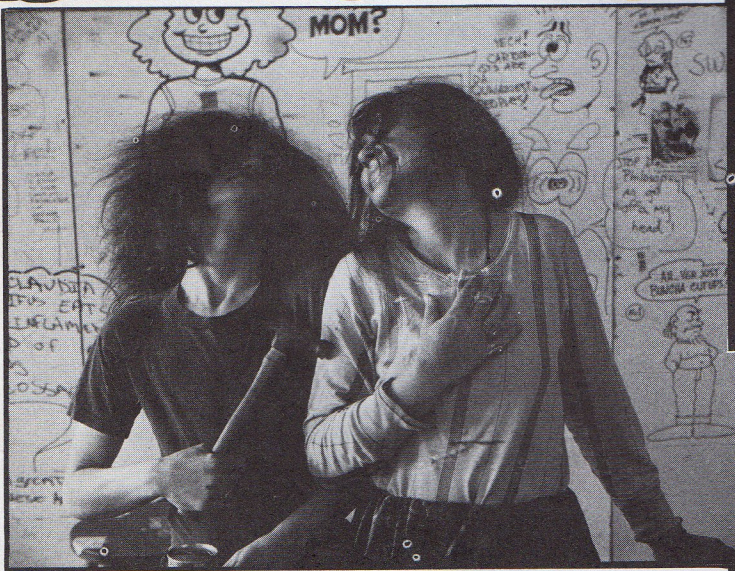
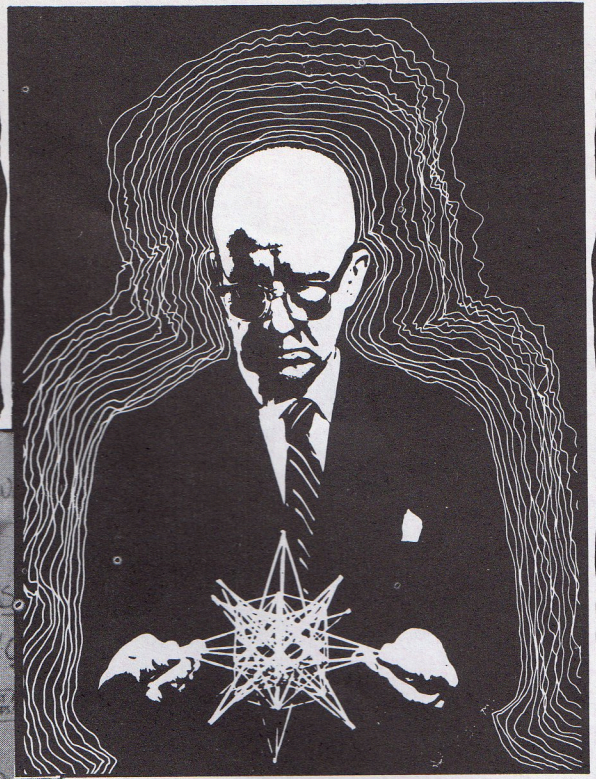


TRIPPING THE LIGHTBOX FANTASTIC

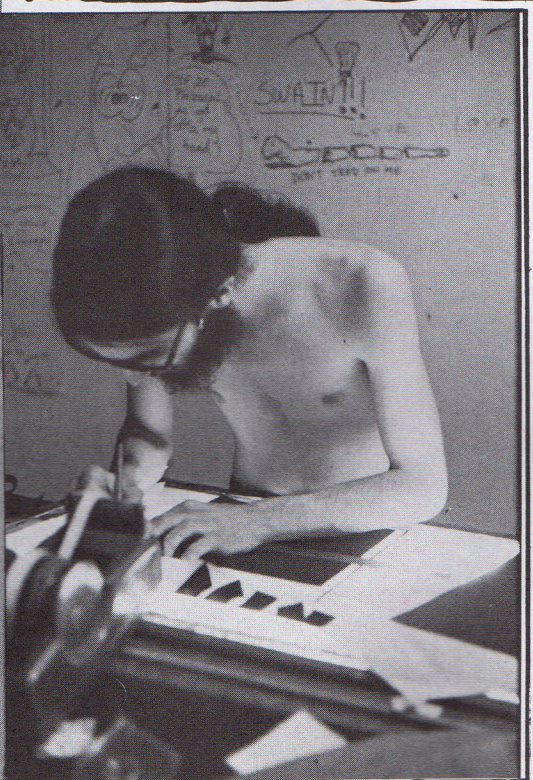
Psychedelic Design Made Easy

by Charlie Frick

*Buckminster Fuller as enhanced in an
early EVO*



Stephen Kohn and Hetti MacLaise



The author

The Enquiring Charlie Frick

Where Asked: New York, New Jersey, and around the world . . .

Heavy is a five letter word, in new jersey it means you cant pick up on it to



"At a Surrealist rally in the late 20's, Tristan Tzara, the man from nowhere, proposed to create a poem on the spot by pulling words out of hat. A riot ensued that wrecked the theatre and Andre Breton expelled Tzara from the movement by grounding the cut-up movement on the Freudian couch."

—William Burroughs, Brion Gysin,
The Third Mind

Many years after the incident described above, and following the lead of the great mystic writer and linguistic visionary, William Burroughs, the painters, ex-beat poets, hippies and psychedelic philosophers who were to become known as "the underground press," seized control of the forgotten medium of the cut-up and changed the ordinary, lifeless, flat, two-dimensional black-and-white style of the newspaper medium into a beautiful, radiant, magical, mystical moveable feast for the eyes.

Many of the early underground and hippie papers were the brainchildren of former beat era literati, who had discovered that they could publish themselves. True, many of the early efforts were little more than small mimeographed poetry sheets or quarterly reviews, but they proved that crazies who were outside of the realm of the legit media could indeed enter the publishing game on their own. These trail-blazing poets, artists and writers were influenced by a well-developed

sense of "hip" and an avant-garde artistic sensibility. They were the first cultural group outside of the Negro jazz musicians to get involved with mind-altering substances as aides to creativity. Thus prepared, they foresook the boring, relatively linear, black-and-white, up-and-down styles of newspaper and magazine journalism, and broke many of the literary as well as graphic restrictions that had defined and limited the publishing styles of the past.

The so-called "hippie papers" were born—the *East Village Other*, the *San Francisco Oracle*, the *Boston Avatar*, the *Chicago Seed*. They were hippie papers because that's what they were—hippie news written and produced by hippies for hippies. These publications weren't started as newspapers per se, but as individual works of communications art that would appear on a more or less regular basis. The only thing that even remotely connected these rags to the newspaper medium was that they were printed on newsprint.

They had a message, a vital story that had to be told. People out in the hills and in the streets of the infant counterculture needed their own psychedelic-flavored visions and ways of looking at the mundane reality of straight life.

Everywhere, especially in America, the cultural revolution was taking place, a revolution that would eventually sweep the old

political and artistic totems into obsolescence. Wisdom was now on the side of the young. It was the primary purpose of the underground press to pass along this information and convince the young people of the world that they were not crazy and alone; that they were wiser than their elders who persisted along a political and economic path leading to nowhere.

The kids of the young Woodstock Nation needed to be reassured that, yes, it was perfectly acceptable if not desirable to see the world through dayglow, paisley and rose-colored glasses. It was in the artwork, layout and design of the more psychedelic-influenced papers (especially the ones with the ambitious experimental multi-color covers and centerfolds) that nurtured and fed the readers' newfound psychedelic identities. The psychedelic papers made the big city dailies look and read about as exciting as the telephone book.

William Burroughs, a beat generation survivor and one of the earliest exponents of the "collage" style of assembling massive amounts of information, a style that became the hallmark of the underground press, said "you cannot will spontaneity but you can introduce the unpredictable spontaneous factor with a pair of scissors." It was this previously missing spontaneous factor, the unknown element, the undiscovered angle, that would pull all of the

normally mundane aspects of graphic journalism (copy, illustrations, photos, etc.) together in a completely new and radically visionary set of juxtapositions.

The really-advanced psychedelic-powered papers worked under the assumption that all things were illusions and the illusions were but windows on a hidden reality. Since it was the job of these papers to communicate to the neophyte hipsters information and road maps into this world of reality, they became used for things other than the straight transmission of news, sports and concert listings. The more elaborate of the visionary artwork was, in the hands of the reader, like a ouija board in the hands of a gypsy. The shifting, changing, mutating, hallucinatory style of artwork produced many simultaneous combustions in the reader's vision, enabling him to view the "new" news with an improved and expanded vision. Artwork was used to induce time travel, to prophesize or to act as new vehicles of the secret code used by all truly possessed poets, artists, writers and visionaries.

The members of the underground press for the most part were working with the assumption that they were not competing with other newspapers (the local dailies and newsweeklies like the *National Enquirer*) for the attention of the mass audience, but with the electronically-based television screen. It was a competition for a means of conveying new and more immediate types of rapidly changing and radically-mutated types of information and images. In response to changing cultural trends and rapidly evolving areas of new interest, the papers like the *East Village Other*, the *Chicago Seed*, the *San Francisco Oracle*, the *Boston Avatar*, the *Los Angeles Free Press*, the *London Oz* and the *International Times* changed their production formats from week to week as the editors and art people shifted their attention from one outrageous topic to another. Radically new types of news required different types of graphic presentation. The relative lack of large display advertising freed space for large-scale, freewheeling, graphic experimentation. They used any and all methods at their disposal to try to shock their readers out of straight media, corporation-induced somnambulism.

"EVO as early as 1965 was the *Bat Masterson of the Underground Press*. It was the first publication in America to think of the newspaper as an art form. Though they introduced art to the newspaper columns, it was the *San Francisco Oracle* that pushed the concept to new psychedelic limits."

—Robert Glessing

The Underground Press in America

Because of the technological revolution, cold type (photo type) could be used as opposed to the letter press, or hot type, method of newspaper production.

At *EVO*, and other papers, body copy was set in any manner of shape or size, from one column pages to six column news page layouts. Blocks of type could and did get shaped into triangles, circles, pentagons, and divided into rhythmic patterns that would set the readers eyes and mind into sympathetic vibration. Copy would be run in reverse (white on black)

for shock and emphasis. The underground artists took full artistic advantage of unjustified or ragged copy lines by running type to fit around photos or illustrations.

Different textured screens were used over the visuals and a favorite trick was to radically alter the dot shape size and percentage of the half tone screens. Regular newspapers used an 85 line screen, but the underground press played around with the screen size, increasing the dot size and reducing the dot line count so there would be more space between the ink dots. The screen size was dropped to 65, then again to 55. The result of greatly increasing the dot size was to give a pop art effect a la Roy Lichtenstein. Screens were run on to each other and at conflicting angles to produce psychedelic effects. These "morie patterns" were sometimes used as moving backgrounds behind blocks of copy.

As a money-saving short cut, half-tones were eliminated and photos were run as line art work (no middle tones between black and white). Headlines and titles were often drawn by hand in a fancy calligraphic style or a crude imitation of the yellow journalistic front page screaming banner style. Some headlines were done in crude, heavy handed magic marker scrawl. Words and even letters were cut out of straight newspapers and mixed and matched and collaged to fit stories in the underground paper. There was a great deal of freedom in the use of stencil type, press type and tact type for headline work. Indeed, some stories were little more than a series of collage headlines.

Some of the best tricks were lucky accidents or art department fuck-ups

One of the most important discoveries made in the underground newspaper experience was the discovery, development and use of the so-called "split fountain" method of inking offset presses. This process enabled one to get twice the number of colors off a four unit press by splitting the ink fountains that fed the rollers. Sometimes six to eight colors would be used in a graphic spread. This was an unheard of technique in newspaper reproduction.

Some of the best tricks were lucky accidents or art department fuck ups that happened because someone was spaced out and happened to see something in an unusual light. Some of the more radical accidents didn't seem so lucky at first, but even those fuck ups—the mismatched blocks of copy, missing color plates, entire pages run upside down, backwards or in reverse—turned the papers into a moveable feast, a floating crap game for the eyes that combined elements of dada, surrealism and pop.

In many cases, the "underground" in "underground press" could be taken literally. Because of lack of money and general support, physical production facilities were often less than adequate; offices were frequently located in low-rent store fronts and converted garages, in industrial lofts and cold water railroad flats

located in sections of town where low income rent controlled housing (amidst third world, welfare neighborhoods) were located. The cash flow was always a matter of luck rather than good business practice, and because of lack of credit, the phones, water and electricity were frequently being turned off. Many papers had to be put together by candlelight or in the dead of winter with no heat. Finance company goons might stop by at deadline to repossess typewriters, adding machines and even filing cabinets, drawing tables and desks. With low funds and poor working conditions, the old standby about necessity being the mother of invention inevitably mixed with the development of spontaneous random factoring in most underground art departments.

The drugs, the booze, the crazy hours, pizza, french fries, coke and chocolate donuts and black coffee with lots of white sugar, combined with the frantic pace, oppressive conditions and the excitement of working on something that was anti-establishment and in fact trying to bring about a revolution of consciousness in America, combined with certain mystical, secret art department transfiguration exercises and production night rituals (dope, sex, rock 'n' roll) helped produce and induce a creative atmosphere where the spontaneous accident could occur and manifest itself in the artwork, rhythm and layout of a paper. Sharp pencils, pagination, lay-out sketches, story conferences and the like went out the window.

In a situation of controlled artistic anarchy, many of the people who had their hands on the final make up may not have had the training or education to enable them to put together a newspaper in the classic fashion, but their vision and determination were much more important. Inexperience and innocence played a major part in the final graphic outcome of more than one underground newspaper issue. Since many of the people didn't know what was really going on, they didn't know what could not be done.

Some of the results worked well and managed to open up readers' minds to the hidden reality. Some of the ideas failed miserably. But nobody cared if the rules of good grammar and punctuation were broken, if copy wasn't laid out in nice little Madison Avenue-approved straight lines. There were a lot of captionless photos and misnumbered pages. The significant point wasn't that some of the fruits of these labors appeared graphically sloppy or ugly, it was that the perpetrators believed their visions to be graphically possible.

The epilogue to the underground newspaper design experience can be seen today in many a slick magazine and newspaper. You'll now find many of the bold underground experiments being happily utilized by highly paid art directors everywhere. Whenever you see the use of ragged right text, of photo montage and collage, of crazy borders and imaginatively-cropped pictures, of wacked-out cartoons and shimmering fountains of color, remember the hirsute dropout with a headful of acid who probably invented the style after several sleepless nights in a dirty office on the mean side of town ten years ago. ■