

OPUNTIA

58.1

ISSN 1183-2703

August 2005

OPUNTIA is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage outside USA and I don't collect them.

Whole-numbered OPUNTIAs are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]

FROM: Kris Mininger

2004-11-11

Calle Obispo 4 bajo

Plasencia 10600, Caceres, Spain

At the moment I have about 150 zines. I am thinking it would be a good idea to start organizing them because in a few more years that number is going to get significantly larger. I suppose the most important thing is to keep them in excellent condition. I replace zines back in their original envelope when I've finished reading them. I put them on shelves mainly by size. Any tips?

[I don't keep my zines in envelopes but some zinesters do, such as the late Harry Warner Jr, who had a massive collection dating from the 1930s. I feel there are two critical factors in collecting zines: accessibility and storage conditions. Accessibility means that the zines and the information in them are easily at hand, and are not lumped into cardboard boxes. I keep my zines in magazine files (brand name is Bankers' Box) so I can quickly pull out an issue. The zines are sorted on my shelves by country and then by title, excepting that some zinesters who kept changing the names of their zines frequently will be sorted by editor name. All my books and zines are on the main floor of my house. Don't

store zines in basements; the hazards of flooding or sewer backup are far too great. Some people fuss about the weight of books but remember that a library of racked shelves is 50% open floor space. Floor joists are built to handle refrigerators, kitchen appliances, and furniture, and are unlikely to give way under books. My house is a bungalow; I sleep in the basement and the two main floor bedrooms are racked with rows of book shelves.]

[Another other important factor is indexing zines. Most so-called zine indexes are not; they are title/editor checklists. I keep a subject index on computer of all Canadian zines I receive, and selectively index interesting articles in foreign zines on a separate card index. Thus I can retrieve useful information quickly and make use of the collection instead of just letting it gather dust. Subject indexes do not have to be fancy. You can keep them on a computer document or use 3x5 cards. I feel strongly that a library should be used, not just be artefacts gathering dust.]

FROM: R'ykandar Korra'ti
5605 NE 184 Street
Kenmore, Washington 98028

2005-04-08

Re: Norwescon 28 fanzine lending library. As per usual, the Quiet Hospitality room of the convention hosted the library. Norwescon simply doesn't have enough fanzine fans to really do

justice to a real fan lounge, but this provides a reasonable alternative. It also insures that fanzine fandom has a presence, a face of sorts shown to Norwescon.

I'm happy to report that this convention saw a lot of browsing and reading. Fans of various sorts occupied the lounge full-time, and most of them were readers. No one zine got noticeably more attention than the others, but they were all being moved around on the shelves, which means they were being examined.

FROM: Alison Scott
24 St. Mary Road
Walthamstow, London E17 9RG, England

2005-03-29

Reading OPUNTIA #56.1, I was fascinated by the tirade from Monty Cantsin about add-and-pass on sheets. From the outside, the whole mail art scene seems quite impenetrable. Add-and-pass on sheets sounded quite interesting to me, the art equivalent of Book Crossing books or a battered suitcase covered in brightly coloured luggage labels. Why is this less interactive than Artist Trading Cards or other forms of mail art?

[A good analogy is that ATCs are sent to someone as part of the gift economy in the same way as paper zines, whereas add-and-pass on sheets are like e-zines, where the recipient is expected to

to do most of the work and take the expense of printing or photocopying. Steve Jeffery explains it better as follows.]

FROM: Steve Jeffery
44 White Way
Kidlington, OX5 2XA, England

2005-03-13

For some reason my name and address seems to have got on one or more mail art mailing lists and I occasionally get sent a bundle of these add-and-pass on sheets. For the most part I can't even grace them with the word 'artworks'. Many of them barely aspire to the sort of thing a three-year-old proudly brings back from pre-school. I don't think I've seen any unsolicited artwork by this route that suggests the person sending it has spent more than ten minutes on their contribution. I have the latest before me. It consists of half a dozen photocopied pages from a book randomly spattered with ink smears, plus another half dozen sheets of card with random words typewritten on them and similarly daubed.

I invariably have a guilty feeling about letting these sit on the kitchen table for a while before consigning them to the paper recycling bin. But, thanks to Monty Cantsin, no more. They are paper spam. I have no qualms about deleting any unsolicited e-mail from people I don't know. Neither should I about anything that comes through my door, be it offers for double glazing, credit

loans, chain letters, or mail art. I don't mind people writing to me or sending me stuff they think I'll enjoy or appreciate. That is part of fanzine fandom, and my response to an editor or correspondent is my implicit acceptance of the rules of the game. But add-and-pass on is different. You're not being invited to respond to the artist directly, to strike up a conversation, but to perpetuate a mailing chain.

FROM: Ruggero Maggi
C.so Sempione 67
20149 Milano, Italy

2005-07

In the art world there are some resistances at the introduction of computer and other technological means, due to their costs and to the fear that they could rationalize too much the artistic work. But computers and other means are like a pencil or brush; the only difference lies in their higher degree of evolution. I think that the technique must not be the principle factor of artistic operations, but only a wonderful and quick means in service of the poetic message.

In this society which quickly devours products and images, a computer is the ideal means of expression. Pierre Restany, in one of his recent writings, says: "*We live in a post-industrial society, that is, in a society which has not really*

surpassed the industrial stage, but is charged of it, totally saturated of industries. In this society it's necessary to re-invent the relationship between the Man and the Machine, and nowadays the machine is the computer. To make a new definition of this relationship implies creating the right and true conditions of a dialogue between two kinds of intelligence, the artificial and the human one."

The networker, through his own poetic and the contacts with other artistic realities, reaches in his own work a high degree of cultural and formal contents, for which it is now necessary to determine the new relative codes and rules. Computer and other technological means give many more great possibilities, but mail art is the network.

I Also Heard From: Sheryl Birkhead, Gabriel Piller, Pascal Lenoir, Ned Brooks, Guy Miller, Gianni Simone, Dewitt Young, Jose Roberto Sechi, Peter Netmail, Terry Jeeves, Robert Lichtman, Randall Fleming, C.Z. Lovecraft, Chester Cuthbert, John Held Jr, John Hertz, Phlox Icona

ZINE LISTINGS

by Dale Speirs

[The Usual means \$3 cash (\$5 overseas), trade for your zine, or letter of comment on a previous issue. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas (the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount) or mint USA stamps (which are not valid for postage outside USA). US\$ banknotes are acceptable around the world. SF means science fiction. An apazine is a zine for an amateur press association distro, a perzine is a personal zine, sercon is serious-constructive, a genzine is a general zine]

Right Up There #2 (The Usual from Sharee Carton, Box 208, Dimbulah, Queensland 4872, Australia) Musiczine; the previous issue was published 20 years ago, proving there is still hope for the sinner who repents and publishes again. Mostly about musical influences, with a few personal accounts and commentary.

Snake Den #24 (The Usual from Ken Faig Jr, 2311 Swainwood Drive, Glenview, Illinois 60025-2741) An extended review of the Victorian-era novelist Sabine Baring-Gould and his works.

The Fossil #324 and #325 (US\$15 per year from The Fossils, c/o Stan Oliner, 1278 Dexter Street, Denver, Colorado 80220) Devoted to the history of zines (which date from the middle 1800s, not the 1970s as many think), with biographies, book reviews, and an extended review of banquet menus enjoyed since 1905 by one zine group.

Kairan #9 (Mail art Usual from Gianni Simone, 3-3-23 Nagatsuta, Midori-ka, Yokohama-shi, 226-0027 Kanagawa-ken, Japan) Mail art zine published in English by an Italian married to a Japanese woman; internationalism at its best. This zine has some serious discussions of whither mail art? and commentary on the state of the mail art world.

Modern mail art has evolved some standards over the past few decades which are now being threatened by those who don't know and don't care about the past or why the standards evolved. This is like the manner in which literary SF fandom was overrun by the Trekkies in the late 1960s, quickly followed by other media barbarians in such quantity that literary SF is now a sideline and the anime and Star Wars fans dominate the conventions, completely oblivious to ideas such as zines being published for trade, not \$15 an issue. Indeed, slash fandom is oblivious to zines, period, and publish only on the Web, what they call fanfic.

Mail art has standards such as "doc to all", which means that anyone sending in mail art to an exhibition is entitled to documentation of the exhibits as a printed catalogue with illustrations or actual mail art. Unfortunately a few modern "mail artists" are doing doc to all as a Web site, which violates the spirit of the Papernet. They plead poverty, in which case they should not have sent out the invitations in the first instance. Some of the more mercenary ones are auctioning off exhibits supposedly for

charity, although one never sees any audit of where the money actually went. Others have accumulations of mail art which they call archives, and want to donate to some university or museum, but those archives are not properly catalogued and thus useless.

There is an interview with mail artist Tiziana Baracchi, who discusses one problem, that of mail artists who send off-topic art to a thematic exhibition. However, it may be they have learned from experience that too many doc to all catalogues are just lists of participants, so they don't bother to put any work into it. Just as zinedom is plagued by people who put out a four-page crudzine and expect it to be fair trade for a 64-page monthly, so it is that mail art is infested by people who do a quick scribble on a postcard and expect a full-colour catalogue.

R. Frank Jensen discusses the cult that was developed around Ray Johnson, an early mail artist (deceased 1995) who has been built up in recent years as the fountainhead of modern mail art. He was the inventor of the add-and-pass-on mail art sheet, which started out with good intentions but is now the spam of the Papernet (not his fault, though). Jensen writes "*The era of physical mail art is over.*" but history demonstrates that new media never kill off old media. The Papernet may dwindle, but has the advantage that paper spam can always be recycled or used to start the fireplace. Jensen notes that: "*The postal system had built-in restrictions, which were not that bad after all.*"

The mail artist had to use time and thought to create a work, to make it ready for mailing, to take to the post office. ... It is just too easy, sitting at the computer, mixing up an image and pester an endless number of e-mail boxes with unwanted stuff." I think e-mail art will go the same way as e-zines, lost in the cacophony of the Internet, with no response from viewers, unlike the way that paper zines get trades or letters of comment. The Internet has demonstrated that the easier it is to transmit, then the lower the signal-to-noise ratio.

15 Mothers #1 (The Usual from Grace Vajda, 6086 Contreras Road, Oxford, Ohio 45056) Poetry and art zine.

Alexiad V4#1 to #3 (The Usual from Lisa and Joseph Major, 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040) Lots of book reviews, and a few candy bar reviews as well, not to mention some personal accounts (perhaps a little *too* personal) and letters of comment.

Library Urinal #1 (The Usual from Donny Smith, 915 West Second Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47403) Assorted articles from the alternative scene amongst librarians. American zinesters who whine about the Shrubbies should read this issue and learn about what dictators are doing to libraries in Turkmenistan, Chechnya, and Zimbabwe. We in North America and western Europe complain too much.

Tortoise #20 (The Usual from Sue Jones, Flat 5, -6-
32-33 Castle Street, Shrewsbury SY1 2BQ, England)

This issue has the best cover I have ever seen in any zine, a full-colour cover with an overlay. The overlay shows an elderly tortoise trimming the topiary of a manor house. Lift up the overlay and one sees the scene behind the hedge. The cover was prepared by Graham Higgins; well done, that man. The issue has gardening and the rural way of life as its theme. Sue Jones points out that those lovely manor houses can't all be run as bed-and-breakfasts; many owners have day jobs to support their rural lifestyle, and somebody has to muck out the stables and spread the manure in the fields. Other writers discuss various aspects of the theme, including 900-year-old abbey ruins and botanical books. Elsewhere are letters of comment and book reviews. Well done, that woman!

FOSFAX #211 (US\$4 from Falls of the Ohio SF and Fantasy Association, Box 37281, Louisville, Kentucky 40233-7281) 69 pages of American politics, book reviews, letters of comment, and convention reports (although one constant reporter does nothing but write about setting up dealer tables and loading dock troubles, without actually mentioning the content of the convention).

Hat #73 to #82 (Mail art Usual from Ross Priddle, 21 Valleyview Drive SW, Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 7K5) Single-sheet collage zine.

Dwan #44 and #45 (The Usual from Donny Smith, 915 West 2 Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47405) Intermingled poetry, diary extracts, and letters of comment.

Ethel The Aardvark #113, #115 to #118 (The Usual from Melbourne SF Club, Box 212, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 3005, Australia) SF clubzine with news, notes, and letters of comment. Also some extended thoughts on fandom, author interviews, a comics column, and reviews.

For The Clerisy #60 to #62 (The Usual from Brant Kresovich, Box 404, Getzville, New York 14068-0404) Reviews of older books that deserve renewed attention, obscure books, zine reviews, and letters of comment. An unnumbered June 2005 takes note of the World Wide Party on June 21.

The Knarley Knews #110 to #112 (The Usual from Henry Welch, 1525 - 16 Avenue, Grafton, Wisconsin 53024-2017) Genzine with articles on an early American settlement, some personal accounts, essays on zinedom, absolute versus relative values, and letters of comment.

What Is A Surreal Community? #2 (Surreal Café, Brooklyn, New York) This is a mail art documentation produced by a café that has since gone out of business. It lists the participants to a call for mail art (myself included) and has some very nice photos

of the displays and on-site participants. The reason I mention it here is because what struck me about the photos was the greying of the mail artists. There are two women shown who appear to be in their 30s, and the rest of the gathering are greybeards, chrome domes, and grannies. It isn't just SF fans and philatelists who are worrying about where the next generation will come from.

As The Crow Flies #7 (The Usual from Frank Denton, 14654 - 8 Avenue SW, Seattle, Washington 98166-1953) Diaryzine of a two-month road trip across Canada and the USA, plus some book reviews.

Banana Rag #33 (Mail art Usual from Anna Banana, RR 22, 3747 Highway 101, Roberts Creek, British Columbia V0N 2W2) An update on Anna's projects, documentation of her Sticker Trees project, and news about bananas.

Musea #139 to #141 (The Usual from Tom Hendricks, 4000 Hawthorne #5, Dallas, Texas 75219) #139 is an illustrated poem, #140 is Hendrick's plan for a dream home, #141 is his script for a movie.

The New Port News #221 and #222 (The Usual from Ned Brooks, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720) Apazine with comments on a wide variety of topics.

Chunga #9 and #10 (The Usual from Randy Byers, 1013 North 36 Street, Seattle, Washington 98103) Reviews of movies that were never made, convention reports, fannish stuff, and letters of comment.

Sugar Needle #27 (The Usual from Phlox Icona, 1029A Adams Avenue, Salisbury, Maryland 21804) Devoted to weird and wonderful candy, such as flower-shaped chocolate from Russia, Pulpitos (gummy octopuses), and other sugar-laden esoterica.

Murderous Signs #11 (The Usual from Grant Wilkins, Box 20517, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 1A3) Literary zine, with a reprint of an 1862 essay bemoaning the fact that anyone can read poetry and that it should be restricted to an elite of artists. It would be interesting to take a time machine back to that author and tell him about mail art, which has a basic philosophy that anyone can create art. The second half of this issue has scripts for some performance art shows, which demonstrate that not just anyone should be allowed to create art. A nicely balanced issue.

Banana Wings #21 and #22 (The Usual from Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7ES, England) SF genzine with accounts such as an Irish fan explaining to English soldiers at an Ulster roadblock about science fiction, festivals and SF conventions, Texas health care, fandom commentary, and letters of comment.

Southern Fandom Confederation Bulletin V8#8 -8-
(The Usual from Southern Fandom Confederation, c/o R.B. Cleary, 138 Bibb Drive, Madison, Alabama 35758-1064) SF clubzine with news and notes about the hobby in southern USA, along with a number of extensive convention reports.

Thought Experiments #2 (The Usual from Geneva Melzack, 5 Brooklands Avenue, Withington, Manchester M20 1JE, England) SF genzine, with essays on fan history, narrative forms in SF, and classifying literature by its effects on feelings.

Amapra #21 (The Usual from Guy Miller, 2951 Archer Lane, Springfield, Ohio 45503-1209) Single-sheet apazine with accounts about a balloon man and seeing the Bolshoi Ballet in a Las Vegas casino.

The Cosmic Hairdryer #3 (The Usual from Max, 20 Bakers Lane, Woodston, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire PE2 9QW) The hospital issue, with complacency-rending accounts of emergency ward visits that are a great encouragement to all of us to stay fit and never go near a medic.

Warp #59 (The Usual from Montréal SF and Fantasy Association, Box 1186, Place du Parc, Montréal, Québec H2X 4A7) SF clubzine with news and notes of local fandom, convention reports, and assorted reviews and listings.

Plokta #32 and #33^{1/3} (The Usual from Alison Scott, 24 St. Mary Road, Walthamstow, London, England E17 9RG) Jolly good fun with various personal essays and letters of comment.

Wabe #7 (The Usual from Jae Leslie Adams, 621 Spruce Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53715) SF zine with convention reports, including the theory and practice of naming them.

Statement #327 to #330 (The Usual from Ottawa SF Society, 18 Norice Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2G 2X5) SF clubzine with news and notes, reviews, and an astronomy column.

File 770 #144 (US\$8 for five issues, from Mike Glycer, 705 Valley View Avenue, Monrovia, California 91016) SF newszine with convention reports and fannish doings.

Littlebrook #4 (The Usual from Jerry Kaufman and Suzanne Tompkins, 3522 NE 123 Street, Seattle, Washington 98125) Genzine with assorted essays and personal accounts, zine talk, and letters of comment.

Farming Uncle #98 (US\$2 from Louis Toro, Bronx, New York 10458) Cut-and-paste photocopied adzine that is a weird melange of small ads and fillers. The ads range from "make money at home" frauds to aboriginal groups to bird fancier clubs to pen pal groups.

Orga{ni}sm #1 (The Usual from Gianni Simone, 3-3-23 Nagatsuta, Midori-ka, Yokohama-shi, 226-0027 Kanagawa-ken, Japan) Perzine about life in Tokyo as an expatriate.

The Thought #144 and #145 (The Usual from Ronald Tobin, Box 10760, Glendale, Arizona 85318-0760) Anarchism, libertarianism, a secret society of philosophers, armchair revolutionaries, and letters of comment.

Under The Ozone Hole #16 (The Usual from John Herbert, 2859 Gorge View Drive, Victoria, British Columbia V9A 2H8) SF genzine with some fan fiction, essays, and letters of comment.

Unofficial Memphen Annual #1 (The Usual from Memphis SF Association, Box 820514, Memphis, Tennessee 38182) Anthology of zine cover art and filler illustrations.

Probe #126 and #127 (The Usual from Science Fiction South Africa, Box 781401, Sandton 2146, South Africa) South African clubzine with the usual news, notes, reviews, and letters of comment, but also lots of short stories.

The Zine Dump #8 (The Usual from Guy Lillian, 8700 Millicent Way #1501, Shreveport, Louisiana 71115) Reviewzine of mostly SF zines.

Xerography Debt #16 (US\$3 from Davida Gypsy Breier, Box 963, Havre de Grace, Maryland 21078) Reviewzine with multiple reviewers reviewing multiple zines. Also some historical articles about life in the Papernet.

Extranjero #3 (The Usual from Kris and Lola Mininger, Calle Obispo 4 bajo, Plasencia 10600, Caceres, Spain) Mostly a trip report of a visit to Finland, trying to teach Spaniards about zines, and letters of comment.

Twenty-Eight Pages Lovingly Bound With Twine #11 (The Usual from Cristoph Meyer, Box 106, Danville, Ohio 43014) Finding a \$20 bill in a Rush Limbaugh book, vegan veal, a short story about supermarket angst, and buying a car.

Word Watchers (Spring 2005) (The Usual from Jeanette Handling, 2405 Sanford Avenue, Alton, Illinois 62002) A zine of modern etymology, discussing the origins of moderns words and catchphrases.

Zine World #22 (US\$4 from Box 330156, Murfreesboro, Tennessee 37133-0156) A substantial reviewzine with news of zinedom, some articles, letters of comment, but mostly lots of zine reviews.

Door Knob #85 to #88 (The Usual from Robert Lichtman, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, California 94611-1948) Apazine with comments on various subjects. **-10-**

Vanamonde #573 to #597 (The Usual from John Hertz, 236 South Coronado Street #409, Los Angeles, California 90057) Single-sheet weekly apazine with a wide variety of comments.

MAIL ART LISTINGS

Mailboxes: (R.F. Cote, 12465 Avenue de Troyes, Québec City, Québec G2A 3C9) Send pictures, collage, or any art-related to mailboxes or post office boxes. Size is postcard size 15 cm x 10 cm maximum (to fit the frames). Deadline is February 1, 2006. Exhibition in April 2006 at the Québec City Stamps and Postcards Show. Documentation to every participant.

The Penguin: (Jeroen ter Welle, Boeninlaan 393, 1102 TL Amsterdam, Netherlands) Theme on the penguin, size A6 (14.8 x 10.5 cm). Send 16 originals or copies, documentation to every 15 contributors. No deadline.

Collage d'aujourd'hui: (Dianne Bertrand, Art terre, 9109 Deschambault, Saint Leonard, Quebec, H1R 2C6) Mail art collage.

Think Here: (Jose Roberto Sechi, Av. M29, Nº 2183, Jd. Sao Joao, Rio Claro SP - 13505 - 410, Brazil) Mail art magazine. Drawing, design, painting, engraving, gluing, rubber stamp. In black and white, please, maximum 13 cm x 8 cm (horizontal format). Theme free, no return, no jury, no deadline, documentation to every 18 participants.

BOOK REVIEWS

by Dale Speirs

At A Distance: Precursors To Art And Activism On The Internet is a 478-page hardcover edited by Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark. This anthology of articles by various authors, published by MIT, tries to remind the techies that the Papernet was there before them. It reviews the world of mail art, performance art, and the predecessors to the Internet. Some of the essays in this book are a bit too turgid, overloaded with pretentious drivel from academics, but others are fairly readable. (My definition of turgid reading is where I have to frequently re-read a sentence or paragraph more than once to figure out what the author meant to say.) The book is an uneven mix of academic essays and personal chats, neither fish nor fowl.

Hypertext use by non-techies did not begin with the World Wide Web. Dr. Vannevar Bush published the basic ideas in a 1945

essay "As We May Think", far in advance of computer technology. In 1970, while SF authors were still churning out stories of giant computers ruling the world from a central site, artists were setting up a museum catalogue called LABYRINTH, which produced maze-like search results as a catalogue. Non-linear media based on telecommunications became uncollectible because even if museums could archive the software and hardware, they could not preserve the context they were used in. A physical painting is the same to all viewers, but a computer display of art varies from one viewer to the next depending on what font they selected, the size of their monitor, and a myriad of other personal values.

The growth of digital media and its use in art forked into two roads, one for artists who used them as tools, and the others for whom the media were the art in themselves. The same thing happened with mail art, where some artists use the mails as a courier taking art from one country to another, and others view the courier as art in itself. Mail art traces its origins back to Ray Johnson in 1943, but wasn't recognized as such until 1962, when Johnson's network was dubbed the New York School of Correspondence (later changed by him to Correspondance). It was soon recognized that mail art had the advantage of putting artists on the periphery into touch with each other. Obscurity did not matter anymore, and one did not have to belong to an arts

academy or gallery to connect with others. The Papernet (as I call it; I borrowed the word from the late Harry Warner Jr) became an underground space where artists can experiment and zine editors rant, free from the worry of convincing a gallery owner to sell one's art or have an Australian newspaper magnate override an editorial opinion.

Mail art puttered along until Ray Johnson organized an exhibit at the Whitney Museum in 1970. The publicity triggered an explosion of interest, and soon everyone had his/her own mailing list. Mail art became a genuine network, where it is not possible even in theory to track down every node (artist or zinester) and map every connection. In 1972, an exhibition of mail art in Omaha, Nebraska, developed the present concept of mail art as a non-juried exhibition open to all, with no returns of artwork but documentation to all participants (usually in the form of a catalogue or zine). These are the basic rules that mail art still operates on, violated from time to time by assorted offenders, but nonetheless honoured for most part.

At the same time mail art was developing, so was Fluxus. This is an informal network of artists producing music, artwork and art performances on the fringes. They quite often collaborate at local conferences, and view art as a social act. By contrast, mail artists tend to be loners interacting across the Papernet. This is not to say that the two groups are distinct; there is overlap between mail

artists who do some performance art and Fluxus members who send mail art.

By the late 1970s, some networked groups were already experimenting with satellite television performances and fax art. Later on came radio broadcasters on college station shows who experimented with the possibility of networked interactions. Negativland, to take the most famous bunch as an example, had and still have a radio show where callers phoning in have their voices mixed into music or found-noise tracks as they speak. A fascinating section of this book deals with Japanese mini-FM stations, which serve tiny geographical areas but large population blocs because of Japan's high density. A pioneer of mini-FM, interviewed for this book, noted that mini-radio stations had high audience participation via phone calls or people walking over to where the station was broadcasting from. However, mini-television stations seemed to pin people down in their homes. He went on to say that high bandwidth applications such as video seem to discourage interaction, while low bandwidth such as radio gets people involved. This would explain why Papernet zines get more response than e-zines.

Another chapter discusses the history of television and Web sites for extreme political action such as the Battle in Seattle and the first Gulf War in 1991. Elsewhere there has been much to-do about how the activists were able to mobilize, via the Internet, a

million protestors to march. I am cynical about the value in this. Calgary was hit twice by outsiders coming in to march through our streets, once for the World Petroleum Congress, and again for the Kananaskis G-8 Summit. I personally saw a huge effort go into performance art on the street, although much to my chagrin I missed the female vegetarians disrobing in front of the downtown McDonald's. But in Calgary, Milan, and elsewhere, those massive protests had little or no impact. Calgary rush hour today still looks like an SUV assembly line, the Tories still fight the future, and the Liberals still deny the past.

The book then goes on to look at various artists in the pre-Internet networks. It concludes with a timeline of events. As the editors remark, the Internet has swamped out the memory of what was before. We need a few more books covering the general history of networks, whether the Papernet or performance art collaborations. My concern is that the people who most need to read these books are the ones least likely to, the Internet nerds who think pre-World Wide Web BBS systems are ancient history and the Papernet the dark ages.

Many Skies by Arthur Upgren (2005, Rutgers University Press, hardcover) is an alternative astronomy book, speculative fact about how our lives would be different if the solar system were different. In many parts of this book, Upgren sets up a scenario,

does the technical side of it, and then abandons it without further consideration of the ramifications that would occur in alternative history. This book is relatively thin, and could have been fleshed out more with a bit of sociology. I have added my further speculations as I go along this review. The order of the chapters was not well thought out, and I will review them out of order in a more logical pattern. For budding ANALOG writers, this book will be a good source of ideas.

"Double Planet" refers to the Earth-Moon system, which is the only known system where the satellite is so large in proportion to its primary. If Venus or Mars were a double planet, then the satellite would be visible to the naked eye. The obvious revolutions would result in the heliocentric theory being accepted in ancient times.

Upgren discusses several aspects of the Earth-centric theory that dominated from Ptolemy until the 1600s. No technology existed until Galileo to see other planet's satellites or the phases of Venus, both of which refute the Earth-centric theory. If telescopes were available in ancient Alexandria, Ptolemy would have been in the position of Galileo, and the heliocentric theory would have become established sooner and prevented the Aristotlean Earth-centric system from fossilizing European thought for the first 1,500 years of Anno Domino. Technology and cultural evolution would have been that much more advanced. -13-

Uppgren also considers another alternative that would have established the heliocentric theory, that of Jupiter being in the orbit of Venus. If Jupiter were there, it would be bright enough to be seen in the daytime sky as is the Moon, and its phases would be visible. Such a Jupiter would exert massive tidal effects on Earth and alter our climate because it would yank on Earth's axis and affect the precession of the axis.

"Our Three Moons" assumes three moons orbiting Earth. Selene is identical to our Moon, Artemis is one-third the size and halfway between, and Astarte is a tiny moonlet 24 km in diameter, a captured satellite like Phobos and Deimos at Mars. With three moons, tides on Earth will be more irregular, more difficult to compute, and will have greater amplitude, since they will vary depending on alignment of Selene and Artemis.

Speirs: Taking this further, I'll add that humans take longer to develop sailing techniques on oceans and large lakes. There would be more colonial expansion by the European powers via land than the sea. Western Europe would colonize Africa by land. Russia would continue unchecked down the Pacific coast of North America, and also travel south down the eastern slopes of the Rockies via the Arctic Ocean shoreline. If Earth had three moons, I would be typing this in Russian. The space programmes of the USA-counterpart and Russia would be a game of leapfrog and the moons much easier to reach one step at a time. Astarte could

not support a colony but Artemis would have both Russian and American permanent bases by now.

"A Second Chance" considers what would happen if Venus orbited Earth where the Moon now is. Earth would have tides 65 times higher than our timeline and most coastal areas would be uninhabitable. Sailing ships would never be developed because of the turbulent oceans. A month would be 57 days. Earthquakes and volcanoes would be more common because of the tidal stress on Earth's crust. Venus would not be subject to the runaway greenhouse effect at this greater distance, and therefore would have developed life, albeit completely different from Earth.

Speirs: At such close quarters, there would be a greater impetus to develop space travel and explore the other half of our double planet. It would be interesting to see if DNA or RNA life also developed on Venus, and what differences in body plans might evolve among animals.

"Within A Triple Star" assumes the Sun is one of a stellar triplet. There would be no planets past Mars because the more distant ones would be destabilized by the other stars. Mars would still be a rocky planet but larger since there is no Jupiter to sweep up material with its gravitational attraction. With extra stars, twilight will be brighter and longer, and for half the year there will be daylight simultaneously on both sides of the planets. Circadian

rhythms of people and animals would be muted, and primitive human societies could work around the clock during planting and harvesting seasons. Monotheism would be weak or non-existent, since the original idea of One God was based on a single sun.

Speirs: For orbital dynamics reasons, the third star will have to orbit at a great distance and be insignificant, thus only two suns exist from a practical point of view. I suspect that a Trinity of gods would be created by humans, one for each visible sun plus the Moon. The development of astronomy would take longer due to trouble in observing on a world where everything is in light.

“The Rings of Earth” is a self-evident title. And, in fact, Earth has had rings in the past when a large asteroid strayed too close. Rings are orbitally unstable and eventually disappear after a few million years (unless replenished, of course), just as Saturn’s rings did not exist when humans first started to evolve and will be gone in a few million years from now. Rings can only orbit about an equator. Assuming Earth still had rings, they would be almost invisible at the equator but would become an arch closer to each pole, then disappear at the poles because they would be below the horizon. They would interfere with astronomy; the big telescopes would be at the poles and subject to poor weather.

“We Are Alone” looks at an alternative solar system where Earth is the Sun’s only planet and there is no Moon. Astronomy in our

timeline developed mainly to understand the other planets and would have lagged in a lonely-Earth system. There would be no measurement of time in months, inspired by the lunar cycle. Archaeologists would have no ability to cross-check absolute time scales of ancient civilizations by referring to their reports of eclipses. No tides means an 8-hour day, strong winds, and life evolving in different directions. There would be exaggerated seasons due to lack of stabilization of Earth’s tilt by the Moon.

To sum up this book, it had some interesting ideas, but did not develop them as thoroughly as could have been done. At times, the book reads more like an outline than full-fledged text.

Worlds That Weren’t (2003, Roc Books, trade paperback, no editor credited) is an anthology of four novellas of alternative history. Each novella is followed by the author’s explanation of the true history and the point of divergence used. I wish that these squibs would be placed before the story starts, so that those of us not conversant with every battle fought by the ancient Greeks will know what the divergence was. Alternative histories should not be mystery stories where the reader has to guess from clues, but rather like a police procedural where the culprit is known at the beginning and the reader interest is in how the story is worked out. Some AH authors seem to take delight in picking obscure events as turning points that no reader could guess without a history PhD in that subject.

“The Daimon” by Harry Turtledove has Socrates going off as a hoplite with an expeditionary force under the command of Alkibiades to fight in Sicily. Athens recalls Alkibiades to face trumped-up charges from its assembly, but he defies orders and stays to take Syracuse. In our timeline, he went back home and his inept replacement was soundly defeated. On the way back home, he pauses to sack Sparta. He then takes over the Athenian polis and begins a dictatorship. Socrates is killed in a fight with him for annoying him with all those impertinent questions. (I.F. Stone remarked that the more you read about Socrates, the less you’ll wonder why they executed him.) Alkibiades goes on to unify Greece, and the story ends with him poised to attack Persia as a premature Alexander the Great.

“Shikari In Galveston” by S.M. Stirling is one that needed the author’s remark as a foreword, not an afterword. The divergence isn’t too hard to guess; a group of asteroids destroys Europe and North America in the late 1800s, removing any advantage they had as technological giants over the Third World. In consequence, the less developed nations take over. The story was overly florid, was tedious and developed too slowly. It was ridden with fake dialects interspersed with characters using modern words like ‘scam’. It would be like an medieval fantasy novel where the Crown Prince goes “Yo brudda, wassup?”.

Stirling explains the lush style of this novella by saying he wanted to recreate the adventure novels of ERB, Haggard, et al. Since I could never get through any of their books, it explains why I couldn’t finish this one.

“The Logistics Of Carthage” by Mary Gentle is basically a vignette of 1477 A.D. with the Turks moving in on Visigoth-controlled North Africa.

“The Last Ride Of German Freddie” by Walter Jon Williams was the best story of the bunch, being an account of the famous gunfight in Tombstone, Arizona. Williams’ afterword definitely should have been a foreword, since he not only explains the divergence (which wasn’t difficult to guess) but also corrects the actual history. Because of all the bad Hollywood movies and television shows about this famous showdown, most people don’t realize that the gunfight was the beginning, not the end, of the feud between the Earp brothers and the Cowboys (which term was derogatory in those days; respectable cattle herders were called ranch hands). The real German Freddie is replaced in this story by another German, the philosopher Nietzsche, who busily philosophizes as the buildup to the gunfight begins. He is as much an annoyance to the Cowboys, to whom he is affiliated, as to the Earps, who prefer gangsters who use good ole American cuss words instead of quoting philosophy at them.