

The 1930s sci-fi zine, the dada art zine, the chapbook created by beat writers in the 1950s, small-scale radical magazines of the 1960s, punk zines of the 1970s, the zine explosion of the 1990s, online blogs and guerrilla news reporting of today all started with individuals sharing a similar DIY ethos.

—Amy Spencer, *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture*

Zine producers have historically embraced new technology. They quickly adopted small hand presses in the 1930s, mimeograph machines in the 1950s, photocopy machines in the 1980s, and desktop publishing in the 1990s.

—Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*

The future presented by the Internet is the mass amateurization of publishing and a switch from “Why publish this?” to “Why not?”

—Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*

Try writing a book that is partly about photocopies and mimeographs, and everywhere you go someone is bound to ask, “Are you going to write about zines?” It started to bother me. Although the pressing relevance of amateur cultural production online seems clear—whether elaborated enthusiasti-

cally by Henry Jenkins in *Convergence Culture*, for instance, or excoriated by Andrew Keen in *The Cult of the Amateur*—the question about zines that kept coming up wasn’t about the Internet at all, at least not explicitly.¹ Asking about self-published, homemade, small-run amateur publications sounded like pure nostalgia to me, or worse. I detected pie-eyed cultural studies, trapped in celebrations of subcultural resistance as cultural critique. And I detected some sloppy media history, too, rushing to connect while forgetting to distinguish. Yet in fact amateurs have kept coming up while I have been thinking about documents, whether in the subtitle to *Harpel’s Typograph*, variously in Robert Binkley’s “New Tools for Men of Letters,” or in pondering the tactical uses of photocopies and the desktop-publishing origins of PDF files.² Technological developments that have helped enable the expansion of the scriptural economy have arisen largely according to the interests of officialdom, but their benefits—thank goodness—devolve to outsiders as well. The meanings of media are not prescribed, we know, but rather evolve amid the conditions of use. Amateurs can certainly play roles as users, but they also inhere within, and help structure conditions of, use in general.

The previous chapters have gestured “toward a media history of documents” without completing one: many are the paths not taken, and much is left to do. New questions must arise. Rather than conclude too neatly, then, this afterword finally responds to the persistent question of zines. After being prompted so often, I started to wonder, what would—what should—a history of amateur publication look like? How do zines have history?³ More particularly, is—or how is—that history relevant to the media history of documents upon which this project dwells?

Returning to Oscar Harpel makes some sense here, both because the subtitle of *Harpel’s Typograph* addresses “master printers, amateurs, apprentices and others,” and because of his anthology, *Poets and Poetry of Printerdom*.⁴ Taken together these titles testify, as I have suggested, to an important moment largely overlooked by media history: the moment when the printers’ monopoly was finally broken. Before the Civil War letterpress, printers had a lock on the look of printedness; afterward and increasingly they did not. (This happened so long ago that we have forgotten what it was like to be—even forgotten that we ever were—limited to writing by hand. Few elementary schools even teach cursive these days.) So although Harpel’s *Poets and Poetry of Printerdom* sounds like a quaint assertion of

printers as poets, one must be aware of its darker undertone, a complaint that by contrast poets really should not be printers. Yet just a few years before, *Harpel's Typograph* had addressed itself to amateur printers inter alia.

It seems likely that Harpel's use of the term "printerdom" was a reaction to that other coinage, "amateurdom."⁵ The *Oxford English Dictionary* is no help here, saying only that *-dom* as a suffix was first noticed by its compilers in an 1880 publication. It is easy to antedate the *OED* now that there are searchable databases, of course, but there is something more interesting here: according to the first edition of the dictionary, the suffix *-dom* is "freely employed to form nonce-derivatives." ("Nonce-derivative," like the related "nonce-word" and "nonce-form," was invented by James Murray, the dictionary's editor, to refer to words "used only 'for the nonce.'") Ironically, a quick search of relevant databases shows that "nonce-derivative" is itself a nonce-form, used only once or twice and only by or under Murray. And searching databases likewise reveals that "printerdom" was also a nonce-derivative, but "amateurdom" was not. It had legs: by the mid-1870s it was standard American usage. And by the early 1880s it was familiar enough to be shortened as second-order slang, with increasing numbers of amateur printers, editors, and writers participating in the domain that some of them sometimes called "the dom."

The character of amateurdom may be gleaned from the American Antiquarian Society's collection of more than 50,000 amateur newspapers. Early examples are "pen-printed" (that is, written by hand) or job printed (by hired printers), but the collection suggests that the production of amateur papers increased tenfold after 1869 when a small platen press, called the Novelty Job Printing Press, came on the market aimed at amateurs—including merchants and druggists—as well as at boys (figure After.1).⁶ Amateurdom organized as such soon followed.⁷ A cursory survey of "the dom" is available from contemporary sources. The children's magazine *St. Nicholas*, for instance, published an account of "Amateur Newspapers" in 1882, and the following year Thomas Harrison published a 330-page book, *The Career and Reminiscences of an Amateur Journalist and a History of Amateur Journalism*, the bulk of which narrates his life as an amateur from 1875 all the way to 1878—that is, from the age of fifteen to the age of eighteen.⁸ (A second volume was promised but does not seem to have been published.) Accounts like these agree in most of their particulars. Indeed, the features of amateurdom seem quickly to have achieved a potted quality, rehearsed again and again as core themes that consumed

THE
NOVELTY JOB PRINTING PRESS

Is the only Low Priced Press ever invented that will do
GOOD WORK.

It is so simple in its construction, and so admirable in its details, that a novice in the art of printing can readily understand its principles and the manner in which it is worked. The finest printing is done upon it at a speed equaling the highest-cost presses, and it is so durable in construction that it will long outwear them and cost nothing for repairs. It excels all other presses in Simplicity, Durability, Compactness, Availability, Convenience, Efficiency, Speed, and Economy. The proprietor claims that printing can be done as well and as rapidly on this Press as on the best that printers use: and for printing offices where artificial power is not used, or who desire to do their own printing, it is entirely without a rival. It is most admirably adapted to the use of Sabbath-schools, Colleges, and other institutions for instruction, and for Missionary work in all parts of the world. Also unsurpassed as a Village Newspaper and Job Press. Three sizes of Presses are furnished as follows:—

Duodecimo, prints 4 by 6 inches,	price, \$15
Octavo, " 6 " 10 "	" 30
Quarto, " 9 " 14 "	" 50

Send for full descriptive illustrated circulars, with testimonials from all parts of the country, and specimens of plain and color printing done on the Press, and specimen sheets of types, borders, cuts, rules, etc. to

BENJAMIN O. WOODS, Manufacturer,
Dealer in every description of Printing Materials,
No. 321 Federal Street, Boston, Mass.

Or to the following Agents: C. C. THURSTON, No. 16 College Place, N. Y.; KELLY, HOWELL & LUDWIG, 917 Market St., Philadelphia, Pa.; A. C. KELLOGG, 65 West Van Buren St., Chicago, Ill.

FIGURE AFTER.1. Advertisement for the Novelty Job Printing Press, advertisers' addenda to Oscar H. Harpel, *Harpel's Typograph* (1870), courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

the geographically "vast literary society" of this "little literary world," as Harrison puts it.⁹ Amateurdom was intensely self-referential, forever consolidating itself as itself. Motivations were clear. Although "the anticipated pleasure of seeing articles from [his] own pen in print, was an entrancing one" (88), amateurs like Harrison did what they did out of a keen ambition to become known to—even to become storied among—other amateurs through the circulation of their publications via the mails. The U.S. Post Office allowed free exchanges of newspapers until 1878, when it cracked down on those that lacked significant subscriber lists and only exchanged copies. Two offending categories of publication were singled out: printer's trade circulars dressed up as periodicals and amateur newspapers.¹⁰ The so-called "postal troubles" briefly put a damper on things, but amateurdom continued, with its active contributors estimated by Harrison at eight or nine hundred (69, 14). That was likely a zenith.

In what sense was amateurdom amateur? This is a more complicated question than it may at first appear. Harrison indicates when a publication

he refers to is “(prof.),” but it would be a mistake to define “amateur” in contrast to “professional” and leave it at that. For one thing, taken together these terms too easily invite anachronism: any profession against which these amateurs might have been defined was still emerging. Professional journalism did not yet exist — there were no journalism schools, no professional associations for journalists, and no avowed ideal of objectivity — and we know that the roles of author, editor, and publisher were professionalized primarily insofar as individuals made and were known to make a living writing, editing, or publishing, or doing some combination of the same.¹¹ Printing, of course, was not a profession; it was a trade dressing itself as an art (“the art preservative”), and one that had for decades experienced wrenching structural changes — loosely put, “industrialization” — as the apprenticeship and journeyman system broke down, while some labors (like presswork) were deskilled and others (like typesetting) were not, or at least not yet. Print production in general experienced explosive growth, yet talented printers like Harpel struggled. Job printing grew more specialized (in its distinction from periodical and book work), inspiring still further innovations in printing technology, among them smaller iron hand presses that after 1850 included myriad versions of the platen press, or “jobber.”¹² It was this press that was eventually miniaturized for and pitched to amateurs. As one purveyor of printing outfits urged, “Every man his own printer. Every boy a Ben Franklin.”¹³

According to Harrison, “the real history” of amateurism didn’t begin until the Novelty press (26); *St. Nicholas* magazine agreed. The figure cut by Benjamin Woods and his little press in these accounts — like those that have followed — suggests that the amateurs of “the dom” might be reckoned in purely technological terms, but that too would be a mistake. New media do not themselves make amateur cultural producers, even though each of the two is regularly cast in terms of the other. Access to new tools was key, it’s true, but access to consumer culture is much more to the point. Following Karen Sánchez-Eppler, we need to see amateurism as a specific and specifically gendered class formation, part of “enormous and extremely swift shifts in the cultural understanding of childhood, work, and play” then under way in American culture.¹⁴ Childhood leisure — especially boyhood leisure — was a class privilege, increasingly enshrined in compulsory schooling laws and epitomized in the merchandising of goods specifically for children. By this light, the amateurs of amateurism — mostly but not entirely male — can’t be defined against “(prof.)” as much as they

can against the figure of a working-class child. Harrison’s corresponding “other” wasn’t Harpel, it was the newsboy, the bootblack, and — already a little bit of a throwback — the trade apprentice and printer’s devil.¹⁵ If the figure of the working child was associated in the popular imagination with play, as Sánchez-Eppler indicates, then it made perfect sense that middle-class play got associated with work.¹⁶ Again and again amateurs insist to their readers how hard they work, how much time and effort their papers require, while they also stress that their labors are self-improving yet money losing, not profit making.

In so adamantly describing itself as a realm of hard work and money losing, amateurism was able at once to participate in consumer culture and to reject its logic. This wasn’t just consumption, in other words; they didn’t say they were buying the same things, only that they lost money and spent time and energy. The repeated lip service paid to nonprofit production locates amateur newspapers (as Miranda Joseph writes of nonprofit organizations generally) within “the absent center of capitalism,” a place where the very subjects of capitalism have gone missing, revealing their discontents. These subjects abscond by dint of energies expended compensatorily toward a communal cause. Today we’d call the result “community”; by 1872 or 1873 North Americans at least said “amateurism.”¹⁷ The amateurs were individually ambitious and unstintingly critical of one another, prone both to empire building and to fractiousness: they were capitalists in training, dressed in a classically liberal discourse of the educable self, yet they zealously participated in and cherished their printed-and-postal community and the corresponding gaggle of amateur press associations that they organized to represent and support it. Amateurism arose not in the commonality of choosing and buying, but rather in the collective imagination of itself as a sphere of productive communication, an imaginary domain for what observers of later zines have called “cooperative individuality” and healthy “intersubjectivity.”¹⁸

The tensions involved in training for capitalism by abandoning its putative object of desire (that is, profit) made perfect sense within the ongoing construction of young adulthood as a liminal stage, between and yet neither. We might consider, too, that these tensions emerged partly as an outgrowth of readerly subjectivities that evolved amid the post-bellum explosion of secular magazines for young readers.¹⁹ Harrison himself acknowledges amateurism’s debt to *Oliver Optic’s Magazine* (26),²⁰ which chirpily editorialized in July 1867, during its first year of publica-

tion: "We suppose Lowe's press is the best for boys; if they don't like it, try Hoe's twelve-cylinder press!"²¹ (The Lowe press was a portable field press used during the Civil War.) By 1873 "Oliver Optic" — the intensely prolific William Taylor Adams — was offering both coverage of and encouragement to amateur printers, editors, and journalists in the pages of his magazine. Children's periodicals had long sought active readerships, but the new magazines perfected them. In November 1865 *Our Young Folks* chidingly instructed children how to write to the editors; *Oliver Optic's* included one regular column called "Our Letter Bag" and soon included another called "Wish Correspondents," where readers named the subjects they were interested in to solicit correspondence from other readers with the same interests; and *St. Nicholas* reinvented the letters column so that it more readily promoted "community and connection among all of [its] readers and contributors."²² Like the shared "fantasy" of a "textual commons," which Jared Gardner suspects cut against the success of so many of the earliest American magazines (by encouraging feelings of shared ownership that may actually have inhibited people from paying their subscriptions),²³ these new magazines for children carried mixed messages. Yes, they were crucial agents in the interpellation of children as subjects of consumer culture, yet they also spun the accessory magic of a less — even a non-commercial — communal domain.

The fin de siècle psychologists who eventually described adolescence as a developmental stage noted a "reading craze" among their subjects.²⁴ Had they noticed amateurdom, they might have seen it as a peculiarly acute form of that craze. Amateur youngsters read so crazily that they wrote, edited, printed, and published. One example is chronicled in amateur lore. Following the model of earlier magazines, *Golden Days for Boys and Girls* (founded in 1882), cultivated correspondence among readers and "clubs" of readers. At some point, "a member of one of its clubs suggested the idea of issuing a small paper to serve as the organ of his particular club. The idea caught fire, and hundreds of these club papers were issued" until 2 September 1895, when a fourteen-year-old named William H. Greenfield started the United Amateur Press Association to organize them.²⁵ That same trajectory — from the readership of commercially published magazines with letters columns, to clubs of readers, to amateur publications that comment on each other, and finally to a self-organizing sphere of postal communication and exchange — would also describe the 1930s evolution of fanzines

and fandom, as it was eventually called, but that may be jumping ahead too quickly. It's a pattern, except when it's not.²⁶

I should emphasize that money-losing amateurs like Harrison and Greenfield didn't say they were jumping off the good ship *Kapital* or steering it clear of the rocks of adulthood; they said the opposite. It was feeling that gave them away: amateurdom was an affective state as well as a textual commons. Young Harrison became "possessed," he says, by the desire to join amateurdom (88). A "printing fever" seized another amateur, David Bethune, and elsewhere it was a "mania for editorship" that prevailed.²⁷ The writer H. P. Lovecraft suffered a short-lived "poetical delusion" when he first encountered amateurdom in 1914, at the ripe age of twenty-three.²⁸ As he explains in a brief reflection titled "What Amateurdom and I Have Done for Each Other," he was introduced to the United Amateur Press Association when he was "as close to the state of vegetation as any animal well can be — perhaps I might best have been compared to the lowly potato in its secluded and subterranean quiescence." The United — in which Lovecraft quickly became chairman of the Department of Public Criticism — gave him at once "a renewed will to live," the "very world in which" to live, and also "life itself."²⁹ That figure of the lowly, secluded, and quiescent potato — known to us today as the couch potato — probably alludes to Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872), a novel that includes a humorous bit on the emotions and sentience of a potato. Lovecraft remained a denizen in and exponent of amateurdom throughout his career, even while enjoying success as a professional writer of fiction in the *Erewhonian* vein.

But can the amateurdom that Lovecraft joined and described in the 1910s and 1920s be the same amateurdom of Harrison and the others from the 1870s and 1880s? Better questions: Are the amateurs of one era the amateurs of another? Is do-it-yourself (DIY) publishing the same thing, whenever and however you happen to do it? So much of what Lovecraft describes about "the United" rings familiar. He acknowledges its origins around 1870, notes a common "yearning" to have "thoughts and ideals permanently crystallized in the magic medium of type," and celebrates those who labor "purely for love," "without the stultifying influence of commercialism."³⁰ The amateur press associations — the United and the National, founded in 1876 — had persisted and matured, each holding annual meetings, publishing an official organ, serving as clearinghouses, and awarding annual "laureates" in the different genres of amateurdom: poetry,

sketch, history, and essay (65), as well as eventually a laureate “for the best home-printed paper,” which suggests a decline in the number of amateurs who were printing their own.³¹ Yet according to Lovecraft’s telling, amateurdom was open to all comers, “boys and girls of twelve and men and women of sixty, parents and their sons and daughters, college professors and grammar-school pupils.” Being open to all was now part of the reigning ethos, important to the encouragement of a “genial” forum for “instruction and fraternal cheer.”³²

Amateurdom, it seems, had gradually become less of a liminal stage in life—a mixture of training for and unspoken deferral of—and more of a clubhouse or hideaway geared toward self-improving self-expression, tenanted by successive waves (well, actually trickles) of far-flung amateurs warmed partly by the accumulated lore of years gone by. (The annual laureate for history generally meant the history of amateurdom.) Along the way, one might speculate that amateurdom had also become less of a formative assertion of middle-class identity and more of a formative assertion within it. The same distinction between amateur and commercial publications held sway, in other words, but no longer were the contrastive “others” of amateurdom working-class, urban youths or the long-gone trade apprentice. More likely the “others” of amateurdom were either sorry couch potatoes— isolate and quiescent subjects of the emerging mass culture — or else they were other amateurs finding their own alternatives, some comfortable with the label “amateur” and others not. Those alternatives might be organized amateur athletics, the high-school yearbook, or the college newspaper. One must wonder in particular about amateur radio, which had exploded onto the scene with the 1906 crystal set and boy operator playing the role of the 1869 Novelty press and boy Benjamin Franklin. The far-flung amateur radio operators didn’t need to imagine a realm called “amateurdom”: they had one called the ether, though perhaps it was a little diffuse. Amateur radio operators didn’t need to publish on paper or communicate by post, though the eventual practice of exchanging QSL cards by mail to confirm radio contact does make interesting food for thought. (“QSL” was telegraph and radio code for “I confirm receipt of your transmission.”) In less than a decade amateur radio in the United States had probably exceeded amateur journalism by three orders of magnitude (several hundred thousand amateurs, instead of several hundred), as wireless captured the popular imagination.³³

Meanwhile the amateur writers, editors, printers, and publishers of

amateurdom’s long maturity—a small group of them called The Fossils, acting in the mode of alumni, still exists—shared a history that tended to be chronicled year by year with elections, schisms, and intrigues, as well as an occasional and fleeting golden age, all studded with the names of predecessors and their typically short-lived publications. Harrison had approvingly discerned a shift from “sensational” to “pure literature” during his brilliant if brief career (47); 1886 brought turmoil surrounding an amateur Literary Lyceum, dead in 1888;³⁴ 1891 saw the publication of a 500-page retrospective literary anthology or “cyclopedia”;³⁵ and Lovecraft eventually likened amateurdom to a “university, stripped of every artificiality and conventionality, and thrown open to all without distinction,” its membership seeking mutually “to draw their minds from the commonplace to the beautiful.”³⁶ As a putative “*revival* of the uncommercial spirit,”³⁷ amateurdom had become an antimodern gesture toward authenticity, evolving in contrast to the slick magazines that heralded mass culture and during the same extended moment in which literary critical authority was ceasing to be a matter of individual taste or editorial selection on the part of commercial publishing and was instead becoming a matter of academic consensus.³⁸ Lovecraft and his compatriots soldiered on as junior elementary aesthetes, exerting individual discernment toward their own common cause. The fact that amateurdom was in general “more newsy than literary”—that is, more about itself than about literature or anything else—only made it more fun.³⁹

The answer then is no, amateurs of one era are not the amateurs of another, even when a continuous tradition exists to connect them. H. P. Lovecraft was no Thomas Harrison, in more ways than one. What changed and continues to change across time is not the DIY ethos or even what the amateur happens to do, but rather the ways that doing and its do-ability are situated within the broader cultural economy and the lives that cultural economy helps to shape. Self-publishing is culturally situated according in part to ongoing constructions of class, race, gender, stage of life, and *Bildung*, as well as the ongoing articulation of domesticity, the disciplines, vocations, and professions. We know too—as I have been hinting—that amateur doings and do-ability would come to be situated in relation to the structure and content of mass culture. Richard Ohmann starts the clock on mass culture with the major monthly magazines of the late 1890s, while it was the model of commercial broadcasting—radio again—developed in the late 1920s and 1930s, that would come to epitomize mass culture

for its later and most influential critics.⁴⁰ But mass culture is less to the point here than managerial culture. The so-called managerial revolution of the late nineteenth century produced the modern corporation and with it the modern office, replete with new genres of and new tools for communication, new bureaucratic imperatives, and new labor cohorts and configurations. The printers' monopoly on the look of printedness, broken with the advent of amateur printing, collapsed with the proliferation of typewriters and the ensuing century of innovation directed at reproducing typescript without setting type: the technologies of the mimeograph, hectograph (ditto), photo-offset, and eventually Xerox. Journalism (like English-professordom) had become a profession, yes, but office work—its patterns and practices—had undergone an even bigger and more salient change.

Of course it will take a lot more than generalizations like these to explain the specific forms that amateur publishing has taken in the extended era of managerial capital, and I can offer only the briefest gesture in that regard. Amateurism eventually did connect to the fandom of the 1930s through figures like Lovecraft, who participated in both domains. And amateur radio connected to fandom, too, through the figure of Hugo Gernsback, who promoted amateur radio and published magazines that eventually included and explored what he called “scientifiction.”⁴¹ In other ways, however, fanzine fandom was substantially its own animal.

To the extent that there was one, the Thomas Harrison of fandom was Sam Moskowitz, a prolific chronicler and devoted collector who had become a fan at age fourteen and then stuck around for life, even working professionally for a time as an editor for one of Gernsback's magazines. Moskowitz published a multipart history of science fiction fandom, which was republished as a typescript book in 1954.⁴² Entitled *The Immortal Storm*, its 250 pages cover only the 1930s, though Moskowitz hoped that someone would publish a sequel that would be appropriately “bibliographical” and “detailed,” complete with the “individual personalities, aims, ambitions, [and] emotional motivations” that make his chronicle of associations, rivalries, and upsets the very obsessive work that it is.⁴³ Reading *The Immortal Storm* along with a selection of fanzines from the 1950s offers a snapshot of fandom at this juncture.⁴⁴ By 1953, to give some idea, the accumulated corpus of fanzine titles was roughly 9 percent printed, 17 percent reproduced by ditto, 60 percent reproduced by mimeograph, and 14 percent in another category or in a category unknown to indexers.⁴⁵

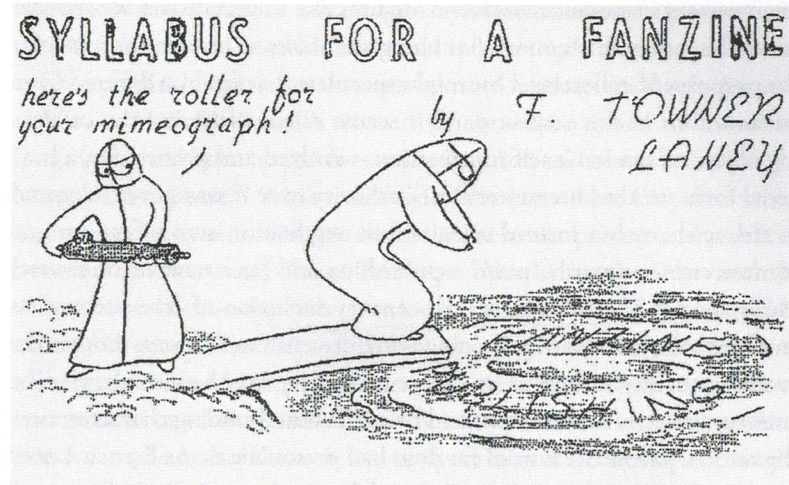


FIGURE AFTER.2. Bill Rotsler, illustration for Francis Towner Laney's mimeographed "Syllabus for a Fanzine" (1950); digitized by the FANAC Fan History Project (www.fanac.org) and reproduced here by permission.

In general—but only in general—the earliest fanzines were small and printed—6" × 4½" (in an era when most of the commercial “pulp” magazines were 7" × 10"). Then came the brief day of the hectograph, or ditto (when fanzines grew to 8½" × 11" and turned purple, but could be reproduced in batches no bigger than about fifty copies). Next came the mimeograph, which became fandom's most popular and consistent medium of publication, at least into the mid-1960s (figure After.2).⁴⁶ Fanzine archives and collections are full of mimeographs, easily recognizable by their soft, absorbent paper, which took mimeograph ink so well.

As late as 1986 one astute fan noted wryly, “mimeography recapitulates hagiography.”⁴⁷ Earlier fans write not of hagiography but of “ego boo,” short for ego boosting. Like amateurism before it, fanzine fandom was intensely self-referential, forever consolidating itself as itself by means of chronicles, conventions, published comments, correspondence, and collecting, as well as reviews, digests, indexes, insider jokes, and jargon. Like amateurism, fandom put a premium on originality and authenticity, yet it largely escaped an antimodern tinge by focusing on what one fan called “the literature of tomorrow”: science fiction.⁴⁸ I think I can safely generalize that fandom to this point remained more engaged than amateurism was with the for-profit sphere from which it distinguished itself, because

of consistent if modest crossover by figures like Lovecraft and Moskowitz as well as a certain amount of rubbing shoulders at conventions and for the purposes of collecting. One might speculate that fandom differed from amateurdom in this respect partly because science fiction—the catalyzing object of fandom’s self-imagination—evolved and persisted as a low-brow form, so that literary critical authority over it was never relegated to the academy but instead remained in negotiation across fandom and commercial—primarily “pulp”—publishing and (at a remove, of course) Hollywood.⁴⁹ The late nineteenth-century evolution of “the literary” as an object of academic inquiry made no difference to fandom, though the evolution of psychology as an object of inquiry may have mattered. The amateurs of early amateurdom had been all about building character; now the no-less-passionate fans of fandom had personalities. As Francis Laney puts it in “Syllabus for a Fanzine,” a good fanzine has an “editorial persona” or some “extensionalisation” of the editor.⁵⁰ It’s not that amateur newspapers of the nineteenth century lacked editorial personae; it’s just that having them didn’t figure this explicitly or grandiloquently into the self-consciousness of amateurdom. The denizens of fanzine fandom—almost universally white and male into the 1960s—saw themselves as selves, and selves of a special sort. It wasn’t membership that made them unique; it was more that a prior uniqueness made them sensible as members.⁵¹

Fandom persists, of course, radically diversified, expanded, and online. Now we have scholarly fan studies, too, a “dom” of sorts if there ever was one, relying not on amateur self-publishing but rather on the not exactly profit-driven publishing of the contemporary academy.⁵² But I’m going to break off my story of “doms”—amateurdom and fandom—here, before the language of underground or subculture versus mainstream takes hold, in order to reflect briefly if speculatively on the history of amateurs, DIY publishing, and only by extension the character of zines. The more recent efflorescence of zines, the recurrent rhythms of that efflorescence, and the scope and character of the relevant zine scenes all deserve further attention. My interest finally is in proposing a connection to the media history of documents with which I have been concerned in these pages.

Rather than take the self-chronicling of amateurs and fans entirely at face value, I have tried instead to gesture more broadly toward the scriptural economy, its trajectory of engagement with consumer culture, and, in particular, its late nineteenth-century expansion in the service of managerial capital. That framing I hope helps reveal some of the selectivity, if

not the shortcomings, of any dichotomy like mainstream versus subculture—or, better put, any schematic that might simply contrast public and counterpublic. In one sense amateurdom and fandom are classic counterpublics in Michael Warner’s terms: they are self-imagined realms of belonging evolved both by and for communication and in opposition to the larger public sphere.⁵³ Yet it would be well to remember that the Habermasian public sphere, with its sharp line between private and public—between the home and the coffeehouse, the manuscript letter and the printed news sheet—depends upon a very idealized notion of print publication, the event of issuing into public, that may more accurately refer to eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century life in Western Europe than to later periods or other locales. Certainly today the eventfulness of publication is complicated by the scale and temporalities of the web: the entanglement of publication with search technology, for instance; the prevalence of dead links and dynamic content; uneven and obscure calendars of updates and subscriptions; and so on.⁵⁴ But even before the web, in the extended era of amateurdom and fanzine fandom, the enormous pressures of social differentiation and the growth of institutions—of which the modern corporation only looms the largest in my ken—worked increasingly to complicate the eventfulness of publication.

In short, amateur newspapers, fanzines, and their successors have always been imagined in contrast to commercially published periodicals, but that imagination itself has become increasingly incumbent on other, unacknowledged contrasts, such as that between the zine and the less-published or the semipublished documents that issue forth amid our increasingly institutionalized existence. Think here of the reports and proposals of the corporate workplace, the newsletters and programs of the voluntary association and congregation, the pamphlets of the public-health agency, the course packs once ubiquitous on college campuses, and even the much-maligned annual Christmas letters proper to that most “important institution of control,” the middle-class nuclear family. (Susan Sontag notes of the amateurization of photography that it became “enrolled in the service of important institutions of control, notably the family and the police.”⁵⁵) Amateurdom and fandom by these lights are less counterpublics than they are counterinstitutions, loosely self-organizing assemblages—of members, mail, media, and lore—that defy institutionalization partly by reproducing it cacophonously in an adolescent key. Later zine scenes and “alt” arenas differ from the “doms” of amateurdom and fandom, no doubt, yet

they too might be studied not just for how they contrast with commercial publication but also for the ways in which that contrast tends to obscure other things, including the forever expanding and baroquely structured dominion of the document.

We have gotten particularly good at noticing the ways that amateur cultural production has emerged and thrived online and to what effects, but we may not be as good yet—even in our fondness for DIY publishing— at seeing from all angles the contexts that have helped to configure DIY. Are recent zines and the recently pressing question of zines (“Are you going to write about zines?”) variously nostalgic reactions to digital communications media? To some extent that is certainly the case, though saying so too easily neglects the massive diversity of digital communications, which include everything from blogs and vlogs with the tenor of zines to backward-looking, paper-imagining forms like the PDF, now used to e-publish so that others may print out. In addition, DIY publishing needs to be located within and against DIY more generally. The futurologist Alvin Toffler, who was already using the term “prosumer” in 1980— alas not “prosumerdom”— came pretty close to predicting today’s independent video, home offices, and distributed computing, but his description of 1980s-style DIY may come as more of a surprise. His futurological extrapolations take as their point of departure the then-new DIY home pregnancy test kits; direct long-distance telephone dialing; self-service gasoline pumps; and automated teller machines (ATMs).⁵⁶ Add the then-familiar mix tapes, copy shops, and film-processing kiosks, and I think it makes a wonderfully evocative context for— among other things— the imminent availability of desktop publishing, which arrived courtesy of Aldus and Apple to the embrace of amateurs and others.

NOTES

PREFACE

1. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 131, 132.
2. De Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* is dedicated “to the ordinary man” (v).

INTRODUCTION. PAPER KNOWLEDGE

1. See Annelise Riles, “Introduction: In Response,” in *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*, ed. Annelise Riles (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 6–7. See also Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 96–155; Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
2. John Guillory, “The Memo and Modernity,” *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 1 (2004): 120.
3. Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 314.
4. I’ve been influenced here by Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson’s Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Ralph Cohen, “History and Genre,” *New Literary History* 17, no. 2 (1986): 203–18; Carolyn R. Miller, “Genre as Social Action,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 151–67; and conversations with Jennie Jackson, Rachael S. King, Clifford Siskin, and Anna Poletti.
5. Briet was a proponent of the European bibliographical movement called Documentation. See Suzanne Briet, *What Is Documentation? English Translation of the Classic French Text*, trans. Ronald E. Day, Laurent Martinet, and Hermina G. B. Anghelescu (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2006). See also Bernd Frohmann, “The Documentality of Mme. Briet’s Antelope,” in *Communication Matters: Materialist Approaches to Media, Mobility, and Networks*, ed. Jeremy Packer and Stephen B. Crofts Wiley (New York: Routledge, 2012), 173–82.