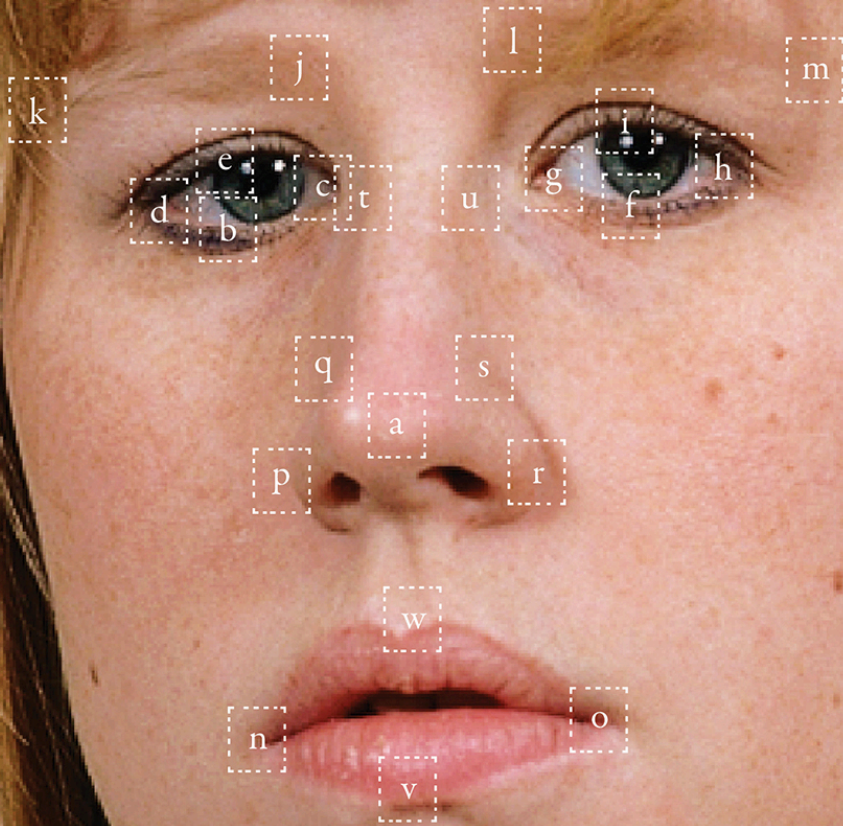


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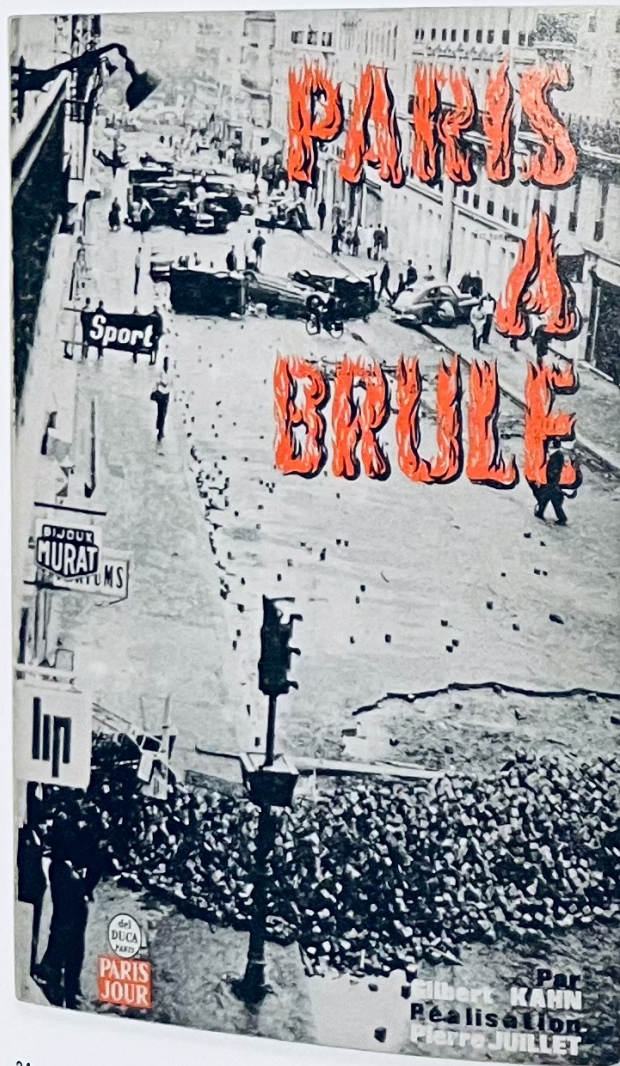




## Viewfinder

A new volume unpacking seven decades of protest highlights how student activists have organized through print culture.

Aaron Peck



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The “touching narcissism of the young”—that sympathetic yet condescending phrase feels dated today. Yet it’s how the writer Mavis Gallant described the Parisian student movement of May 1968. In *Paris Notebooks* (1986), which includes her journal of the events, she witnessed the crowd go silent as they listened to a radio broadcast about their very barricade on the rue de Rennes. Representations of protest are double-edged. They both communicate to the outside world the struggles, aims, ethos, and even aesthetics of a particular group and also provide an instance of self-reflection. *Flashpoint! Protest Photography in Print 1950–Present* (2024), deftly edited by Russet Lederman and Olga Yatskevich, grapples with that dual nature.

The book gathers a compelling selection of items from global protest movements since 1950, and will no doubt become an essential resource on the subject. Tackling a nearly inexhaustible range, *Flashpoint!* is divided into seven thematic sections, each with further subsections. Every page reproduces images, whether from posters, books, or pamphlets, and includes rigorously detailed contextual descriptions.

“The DIY pamphlet, zine and artist-created posters are ‘tools’ of protest conceived through an ‘aesthetic of urgency’ to be used during events as they unfold,” write the editors. “Books—especially those developed and published by scholars and journalists—are more often produced years later, some with the help of well-known photographers, writers and designers and serve as ‘evidence’ or ‘documents’ of past events.”

There are works by such established artists as Justine Kurland and Paul Graham along with those of younger artists such as Frida Orupabo and Pixy Liao. Also included are anonymous photographs and examples from graphic designers including Emory Douglas, of the Black Panthers. Instead of seeming unfocused, however, this breadth of work is bracing. “A bit of chaos and a widening of categories,” the editors write, is “not always counterproductive.”

The emphasis on students throughout *Flashpoint!* brings to mind the recent protests that have erupted throughout the world in response to the Israel-Hamas war, as well as those related to Myanmar’s civil war. The book bears witness to the tenacity of young protesters. “Students, as might be expected,” writes





Opposite:  
Cover of Gilbert  
Kahn, *Paris a brûlé*  
(Paris has burned),  
1968

This page:  
Cover and spread  
from *The Chestnut*  
*Burr* (Kent State  
University yearbook),  
1971

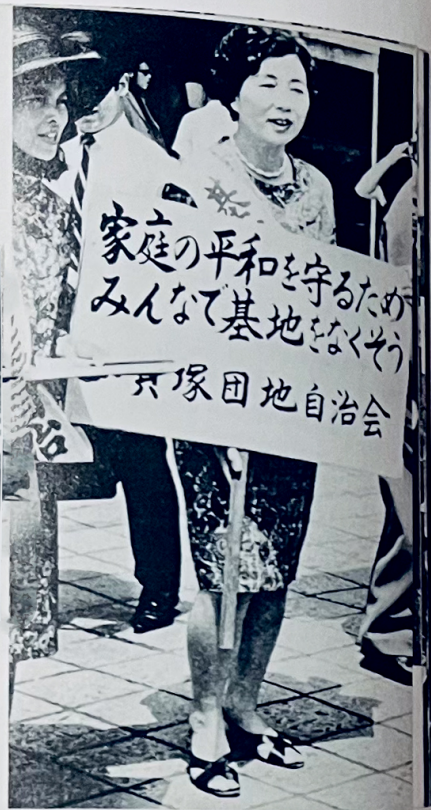


the contributor Arthur Fournier, “were among the early adopters. An emergent DIY print culture meant that young people worldwide were no longer simply the recipients of information generated by government-sanctioned authorities.” Two months after May ’68 in Paris, for example, Pierre Juillet, Gilbert Kahn, and others produced *Paris a brûlé* (Paris has burned), a collection of photographs and reportage that document the month-long student-led uprising in which around

a million people shut down Paris, nearly leading to revolution.

The selection within *Flashpoint!* connects a variety of international movements from all over Africa to across Asia and Europe. “The revolutionary mood of the 1960s,” Fournier continues, “was hardly contained to North American college campuses.” While *Flashpoint!* includes the 1971 Kent State yearbook (the American flag on its cover obscured behind a perforated, gunmetal-gray





Spread from Kikujiro Fukushima, *Gasu dan no tanima kara no hokoku* (A Report from the Tear Gas Valley), 1969  
All images courtesy 10x10 Photobooks

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screen and a black armband), it also presents Elena Poniatowska’s work of reportage *La noche de Tlatelolco* (Night of Tlatelolco, 1971), which gathers firsthand accounts and anonymous images from October 2, 1968, when somewhere between a few hundred to a thousand students protesting the Mexico City Olympics were massacred. The Japanese photojournalist Kikujiro Fukushima’s *Gasu dan no tanima kara no hokoku* (A Report from the Tear Gas Valley, 1969) depicts the chaos and unrest that gripped Japan’s universities in the late ‘60s. The book also documents the role of students in the Thai popular uprising of October 14, 1973, which led to the end of dictatorship and the establishment of a democratic constitution. Such scope, all the way from the Riot Grrrl movement to the Algerian War for independence, emphasizes the fact that youthful resistance to repression is global.

Reading *Flashpoint!* also offers a wider context for current protest movements. On April 26, 2024, photographers from the student paper *Columbia Daily Spectator* took more than one hundred portraits of students, faculty, and staff at Columbia University. They asked each

sitter to write a slogan on a piece of tape and affix it to themselves. Four days later, the police swarmed the campus and shut down the occupation of Hamilton Hall. The resulting portfolio, along with a feature, published in *New York* magazine on May 4, presented a diversity of people with an array of experiences, from testimonies of antisemitism to descriptions of police brutality. A second volume of *Flashpoint!* could, no doubt, include them. Far from the “touching narcissism” of students listening to themselves on the radio, these recent images provide a different kind of self-reflection—in this case, for both the sitter and viewer.

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