

# Scenarios of Countercultural Representation: An Analysis of Inventory Books' Visualities

**Abstract:** This paper explores the social implications of the page layouts of 'inventory books', a series of non-fiction mass-market paperbacks published during the 1960s and 70s that employed eccentric printing strategies characterised primarily by a proliferation of imagery and nonlinear text layout and argumentation. Inventory books all use text and imagery in unique ways, appearing to include visual cultural references with connotative value that would have appealed to readers' understandings of self and society. Drawing from scholarship from medieval, visual, and literary studies, this paper argues that inventory books' visualities represented and affirmed the countercultural movements of 1960s/70s America. They did so by accentuating each individual reader's power for meaning-making, and by (figuratively and literally) turning conventional reader expectations upside-down. Not only do inventory books reflect the nature of their contexts of production, but they also serve to establish and perpetuate contemporary readers' senses of connection with countercultural identities.

**Keywords:** counterculture; visual culture; 60s; cultural citizenship; society; the visual; United States of America

## Introduction

During the 1960s and 70s, a series of non-fiction mass-market paperbacks – which Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Adam Michaels call 'inventory books' – was published. Schnapp and Michael's label was inspired by the subtitles of the series' first two books, written by Marshall McLuhan, designed by graphic designer and advertising consultant Quentin Fiore, and 'produced' and 'co-ordinated' by Madison Avenue adman Jerome Agel: the first, and best-known, being *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (1967), and then *War and Peace in the Global Village: An Inventory of Some of the Current Spastic Situations That Could be Eliminated by More Feedforward* (1968). Inventory books took stock of 'technology's impact on the contemporary psyche and society. Fast-paced verbal-visual collages, intermedia hybrids, nonlinear "COLLIDE-O-SCOPIC" look-arounds aimed squarely at the contemporary scene and at younger readers, INVENTORY BOOKS made the rhythmic sequencing, layering, and interleaving of photographic-textual combinations their stock and trade' (Schnapp and Michaels, 2012, p. 27). These books stray from the typical visual linearity of printed books and instead

present unconventional page layouts through incorporation of imagery, changes in font style and size, and unusual word placement and orientation. Along with more conventional expository blocks of text, inventory books also include random snippets of text scattered throughout, disrupting cohesive narratives with typographical interruptions. Through their layouts, inventory books demand a way of reading that is markedly different from the traditional linear approach: a way that demands the reader to make connections between seemingly disparate juxtapositions, necessitating both textual and visual literacy to discern meaning from the works. Today's readers may be familiar with such nonlinear texts including both text and image. To navigate the Web demands similar literacies, experimental literature has revealed the myriad forms books may take, and multimodal texts abound. Still, though, books remain primarily text-based, and inventory books continue to affront expectations of typical book layouts and textual linearity.

Inventory books also bring into question the conventional roles associated with industrialised print culture. Jerome Agel, for example, 'produced' *The Medium is the Massage* and 'co-ordinated' *War and Peace*, but such roles – while familiar to the film and television industries – seem altogether unusual for explicit recognition in print contexts. Indeed, Agel (in Kitman, 1967) self-identified as 'the first co-ordinator in publishing history, which means I played the David Merrick, bringing together the sound and the music.' Likewise, the role of inventory book designer is elevated to a kind of co-author position, with Quentin Fiore's name appearing on the front cover of both *The Medium is the Massage* and *War and Peace* alongside McLuhan's (Guffey, 2014, p. 94). Inventory books therefore not only challenge readers' expectations for linearity, but also the sensibilities of an industry that has long been content with production through distinct roles (see, for example, Darnton, 1982, p. 68).

Despite being rejected by 17 publishers until Bantam's agreement to produce 35,000 paperback copies (Miller, 1993), *The Medium is the Massage* has since become McLuhan's bestselling book, supposedly having sold more than a million copies (Buxton, 2012, p. 589) and amassing cult followings in both the academic and popular spheres. Yet following their work with McLuhan for the creation of

the two inventory books cited above, together and individually Fiore and Agel went on to collaborate with other high-profile contemporary thinkers such as futurist R. Buckminster Fuller for *I Seem To Be a Verb* (1970), coleader of the countercultural Yippie Party Jerry Rubin for *Do It!: Scenarios of the Revolution* (1970), and military strategist Herman Khan for *Herman Kahnsciousness: The Megaton Ideas of the One-Man Think Tank* (1973), as well as with Stanley Kubrick (1970), Alan Lakein (1975), and Carl Sagan (1975). Inventory books, as they are considered here, only include those books produced by Fiore and Agel. A more complete list of inventory books, as well as other works that could be classified as additional inventory material (such as the *Whole Earth Catalog* or *Aspen Magazine*, the 'magazine in a box'), is provided in the Appendix. This paper focuses primarily on the Kahn and Rubin books mainly because they have yet to be extensively reviewed, but also because scope is needed to contain what would undoubtedly be realised rather quickly as a vast area for research. However, all examples referenced represent visual strategies that are used consistently throughout the series. To further narrow scope, only the American context of these books' production and reception is considered. Although these books may have garnered readerships outside of America, their authors were so deeply rooted in the contemporary consciousness that a focus on the American context particularly is a natural way of streamlining the following discussion.

No other inventory book has achieved the extent of commercial success enjoyed by the McLuhan books, but all found their ways to local bookshops and were widely distributed. One 1970 *New York Times* article (Schleier) claims that Jerry Rubin's *Do It!* had sold over 190,000 paperback copies within the first seven months of its publication, at an average rate of 3,000 to 5,000 each week. Another article from 1970 (Goldman, p. 1) claims that Rubin had earned at least \$45,000 from his paperback in six months, despite having to return half of his \$10,000 advance to pay for Fiore's layout design. Sales figures for *Herman Kahnsciousness* have been buried by time, and the book does not appear to have achieved great commercial success. The few available second-hand copies of both *Do It!* and *Herman Kahnsciousness* are, however, now priced between \$100 and \$300 USD, and *Do It!*'s title inspired the title of a recent Rubin biography (Thomas, 2017). Nevertheless, while the McLuhan

inventory books have achieved international and prolonged success, enthusiasm for the Rubin and Kahn books has largely waned, likely because both figures and their books were so firmly entrenched in the contexts of their own age.

This paper argues that inventory books' visualities represented and affirmed the countercultural movements of 1960s/70s America. 'Counterculture' as it is used herein refers to any ideal or organised movement that intentionally challenges the dominant culture of its time. While others (Schnapp and Michaels 2012) have already put forward the argument that inventory books represented their contemporary countercultures, this paper explores and articulates this representation with an eye to the countercultural. It stems from a larger study wherein the visualities of inventory books were compared to those of two fourteenth-century medieval psalters. Although the medieval examples are omitted here, theories about medieval manuscript visuality are useful for understanding the complexities and overall significance of inventory books' unconventional page layout, and scholarship about medieval manuscripts therefore offers the basic framework for the consideration of inventory books discussed here. While drawing from medieval manuscripts to illustrate points about 1960s/70s counterculture may be anachronistic, Michaels (in Guffey, 2014, p. 105) argues that '[a]nachronism is one of the central forms of invention and innovation that drive that work that I do. The road to interesting futures often runs through the past and, as a media archaeologist, I'm always looking for good ideas to steal'. To this, Schnapp (in Guffey, 2014, p. 105) adds that 'I'm always telling my students that, to be creative, one of the best things to do is to take an interesting idea from one field and apply it to another. You're actually, then, looking from the past at interesting things there and applying them to the present.' Through recontextualisation, new perspectives emerge, allowing for alternative – countercultural – interpretations that stand alongside those of the mainstream. Schnapp and Michaels (2012, p. 74) themselves imply a connection between print and manuscript when they write that, when considered alongside a book's printed edition, one sees 'a new media constellation in which the gap once separating handwritten manuscripts from print artifacts from television-age publishing models has collapsed.' Whether the distinctive gap has ever really existed is debatable – such scholars

as Nancy Barta-Smith and Danette DiMarco (2003, p. 161) believe that it has not – but that the established visuality of printed books was and is called into question by inventory books’ page layouts is undeniable. Quentin Fiore (Schnapp and Michaels, 2015, p. 31), designer of the first inventory books and many thereafter, even cites medieval illuminated manuscripts such as the *Book of Kells* and the *Lindisfarne Gospels* as inspiration for his work on these books.

Of course, the time of inventory books’ initial publication was a tumultuous one for print culture. ‘Various labels and genre designations came and went over the [twentieth] century,’ write Schnapp and Michaels (2012, p. 32):

But not one core conviction: that off-set lithography, photography, telegraphy, telephony, radio, moving pictures (and, later, video, television, and electronic data networks), shaped by and shaping, in turn, new social needs and expectations, had disrupted the galaxy of the Gutenbergian book and created the preconditions for a communications revolution. A gulf had opened up between the printed page – with its well-oiled typographic geometries, its subordination of image to text, and a cognitive linearity that it both produced and enforced – and contemporary life, with its simultaneity, accelerated cadences, and overloaded sensorium.

This paper explores these ‘new social needs and expectations’ that shape and were shaped by page layout, as well as the influence of unconventional page layouts on reader interpretation in 1960s/70s America. As yet, Schnapp and Michaels offer what may be the only comprehensive analysis of inventory books, although other scholars such as Jan Baetens (2003) and Kevin Brooks (2009) have examined the McLuhan books in papers about visualities of books and digital environments. This paper primarily aims to spark an enquiry into the decipherment of inventory books through close reading, and to uncover some of the myriad potential meanings embedded in inventory books’ visualities.

Visuality, as it is defined by professor of art Sydney Walker (2004, p. 75), refers to the socialisation of the physical and psychological processes of vision: ‘[t]his socialization is a network of cultural meanings generated from various discourses that shape the social practices of vision.’ When I refer to the visualities of medieval manuscripts and inventory books, I do so in recognition of the respective social circumstances surrounding vision that influenced and were influenced by the conventional page

layouts of the day. As media historian and critic Jay David Bolter (1991, p. 108) writes, ‘to read is to choose and follow one path from among those suggested by the layout of the text.’ Readers’ experiences are often heavily mediated by visual conventions (for example, page numbers) that prompt readers to follow particular paths. Inventory books, however, deviate from the conventional visuality of printed books, offering readers opportunities to stray from any one path, or to pave their own paths by determining meaning through cognitive association.

## Forms and Contents of Inventory Books

Inventory books all use text and imagery in unique ways, incorporating visual cultural references with connotative value that would have appealed to readers’ understandings of self and society. These visualities are more than just illustrative. They spoke to both the personal and collective dispositions of their books’ intended readers, affirming readers’ identities while simultaneously conveying implicit and explicit commentary on contemporary culture. Those intended readers were almost certainly involved with the countercultural movements of the day. *Do It!* is, after all, a manifesto for cultural upheaval, and Rubin himself was a coleader of one of the most infamous countercultural groups at the time; the book’s designer, Quentin Fiore, sympathised with many of Rubin’s views (Schnapp and Michaels, 2015, p. 23). Even *Herman Kahnsciousness*, despite being penned by a conservative who served as a military strategist and political consultant, could be considered as targeting a similar audience through its radical statements advocating both political and individual action for widespread cultural change. While reading *Do It!* and *Herman Kahnsciousness*, readers were encouraged to reflect not just upon that included in the books, but also upon the greater cultural contexts within which the books were produced and consumed. These books were, evidently, for readers of a revolutionary bent, and they represented and affirmed the countercultural movements of 1960s/70s America through their visual components as well as their textual contents.

According to Stephen Nichols (1990, p. 7), each visual component of a medieval manuscript – and any book, really – ‘is a unit independent of the others and yet calls attention to them; each tries to convey

something about the other while to some extent substituting for it.' For Nichols, these verbal-visual compounds constitute the 'manuscript matrix', a term that Martha Dana Rust (2007) later adapted to describe the network of textual and visual signs present in medieval manuscripts. The manuscript matrix, according to Nichols, assumes a double literacy: the ability not just to read texts, but also to interpret visual signs, thereby offering 'a dual route of penetration to the underside of consciousness' (Nichols, 1990, p. 8). Rust uses the term slightly differently, preferring what she calls a 'lineal dimension' constituted by a reader's cognitive recognition of the diverse semiotic systems present on the page. Nichols' version of the manuscript matrix is primarily concerned with the book as a material object. For Rust (2007, p. 9), all aspects of the page – all text, all imagery – work together as 'one overarching, category-crossing metasystem of signs.' Rust's manuscript matrix is founded upon the unity that can exist between word and image to influence the reader.

This notion of 'a dual route of penetration to the underside of consciousness' is complemented by medievalist Michelle Brown's concept of the inner library. Writing with an eye to the theological, Brown describes the inner library as each individual believer's personal mental repository of biblical stories, rote verse, and theological meaning through continued study of Scripture. She writes that 'books are the vessels from which the believer's ark, or inner library, is filled' (2003, pp. 398-399). Through cognitive association, readers come to make connections between what is shown on the page and what is held in their inner libraries. The concept of the inner library, however, need not only apply to medieval or religious contexts. For any process of meaning-making related to the interplay of text and visuality to occur, one depends heavily on the associational work undergone in one's own mind (this concept draws upon associational mind play, from Carruthers, 1998/2008). As historian Brian Stock (1983, p. 15) avers, '[t]he single great storehouse of meaning is memory.' One's perceived unity of text and image is enhanced by the quality of one's inner library. Through cognitive association, a book's layers of meaning, all comprising the manuscript matrix, are unravelled.

Figure 1: Pages 124-125 of McLuhan, Fiore, and Agel's 1968 *War and Peace in the Global Village*.

Inventory books clearly exemplify the notion of a book as having multiple layers of textual and visual meaning. These books do not feature just one central narrative. Rather, their texts are disjointed and dramatic, often with entire sections of text (original or quoted) seemingly decontextualised, accompanied by images that appear similarly decontextualised upon first glance. As just one example of the presentation of multiple narratives, *War and Peace in the Global Village* (McLuhan, Fiore and Agel, 1968, pp. 124-125) includes quotations from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* alongside the central text throughout, as well as photographs and contemporary print advertisements that reflect the disjointedness and distress of an American culture overwhelmed by consumerist and militaristic excess (Figure 1). In such ways, inventory books hardly represent the words of their authors in any definitive form, as their visualities afford countless potential interpretations for readers to determine for themselves.

This fluidity contradicts the commonly held notion of the printed word as embodying a sense of finality, of definitiveness. Printed book visuality largely adheres to what Valerie Kirschenbaum has called a 'Gutenberg cliché': blocks of black text on a plain white background, surrounded by small image- and commentary-free margins (2005, pp. 106-107). Kirschenbaum's use of the word 'cliché' is a critical rhetorical choice, but also nods to the printing 'cliché', more commonly called a 'stereotype': a metal printing plate cast from a plaster or paper mould of a type form that allowed for rapid mass printing of a text. The conventional Gutenberg cliché layout, according to Marshall McLuhan (1967, pp. 44-45), supports the present-day understanding of rationality as linear thought through 'the presentation of connected and sequential facts or concepts. 'For many people', McLuhan writes, 'rationality has the connotation of uniformity and connectiveness. [...] Rationality and visuality have long been interchangeable terms.' For printed books in Western European languages and alphabets, the reader's eye moves mechanically from the left to the right, and from the top to the bottom, of the page, guided by the content of the text and by habitual linear reading practices. Images in these books, if included at all, similarly follow a linear flow, so too supporting McLuhan's conception of rationality. William Ivins, Jr. (1953, pp. 2-3) suggests that the ingraining of lineal, sequential reading habits



resulting from the visual homogenisation of print culture has had ‘incalculable effects upon knowledge and thought’. Jay David Bolter (1991, p. 39) echoes McLuhan and Ivins when he maintains that printing defined ‘the contemporary, highly organized and standardized writing space’, thereby initiating the modern economy of writing in which the presentation of imagery is similarly standardised. It is for such reasons that McLuhan deemed the printing press ‘a ditto device’, a point stressed in *The Medium is the Massage* (1967, pp. 50-51) both explicitly through the text and implicitly through the book’s deviation from the visual standard (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Pages 50-51 of McLuhan, Fiore, and Agel's 1967 *The Medium is the Massage*.

With this deviation, the Gutenberg cliché’s constraints on nonlinear – and less explicitly rational – thinking are surmounted to facilitate broader understandings of the presented concepts through alternative reading practices. In general, readers have become so accustomed to the Gutenberg cliché that ‘we no longer notice how the page is fundamental to the transmission of ideas and that it shapes our interpretation of those ideas’ (Mak, 2011, p. 8). Inventory books make readers notice. The Gutenberg cliché may allude to the author’s words as being definitive, but the visualities of inventory books most certainly do not.

A book is produced within a particular cultural context that informs its visuality. Likewise, readers read within particular cultural contexts that inform their thought-associations, at times externalised through textual annotations and physical destructions or subversions of the printer’s standardisation. Thought-association, according to medievalist Mary Carruthers (1998/2008, p. 21) ‘has an irreducibly personal and private or “secret” dimension to it [... but] at the same time, because most of its building materials are common to all – are in fact common places – thought-association is also fully social and political, a truly civic activity.’ Although thought association is highly personal, it is also influenced by the social circumstances readers are in. Inventory books are all public artefacts: representations of cultural circumstances that support a range of potential interpretations made in light of each reader’s personal inner library, which itself is largely informed by that reader’s perceived place within the greater cultural context. It is worth remembering, though, that many of these interpretations would

have been anticipated by these books' producers and shared by other readers. Semiotic language and symbolism are rooted in a shared cultural consciousness. That is, the inner libraries of the respective books' contemporary readers would have been stocked with similar materials.

Inventory books accentuated the reader's power of meaning-making through unconventional page layouts that resurrected the manuscript matrix and required application of double literacy for full comprehension. Although particular interpretations of inventory books' verbal-visual compounds may have been anticipated by the books' producers, the processes of interpretation that allowed for personalised meaning-making from cognitive association is significant. Inventory books challenged, and continue to challenge, the modern convention of using images predominantly for informative purposes, regarded as additional – rather than required – material. While these books were not customised for predetermined patrons as many medieval manuscripts were, they appealed to 1960s/70s American readers' inner libraries through the (counter)cultural references embedded in their visualities. Inventory books evoked a sense of closeness to elements of counterculture. Foregoing the structural layout of the Gutenberg cliché, inventory books used freer visual strategies and returned to readers the power to determine meaning.

## Implications of Forms and Contents

It is at this point that this paper's discussion shifts from relevant theoretical scholarship to more specific examples of readers being required to determine and establish meaning. Examples are drawn primarily from Herman Kahn's *Herman Kahnsciousness* (designed by Jerome Agel) and Jerry Rubin's *Do It!* (designed by Quentin Fiore), although one example from Buckminster Fuller's *I Seem To Be a Verb* (co-ordinated by Jerome Agel and designed by Quentin Fiore) serves as emphasis.

As has become clear from the discussion thus far, for an analysis of inventory books we must consider the cultural climate of America in the late 1960s and early 70s, where and when these books were produced. Numerous countercultural movements had materialised. The Beat movement of the 1950s – characterised by explicit portrayals of the human condition, exploration and experimentation

(particularly with drugs and sexuality), and anti-conformity in general – had waned but had nonetheless instilled a lasting sense of scepticism of the conventional. The 1950s also saw the House Un-American Activities Committee active in its investigations against those with presumed communist ties; the Committee later targeted those involved in 1960s countercultural movements. The Vietnam War was in full swing, with large-scale demonstrations against the War being held across the country, contributing to the development of an increasingly strong suspicion amongst citizens of the American Government's activities. Jerry Rubin, one of the authors discussed herein, was among the most notable demonstrators against the Vietnam War, and cofounded the Youth International Party (the Yippies) with other prominent countercultural figures such as Abbie Hoffman in 1967. The Yippies, alongside other groups, advocated for more socialist political administration and American withdrawal from Vietnam. Herman Kahn, another author discussed herein, disagreed; a 1971 article from Harvard's *Crimson* ('Kahn Calls Morality of War Irrelevant') reports Kahn as favouring American troops remaining in Vietnam for the next decade, despite the moral issues of civilian deaths. This same article reports both scepticism and support from Harvard students in response to Kahn's statement.

Indeed, Rubin and Kahn were both prominently discussed within the underground circles of their day. Rubin, as a cofounder of the Yippies, openly identified with countercultural values and lifestyles. Kahn, on the other hand, worked closely with the American government through thinktanks like the RAND Corporation and the politically conservative Hudson Institute (which he founded), but was nevertheless revered by some within countercultural movements. One 1973 article from the *Los Angeles Free Press* (Cady, p. 5), a widely distributed underground newspaper from 1964 to 1978, describes Kahn thus:

Using phrases like most people use words, he tosses jumbled concepts into the air and then unscrambles them before your very eyes. He can twirl his ego in one hand and his genius in the other - all the while delivering humorous and self-deprecating patter about his lack of humility. And he is infinitely charming. Herman Kahn is a tough act to follow.

Despite Kahn's conservative and militaristic sensibilities, he was a figure recognised and respected by the left-wing countercultures. One biographer (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2005, p. 74) even notes that Kahn

had once had 'a wonderful time' with Yippie cofounders Abbie Hoffman and Paul Krassner, and that 'Kahn's engrossment in the counterculture was not wholly theoretical. He confided to a reporter in 1968, 'I like the hippies. I've been to Esalen. I've had LSD a couple of times. In some ways I'd like to join them.'" Both Rubin and Kahn were revolutionary thinkers of their time, challenging the conventional with radical suggestions for alternative lifestyles. Rubin (in Goldman, 1970, p. 19), himself stated that '[t]he goal of the book [*Do It!*] is to destroy the system... it's a Molotov Cocktail. The whole purpose of the book is to spread chaos.' *Do It!*'s text advocates a cultural overthrow, certainly, but so does the book's presentation. By figuratively and literally turning the conventional on its head, both *Do It!* and *Herman Kahn's Consciousness* urge readers to reconsider what they think they know, to question the institutionalised systems of the everyday. Both books advocate alternative futures through critical and combinative thought.

It is within the cultural context of widespread cultural scepticism and uncertainty, accompanied by a growing prominence of countercultural movements, that inventory books were produced and received. Ironically, the production of inventory books prompted collaboration between countercultural figures such as Jerry Rubin with those of the mainstream. Indeed, it was Rubin himself who approached *Do It!*'s graphic designer Quentin Fiore to propose the collaboration around the time of the scandalous Chicago Eight trial (Fiore in Schnapp and Michaels, 2015, p. 22). That is, one of the most countercultural figures of the day realised his own movement's interplay with, and fundamental dependency upon, the dominant culture. But '[e]ven a good Communist can respect a good capitalist,' Rubin (in Goldman, 1970, p. 19) declared. 'They [Simon & Schuster] have distributed the book well.' The counterculture and the culture were intertwined, and Rubin and Kahn vacillated between both. As a result, their experiences of both the countercultural and the cultural are reflected in their respective inventory books. It is worth noting that the 1960s/70s was a postmodernist period, wherein abstract art had become a familiar feature of the cultural landscape, and was no longer considered shocking (Mitchell, 1994, pp. 213-214). But while experimentalist visual art was commonplace, the visuality of the book does not appear to have changed during this time. When the first inventory book

*(The Medium is the Massage)* was published in 1967, unconventional page layouts, especially those featuring an abundance of seemingly decontextualised images, had hardly been exploited in mass-produced text-based books.

Inventory books include timely visual references that reference particular cultural tropes with which the reader would have been assumed to be familiar. One can read any of these books' texts while ignoring their visualities entirely, but the visualities expand upon – and add socially poignant nuance to – the content of the texts. Through references to contemporary cultural figures and events, inventory books appealed to the inner libraries of 1960s/70s American readers.

Figure 3: Pages 16-17 of Kahn and Agel's 1973 *Herman Kahnsciousness*.

For example, page 17 of *Herman Kahnsciousness* (1973) (Figure 3) features a large photo of Yippie cofounder Abbie Hoffman's face being pelted by baseballs that presumably represent 'traditional' American values. Hoffman was a renowned countercultural figure at the time of *Kahnsciousness*' publication and, despite there being no explicit mention of his name in the book, readers would have recognised him, especially with the accompanying 'Yippicrite' label. This image does relate to the text it accompanies. On pages 16 and 17, Kahn criticises those involved in American countercultural movements, saying things like: 'They don't like reason, which differentiates man from animal. [...] They don't see themselves mirrored in the past. Some see themselves as a new species.' However, this image may also be a more implicit reference to Jerry Rubin's *Do It!: Scenarios of the Revolution*, a Yippie manifesto and a hopeful argument for an alternative future, published three years earlier. *Do It!* was designed by Quentin Fiore, Jerome Agel's former colleague, and it was Agel who supervised the production of *Kahnsciousness*. Ironically, *Do It!*'s subtitle may be a subtle nod to the notion of scenario planning, a strategic method used by some organisations to predict possible futures based on current socioeconomic trends. The development of scenario planning is generally attributed to Herman Kahn during his time at the RAND Corporation (Kahn and Wiener, 1967, pp. 262-264). Rubin's use of Kahn's mainstream notion of scenario planning indicates an adaptation of a dominant cultural practice for countercultural purposes. Thus, maybe the inclusion of Hoffmann's photo in *Herman*

*Kahnsciousness* was partly a critique of Rubin's, and the Yippies', misuse of the scenario planning method three years earlier. Intentional or not, these visual and textual details can only be fleshed out and connected through thought-association that is based in an understanding of the cultural circumstances within which these books were produced and consumed. What is more, the books speak to each other, augmenting and challenging the earlier books in the series.

Figure 4: Pages 14-15 of Rubin and Fiore's 1970 *Do It!*

Like *Kahnsciousness*, *Do It!* (Rubin and Fiore, 1970) makes considerable use of visual cultural references. This is exemplified on pages 14 and 15 (Figure 4), which feature a collage of American iconography prominent at the time: capitalist company logos, like Coca Cola and White Castle; portraits of leading personalities, like former President Lyndon Johnson and Jerry Rubin; references to 'wholesome' popular entertainment, like the *Josie and the Pussycats* comic books, baseball, and the *Lassie* television program; and journalistic photography related to burning social issues like the Vietnam War and public demonstrations. The collage is a mixture of cultural and countercultural symbols, muddled together so that it is at times difficult to distinguish which category they may fit into. There is no singular point of view; there is a pile of familiar imagery to be sorted by the reader, who must consider each image's relation to the 'FUCK AMERIKA' banner occupying the top of the collage. The reader must actively participate to discern meaning.

When inventory books were published, their unconventional visualities would have unsettled readers accustomed to the Gutenberg cliché. However, inventory books' visualities served not only to unsettle: they affirmed the countercultural ideals of the time. As counterculture scholars Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (2002, p. 13) write:

The countercultural mode reveled in tangents, metaphors, unresolved contradictions, conscious ruptures of logic and reason; it was expressly anti-linear, anti-teleological, rooted in the present, disdainful of thought processes that were circumscribed by causation and consequence. Countercultural knowledge can't be accurately represented by a straight line, or even the squiggly line; a more evocative figure would be the matrix, or perhaps the concentric circle.

Readers of inventory books are encouraged to engage in nonlinear and participative reading practices to decipher the network of textual and visual signs present on a page. The imagery and overall visuality of inventory books not only represented the countercultural movements of 1960s and 70s America, but also affirmed these movements. The mixed and merging discourse of the various countercultural groups present in America at this time was represented through inventory books' matrices of tangents, metaphors, unresolved contradictions, and conscious ruptures of logic and reason. The Gutenberg cliché, which supports rationality through uniformity and connectiveness, would only have stifled the anti-linear and anti-teleological countercultural modes embodied in inventory books' texts.

Inventory book producers, as with any author, would have anticipated many reader interpretations due to an assumed knowledge base – an inner library – founded upon a shared cultural consciousness. However, while readers would have recognised the individual images included in *Do It!*'s 'FUCK AMERIKA' collage, their interpretations would have differed based on their perceived places within the greater cultural context. To clarify, let us draw attention to the collage's car-related inclusions. There are two: a large 'LEARN TO DRIVE' sign at the rightmost side of the spread, and a photo of an upside-down Pontiac car on the bottom right side of the centre fold. Those sympathetic to Rubin's political views may have seen these inclusions as representing the freedom of physical mobility and spontaneous adventure that comes with driving, such as that Beat writer Jack Kerouac documented in *On the Road* (1957). A Pontiac in particular may have appealed to a countercultural audience in light of General Motors' 1968 television advertisement (dreamingimalive, 2006), which showed countercultural icons Bonnie and Clyde (as represented in Arthur Penn's 1967 film, which Peter Braunstein (2002, p. 263) calls 'a cultural hand grenade') fleeing a bank heist in a Pontiac GTO. Rubin himself declares later in *Do It!* (1970, p. 112) that 'Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow are the leaders of the New Youth.' In these ways, this collage's car-related inclusions affirmed the countercultural identities of Rubin and his followers. However, the 'LEARN TO DRIVE' sign might have also represented a desire for the upward mobility that had come to characterise the American Dream. Cars are status symbols, and the Pontiac was one product of a hip consumerism (Heath, 2001, p. 2) wherein

consumers felt they could express their individuality through their purchasing decisions. In this way, readers adhering to dominant cultural ideals may have observed the financial and social prospects represented by the collage's car-related inclusions. Given the content of *Do It!*'s text, though, it is clear that these ideals are the ones the 'FUCK AMERIKA' banner is directed against. After all, Rubin (1970, p. 235) contends, 'revolution is profitable. So the capitalists try to sell it.' Thus, this collage's car-related images called into question the cultural conventions of the day (the American Dream) while simultaneously affirming the beliefs of those involved in countercultural movements. Indeed, this collage prompted processes of meaning-making that were informed by readers' personal and cultural experiences. The artist, called Spain, accentuated the culture within which the book was produced, and set the stage for the book's critique of this culture by immersing the reader in familiar imagery juxtaposed in an unfamiliar way. This collage emphasised the disjointedness of contemporary American culture, making it the 1960s/70s reader's duty to determine why each image was included, and to impose a new semblance of order: a counterculture, so to speak.

Inventory books all feature imagery inspired by contemporary circumstances and events to illustrate the text being accompanied. At times, images appear to have direct relevance to the text; other times, they appear to be decontextualised. In all instances, the images enclose additional layers of meaning to be determined by discerning readers who employ associative patience to connect that held in their inner libraries to that presented on the page. Inventory books' visualities' engaged readers by calling into question the social conventions and ideals of the day, and by facilitating alternative worldviews. All of these books employed what Fraeters and Pieters (2013, pp. 1-14) have referred to as the 'mediating power of the image' in the service of discovery and demonstration; in inventory books this demonstration is of countercultural ideals. Each book's imagery is heavily embedded in the cultural context of its production, as evidenced by the use of timely references that require a deep social understanding to fully appreciate. Inventory books employed imagery to make their readers feel uncomfortable, to make them question the conventional. The images do not necessarily just help readers navigate the text, adhering to modern desires for linearity and rationality; they also offer



opportunities for readers to drive into off-road territory, prompting them to explore the rocky terrain of their own minds while reassuring them that the paved road was nearby should they choose to return to the smoother route.

In printed books, page numbers encourage readers to stay on paved roads. Save for on pages that are mainly tables or images, or are dominated by paratextual material, page numbers have come to be an expected feature of the page, telling readers how far they are through a book, as well as allowing for effective citation and future reference. Indeed, page numbers are indispensable in modern scholarship, despite pagination only being established as common practice in the sixteenth century. However, while inventory books mostly present texts based on extensive research by renowned scholars, most do not include page numbers consistently throughout. McLuhan's *The Medium is the Massage* for example, includes page numbers only on those pages that almost entirely adhere to the Gutenberg cliché. On the pages that are more visually distinct, page numbers are usually absent.

Shumon Basar ('Yourheadisthewholeworld', 2015), one of the authors of *The Age of Earthquakes*, a 2015 experimental paperback that mimics the visual style of *The Medium is the Massage*, recalls his co-author's interaction with the book's designer:

Doug's simple request to Wayne was that the cover should 'feel like a classic Penguin paperback.' And this time-travel logic continued in the brief for the insides, too: 'Wayne, the reader should be able to open our book somewhere and it feels like 1967. Then open it elsewhere and it's 2015.'

*The Age of Earthquakes* uses page numbers sparingly on its more visually unconventional pages (Basar, Coupland, and Obrist, 2015). By removing the reader's ability to linearly navigate her reading experience, to feel rooted in a numerical sense of space, the reader is more easily transported to an intellectual hyperspace unbounded by rational linear thought. *The Age of Earthquakes'* authors made a conscious decision to omit page numbers to avoid drawing attention to any sense of linearity that might offer the reader a rational and predictable sense of order. Page numbers may have posed a technological issue in the 1960s and 70s: the formatting process of the time may not have easily accommodated the inclusion of page numbers laid on top of the images. However, McLuhan's *War*

*and Peace in the Global Village*, while still largely adhering to the pattern of page numbers being included on Gutenberg-clichéd pages, does include page numbers on many of its more visual pages. The ability to include page numbers on visual pages thus appears to be present within a year of the publication of *The Medium is the Massage*. Of course, as book production is a profit-driven enterprise, the financial element of page numbers may have been a limiting constraint. Perhaps the cost of overlaying a page number on a visual page was not justifiable. Such considerations are opportunities for further study and will not be discussed at length here.

The most apparent example of inventory books' lack of pagination is in *Herman Kahn's Consciousness*, which does not include a single page number in its body. For a citation, the reader must count the book's pages, one by one, and often more than once to ensure a proper reference. The image credits page at the end of the book, though, cites each image using the page number on which it appears. This kind of crediting implies that page numbers were present in the working copies of the book and were consciously removed for publication.

Removing page numbers dampens the sense of orderliness, linearity, and rationality associated with modern books and scholarship; their absence forces the reader to be present on the current page, and only the current page, as there is no longer a reference to the rest of the book aside from the weight of it in the reader's hands. Page numbers, if included on image-based pages, might draw attention to themselves, begging the reader to return to the linear reading practices customary of everyday life. Pages 8 and 9 of *Herman Kahn's Consciousness* (1973), for example, allow for the reader to disregard any numerical sense of space, and instead float into the universal abyss alongside the pages' reminders of Earth: contestants of a Miss Universe beauty pageant (Figure 5). While the physicality of the book itself prevents the reader from feeling a full sense of immersion in the imagery, the removal of page numbers supports readers' journeys into intellectual hyperspaces through a similar 'time-travel logic' as that used by the producers of *The Age of Earthquakes*.

Figure 5: Pages 8-9 of Kahn and Agel's 1973 *Herman Kahn's Consciousness*.

A further means for achieving such a sense of connectedness may have been through figuratively overturning a reader's reality by requiring readers to literally turn their books upside-down. The clearest example of this is in R. Buckminster Fuller's *I Seem To Be a Verb* (1970, pp. 22-23) (Figure 6), wherein the top halves of most of the pages feature one verbal and visual narrative (printed in black) and the bottom halves feature another verbal and visual narrative (printed in green). In an interview with design critic Steven Heller, Quentin Fiore (in Schnapp and Michaels, 2015, p. 15) recalls the inspiration for this layout as stemming from a conversation with Jerry Rubin in which Rubin described sitting across from someone in a subway. As Rubin stood watching someone read a newspaper, he read a disturbing headline. Listening to Rubin, Fiore realised that, when seen from above a headline appears upside-down. Hence the reader of *I Seem To Be a Verb* must flip the book upside down, reading from the first page to the last and then the last page to the first, to read the book in its entirety. All the while, two large lines of text run through the middles of the pages, to be read from the first page to the last and then the last page to the first, presumably in a separate reading. The book is, in essence, a series of news headlines: snippets of contemporary relevance. A subtler example of inventory books' needs to be flipped upside down is on page 19 of *Do It!* (1970) (Figure 7). The featured photograph has been set upside down and is virtually incomprehensible unless the reader turns the book on its head. When the book is viewed right-side up, one can distinguish little more than human hands; only once the book has been flipped can the reader see that the photograph is of a bare-breasted woman, beaming as she hugs another bare-breasted person.

Figure 6: Pages 22-23 of Fuller, Agel, and Fiore's 1970 *I Seem To Be a Verb*.

Figure 7: Page 19 of Rubin and Fiore's 1970 *Do It!*

The action of physically flipping a book upside down shifts the act of reading from being a primarily visual experience to a more participative one, connecting the reader's imaginative world to the physical world surrounding the reader. The eye is no longer in a position of total predominance. Further, the inversion of the image prompts nonlinear reading as the reader is encouraged to move not just her eyes, but more of her body to physically turn the book – the printed matrix of her

imaginary world – upside down. ‘Tactility is the mode of interplay and of being rather than of separation and of lineal sequence,’ Marshall McLuhan (1962/1967, p. 240) declares. By requiring a reader to turn a book upside down to make sense of it, the book directly opposes the typical visual conventions of printed books. The reader is unsettled by such visually extraordinary pages that push her into unfamiliar territory, unconstrained by linearity.

In inventory books, readers can become enthralled with the imagery, striving to determine its meaning in relation to the text it accompanies through cognitive association. These books are visual and intellectual feasts, causing the mind to salivate as it hungers for a sense of connectedness. Thus, on the outset, the reader’s instinct to make sense from the senseless seems to correspond with the extraordinary layouts of inventory books. However, inventory books exhibit unique and dynamic text-image relationships that do not necessarily lend themselves to the rational, linear thinking characteristic of modern scholarship. Through word-image interplay that appeals to readers’ inner libraries, these books support ‘irrational’ nonlinear reading practices that bring the reader towards more comprehensive and customised understandings of their texts.

Consideration of inventory books’ visualities speaks to more recent practices of what Jeffrey Schnapp (Guffey, 2014, p. 96) has called ‘knowledge design’: the presentation of information for effective communication directed towards both academic and popular audiences. Inventory books’ interactive and nonlinear elements serve as early examples of hypertext, with readers navigating an array of textual and visual voices to formulate a cohesive narrative that is unique to each reader’s subjective worldview. Darren Wershler (2012) has suggested that inventory books, with their hybrid forms drawing from both text and image, lack of bibliographies, and lack of page numbers, prompt the development of new knowledge economies wherein citation is increasingly difficult and recontextualisation - bordering on plagiarism - is encouraged. Inventory books not only challenge individual experiences of culture, but also more institutionalised structures that direct everyday life and socially acceptable behaviours.

## Conclusion

A book is produced within a particular cultural context that informs its visuality. Likewise, readers read within particular cultural contexts that inform their thought-associations. Through Nichols' aforementioned notion of double literacy, inventory books' contemporary readers could interpret what they were seeing on a page in multiple ways, all of which were informed not only by their own inner libraries, but also by their collective experiences and cultural circumstances. For readers do not read in isolation. They read within circumstances that inform their understandings and interpretations of what they are seeing. The images featured in the books discussed herein all reflect the circumstances and ideals of their respective cultural contexts, in ways that would have appealed to their intended readerships. Inventory books called into question the cultural conventions of the day, encouraging readers to reconsider their places within the greater cultural context and to consider alternative worldviews. Once in the hands of readers, they aimed to make readers uncomfortable in their safe and affluent button-down culture.

Each inventory book contains layers upon layers of meaning to be discerned by readers who personalise their interpretations of the pages' visualities to accept them at more than face value. These books' readers were encouraged to determine meanings for themselves, with customised meanings emerging in light of each reader's unique inner library. Inventory books made use of visual tricks to emphasise and affirm countercultural identity within a nation's time of political and social flux. In doing so, they became countercultural artefacts themselves, representing the thoughts of revolutionary thinkers through intentional convolution and contempt for the conventional. Through consideration of Pontiacs, pagination, and physicality, private reading became private – and politicised – reflection.

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## Appendix

### Inventory Books

The following list includes all known inventory books that Quentin Fiore and Jerome Agel were involved in producing.

Agel J (1972) *Is Today Tomorrow?: A Synergistic Collage of Alternative Futures*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Agel J (ed) (1970) *The Making of Kubrick's 2001*. New York: The New American Library, Inc.

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Rubin J and Fiore Q (1970) *Do It!: Scenarios of the Revolution*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Sagan C and Agel J (1975) *Other Worlds*. New York: Bantam Books.

### Selected Additional Inventory Material

The following list includes additional books, magazines, and audio recordings that could be deemed inventory material, but were not necessarily produced by Quentin Fiore or Jerome Agel. Future studies may wish to consider this material, as doing so would contribute to a fuller understanding of the vast array of visualities employed, and their effects on reader experience. This list is not exhaustive.

Andraos A and Wood D (eds) (2010) *Above the Pavement – the Farm!: Architecture & Agriculture at PF1*. Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press.

Basar S, Coupland D and Obrist HU (2015) *The Age of Earthquakes: A Guide to the Extreme Present*. London: Penguin Books.

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