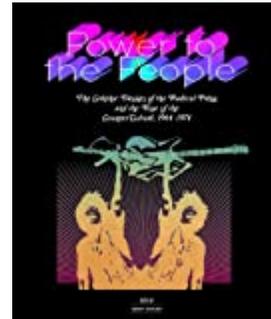




Geoff Kaplan, ed. *Power to the People: The Graphic Design of the Radical Press and the Rise of the Counter-Culture, 1964-1974*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. 264 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-42435-4.



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Graphics Have the Power: The Sixties' Dissident Press

During the past few years, we have seen a rise of publications concerning different aspect of the sixties, such as John McMillian's monograph on the underground and alternative press in the United States.[1] Now Geoff Kaplan presents an edition that focuses on the graphic aspect of the radical press to understand how these media contributed to the creation of social movements.

In his short introduction, Geoff Kaplan charts the rise of numerous political, activist, and cultural groups and their respective publications that, according to Kaplan, constituted a media revolution. This occurred alongside technological advances in print that made cheap offset printing available and the production procedure easier. These groups and their publications do not form a unified body in terms of content, since they range from psychedelia and alternative lifestyle to revolutionary and subversive politics, nor in terms of design since they range from mimeograph prints to colorful offset publications. But that diversity is the very essence of the sixties, when anticolonial national liberation movements of the Third World met the French May '68 or the hippies.[2]

Still, certain common characteristics bound these publications together. First, they espoused an amateur-driven do-it-yourself culture of creation, production, and distribution. Second, these publications pushed for freedom of expression by giving a voice to issues and people shut out from corporate media. Ethnic minorities, radicals, gays and lesbians, and others marginalized groups could now express themselves freely through the press. In turn, the press also served as a means to construct these social, political, or ethnic identities as well as benchmarks for these formulating communities. Third, these publications combined radical politics and counterculture lifestyles. The publications often reflected this combination by interweaving radical content with graphic design that was outside the box of mainstream media graphics, such as the covers of the *Great Speckled Bird* or *Kaleidoscope*.

The introduction is followed by a timeline of the historical developments, both in the United States and globally, from 1964 to 1974 in the form of newspaper pages, a page per year. The events selected might not be necessar-

ily the most important of the time but give the reader a very good sense of the social turmoil. Publications from Germany, the United Kingdom, Lebanon, and Biafra also appear and show the reader the diversity of content, design, and printing process contained in the newspapers and magazines analyzed in the rest of the book.

Gwen Allen's contribution focuses on graphic design of the radical and underground press from the viewpoint of art history. Allen notes that radical artists used similar experimental techniques as underground press designers. Allen argues that as far as graphic design is concerned, those involved in the alternative media investigated the materiality of language, critiqued traditions of documentary photography, and invented participatory strategies to transform the relationship between cultural producers and consumers (p. 80). These underground presses thus aimed not just to report events, but to transform the media and reality itself. Allen counters the argument that graphic innovation was a mere result of factors such as lack of funds or drug experimentation. Although she believes that these factors had their share in the innovative spirit of that era, she argues that focusing on a deterministic cause-effect relation underestimates the conscious and unconscious aesthetic choices that resulted in these graphic innovations (p. 86).

Fred Turner's essay focuses on a rather neglected aspect, the fact that part of the counterculture was engaged in discussions and ideas that were far from countercultural. He gives the example of the *Whole Earth Catalogue* and *Radical Software* and claims that in these two publications countercultural utopia met with some of the technocratic ideals of the postindustrial society. He argues that the growth of communalism was the answer of counterculture to the social transformation proposed by radical movements of the time and that this alternative way of life was not only bohemian but also deeply technocratic (p. 145).

Bob Ostertag provides a concise history of the underground press beginning in the American War of Independence and tracing other underground presses up to the 1960s. Ostertag then focuses on the publishing initiatives that formed the countercultural Underground Press Syndicate as well as its more political equivalent, Liberation News Service; the GI press service, which exclusively circulated the underground GI papers; and the so-

cial movement press of blacks, Chicanos, and American Indians. Ostertag provides extensive quantitative data on subscribers, circulations, and the number of underground papers to complement the more qualitative analysis of previous contributions. Furthermore, his contribution focuses on elements of state suppression and the differences between the underground press and corporate media's focus on profits. The last part of this volume was edited by Pamela M. Lee. It consists of a set of four questions answered by eleven participants in the counterculture or social movements of the 1960s. This provides the volume with a mixture of eyewitness accounts and scholarship.

Kaplan could not find a more suitable title for the book since it is probably inspired by the eponymous song by John Lennon, not only because the song was written during Lennon's own experimental phase, but also because it was inspired by an interview published in the radical press of the time.[4] Still, there are a few minor quibbles with the volume. The majority of both text and illustrations concern publications produced by and, in a way, addressing white college students (p. 7), with the Black Panther press the main exception to that rule. The volume also tends to use different terms like radical media, underground press, and alternative media interchangeably, without clarifying the differences. Overall, though, the unique combination of extensive illustrations along with the texts gives the reader a very helpful panorama of the underground and radical press of the sixties.

Notes

[1]. John McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters. The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[2]. Fredric Jameson, "The 60s without Apology," *Social Text* 9/10 (1984): 178-209.

[3]. Emily Roydson, "Be a bossy bottom!," interview with Eva Egermann and Katharina Moraw in *Malmoë* (Austria), July 9, 2007; available online at <http://www.malmoë.org/artikel/tanzen/1445>.

[4]. Elizabeth Thomson and David Gutman, eds., *The Lennon Companion* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004), 165.

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