

Zine & Comics Review

Mark Pawson



In the **El Borbah** and **Big Baby** collections, Charles Burns finally gets the treatment his work deserves, these two stylish large format volumes from Fantagraphics, showcase Burns' ultra-clean scalpel-sharp lines in true black and white, not the murky grey and off-white that comics readers usually have to put up with.

Facetasm—a creepy mix & match book of gross face mutations!—is a collaboration between Burns and Gary Panter (Jimbo comic, "Pee Wee's Playhouse" designer). It takes the form of one of those kids flip books—where you build up faces identikit-style from different hair, eyes and mouths. The pages of mutants, zombies, robots, monsters, aliens and some very odd looking humanoids alternate between the artist's, there's a marked contrast between Burns' ultra smooth lines and Panter's scratchy more primitive style.

Whilst I feel it necessary to point out that I bought the larger, collectable 1992 edition of **Facetasm** when it came out, this new version is more satisfying, the smaller format makes it easier to play with, there's some extra monsters and a thoughtfully provided space to insert your own picture!

Gary Panter's **Burning Monster** is one of the first titles in a new sketchbook series issued by maverick French screenprinters Le Dernier Cri, his ultra-scratchy, almost totally self-obliterating sketches of monsters and monster trucks alongside holiday and wedding scenes make me think of those biro-scrrawl encrusted fag packets sometimes found on pub tables. Gary Panter's most recent work **Pink Donkey's Coot Country** is not available in any shops, it's a web animation exclusive for the cartoon network; www.cartoonnetwork.com/wpt/coot/index.html

Also in the Le Dernier Cri sketchbook series is **Caroline et Ses Amis**. Caroline Sury's scratchy sketchbook wander around Marseille, calling in at the Post Office and Boulangerie, running the gamut of loitering track-suited youths, dropping in on numerous friends' studios and bars, centrespread is unsurprisingly of the Dernier Cri screenprinting/bookbinding studio, there's a recipe for fish soup as well.

Julie Doucet's **My New York Diary** is a collection of three autobiographical comics, the title story is a powerful account of the brief and rather miserable time she lived in the Big Apple. Moving in with a boyfriend she'd



only just met proves to be a mistake. Julie soon gets distracted and bogged down with too much cheap beer, too many drugs, too much TV and the poor quality drawing paper she has to work on! She misses her cat, suffers increasingly frequent epileptic seizures and feels trapped by her overbearing asshole of a boyfriend and the sheer remoteness of living in a shitty NY suburb. It's just too much having to put up with all this crap when she should really be living downtown and hanging out with New York's cartooning fraternity. Despite the desperation of her situation, Julie doesn't seem to get too bitter, perhaps drawing this strip seven years later helped her come to terms with it all, putting it down to experience, she swiftly gets the hell out of New York and leaves for the cartoon artists Mecca of Seattle.

Cheap Date magazine started out as a magazine about second-hand clothes but soon evolved into a more all-encompassing anti-fashion/anti-lifestyle magazine. **Cheap Date** the book has plenty of new articles together with the best parts from six issues of the magazines. The contents are just as varied and unpredictable as a junk shop or jumble sale. Interviews with people off the telly jostle with an eulogy to the Stylophone, celebrity pin-ups fight for space with Old Bangers. Editor Kira has assembled an ultra-eclectic gang of contributors, skip-scroungers, ketchup dispenser historians, ex-teenage Goths, dandies on the dole, Anti Consumerism Campaigners, Oxfam obsessives, crap collectors, zinesters, junk shop addicts, obsolete technology aficionados, inspired entrepreneurs, the fashion-victimised and assorted celebs.

Cheap Date interviews their style-idols and then goes out shopping with them. It pays homage to Flexipop magazine with the goofy "Tale of Putney Turner" photo story—starring Wreckless Eric no less!, and bravely goes where others fear to tread—inside Christopher Biggin's Flat! In a ground-breaking photojournalism story certain to be picked up soon by the newspapers, **Cheap Date** exposes *shop-dropping* a subversive new craze sweeping the high street: its the opposite of shop-lifting, recycle old clothes by leaving them in shops! Get a copy now, unless you're a real cheapskate and prefer to wait a couple of years in the hope of finding a copy for 29p at the local Mencap shop....

Stephen's **Second Little Book Of Charity Shopping** by **Cheap Date** contributor Stephen Drennan features ten of his favourite recent finds from Bighton and Hove's numerous charity shops. Each item is lovingly described together with the price paid and shop location details. Superb illustrations by Erica "Girlfrenzy" Smith and endpapers patterned with charity shop logos make this a cute, neat little book, and unlike Drennan's writing for **Cheap Date** which is for some archaic reason handwritten, his own **Second Little Book Of Charity Shopping** is neatly typeset and thankfully we're spared the scrawl.

Coming from the opposite direction of **Cheap Date** yet similar in many ways is **Things**, a publication put together by history of design post-graduates "as a forum for the free discussion of objects, their histories and meanings." **Things** significantly avoids calling itself a Journal, the writing is relaxed and accessible and avoids being too academic or theoretical. Each issue begins with "contents", three or four long pieces, followed by "other things" with approximately 25 short pieces—"texts, exhibitions, ideas"—this eclectic, zine-like section is the most interesting part; a recent issue covered: disappearances in Soviet Photography, Donkey Jackets, Taylorism & scientific management, children's games past and present, the '98 England v. Argentina World Cup Second Round, the Museum of Collectors, Cod and a poem about Picasso's Pots. The issues I've seen vary from 130-200 pages long and have all been completely different, the lively mixture of research based writing exhibition and book reviews with more personal musings, selected literary quotes and snatches of oral history works extremely well.

Cool And Strange Music! Magazine #15—"dedicated to unusual sounds" is required reading for anyone into the vast field of what has come to be known as "Incredibly Strange Music". Recent issues have featured Julie London, Wildman Fischer, Alvino Rey, Claudine Longet, Mrs Miller, Hanna Barbera Records, Elvis Parody Records, Star Wars Cash-in Records, Twist Records and Music from Car Horns—this gives you a pretty good idea of what to expect. Issue 15's Julie (Cry Me A River) London article is accompanied by a full colour 2 page spread of her sultry album covers, and I particularly appreciated the thoughtful and considerate





"Once is Enough! Recordings you don't need to hear a second time" article, it's enough to just know that some of these records exist without having to hear them.

With snazzy layouts, colour covers and cartoons by Wayno (best known here for his illustrations in the Guardian Guide) **C&SM!** is looking more and more like a proper magazine, but the lively letters pages and overlap/interchange between readers and contributors reveal their zine roots. With the golden days of finding Incredibly Strange records at charity shops and car boot sales now long gone, the extensive CD reviews section is particularly useful for keeping track of new and reissued material—much of which you're unlikely to see mentioned anywhere else, I'm keeping an eye out for the Ramonettes LP—16 classic Ramones tunes played instrumental surf guitar Ventures style!

My only complaint is that **Cool And Strange Music!** comes out too frequently, I've only just finished reading the last one and made a shopping list of records to track down when a new issue arrives!

Fucked Up And Photocopied: Instant Art of the Punk Rock Movement, is an impressively hefty 240 page collection of American Punk gig flyers accompanied with photos and short pieces of writing. More than 100 band members, concert organisers, Punks, ex-Punks and poster-makers have contributed material from their personal collections by coming up with photocopied posters that have been lovingly kept for years.

Most large US cities have ultra-cheap photocopy shops and concentrated "downtown" locations with plenty going on, these factors combine to produce a tradition of flyposting, that sadly there is no UK equivalent of. Fly posting—as an attention grabbing, quick and cheap form of communication—thrives in such an environment according to 'Winston Smith': his hometown San Francisco had an active flyposting circuit, he loved making posters, but didn't happen to know any bands—so he just invented band names and went ahead sticking their posters up all over San Francisco. The book is divided into regions, Northern California, Southern California, the Pacific North West etc., in this way each section gives a flavour of the importance and vibrancy of local scenes, each with their own set of bands and venues.

Initially I was a disappointed that there's very little about cre-



ation of the posters/artwork, but there's not really much that needs to be explained—the posters themselves say it all, they combine information, art and the method of communication on an 8 1/2 x 11 inch sheet of paper. Collages, photos, drawing and stencilled, hand-drawn or pricey letrasetted text were the quickest, most accessible methods of making posters in the pre home computer age. It's interesting to see very early work by Gary Panter, the Hernandez brothers and Raymond Pettibon—all of whom retain a Punky edge or content in their current work.

Sadly most UK readers won't have the fun of being able to flick through the book saying "I was there!" My copy has already started acting as a repository for Punkabilia, there's a flyer for a 1978 Slaughter and the Dogs gig inside the back cover.

The **Fucked Up And Photocopied** editors have done an impressive job of assembling so much US Punk ephemera, their book gets extra Punk points for being defiantly bar codeless but is guilty of wimping out in a most un-Punk way by not daring to have the full title visible on the front cover or spine!

Check My Chops is a fine example of an all-round personal zine with a bit of everything, I read it cover to cover the morning it dropped through the letterbox rather than the usual reviewing technique of filing it in a pile of magazines and forgetting about it. Publisher 'Dave the Chimp' is one hyperactive ape and keeps plenty busy with pen, sketchbook and camera. Issue 5 has stories of his travels as he swings from New York to Japan, Germany, California and Portugal, there's photos of Motel signs and the desert, cartoons, reviews of skateparks and sideburns as well all the other usual things that zines review, there's even some poems as well. Layout and lettering is all done by hand in a nice 'n' chunky skateart/graffiti style, no computers appear to have been used, the tall-and-thin A3-folded-in-half format is different and effective. **Check My Chops** is bursting with monkey energy, an organised chaos feel, with every inch of background space crammed full of collages and doodlings is reminiscent of *Bugs 'n' Drugs*.

Parasol Post creates its own cross-fertilisation of fringe and mainstream cultures, the result is a surrealistic, sometimes disconcerting zine. The Association of Autonomous Astronauts, Zoë Ball, Leicestershire

Psychogeography, Chris Evans, umbrella symbology, Grateful Dead Conspiracy Theory, a rant in praise of Lard and a possibly non-fictional Stewart Home interview are all haphazardly juxtaposed leaving the reader to sort them out. The transcript of a Jerry Springer show with couples scrapping over fundamental philosophical principles: "I am so an existentialist, Bitch!" is a precisely observed classic parody that surely deserves to be filmed! Serious subversives or cheeky wisecrasses? Do these people really want to make a revolution and have fun at the same time? *Parasol Post's* lo-fi presentation and home-grown mix of articles of uncertain origin with loopy press clippings may not be to everyone's taste, if you don't get it, don't get it.

Contact Information

- El Borbah** and **Big Baby**, both Fantagraphics, £19.95, fantagraphics.com
- Facetasm**, Gates of Heck, £8.95, www.heck.com
- Burning Monster** and **Caroline et Ses Amis**, £5.50, Le Dernier Cri, 41 rue Jobin, 13001 Marseille, France available in UK from disinfotainment.
- My New York Diary**, Drawn & Quarterly, £9.99, www.drawnandquarterly.com
- Cheap Date** antidotal anti-fashion, £7.50 inc. p/p, Slab-O-Concrete, PO Box 148, Hove, BN3 3DQ, www.slab-o-concrete.demon.co.uk
- Stephen's Second Little Book of Charity Shopping**, £1.25 inc. p/p, Fabgear Books, PO Box 2927, Brighton, BN1 3SX
- Things**, £6.00 inc. p+p, PO Box 10632, London, SW3 4ZF
- Cool And Strange Music! Magazine**, £3.00/\$4.95, 1101 Colby Ave., Everett, WA 98201 USA, www.coolandstrange.com available in UK from disinfotainment.
- Fucked Up And Photocopied** £29.95 Kill Your Idols/Gingko Press Inc., 5768 Paradise Dr., Suite J, Corte Madera, CA 94925, USA
- Check My Chops** is £1 and an A5 stamped addressed envelope. Send cunningly concealed cash or unused postage stamps to; CHIMP, 27 Puteaux House, Cranbrook Estate, Mace Street, Bethnal Green, London, E2 0RF.
- Parasol Post** send some stamps or trade your stuff; to 24 Marfitt St., Leicester, LE4 6RN
- disinfotainment PO Box 664 London E3 4 QR www.mpawson.demon.co.uk

