WING WINDOW

WING WINDOW #10 is the fanzine that finally admits to being in the Eighties.
No more namby-pamby cooperation, no starry-eyed idealism; this is a fanzine
that grinds tiny countries underfoot. Unleash private enterprise! Turn the
trees into twiltone! Damn the torpedoes, let them eat cake! Big cars for
all! (Can't you just feel the patriotic throb of that huge, manly mimeograph?)
We want your egoboo, and we want it now! Send it to John D. Berry, 525 19th
Avenue East, Seattle, Washington 98112, USA. Don't try to hold anything back
for yourself, or we'll call in a tactical air strike. This fanzine is avail-
able for "the usual" on the free market, but don't forget that we've got all
the guns. (And several mine-sweepers on order through Soldier of Fortune
magazine.) Today is August 20, 1987, and you have been warned.

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        I've just surfaced after several months submerged in technical editing
of computer manuals -- you know, the sort of thing where people talk about
"simultaneous execution of parent and child windows," and where a file folder
marked "Conventions" won't tell you where the worldcon is being held but
bores you with a description of notational conventions -- and I've discovered
that practically the only mail I get anymore is well-meaning junk mail. I
never suspected that there were so many shoestring groups with well-organized
mailing lists, nor that so many people could write four-page form letters
where every paragraph is a different width. I used to try and give myself
a unique middle initial for each group I responded to, just so I'd know which
mailing list was being sold to whom, but I could never remember the phony
initials. (Eileen got stuck on one right-wing religious mailing list as
"Eileen Gum," so any time another item comes in for Ms. Gum, Eileen knows
who to hold responsible.)

        I never did manage to trace how I got on the mailing list of Exotic
Asian Adventures, Ltd. The envelope contained a straightforward brochure
about Bangkok ("City of Angels") and another glossy flyer called "Bangkok
and the Beach," which featured a large number of submissive-looking young
women standing in front of temples and brilliant white sands. The payoff
was in the sleazy cover letter, with its "Dear Traveller" opening: "We think
that a trip to Bangkok will fully satisfy all your travel desires.... Your
escort will be with you to guide you around Bangkok and then she will also
go to Pattaya, the beach resort with you or you may chose a different escort.
Pattaya has beautiful beaches and many secluded spots to bathe 'a la naturelle!'"
(Their grammer and style is "a la naturelle," too.) This is not the sort of
tour where prices are based on double occupancy, you can bet ("single room,
of course"). "When you arrive in Bangkok, Mr. Jonothan Slosberg will be your
guide. He lives in Pattaya and is a sharp New Yorker, who will see that you
are fully happy with all our 'arrangements'.... We promise you a good time."
After all this, you hardly need to study the fine print in the "beach" flyer,
where on Day 4, after a handy trip to the tailor, you "will visit a famous
Bangkok massage parlor where you will experience a 'body to body' massage
that you will never forget," nor will you be surprised to discover that

"the choice of your masseuse will be a difficult decision indeed because you may have as many as 200 options." I'm sure that that "sharp New Yorker" Mr. Slosberg could help me make a wise choice.

I've never been on the mailing list of an international whorehouse before.

When this stuff is the high point of your postal week, it's time to do something drastic, like publishing another fanzine. WING WINDOW hasn't been one of the more free-flowing tributaries to the fannish mainstream of late. You know how the rhythm of fanzine publishing goes: you start off with a point to make and a lot of enthusiasm, but once you've hit your stride the only real question is how long it'll take you to get tired of the whole thing and start to falter. I faltered a while ago, and last year I simply stopped. The old format wasn't doing much for me, and I found that I'd hit one of those points where I had nothing original to say to fandom, nothing but a metaphorical, "Hi! How ya doin'? Yeah, me too. See ya later."

Since I was too busy to do much writing of any kind, fannish or not, I occupied my spare brain time by wondering what kind of writing I ought to be doing. Theories of metafannish wordplay and dense topicality clashed with images of a highly-evolved, almost perfectionist form of personal essay. Neither one was coming from my typewriter. When I'd find time to sit down to write even a letter, it would always seem to come out, "Hi! How ya doin'...?"

Even though I was raised on fandom as a postal phenomenon, where gathering in person was just frosting on the cake, I've found that one of the things that stimulates me in these latter years is fannishness that revolves around face-to-face encounters, where even the written words take a resonance from the life beyond the page. I don't mean that I enjoy slapdash writing that doesn't bother to be polished because it's just a pale reflection of casual conversation; I mean that I'm delighted by writing that plays off of what goes on in person, that gives it another aspect, and then affects the conversation and the drama as it's read and talked about once more in person. That being the case, what better occasion for publishing a fanzine again than a worldcon in Britain, where I'll be meeting fans I don't yet know and seeing again fans whose voices I've had only on paper in recent years?

* * *

Where did fans ever get the idea that fanzines were amateur versions of fiction magazines? Oh, they may have been based on the prozines in some fans' minds back in the ur-fannish days, but it's been obvious ever since I first saw a real fanzine that the things were based on magazines -- general magazines, the sort that combined topical commentary on the happenings of the week (or month, or quarter) with speculative and reflective pieces about one or another aspect of the world that might interest the readers. The most fannish magazine I see these days is Science News, which is short, frequent, well designed, very colloquial in its tone, and full of little bits and articles about what's new in scientific reality. On a stuffier plane, and without any bow at all to interaction with its readers, stands the New Yorker -- a bastion of personal journalism if I've ever seen one. But any regular magazine will do, any one that's not a modern specialty mag. Fanzines are the general magazines of a specific small culture, and they knit that culture together. They set the terms of the public debate; they mold the public mind. The fannish

"public" exists outside of fanzines, whether in the social swirls of "cafe society" or only in an armchair beside the fire on a dark, rainy night, but fanzines are the public forum and the place where fandom finds its voice.

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It's an acknowledged truth that one of the distinguishing factors of much fanwriting is the fannish context. (There are kinds of fanwriting that don't make use of this context, and it's a bit purist and theory-driven to claim that they're not really fanwriting because of that, but the fannish context is unique to fandom.) A piece of fannish writing gains richness by allusion, a depth of reference within that context that only other people in the know can fully appreciate. That's what makes fanwriting, by definition, in-group. But when did it become accepted belief that fanwriting can get by on nothing but allusion, that a fanwriter has no need to flesh out a character in an anecdote, just because "everyone" knows the person behind the mask?

In STILL LIFE 4, Simon Ounsley seems to accept this premise as a given:

Because that's where fannish writing has an advantage over fiction. There is so much shared knowledge between the writer and the readers that a lot of the work is taken out of the writing. Characterisation is often unnecessary; in-jokes can be invoked to liven up the dull patches; effects can be created using a kind of short-hand which isn't available in fiction of "mundane" anecdotal writing. Just mention D. West a lot and you can probably scrape by.

In PULP 5, John Harvey seems to make the same assumption as he describes an article that Jimmy Robertson wrote about the problem of writing for fanzines:

Jimmy doesn't consider himself a writer and what he does write is aimed at a small known audience. Therefore common reference points can be used as a kind of shorthand in making the task of communication simpler. Contribute to somebody else's fanzine and you have no idea of who will be reading your words. Thus the shorthand isn't valid and you end up having to explain yourself.

When I got into fandom, it was an axiom of good fanwriting that the best writers worked the background into their writing (much like an sf author hiding an expository lump) unobtrusively, using the shared knowledge of the fannish in-group but also providing enough context, enough cursory description of the characters involved, that a new fan had something to hang his understanding on. In other words, the best fannish writing worked on several levels: you got more out of it the more familiar you were with the people and situations involved, but you would get something out of it, too, if you were only coming to it cold with nothing but an inquiring mind. As a writer, you don't get this kind of effect by explaining all the jokes, but you do achieve it by sneaking in clues, maybe just an adjective or a single action that fleshes out the person behind a name. It's part of the skill of good writing in any context: providing just enough information and inserting it elegantly, unobtrusively, but making sure that it's there, so that later, when the reader gets to the point where that information is needed, it all comes together.

Good fannish writing makes full use of context, but at the same time
it helps in the creation of that context. What you've got when you've got
an author who just mentions "D. West" and expects a laugh is lazy fannish
writing. It's just like the kind of fannish humor that consists of repeat-
ing routines that everybody already knows: rote jokes, automatic laughter.
Sure, you can probably scrape by, but you'll do better to aim a little
higher. And entertain the rest of us better.

*   *   *

One of my purposes in coming to Britain (although one for which I
haven't done any of the preparation I'd meant to do, such as writing letters
in enough time to expect a reply) is to investigate the background of
typography in that country. After all, it was Stanley Morison at Monotype
and the Cambridge University Press that pulled typography up by its boot-
straps in 1920's, setting a standard of typeface design and type use,
especially in book printing, that dominated the trade until the advent of
phototypesetting made hundreds of new typefaces available a couple of
decades ago. (Compare the spindly typefaces and bad spacing of most books
from the late 19th century with almost any decently done book from the
Thirties, and you'll see what I mean. Morison was reaching much farther
back, reviving typefaces that had seen their heyday in the 17th, 16th, or
even 15th century and making them available as machine fonts to the con-
temporary printing trade.) I would like to see first-hand some of those
books, and some of the paraphernalia and history of type design and manu-
facture, while I'm in London.

My passion for typography, which has paid most of my bills for the
past eight years and has led me into book design, consulting work, and or-
ganizing panels and workshops on how to use type, grew straight out of my
experience with fanzines. There have been articles written about how to
design your fanzine (I published one of the better ones, by Ted White, many
years ago, and I've still got copies of the fanzine it appeared in -- though
paradoxically the layout I did for Ted's article is by far the worst in the
issue), but all it really boils down to is looking at a fanzine (or a book,
or a magazine) and liking its feel or not, then trying to figure out why
it appeals to you or fails to appeal. Everything else derives from that.
If there are "rules" in typography and design (and there certainly are)
they're just recognition of patterns that work, guidelines describing some-
thing that's been shown to succeed and that can tell you something about
where your creative energy will be most usefully spent. Dave Wood may have
taken great glee in naming a long list of the most famous pattern-makers of
twentieth-century graphic design, in the colophon of a wonderfully scruffy
issue of XYSTER, and averring that they "have failed utterly in having any
tangible effect on design and layout," but in fact fanzines have their own
patterns of what makes readers comfortable with them and what doesn't (and
scruffiness, of a certain sort, sometimes helps).

There used to be arguments about whether offset or xerox were truly
"fannish," which is to say whether the people reading the fanzines that were
produced this way felt comfortable with them, and there have been worries
too about the advent of various kinds of alphabetical changes: press-type
instead of lettering guides, Selectric faces in place of old manual type-
writers, and so on. Real typesetting isn't within the reach of most fans,
and the fake typesetting used in desktop publishing hasn't worked its way

into fandom very far yet, but it seems that dot-matrix printers are becoming all the rage, especially in British fanzines.

The results usually look like hell. Dot-matrix is by definition a crude approximation of a real letter-form, though at least the worst travesties of letters, the kind that used to appear all the time with no descenders and everything looking blurry and pretty much alike, have tended to disappear. The dot-matrix type used in PULP 5, for instance, is not very pretty but isn't too much worse than a lot of traditional typing -- except for the godawful condensed type used in the letter column. This latter looks smudgy and splotchy, and it's hard to read; on top of this, it's set justified, which makes the spacing uneven and does nothing to make the shapes on the page look any neater. Why use this typeface? Is it so hard to borrow a letter-quality printer for the final run of the fanzine? The typed bit of PULP, John Harvey's fanzine review column, doesn't look elegant either, but it's much more friendly and visually more coherent than any other pages in the fanzine. Don't the editors care how it _feels_ to their readers?

All it takes is figuring out what appeals to you in what you're reading, then imitating it in what you're publishing. But it does mean _paying atten-_ _tion_ to what you look at and what you read.

A couple of rules of thumb, or patterns if you will: Don't justify columns. If you must justify, be sure the columns are wide enough so you don't get strange spacing between words, and be willing to break words freely in order to keep the word-spacing tight. (It's hard to read loosely-set type.) Never allow your word processor to letter-space to fill up a loose line; it's more disruptive to the reader who's trying to recognize word shapes, and it messes up the texture of the page, so there's no advantage either way. (Take a look at a column of text in LOCUS for a good example of how bad this can look.) If you do insist on justifying, there's a typist's habit that you should change: don't double-space after periods. In printed text, it's almost never done, and the reason is that it's unnecessary and looks splotchy.

And _look_ at your type. Run it out once to look at, then correct the problems. (If you're setting it ragged right, but not allowing the computer to hyphenate, watch for absurdly big gaps, where a long word may have been shoved down to the next line just because it was one letter too long; breaking that word in the middle would have worked better.) If the typeface you've got looks like shit, then try to get hold of another.

One place where desktop publishing has reached fandom recently is in the fourth Progress Report from Conspiracy (which I got, at long last, on August 19). I have nothing but sympathy for the people putting this out, who I'm sure were up against deadlines and pressures that made any solution look promising, but after the beautifully done earlier PRs I was shocked at the lapse in this one. And it was all because a lot of the text (not all of it, though, which only makes the contrast more obvious) was not typeset but run off on a laser printer. The typeface chosen (Palatino) is an excellent one, and even the fuzziness inherent in laser printers might not have disturbed most people and actually gave the text an interesting texture. But the spacing was all wrong, and that made all the difference. The leading (the vertical space between lines) was much too tight, so tight that the descender of one letter and the ascender of the letter below it might even overlap, and some quirky refusals to hyphenate made the word spacing at times

much greater than the space between the lines -- one of the best ways I know
of to get your reader's eye lost on the page. (Using hyphens as dashes didn't
help the reader much, either.) And somebody wasn't thinking about what went
with what when they laid out the head and subhead for Ian Sorensen's "Spreading
the Word" (if you'll all turn to page 20 in your PRs...). It's clear that
this stuff was all slapped together in a hurry and run out with nary a glance
behind. The forethought that obviously went into the earlier progress reports
is missing here. What happened? Why?

Nobody took the time to look at it and see that something was wrong, then
to figure out what it was and how to fix it. (At least they didn't double-
space after periods.) There may have been good reasons why they couldn't do
any better at the time, but the result is a mess.

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I didn't make it to the worldcon in Brighton in '79. The last time I
visited Britain -- and British fandom -- was in 1971. Days when people were
just starting to use new pence in their speech as well as in their pockets,
days when nobody had ever heard of Maggie Thatcher, days when Greg Pickersgill
and Roy Kettle had just achieved notoriety by spitting in the face of fandom
and making fans love it. I remember being perplexed by a few things, like
the way everyone spent most of their time standing around in the hotel bar,
talking (and drinking). (In my experience at American conventions, you would
only be standing talking in a public place on your way to somewhere else, or
while waiting to find someplace more interesting to go.) I was also perplexed
by the British custom of buying a round (How could anyone afford it? What if
you didn't want to drink at such a pace?), though my perplexity became compla-
cency as more rounds were bought. (In Seattle last year, I was buying Greg
a pint of Grant's Imperial Stout to show him that we had some drinkable beer
in these parts, and he laughed at the memory of my puzzlement: "Yes," he said,
"you thought it was bloody marvelous the way the drink kept appearing!") But
I'm sure that this time around you'll be willing to help me achieve a state
of unperplexedness. (What? You say it's my round?)

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We the people
of the United States,
in order to form
a more perfect Union
Preamble, U.S. Constitution   USA 22

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