

Punk Zines:
Self-Published Media for a DIY Movement

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The word “punk” has its origins as early as the 16th century, when it was first used to describe people perceived to be at the bottom of society: prostitutes and criminals.¹ In the last few centuries, the term “punk” has denoted a variety of things, but at its core retains the same connotation of trouble, toughness, and being up to no good. These elements were very much present in the punk rock scene of the 1970s, which was characterized by fast, loud music with stripped-down instrumentals and aggressive lyrics and vocals. Punk ideals placed great emphasis on the deskilling of music, a do-it-yourself ethos, and conscious movement away from what the mainstream media deemed “in” or popular. Much of this was conveyed by the fanzines that circulated during this time, unofficial publications produced by individuals which drew members of the punk community together and offered an alternative source of music coverage that, unlike mainstream newspapers and magazines, represented the angry, impassioned punk ethos. While there were many different fanzines produced during the punk era, in this paper I will be focusing on *Sniffin’ Glue*, a fanzine created by Mark Perry (who wrote under the moniker Mark P.) that ran from 1976 to 1977, and which is widely considered by punk historians to be the first punk zine out of Britain.

Zines had been around since the 1930s, when they were first created by members of science-fiction fandoms,² and as they are generally low-budget and easy to make, with a rapid production time, they were in great ubiquity during the 1970s, when those who aligned themselves with the punk movement were surrounded by many who identified themselves similarly and felt deeply about punk rock. Zines were very economical, which can be seen in the bare-bones design of Issue 1 of *Sniffin’ Glue*, the content for Mark Perry typed out on the

¹ Emily Hage, “Bay Area Dadazines and Punk Zines in 1970s San Francisco: Interactive, Ephemeral, Live,” *American Periodicals: A Journal of History & Criticism* 27, no. 2 (2017): 193.

² Hage, “Bay Area Dadazines and Punk Zines in 1970s San Francisco,” 186.

children's typewriter gifted to him at the age of ten by his parents on Christmas. Once the original was complete, Perry made copies using the Xerox machine at his girlfriend's workplace.

³ For many people who produced and edited zines during the punk era, this origin story was not uncommon: in their essence, zines are historically humble publications, and while they gained a substantial readership over time, they almost always started out as home-grown bedroom productions. *Sniffin' Glue* no. 1 was created with a black felt-tipped pen, the aforementioned typewriter, a copier machine, and a stapler; its first photocopier run in 1976 was about 50 copies.

⁴ Perry included his spelling mistakes and cross-outs where he had corrected errors in grammar and punctuation, or where the typewriter had failed⁵, and as a result the publication came across as extremely honest. In one spread, next to a review of Blue Oyster Cult's various albums, Perry writes, down the length of the page where a blank space remains: "I didn't no what to put here / So I wrote this!" (Fig. 1).⁶ Perry's unique voice was expressed very clearly through his inclusion of swear words as well as snarky and forthright comments. Moreover, the crude physical presentation of his content lent a certain immediacy to his publication, which compelled readers and inspired the creation of many similar zines.⁷ The modest materiality of the fanzine format enhanced and set the stage for *Sniffin' Glue*'s frankness and authenticity, which ultimately led to its success in the underground news world and punk community.

The benefit of the cut-and-pasted, cobbled-together nature of fanzines was that punk rockers and those who identified themselves with the punk movement could speak their minds on

³ Mark Perry, *Sniffin' Glue: The Essential Punk Accessory* (London, UK: Sanctuary House, 2000), 15-16.

⁴ Perry, *Sniffin' Glue: The Essential Punk Accessory*, 15-16.

⁵ Teal Triggs, "Scissors and Glue: Punk Fanzines and the Creation of a DIY Aesthetic," *Journal of Design History* 19, no.1 (2006): 72, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epk006>.

⁶ Mark Perry, *Sniffin' Glue... + Other Rock N' Roll Habits for Punks* (no. 1), July 13, 1976, 5.

⁷ Triggs, "Scissors and Glue" 72.

the pages of a zine, free of the constraints or censorship that they would almost certainly have faced had they been writing for a mainstream media outlet. Many punk zines were created with the intention of replacing, or compensating for, what many believed to be the insufficient coverage of music by established newspapers, magazines, and radio.⁸ Additionally, the punk movement actively condemned big corporations and anything considered “mainstream,” so zines were in themselves a protest against corporate culture, while maintaining great utility in the underground community. Fanzines could contain anything from information on upcoming shows and gigs, reviews of albums, to interviews with bands, and more personal rants on politics and current events. As mainstream media does for the public, zines connected and kept informed members of underground punk culture, and provided a platform by which those members could express their worldviews freely and be heard, as well as develop the general idea of punk rock.⁹

Punk zines were borne out of a sense of urgency and a great need to communicate with others about this crazy, constantly growing and changing music scene and style of life. Moreover, zines directly contributed to the development of the punk ethos and punk aesthetic, as many, through their collaged visuals and colorful language, were able to recreate on paper the chaotic and emotionally-charged experience of listening to punk music and being at live punk shows.¹⁰ In *Sniffin’ Glue* no. 1, Perry opens with a disclaimer note about how this particular issue is reminiscent of a Ramones fan letter, alongside a promise to cover other bands in further issues.¹¹ Perry has also expressed how the simplistic, “back-to-basics” design of the first *Sniffin’ Glue* was a nod to the unadorned nature of the Ramones’ songs, one of which he directly drew the title

⁸ Matthew Worley, “Punk, Politics and British (fan)zines, 1976-1984: ‘While the world was dying, did you wonder why?’” *History Workshop Journal* 79, no. 1 (2015): 81, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbu043>

⁹ Triggs, “Scissors and Glue,” 70.

¹⁰ Emily Hage, “Bay Area Dadazines and Punk Zines in 1970s San Francisco,” 196-197.

¹¹ Perry, *Sniffin’ Glue... + Other Rock N’ Roll Habits for Punks*, 2.

of his publication from.¹² Furthermore, the rough-and-tumble aesthetic of fanzines was a way of building, refining, and expanding the definition of punk and developing an underground media source through which punks could accurately convey and report on the punk movement.

Despite the chaos that characterized the time period, material ephemera of the punk era including posters, fanzines, albums, buttons, have been gathered at the Museum of Art and Design (MAD) in the exhibit *Too Fast to Live, Too Young to Die: Punk Graphics, 1976-1986*. In an interview, Alida Jekabson, an assistant curator at MAD, regarding fanzines, wonders, “How do you make a history of an official media?”¹³ She answers her question, saying, “I think having something like ZineWiki (an online encyclopedia of zines and others forms of independent media), having the zines upstairs in the show, is validating this DIY movement that I’m sure we’ve all seen take off in a ton of different directions.”¹⁴ This highlights the ephemerality of the punk movement: even zines, which were able to be kept and possibly stored, as opposed to other pillars of punk culture such as live shows, were often discarded after being read. Zines had a utility akin to mainstream newspapers in that they were primarily valuable for the information one could glean from them, and, in fact, the editors and creators of many punk zines were against the saving of zines, intending them to be lived and experienced, as one would a live performance, rather than preserved.¹⁵ Fanzines were omnipresent on the 1970s punk scene, and as such, they were not viewed as particularly amazing or precious. However, it is important that some portion of them did end up getting saved, as it helps those living in the present day analyze

¹² Perry, *Sniffin’ Glue: The Essential Punk Accessory*. 15.

¹³ Alida Jekabson, Interviewed by the author, Digital recording. New York City, NY, July 23, 2019.

¹⁴ Alida Jekabson, Interviewed by the author, July 23, 2019.

¹⁵ Hage, “Bay Area Dadazines and Punk Zines in 1970s San Francisco,” 197.

the punk movement and understand the punk movement and its implications; thus, the exhibition.

Over the course of writing this paper, I came to a variety of conclusions regarding zines. First off, that zines are defined by their circulation: making a zine is different than making something that resembles a zine but simply stays in your room (or wherever you choose to keep it) and does not end up being distributed. Zines are supposed to travel, they are supposed to end up in someone else's hands. Second, that the existence of a fanzine means that someone somewhere felt so deeply about something that they could no longer keep it inside of themselves, and couldn't wait for a mainstream publication to express their emotions and ideas. What I think is so special about zines is that they can literally be about anything, and there are virtually no rules regarding how they can look, what they can contain, or how they can be created. It makes sense that they were such an integral part of the punk movement, as presiding above all else in the punk community was a belief that preimposed rules were not to be trusted or adhered to, and a spirit of rebellion against, specifically, rules created by society and the mainstream.

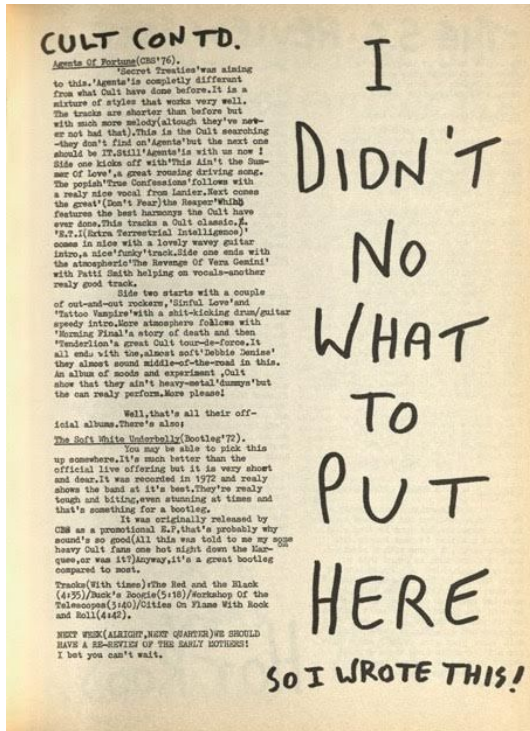


Fig. 1: Page 5 of *Sniffin' Glue* no. 1. "I didn't no what to put here / so I wrote this!"



Fig. 2: Mark Perry, creator of the punk fanzine *Sniffin' Glue*, with *Sniffin' Glue* no. 5. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/jun/14/mark-perry-fanzine-culture>



Fig. 3: Issues 2-12 of *Sniffin' Glue*. Source: <https://www.vialibri.net/years/books/97783883/1976-perry-mark-editor-sniffin-glue-and-other-rock-n>



Fig. 4: Members of the Sex Pistols, a prominent British punk band, reading an issue of *PUNK Magazine*, a publication that early-on defined and covered the ideas and people central to the punk movement, specifically those involved in the New York punk scene. Source: <https://milk.xyz/feature/exploring-punk-magazine-the-publication-that-defined-a-subculture/>

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