an ongoing artistic journal in digitally published zines
derek beaulieu
give er
21 years ago, I published my first chapbook. A collaborative edition with a then friend in Brampton, Ontario, William S. Burroughs: Ghost of Steel was produced in an edition of 26 signed copies. Each page was designed and laid out in MS Publisher, printed at home, folded and inserted into hand-printed covers and sewn using needle and thread. Most copies were given away, I haven't seen one in years.
That same format – printed at home, folded and assembled by hand, sewn and given away – has remained my modus operandi ever since. *William S. Burroughs: Ghost of Steel* became the first of 268 editions that I published through the housepress imprint, followed by over 300 more under No Press.
For 21 years I've averaged a publication every two weeks – each one made by hand as a means of distributing the news to a fluctuating community of readers.
In my opinion writing is a public act, we must learn (even the most introverted of us) to share our work with a readership. See our work as worth sharing, our voices as worth hearing. It doesn't have to be a huge public gesture; it could be 10 copies among friends. Share.
There are a growing number of online print-on-demand publishers like Lulu and Blurb, and many photocopy shops will do collation and binding – but those are far from the only options. Anyone who has a desktop printer or access to a photocopier (or a typewriter, or a silkscreen or rubberstamp letters or any number of intriguing possibilities) can produce her own work. Paper, printer, stapler, scissors.
A challenge to my peers: publish your own work. Start a small press. Find the material that your colleagues are making that impresses you and publish it in pamphlets, in leaflets, in chapbooks and broadsides, posters and ephemera.
It is all too easy to rely on other people to do the work for you – to allow the means of distribution to remain with book publishers, magazines and journals. Small press builds community through gifts and exchange, through consideration and generosity, through the creative interplay and dialogue with each other's work.
Small press publishing allows authors to present their work in a way that physically responds to the content – texture, size, shape, colour and binding all become aesthetic decisions that the author herself can shape.
The internet is rife with instructions on how to hand bind books. Make stuff, hand it out, talk to people.
You are out of excuses.