and perhaps unsettling […] Some others will be disappointed that I’ve written a book on zines at all. Isn’t this just another exploitation of zines, “selling out” the underground to the above-ground world? Perhaps. But alternative culture has already been discovered—the more important question is who will represent it and how. (Duncombe, 1997: 15–16)

This positioning necessitates a delicate balance on the part of zine scholars, who must negotiate with often contradictory expectations and imperatives. Perhaps more importantly, it demands of zine scholars to acknowledge their role as actors of zine culture and to find their place within it.

The Teal Triggs Affair shows how, despite being an idealization, the principle of academic Zine Studies stemming directly from zine making matters to zine makers. This has important consequences on how the legitimacy of zine scholars is established. In fact, we could even say that zine making remains the most important source of legitimacy for any actor of zine culture. Participants of the WMZ thread were quick to question Triggs’ credentials on this basis. Answering criticism sent directly
to her via email, Triggs replied to user Nichole with a detailed justification, a reply that she immediately posted on discussion:

I have been involved in the zine community for nearly 20 years and I am as passionate about zines as I was the first day I came across one growing up in the States. As a collector and design historian, I am asked to speak frequently on the subject in the UK, Australia and the US, at zine fayres and symposia, the women’s library, to students, etc. The majority of these talks are done gratis as I feel it important to give back what support I can. The book has emerged out of my conversations with zine producers over the years and a passion for the subject. Many of the zinesters featured in the book are friends. (Nichole on August 26, 2010 at 7:37 am)

Faced with this justification, some questioned Triggs’ legitimacy further. Others sided with her. I reproduce parts of the debate at length as it is particularly illustrative of the way legitimacy is established in zine culture:

Does anyone know what zines (if any) she used to write? (Erica S. on August 26, 2010 at 8:06 pm)

She can give all the speeches she wants, but I don’t think it makes her any more a part of the community than, say, me giving speeches about space would make me an astronaut. (Amber/Culture Slut, quoted by Aj Michel on September 1, 2010 at 5:37 pm)

I think it is possible to be a member of a “community” surrounding an item of culture without producing said item of culture. In my case, it would be indie comic and minicomics. I read many, many minicomics and self-published comics, probably more so than zines these days. I review them on my blog and attend small press events [...] I know many minicomics creators. However, I have never made a minicomic, never even tried. However, I still feel connected to the minicomic “community” through the friendships I have made, reviews I write, and conferences I attend. You don’t need to be able to create an item of culture to become deeply involved with it. (Aj Michel on September 1, 2010 at 5:37 pm)

I would consider her a pretty active part of the zine community in London/the UK to a certain extent. Although she doesn’t produce zines she regularly writes and talks about various zines in a variety of places—magazines, other fanzines, events, etc., and is pretty “present” at zine related events. I really wouldn’t ever peg her as the exploitative outsider. (R!R! on September 8, 2010 at 10:37 am)

Re-presentation, the ability for representatives to appear publicly in the name of those they represent, is a fundamental element of any community (Bourdieu, 1985; 1991b). In the context of zine culture, this authority is considered to emanate from zine making, and zine makers are regularly
identified as the most authorized voices, not only for commentary on their own work but to serve as representatives of the culture as a whole. Some zine makers push this to its logical conclusion by dismissing all non-maker actors as illegitimate. This exclusive understanding of belonging to the zine community is not necessarily well-spread. More moderate voices do, however, appear to establish the legitimacy of actors of zine culture on similar grounds. Even those siding with Triggs and trying to defend her credentials highlighted her relationship with zine makers, if not with zine making. Some might tolerate a relative distance from zine making, but a complete disconnection from practice and practitioners usually discredits any attempts at speaking on behalf of zine culture.

A comparison of Duncombe with a less successful predecessor can illustrate how important this connection with zine making is for the legitimacy of zine scholars in the eye of actors of zine culture. Fredric Wertham was the first academic to ever write a study of zine culture. His *World of Fanzines* was published in 1973, more than two decades before Duncombe’s *Notes from Underground*. A German-born American psychiatrist, Wertham was considered one of the leading specialists in his discipline after the Second World War. He gained public figure status in the 1950s for his involvement as an expert in a series of high-profile political cases. Based on his work on brain development, Wertham was summoned as an expert in the 1950 Kefauver Senatorial Committee, a public investigation into organized crime (Gabilliet, 2020: 64). He was summoned again in 1954, this time by the United States Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, chaired by the same Kefauver (Kidman, 2015). During these highly publicized hearings, Wertham published *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), a polemical essay on the role played by comics in the moral corruption of youth, thus giving his support to the creation of the Comics Code Authority, adopted the same year (Nyberg, 1994: 194–249).

While he saw comics as a source of violence and moral depravation in youth, Wertham considered zines a form of authentic communication untampered by the alienating effect of modern mass
media. The World of Fanzines, his last published book, celebrated science fiction and fantasy fanzines as “sincere and spontaneous”—a “more intimate, personal, and perhaps more democratic” form of communication than the mainstream press, functioning “outside the market and outside the profit motive.” (Wertham, 1973: 33; 74) He also insisted on the “intensely personal” character of zines, prompting “people of similar sentiments and interests to commune with one another—not only by reading their publications but also by direct contact.” (Wertham, 1973: 129; 131) Although he addressed zines from a moral rather than political point of view, his take on zine culture uncannily insists on ideas that will become commonplace in Zine Studies after Duncombe: opposition to mass media, individuality, authenticity, community, and uncensored, untampered communication.

Wertham is, however, virtually absent from zine scholarship. His reputation after the creation of the Comics Code, his disconnection from zine makers, and his patronizing approach to zine culture undoubtedly explain this fact. Despite claiming to offer “a serious study of what some would regard as trivialities” (Wertham, 1973: 34) and being obviously enamored with the object of his attention—and despite, furthermore, anticipating many of the tenets of later zine scholarship—Wertham did not enjoy the backing of zine makers, and was thus discarded as an illegitimate representative of the culture, not only by zine makers but by zine scholars as well.

5.2.1. Conflicting Legitimacies

Despite its centrality, zine making is not the source of all legitimacy in zine culture. In fact, zine culture is permeable to the hierarchies and values of the hegemonic culture in which it is immersed. Because of its marginality within the field of cultural production, the legitimacy based on zine making is thus competing with external sources of recognition and status. The recent renewal of zine culture’s

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111 See Nyberg (1998) and Beaty (2005) for an account of Wertham’s work from the perspective of comics studies.
institutional configuration, making zines appealing to a new range of actors, has intensified this
phenomenon. The difficult question of who can be considered a legitimate representative of the
culture, and on what basis, is thus complicated by the coexistence of different and potentially
contradictory sources of legitimacy.

The prominent figures of the anti-Triggs camp could rely on their status as high-profile zine
makers, as much as on their organizational roles within their own respective local scenes as publishers,
event organizers, journalists and critics, or zine distributors. Some had already established themselves
as representatives of the culture. This was the case of Alex Wrekk, whose *Stolen Sharpie Revolution* is
intentionally aimed both at zine enthusiasts and the general public. The book's webpage thus reads:
“Since 2002, *Stolen Sharpie Revolution: a DIY Resource for Zines and Zine Culture* has been the go-to guide
for all things zine related [...] *Stolen Sharpie Revolution* contains a cornucopia of information about zines
and zine culture for everyone from the zine newbie to the experienced zinesters to the academic
researcher” (Wrekk, 2023).

Wrekk’s credentials were, however, established “from the bottom up,” providing a legitimacy
perhaps limited in the cultural field at large but strongly rooted in zine culture. On the other hand,
Teal Triggs’s status, especially in the United States, was that of a relative outsider, and this on many
levels: as British instead of American, as collector and academic instead of zine maker. The dual and
conflicted nature of Triggs’s legitimacy was thoroughly used by her adversaries against her. It was
pointed out that Triggs had not respected the rules of the community, that her carelessness had hurt
zine makers, and that, on top of it, she was to make a profit out of it. Many highlighted a contradiction
in Triggs’s approach, which was supposed to legitimize the work of zine makers without
acknowledging zine making itself as a source of legitimacy: “It says right in the e-mail that they’re
trying to establish the importance of this form of self-publishing, but then they don’t even take it
seriously enough to ask permission first. hmmm.” (ramsey everydaypants on August 24, 2010 at 8:30 pm)

This inability to carry the voice of zine makers into academia and the obstacle this posed to her aim of legitimizing zines and zine culture was, her opponents argued, disqualifying her not only as a member of the community but also as a scholar:

It’s disappointing to see an academic of Triggs’ standing treating zine makers like this. (anna p on August 26, 2010 at 4:10 am)

yea, that’s ridiculously and totally unprofessional for someone who is publishing a book. (Derek Neuland on August 24, 2010 at 8:06 pm)

Hmm, as a Professor of the University of London you’d have thought she’d appreciate copyrighting laws. (Tiffany Daniels on March 4, 2011 at 1:13 pm)

Many, for instance, pointed out the factual errors included in the book, discrediting not only her work, but academic, mainstream, and “outsider” discourses on zines more generally. Tobi Vail noted the feeling of dispossession this generated for many: “People will use this book as a source for further writing on the subject matter.” (Vail, 2010b).

This perfectly illustrates the precarious character of the legitimacy of zine academics, as they have to build on connections with zine makers to justify the relevance of their work while answering to expectations of professionalism not only within academia but in the zine community as well. Underlying the criticism of Triggs’ professionalism, we can discern important expectations from zine makers regarding academia. What hurt the most is not necessarily that Triggs would represent zines in academia and for the general public, but that she would do it without regard for the values and ethics prevalent in zine culture. In short, Triggs was misrepresenting zine culture. This denunciation entailed a tacit recognition of academia as an important source of legitimacy, even within zine culture.

Conversely, attempts made by the anti-Triggs camp to dismiss her as an actor of zine culture were plagued with contradictions stressed by their adversaries. Zine culture has, at least since the 1980s,
been defined in opposition to mainstream culture. This opposition has been extensively remarked upon in scholarship. Whereas books and magazines are clean and “glossy,” zines are amateur and “messy,” relying on accessible means of production (Piepmeier, 2009: 2). The field of publishing celebrates the authority of the author; zine culture is inclusive and encourages readers to “emulate” zine makers and create their own zine (Duncombe, 1997: 123). In short, compared to the exclusionary practices of the mainstream, zine culture opposes inclusivity and the DIY ideal of a community of creators in which everyone can take part. This ideal makes the enforcement of zine culture’s borders particularly delicate. The paradox of dismissing Triggs as illegitimate and unauthorized in an open and equalitarian culture has not gone unnoticed in the WMZ thread:

I really cringe at any attempt to define who is a part of the zine community and who is not. What next, a ranking based on how many zines you’ve made? How “authentic” they are? Cut and paste zine maker is more “real” than those who use a computer program to lay out their zines? What about those who go to a printer rather than a photocopier? I’m getting a bit dramatic, but it’s a slippery slope and would I hope that a huge fan and potential historian would be welcomed by the community. (Sarah-Marie on September 1, 2010 at 9:18 pm)

To defend the specificity and autonomy of zine culture, zine makers and other actors of zine culture must attempt to manage its borders and distinguish between “insiders” and “outsiders.” No matter how we approach it, this question of borders is at stake in the Teal Triggs Affair, as much as in any controversy involving the dangers of “appropriation,” of “selling out,” of “misrepresentation,” and any other form of external intervention into the culture. On the margins of the cultural field, barely participating in the public sphere, zine culture’s extension beyond its immediate surroundings is strongly dependent on mediations it cannot fully control. On the other hand, to fully embrace its place within the “mainstream” to seek complete inclusivity would also endanger zine culture’s autonomy. Both ways, zine culture is at risk of losing its specificity. Unless it develops its own, independent structures to ensure its lasting through time, zine culture will always have to negotiate its place ion grounds not of its choosing. Putting the legitimacy of some actors into question, especially
those further away from zine making, is one of the few ways available to enforce the border patrol and protect the culture’s autonomy.

5.3. Institutional dynamics and librarianship

Paradoxically, the complex institutional configuration of contemporary zine culture has, it seems, secured it a greater autonomy, while multiplying the risks of appropriation and misrepresentation. This configuration involves a diversity of actors, many of whom are only partially involved in zine culture. These include academics and trade publishers like Triggs and Thames and Hudson, but also event organizers like Alex Wrekk with the Portland Zine Symposium or zine librarians like Jerianne Thompson. This diversity of actors implies a wider range of forms of belonging to zine culture and a multiplicity of vested interests. This in turn increases the potential for internal conflict and external co-option. On the other hand, this new institutional configuration also provides to zine culture a greater weight, a closer relationship to its own past, and a clearer sense of its own specificity.

This institutional framework is rarely questioned by the actors of zine culture. Even during the Teal Triggs Affair, the most radical voices questioned her credentials as an academic, or the entitlement of academics to study zines without being personally involved with them, but not the worthiness of zines to figure in academia. This is because basic agreement over the institutional configuration and the values it presupposes is needed for zine culture to exist as a distinct phenomenon at all. This is highlighted by Boltanski and Claverie, for whom forms of public conflict such as can be found in affairs presuppose some level of agreement:

There needs to be a certain agreement over the values and workings of the political setting for affairs to develop. Affairs then make it possible to denounce injustices without calling into question the entire political edifice. Different groups then oppose
each other in the name of differing political principles, but within a shared institutional framework. (Boltanski & Claverie, 2007: 424)

At par with scholars, the addition of librarians and archivists to zine culture is one of the most important institutional changes in recent zine history. The two are, incidentally, related in more than one way. The creation of the first major zine collections was only a few years ahead of academic Zine Studies taking off in the 1990s. Zine librarians have also generated a substantial body of scholarship, constituting one of the pillars of Zine Studies (Hays, 2020: 10–11). Finally, zine librarians have been highly active politically, contributing to the recent ideological reorientation of zine politics.

The positioning of zine librarians during and after the Teal Triggs Affair illustrates the complex place librarianship has come to hold in contemporary zine culture. Librarians positioned themselves as opposing but moderate voices in the anti-Triggs camp. They insisted on their understanding of Triggs’ uneasy position as an academic within zine culture while remaining critical of her approach. There is, for example, a hint of understanding in Jenna Freedman’s posts on the We Make Zines thread:

I do think it was irresponsible, inappropriate, and out-of-synch with zine community standards. I guess I’m a teeny bit more sympathetic than some of y’all because I switch back and forth from zine scholarship subject to zine scholarship author. In the past I’ve been guilty of using zine images in presentations without asking/notifying the author/artist, but I’ve been more diligent about it in more recent work. And I sure wouldn’t use zine images in a book without making a concerted effort to find the publisher. (Jenna Freedman on September 2, 2010 at 4:36 pm)

Jenna Freedman is an influential zine librarian and zinester based in New York. She is publishing her serial perzine, titled Lower East Side Librarian, since 2001. In 2003–2004, she created, and since then curates, the Barnard Zine Library at Barnard College of Columbia University, one of the most important zine collections in the United States, focusing on zines by women and people of colour.

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112 “C’est quand […] un compromis se met en place sur les ‘valeurs et le fonctionnement du cadre politique’ que des affaires se développent, parce qu’elles permettent de dénoncer des injustices sans mettre en cause tout l’édifice politique. Plusieurs groupes entrent alors en concurrence au nom de principes politiques différents mais ils le font dans un cadre institutionnel commun » (My translation)
Freedman is also an important actor of the international zine librarian community as one of the instigators of the Zine Librarian Interest Group and sponsor of the Zine Librarian (Un)Conference held every year since 2009. Her influence has been considerable in defining today’s customary practices in zine librarianship. She notably played an instrumental role in positioning librarians as intermediaries between zine makers and other institutional actors, including scholars.

5.3.1. A Brief Political History of Zine Librarianship

In many ways, the history of zine collections parallels the various narratives of zine history presented in this thesis. As is usually the case in zine history, it begins with science fiction fanzines. The first inclusion of science fiction fanzines in academic libraries dates back to the 1950s, with the Science Fiction Collection at Harvard University’s Houghton Library, created in 1957, being an early example. Later important collections include the Paskow Science Fiction Collection at Temple University in Philadelphia, founded in 1972, and the Sam Moskowitz Collection at the Texas A&M University, founded in 1993 and holding materials from Moskowitz’s research files dating as far back as the 1930s. The Eaton Collection at the University of California, Riverside, with an estimated 68,000 items in its fanzine collection alone, might well be the most important zine collection in the world.

These collections seem to operate in a vacuum and are never mentioned in zine scholarship. An article by Jeremy Brett (2015), processing archivist and curator for the Science Fiction and Fantasy Research Collection at the Cushing Memorial Library & Archives of Texas A&M University, illustrates this divide. Brett is fully aware that the institution he works for “holds one of the nation’s largest and most important research collections devoted to science fiction, which includes a large number of science fiction fanzines.” (Brett, 2015: 395). Still, he lays the groundwork for a new zine collection to be hosted in the same institution without seeking to build on the existing collection. Acknowledging
the importance of maintaining a close relationship with the zine community, Brett still ignores the fan community behind the extensive collections already held by Cushing.

The history of zine librarianship as told in Zine Studies usually begins in the early 1990s. Mike Gunderloy’s donation of his personal collection to the New York State Library in Albany is referred to as a founding moment. Estimated at 25,000 documents, it is considered to have sparked interest for libraries within the zine community. Throughout the 1990s, as the foundations of Zine Studies as an academic discipline were laid down, zine collections began to multiply (Radway, 2011: 144; Hays, 2018: 61). Over the last few decades, their number has exploded. Academic libraries seem to be favoured in the United States. According to a 2014 survey, 33 of the 132 (21.9%) academic libraries members of the Association of Research Libraries and the Canadian Association of Research Libraries, had special zine collections (Tkach & Hank, 2014: 16). A list of zine collections and libraries compiled by Jennifer Huang for the Zine Union Catalog blog provides a good idea of the magnitude of the phenomenon (Huang, 2022). While not exhaustive, especially when it comes to zine collections outside of the United States, it lists 176 collections in the United States and 112 more in the rest of the world.

Unsurprisingly, given that its evolution parallels that of Zine Studies, politics seems to have been at the heart of the development of zine librarianship since the 1990s. The impressive body of scholarship produced by zine librarians attests of important inflexions in this regard. As the first zine collections in public and academic libraries were created in the early 1990s, librarians focused on two

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113 This is not necessarily the case outside of the United States. For comparison, zine collections in academic libraries are almost nonexistent in France and Quebec. In both cases, collections in community settings have been preferred, La Fanzinothèque in Poitiers and Archive Montréal in Montreal being the most important. That being said, public and national libraries have recently started to include zines into their collections. The Bibliothèque Forney in Paris, La Cité de la Bande Dessinée in Angoulême, and Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec in Montreal now all have important zine collections.
main goals. First, establishing the importance of zines as privileged documents for the cultural history of the 20th century; second, building a trusting relationship with zine makers.

Chris Dodge, member of the advisory committee of the Alternative Press Center and then cataloger at the Hennepin County Library in Minnesota, has been one of the most vocal librarians on the importance of preserving zines. For him, it was obvious that “Future researchers will rely on materials like zines for evidence of cultural dissent and innovation in the late twentieth century” (Dodge, 1995: 1). Later zine scholars, and especially feminist and queer historians and theoreticians, have proven him right. Alison Piepmeier, for instance, argued that zines were essential documents of third-wave feminism (Piepmeier, 2009: 9). Without the work of early zine librarians like Dodge, the work of later scholars aiming to make sense of the recent political and cultural past would have been impossible.

Trust in zine librarians was, of course, a precondition for this important work. In the 1990s, the presence of zines in libraries was not a given, far from it. Many zine makers expressed skepticism towards librarians, especially those working with zine collections hosted in academic libraries. Kathryn DeGraff, head of the special collections at the DePaul University Library in Chicago, argued that despite this reticence, it was the librarians’ duty to convince zinesters otherwise:

Zines are counterculture and their publishers like to be outside the mainstream […] They feel that having their zines in a library flies in the face of what they are doing. I understand their point of view, but I think it’s the library profession’s responsibility to try to convince zine publishers that their efforts should be preserved in a library (quoted in Chepesiuk, 1997: 70).

This reticence was never completely overcome. Once again, Anne (Hays) Adkinson provides indispensable insight. Based on a survey administered in 2015–2016 and answered by 150 zine makers, they conclude that zine makers are generally enthusiastic about having their zines included in libraries and for their work to feature in academic research and pedagogical content (Hays, 2018: 68). However, almost all expressed a preference for being asked before their zine could be included in a library.
collection (Hays, 2018: 75–76). In other words, zinesters seemed to “favour access over privacy” while greatly preferring “that the library request permission before carrying the zine,” illustrating a desire to keep some control over the circulation of their creations and to limit the possibility of disclosing personal information beyond their intended audience (Hays, 2018: 76).

The question of zinesters’ control over their work was increasingly addressed in zine librarianship as a new, more politicized generation of librarians came to the fore in the early 2000s. Inspired by the work of librarians such as Sanford Berman and James Danky, they had a considerable impact on zine librarianship, Zine Studies, and zine culture more generally (Tkach and Hank, 2014: 18, endnote 5). These younger zine librarians evolved in a different context, characterized by the rise of zine-specific collections in contrast to zine collections within larger collections of alternative or radical press. Unlike librarians of the previous generation, zine librarians began to consider themselves as actors of zine culture in their own right.

This new generation also developed new theoretical frameworks to make sense of their practice, notably on the political level. This shift was reflected in the creation of special collections dedicated to queer and feminist zines or the work of zinesters of colour. The Barnard Zine Library or the Queer Zine Archive Project, both established in 2003–2004, immediately come to mind. Political considerations increasingly permeated the work of zine librarians, even of those working in generalist collections:

> The zine librarian community was founded with an impulse towards social justice and inclusivity, valuing lived experience and local expertise, and challenging traditional library practices […] In our work with zines, we call on queer theory and feminist, radical, and critical pedagogy in addition to theory from library and archival science […] feminist theory and ethics support the case for close attention to the human connections, not just impersonal transactions of acquiring materials or conducting research. (Fox et al., 2018: 212)

This perspective must be understood in the broader context of a critique of “liberal neutrality” in librarianship (Berthoud et al., 2015: 3) and in relation to the important role zine librarians were starting
to play in zine culture. Weary of their legitimacy and the possible negative effects of their position of authority towards zine makers, zine librarians started to codify their practice, a process that eventually led to the creation of the *Zine Librarian Code of Ethics*.

5.3.2. The Zine Librarian Code of Ethics

The development of the *Zine Librarian Code of Ethics* during the first half of the 2010s both reflected and contributed to establishing the special place zine librarians have come to play in the institutional configuration of contemporary zine culture. The *Code* was drafted during the 2014 Zine Librarians (Un)Conference in Durham, North Carolina, and published in zine format in 2015. It addresses a series of ethical considerations regarding every aspect of librarianship: acquisition and collection development, access, use, cataloging, organization, and description (Berthoud et al., 2015). It also rates methods of acquisition in order of preference (the preferred being purchase directly from the author or publisher), emphasizes the importance of respecting the creators’ right to refuse being included in collections, and generally favours the introduction of zine ethics and practices into libraries rather than the imposition of librarian procedures on zine makers and their work. Beyond the specifics, the *Code* attests to a self-conscious willingness on the part of zine librarians to be an active and potentially transformative presence both in zine culture and the librarian community. “Because librarians/archivists are often part of the communities that make/read zines,” the “Preamble” to the *Code* goes, “we want to be accountable to our users, our institutions, our authors, donors, and communities” (Berthoud et al., 2015: 3).

The Teal Triggs Affair played a role, albeit marginal, in the creation of the *Code of Ethics*. This is a reminder that affairs not only reveal inherent social and political dynamics but can also contribute to their transformation (Boltanski & Claverie, 2007: 447–448). The Affair was sparked only a few days
before the Portland Zine Symposium, set to take place on August 28–29. Alex Wrekk was already set to host a workshop on zine ethics long before receiving Triggs’ email on the 24th. This was, of course, perfect workshop material. Jerianne Thompson took part in the workshop and recalls some of the discussions during that day:

In that ethics workshop, we talked about academia and zines and how there is this disconnect between academia and zines. Academics don’t always treat zines seriously or in the same way as they might treat “legitimate” published documents [...] We actually talked about the idea of creating a zine code of ethics and trying to get librarians, especially those working in academic settings, to get on our side so that they can help inform, educate, and persuade academics who might encounter our zines in an archive to treat them with a better deal of respect. (Wrekk & Neuland, 2011: 30:00–31:10)

This fell right into discussions already taking place within the Zine Librarian Interest Group, created some years prior in 2007. If not necessarily initiating the movement that eventually led to the creation of the Zine Librarian Code of Ethics, the Teal Triggs Affair demonstrated the need for ethical guidelines.

A crucial idea defended in the Code is that there should be a limit to researchers’ scrutiny of zinesters and their work. For the creators of the Code of Ethics, zine librarians were the best positioned to implement this limitation:

When cataloging choices need to be made between a concern for privacy for a zine creator and the desires of researchers to have complete information (as is the case when creating personal name authority records), the Zine Librarians’ Code of Ethics directs the cataloger to “refrain from recording more personal information than is necessary or required to identify the person.” [Berthoud et al., 2015: 17] This reflects the moral stance of the ethics of care theory—protecting the zine creator, even to the detriment of the information seeker or the researcher, by not necessarily providing all the information available to the cataloger. (Fox et al., 2018: 217)

This stance does a lot to empower zine makers and protect them in the context of intensifying attention coming from major institutions, including academia and its libraries. Concurrently, it legitimizes zine librarians as essential actors of contemporary zine culture, endowed with the responsibility of protecting not only zine makers but also fundamental principles of zine culture. In this sense, the Code of Ethics consolidates the increasingly important position zine libraries have come
to acquire in zine culture since the 1990s. Despite being sometimes at odds with one another, zine librarians and academics seem to have a lot in common. The increase of their presence coincides, and they both aspire to the status of representatives of the culture. Similarly, their legitimacy resides in their relationship with zine makers.

Conclusion

Readers of *Broken Pencil* could find in issue 90 (Winter 2021) an article from Jennie Robertson that demonstrated the imperative of relationships with zine makers amply. Reviewing the first issue of *Zines. An International Journal on Amateur and DIY Media*, she asked: “Academia: Friend or Foe to Zines?” As I am a member of the editorial board of the journal and collaborator to its editor Samuel Étienne, the review immediately caught my attention. Robertson’s framing could have been taken directly from one of the moderate voices opposed to Triggs during the Affair:

> For zines to be an object of rigorous study felt like a badge of legitimacy, a nod that my self-published work is finally being recognized as worthy of analysis. We are serious writers of legitimate literature, and the journal is proof […] Like many of my peers, I see zine-making as a rejection of exclusionary institutions like academia and big publishing. I should no longer need their validation, yet it seems part of me desires it […] For all of its potential, would *Zines* exclude or misunderstand the very people who produce the object of study—that is, zine creators? Who is this for, and who might it exclude? (Robertson, 2021: 38)

Turning to Étienne, Robertson is however reassured by his zine maker background and his emphasis on the role zine makers should play in Zine Studies: “I was encouraged to learn that he has some proper zine cred, active in the French and international zine scene since the mid ’80s,” then quoting

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114 I have met Samuel Étienne for the first time at a zine festival in Brussels in the Summer of 2019. I have been a member of the editorial board of Zines since the first issue was published later that year. In June of 2022, I was Étienne's intern at the Campus Condorcet as part of the field research I have conducted for this thesis. Furthermore, I have published a paper on Montreal’s feminist bookstore L’Euguélonne and its role in Montreal’s zine scene in issue reviewed by Robertson (Legendre & Toffoli, 2020).
Étienne: “I noticed the [increasing] interest of academia [in] zines … and I thought that zines should be studied by insiders first” (Robertson, 2021: 38).

In the end, Robertson, like many zine makers today, sides with Étienne and endorses the academic study of zines: if well done, zine research can benefit to zine culture. In fact, as Robertson put it, zine culture and academia seem to aspire to the same fundamental ideals:

At their best, both zines and academic publishing celebrate and enable the free exchange of ideas and foster a love of learning and thinking. They expand our understanding of the world, as do all forms of knowledge sharing. Academia does tend to be exclusive, too often undervaluing the expertise, knowledge, and experience of people without access to or interest in those echelons. But that is academia at its worst. Zines, instead, offers something to everyone—zinesters, researchers, and those who are both. (Robertson, 2021: 39)

Robertson’s position shows striking similarities with the arguments invoked during the Teal Triggs Affair. It has also, in my opinion, the same shortcomings. By systematically questioning the legitimacy of zine scholars—their relationship with zine making, their connection with zine makers, their respect of zine values and customs—the more important, yet uncomfortable question is left out: should academics study zines at all? By focusing the debate away from zine scholars and towards Zine Studies, we open what is in my opinion a much more crucial question: what do academic Zine Studies have to bring to zine culture? If zine scholars are to be active participants to contemporary zine culture, what should be their role? What can they bring to the table that other actors of zine culture, and most importantly zine makers, cannot?

An easy answer is, of course, recognition. This was repeatedly pointed out during the Teal Triggs Affair, and was at the crux of Robertson’s argument. Any discourse on zines circulating beyond the confines of zine culture can bring newcomers, extend the audience of zine makers, and further legitimize the medium. Despite its inherent elitism and exclusionary practices—or perhaps even because of them—academia is a fine-tuned legitimizing machine.
What is true for zines and zine culture can also be for active zine makers, given that scholars study contemporary production. Some zinesters have acquired a reputation both in and beyond zine culture. The successes of “Big Name Zinesters” (to paraphrase fandom’s “Big Name Fans”) do, however, overshadow the majority of zine makers, who can often only count on peers and their own social circles for critical reception of their work. Conversely, most contemporary zines have evacuated zine criticism from their pages, leaving little in way of critique available to zines. Although not the most influential form of critique, academics can provide exposure and recognition. In the absence of any other forms of critique, academics can also supplement one of its most important functions: directing readers to zines that might be of interest to them.

Just as zine makers have progressively turned their back on zine criticism to privilege their own creative output, zinesters might not be interested in documenting and writing their own history. This was pointed out by Kathleen Hanna amidst the launch of Sara Marcus’s history of Riot Grrrl:

> When I read it, I felt this kind of collective sight of relief for me and all of my friends who were involved [in Riot Grrrl] back then in the 1990s […] I think a lot of us felt like: ‘Oh, good! Someone wrote a really fucking great book about this stuff, and now we can write the books we want to write, we don’t have to write this book’” (Punkcast, 2010: 1:25–1:55).

This might have not prevented Hanna from publishing her own memoirs (Rebel Girl: My Life as a Feminist Punk, to be published in 2024). But it certainly meant that this story would not have been left untold. Despite having already generated a rich literature, the history of zines remains largely untold, and scholars may be better positioned to carry out the work of telling and preserving it.

As was pointed out by many participants to the Teal Triggs Affair, exposure and recognition are not universally sought after in zine culture, far from it. Many zine makers are more than happy to stay in the semi-public, semi-private space typical of most zine scenes. To be relevant, Zine Studies should definitely go beyond academic critique. One important thing that zine scholars can bring to the table is access to zine corpuses across time and space. In a context where circulation is limited and re-
editions almost non-existent, most zine readers’ choices are limited to the here and now. It is the role of scholars, academic and endogenous alike, to compile bibliographies, to revive works of the past, to report on foreign scenes. Without their work, zine culture easily becomes amnesic and ethnocentric.

As Duncombe already pointed out, the zine community tends to fragment into micro-communities, better illustrated by the separation into genres and subgenres, scenes and subscenes (Duncombe, 1997: 71). Science fiction fanzine editors have little in common with punk zinesters, who have little in common with zine artists making zine objects. Or so they think. Scholars can help negate this mutual ignorance by providing a broader picture, emphasizing interconnections and shared heritage.

In short, the role of scholars might be to account for “zine culture” as a whole, beyond the confines of this or that specific scene, movement, genre, or period. Together with librarians, depending on the breadth of their collections, scholars are better positioned than zine makers to offer this perspective. This broader approach is not better or more complete than others. But it is different, and not less precious.
Conclusion

Most of this thesis has been dedicated to specific corpuses. The theoretical questions raised have been in most cases topical. I want to try, as way of conclusion, to highlight some broader tendencies. This effort can be understood as a way to map out further research in Zine Studies.

Periodizing Zine History

Based on the cases studied in this thesis, I can first suggest distinct ways of periodizing zine history. The first would retrieve the various inflexions of the zine category, from its inception in the 1930s and 1940s, from its more recent appropriations. It would highlight the predominant forms taken by zines at a given time and try to make sense of their evolution. In short, it would try to find some continuity in the particularly variegated and discontinuous mass of zines produced. This first periodization I offer might emphasize three major phases in zine history: fandom-based, subculture-based, and contemporary zine culture.

Fandom-based zine culture began in the 1930s and defined “(fan)zines” primarily through their participation in fandom. As fandom became increasingly diversified as a phenomenon—first with the specialization of literary genres (science fiction, fantasy, horror) and then with the introduction of new objects (comics, movies, television shows, music)—the “(fan)zine” category followed suit and expanded accordingly. This criteria of belonging to fandom meant that these early zines could develop into a wide range of subgenres, while keeping a high degree of unity, especially as fandom grew into its own culture, with its language, its customs, and its history.

The rise of punk zines in the 1970s marks a major shift in the way the “(fan)zine” category was understood, so much so that something new emerged, something that did not fit in the framework
established by fandom. Punk zines appropriated and transformed the medium by inscribing it into new ways of being and doing. Downstream, starting with the second punk wave and down to a wide range of post-punk subcultures, zines were also increasingly politicized, if only to be framed as a form of resistance against the dominant culture and the mainstream media. This “subcultural moment” in zine history has had a considerable impact on how zines are understood to this day.

Most zine scholarship has overlooked the existence of a new, third paradigm in zine history. Contemporary zine culture is characterized by a new positioning in the field of cultural production, with greater circulation, and exchanges with more recognized artists and practices.

It is also considerably influenced by a new institutional configuration, build on the creation of zine collections in libraries and archives, the introduction of zine research in academia, an increasing presence of zines in independent bookstores, and the creation of new community-based institutions such as DIY zine collections, fairs and festivals, zine publishers and distros, adding to the magazines and similar publications of the previous era. This shift has seen zines turn from periodicals to single-issue publications, and synthesizes a large number of previously separated forms of alternative publishing, from mini comics to political pamphlets, to works of printed art, to chapbooks.

These three periods of zine history are in no way separated and clearly delineated. They overlap considerably, and for some these shifts are barely noticeable. This periodization is thus better understood as being made of three different threads woven together, in the manner of Wittgenstein’s family resemblance metaphor:

we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing […] I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances”; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way […] Why do we call something a “number”? Well, perhaps because it has a—direct—relationship with several things that have hitherto been called number; and this can be said to give it an indirect relationship to other things we call the same name. And we
extend our concept of number as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres. (Wittgenstein, 2009: 36)

We have seen in Chapter 1 how debates over what was the “first fanzine” are faced with a contradiction: the earliest examples of zines are older than both the term “fanazine” and the main criterion used to define them: fandom. In this sense, earlier forms of self-publishing—in Amateur Press Associations, in youth organizations, or simply unrelated to fandom—bleed into the first thread of zine history almost imperceptibly. The same goes downstream with the shift to the subcultural paradigm starting in the 1970s. Fandom-based zine culture did not disappear after the publication of the first punk zines, far from it. The 1980s were, in fact, particularly dynamic for fandom-based fanzines, as they saw the boom of media fanzines and a considerable renewal of the fan tradition. The vitality of projects such as Fancyclopedia 3 and Fanac.org show just how this fandom thread is still very active to this day. Yet, starting with the first punk zines at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, it has become clear that the predominant form taken by zines had changed.

Shifts in paradigm are always easier to establish a posteriori. In the present, things often seem to blend seamlessly into one another. This is perhaps why the last, third thread of zine history has been so neglected in zine scholarship. It is also still hard to pinpoint a clear turning point as a beginning of this new period in zine history. We could say that already in the early 1980s with the creation of Factsheet Five, something was starting to change. Whereas punk zines are better understood in relation to their subcultural environment, Gunderloy’s aim was explicitly to make the medium itself, and not its specific cultural context, the main definitional criterion. The shift was furthered by the Riot Grrrl movement, which had a determining, but largely overlooked impact on how zines were being published. Perzines

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115 A good example of this is given by how the concept of “subculture” came to be used to describe science fandom in the 1970s. Lester Del Rey’s history of science fiction culture The World of Science Fiction, 1926-1976: The History of a Subculture was published in 1979, the same year as Dick Hebdige’s Subculture: The Meaning of Style, a book that largely contributed to popularize the concept. Similarly, many scholars have emphasized the “fan” character of punks and other subculture participants, especially in contexts such as France, where the term “fanazine” has remained the most common denomination (see for instance Étienne, 2016: 27-72).
a predominant genre of contemporary zine culture, started to become increasingly codified as a distinct
genre during that time. Single-issue zines also became more frequent, in part due to the distribution
networks established by riot grrrls: distros, but also gatherings like the Ladyfests, and “metazines” and
catalogues in the wake of *Factsheet Five*. Politically, the contribution of Riot Grrrl to contemporary zine
culture was of course considerable. Its influence was not only ideological, but is also reflected on the
zine maker population. Most zine scenes across North America and Western Europe today are not
predominantly masculine anymore, a reality unseen outside trekker and other parts of media fandom
before the 1990s. That being said, most Riot Grrrl zines remain distinctively subcultural when compared
to the contemporary counterparts. Despite it being hard to settle for an unambiguous starting point,
there is no doubt that contemporary zine culture is clearly distinct from its subculture- or fandom-based
predecessors. Any excursion out in a zine fair or festival should be sufficient proof of this. The most
familiar genres and forms found in Zine Studies are almost absent from contemporary production. In
most cases, the differences are striking.

This first periodization can be used to make sense of the translocal and international spread of zine
culture. As French zine history shows, the international development of zine culture seems to have
followed a pattern of “uneven development” reflecting the weight of global hegemony. The
dissemination of zine culture was driven by two combined logics. First, it spread through interrelated
translocal scenes without featuring at the national level. The development of early zine culture through
fandom showed how actors of zine culture could build their own networks unbeknownst to the national
cultural field. The same has been shown by the co-evolution of subcultures like punk in the United
States and the United Kingdom. On the other hand, this dissemination also seems to have followed
broader patterns determined by capitalism, and more specifically the economic, political, and cultural
hegemony of the United States and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom. From its inception in these
two countries, zine culture then spread following the concentric structuration of the world, with the
hegemonic powers at its center and a series of layered peripheries. This dissemination, when studied attentively, is haphazard, uneven, unpredictable, and strongly dependent on the local and national context\textsuperscript{116}.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the French case regarding these patterns of dissemination. The first is related to the succession of the different threads of zine history. Despite being appropriated decades later, zine history has followed the same sequence, starting with fandom, then evolving into a subcultural thread, and then into the contemporary paradigm. In France, fandom emerged at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, meaning that the fandom-based thread was predominant only a decade or so before being replaced by the subcultural paradigm. We can note the same pattern in countries where zines were introduced even later. The example of Czech Republic is particularly telling, since the first science fiction fanzines were published well after the subcultural turn was under way in the United States and United Kingdom. The first Czech fanzines were published in 1981–1982, explicitly emulating American examples, notably by appropriating the English-language terminology (Adamovič, 2017:110–111). Czech subculture-based zines followed soon after, at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, but with a local twist: they were produced by metalheads rather than punks (Palák, 2017:42).

French zine history also illustrates a second important dynamic at play in the international dissemination of zine culture. If the circulation of zines rarely goes both ways, developments outside the historical centres of the United States and the United Kingdom can still anticipate later evolutions. Whereas fandom-based zines appeared almost three decades later in France then in the United States, the more recent shift to a contemporary paradigm was anticipated as early as the late 1970s by French graphzine artists such as \textit{Elles sont de sortie}. If today’s carefully printed artzines are common place in zine culture across the world, French zines build on a longer tradition, as reflected in the rich aesthetic

\textsuperscript{116} See Harvey, 2005 and Smith, 2010 for in-depth accounts on this process of “uneven development,” especially after the Second World War.
diversity and high quality of contemporary zines in France. If French zines rarely reached the “centers” of zine culture, they are still, for this reason, well represented in recent accounts of the artzine genre (Lefebvre, 2023; Bronson & Aarons, 2013; 2014).

To retrieve and make sense of the frail continuities traversing zine history, we must therefore not only account for the subtle shifts between the different threads, but also the complex patterns of dissemination and anticipation at the global level. The French case illustrates how American and British zine cultures were exported from the center to the periphery, but also how local and national traditions induce their own inflexions, sometimes even anticipating larger shifts in zine making. To account for the global dissemination of zine culture from a historical perspective we must therefore try making sense of these parallel temporalities.

Based on my work for this thesis, I can suggest a second periodization of zine history, based on the concept of “longue durée” developed by French historian Fernand Braudel (2009). The concept of “longue durée” (French for an extended period of time) was first created to address the problem of continuity in a discipline mostly focused on changes and evolutions. Braudel insisted particularly on the geographical determinants of European economic and social history. Later historians convincingly used the concept to make sense of patterns in political history (Rémond, 1988). At the smaller scale of zine history, the concept of “longue durée” is still be useful to highlight some continuity beyond the breaks separating the three periods mentioned above.

Even given the comparatively short span of zine history (Braudel works with physical geography and periods counted in millennia), such a sense of continuity remains hard to establish. It cannot be found in the social or cultural context in which zines are published of course, nor in what zine makers make of their creations. There is not a single set of cultural or political references that zinesters would have shared across all of zine history, not even zine-specific references. Few reissues and small
circulation means that most zine makers have almost no real contact with zines of the past, and only a vague idea of zine history. The word itself has evolved, at least in the English language, from “fanzine” to “zine” so that it could be argued that there is a discontinuity on this level as well, separating “fanzine culture” and “zine culture.”

Some scholars have turned to zine makers’ intentions in the hope of establishing a form of continuity across zine history. Duncombe, insisted on amateurism — “amator, Latin for lover. While other media are produced for money or prestige or public approval, zines are done [...] for love: love of expression, love of sharing, love of communication.” (Duncombe, 1997: 14–15) This characterization was up by many subsequent scholars, to the point of sometimes obfuscating the economic dimension of zine culture. Poletti, for example, considers that the exchange of zines follows a “gift economy” contrasting with the market economy of cultural industries (Poletti, 2008: 243–256). While it is certainly true that examples of gifting and barter are comparatively common throughout zine history, they have also always been part of a larger economy alongside commercial forms of exchange including subscriptions, trade fairs, and sale in bookstores. “Hucksters” selling old science fiction books, magazines, and zines at substantial price were part of fan conventions as early as the 1930s (Fancyclopedia 3: “Hucksters”); more recently, it has been noted that many zine makers factor their work time in the selling price of their zines (Parzonko, 2023: 34). Conversely, it seems doubtful that amateurism or the gifting of one’s work would be specific to zine culture in any way.

When comparing the first science fanzines with early zines, the only commonalities we could note are, regarding the objects themselves, them being printed publications and, regarding the context in which they were produced, the marginal or peripheral position they find themselves in. In the long run, or “longue durée,” paper and marginality seem to be the only stable elements.
Based on what we have seen throughout this thesis, we can see how these two elements of definition remain problematic, however. Although an essential component of zine publishing since the 1930s, materiality has only been conceptualized as such since the 2000s. Emphasis on communication prevailed until, precisely, it was replaced by paper and materiality as a main defining criteria. Thus, even from the perspective of the “longue durée,” contemporary zine culture appears unique in zine history. Until the 2000s, zines were mostly about communication—whether in the context of fandom or in that of subcultures. The fact that they were printed or duplicated on paper appeared secondary. Only after the 2000s did actors of zine culture started to emphasized materiality.

As for marginality, if the status has been relatively constant, the center around which zine culture gravitated has moved considerably over time. Fandom-based zines gravitated around specific cultural industries: pulp publishing first, then film and media. This relationship was either conflictual, as with Wollheim’s campaign against Gernsback, or amiable, as with New Fandom’s policy of cooperating with the professional magazines for the organization of the First World Convention. Yet, however this relationship was negotiated, it had to be, insofar as zines would remain defined by their participation to fandom, and therefore in relation to professional publishing.

The shift from fandom to subcultures as the dominant paradigm in zine culture eventually led to another center-margin configuration. In the 1980s and 1990s, zines were increasingly understood in relation to the “mainstream” or dominant culture: an alternative or underground form of publishing. Unlike the fan/pro opposition structuring early zine culture, the alternative/mainstream one implied a more diffuse and distant center, and a different relationship to it as well. The MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL policy of only reviewing records from independent labels, or the Riot Grrrl media blackout illustrates how opposition to the “mainstream” was not only ideological, but could also take the form of an actual conflict with clearly defined antagonists.
This form of antagonism has become more and more diffuse throughout the last decades. Contemporary zine culture is characterized by its integration in the cultural field, alongside comics, artists’ publications and art magazines, literature, and so forth. Zine makers are today interacting with a much wider range of actors, and it has become harder and harder to establish a clear center around which zine culture would define its marginality. Yet, the marginal status of zines within the cultural field remains as clear as ever. The willingness of many actors of zine culture to defend these new margins is also clear, as the work of Stu Mead and the opposition against Triggs have demonstrated.

A History of Zine Politics

The way politics has played out throughout zine history illustrates how the two periodizations presented above can make sense of fundamental changes in zine culture. Zine culture has inherited from science fiction fandom a rather conventional understanding of politics. Following the demise of the Futurians and their attempt at politicizing fandom, zine culture and politics have generally been understood as separate, up until the anarcho-punk movement at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s.

A look into Speer’s *Fancyclopedia 1* shows how politics were framed in early zine culture. The “Politics” entry is particularly short and attests of Speer’s anti-Futurian stance: “Politics—In such expressions as Fanny’s [Taurasi’s *Fantasy News*] ‘Boost Science Fiction Not Politics,’ means sociological discussions.” (Bristol, 1944:67). A look at the “Sociology” entry provides clarifications:

Sociological issues in fan feuds and other fan disputes have included: The merits and demerits of capitalism, fascism, Technocracy, socialism, and Marxism; Negro equality; the right of labor unions to exist; escapism; the World State; the respective merits of Roosevelt and Dewey; patriotism; American intervention in the Second World War; and so on, shading off into such quasi-sociological subjects as the superman and atheism. (Bristol, 1944: 82)

This framing calls for a few observations. First, the distinction made by Speer between political and sociological issues can seem trivial, but it illustrates a political culture in which issues now commonly
understood as political were still taken to be secondary to “real” politics, that is, the politics of the political parties, the state, its policies, and its relationship with other states at the international level. Second, these issues were considered, if not unconnected, external to zine-specific concerns. The debate over the politicization of fandom at the turn of the 1930s and 1940s illustrates that even for Futurians, politics was considered as a phenomenon distinct from fandom and science fiction, if only by the fact that Michelism was an attempt to bridge the gap between the two. Internally, zine- or fandom-specific political issues were simply not understood in political terms. As the Futurians lost their cause, even this understanding of politics as external from zine culture was put on hold, only to return decades later.

With the rise of punk zines and the subcultural paradigm they embodied, zine making would start being understood as an inherently political activity. This shift did not occur overnight. The zines published during the first punk wave resisted being characterized as “political,” and outright political content would not become generalized in punk zines until the rise of anarcho-punk at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. Once put forward, however, the idea of zines as intrinsically political gained ground. It was, ultimately, the leading principle behind the work of Gunderloy, who would write after decades of relentless involvement:

All in all, there are at most a couple of million people who read any of these things, and only a handful of hardcore zine junkies who, like myself, read a lot of them. So then why am I excited? Because these people, the few thousand publishers and the few million readers, are the ones at the cutting edge of social change. (Gunderloy, 1990: 58)

As digital culture deeply transformed publishing throughout the 1990s and 2000s, this understanding of zine politics could not be sustained anymore. As Duncombe wrote for the 2008 postscript to the second edition of Notes from Underground: “zines made the promise of democratizing the media, the internet has actually delivered it” (Duncombe, 2008: 211). In this context, zine politics was facing a void: framed since the 1980s in terms of communication, it had to find a new footing as the medium was redefined based on its materiality. One thing remained certain: zines were, obviously,
inherently political objects. The how and the why, however, were becoming less and less clear. Piepmeier insisted on the embodied communities fostered by the material circulation of zines (Piepmeier, 2009:57–86), while Licona suggested that zines were now sites of political practices neglected by traditional media: “Zines […] build and mobilize community, work to forge coalitions across lines of difference for purposes of pursuing agendas of social justice and equity, and provide third-space contexts ideal for exploring rhetorical innovations and third-space practices.” (Licona, 2012: 10).

This reframing of zine politics presents some problems that I hope this thesis could illustrate. First, many zine scholars argued that zines were inherently political irrespective of their contents, while focusing exclusively on zines addressing feminist, queer, and antiracist issues. The possibility—or desirability—of zines pursuing social justice agendas or fostering embodied communities when they did not address emancipatory politics in their contents was never really questioned. Second, these new understandings of zines as political still largely located zine politics in zines and zine makers themselves, something this framing inherited from a past era of zine culture. Zines might not foster alternative networks of communication as they used to, but they still foster political communities, and these communities are increasingly shaped by a new and complexifying institutional framework of which zine makers are only one part of. If anything, an account of zine politics that factors in the most recent shift in paradigm in zine history would have to include this new configuration for zine culture, that now includes the contribution of zine librarians and archivists, teachers using zines as pedagogical material, zine scholars, but also a wide range of community organizers from event organizers to bookseller, to social media influencers.
Redefining Zine Politics

A re-evaluation of zine politics that would build on this new configuration needs to be established on firmer grounds. Looking back at how the politics of zine culture have been understood throughout zine history, we can but note how little has been offered in terms of clear definitions and explanations. The generally dismissive attitude prevailing in early zine culture (“this is too political for fandom”) has been replaced by enthusiasm (“zines are fundamentally political”), but the basic terms of the equation (what do we mean exactly by “political”?) have remained surprisingly vague.

I chose to supplement this lack by turning to political theorists like Chantal Mouffe and Michael Freeden, who have contributed to a movement in recent political theory aimed precisely at redefining and precising what is meant by “politics” and “political.” To these developments, I have also made use of concepts elaborated by thinkers such as Foucault, Bourdieu, and Boltanski, who share some of the basic assumptions these political theorists work from.

The first of these assumptions is the idea that politics is a fundamental, and ineliminable component of social life. As Mouffe puts it, there is an “ineradicable character of power and antagonism” (Mouffe, 1993: vii). This irreducibility of conflict and power is not predicated on a pessimistic view of the human nature, but is a fundamental component of politics and the function it plays in social life. For Mouffe, politics is the sphere of human activity in which the social order is created and the community organized (Mouffe, 2005: 9-10). Understood this way, politics presupposes conflict because the question of how things ought to be cannot be reduced to a single possibility. Yet, only one reality can exist at a given time. The stake of political activity is thus to decide what course of action should be taken, necessarily excluding other possibilities.

There are in zine history patent examples of this process of political decision-making. Sometimes, the decision is made by a limited number of actors and carries the weight typical of “conventional”
political decisions. The exclusion of the Futurians by New Fandom, and the subsequent rejection of their proposal to politicize fandom is a perfect example. The Riot Grrrl turn against sexism in punk and the major overhaul of zine culture that ensued is another. In other cases, decision-making is more diffuse, the result of unconcerted yet collective action. The rise and fall of e-zines presiding over the shift from communication to artefact shows how the long-term consequences of decision-making are not necessarily apparent to those who carry them out, or even at the center of their preoccupations. The purpose of Jenna Freedman’s, Anna Poletti’s and Alison Piepmeier’s interventions was never to operate a major shift in the history of zine making. In most cases, they only put words on diffuse changes in zine making practices of their time. Yet, they nevertheless considerably contributed to shape contemporary zine culture and its orientations.

Locating zine politics as such, framed within zine culture, makes visible a series of problems and observations otherwise unaddressed in Zine Studies. First, politics involves clear actors, concrete alternatives, objective conflicts. It is embodied in strategies and tactics and carried out by people and groups. To understand political events in zine history, we must locate their actors, and make sense of their confrontations.

Second, the politics of zine culture are as important internally as they are externally. To make sense of the potentially transformative contribution of zines to the cultural politics of their day, it is necessary to understand the political debates playing out within zine culture itself. Focusing on actual conflict makes the dynamic between internal and external politics easier to apprehend. Both levels of political activity are, obviously, never disconnected. The debates over Michelism and the ideological history of punk zines illustrates this amply. The broader ideological orientations of zine culture—its connection with external politics: the major political questions of the time, the political events of national or international scope—are closely related to internal power relations. In turn, the interactions between politics internal and external to zine culture profoundly determine the general orientations and
development of zine history. Had the Futurians won their cause, or the anarcho-punks lost theirs, our current understanding of zine culture and its relationship with politics would have been significantly different. For zine culture to play any role in emancipatory politics—the goal, it seems, of most account of zine politics found in Zine Studies—it must be predicated on the political dynamics already at play in zine culture.

A third remark must be made regarding different forms taken by political conflict, both within and without zine culture. Mouffe’s and Freeden’s characterizations have the disadvantage of downplaying the important role of inequality and hierarchies in shaping conflict. Their understanding of politics could be described as “horizontal”: they emphasize the conflict between equally valid alternatives, competing ideologies and world views. Based solely on their approaches, it would be as if political life only involved struggles between equals located on a horizontal plane. Inequalities, even within a culture as egalitarian as zine culture, do exist however, and this entails a “vertical” axis to political conflict. This vertical plane would locate conflict not between otherwise equal actors, discourses, or alternatives, but across hierarchies, taking into account conflicts between dominant and dominated, central and marginal, leaders and led, representatives and represented.

Among the cases studied in this thesis, the Teal Triggs Affair conveys at best this verticality of politics. The criticism levelled at Triggs by her detractors cannot be properly understood without accounting for the complex dynamics of political representation, and the fact that some actors of zine culture would simply not allow an academic to represent them. On the other hand, as the anti-Triggs camp coalesced around leading figures with closer ties to zine making such as Alex Wrekk, Jerianne Thompson, or Amber Forrester, it became clear that their authority had its limits. If some followed them in their charge against Triggs, others questioned their legitimacy and their ability to choose who counts as a legitimate participant of zine culture and who does not.
The same vertical component to power relationships was at play in the struggle opposing the Futurians to New Fandom, which cannot be accounted for without factoring in the fact that the goal of their clashes was to exert the most influence possible on fandom, and, possibly, to gather it all under a single, central organization—their own. As with the Teal Triggs Affairs, there were bystanders, probably more numerous than those actually involved in these fan feuds. From the standpoint of Futurian history, Harry Warner can be considered an adversary for his disapproval of fan politics, be it internal or external. Warner also disapproved of New Fandom for the same reasons, however, and his histories of fandom in the 1940s and 1950s privilege the less agitated scenes over the more political New York.

Verticality also played an important part in the waning of both anarcho-punk and Riot Grrrl. As both movements really caught up, their instigators eventually relinquished their roles as leaders, considering it antithetical with their own ideals and those they considered central to the movements. Their authority as representatives was not challenged from below, but rather declined in the hope of challenging the verticality of political representation altogether.

Based on these observations, I can thus propose a definition of zine politics as the process by which participants of zine culture struggle with one another to define its parameters internally—including the hierarchies that govern it, and the terrains on which this struggle will take place—and its place externally, within its cultural, social, or political environment. With this definition in hand, we can now turn to the various terrains on which this political activity is enacted.

Three Battlegrounds of Zine Politics

Looking at the various cases studied throughout this thesis, we can note that zine politics can take various forms. It manifested in conflicts over the definition of “(fan)zines,” in the struggle to create,
populate or redirect institutions, and in the elaboration and dissemination of ideological discourses. It took the form of public debates and controversies, “affairs,” physical confrontations, and even trials.

To make sense of this plurality, I suggest the notion of “battlegrounds” of zine politics: institutions, representations and discourses, and practices. These are the terrains on which the future organization and orientations of zine culture are fought over. They are interrelated and build on one another. Each of these battlegrounds, I content, must however be understood as a distinct site of political activity, with its own rules, its own actors, and its own history.

Institutions

As Lucie Robert noted, “Harmonious social relationships do not produce institutions.” (Robert, 2019: 144) That is to say that institutions are always created in the midst of conflict. This is also what Foucault referred to with his concept of “dispositifs” (Foucault, 1980: 194–195). This is made obvious when looking at the bustling institutional activity of early zine culture. The first science fiction clubs were either created by professional editors like Hugo Gernsback to secure a readership for their magazines, or by independent-minded fans who preferred keeping “filthy pros” at an arms length. The same went for larger institutions like Amateur Press Associations, Conventions, or groupings of clubs such as New Fandom. Each were created to answer internal political problems raised by the specific situation their creators found themselves in, to leverage their influence on fandom.

Through an accumulation of such acts of foundation, early zine publishing was instituted into a culture, build from a network of translocal scenes, that could then be transmitted to future generations. For despite being founded in their midst, institutions refract, mediate, and pacify conflict. They act as

\[^{117} \text{« Des rapports sociaux harmonieux ne créent pas d'institution. » (My translation)}\]
arbiter of the tacit conflict the led to their creation. This is not to say that they completely exhaust and eliminate conflict. The latent conflictuality can always be reactivated. Then, the institution loses its mediation ability and becomes again itself a stake of the conflict.

When, in the 1980s, the Homo/Queercore movement came to the fore, it immediately exhibited the latent homophobia and sexism in the punk scenes constituted a decade or so before. What had become a tacit and accepted situation suddenly appeared in all its conflictuality. Major punk institutions such as labels, venues, bands and zines were thus losing their instituting power, and being revealed as biased against a whole portion of the punk population. Losing their consensual veneer, their place in the culture had to be renegotiated, risking being replaced by other institutions. In most cases, Homo/Queercore institutions were created in parallel, becoming strategic sites to pressure major punk institutions such as MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL. The institutional network developed by Homo/Queercore lived on and was repurposed by Riot Grrrl in the 1990s. The Riot Grrrl case shows how, once created, institutions outlast the conflicts out of which they were born. Their structuring role nevertheless makes them important sites of power, and the target of eventual attempts at shifting the balance of power.

The institutions of zine culture are very diverse. Some of them are specific and exclusively dedicated to zines, while others are part of larger configurations that can be traced all the way back to the state. To make sense of this diversity, I suggest the notion of an “institutional continuum,” building on the work of Sarah Baker. At the one end, we find “DIY institutions”: community-based, informal institutions, created by and entirely dedicated to the community (Baker & Huber, 2013: 513). These DIY institutions can themselves take various forms, from the more DIY and less official to the almost officially recognized. DIY institutions

exist along a continuum that begins with the individual collector who seeks to establish a place to share their collection, all the way through to the DIY institution that might
have found enough funding for a few staff members, and has become formalised to
the extent that it is on the verge of official, national acceptance. (Baker and Huber,
2013: 514)

Such DIY institutions played major roles in zine history. In early zine culture, independent fan clubs,
fan houses, and even larger organizations such as New Fandom could be considered as various forms
of DIY institutions. Punk and post-punk equivalents include the Dial House, Existensil Press and Crass
Records, as much as later distros such as the Riot Grrrl Press, or even events such as Ladyfests. Zine
publishers like Le Dernier Cri, or zine-specific online platforms like We Make Zines are perfect recent
examples of DIY institutions. Some have argued that zines themselves, especially long-lasting
periodicals operating in a context where few other institutions exists, can act in the capacity of such
community institutions (Straw, 2023: 11; Wertham, 1973: 132). There is no doubt that major
“metazines” or “network zines” such as Factsheet Five and MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL can be counted
among the most influential DIY institutions of zine history.

DIY institutions themselves can be located within a broader institutional continuum that see them,
at the most instituted end, coexist with public, national, corporate, or academic institutions. By analogy,
we could say that these DIY institutions are to bigger, more instituted collections what the endogenous
research apparatus identified by Radway is to academic scholarship. Zine archives and libraries, a major
component to the institutional configuration of contemporary zine culture, can be found across the
institutional continuum, ranging from the private personal collection to special collections housed in
major academic or national libraries. The same can be said of publishers involved in zine culture, ranging
from international trade publishers such as Thames & Hudson, to midrange DIY-born institutions
publishing zines alongside books such as Le Dernier Cri or Microcosm, to the most informal publishing
projects established by zine makers who occasionally publish the work of their peers. Distribution also
gathers a wide range of institutional actors, from the zine distro to the zine shelf in an independent
bookstore, and the same goes for zine-related events, ranging from fairs large and small, to zine sections in major international festivals such as the Angoulême comics festival or the New York Art Bookfair.

We can see from this quick overview how contemporary zine culture is unique in zine history for its complex institutional configuration, touching upon all stages of the zine economy, from production to distribution to preservation. Since at least the 1990s, zine culture has considerably extended its institutional configuration, reaching further from its DIY, community-based roots. This has increased the visibility of zines within national cultural fields, and also possible interactions with the state, be it through cultural policy and public funding of the arts or threats of censorship.

This institutional continuum is an important site of political activity. This institutional battleground for zine politics involves a wide range of actors and gives rise to various forms of conflict. These can be categorized into inter- and intra-institutional conflict, conflicts opposing zine makers to institutional actors, or opposing zine makers to one another over the place zine institutions should have in zine culture.

Interinstitutional conflict can be generated by the great breadth of the zine institutional continuum. Due to their partial involvement in zine culture, institutions at the more “official” end of the continuum might have means of organization, ways of doing things, and values that contrast with their DIY, zine-specific counterparts. The Teal Triggs Affair have shown how these differences in values and customs can generate intense clashes. The more “official” institutions involved in zine culture can present other actors with hard to navigate double-bind choices. On the one hand, academic libraries and scholars, trade publishers and major bookfairs contribute to the legitimation of the medium and to a broader recognition for zine culture. They also have access to comparatively huge financial resources. On the other hand, many marginal communities—to which many actors of zine culture identify and belong—have historically bad relationships with state, corporate or public institutions. Many actors operating
DIY institutions might frame their practice in opposition to larger institutions, as a “response to feelings of invisibility and exclusion” (Fife, 2019: 233). Albeit in different terms, the conflict opposing Wollheim and Gernsback in the mid-1930s can be understood along the same lines, as it opposed fan-specific forms of organization to Gernsback’s “external” interference as professional publisher. These tensions between zine institutions across the continuum should not be overplayed, however. If conflict can and does exist between institutions at the opposite ends of the continuum, actors nevertheless often collaborate, and generally consider themselves as active participants to the same culture.

Conflict can also arise within larger, more “official” institutions. In many cases, librarians, archivists, scholars, or teachers working with zines see themselves as bringing the values and the ways associated with zine culture into the more formal institutional settings in which they operate. This can be a source of conflict with their colleagues or superiors. A common issue in zine librarianship illustrates this: it is not uncommon for zine makers to request libraries to leave out some personal information from authority records, something that catalogers might find surprising and hard to understand (Hays, 2018: 71). Most of the recommendations of the *Zine Librarian Code of Ethics* are specifically aimed at addressing such issues, as the most important zine collections in the United States tend to be housed in prestigious academic institutions at the very end of the institutional continuum.

Another important contribution of the *Code of Ethics* is, of course, to position zine librarians as intermediaries between students and scholars on the one hand, and zine makers on the other. This approach illustrates how institutional politics can also oppose actors involved in different kinds of institutions. This type of conflict is not restricted to librarians and scholars, of course, and can involve all types of institutional actors. During my field trip in France, for instance, I was faced with some important actors in charge of zine distribution who acted as “gate keepers” and seemed to consider my academic interest as unwelcomed. Although exceptionally rare, this attitude illustrates how conflict
between institutional actors is not limited to those involved in the same kind of institutions but can also be related to the relative important of this or that type of institution in the culture.

The existence of zine institutions itself can be subject to conflict within zine culture, and there is a long history of zine makers opposing institutional actors. The work of Anne (Hays) Adkinson has illustrated how widely spread distrust towards zine collections can be among zine makers. Prominent zine makers have also spoken out against the work of scholars and librarians, including Bruce Labrure and Mimi Thi Nguyen:

'queercore' fanzines aren’t supposed to be catalogued and historicized and analysed to death, for Christssake. They’re supposed to be disposable. That’s the whole point. Throw your fanzines away right now. Go ahead. Xeroxed material doesn’t last forever anyway, you know. It fades. (Labrure, 1995: 205)

the minor object [zines] might refuse the troubled politics of information retrieval and knowledge production by state and capital. What we do is secret is not just an anthem, but an argument about incommensurability. (Nguyen, 2015: 20)

During my previous work on Montreal’s French speaking zine scene, I noted how activist zine makers, who often produce anonymous zines distributed for free or on a “pay-what-you-can” basis often opposed zine fairs and festivals (Legendre, 2022: 35). Festivals often operate based on the author/creator status and rent table space, expecting zine makers to want recognition for their work. Such events also tend further integrate zine culture into the cultural field. The modes of operation of activist zines often differ, if not outwardly oppose this approach (Jeppesen, 2012).

Institutional politics can, finally, involve zine makers between themselves, who can debate the advisability of zine institutions without directly addressing institutional actors. As we have seen repeatedly, zine makers have of all time taken part in debates over the orientations and organization of their culture, zines serving as important political outlets. In more recent history, these debates have largely migrated online, as the development of the Teal Triggs Affair have shown. This latter example, mostly carried out without the participation of Triggs herself, amply shows how the institutional
configuration of zine culture is not the exclusive prerogative of institutional actors themselves, but an important part of the politics enacted by zine makers.

Discourses and Representations

These last examples hint at a second battleground for zine politics: not institutions but discourses and representations. Theoretical developments in literary studies help delineate political activity at this level. Literary scholar Jean-François Hamel, building on the work of Benoît Denis, proposes this definition for a “politics of literature”:

a politics of literature is a system of representations created by the actors of the literary field, and more or less commonly shared by them. Answering to an imperative of justification, it contributes to establishing the greatness of literature in the social world. From an agonistic perspective accounting for the rivalries and tensions structuring the literary field, politics of literature contend with one another to define literature’s mode of existence and measure its presence and its power within the public sphere. (Hamel, 2014: 14–15)

The stakes at play in the discursive battleground is the representation of zine culture and its place in the broader social, cultural, and political context. This fits with the definition of zine politics I am suggesting here inasmuch as it engages with the form taken by zine culture, including its orientations, ideological or otherwise.

Such a politics is located within zine culture but is profoundly shaped by its relationship with its surrounding. The representations of zine culture at stake here are not exclusively addressed to other actors of zine culture, but also to external eyes. Champions of zine culture might, for instance, try to lay out the relevance of zines to people unfamiliar with them. Zine politics at this level thus overlaps the

118 “une politique de la littérature désigne un système de représentations, plus ou moins largement partagé, élaboré par les acteurs du champ littéraire, qui, en réponse à un impératif de justification, contribue à établir la grandeur de la littérature dans le monde social. Dans une visée agonistique, tributaire des tensions et rivalités qui structurent le champ littéraire, les politiques de la littérature s’affrontent pour identifier l’être de la littérature et mesurer à la fois sa présence et sa puissance dans l’espace public.” (My translation)
internal/external distinction outlined previously. From the perspective of the institutional battleground, zine culture appears as a network of translocal scenes, each endowed with its own institutional configuration. From the perspective of the discursive battleground of representations, zine culture appears as a counterpublic sphere:

[Zines] contribute to the dialectic outlined by Fraser between, on the one hand, the consolidation of an inward-looking alternative space of deliberation where needs, vocabulary, and aspirations are identified, and where solidarity as well as collective strength are developed, and, on the other hand, the use of this strength and of this language to act in the dominant public sphere from a somewhat less subordinate position (Pagé, 2014: 206–207).

The interplay between public and counterpublic, between hegemony and counter-hegemony, is predicated on the legitimacy zine culture can foster as an alternative to the dominant cultural field. This legitimacy can only be built through representations of zines and zine culture. Understood as a political battleground, however, this oppositional character of zine culture and how it is represented cannot be understood as unanimous. We have seen with the campaign led by Wollheim against Gernsback, for example, that a representation of zine culture as independent and oppositional could be framed as early as the mid-1930s. But we have also seen, with the rise of New Fandom, how actors of zine culture could just as much enforce a representation of zine culture as collaborating, rather than being opposed to professional publishing. None of these two alternatives can be considered more “political” than the other, and both have left important marks on zine history.

The discursive battleground engages all actors of zine culture. This follows from the fact that this form of political activity is not necessarily carried out in zines themselves, but rather in discourses about them. As the example of librarianship as an important topic in Zine Studies illustrates, even actors as typically associated with the institutional dimension of zine culture—librarians and archivists—reliably

119 « Ils participent à la dialectique énoncée par Fraser entre, d’un côté, la consolidation d’un espace alternatif de délibération tourné vers l’intérieur où sont identifiés les besoins, le vocabulaire et les aspirations et où la solidarité de même que la force collective sont développées et, de l’autre côté, l’utilisation de cette force et l’emploi de ce langage pour interagir dans la sphère publique dominante d’une position un peu moins subalterne. » (My translation)
generate an impressive discursive production covering all aspects of zine culture, including the explicitly political. Representations of zine culture are produced and debated within zines themselves, even in recent periods when most discourses about zines are rather found online. In the contemporary period, the production of representations of zine culture has been increasingly taken up by zine scholars. Zine culture is rife with representations of zine culture framing it in explicitly political terms.

Being discursive in nature, this battleground is also the space in which political ideologies come to influence zine culture. Ideologies are discourses tied to a representation of reality and expressing or making sense of lived experiences of it. On some level, the relative, but fragile, autonomy of zine culture as a counterpublic sphere can be measured by its permeability to ideologies in circulation in the public sphere. The opposition of British anarcho-punks to the influence of both the far-right National Front and the far-left Socialist Workers Party illustrates how this autonomy was never a given but had to be fought for by actors of zine culture. Broader permeability to dominant ideologies has also been noted by scholars. We have seen how scholars such as Freeden considered liberalism the dominant ideology of the last two centuries or so in most Western, industrialized countries. This fits with what Duncombe had remarked considering the zine culture of the 1990s, enthused as it was by the radical political potential of DIY:

in some ways the ideal of do-it-yourself is a far-from-radical proposition. The idea of now allowing your creativity to be stymied by any “authoritarian system” is the essence of American individualism […] Zine creators, as primarily the sons and daughters of the American middle class, are trained to be individuals. Schooled in the ideology of self-sufficiency, they enter the world prepared to make their mark on the world. (Duncombe, 1997: 179)

Zine culture’s relationship with the dominant ideology is negotiated, and fought upon, by its actors who produce alternative or concurring representations of zine culture. Duncombe’s own take on how the zine culture of the 1990s must struggle with this undue influence being, of course, a perfect example of activity at this level of zine politics.
Some ideologies also acquire dominant status locally. The succession of movements presented in the third chapter—from anarcho-punk to Homo/Queercore, to Riot Grrrl, to Race Riot—illustrates how political ideologies have come to the fore, established themselves as locally dominant, only then to be challenged and replaced with others over the generations. Many actors of zine culture do not necessarily align with these locally dominant ideologies. However, the contribution of zine culture to the circulation of political ideologies outside its counterpublic sphere is far more likely to correspond with these, as the fortunes of Riot Grrrl in the recent feminist history illustrates.

The question of internally dominant ideologies and discourses hints at the existence of a vertical dimension to the discursive battleground. As we have seen with the Teal Triggs Affair, representations of zine culture are not all equal, and the status of “representative” is subject to important internal conflict. The most influential representations of the group are produced by representatives whose authority is recognized, or left unchallenged, by large portions of the zine population. Conversely, marginal or contentious zine actors will produce representations quickly falling out of favour and easily replaced. The Michelist ideal of a zine culture geared towards world revolution, for example, has had but a limited impact on the politics of its time, mostly recorded in zine history as a genuine but failed attempt at politicizing fandom.

Practices

A third battlefield on which zine politics is carried out is that of zine making practices. This idea requires perhaps some explanation, not so much because it is less obvious but rather because zine making has often been relegated to the background throughout this thesis. This theoretical and methodological step back was necessary to provide a synthetic outlook on the broader political history
of zine culture. It is nevertheless worth revisiting this history through the prism of practices, as it remains an important site of political activity. Zine makers are the main actors of zine politics at this level.

Bourdieu, again, provides the best theoretical framework to account for the great diversity of zine making practices understood as political intervention in zine culture. For him, the production and publication of artworks should be understood as “position-takings” in the same way as political interventions like speeches or demonstrations (Bourdieu, 1996: 232). Unlike political position-takings, however, artworks must be understood as interventions not in politics, but in the context of their own respective fields—in this case, zine culture. Unlike representations and institutions, zine practices are often only implicitly prescriptive. Every publication can be considered as a “position-taking” within zine culture, that is, in relation to other zines, as an example of how zine making should be conducted. In this sense, every zine published can be read as a statement on zine culture, on the particular position its maker holds within it, and on other zines alongside which it must be read to be properly understood: “the space of works always appears as a field of position-takings which can only be understood in terms of relationships, as a system of differential variations” (Bourdieu, 1996: 205). All zines share a minimal common characteristic: their participation to zine culture. Based on this observation, new zines published, new zine makers entering zine culture, new styles and genres, new techniques of production, new problems addressed—everything, in short that can be related to the realm of practices—produces an effect not only on readers, but also on other creators. With every zine publication, the composition of zine culture changes ever so slightly. In some cases, these changes catch (like a fire catches), and leads to veritable local revolutions, establishing precedents, instigating major transformations in the way zines are being made:

While there is no doubt that the orientation and the form of change depend on the “state of the system”, that is, on the repertory of actual and virtual possibilities that are offered at a given moment by the space of cultural position-takings (works, schools, exemplary figures, available genres and forms, etc.), they depend also and above all on the relations of symbolic force between agents and institutions. Having totally vital
interests in the possibilities offered as instruments and stakes in the struggle, these agents and institutions use all the powers and their disposal to activate those which seem the most in accord with their specific intentions and interests. (Bourdieu, 1996: 201–202)

Australian zine librarian and scholar Jessie Lymn attempted a definition of zine practice as the conjunction of their materiality and the networks they are a part of (Lymn, 2016: 1). The unique aspect of zines, she argues, comes from the fact that their creators mobilize a form of materiality and networks of sociability that are specific to zines and zine culture. These two elements are inherited from the historical development of zine culture and the accumulation of zines published since the 1930s. I suggest extending this characterization to include a larger number of “resources” zine makers can draw on at every step of the zine life cycle, including types of content, networks of collaboration in production and distribution, intentions and motivations, tools and techniques, means of distributions, and artistic, ethical, or political values. In short, zine making practices mobilize elements of definition of “(fan)zine”—signifieds and referents— drawing from them, making choices, insisting of some over others, adding new ones. Zine practices are, from this perspective, predicated on pre-existing representations and institutions providing elements of definitions and resources to work with. These practices are, then, paralleled to other appropriations of resources, each of them implicitly prescribing a certain approach to zine making, a certain understanding of what zines ought to be. Every zine practice can thus be considered as a situated actualization of zine history and the traces it left in zine culture, contributing to conflicting views of how this history should be appropriated and where it should be led to.

Zine history has proven more than enough that among the many resources available to zine makers are political ideologies and forms of activism. From the Futurians to anarcho-punk, Homo/Queercore, Riot Grrrl, and Race Riot, zine culture has been considered a reservoir of political alternatives, a proving ground and headquarter of sorts for broader political transformations. Similarly, the resources available to be mobilized in zine practices can provide—as with the Riot Grrrl media blackout—tools of external
political intervention. In all cases, however, zine making can be considered as an intervention on the battleground of zine practices, contributing to the internal politics of zine culture.

The case of graphzines show that there is no necessary connection between revolutionary transformations in zine making internally, and revolutionary politics externally. It also reveals how political and artistic values, the imperatives of artistic and political practice, can sometimes be at odds with one another. It is not an overstatement to say that graphzine artists operated a local revolution in zine making practice. Among their most important innovations is the use of screen printing to produce large-sized zines mostly comprising images. The importance of this shift has not gone unnoticed at the time, even by those who operated it, such as Olivier Allemane:

> From the moment that screen printing entered the scene, we were no longer into the “fanzine.” It was no longer the same medium. Something had happened. All of a sudden, we moved towards something that had artistic value. A form of nobility had developed […] Screen printing expanded the scope of graphzines, and even influenced their contents. (Quoted in Néret, 2019a: 114)\(^{120}\)

However important for internal zine politics, the transformation induced by graphzines remained overtly apolitical externally. This attitude must be understood in relation to the social and cultural context in which early graphzine artists operated, where political activism and ideological discourses motivate a large proportion of artistic and publishing activity. Among others we can note the daily newspaper *Libération* where the Bazooka group worked, the anarchist second wave of punk, and the heritage of May 1968. Kiki Picasso, member of Bazooka, is unambiguous to this effect when noting that “political activism had proved to be such a brainwashing exercise that people instinctively turned away from it.” (Quoted in Néret, 2019a: 81)\(^{121}\) The decisive transformation they brought to zine culture was—as internal politics goes—effective to the paradoxical extent that they diverted it from external,

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\(^{120}\) “À partir du moment où la sérigraphie est entrée dans cette affaire, on n’était plus dans le “zine”. Ce n’était plus le même support. Quelque chose s’est produit. On est passé à un truc qui avait une valeur artistique. Une noblesse s’est installée […] La sérigraphie a agrandi le champ du graphzine et a également influencé son contenu.” (My translation).

\(^{121}\) “L’engagement politique s’est révélé un tel bourrage de crâne que les gens s’en sont instinctivement détournés.” (My translation)
explicit political activism. As André Igwal, considered to have coined the term “graphzine,” put it: “No more boring activist zines printed on a rotten mimeograph. Down with the good word. The time is to expression, long live filthy images.” (quoted in Néret, 2019a: 5)

The work of Pakito Bolino, as part of the second generation of graphzine artists, follows suit on this relationship to politics. His work with Stu Mead can be understood in these terms, as “filthy images” aimed at stirring aesthetic, and perhaps existential trouble, rather than clearly defined political change. It should be noted that Bolino innovates within the zine culture he inherits. His workspace, modelled on that of Henriette Valium in Montreal, is a major turn in how screen printing is approached in French zine culture. His contact with art brut artists also established new networks and opens up a series of important collaborations, leading all the way to Bolino’s own recent work with Pascal Leyder, I’m the Eye Climax in 2021, signed “Pascalito Boleyder.” His most important contributions to zine culture, his political legacy as understood on the battleground of zine practices, nevertheless furthered the disconnect from ideological categories and discourses initiated by the first generation of graphzine artists. If anything, Bolino’s relationship to politics seems to be expressed through irony, derision, and hyperbole, as when he considers his workspace as “‘Art Qaeda,’ the base from which everything departs from all places to train graphic terrorists to destroy the world!” (Quoted in Néret, 2019a: 90)

Margins in Motion

Despite its incredible diversity in forms and the various battlegrounds on which it is enacted, zine politics do share some commonalities that I want to illustrate in closing. Since its early history in science

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122 “Fini les fanzines militants chiants tirés sur une ronéo pourrie. Fini la bonne parole. Place à l'expression, vive les images sales.” (My translation)

123 “‘Art-Qaïda’, la base d’où tout part de tous les endroits pour entraîner les terroristes graphiques à détruire le monde!” (My translation)
fiction fandom, zine culture has been defined by its marginal status in relationship to a moving centre. Be it in relationship with professional publishing as with science fiction fanzines, with the mainstream as with punk and post-punk subcultural zine cultures, or within the more diffuse cultural field today, zine culture has always had to negotiate its marginality. This is consistently reflected in the history of zine politics as a major stake of the conflicts opposing its actors. To be understood properly, zine culture, its history and its politics must be understood through the lens of marginality. Without this, zines necessarily appear as pale copies of more important forms of cultural production. This specificity of zines is at stake in virtually all internal debates within the culture and has featured prominently in most major events of the political history of zine culture. To account for zine politics, we must necessarily factor this marginality in.

From that perspective, the history of zine politics can be understood as a history of the progressive but perpetually incomplete autonomization of zine culture. Born within fandom, appropriated by subcultures, zines are now freed from their dependence on other forms of cultural production. Turned from a medium of communication into a medium of expression and creativity, contemporary zines and the culture that support them are more autonomous than they ever were. Paradoxically, they are perhaps also more exposed to various threats: appropriation, misrepresentation, censorship. Autonomy must therefore be understood as both the result and the precondition of zine politics. From that perspective, zine history appears as a process by which increasingly refined and specific zines practices, representations, and institutions were developed, granting zines as relatively autonomous, and establishing them as the mediums through which this autonomy would be expressed, claimed, questioned, enacted. All the tactics and strategies used by the actors presented in this thesis contributed to this process of autonomization as much as they drew on it to offer unique solutions to political problems both internally and externally. No matter the battleground— institutions, representations, or practices—and the historical thread—fandom, subcultural, or contemporary—the autonomy of zine
politics in a context of marginality remains the horizon of zine politics: its aim, its stake, and its condition of possibility.
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