

Social Vision popular visual culture in Britain 1941-1951

abstract

The propaganda of war has been variously described as aggressive, masculine nationalistic and reactionary. It is therefore surprising to find that, in the period 1941-1951, a new popular visual language emerged in Britain that confounds this orthodoxy.

This visual language was made possible by the mobilisation of new print technologies for the propaganda efforts of war and reconstruction. The new photomechanical processes made use of a design practice that embraced elements of European Modernism to project a Social Democratic project beyond the immediate military objectives of war.

The multiplication of images and their efficient distribution, both required for propaganda purposes, allowed these communications to outflank the usual controlling mechanisms of capital and the Establishment class.

The radical values, implicit in the popular experience of war, were expressed through the production of books, magazines, posters and films. Together these helped project a new vision of Britain and reconfigured the alignments between state and citizen, capital and labour.

An understanding of the conditions by which this radicalism found graphic expression counters the prevailing orthodoxy of a British resistance to Modernism. Furthermore, This may inform our contemporary design practice, education and historiography.

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introduction

The radical potential of the printing press is evidenced by the revolutionary association between the personalities of, amongst others, Thomas Paine and Benjamin Franklin and their activities as printer and pamphleteers. Roy Porter (2000.76) has described the central significance of print culture within the 18th century radicalism of *the Enlightenment* as founded on a shift between “intensive” and “extensive” reading. Benedict Anderson (1983) showed how new texts could allow communities to imagine themselves beyond the immediate reality of their experience. Anderson’s methodology is implicit in a number of more recent publications exploring the radical potential of letterpress print culture (See, for example Watt (1991), Raymond (2003) and Peters (2005) who examine the print culture of 17th century England).¹

The emergence of a widespread and inexpensive print culture of images, of which graphic design is a fundamental and mediating component, is an even more recent phenomenon, (Probably post 1918, but that is another story). The shift from an intensive to an extensive reading of images is more recent still and continues apace. Nevertheless there is a developing literature that connects the printing of images with technology and the developing capitalist economy (see Twyman 1979) to reveal the utopian imaginings of a different social order. Louis James (1978) on the print culture of the emergent working class in Britain and Robert Dranton and Daniel Roche (1989) on the print culture of the revolutionary citizenry in France are but two examples of this genre. More recently, Peter Burke (2001) has argued that visual images have a special value as historical evidence within a social context.

The emerging sociology of print culture and graphic design draws on ideas from semiotics, visualisation and political economy to examine the interface between graphic communication, visual culture and society.² The resulting analysis sheds light on the development of collective consciousness in modern society and the visual expressions of citizenship in an open society.

This paper examines the graphic ephemera of WW2, within a British context, and suggests that the propaganda requirements of WW2 transformed the political economy of graphic design in Britain. Furthermore, this graphic material offers compelling evidence of an embrace of modernist practice in design to serve the nascent British social-democratic project. Accordingly, the orthodoxies of a British resistance to modernism and design are disavowed. In the process, the radical experience of ordinary people during WW2 is recovered. The paper presents the historical and theoretical contexts of the period and then examines a selection of material through a series of case notes relating to ABCA, "Picture Post, RoSPA and the Festival of Britain.

Traditionally, the advent of WW2 has been seen as one of the dramatic ruptures in the history of modernism and the avant-garde. The developing history of graphic design has tended to concur and the received view, first expressed by Alfred Barr, has been of WW2 as marking a break to a period of graphic and design experiment in Europe.³ The perception of war propaganda as necessarily aggressive, nationalistic and masculine has tended to further marginalise the study of war propaganda as antipathetic to contemporary sensibilities.⁴ In the 1930s a similar antipathy had emerged in response to the duplicitous propagandising of

WW1. George Orwell (1941), for one, had recognised this as indicative of a moral failing within the establishment class.⁵

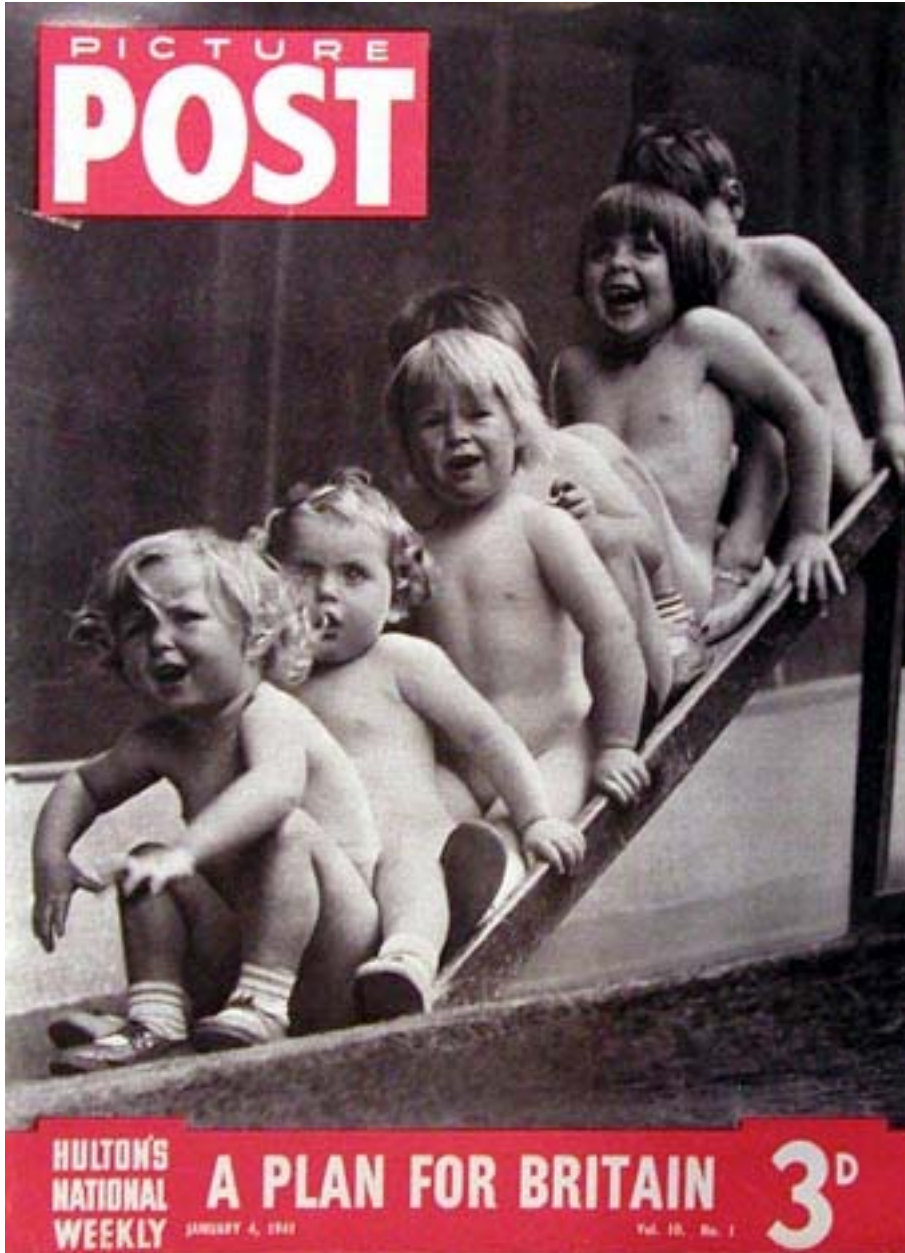
The project has its origins in research carried out within the School of Graphic Design at the London College of Communication. The research examined the industrial safety posters produced by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) during WW2. The project was prompted by the presence, within the Eckersley Archive held at the School, of several RoSPA posters designed by Tom Eckersley. A full description of Eckersley's contribution to the development of graphic design in Britain is beyond the scope of this paper but it should be noted that, in addition to his remarkable contribution to the RoSPA campaign, Eckersley was a pioneer of graphic design education, here at the College, during the 1960s and 70s.⁶ This paper is an attempt to extend the original work to a wider variety of graphic ephemera and to formulate a methodology for examining the interactions of technology, dissent and society.

The term *Social Vision* is derived from Stuart Hall's analysis of the visual language of "Picture Post" that identified a particular visual sensibility within the magazine. Hall (1972) identified this sensibility as having its origins beyond the immediate vicinity of the publisher's office and beyond the class interests of its journalists. The defining characteristic of "Picture Post's" photojournalism was a democratic egalitarianism that manifest itself in picture stories about ordinary people, sporting heroes and stage celebrities as well as the great-and-the-good of the national elite. "Picture Post" was first published in 1938 and continued until 1957.

The terms of reference for this paper are the publication, on January 4th 1941, of “Picture Post’s” “Plan for Britain” and the Festival of Britain in 1951.

The first popular expression of a social-democratic project, as a necessary and inevitable consequence of a successful effort in Total War, was drawn out in the “Picture Post’s” “Plan for Britain” (Hopkinson (1941)). The “Plan” made a link between the economic and social problems that had plagued Britain during the 1930s with the discredited economics of the establishment class and political elite. The “Plan” proposed scientific economic management and the distribution, by the state, of the social goods of education, health and social security to promote social justice. Furthermore the “Plan” gave visual expression, through photographs, illustrations and diagrams of a different social order. From 1941 onwards it was possible for the British to visualise themselves emerging victorious, at some time in the future, into the sunlit uplands of social-democratic utopia.⁷ The “Plan” provoked such interest that a conference was called to offer a platform for further debate. “Picture Post” continued to publish political material and actively promoted the Beveridge report (1943). The visual material associated with the expression of these ideals therefore contributes to the Labour election victory in 1945 (Hopkinson 1970.15).

The radical bona fides of “Picture Post” should not be underestimated. The magazine was a pioneer, within a British context, of photographically illustrated popular news journalism. First published in 1938, “Picture Post” was barely a year old when the outbreak of war transformed the news and media economy in Britain. The military narrative of 1940 (Dunkirk, Battle of Britain and the Blitz) established the popular mythologies of WW2 in Britain. Calder (1991) describes these mythologies in terms of egalitarianism and class solidarity. This



Picture Post January 4th 1941

A Plan for Britain

Paul and Karen Rennie Collection

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experience was also given powerful and radical expression through the words of J B Priestley (1943), George Orwell (1941) and Tom Wintringham (1940).

The radical temper of 1940 was given the most complete expression in Orwell's polemical essay "The Lion and Unicorn" (1941). Orwell had emerged as a powerful political writer in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War. The British prevarications in relation to the Spanish conflict and the betrayal of popular radicalism in Spain had confirmed his worst suspicions of the ruling classes, their self-interest and moral equivocations. Orwell identified the radical potential implicit in the popular experience of the war as a potential engine of social revolution. The war, he contended, could only be won through a revolutionary effort that would irrevocably transform social and economic relations in Britain. It is to these transformations that the graphic ephemera of Britain's Home-Front attest.

The Festival was conceived as celebration of Britain, its people and their culture. The Festival gave concrete expression to the post-war social-democratic project through the integration of architecture, art and design. Subjects were re-cast as citizens and given a right-to-roam through the corridors of power. The scientific and technological advance that would assure the future prosperity of Britain could only be achieved through a properly meritocratic and egalitarian access to higher education. The utopian idealism of the Festival found further expression in the development of a Festival style in graphic design and typography (Rennie 2001).

The emancipatory potential of a popular culture had been identified by Walter Benjamin (1934 and 1936).⁸ The characteristics of a radical and modernist cultural production were itemised

as economy based on more widely available processes of mechanical reproduction and the potential of mass production (Benjamin is describing the relations of political economy). In graphic design the developing technologies of offset lithography, the half-tone and process block had been enthusiastically adopted by European modernists. For Benjamin the development of a socially progressive, politically engaged, mass-produced and widely available form of popular visual culture was a logical and necessary component of political consciousness-raising as a defence against reactionary and extreme politics.

Antonio Gramsci gave the radical ideas expressed by Orwell and Benjamin a coherent framework of political science derived from revolutionary Marxism. Gramsci had also considered the developing connections between technology, industrialisation and culture along with their potential impact on radical politics in advanced capitalist economies. A number of concepts described by Gramsci are applicable to the developing political hiatus in Britain, during 1940-41, and help us to understand the contribution of visual culture to shaping consent, collective consciousness and citizenship during WW2.⁹

In Britain, the political economy of visual culture was dominated by long-established craft traditions concentrated within the larger lithographic printers who enjoyed powerful regional monopolies. This concentration of resources combined effectively with the established advertising industry to resist the advent of new technologies and practices that were potentially disruptive. The cosy alignments of capital, ownership and resources that had characterised the print economy of the 1930s were exploded by the massive, immediate and urgent requirements of the propaganda efforts attached to Total War.

The retreat from Dunkirk (May 1940) required an immediate productive effort in support of defensive action and to replace arms abandoned in France. The demands and scale of this productive effort required the prioritisation of resources and strict economies in non-urgent or unnecessary consumption. George Orwell (1942) was able to report that, by the beginning of 1941, the traditional structures of consumer society (including the advertising industry) had more-or-less collapsed. The immediate aftermath of the war was equally difficult and it was not until the 1950s that a recognisable consumer economy was re-established in Britain.

case notes

Picture Post

I have already mentioned the picture magazine “Picture Post” as a significant force in the promotion of social-democratic ideas through a new kind of photo journalistic visual language. The origins of the magazine and the development of that visual language have been told in some detail by Hopkinson (1970) and Hall (1972). I want to focus here on the relationship between “Picture Post,” the citizen’s militia of Local Defence Volunteers (Home Guard) and Tom Wintringham.

Tom Wintringham (1898-1949) was a key figure of the British Left during WW2. His military and political experience during the Spanish Civil War had given him an indication of the kinds of engagement expected in modern war. Wintringham was a tireless critic of the political and military establishments who he recognised as unqualified for the prosecution of a progressive war. Purcell (2004) has told the full story of Wintringham’s political trajectory from communism to revolutionary socialism and founder of Common Wealth.

Military historians of WW2 have tended to overlook Wintringham’s contribution to the development of military philosophy. In fact, he was one of the first to express disquiet with the levels of military preparedness and thinking. He expressed his ideas in detail through his “New ways of War” (1940) and in a series of polemical journalistic essays published in “Picture Post” during the second half of 1940 and early 1941 (See for example, Wintringham 1940). Wintringham called for the formation of a localised defence force and argued that it should be properly trained, armed and schooled in the appropriate tactics of military

resistance. Wintringham lobbied ceaselessly that this militia should be deployed actively in anticipation of military engagement.

Wintringham wrote two important articles for "Picture Post" in support of his arguments: "Against Invasion" and "Arm the Citizens." Sir Edward Hutton, the publisher of "Picture Post," further supported Wintringham and agreed to underwrite the Osterley Park Training School in June 1940. "Picture Post" effectively became a widely available and illustrated platform for Wintringham's ideas of armed resistance as an emancipatory and consciousness-raising activity.

The school quickly established a notorious reputation, helped by the frequent publicity in "Picture Post," for the promotion of eccentric military ideas and for the expression of democratic ideals that were, from the Establishment's perspective at least, practically revolutionary. The School's staff were drawn from Wintringham's colleagues in Spain and from democratic politics in Britain. There were courses in ambushing, hand-to-hand fighting and hit-and run, Molotov cocktail mixing, field craft and in camouflage deception. Roland Penrose, an English Surrealist painter and friend of Picasso, taught the courses in camouflage. The course was issued in published form in Penrose (1941).

The call for a properly armed citizen's militia, and an active role in military operations, was especially worrying for the establishment who were suspicious of the revolutionary potential of an armed citizenry. Wintringham's arguments in favour of an active, armed force to complement the Regulars and Territorials was altogether too irregular for the "Blimps." The School was effectively taken over by the military establishment through a conditional grant, to



Picture Post September 21st 1940

The Home Guard Can Fight

Paul and Karen Rennie Collection

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Edward Hulton, which removed Wintringham from the School. His place was taken by Orde Wingate.¹⁰

The popular conception of the LDVs as a “Dad’s Army” of pompous captain Mainwaring types and aged veterans is based, to a large extent on the popular television series. In fact, the series played a crucial role in effectively marginalising Wintringham’s reputation, without mentioning his name, and in adjusting the radical mythologies of WW2 downwards.¹¹ After Osterley Park Wintringham was active in the “1941 Committee” and in the formation of the Common Wealth Party. Wintringham died in 1949.

The politics espoused by the editorial position of “Picture Post” made use of a wide range of visual material including photographs, illustration, diagrams and plans. This technical material was an important extension in the visual education of the population at large. The rich visual mix of “Picture Post” along with its radical politics and its huge circulation (over 1 million copies after four issues) made the magazine a “concrete political force,” (a concept from Gramsci).

ABCA

The Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA) was established by the Army Education Corps in 1941. The military circumstances of the 1940 emergency (Dunkirk) led to a very much larger army expecting to act in a defensive capacity before embarking on offensive action at some point in the future (June 1944). The purpose of ABCA was to make better soldiers by increasing motivation through the development of political, military and social ideas as a support for military action. The creation of ABCA was an acknowledgement, by the military authorities at least, that a more sophisticated motivation than a revolver would be required to wage war against a totalitarian enemy. (See Grant 1984).

The work of ABCA was promoted through a series of fortnightly discussion groups convened by a member of the officer cadre. Notes were provided in small booklet form to the officer in charge who was expected to lead the discussion on aspects of the military campaign or on the possible social and political consequences of the conflict. The discussions were enlivened by the development of role-playing games to illustrate leadership, parliament and democracy at work. The theme of the discussions was always to distinguish the ethical correctness of war against totalitarianism and to link this to the emancipatory potential of active citizenship within a democracy.

Map-posters were conceived as visual aids in the discussions of the ABCA group. One side of the poster showed a state-of-the-conflict map with information about battles, advances, retreats and so forth. The reverse gave information about the contributions to the war effort of ally states, of different services and of the civilian casualties of the occupied territories in Europe and Asia.

Abram Games (1914-1996) designed ABCA's map-posters from his studio at the War Office aided by his studio assistant. The fortnightly publication of these posters represents a little known, but substantial, element in the career of Abram Games. Games had been appointed "Official War Office Poster Designer" with the rank of Captain in the summer of 1941 and produced a steady flow of remarkable propaganda poster images for the army and recruitment. Moriarty, Games and Rose (2003) have told the full story of his contribution to the development of graphic design in Britain. We need only, at this stage, acknowledge that this contribution was unique in expressing a utopian idealism through the visual projection of personal integrity and collective solidarity. Rights and responsibilities, ethics and consequences, have never been so perfectly expressed in poster and information design. Abram Games was also the designer of the Festival of Britain emblem in 1951.

The ABCA map-posters offer a visual support to the evolution of the radical ideas of social-democratic reform in Britain. The idealism of the ABCA project was given substantive form in the series of three posters that Abram Games designed for the "Your Britain - Fight for it Now" series. The posters were conceived to show the bright modernist architecture of a future utopia emerging from the ruins of Victorian urban decay. The three posters are of Education, Health and Housing and feature buildings by key modernist architects – Berthold Lubetkin, Maxwell Fry and Walter Gropius. All three posters express the ideals of community through the modernist expression of the supporting structures of social justice.

Frank Newbould designed a second series of four ABCA posters to complement those by Abram Games. Newbould was a colleague of Games at the War Office and had been a

successful poster designer during the 1920s and 1930s. He chose the themes of landscape, history and tradition to express a conservative response to the ABCA debate.

The Newbould posters are probably more widely known today (2005) than those by Abram Games. The comforting images of landscape and tradition combined have been used to point up the equivocal nature of Britain's WW2 social revolution and to implicitly confirm reactionary narratives of a national decline in economic and political status. The motives and effect of ABCA were fiercely criticised from the beginning as being incompatible with an efficient military discipline based on hierarchy. Notwithstanding these objections, the ultimate success of military operations was testimony to the effectiveness of political idealism in motivating "good men."

RoSPA

We have already seen how graphic design and mechanical reproduction were able to play a part in presenting radical political ideas within the military contexts of regular and irregular forces. The same intervention can be seen within the civilian context of industrial production and the accident prevention posters produced by the Industrial Service of RoSPA.

The origins of RoSPA are to be found at the end of WW1 when metropolitan areas came under air attack and a blackout was enforced. The changed environment immediately caused an increase in accidents between motor vehicles and pedestrians and the London Safety First Association (LSFA) was formed to address this issue through education and propaganda. Other metropolitan areas formed their own safety associations and these were merged to form the National Safety First Association (NSFA) and subsequently RoSPA..

The outbreak of WW2 altered the context of RoSPA's activities so that safety issues were integrated into a discourse of national survival. This was especially true of industrial safety where issues of war production, efficiency and victory converged. The leadership of RoSPA were conscious of these altered priorities and Lord McGowan, President, expressed the importance of safety work by observing that, "an accident in the works is as much a gain to the enemy as a casualty in the armed forces." (Rennie 2004).

RoSPA's industrial safety activities were co-opted within the Ministry of Labour and National Service. The Ministry had been placed, in May 1940, under the leadership of the Trade Unionist Ernest Bevin who recognised the potential of RoSPA's activities in addressing the problem of safety and of advancing issues of worker welfare decisively. The circumstances of

war (post Dunkirk) and of industrial expansion (required to meet the urgent and growing requirements of the military) conspired to bring an influx of new workers, including women, into the factories. The urgency of the task, the conditions of war and their inexperience would, Bevin understood, make safety a primary responsibility of employment (see Bullock 1967).¹²

Ernest Bevin had become aware of the potential impact of graphic propaganda through a friendship with Frank Pick of London Transport. Bevin realised that if he could establish an effective projection through his Welfare Division, this time based on the idea of a safe and civilised working environment, he could effect permanent change in the relations between capital and labour in Britain. The circumstances of war gave Bevin an opportunity to accelerate his project and to cement worker welfare as a primary responsibility of capital. Bevin understood that, politically, any post-war settlement would be irrevocable.

RoSPA had made use of humour in their road safety campaigns of the 1930s. The NSFA produced small books of comic drawings for drivers "You Have Been Warned" (1935) and "Many Happy Returns" (1935) by Fougasse (Kenneth Bird). Fougasse was Art Editor of "Punch" and was a regular contributor to the NSFA's driver education campaigns. Fougasse also produced the highly effective "Careless Talk Cost Lives" posters for the Ministry of Information during WW2. Fougasse also produced a series of citizenship posters for London Transport (move along the platform, stand on the right, pass down the bus and have the exact change etc) and could easily have been the focus of another case study here. For further information on Fougasse see Bird (1946) and Hillier (1977).

RoSPA's accident prevention posters were produced, during WW2, under severe financial and time pressures. The posters were part of a package of propaganda material sent out to the member factories and workshops. The "Industrial Service" was delivered, on a subscription basis, and comprised pamphlets and educational notes along with three types of poster.

Loxley Brothers of Sheffield printed all of RoSPA's industrial propaganda. The firm was of Quaker origins and had close links, from the beginning of the 20th century, to Rowntree's of York. Rowntree was one of the great Quaker enterprises and was a pioneer of worker welfare, stake holding and communitarianism. The printers were equipped, after 1925, with rotary litho presses by Crabtree of Leeds. These presses were designed for two-colour work from zinc plates. The make ready of sensitised plates was, along with half-tone processes, at the leading edge of printing developments before WW2. In 1940, when RoSPA suddenly required posters to be printed quickly and in great number, Loxley was ready.

The industrial safety campaign was strengthened, within the RoSPA administration, by the presence of Ashley Havinden and Tom Eckersley on the Publicity Committee. Havinden was a pioneer advertising executive in Britain who had worked in Berlin during the 1920s where he had helped to establish an international office for the Crawford agency. Havinden became, in consequence, one of a relatively small number of English business people with any knowledge of German, Russian and Dutch experimentation in the graphic arts. Accordingly, when the political climate in Germany became hostile to this form of modernism Havinden was able to help Gropius, Moholy-Nagy and Herbert Bayer as they passed through Britain

during the 1930s. The RoSPA campaign gave work to a number of émigré designers during WW2.

The administrators of the RoSPA campaign recognised that the use of shocking and disturbing images was unlikely to have the desired effect of changing behaviour. Accordingly, they concentrated their efforts in creating a coherent framework for the visual expression of a threat minimised through education, collective and individual responsibility and by the observation of simple, commonsense rules. The visual language used to express these ideas draws effectively on that of Surrealism and of the International Left. The result was a wide ranging and sophisticated visual language reaching beyond the immediate vicinity of the workplace. This, and the good humour of the campaign, helped to establish a sense of community unencumbered by traditional class distinctions.

Festival of Britain 1951

The case studies presented so far have shown how different elements of the fighting citizenry (regular and irregular forces, citizens and workers including women) began to be addressed through a sophisticated visual language made possible by developments in printing technologies and advances in graphic design. These demographics were further addressed through a huge explosion in book and magazine publishing and in photojournalism. It would be possible, at this stage to mention books from Penguin, the magazines "Contact," "Convoy" and "Future" and to mention the photography of John Hinde (Spender 1945) and Percy Hennell (Priestley 1943). The images within this material provide a powerful source of democratic visualisation. Notwithstanding these examples we should note that the immediate post-war period was one of difficulty for the nascent profession of graphic design. It was some time before the normal relations of supply and demand were re-established to support a pre-war level of advertising activity.

The Festival of Britain in 1951 gave concrete expression to those ideals through the integration of art, design and architecture into a coherent vision of a new social order. Conekin (2003) has called the Festival "the autobiography of the nation." In popular memory the Festival is recalled as a "tonic to the nation" (Banham and Hillier 1976) that marked the end to a period of material hardship, austerity and psychological trauma. The Festival marks the end of one strand in the cultural trajectory of social revolution in Britain during and after WW2. That strand was democratic, egalitarian and social-democratic. The architecture of the Festival used engineering, technology and new materials to create a new kind of social environment that gave ordinary people "access all areas." Graphic design played a crucial role in mapping this new topography and in providing navigational markers for the new

citizenry. Rennie (2001) has described these markers, their typographic style and antecedents.

The typographic style of the Festival offers a sharp contrast, though the use of serrated, oversized and italicised display types, to the rational and utilitarian typography usually associated with mid-century international modernism. The designers of the Festival found inspiration in the public spaces of early 19th century Britain; its markets, its pleasure gardens and seaside resorts. Implicit in the style of the Festival is the utopian possibility of a widely available leisure society. The Festival offered a series of promenades through the various narratives of national achievement and potential.¹³ This potential was supported through the publication of a vast quantity of printed and graphic material; most with the Festival emblem designed by Abram Games.

The Festival organisers had called for visual ingenuity in the hope of creating a variegated and textured typographic interface between spaces and architecture. The idea of an architectural semiotics that included a wide range of typographic material had been promoted through the “Architectural Review” and its architectural draughtsman Gordon Cullen.

Gordon Cullen had been associated with the MARS group before WW2 and had illustrated the Tecton proposals for deep ARP shelters beneath metropolitan areas. As an art director at the Architectural Review” Cullen was responsible for the illustration of many utopian plans for the rebuilding of Britain. Cullen’s illustrations always provide for a range of architectural styles, scales and signage. Cullen was later to codify this democratic approach to architecture and planning in his theory of “townscape.”¹⁴ The graphic explosions of the 1960s, although

associated with a different cluster of ideas, embraced Cullen's idea of "visual pleasure" as an integral element of modern life.

The richly textured architectural environment of the Festival and its signage was in sharp contrast to the minimalist functionalism of international modernism. The rational frivolity implicit within the Festival was an expression of official optimism and popular relief that the disruptions of war and reconstruction were over.

conclusion

Writing about British design history in 1986, Penny Sparke asked the rhetorical question “Did Britain Make It?” The equivocal tone of the question clearly implies not. Indeed, the emerging history of graphic design has, throughout the last ten years, tended to pass Britain by and to concur with the notion of a national resistance to modernism.

Furthermore, the radical history of ordinary people during WW2 has been revised downwards and the lasting significance of those post-war social structures questioned. The graphic design of the period 1941-1951 offers compelling evidence of the radical potential identified in ordinary people. In addition the printed ephemera of the period is evidence of a conjunctural moment (an idea from Gramsci) where a technology and radical politics emerge simultaneously as a disruptive force to the existing political economy. The graphic archaeology of the period allows us to recover a radical social history that was in danger of disappearing beyond the event horizon.

The disruptive tendencies of the Festival, and of the social organisations it implied, were controlled, in due course, by the Coronation of 1953, the emergence of television as a mass medium and the development of consumer society in Britain. The 1960s explosion of visual culture was associated with a different crop of graphic artefacts. The counter culture associated with that period expressed itself through hedonistic lifestyle choices rather than the relatively austere egalitarianism of 1941-1951.

I have tried to show how the society and politics of Britain during WW2, mediated through an exploding visual culture and orchestrated through a developing practice of modernist graphic design, has left an exciting legacy. The material is substantive proof of the radical temper of the time and confounds the dominant historical narratives that have sought to de-radicalise the experience of citizens at war. The interactions, revealed by this analysis, offer an opportunity to rediscover the constructions of citizenship imagined beyond the immediate confines of contemporary consumer capitalism and brand theory. The project continues.

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¹ Christopher Hill (1949) further substantiates the argument of his essay of 1940 in which he re-establishes the radical nature of the English Revolution of the 17th century. Hill's was a no-holds-barred assertion of the revolutionary nature of England between 1640 and 1660, and an assault on the traditional presentation of these years as an aberration in the stately continuity of English history. The process by which radical histories are subsumed within conservative narratives of continuity, described by Hill and theorised by Gramsci, is the starting point for the rediscovery of the visual culture of WW2 in Britain and the recovery of its radical history.

² Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols as a structured language and has developed to a level of extreme theoretical sophistication. An introduction to the ideas that inform semiotics can be found in Wollen (1969.116). More recently, David Crow (2003) has written about semiotics and graphic design.

Ryan (1997) has explored the theory of visualisation and the construction of Imperial identity. Crary (1992) has examined the links between technologies of representation and personal identity.

The political economy of visual culture describes that visual culture in relation to the technical, managerial and economic determinants of its production, distribution and consumption. What is described is effectively the means by which supply and demand are balanced, through pricing mechanisms, in favour of the dominant class interest. These conditions are extremely robust and can only be unbalanced in conditions of emergency and disruption. Bonnell (1997) provides a detailed analysis of these conditions within the context of Soviet Stalinism.

³ Alfred Barr, Director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, helped establish a trajectory of modernism that connected Moscow, Berlin, Paris and New York. The marginalisation of any British contribution to modernism was continued through Barr's identification of WW2 as a decisive rupture in the progressive evolution of a modernist visual language.

⁴ Angela Weight, of the Imperial War Museum, London, considering the contemporary distaste for propaganda and reviewing Bird and Rubenstein (1998) in *Print Quarterly Volume XVI number 3*. Of course, our contemporary unease in no way makes propaganda any less effective. The most recent general analysis of propaganda posters is by David Crowley in Timmers (1998).

⁵ George Orwell (1903-1950) was a writer, journalist and broadcaster. He was amongst the first of leftist intellectuals to recognise the particular danger of fascism and totalitarianism and to renounce pacifism. Orwell was conscious, in recollecting his schooldays, of the potent appeal of militarism and of its propagandistic deceptions. He identified these tendencies with the psychological consequences of militarism and imperialism in Britain. Elsewhere, the same tendencies were associated with reactionary policies of appeasement and the identification of "The Guilty Men."

⁶ Tom Eckersley (1914-1997) was one of Britain's foremost poster designers and was RoSPA's most active poster designer during WW2. He was a pioneer of graphic design education at the London College of Printing, (see Rennie and Triggs 2005.13). Eckersley was instrumental in establishing the first undergraduate teaching in graphic design at the London College of Printing. The contribution of Eckersley and the College to the visual explosions of youth, consumer and counter cultures that characterised the late 1960s in Britain is crucial.

⁷ Calder (1969) drew on the Mass Observation Archives to attest the radical and emancipatory experience of WW2 for ordinary people in Britain. Mass Observation was a social-anthropological project that drew on the subjective responses of ordinary people in an attempt to gauge the collective temper of British society beyond Westminster. The origins of MO draw on ideas from Surrealism, psychoanalysis and anthropology. Calder's argument came under general attack through Barnett's (1986) thesis of national decline as a consequence of WW2. The emancipatory consequences of WW2 identified by Calder have come under more specific attack in Summerfield (1984) and Rose (2003). The processes by which the narratives of WW2 were established, and subsequently contested, was first described by Calder (1991) and further analysed by Smith (2000) and Connelly (2004). The issue of landscape and community in relation to national identity, a theme evident in the ABCA posters, is discussed by Matless (1998) and Colls (2002). A further expression of the cultural anxiety implicit in the re-alignment of British society is described by the cinematic trajectory of Jack Warner whose career is recalled for "Dixon" rather than Joe Huggett.

⁸ Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) was a German writer and critic. He was amongst the first to recognise the radical potential of a cultural production aimed at the masses and its emancipatory role in a resistance to fascism.

⁹ Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was an Italian political journalist and radical. His writings include "The Prison Notebooks" from 1929-1935. Gramsci's political philosophy is especially interesting in its potential for explaining the processes by which cultural and intellectual activity can engage, radically, with the dominant class interests in advanced capitalist economies. The particular circumstances of Britain in WW2 give a perfect illustration of Gramsci's ideas concerning cultural production and collective consciousness as a "concrete political force." The limitations of economism in political science are revealed by the emergence of a powerful and alternative collective consciousness in the non-economic circumstances of WW2. The "external" forces operating within this context are those that, suggests Gramsci, are more likely to be counter-hegemonic. These forces explain, in part at least, the Labour victory of 1945.

¹⁰ The radical antecedents of Wintringham's citizen's militia are attested through the 2nd amendment. "That rifle hanging on the wall of the working class flat or labourer's cottage is the symbol of democracy," wrote George Orwell in 1940 (Purcell 2004.179). The circumstances of war may excuse this revolutionary fervour. Major General Charles Orde Wingate (1904-1944) was an iconoclastic military pioneer of mobile and undercover tactics. See Royle T (1998) **Orde Wingate - Irregular Officer** London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

¹¹ Corelli Barnett formally expressed the narrative of national decline in his “Pride and Fall” quartet. This narrative effectively identified the radicalism and social transformations of WW2 as a catastrophic aberration in national life. The attempt to recast the Labour victory as a betrayal of a Conservative national elite is another example of a continuing policy to present dominant conservative interests as “natural.”

¹² Ernest Bevin (1881-1951) pioneered a policy of human factor management in industrial relations. The policy contrasts sharply with the management and productivity concepts that dominate classical industrial and economic management. The American productive effort of WW2 rehabilitated American management expertise and established a new social class with increasing political influence. The emerging political theory of management was itemised by James Burnham in the USA. George Orwell was highly critical of Burnham’s ideas.

¹³ The “time-and-motion” studies of Frederick Taylor’s theory of scientific management rationalised the industrial workplace to maximise production and efficiency. The legacy of the theory has found expression in the developing anxieties of dystopian observation. Interestingly, Gramsci identified the Taylorised workplace as a potentially radicalising and emancipatory environment. Gramsci had reckoned without the malign expression of managerialist class interests anticipated by Burnham.

¹⁴ Cullen’s concept of “townscape” and his cinematic style of drawing (a kind of unravelled cubism or a dolly, or tracking, shot) provide a narrative of re-development that invites an active participation in the viewer. See Philp (1952) and Curtis (1985).