

## A history of alternative publishing reflecting the evolution of print.

### 2.1 PRINT IS LIBERATING.

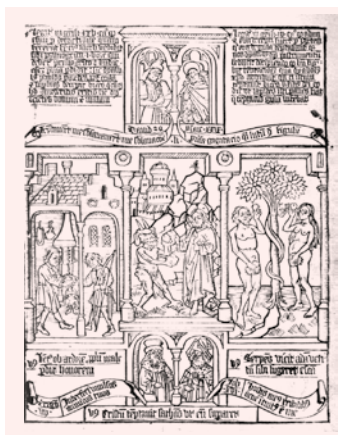
As André Breton, one of the founders of the 1920s Surrealist art movement, famously declared: “One publishes to find comrades!”<sup>35</sup> This short statement brilliantly embodies the spirit of early avant-garde publishing, as well as that of independent publishing later in the 20th century. Strictly speaking, the main concern here is neither commercial success, nor the aesthetic purity of the printed experiment, nor even the archiving of works (at least not yet). Rather, this kind of publishing is all about fostering and spreading ideas among like-minded people, through the ‘viral’ communication model so often applied by the alternative press.



(Left to right)  
André Breton, René  
Hilsum, Louis Aragon  
and Paul Eluard, with  
*Dada* #3, circa 1920

But when did this ‘alternative’ concept come into existence? Actually, it predates even Gutenberg, going at least all the way back to when the ‘*Biblia Pauperum*’ were being printed in woodcut. These were single-sheet illustrations of passages from the Bible, rendered in a style which today would best be described as comic strips, in an attempt to reduce the complexity of the original text into something more ‘popular’, a phenomenon which was mostly ignored by the educated elite of the time.<sup>36</sup>

Later, Gutenberg’s movable type print itself turned out to be the



Example of a  
'Biblia Pauperum'  
woodcut, 1470

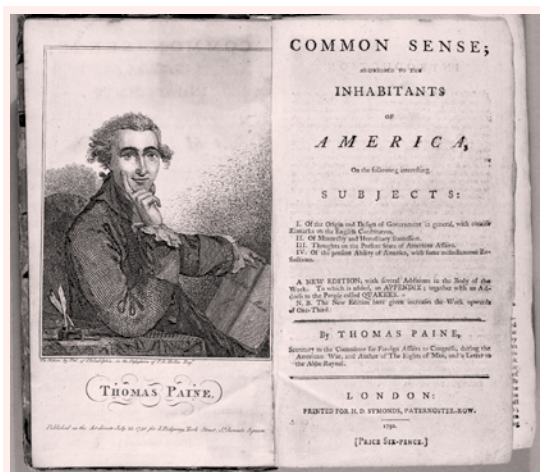
'media technology' invention which facilitated the spread of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>37</sup> By making the original text of the Bible accessible to anybody with a printed copy, it became possible for individuals to decide for themselves the meaning of the scriptures, based on their own reading. This new practice was called 'self-salvation' (and in a way, the spread of Gutenberg's printing press also meant the beginning of self-publishing).

Another case in point is the body of work of the Ranters, a radical group which flourished during the second half of the 17th century, with heretical views on religion (if Jesus is in everyone, who needs the Church?), politics (expropriation of the rich and collective ownership of property) and sex (preaching an ideal of free love). Such an extremist rebel group (which counted a few thousand followers in London alone) could easily self-publish and distribute its pamphlets. Though such publications were banned and burned, it was much more difficult to destroy an entire printed edition than had been the case with manuscripts, because of the sheer number of copies as well as their widespread distribution – and so some copies survived, a few even to this day.<sup>38</sup>

The two major political revolutions of the 18th century were both preceded by a frenzy of intellectual self-publishing activity, including a few 'underground' bestsellers. In the case of the French Revolution, many of the countless pamphlets produced were sponsored by printers, based on their potential commercial success. And at the beginning of the American Revolution, in 1776, Thomas Paine became famous for (anonymously) publishing a uniquely popular pamphlet (with a circulation of hundreds of thousands of copies) titled *Common Sense*, which provided the intellectual spark for the uprising. Paine was



The Ranters Ranting,  
a newsheet about the Ranters, 1650



Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense*, 1792

a prolific pamphleteer, as well as an early independent publisher. During the same period, it should be noted, the eminent British poet William Blake self-published all his works, including his now-famous masterpieces. But independent publishing, from the late 18th century onwards, was still mostly a medium used for spreading the kind of dissident political ideas which would eventually inspire the Mexican and Russian revolutions in the early 20th century – just as a multitude of new and extraordinary artistic and cultural movements was beginning to emerge.

## 2.2 THE USE OF PRINT IN THE 20TH CENTURY AVANT-GARDE.

In the early 20th century, the introduction of electricity was rapidly transforming urban daily life as well as the media landscape. And so the various emerging avant-garde art movements envisioned a brave new world, driven not only by electricity itself, but also by industry and the new upcoming media, all of which were seen as tools for conceptually revolutionising the existing order.

The first art movement to attempt this transformation was Italian Futurism, with its hostility towards the perceived mawkishness of Romanticism, and its own eagerness to force a radical break with the past. The Futurists' bold, iconoclastic statements (to which they owed much of their original fame and cultural impact) were distributed through various channels, including of course printed media. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti was in fact quite fond of print, particularly magazines. In 1905 he was editor in chief of *Poesia*, the international

journal of the Futurist movement,<sup>39</sup> produced with the support of a sympathetic printer – until Marinetti cancelled the project a few years later and went on to collaborate with the Florentine editor Giovanni Papini (who also worked closely with other Futurists). The resulting *Lacerba* magazine, printed in 1914, featured a re-thinking of typographical composition, beginning a process (with Marinetti's famous work *Parole in Libertà*) of pushing to the very limit the possibilities of black-and-white letterpress printing. The use of markedly contrasting font sizes, as well as a creatively graphical positioning of text elements (diagonally, forming visual patterns, etc) all helped to produce a new kind of typography, which aimed to express not only a rich variety of visual forms but also powerful emotions.<sup>40</sup>

A few years later Marinetti would be a key contributor to the definitive journal promoting Futurism as a cultural movement (including its unfortunate political involvement with Fascism). *L'Italia futurista*, published from 1916 to 1918, was important from a media perspective for its publication of photographic sequences of the *Teatro sintetico futurista* ('Futurist Synthetic Theatre') performances.<sup>41</sup> Marinetti also used print to produce propaganda leaflets: his Manifesto was printed on a two-sided leaflet, as was his response to an anonymous knife attack on the Boccioni painting *La Risata* during an exhibition. Also, in 1910 he climbed the Clock Tower in Venice to drop leaflets (fiercely condemning the city's Romantic rhetoric and cultural policy) upon the crowd below.<sup>42</sup>

In a more or less parallel development, the Dadaist movement from the very beginning produced various journals in different cities (Zurich, Berlin, Cologne, Amsterdam, Paris, New York, Tbilisi), which shared the distinctive Dadaist principles, while also reflecting local sensibilities. They may be seen as ancestors of the later 'zines': both are characterised by the same ephemeral nature (often going out of circulation after a single issue), and both challenge the graphic and journalistic conventions of their time, embracing instead the sheer pleasure of expressing ideas in print, in a way that reflects these ideas in content as well as graphic form. The now rare and collectable Dadaist magazine *Dada*, for example, published and designed by Tristan Tzara, which made its debut in July 1917, was printed on letterpress, stretching contemporary technical possibilities to the limit in order to reflect the Dadaists' radical approach towards interpreting and transforming contemporary society.

The Dadaists attempted to exploit the experimental possibilities of the printing machine, through a playful use of font sizes and by creatively integrating lines acting as content separators or as purely

graphic elements. Later on, even collages and photomontages were created manually and reproduced mechanically, definitively breaking through the rigid grid-based order of the published page, and entering the field of artistic re-appropriation and re-contextualisation of content. Most of the Dadaist magazines were produced through the patronage of sympathetic printers, who helped get around censorship problems and generally promoted self-publishing in a way that made these printed products affordable to artists.

The Surrealist movement used print as well, most notably to produce a small number of magazines which embodied in various forms the Surrealists' playful social satire. The first was *La Révolution Surréaliste*, published from 1924 to 1929. Its first issue, edited by André Breton, was designed to closely resemble the conservative scientific review *La Nature*, thus deceiving the reader into an unexpected encounter with the Surrealists' typically scandalous content. *Documents*, a later journal edited by Georges Bataille from 1929 to 1930, featured original cover art, harsh juxtapositions of pictures and text, and generally speaking a more extreme approach (compared to Breton's 'mainstream' Surrealism, and especially compared to the art-dealer-sponsored luxurious *Minotaure* magazine, published from 1933 to 1939). In a way, all these magazines, even as they called into question the printed medium, also reflected upon this very medium (by emphasising its graphical space and the challenges inevitably posed by its technical limitations) – just as they questioned and reflected upon the historical era of transformation of which they were very much a part.

Another contemporary master in this context was El Lissitzky, with the fascinating and visionary techniques he applied to graphic space. In his *Prounen* series of drawings from the early 1920s, he created complex, purely abstract three-dimensional spaces (using only ink and paper) which now may seem like a precursor of computer graphics and their endlessly programmable possibilities. His abstract conceptions literally broke through the constraints of the printed page, reformulating the concept of space within a single sheet of paper. He also redefined the book, a popular but nevertheless iconic object, as a different kind of space: "In contrast to the old monumental art (the book) itself goes to the people, and does not stand like a cathedral in one place waiting for someone to approach... (The book is the) monument of the future."<sup>43</sup> Lissitzky considered the book as a dynamic object, a "unity of acoustics and optics" that required the viewer's active involvement.

An even more amazing prediction was formulated in the conclusion of his *Topography of Typography* statement, published in 1923 in

Kurt Schwitters' *Merz* magazine (see also chapter 4.4). Here Lissitzky speculated on different levels about the new characteristics of what he defined as "the book space", which would definitively break with previous conventions – and he ends with a climactic definition in capital letters: "THE ELECTRO-LIBRARY", championing a future vision of books more 'optical' and sensorial than physical, and combining this vision with the core technology of the time: electricity.

### 2.3 THE MIMEOGRAPH OR STENCIL DUPLICATOR, ENABLING UNDERGROUND PUBLISHING.

So even the exhilarating spirit of the early avant-garde could not do away with traditional printing. The avant-garde struggled with the established technology of printing, and it did so with an admirably innovative approach. But the following decades would see the appearance of new technologies and devices which were to change forever the very concept of print.

One of the most important of these devices is undeniably the stencil duplicator, also known as the mimeograph machine or 'mimeo'.



Autographic printing, a mimeograph precursor invented by Thomas Alva Edison, 1876

Thomas Alva Edison patented a device for 'autographic printing' in 1876, the first step of a process that led in 1887 to the production and marketing of the mimeograph. After a slow start, this revolutionary technology was appropriated in the 1930s by left-wing radical groups (not without some ideological controversy, as this effectively meant replacing unionised print workers with a cheap, lightweight machine). Significantly, the radical trade unionists of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) embraced the mimeo stencil, declaring it to be the IWW's unionised printing facility. So even more than artists, it was political activists and dissidents (such as the exiled Trotsky, who printed his political 'zine' *Byulleten Oppositzii* in this way) who found in



A woman using a  
mimeograph machine,  
1930

the mimeograph the ideal medium for fostering freedom of expression and ideas, particularly during the years before and immediately after the Second World War. The mimeograph turned out to be the ideal clandestine printing device. It was lightweight and compact enough to be easily moved from place to place, thus avoiding confiscation and censorship, while also being suitable for producing a reasonable amount of copies.<sup>44</sup>

In subsequent years, the mimeograph would give rise to the first major waves of alternative print publishing, in two very different contexts, reflecting the upcoming geopolitical dichotomy of the period (U.S.A. vs. U.S.S.R.). By now, the mimeograph was being marketed to offices (circulars, newsletters), schools (classroom materials) and churches (bulletins). The key selling point was that it allowed short-run productions to be made cheaply, quickly and with reasonable print quality.

But such a device was also very interesting to those wishing to create printed productions outside of mainstream print infrastructures. And so in the U.S.A. the mimeograph was used by a generation of science-fiction enthusiasts to produce a multitude of ‘fanzines’ (as the term was soon coined) with a peak of production in the 1950s. Despite the fragile and easily corrupted stencils, the often messy printed results and ink-stained hands, this device was essentially the first ‘personal printer’. The crude aesthetic of the SF fanzines and their limited

ODD issue #9,  
a U.S. science-  
fiction fanzine,  
1951



circulation were characteristic of a scattered but prolific scene, genuinely more interested in discussing the latest productions, than in the possible socio-cultural implications of a critical glance into possible future developments of their chosen medium. Nevertheless, an extensive scene was established here, with its own distinctive characteristics – for example, a readiness to simply swap issues with each other, without anyone seeming to worry too

much about who was getting the better deal. (It should also be noted in passing that *Beatitude*, the first ‘zine’ of the Beat movement, was also printed using the mimeograph.)<sup>45</sup>

During the same period, on the other side of the globe, in the post-Stalinist U.S.S.R. (and other countries with a similar socio-economic system), the same medium was being used for a completely different purpose: clandestinely copying, sharing and distributing dissident literature or other media suppressed by the government. This kind of underground printed production was called ‘Samizdat’ (a contraction of ‘self-publication’ in Russian). Often no more than a few copies were made at a time, and those who received a copy were expected to make more copies. When there was no mimeograph machine at hand, copies were made by handwriting or typing. Within the Soviet bloc, Poland and Czechoslovakia were the most active Samizdat-producing countries. In Poland, especially, alongside the hundreds of small individual publishers, several large underground publishing houses also flourished, with supplies either smuggled in from abroad or stolen from official publishing houses.<sup>46</sup> The perceived threat of the Samizdat phenomenon for Communist regimes was so great that the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu went so far as to forbid the possession of unmonitored typewriters by Romanian citizens.

## 2.4 FLUXUS, PRINTED MATERIALS CIRCULATING WITHIN AN ‘ETERNAL NETWORK’

Another art movement, arguably one of the most influential to our current communication-driven mediascape, based much of its

multi-directional strategy on printed materials. In the early 1960s, George Maciunas founded his Fluxus movement, with its legendary event scores, performances and 'Fluxus boxes' filled with organised collections of games, concepts, plastic objects and miscellaneous printed materials. In these carefully designed objects, produced in limited editions that were in fact quite cheap to make, the printed components (brochures, leaflets, flip books, maps, playing cards, etc) were always an integral part of the concept.<sup>47</sup>

Soon, the 'Fluxus newsletters' were being published to facilitate communication and the exchange of ideas within the network of Fluxus artists spread across three continents. Maciunas also collected various newspaper cuttings of Fluxus-related articles into a 'newspaper roll' to be displayed as a kind of advertisement in public spaces.

But the most consistent effort in print by Maciunas and his associates was certainly the *Fluxus Newspaper*. The earliest issues were basically anthologies of Fluxus artists from various countries; the fourth issue, however, featured a *Fluxus Symphony Orchestra in Fluxus Concert* poster, meant to be torn apart as a way of promoting the event; the fifth issue contained a catalogue of Fluxus editions, also meant to be torn apart; and for the seventh issue, Maciunas asked artists to contribute "events related to the paper page", which were printed as two separate editions: as a regular newspaper, and on card stock.<sup>48</sup> The magazines were shipped in parcels to Fluxus members in various cities, who personally formed a distribution infrastructure parallel to the European Mail-Order Fluxshop already set up in Amsterdam.

Another radical Fluxus approach to print was to sell cheaply-made art books at prices usually associated with prestigious collector's editions. Several Fluxus publishing houses were founded, of which Dick Higgins' Something Else Press was probably the most well-known, pioneering the artist's book movement with book editions running anywhere between 1,500 to 5,000 copies and sold at standard bookshop prices.<sup>49</sup>

Several of the countless Fluxus artworks dealt with the subject of money, specifically banknotes, which are probably the most precious (and the most trusted) of all printed materials. Banknotes may also be considered as limited-edition 'original prints' – a concept which is essentially nonsense anyway, since print was invented for potentially endless serial production. Artistic imitation of banknotes is a recurring theme in art, but the Japanese Fluxus artist Genpei Akasegawa took the idea quite literally, while pushing the aforementioned 'original print' conceptual nonsense to its logical conclusion. In 1963 he commissioned a print run of 1,000 Yen banknote replicas,

which he proceeded to use in his announcements and performances. Unfortunately, the following year he was arrested and convicted of currency counterfeiting. He then went on to create a series of zero-yen banknotes, as a comment on the absurdity of his trial.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, the Fluxus movement was also the first to properly formulate the seminal concept of the network. The ‘Eternal Network’ was a radical idea, enabling practices which would transform the working methods of many artists: an “ongoing, global artistic network in which each participating artist realizes that s/he is part of a wider network. It is a model of creative activity with no borders between artist and audience, with both working on a common creation.” (Chuck Welch, *Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology*)<sup>51</sup>

The Eternal Network was initiated by Fluxus artists Robert Filliou and George Brecht, who introduced the concept in April 1968 in a poster mailed to several correspondents. This can be seen as one of the earliest conceptual models of an international network of artists working together through postal communication – a forerunner of what a few years later would become the Mail Art network.

The influence of Fluxus on underground print was not long in waiting. For example, *Aspen*, an experimental “multimedia magazine of the arts” published by Phyllis Johnson from 1965 to 1971 and designed by various contributing artists, featured “culture along with play”: each issue came in a customised box filled with booklets, phonograph recordings, posters, postcards – one issue even included a reel of Super 8 film. Johnson herself was later quoted as saying: “We wanted to get away from the bound magazine format, which is really quite restrictive.”<sup>52</sup>



Advertisement for  
Aspen magazine,  
1967

## 2.5 THE UNDERGROUND PRESS BOOM, OFFSET COLOUR DRIPPING AND THE NETWORK (AGAIN).

In the mid-1960s, new countercultural and revolutionary movements were emerging which would give rise to a further transformation of alternative print, spawning countless new magazines by the end of the decade. Probably the first important sign of things to come was the *Greenwich Village Voice*, founded in 1955 in a two-bedroom apartment in New York, and positioning itself from the start in fierce opposition to the 'bourgeois' culture of the glossy *New Yorker* magazine. For almost a decade, the *Village Voice* would remain the one and only point of reference for the radical cultural critique it embodied.

Then in September 1966, all the way on the other end of the country, the first issue of the *San Francisco Oracle* was published, giving a legitimate and superlative voice to the Haight-Ashbury counterculture, while once again revolutionising print design. Affordable offset printing had gradually improved to the point where it could now effectively reproduce the psychedelic aesthetic, originally produced using silkscreen printing. The *Oracle* was designed by Allen Cohen and his staff, who tormented the printers with endless requests for special colours, until the printers finally gave up and left the presses in the hands of Cohen and his associates so they could do it their own way. They soon started filling the various inkwells of the printing presses without paying too much attention to where any particular colour went, resulting in rainbows of colours splashed and blended all across the pages.<sup>53</sup>

The *Oracle* (which peaked at a print run of 150,000 copies) epitomised the idea that a magazine could be more than simply a handful of paper conveying literary and political information. By doing away with the traditional 'static' typographical structure, headlines could be designed rather than composed, and texts were no longer laid out as blocks of letters, but were allowed to penetrate the illustrations spread across multiple pages. Thus the magazine became an object to behold, an image to experience – in one word, a 'trip'.<sup>54</sup> This use of colour broke with the established modalities of information transmission, and the result, besides being a popular success, was also a masterly reflection of the aesthetic and the spirit of the times, soon to be imitated by countless other underground magazines. Once again, this new alternative publishing scene was able to survive through the support of a few sympathetic printers. And soon enough, the first printing cooperatives were being set up.

The geographical on-the-road 'trip' of the 1960s generation was also reflected in publishing, the best example of which is probably

*Other Scenes*, a bi-weekly publication edited by John Wilcock in whatever world city he happened to be at the moment, and then distributed globally.<sup>55</sup>

Another powerful concept (and one foreseen by Fluxus) to emerge during this period was the idea of a 'network' of magazines. In its cooperative form, this concept was brought into practice by the Underground Press Syndicate, a network of counterculture newspapers and magazines founded in 1967 by several early underground publishers. The common agreement was that any member of the network was allowed to reprint, free of charge, the contents of any other member, and that any publication could join the network later on, provided they agreed to the same terms. The result was a widespread distribution of countercultural articles, stories and comics, as well as a treasure trove of content immediately available to even the smallest startup publication. At the time it was founded, the Underground Press Syndicate brought together 62 of the approximately 150 publications then considered as underground press.

Another remarkable effort was the Liberation News Service, a left-wing alternative news service which published news bulletins from 1967 to 1981, rapidly growing from a single mimeographed sheet



Cover of *Liberation News Service* #275, 1970

distributed to ten newspapers, to a complete publication featuring 20 pages of articles and photographs, and mailed twice a week to almost 800 subscribers. Through its contacts with worldwide Western radical groups as well as Third World liberation forces, the Liberation News Service was able to draw attention to a new global perspective by documenting important facts which were either totally ignored or else poorly documented by the mainstream press.

By 1969, virtually every sizeable city or college town in North America had at least one underground newspaper. And yet, by 1973 most of them had already gone out of circulation. Still, one new publication was fostering the development of networks as well as the spreading of information. The *Whole Earth Catalog*, published by Stewart Brand regularly between 1968 and 1972, and occasionally afterwards, embraced a mission of promoting “access to tools”. Brand, in his own words, wanted everyone to be able to “find his own inspiration, shape his own environment, and share his adventure with whoever is interested”.<sup>56</sup>

While remaining, strictly speaking, a catalogue (listing a huge variety of ‘tools’ including maps, professional journals, courses, classes, specialised utensils, even early synthesisers and personal computers), the *Whole Earth Catalog*’s editorial selection was very sophisticated, resulting in something between a curatorial work and a list of resources. Furthermore, the listings were continually revised according to the experiences and suggestions of users as well as the staff. Thus the level of interaction and involvement between publisher and users/readers was unusually high; this ‘tool’ was a networked one, used for unveiling and sharing important information, and allowing people to change their relationship with their personal and social environments. The *Whole Earth Catalog*’s farewell statement in 1974 was prophetic for future generations of underground publishers: “Stay hungry, stay foolish.”

## 2.6 PHOTOCOPYING THE WORLD, RE-APPROPRIATING CULTURE.

After the mimeograph stencil, the next technology destined to revolutionise underground print was xerography, also known as photocopying. This was first marketed by Xerox in the 1960s for use in offices (although the basic principle of ‘electrostatic printing’ had been described as far back as the 18th century). Later, in the 1970s, the technology gradually became available to the general public, through coin-operated machines or in specialised copy shops. A black-and-white copy of any original could now be created cheaply and instantaneously, opening up endless new possibilities for small-print productions.

Photocopying made its appearance just before the beginning of the mid-1970s Punk cultural revolution, which quickly and wholeheartedly embraced this new medium, for its particular aesthetic qualities as well as its properties as a means of communication. Publishing a zine, or printing a flyer, was now easier than ever. Punk zines became

an integral element of the Punk culture, making full use of the medium's black-and-white aesthetic, and with a playful attitude towards the photocopying process itself (for example, the shades and contrasts obtained by re-copying a copy, the ability to 'photograph' objects placed directly upon the scanning window, and the strange effects that could be created by moving the original during the scanning process) – which would also inspire the later Copy Art movement.

Photocopying proved essential to Punk culture for a number of reasons: it guaranteed individual freedom of expression, it encouraged a do-it-yourself attitude, and it was cheap and accessible. Furthermore, the freedom to sample and juxtapose images led to the production of collages that enabled the Punk zinester to re-appropriate media in new and liberating ways – techniques which remain in use in various forms to this day. Also, publications such as *Maximumrocknroll's Book Your Own Fuckin' Life* contained extensive lists of contacts, essential for the survival of nomadic Punk bands, once again exploring the concept of building networks within a 'scene' (see also chapter 6.1.2).

More or less simultaneously with this boom of Punk performance-related publishing, another art movement also started producing printed works using mainly photocopies, but from a rather different perspective. The Mail Art movement was grounded in a similar do-it-yourself practice and freedom of expression, suitable to its radical critique of the art world (no curators, no critics, everybody can be an artist, everybody can create an exhibition simply by collecting works by other artists sent through the mail). Mail Art was based on a remarkable yet underestimated infrastructure: the global postal system. As John Held Jr. pointed out: "Bolstered by international treaties, the postal system was one of the only available means of communication between artists separated by divergent political systems."<sup>57</sup>

The first such publication was the famous *New York Correspondence School Weekly Breeder*, a zine from the late 1960s distributed to various Mail Art participants, confirming once again the central role of the 'network' concept. Mail Art zines were by nature meant to be exchanged between participants, in a spirit of 'everybody can be their own editor'. The creative use of this network generated some very original printed products. One memorable strategy was that initiated by the Mail Art zine *Cabaret Voltaire*, edited by Steve Hitchcock in the late 1970s: for issue #3 he sent to a number of Mail artists a 'drawing test', an image consisting of just a few sketchy lines, with instructions encouraging the artist to complete the drawing. The subsequent issue was a collection of the drawings that were sent in, signed with the postal addresses of the respective artists.<sup>58</sup>



Clockwise from top left

Sniffin' Glue, an archetypal Punk zine, issue #12, 1977

New York Correspondence School Weekly Breeder, issue #7, 1972

An example of Copy Art by Knut Hoffmeister, 1982

Xerox 9700 advertisement, 1977



Another specific sub-genre within Mail Art zines were the ‘assemblies’: “The publisher invites contributions and from a few people and each of them sends multiple copies of their work to cover the number of copies in that edition. Each zine copy is then collated and bound making (it) unique, and personalized.” (Christopher Becker, writing in *Factsheet Five*<sup>59</sup>)

For example, the zine *X Ray* assembled 226 copies of each issue (usually sold out), while the single-sheet *Braincell* brought together donated stickers and stamps, using a cheap multicolour home-publishing technique called Print Gocco.<sup>60</sup> From 1970 to 1982, Richard Kostelanetz’s Assembling Press published the annual *Assemblings* featuring “otherwise unpublishable” art and literature: rather than making a selection from submitted material, Kostelanetz (and a few other co-editors) asked contributors to send in 1,000 copies of anything they

wished to publish, and then assembled the unpredictable visual and written content into books.<sup>61</sup>

One of the leading Mail Art magazines, *Arte Postale!*, edited by Vittore Baroni, featured theme issues, such as the ‘game issue’ in which each page was dedicated to a game invented by a different author – in order to play the game, the page had to be cut, folded, or otherwise manipulated, all according to the author’s rules, so that ‘playing’ the magazine also involved disassembling it (and thus somehow destroying it).

The self-awareness of this extensive network (predating the Internet) was sustained by a few publications featuring almost exclusively project announcements, of which *Global Mail* was by far the most relevant. As its publisher Ashley Parker Owens stated: “There’s not a single place for the mail art or the networked collaboration. (...) Beyond the projects and exhibitions (...) the true meaning (...) is the exchange between individuals. The secret is in this kind of positive energy.”

Another approach to photocopied publication was the one taken by a particular wing of the Autonomist political movement. The ‘Creative Autonomism’ movement, which flourished in Italy during the 1977 nationwide wave of university student sit-ins, generated almost a hundred different Dadaist and Surrealist-influenced political zines, featuring subversive (often bordering on illegal) content. Some of the most interesting products of this prolific underground scene were the various ‘fakes’, a specific sub-genre within underground publishing: clever parodies by creative individuals ‘hijacking’ established (large or small) publications by mimicking their graphic style and typeface. One of the most celebrated was the *Il Male* series of campaigns, which featured outrageous yet somehow plausible journalistic ‘scoops’, designed to resemble the front pages of major newspapers and displayed near newsstands, regularly triggering a wave of public anger, shock or disbelief.

In Poland as well, a fake of the newspaper *Trybuna Ludu* was produced and distributed during Pope John Paul II (Karol Wojtyła)’s visit to his homeland in 1979, with the banner headline *Government Resigns, Wojtyła Crowned King*. In France, a fake *Le Monde Diplomatique* was anonymously distributed to a number of subscribers, featuring satirical comments on the Rote Armee Fraktion’s Stammheim Prison blood-bath.<sup>62</sup> These ‘fakers’ were all applying in a new way Karl Marx’s often-quoted statement that “It is the first duty of the press to undermine the foundations of the existing political system.”<sup>63</sup>

Photocopying was also a cheap and easy medium for activist print campaigns, attempting to expand these into an urban territory which was being conceptually remapped starting in the late 1970s. *Bambina*

*Precoce*, a fanzine edited by Tommaso Tozzi from 1984 to 1986, was posted on walls in the streets of Florence (in the city centre as well as the outskirts), thus exploring an innovative form of distribution. It might also be regarded as a performance in print: one issue was designed as fake street names in A3 format, while another took the form of a tourist-guide map of graffiti to be found in the city.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, it should be mentioned in passing that (at least) two other technologies were used marginally during this same period in order to print zines. Architecture students used a technique called heliography, which produced zines in long scroll-like sheets – somewhat similar to fax zines, which were sent using facsimile (fax) machines. In both these cases, circulation was limited, and copies were transmitted straight to the readers' machines, often through a pyramidal distribution scheme using a small number of 'nodes' and sub-nodes that faxed the zine to a restricted number of readers.

## 2.7 THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION, AND THE PEAK AND FALL OF ZINES.

But the most important development to revolutionise print was surely the explosion of digital technology. Starting in the late 1980s, anyone could purchase Desktop Publishing (DTP) software in computer shops; from now on, simply owning a personal computer and a printer meant potentially having all the means of production in one's own home. Amateurs (often referred to as the 'bedroom generation') could now produce printed materials in their own personal environment. At the same time, new digital storage media were being introduced, such as the floppy disk, which was cheap and compact and could carry a reasonable amount of data.



Meet the Press. Apple  
desktop publishing  
advertisement, 1985

One of the very first periodical publications to make use of computer-related storage media was *Between C & D*, a New York quarterly

literary magazine edited by Joel Rose and Catherine Texier and published between 1983 and 1990; contributors included Kathy Acker and Dennis Cooper. The magazine (tagline: “Sex. Drugs. Danger. Violence. Computers.”) was printed on computer paper and sold in a plastic bag. The limited-run editions were collected by New York galleries and libraries, while back issues could be purchased on computer disks.<sup>65</sup>

A number of zines started enhancing their printed editions with a floppy disk featuring ‘bonus’ content. One of the more conceptual applications was created by the Italian literary and Mail Art zine *Adenoidi*, adding a floppy disk containing colour pictures – which were also printed in black-and-white inside the paper zine itself, with the missing colours indicated by text captions with arrows pointing to the corresponding fields. More and more publications were designed as ‘interactive’ magazines, experimenting with various media such as the emerging CD-ROM. One trend was to reproduce as faithfully as possible the conventions and standards of print, while adding ‘bonus’ animated or audio content. *Blender* magazine (and its close competitor, *Launch*) was one of the very first to do this, in 1994 – publishing a CD-ROM magazine with original pop music-oriented content, including advertisements.

*Launch*, commercial for CD-ROM magazine, issue #20, 1998



Various ‘interactive’ CD-ROM magazines were also produced which focused on experimental interfaces, such as the seminal (and almost impossible to navigate) *Blam!*, which was in fact more a purely digital product than a normal ‘publication’. Yet another genre was defined by the emerging profession of digital designers, as exemplified by the mixed-digital-media *Gas Book*, a publication showcasing multimedia and electronic music talents within a single package consisting of a book, a CD-ROM, an audio CD, stickers and a T-shirt.

Probably also as a result of the arrival of digital media, the early



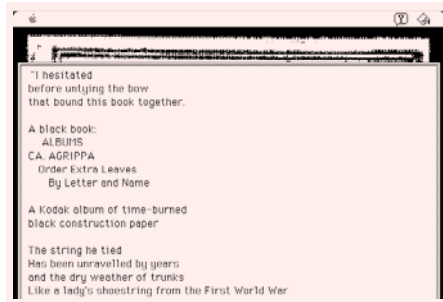
1990s saw an unprecedented peak in the production of zines, culminating in the phenomenal *Factsheet Five*, the ‘mother of all zines’ which for almost twenty years served as “the connecting tissue holding together a mutant media beast” (Gareth Branwyn, *Jamming the Media*<sup>66</sup>). Founded by Mike Gunderloy in 1982 (in 1987, he was also running a zine Bulletin Board System (BBS), one of the first associated with an underground publication), *Factsheet Five* reviewed more than a thousand zines in each issue. By 1990 Gunderloy quit, since he could no longer cope with the huge workload. Eventually Seth Friedman, an active figure in the zine community, stepped up to take his place, and was very successful in dealing with a rapidly growing and increasingly productive international scene.

By the late 1990s, the number of zines had exploded to an estimated 50,000, covering all kinds of social and personal themes. The zine scene featured well-attended meetings, professional distributors and dedicated sections in public libraries. As Gunderloy said in the introduction to his book *The World of Zines*: “The zine world is in fact a network of networks”.<sup>67</sup> But the economic crisis of the mid-1990s took its toll on the paper zines: increases in postage rates and bankruptcies of some of the major zine distributors (most notably Desert Moon) forced the zines towards a much more cautious publishing policy.

Furthermore, by the late 1990s the mediascape was – once again – being completely reshaped. Already in 1995, just as the World Wide Web was about to take off, John Markoff wrote in the *New York Times*: “Anyone with a modem is potentially a global pamphleteer.”<sup>68</sup> In the first decade of the 21st century, most zines stopped publishing on paper, choosing instead for a web-based platform. This too would soon be superseded by a new (and controversial) phenomenon, the (literally) millions of blogs and the ensuing ‘blogosphere’ – to mention here in passing a complex and diverse phenomenon which we shall analyse more in depth in chapter 4.

Only science fiction could predict what might come next: and indeed, a fascinating vision of the relationship between paper and pixel was formulated by the science-fiction author William Gibson, an absolute master of twisting today's reality into tomorrow's possibility. His story *Agrippa*, written in 1992, was an electronic poem, sold as an expensive

A screenshot from  
William Gibson's  
electronic book  
*Agrippa*, 1992



limited-edition work in a decorated case and with a 3.5" floppy disk containing the entire text. The software was designed to let the user turn the pages on the screen by clicking a computer mouse. But the pages, once turned, were immediately deleted from the disk. Also, the printed book was treated with photosensitive chemicals, so that the words and images gradually faded as the book was exposed to light. So once the book was read, it was gone forever. This work can be understood as a reflection on our faith in paper, as well as a representation of the instability of electrons – and it certainly sheds a light on the uncertain future of publishing in both paper and electronic media, while predicting how the two are destined to become increasingly intertwined.

## 2.8 INTERTWINING MEDIA, A LOOK AT THE NEAR FUTURE.

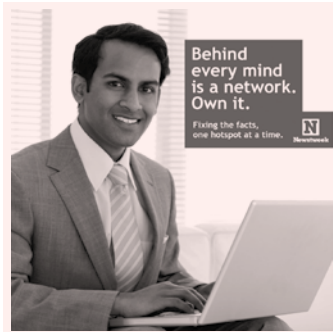
"Zines are purely libertarian", declared Stephen Schwartz in his *History of Zines*.<sup>69</sup> This is a definition which can be expanded to include any of the best underground publishing productions. Yet we may ask, does it still hold true in the current digital era? What does it mean to create an 'alternative publication' within this new environment? The basic requirements remain the same: to challenge the prevailing medium, to formulate a new original aesthetic based on the new medium's qualities, and to generate content which is relevant to the contemporary situation. The trailblazing 'intermedia' concept formulated in the mid-1960s by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins seems to have now become the norm; and while independent publishers in the 21st century are increasingly apprehensive about their future survival, they will certainly

use offset printing, photocopies, print on demand, PDF files, blogs, or whatever combination of media happens to be most useful for their current project.

On the other hand, while our trust in print remains more or less intact, we increasingly perceive printed media as being too slow in delivering content, compared to the ‘live’ digital media which can be constantly updated minute-by-minute. This is true especially in the case of the news, which is increasingly seen as being completely ‘disembodied’. A clear sign of this is the desperate trend of online platforms attempting to speculate on ongoing news developments, by constantly anticipating what may be going on, or what is about to happen very soon – often using a vague and elusive tone designed to trick the reader into trusting that all the developments mentioned in the news have already actually taken place (see chapter 3.3).

The artwork *Newstweek*<sup>70</sup> (the name is a twist on the well-known *Newsweek* magazine) playfully yet disturbingly challenges our blind trust in easily modifiable online content such as news. Artists Julian Oliver and Danja Vasiliev built a miniature electronic device resembling a laptop charger which, once plugged in, accesses local wireless networks (in a café, for example) and makes it possible for the artists to edit in real time the content shown on other people’s internet browsers, including news stories published on the websites of popular newspapers. So an unsuspecting user might find himself suddenly reading outrageous headlines (such as *Milk and Hormones: Why Your Son Has Breasts* or *Thomas Pynchon to Wed Lady Gaga*). One journalist, who personally experienced the effects of the device on one of her articles, had to call the newspaper before realising she was the only one reading the seamlessly modified content.

One of the most significant alternative projects of the new millennium was surely the amazing campaign by the activist duo The Yes Men (in collaboration with Steve Lambert and The Anti-Advertising Agency, and anonymously sponsored), which took place in New York City on November 12, 2008.<sup>71</sup> The campaign involved printing and distributing several thousand copies of a fake *New York Times Special Edition* set in the near future (July 4, 2009) and featuring only positive news, perhaps briefly plausible after Barack Obama’s election as U.S.



Flyer of  
*Newstweek* by  
Julian Oliver  
and Danja  
Vasiliev, 2011

"All the News  
We Hope to Print"

VOL. CLIV, NO. 54,631

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JULY 4, 2009

PRICE

## Nation Sets Its Sights on Building Sound Economy

True Cost Tax, Salary Caps, Trust-Busting Top List

By E. VERNON

The President has called for swift passage of the Stimulus for a New Economy (S.N.E.), the stimulus economic package includes a phased withdrawal from credit, financial institutions, and other measures intended to improve the for salient situation. (See highlights on page A13.)

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"At this point, the market is not

likely to see the stimulus situation of being less declining so much for as long.

Krugman said that the new Treasury bill needs to ensure the prosperity of all citizens, rather than simply supporting large corporations and the wealthy. "The market is supposed to serve as a barometer, not as a goal."

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Continued on Page A13

## Maximum Wage Law Succeeds Salary Caps Will Help Stabilize Economy

By J. M. MORGAN

WASHINGTON — After long and often bitter debate, Congress passed legislation, known as the Maximum Wage Law, which will set a limit on the wages of the top 10 percent of the U.S. economy. The law will also set a limit on the wages of the top 10 percent of the U.S. economy. The law will also set a limit on the wages of the top 10 percent of the U.S. economy.

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## TRUE COST TAX PLAN

By MARCUS S. DRIGGS

The proposed "True Cost" plan, which requires product prices to reflect their true cost to society, has been rejected by the U.S. Congress. The plan would require product prices to reflect their true cost to society, has been rejected by the U.S. Congress.

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## Popular Pressure Ushers Recent Progressive Tilt

Study Cites Movements for Massive Shift in DC

By SAMUEL H. HERRICK

The report indicates extensive intention by the Administration and both houses of Congress can be attributed directly to grassroots advocacy, according to a comprehensive study done this month.

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# IRAQ WAR ENDS

## Troops to Return Immediately

By JIM HENRIS

WASHINGTON — Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom were brought to an end, according to the Department of Defense, which would be the most unfortunate admission to modern American history.

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Cover page  
of New York  
Times Special  
Edition by  
The Yes Men,  
Steve Lambert,  
The Anti-  
Advertising  
Agency, 2008

INTERNATIONAL A-5

Gilman, Other Centers Closed

The national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) today announced that it will close all of its offices in the United States, except for its headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia.

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President. The fake special edition copied the ‘look and feel’ of the real *New York Times* in painstaking detail (including the usual advertisements), and succeeded in fooling a significant portion of the general public who picked up a copy early in the morning (a large network of volunteers, organised through the Internet, distributed the publication on the streets, all apparently without any legal repercussions).

The fact that a newspaper, the most visibly endangered of all contemporary media, was the chosen medium for this campaign demonstrates on one hand the ongoing trust of the public in printed media such as newspapers (as well as our endless appetite for news); on the other hand, the same printed media are also clearly in a process of profound mutation, which is causing a major shift in their relationship with the public. The need to be kept up-to-date, previously catered to by the morning newspapers, is now being serviced through the Web and the even more addictive RSS web feeds, constantly updated from hundreds of sources. And consequently the ‘unified’ but ever-changing newspaper increasingly aims to fulfil our need to know ‘what will happen now’, by attempting to announce rather than narrate reality, while continuing to sell the feeling of being part of a community.

The Yes Men’s fake but historic *New York Times* sheds a light on the future of publishing: here a ‘forecast’ content was printed and presented as reality, ironically demonstrating how the ‘real’ news is increasingly turning into a ‘virtual reality’: a vast, crowded, ever-changing and immersive space, endlessly navigable in different hyperlinked directions and dimensions.

But in order to understand the impact of this fake print object as a conceptual and activist campaign, we must first understand how our current perception of the news is derived from this virtual news space which we navigate every day. We trust it – because it is printed, and because of the way it is printed. And so the fake *New York Times* is also a perfect illustration of the philosopher Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi’s statement on the cover of his 1977 *A/Traverso* zine: “false information that produces real events”.<sup>72</sup>

Clearly, print is mutating profoundly as a result of its (final?) hybridisation with digital technology – as the last of all traditional media to undergo this process (after music, radio, and TV). And we can assume that this mutation will be neither easy nor straightforward.