

The influence of constructivism

Philosophy



Determining the Influences of Soviet Propaganda on Contemporary Advertising and Promotion The purpose of this study is to look at the representation of political ideology on Soviet posters and the ways in which this style continues to influence today's advertising and popular culture. Though there are many forms of propaganda the forms of propaganda I intend to discuss in this essay are visual. The areas I aim to further my understanding of are the representation of political ideologies on today's contemporary popular culture.

I intend to investigate the idea that the Constructivists created the blueprint for modern consumerism and methods of advertising. I will investigate semiotics and Marxism in context with my study. In today's society of consumerist culture I think the topic of propaganda is interesting as I feel propaganda goes hand in hand with advertising. In today's society we are relentlessly saturated with loaded words and images, for this reason I wanted to investigate the origins of consumerism and today's advertising.

The purpose of Soviet propaganda was to create a new type of world; Lenin wanted to remodel the world under Socialist Realism and visual propaganda played an important part in this. Using propaganda to influence people's thoughts and actions by making them act on feelings rather than rational thought. I am going to investigate the idea that soviet Marxist ideology continues to influence To illustrate my idea I am going to discuss the semiotics of a Soviet poster designed by Alexander Rodchenko for Gosizdat (fig.) in 1924 the poster is a typical example of the stark, distinct and timeless design of the era. The poster features Lilia brick, a muse of Vladimir Mayakovsky and later Alexander Rodchenko. The poster was designed as

mass spread agitprop intended to spread the ideals of Socialist Realism with its vision of a widespread literate society. The simplified bold graphic is typical of the work produced during the Constructivist movement; the lack of decoration or of representational depiction of objects ties in with the movement's aims to keep the production purely informative and functional. Art that fails to become part of life will be catalogued in the museum of archaeological antiquities" (Rodchenko The poster features a woman, Lilia Brick, wearing a kerchief; clothes of the proletarian workers. This design and its message was calculated so that the proletarian of Russia would relate and engage with the message the image conveys. The woman is shouting "Books" inside a trapezoid shape, as most of the population were illiterate it was necessary for the image to be understood visually. Pictures indeed could be more potent than writing because they 'impose meaning at one stroke' but semiotic communication could extend beyond both the verbal and the visual" (Visual Culture, Richard Howels, 2003, page 100) Personally, I think this is a timeless image but I don't think it is very understandable without the text. It is an example of the constructivist's novel experiments with juxtaposition and photography. Contemporary posters and graphics are testament to the strength of design this age produced.

To further illustrate my idea I am going to discuss the semiotics of three advertising images and compare them with the Gosizdat (fig. 1) 1924 Lilia Brick poster from the Soviet era, which they are derivative of. The images I will discuss come from a broad spectrum in popular culture. I will look at an image from a political campaign, a mobile phone advert and a popular indie band. In order to sell and appeal, it is my opinion that these products and

ideologies have borrowed the connotations of power and directness that these Soviet posters command.

A humorous take on poster from the Barak Obama campaign featuring a dog in the place of Lilia Brick became a hit on the Internet. This suggests the poster has widespread appeal on masse. The poster was not affiliated with the campaign. An example of the Gosizdat posters influential use in advertising can be viewed in a Greek advert for Vodaphone mobiles (fig. 2), here the semiotics are not entirely saying the same thing as in the poster designed for Gosizdat (fig.), in this version it is depoliticised. The poster itself comes with an extra subtext thanks to its history; the viewer can take meaning from this as well as the intended message to advertise Vodaphone. " The art of the past no longer exists as it once did. Its authority is lost. In its place there is a language of images. What matters now is who uses that language for what purpose. " (Berger, 1972, p. 33) The anonymous woman in the poster is supposed to be shouting some sort of offer or Vodaphone; the anonymous woman in the poster is in black and white creating an interesting juxtaposition against the bright colour scheme. The image of the woman seems slightly more ' cut-out and pasted in' than the other example images. I feel this could be derivative of the Constructivists experimentation with photomontage. It is in a sense ironic that these posters are now being used to promote capitalism given that the political ideology at the time was to do with Communism.

A statement made by art critic Andrew Graham-Dixon backs this up; he says in BBC4 programme The Art of Russia: Smashing the Mould " this was totally new to use words like this and that is one of the paradoxes that Rodchenko

and Mayakovsky give to the West - the visual language of Capitalism... because they are inventing advertising" (M2 PRESSWIRE-10 November 2009- BBC: The Art Of Russia on BBC Four(C) 1994-2009 M2 COMMUNICATIONS RDATE: 09112009) The second example of the influence of the poster for Gosizdat (fig.) is in the album artwork for Franz Ferdinand's 2005 album You Could Have It So Much Better (fig. 3). The semiotics suggests the same as with the last two reworks. The band reworked two other Constructivist posters for two more of their singles artwork; This Fire 2004 (fig 4) is derivative of the El Lissitzky poster Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge 1919 and Take Me Out 2004 (fig. 5) is a rework of Aleksandr Rodchenko's One-Sixth Part the World Poster 1923 (fig 6).

The illustrator and graphic designer Shepard Fairey who created the affiliated Obama campaign posters deliberately took inspiration from Soviet posters when creating the Obama Hope (fig. 7) poster. The work of Neville Brody further backs up the ideology behind the movement and that today's designers draw much inspiration from Constructivism. Bold design and typography classic are time enduring. The semiotics of these images have connotations of empowerment. What matters is that design is a way of reflecting social undercurrents. The Futurists supported Mussolini, whereas Rodchenko was a socialist revolutionary. I draw a sense of dynamism and optimism with no intention of a political connotation. If you look at some of Rodchenko's paintings, you'll see he anticipated abstract expressionism by a good 50 or 60 years. It's so abstract, it's completely apolitical. Rodchenko was more about humanism and humanitarianism than communism. "- Neville Brody.

Another direct example of a Soviet posters influence on recent popular culture is the occurrence of Red Wedge in the 80's, this collective of musicians wanted to inspire young people to connect with the politics of the Labour government and inspire them to take charge of their political opinions. A lithographic poster inspired the name for this movement: Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge 1919 (fig. 8); a poster designed by Constructivist artist El Lissitzky. The Red Wedge' logo was also inspired by the poster and designed by graphic designer Neville Brody.

In the 1980s there was a revival of politically fuelled art, Neville Brody reworked the typography of the Soviet era in popular magazine The Face (fig. 9). Jenny Holzer's Protect Me from What I Want, 1998 (fig. 10) is sending out a political message in a very simplified way just as the Constructivists did. " Holzer writes messages which are not in " her" voice but in styles that mimic the anonymous voices of authority" government, education and advertising" (Toby Clark, Art and Propaganda, 1997, page 155)

The film created in the time of Soviet Russia was also influential.

It has had an affect on the film production and movie editing of today. The film Battleship Potemkin, a silent film directed in 1925 by Eisenstein is one of the first examples of evocative film editing and of propaganda in film, it served as a warning against rebellion toward the government, such was the influence of this film, people at the time of its release who viewed it believed these were real events. The films this influence is apparent in are The Untouchables and Brazil.

In my opinion the imagery of the Soviet era is incredibly iconic and it is not surprising that it has been borrowed time and time again. It seems evident

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from the examples in the text that everything from companies and politicians and popular culture will continue to borrow some of the imagery and iconography that the Constructivists strived to create, it is interesting that the artistic movements at the time of the Soviet era are not known as well as some. I have come to the conclusion that Soviet idealism has influenced much of today's culture though the message is obviously not the same.

I think the much of the advertising inspired by The Constructivists is clever as it can tap into what makes an image iconic. Companies that use the Russia propaganda style of imagery are looking to give their product cult status and iconography. With reworking of the Soviet and Constructivist style the designers are borrowing some of that power. In a world where we are saturate by advertisements the ones inspired by Constructivism are most successful in my opinion.