

Comic & Zine Reviews

Mark Pawson

Fan/Zines have been getting a lot of coverage over the last year, they were featured in the **Loud Flash: British Punk on Paper** exhibition at **Haunch of Venison** gallery; were showcased at **Dazed & Confused** magazine's **Dazed Live** extravaganza; anarcho-punk band **Crass's** collection of several hundred **Fan/Zines** was exhibited recently at **Boo-Hooray** gallery in New York; **Verso** have just published a 480 page complete collection of **Laura Oldfield Ford's Fan/Zine Savage Messiah**; and there's even a specialist vintage **Fan/Zine** store, **Goteblud**, in San Francisco. At the **New York Art Bookfair** it seemed that just about any **Fan/Zine** produced in the last 40 years had been bagged up and priced up. And there're three books which examine different areas of all this **Fan/Zine** publishing activity that deserve your attention: **'Fanzines'**, **'100 Fanzines/10 Years Of British Punk: 1976-1985'**, and **'Behind The Zines: Self-Publishing Culture'**.

But first we need to get a couple of things straight, apologies for inflicting **'Fan/Zines'** on you, I won't do it again. Now let's work at establishing a practical working definition of a **Fanzine**. **Fanzine**, a term in use since the 1930s, refers to an amateur, autonomous, self-produced publication, made using readily accessible production tools and printing methods, sold at an affordable price and not primarily intended as a profit-making venture. A **Fanzine's** subject matter is usually a specific genre of entertainment or popular culture – for example, science fiction, comics, music, or sport. **Zine**, a term popularised in the mid-late '80s, simply drops the word **Fan** and jettisons the last sentence of the above definition, thus escaping fandom and gaining the freedom to be about anything whatsoever it chooses as its subject matter. This column has always used the term **Zine** in its title.

'Fanzines', by design historian **Teal Triggs**, is the largest and has the widest viewpoint of the three books under consideration. Published by **Thames & Hudson**, it's designed as a companion volume to **'200 Trips from the Counter Culture: Graphics and Stories from the Underground Press Syndicate'** (2006). This oversized volume sensibly calls itself 'a' history of **Fanzines** rather than pretending to be a definitive textbook on the subject. It looks at **Fanzine** activity as far back as the 1930s, with its main focus on the late 1970s right up to 2009. Most of the book is taken up with colour images of **Fanzine** covers grouped into thematic, roughly chronological chapters: 'A Do-It-Yourself Revolution: Definitions and Early Days', 'Its as easy as 1-2-3: The Graphic Language of Punk 1975-1983', 'Liberated Spaces: Subcultures, Protest and Consumer Culture 1980s-1990s', 'Girl Power and Personal Politics' (a particular interest of the

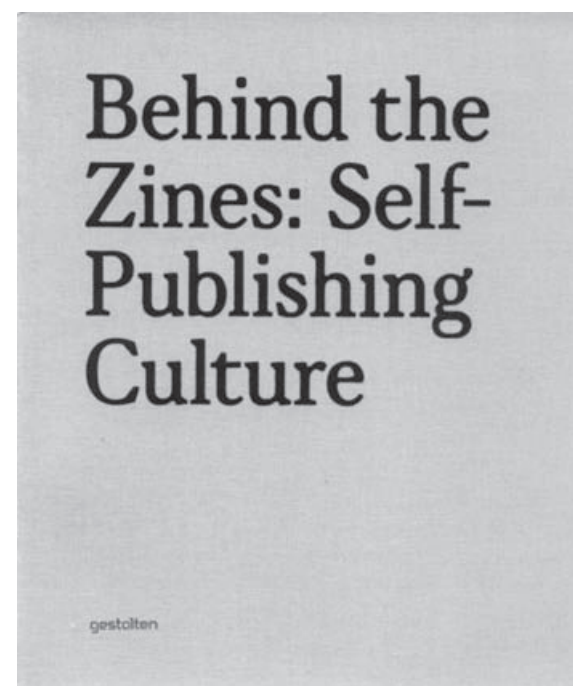
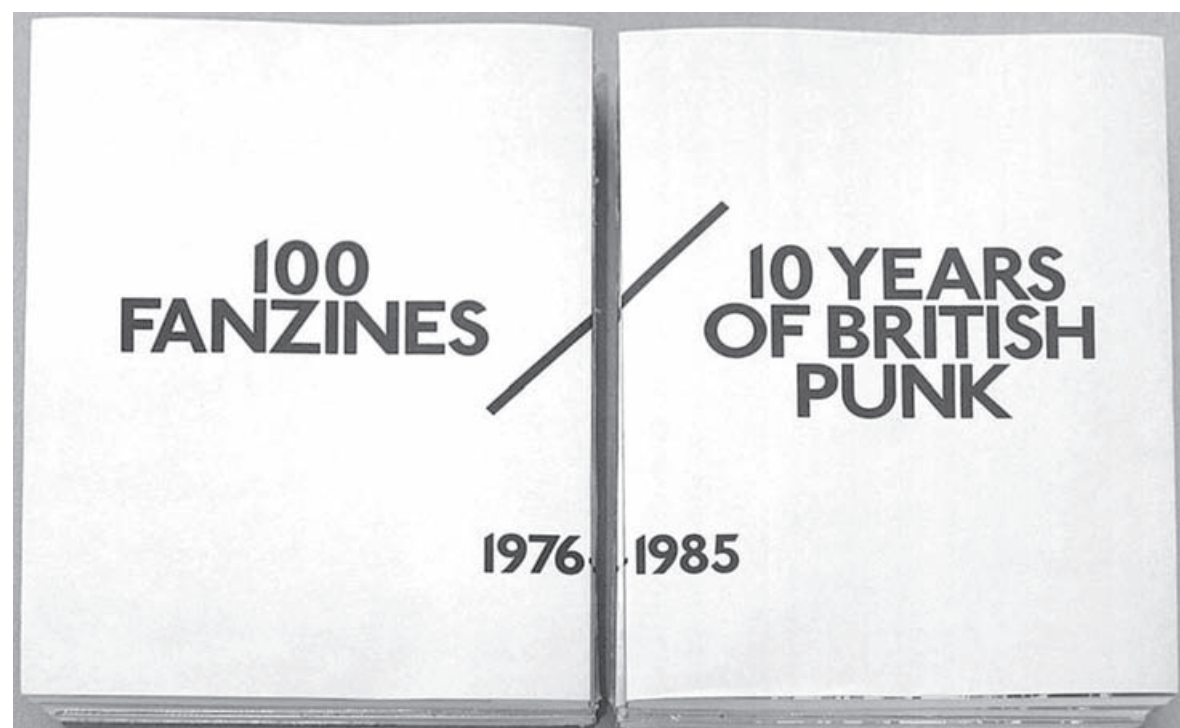


authors), 'E-zines 1998-2009', and 'The Crafting of Contemporary Fanzines'. Each chapter is introduced with a 3-page essay. Altogether, 550 publications are included, predominantly from the UK and USA, this large selection of titles allows lots of oddball, one-off and generally uncategorisable zines to be included, many of which are unlikely to be given coverage elsewhere. All the **Fanzine** covers are accompanied with short descriptions, which are useful but sometimes perfunctory, as readers only see cover images. Considering the extreme difficulty of accessing original copies, slightly longer descriptions would be useful. I enjoyed slowly working my way through **FANZINES**, as someone who for the last 30 years has **Fanzine**, sold, collected, contributed to, distributed, curated and reviewed **Zines** and **Fanzines**. This book parallels a large part of my life and interests. Approaching **Fanzines** from a design history perspective is interesting but has its limitations. In *The City* (1977-1980) is commented upon as "being notable for its... standardised logo", but to someone involved in creating publications at the same time it's easy to see that they just cut the title off the artwork of the last issue and stuck it onto the paste-up of the next one! The final chapter, covering 2000-09, seems a bit scrappy, but accurately reflects the disparity of **Zines** and **Fanzines** made in this period. Linking

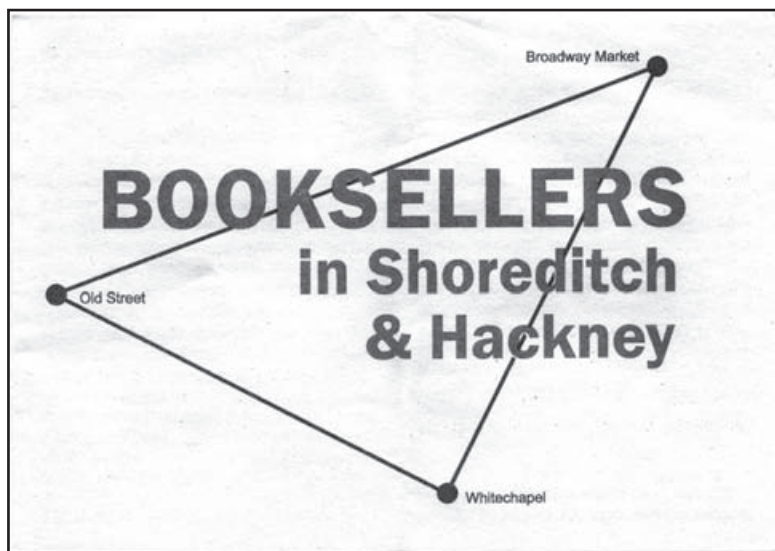
these publications to a theory of Craftivism seems spurious, few of the examples shown back it up. Craft values can tend to emphasise materials and construction over content, shifting the resulting publication away from any useful definition of **ZINES** or **Fanzines**.

'100 Fanzines/10 Years Of British Punk: 1976-1985' features 100 publications from **Toby Mott's** seemingly endless collection of Punk ephemera. The title tells you exactly what to expect: a short, sharp, shock of **100 Fanzine** covers reproduced full size in chronological order. This format lends itself readily to flicking back and forth, comparing and contrasting. It's notable that many covers are entirely hand drawn, the total cost of materials used would be just a few pennies. Several covers are hand drawn and augmented with sparingly used rub-down lettering – I can't remember how much **Letraset** cost in the mid '80s; it was expensive, priced for professional use at something like £2.95 a sheet, but **W H Smith** transfer lettering was just 25p a pack and **Decadry** was 75p. Only two magazines, both from 1976, are professionally typeset, featuring **The Crusaders** and **Steve Hillage** on their covers! At this time – years before the availability of home computers and good quality, affordable printers – typesetting was expensive and largely inaccessible to self-publishers unless you were lucky enough to have friend who worked in the industry. As well as punk rock **Fanzines**, mod, new wave, skinhead, Oi, and anarcho-punk **Fanzines** are included – the first anarchy sign appeared in 1981, followed by a British Movement symbol in 1985. Several of the **Fanzines** illustrated are free, proudly proclaiming this fact on their covers; a small attempt to combat capitalism, or maybe the makers were just able to rip off hundreds of photocopies at work. The cover images are accompanied by **Toby Mott's** memories of making **Raw Power Fanzine** as a teenager, and an essay by **Vic Brand** which makes the insightful point that "The zine-makers...generally...represent the consumers of punk culture, rather than its producers"; **Fanzines** rather than **Zines**. But then **Brand** lapses into the tired cliché of lionising the power of the photocopier. Copiers have always been powerful creative tools, but the **Fanzine** covers shown in **100 Fanzines** are printed using 6 different techniques – most of the slightly more proficient-looking examples, with multi-colour covers, were printed offset litho by **Joly** at **Better Badges**.

'Behind the Zines: Self-Publishing Culture' from German publishers **Gestalten** is a survey of recent European self-publishing and small publishers. The publications included are primarily concerned with art, design, graphic design,

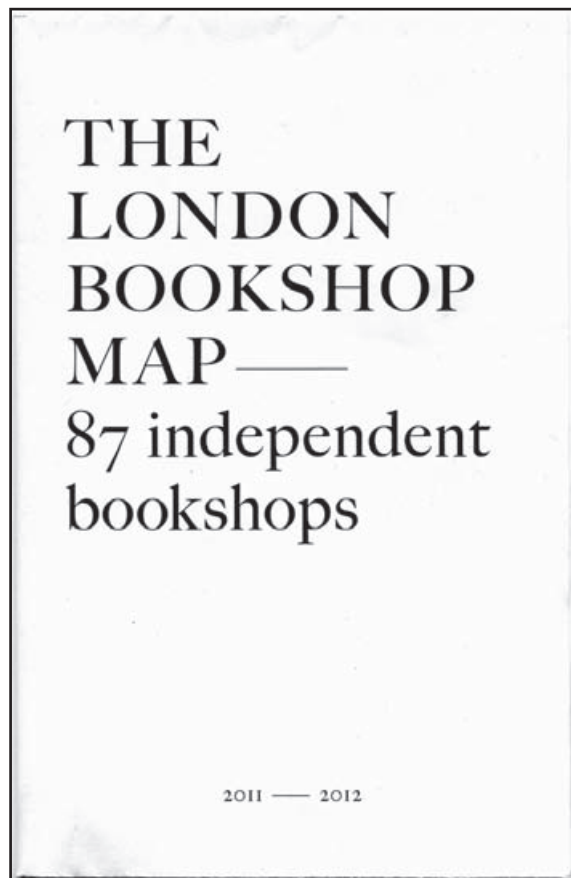


drawing, illustration, photography, and art writing. Each title is given an entire page, showing the cover and several page spreads – giving a good overall impression – and accompanied by a brief description and information on the creators, edition size, frequency and printing methods used – **Risograph** stencil printers are very much in evidence – but cover prices are omitted. Websites, e-mails and countries of origin are all listed in the index. Compared with the publications shown in **Fanzines** and **100 Fanzines/10 Years**, these are more colourful with carefully composed layouts, but there's little of the passion, politics, urgency, engagement and excitement demonstrated in the other two books. A particular strongpoint is that **Behind the Zines'** contemporaneity allows for the inclusion of interviews with publishers and some interesting behind-the-scenes photographs. The image showing **Dot Dot Dot #15** underway is instructive, showing simultaneously, in the same room, an editorial meeting, designers working on computers shading the adverts and preparing files ready to be sent direct to the adjacent digital stencil printers, and a printer changing ink colours. Most of the publications in **Behind the Zines** seem much more insular and inward-looking than those in the other two books; some fit our definition of a ZINE but most would be more usefully described as artzines, illzines, pamphlets, drawing books, compendiums or maybe just picture books. Showing so much of the publications featured is a



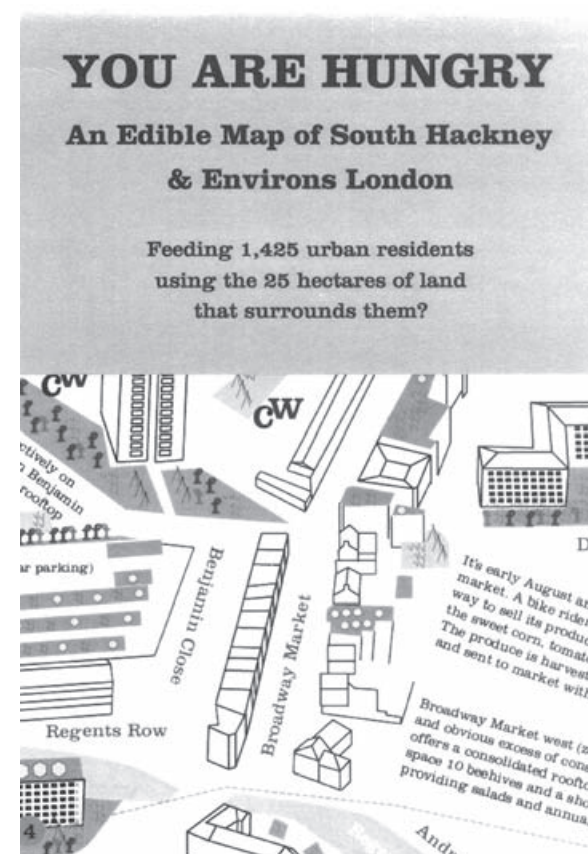
laudable approach, but almost reveals too much – there's only two books shown that I'm tempted to get hold of.

Everybody's mapping nowadays. I can't remember reviewing maps previously in this column, but a small stack of them have built up which deserve a closer look. First up is the elegantly designed **The London Bookshop Map: 87 Independent Bookshops**. This foldout map covers an enormous area; from Wood Green in North London to Streatham in the South, and from Hackney in the East to Ladbroke Grove out West. The 87 independent bookshops are all listed with contact information, opening hours and a brief description. They encompass specialists and generalists, new and secondhand, antiquarian, occult and anarchist, with a strong showing of art, design and photography, but curiously there're no pornographers. You'll discover a bookshop/reading room inside an operating railway station – open at peak commuting hours – and there's even a bookshop inside a greenhouse. More modest in scope and utilitarian in design is **Booksellers In Shoreditch & Hackney**, a pocket sized map compiled by the **Bookartbookshop** and printed locally by **Ditto Press**. Covering an East London triangle which spans from Old Street up to Broadway Market and down to Whitechapel, it includes 17



locations, which are all within walking or bus hopping distance of each other. These include a bookshop with its own curiosities museum in the basement and there's also details of weekly market stalls selling books. Both these bookshop maps are independent initiatives. They're the result of lots of hard work by people who've had the vision and energy to go ahead and get their projects off the ground. Hopefully it isn't a thankless task. They're both funded mainly by the bookshops listed and are refreshingly free of funding body logo clutter. Both are intended as ongoing projects and invite users to send in suggestions and recommendations for future issues – it will be interesting to see how they evolve and grow. A bookshop map is a fairly simple idea and could be easily replicated in other locations.

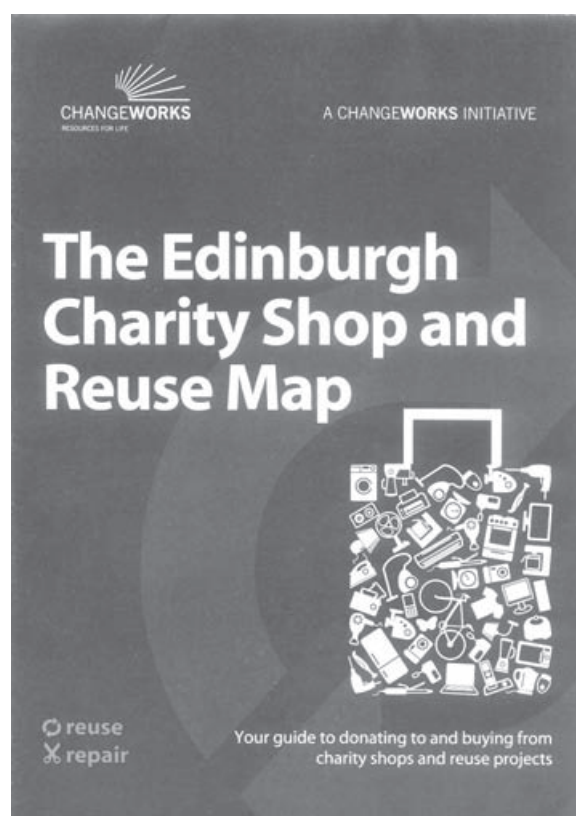
Books are important, but feeding your brain and amusing your eyeballs is not quite as vital to survival as food. **You Are Hungry – An Edible Map of South Hackney & Environs** by **Mikey Tomkins** focuses on public space in a small corner of East London and maps the locations of actual and imagined food growing activities alongside each other. Examples of current food production include beehives on top of the **Space** gallery and studio complex, Bangladeshi families creating small ad hoc gardens outside their windows to grow runner beans and dodis (marrows), and there's even some grapevines growing in the back yard and up the walls of a cafe planted by the **Urban Wine Company** who collect the ripe grapes and make local wine from them. To complement this existing food growing activity



Mikey Tomkins proposes using the grassed areas surrounding the local authority housing blocks for vegetable growing, empty garages for mushroom farms, and plenty of beehives on the roofs of taller buildings. He backs up these proposals by measuring the available growing spaces, suggesting suitable, easy to grow fruit and vegetables, and working out the potential annual yield of these crops. What may initially seem like a fantasy could only be a few steps away from the ad hoc planting and growing already taking place. **You Are Hungry – An Edible Map of South Hackney & Environs** overlaps with the area covered by **Booksellers In Shoreditch & Hackney**. **Mikey Tomkins** imagines a near future when fresh local sweetcorn and tomatoes will be sold at the Saturday market on Broadway Market, on the same day they've been picked, with zero food miles, processing or storage. I don't know if any booksellers in the area are already growing herbs in window boxes or composting unsold magazines, but I suspect a few of them would be very interested in planting some grape vines.

Okay, three London maps is enough – I do realise that not everyone lives in London, but thrift is omnipresent. On a recent trip to Edinburgh I luckily stumbled across Raeburn Place, with its rich seam of Charity shops and specialist Charity Bookshops, where I picked up a copy of **The Edinburgh Charity Shop And Reuse Map**. It's an impressive resource covering the whole city. The map shows 112 charity shops, furniture projects and a string of Community Recycling Centre Reuse Cabins, all with detailed information on the items/services they specialise in, what they sell and the type of donations they'll accept. The main function of this map, published by Changeworks Waste Prevention Team, is to actively encourage people to reuse and repair consumer goods; prioritising reuse and repair over the less intelligent route of simply recycling things back into raw materials. There's plenty more information on the back of the map – they're almost trying to squeeze too much in. There's a resource list of other places to buy and sell secondhand goods: carboot sales, auction houses, gumtree and eBay. There's also a disappointingly small section about simply giving stuff away to other people, which strangely doesn't mention the active Edinburgh freecycle group or Free Stuff events. I'd really like to see direct unmediated giving, without third parties regulating or profiting from the exchange, publicised as much as other reuse schemes. The Free Stuff Stores must happen. I've never seen anything quite like The Edinburgh Charity Shop And Reuse Map before: it's a unique, broadminded publication useful for cheapskates, bargain hunters, declutterers, booklovers, and more importantly those in genuine need and trying to survive on very limited incomes.

If there was a bookshop map for Edinburgh, **Analogue Books** would definitely be included, in



fact they'd probably be the instigators of such a project. This compact shop offers a precisely curated selection of books and magazines focussing on illustration, design, graphic design and the visual arts, together with screenprints by local designers and their own publications, including several books by Nigel Peake. Analogue Books have a policy of displaying everything in their shop with the full cover on show. There's no overlapping magazines or rows of book spines which you have to bend your neck to look through. In retailing this is an approach that takes a lot of conviction and is very rarely seen.

(December 2011)

Links

Fanzines, Teal Triggs, Thames & Hudson, London, 2010.

100 Fanzines/10 Years of British Punk: 1976-1985, Toby Mott, Andrew Roth Inc., New York, 2011.

Behind the Zines: Self-Publishing Culture, R. Klaten, A. Mollard, M. Hübner, S. Commentz, Gestalten, Berlin, 2011.

Panel Discussion about *100 Fanzines* at NYABF 2011: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEVQvfAh42o>

750+ fanzines from the Joly/Better Badges archive:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jYQ2dTLeOo

The London Bookshop Map
<http://www.thelondonbookshopmap.org>

bookartbookshop
<http://www.bookartbookshop.com>

Mikey Tomkins: Research on food growing
<http://www.mikeytomkins.co.uk>

Changeworks
<http://www.changeworks.org>

Haunch of Venison - 'Loud Flash: British Punk on Paper'
http://haunchofvenison.com/exhibitions/past/2010/loud_flash/

Boo-hooray
<http://boo-hooray.com>

Savage Messiah
<http://www.versobooks.com/books/1022-savage-messiah>

gotablud
<http://gotablud.livejournal.com>

Urban Wine Company
<http://www.urbanwineco.com>