

# Zine & Comic Reviews

## Mark Pawson

Another bumper crop of print creations this time around, and as there's lots of small publications it seems logical to review everything in size order, biggest first, leaving the little ones for last. Next issue I'm planning a whole column of free publications, all contributions and suggestions of publications to include will be gratefully received.

Found notes and letters have an enduring appeal and have often appeared in zines and one-off collections previously, **Found Magazine** is the first regular magazine devoted entirely to them. It's a winning formula, **Found Magazine** fills a big 112 pages with love letters, nasty notes, shopping lists, sketches, school essays, photos, blackmail demands, notes left under windscreen wipers and even a 'Curtsy' notice from the San Francisco Hell's Angels. Material of this kind speaks for itself and doesn't need any explanation or comments. Excellent as it is, **Found Magazine** is let down by an annoyingly messy layout, (some kind of anti-computer statement?), and far too many plugs for the editor's websites and other projects. Nonetheless, I'm glad **Found Magazine** is around, and with an active readership sending in contributions it should continue for a good while. After receiving a squashed frog found on the 25th floor stairs of a tower block, they politely ask readers not to send any more dead animals.

**Extrapool**, Nijmegen in the east of Holland is a unique autonomously run centre that houses a print shop and hosts film shows, exhibitions and performances. The print shop operates stencil printers, ancient Roneo and Gestetner duplicators and their modern day descendant, the digital stencil printer. Looking like photocopiers from the outside, digital stencil printers contain cylindrical drums of ink, around which stencils are automatically wrapped. These machines are intended to print in a single colour only, but the **Extrapool** printers have pushed them to the limit and somehow manage to print in full colour which has a unique vibrant look and sophisticated yet raw-edged feel. **Half-Wit #2** is **Extrapool's** house magazine, a riotous mix of graphics, comics, artwork and photos from 42 of the diverse artists/musicians/performers who have worked/exhibited/performed at the venue. **Half-Wit** is also a type of Dutch bread.

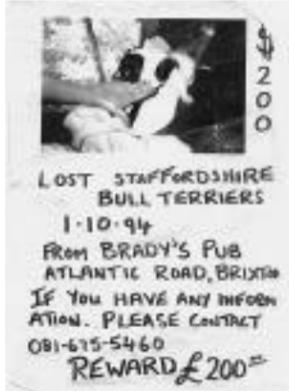
There's hardly any comics this time around, so I'd better squeeze in Johnny Ryan's **Angry Youth Comix** which with issue 4 has mutated into 'Hot Headed Cyborg Ass Kicker' in

a pathetic and transparent attempt to attract comic fanboys. Inside it's just as sick-smart and reprehensible as ever, probably even more so with this issue's big name collaboration with Peter Bagge—'Hipler'. Adolph's back on the scene, he's totally awesome and just wants to be loved, with the help of his Hollywood agent, Hitler reinvents himself for 2002, hits the Talk Show circuit, becomes a Teenybopper Idol and lands a co-starring acting role in *ET 2*, before the pressures of

fame get to him and he reverts back to old habits...It's clear why 'Hipler' is a collaboration, if you're going to produce such a gross-out-fest you'd better have someone to share the blame with. In a perfect world **Angry Youth Comix** would be on every news agent's shelves alongside Matt Groening's (imaginary) Sullen Teen Magazine.

Kevin Lyons' book **Natural Born: the graphic history of Reggae, Ska, Rocksteady and Soul 1960-69**, comes in a 7 inch single sleeve. The book graphically explores and celebrates the early days of Jamaican music, the roots of Reggae, Ska and Rocksteady in this period were complex and inter-

woven, it would be impossible to have a single comprehensive diagram illustrating all the influences and cross-fertilisation. Lyons doesn't attempt this, instead he gives us an assortment of carefully hand lettered family trees, of artists, labels, studios, producers, DJs and sound systems, together with collections of record company logos, label artwork and portraits of legendary original rockers—Duke Reid, Sir Coxsone and Prince Buster. **Natural Born** had me skanking round the living room to the wonderful Club Ska 67 and



Intensified LPs.

French Silkscreen publishers Le Dernier Cri have gone into hyperdrive, publishing 16 new books in 9 months, I was tempted to devote this column entirely to their books, maybe all the fish soup they eat in Marseille acts as magic potion? Most interesting to comics fans is Charles Burns' **Close Your Eyes**—a book of copied drawings. While he was waiting in the badly lit hallway during his daughter's piano lessons, Burns tried reading and sketching, but with the sound of 'Mary had a little Lamb' coming through the door for the fiftieth time found it hard to concentrate, so he hit on the solution of taking a drawing and copying it in the one hour time slot. His source material is classic horror and romance comics and his peer cartoonists' (Crumb, Clowes, Doucet and Panter) original drawings are shown next to Burns' distinctive smooth incised versions. Each of the original comic book images is given the Charles Burns workover, emerging more sinister and grotesque.

When he's not busy txtng late night radio talk shows, Dave the Chimp finds time to abuse the office photocopier and slap together an issue of **Switch On Your Brain**. It's a good old fashioned wake-up-and-do-something-zine. Contents: Steal From Work, Make your own zine & website, Mess with the Swoosh, Reclaim the streets and walls with skateboards and sprycans, Go Barefoot, Sticker



designs to photocopy, there's even a spray painted cover. Maybe you've heard all this before, but still it's good to be reminded, and there's a whole generation out there who haven't, but might just become tomorrow's culture jammers and meme breeders, creating the next wave of zines & comics. "Why don't you switch off your Television/Playstation/Mobile/DVD/Computer and go and do something more interesting instead?"

Having just spent a whole afternoon painstakingly cleaning up photographs and removing shadows in Photoshop, Andrew Lanyon's **The Shadow Shop** makes me wonder why I bothered. **THE SHADOW SHOP** is a whimsical, poetic attempt to trace the dimly remembered story of Vera Rowley's Shadow Shop which was open for just three days during an overcast spell sometime in 1938. **The Shadow Shop** sold a full range of shadows from simple paper ones that you had to stand on to bespoke models, made of silk and attached to the ankles with elegant leather straps. **The Shadow Shop** has illustrated diagrams, photographs and tipped-in colour plates of elaborate mechanical contraptions with levers and rollers. One demonstrates a man's shadow sliding upstairs, another shows a person banging their head against a wall, causing their shadow to drop to the ground. My informant tells me that the machines pictured are genuine, the rest of **The Shadow Shop** is for you to decide.

Tom Trusky's **Tortillas: A glow-in-the-dark book of miracles**, takes as its starting point the phenomena familiar to *Fortean Times* readers of religious symbols miraculously appearing in everyday groceries—Jesus' face on a Corn Tortilla or Allah's name in a slice of aubergine. **Tortillas** contains 6 printed 'Tortillas' when they're heated up/exposed to light and then viewed in darkness Trusky's personal icons miraculously appear, including Marilyn, Elvis and the almighty S. **Tortillas** comes with 2 sachets of Taco Sauce glued inside—do you

prefer your mysteriously appearing icons with mild or extra hot sauce? **Tortillas**, also incorporates images of Aztec Gods, reminding us that for the Aztecs corn was the source of all life on earth and that in the Aztec creation myth the first humans were made from corn meal by the Gods who then breathed life into them. You don't quite get the same associations when you buy a packet of 'Wraps' from the supermarket.

For the last 10 years Canadian Designer/Book artist Ian Phillips (a.k.a. Pas De Chance) collected Lost Pet Posters from around the world and compiled them in his zine **Snacks**. **Snacks** came with pet food biscuits and dog registration tags glued to the cover and was continually updated with new posters added as they were sent in by readers. **Lost** is a compendium of the Lost Pet Posters in **Snacks**, an instance of a zine being picked up and 'overgrounded' by a major publisher. **Lost** doesn't suffer from this process and benefits from the larger size and increased page count. Simultaneously sad and hopeful, **Lost** illustrates the large number of pets that go missing or get stolen, shows how much their owners care and the lengths they go to—putting up posters around their neighbourhoods and offering rewards for the return of beloved pets. What part do Lost Pet Poster collectors play in this process, are they reducing the chances of pets being reunited with their owners by removing posters for their own selfish pleasure? Wow, I managed to review **Lost** without mentioning Tracey Emin's Lost Cat Posters...



The Caravan Gallery postcards take the instantly recognisable format of a holiday postcard with 4 different views of a holiday town and the town's name in the centre, and replace the picturesque scenes and local landmarks with equally familiar yet less celebrated scenes of urban life—tanning salons, traffic wardens, portaloos, 'humourously' named businesses, boarded up shops, backs of statues, those massive stuffed animals given as fairground prizes, wonky handwritten signs, wheelie bins and rancid canal towpaths. With simple captions ('Signs of Scotland, Glasgow'; 'A Shoppers Paradise, Around Norwich'; 'Glimpses of Ipswich'; 'Lovely Liverpool') these postcards which could be from any town in the UK need no further explanation. They should be on sale at every souvenir shop and news agents in the towns featured. As soon as I saw them in the *bookartbookshop* I bought all 26 postcards in the series. Unlike Martin Parr's dull, and inaccurately titled 'Boring Postcards' books, The Caravan Gallery's ever-growing series of postcards (there's over 50 now) genuinely celebrate and record the mundane, commonplace aspects of Blair's Britain. Jan Williams and Chris Teasdale have travelled with their digital camera and the Caravan Gallery itself to Liverpool, Ipswich, Norwich, Brighton, Glasgow, and there's plans for The Caravan Gallery to appear in a variety of locations throughout the UK in 2003. Their recent residency at the Liverpool Biennial, produced 2 postcards branching out in new directions—a purely conceptual 'River Mersey' card featuring 4 views of murky grey water and a saucy VPL/Visible Panty Lines postcard, focusing on g-strings visible through thin white summer trousers.

**Mail for Funtastic United Nations** is a pocket sized Mail Art Kit put together by veteran mail-artist Vittore Baroni and his conspirator Piermario Ciani. The snazzily designed folder contains 22 postcards, 4 sheets of stamps, 3 booklets and a rubber-stamp. Themed around imaginary countries with their own languages, currencies and postal systems, **Mail 4 f.u.n.** embodies the collaborative spirit of the Postal Art Network—each of the 23 contributors from Italy, Germany, Japan and the USA financed a share of the printing costs and received part of the edition when complete. **Mail 4 f.u.n.** is proof that the mail-art network is still alive even if it has taken a battering from upstart electronic communication methods. **Mail 4 f.u.n.** also serves as an inspiring working model of how an ambitious international project can be realised.

**Pocko** editions are a series of cute uniform books by artists, photographers and illustrators. They're all 96 pages, postcard sized, budget priced and come in batches of 5 titles, with a neat slip-case thrown in if you buy the set. They've defined their own space which is somewhere between artists' books, news-stand fashion/art glossies and Taschen books, but hey at just £4.99 each it doesn't really matter where they fit into the grand scheme of things. To do a proper review of Pocko books I'd need all 5 books in front of me, but for some strange reason they only sent one. **Pocko's, Out of Science** showcases Hiro Sugiyama's paintings and collages which draw on the vernacular imagery of Mexican and Indian educational posters and children's illustrated 'World of Knowledge'-type encyclopedias—the genre of workman-like proficiently painted illustration art. From this source material Sugiyama creates graphically rich, Jim Shaw-esque curious paintings, which always have a discordant element to them. It's a great image book which can be dipped

into repeatedly, but c'mon **Pocko**, how about titles for the paintings or more information on Sugiyama's publishing company, which apparently distributes a free newspaper in Tokyo on the 23rd of each month, which is payday in Japan?

Getting smaller, and cheaper we come to **Neomu** #4. If you guillotined 3 cm off the top of a **Pocko** book and used the chopped-off bits to make more pages you'd eventually get an 11cm square 160 page book. Then invite 80 designers and illustrators to contribute a monochrome 2 page spread, and print it all in a rainbow of colours graduating from glossy neon pink at the start to a matt dull purple at the end of the book and you've got **Neomu**. You've invited lots of contributors, from Australia and Singapore so it's not a case of work from 'all the usual suspects' (well it might be if you're Australian or Singaporean). **Neomu** is delectable top grade eye candy, hard-to-find and costs £1 / US\$ / HK\$10 / ¥100 / EURO 1 depending on where you live—**Neomu** is cheap in any language.

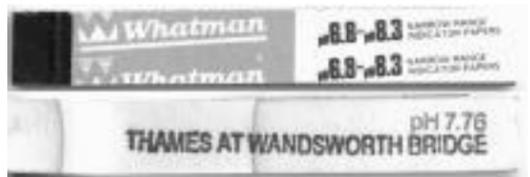
Yasushi Cho's **More Books About the Transmission and Food** is an instant collection of 4 colourful teeny tiny books packaged in a hanging plastic strip with pockets for each book—like sweets in a Japanese ¥100 shop. Each of the 4 hand sewn

books contains intricately collaged and rearranged images from magazines, food packaging and photo booth portraits.

**Please Bury Your Finds So Others Can Discover Them** by Matt Pattinson, measures in at just 4cm square. It's a collection of 28 succinct pictograms of modern stereotypes, undersea creatures and interesting sexual positions. Economical and precise almost to the point of abstraction, there's still a couple that I haven't figured out yet, and in true image virus style, if you look carefully these designs can be spotted stickered onto lampposts and screened on t-shirts.

The winner of this issue's prize for the smallest book, measuring a minuscule 1 x 7cm, is Tracey Bush's **The Thames pH Book**. Using

readily manufactured books of litmus paper, each page of **The Thames pH Book** has been dipped in water collected from sites along the River Thames. The book takes us on a journey upriver from Purfleet to Kew, accompanying the Environment Agency's weekly River Run, sampling water at 18 locations. Each page of this labour intensive, site specific book has the location and pH value of the water sample rubber-stamped on it. Thrill as pH values soar to a whopping great 7.78 and then dip down to a miserable 7.39. As I flicked through **The Thames pH Book** I found myself secretly hoping for an off the scale reading caused by polluted water; can you imagine the excitement of a pH reading of 9.13?



#### Contacts

**FOUND MAGAZINE**. 3455 Charing Cross Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48108-1911, U.S.A. Available in Tower Records if you're lucky enough TO find a branch that's still open...  
www.foundmagazine.com

**HALF-WIT**, available from Disinfotainment.

**ANGRY YOUTH COMIX** Fantagraphics Books, available from all good comic shops

**NATURAL BORN**, available from Artomatic, 13-14 Great Sutton St., London, EC1V 0BX  
www.artomatic.co.uk

**CLOSE YOUR EYES**, available from Disinfotainment  
www.lederniercri.org

**SWITCH ON YOUR BRAIN**, 171 Corfield Street, London, E2 0DN  
react@switchonyourbrain.co.uk

**THE SHADOW SHOP**, available from bookart-bookshop

**TORTILLAS: A glow-in-the-dark book of miracles**, Tom Trusky, Painted Smiles Press, P.O.Box 6414, Boise, ID 83707, USA

**LOST**, Chronicle books.  
*The Caravan Gallery*, 77B Lucknow Street, Portsmouth, PO1 1PT  
Postcards available from; Zwemmers/CCA, Glasgow; The Lighthouse, Glasgow; Fruitmarket, Edinburgh; Beyond Words, Edinburgh; bookart-bookshop, London.  
www.thecaravangallery.co.uk

**MAIL 4 f.u.n.** Vittore Baroni, via C Battisti 339, 55049, Viareggio, Italy  
www.aaa-edizioni.it

**POCKO** books, available from Diesel clothes shops worldwide  
www.pocko.com

**NEOMU**, www.neomu.com

**PLEASE BURY YOUR FINDS SO OTHERS CAN DISCOVER THEM**, mattpatt520@virgin.net  
www.inkshed.co.uk/mpbook.htm  
*More Books about the Transmission and Food*, available from Disinfotainment  
www5.ocn.ne.jp/~laughter

**THE THAMES pH BOOK**, available from *bookart-bookshop*, 17 Pitfield Street, London, N1 6HB  
www.bookartbookshop.com

Send information on free publications for review in Variant issue 17 to: Disinfotainment, P.O.Box 664, London, E3 4QR  
www.mpawson.demon.co.uk