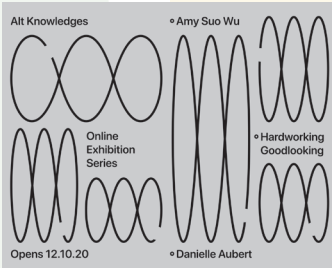


Alt-Design, Alt-Mind — Empowering Designs through Decentralizing Capitalism: *Alt-Knowledge's "No. 7"*

by Gordon Fung



Alt Knowledges Exhibition Series

Alt Knowledges was initiated by the California College of the Arts Graphic Design Department, Fall 2020 with support from IF/THEN. Alt Knowledges explores alternative values through the work of Amy Suo Wu, Danielle Aubert, and Hardworking Goodlooking. This student-led series of solo-exhibitions presents models for challenging entrenched colonial and capitalist systems through privacy tactics, worker-run presses, and a rethinking of modernist design values. This event is part of the [Creative Citizens in Action](#) initiative at CCA (CCA@CCA) and is funded by an endowment gift to support The Deborah and Kenneth Novack Creative Citizens Series, an annual series of public programs focused on creative activism.

Alt Knowledges is a series of student-led exhibitions that challenge existing reproduction and distribution models in graphic design. Organized by Christopher Hamamoto, Assistant Professor of the Graphic Design Program, CCA student graphic designers Darian Newman, Alia Moussa, Karina Kristensen, and Jennifer Jang, curated the project No. 7 in collaboration with designer Danielle Aubert. Aubert—a Yale MFA graduate (graphic design, 2005)—was the inspiration for the exhibition, sharing her scholarly research on the history of the Black & Red publishing project (hereby B&R) in the 1970's. B&R was a magazine initiated in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and later consolidated in the Detroit Printing Co-op. Aubert's research centers around Fredy Perlman—an activist of liberalism, professor, and publisher. Perlman was a major collaborator in the B&R periodical that focused on decentralizing print reproductions. As part of the fight against capitalism, the Co-op published a broad spectrum of voices through B&R, which provided more general access to leftist and liberal ideologies for both graphic designers and printers.

The exhibition's title No. 7 leaves room for the viewer's poetic imagination. To connect with Aubert's research on anti-capitalism, the title refers to the 6-1/2 issues of B&R that were published. The serialized publication attempted to stand against state power by encouraging parties of interest to utilize the printing facilities at Detroit Printing Co-op for their own publications. Without censorship and authoritative bureaucracy from the government, B&R pushed forward publications on class struggle, liberalism, poverty, social ecology, and other leftist and anarchist themes. No. 7 acts as the publication that was never realized—a continuation of the Co-op's determination to stand against exploitation within the printing industry and beyond.

Pulled directly from a published issue of B&R, No.7's subtitle is "If you don't like it, MAKE YOUR OWN." As a "motto" or "manifesto," it clearly emphasizes the need to decentralize and reproduce the exhibition-making process and form. Instead of exhibiting Aubert's work, the student-designers distilled her research on anti-capitalism within the print world, displaying the essence of her research as a "kit." The exhibition kit invites the viewer to

NO. 7

IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT,
MAKE YOUR OWN.

NO. 7: IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT, MAKE YOUR OWN IS A KIT CONTAINING A SET OF TOOLS AND PRINTS, INVITING USERS TO CREATE THEIR OWN EXHIBITION. THE PRINTS ARE TAKEN FROM DANIELLE AUBERT'S RESEARCH AND WRITING ON THE ZINE BLACK & RED. BLACK & RED WAS A RADICAL, LEFT ZINE THAT WAS FOUNDED AND PRODUCED BY FREDY PERLMAN AND THE DETROIT PRINTING CO-OP DURING THE 1970S.

craft their own display anywhere, anytime. It includes five risograph printed spreadsheets published by B&R and tools to reproduce their process. The tools include tape (with student designers' custom design, featuring images from B&R), a brochure with intentional blanks for the user to add their own content, markers, glue, and clips to hang prints. Due to budget restrictions, the kit is only distributed to a small audience via mail. The designers invite the person receiving the kit to alter the prints by cutting, collaging, or tearing them then displaying them in any arrangement they like. The package is designed in black and red—a clear reference to the B&R magazine. By enabling an individual to create their own exhibition, the curators omit the need for centralized printing, opening a model ripe for future experimentation.

Conventionally, graphic design has primarily served capitalism and consumerism, as the artists' designs are used to visually promote a product or ideology. This requirement to align with the client's needs has confined many aspiring designers to value function over artistic expression. Clients' over-reliance on the quick reproduction of the print medium exploits the graphic design industry and the wage-laborers involved in the printing and publishing industry.

In its form, *No. 7* resembles the instruction arts or conceptual works of Sol LeWitt, Yoko Ono, Fluxus, and even John Cage. Conceptual artists in the 1960s and 70s attempted to dematerialize and challenge the formality established by the Art market and so-called "high art" through their anti-Art manner. If anti-Art is proven to be a successful tactic that promotes anti-materialism and decentralization, "anti-design" might also be a path worthy of exploring in the contemporary era. By instructing viewers to create their own displays, these artists expanded their audiences who no longer had to worry about entrance

fees, long queues, and displeasing crowds that are typically the reason one avoids the big-name museums. Through these anti-capitalistic actions, graphic designers can independently take charge of their work outside of a client or consumer framework.

The physical exhibition, held at IF/THEN gallery in Berkeley, makes use of the gallery's collaborative and anti-capitalist design space that fosters social experiments, pop-ups, and installations. To facilitate more visibility, the exhibition was live-streamed on February 5th, 7th, and 9th. Though frustrating and pathetic when we first endured them at the beginning of the pandemic, online exhibitions enable individuals to display their endeavors anytime and anywhere. If we continue this model, artists and designers are privileged

to enjoy the freedom to showcase their works globally. Any classic, orthodox, or institutionalized gallery and museum pose many limitations and requirements to collaborators, restricting the content and expression of an artwork. With a virtual platform, the exhibitors can act independently of any higher authority. Aligned



with the designers' attempt to democratize art and information by decentralizing the exhibition, the virtual exhibition provides a promising model for artists and designers to continue experimenting.

Unfortunately, class struggle and labor exploitations are haunting, never-ending tales due to the misallocation of power in our society. How can graphic designers help break this curse incurred from the centralized production line? How could a design speak for such oppression? How are virtual platforms and instruction models furthering anti-capitalist agendas? Perhaps the ingenious project *No. 7* has shed some light on these questions. Check out altknowledges.com for more.

Gordon Fung is a composer, folk-instrumentalist, and cartomancer. Gordon is pursuing a BFA in Individualized Studies in light of bridging the multi-disciplinary practices for creating installations, performance, and conceptual works.



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