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Mind Bombs: Woodcuts, Satirical Prints, Flyers, Photomontage, Posters, and Murals

When we step into the print world of woodcuts, prints, flyers, and posters, and then still further into photomontage and murals, we are operating within another whole level of radical alternative media. Not that these technologies and formats have exclusively been used for such purposes. Like all media forms, their more common use has always been in the service of classes in power or immediate money-making ends, or both. But the use of these artistic techniques and genres for protest, and especially for the purposes of caricature and satire, has a rich and fascinating role in the history of social movements. Sometimes, these media were incorporated in books and newspapers, at other times, they stood by themselves as pictures or flyers. Their technology has mostly been easily accessible, as has their point. Along with graffiti, performance art, street theater, and song, among the forms we have already reviewed, they have lent the vitality of the imagination to alternative public spheres, have made those spheres exciting as well as informative, and have sent public conversation flying.

Here, I have cast them together as mind bombs because they aimed to make a potent statement in one short space and thereby to lodge themselves in people's conscious memories, although of course they were reproduced, sometimes on a mass scale. And I am using the metaphor *bomb*, as I said in the Introduction to Part II, to signify the unanticipated disruption of settled patterns of thought, not the obliteration of thinking. On the other hand, it would be an error to assume all these artworks expressed unalloyedly constructive oppositional passions. They illustrate the *mestizaje* of the popular and the oppositional, even of the hegemonic, a hybrid quality argued in Part I to be characteristic of many if not most radical media.

- Woodcuts and political critique, from Albrecht Dürer to Käthe Kollwitz
- French political cartooning—Honoré Daumier
- Satirical prints in 18th- and 19th-century Britain—William Hogarth, James Gillray, George Cruikshank
- Political satire in 19th- and 20th-century Germany—*Kladderadatsch*, *Simplicissimus*, *Der Wahre Jakob*, and Georg Grosz
- Photomontage as radical media—John Heartfield
- The political poster and the *dazibao*
- Political murals—Chile's Popular Unity period, the "Great Wall" of Los Angeles, the Northern Ireland "troubles" 1969-1999

WOODCUTS AND POLITICS

We will begin with one of the very cheapest and most accessible technologies for reproducing images: the woodcuts. One of the earliest instances of their deployment as radical media was in Germany in the aftermath of the brutal suppression of rebelling farmers—supported by Martin Luther—during the 1515-1525 Peasant Wars. Dürer, Deutsch, the Petrarch Master, Tirol, and Lucas Cranach the Elder were among those who used the medium to denounce the repression (Philippe, 1982, pp. 12, 83).

Wood-engraving would continue to have its place right up to the early 20th century, when Käthe Kollwitz's (1867-1945) extraordinary talents permitted the world of official art to acknowledge the medium

as art as well as merely communication. She, indeed, made an early “conscious choice to work with graphics because of their accessibility” (Lippard, 1981, p. viii). Her first woodcuts date from 1919 in the traumatic aftermath of the war. She wrote in 1916 that “genius can probably run on ahead and seek new ways. But the good artists who follow on after genius—and I count myself among these—love to restore the lost connection once more” (cited in Lippard, 1981, p. vi). This is an insight of great interest for analyzing radical alternative media. Some commentators tend to wish to choose between accessibility and diffusion as touchstones of radical communication media, rather than including originality. Kollwitz’s observation suggests that a longer time frame makes more sense, a time frame in which both types of talent make complementary contributions.

Kollwitz first came to a certain notoriety in 1898 when a work of hers on a famous 19th century weavers’ strike was awarded the gold medal at the Great Berlin Art Exhibit, only for the honor to be vetoed by the Kaiser. Her most active period, however, especially in woodcuts, was in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1929, she was listed in a public poll as one of the three German artists who best expressed workers’ aspirations. Her works dealt with the situation of women, inflation, unemployment, abortion, gay rights, and peace issues. She was always a pacifist but never a Marxist. Unlike some radical media such as *Simplicissimus*, “Kollwitz managed to portray victims in a manner that endowed them with strength” (Lippard, 1981, p. ix).

A paradox that requires comment is that some of her works were used by the Nazis, without attribution, for their propaganda purposes. For several decades, she was also the most popular foreign artist in the Chinese Communist regime. This raises complicated questions about imagery and its uses. For someone like photomontagist John Heartfield, to seize an image and pitchfork it into a totally new set of related images to make a particular point raises no real problems regarding the continued meaning of the original. But the use of imagery designed and generally interpreted as liberating to control seems acutely paradoxical.

One basic question is why both these regimes felt inclined to use her work. A part of the answer assuredly lies in their wish to use a certain level of radical populism, a show of being in favor of everyday people, shoring up their own political power. There is an appeal in dictatorship, sadly, one it would be pleasanter to skate over, but which helps to

explain how they function. Brutal and violent as such regimes are, their repression is often targeted, and their propaganda to the majority promises stability, direction, and national independence—even may offer new affluence for a time. Mussolini used to attack “the plutocrats” Hitler and Goebbels isolated the Jewish people for demonization to avenge Germany’s humiliation; Idi Amin did the same with Ugandan Asians; Mao signaled an end to warlords and foreign interventions; the murderous Chilean Pinochet regime and the even more murderous 1976-1982 Argentinean military junta promised political and economic stability: Dictatorships do not only work by means of terror.

A further question is what these manipulations of her work meant to German or Chinese publics unaware that her work had been forced into service by their regimes. Yet, just because a propaganda effort tries to harness imagery to its ends does not automatically guarantee that perspectives and ideas will be sparked that mirror those ends. The message of repressive political regimes is that they alone can solve people’s problems—but if the public resonates with the depiction of the problem and not the proffered solution, then the message effectively fails. Also, undoubtedly, the more basic the image, the easier it is for a variety of forces to invest it with different meanings.

Prints, especially satirical prints, were immensely popular at various junctures in the 18th and 19th centuries.¹ They were important before the era of mass literacy, in that the words were often few, the pictures graphic and easily recognizable lampoons² of well-known public figures, and the prints were displayed in city store windows where passers-by could stop and examine them. Sometimes, gales of laughter would emanate from the crowds standing around peering at a new print just displayed. Their store window display was an important balance to their relatively high price, so that whereas owning one was expensive, viewing one cost nothing.

French governments, in particular, were made extremely nervous by them. The minister of trade in 1835 denounced them, saying “there is nothing more dangerous, gentlemen, than these infamous caricatures, these seditious designs [which] produce the most deadly effect” and a government deputy in 1822 warned that “as soon as they are exhibited in public, they are instantly viewed by thousands of spectators and the disturbance has taken place before the magistrate has had time to repress it” (Goldstein, 1989, pp. 1, 3). Even in 1880, another deputy is quoted as saying,

A drawing strikes the sight of passers-by, addresses itself to all ages and both sexes, startles not only the mind but the eyes. It is a means of speaking even to the illiterate, of stirring up passions, without reasoning, without discourse. (Goldstein, 1989, pp. 4-5)

We need not share the last speaker's clear contempt for most of his fellow citizens to recognize that, nonetheless, he had understood the print's impact. For these reasons, successive French governments banned caricature of political figures in 1820-1830, 1835-1848, 1852-1870, and 1871-1881, even restoring the ban during World War I (Goldstein 1989, p. vii). The press, for most of that period, was not systematically censored, only these lethal drawings.³

DAUMIER AND POLITICAL CARTOONS

Probably the most famous were by cartoonist Honoré Daumier (1808-1879), an immensely versatile artist who, in his lifetime, created about 4,000 lithographs, along with wood engravings, oils, watercolors, black chalk drawings, even clay models. He contributed work especially to *Le Charivari*, a daily, and to the weekly *La Caricature*. His first real political campaign as a cartoonist was against King Louis-Philippe; for this, he was fined and jailed in 1830. In 1832, with his father's sickness, he became sole provider for his parents and two sisters. His skills as caricaturist then proved vital for the family income: "What earned him his daily bread in the 1830s and 1840s was his power to draw cartoons that could be instantly understood by everyone, whether their targets were political or social" (Laughton, 1996, p. 11).

Indeed, much of his work was social. He cartooned lawyers very effectively but also did many portraits of regular working class life from the Île St. Louis, then a mixed-class neighborhood in which he lived. A dispiriting feature of his work, however, was that he frequently lampooned women, should they venture to be assertive, with socialist women and women writers as cases in point (Ramus, 1978, p. xv). As is amply evident from the history of radical alternative communication, constructing a binary drama in which such media or media activists are unequivocal heroes does violence to both history and common sense. The scenario was, and is, mixed.

SATIRICAL PRINTS IN BRITAIN

Although the art of caricature⁴ began in Italy and was associated with such luminaries as the multitalented Bernini, it was in England that, as Diana Donald (1996) has proposed, artists "shaped the budding naturalism and earthy exuberance of the medium" (p. 1).⁵ This was connected partly with the relatively freer political restraints during much of the 18th century in Britain as compared to the exceptionally tight reins on political expression in continental Europe. The key figure in caricature's introduction and popularization was William Hogarth (1697-1764), who habitually fused together classical motifs and popular lore and thus expanded the audience for the medium. In this manner, he paved the way for his successors James Gillray (1757-1815), George Cruikshank (1792-1878), and others.⁶

In Britain, these prints were typically issued on single sheets, not within newspapers:

Graphic satire was . . . highly visible. Distributed to overflowing print shops and boisterous coffee houses, pinned up in cluttered street windows, scattered across crowded shop counters and coffee tables, and then passed from hand to hand, or hung and framed in glass, or pasted in folios bulging with other graphic images—the satiric print was . . . a ubiquitous feature of . . . urban life. (Hallett, 1999, p. 1)

Prints were not only diffused widely in London. There is evidence that they were frequently purchased in the provinces by mail order, where their arrival represented the latest, "hottest" news from the big city, an occasion to invite gentry neighbors over to join in admiring the latest acquisition. They traveled around, too, carried by the large floating population that spent part of the year in the metropolis and part of the year in the countryside. There were also a few provincial print shops. Reduced versions of particular prints turned up on handkerchiefs, fans, cards, and even playing cards, on ceramics and in woodcut versions, the latter now nearly all lost. Their themes were recycled in the large-format broadsides and in street ballads, and pirated copies were common. Furthermore, satirical prints had an international circulation, being very popular in other European countries because of their frequently merciless attacks on royalty. Thus, copies reached as far as Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Spain.

It would be an exaggeration to term them mass media. Not until the diffusion of wood-engraved prints in the next century, especially in the period following the Peterloo massacre⁷ of 1819, would this medium truly become a mass phenomenon. Nonetheless, their impact needs to be judged within the constraints of the time. Capital cities such as Paris and London, then even more than now, were a world apart. Short of armed insurrection, governments were much more concerned with metropolitan reactions, both from disaffected sectors of the elite and from what the elite thought of as the mob, than with sentiment out in the provinces. They were also often more alarmed by the prospect of successful propaganda against their rule than by plots to overthrow them. Anything that bridged the cultural gap between the elite and the more general city public, as many of these prints succeeded in doing, was viewed as potential dynamite, not only in France, as we have seen, but also in Britain. Some of the more sophisticated prints would not have overcome that cultural gap, but many did.

There are absorbing features to consider in these satirical "squibs" and "drolls" (terms then in use) and the way they developed over time. Among them is the transition from emblematic and often cryptic depictions of those lampooned to allusion and parody, Gillray having been a major architect of this shift. From Hogarth onward, the targets of satire had included the mores of high society and low society, as well as the shenanigans of the royals. As the 18th century continued, a more and more popular target was the commercialization of society, expressed in the airs and graces and decadence of the rich (although, interestingly, wealth as such was not a target). At the same time, the caricature became "urbane and self-conscious . . . not so much an affront to high culture as a playfully antithetical form which confirmed its hegemony" (Donald, 1996, p. 74).

This observation of Donald's (1996) should give us pause. Whether the prints did, in fact, simply confirm high culture's hegemony or whether their impact was more mixed is a very difficult judgment to make, but an important question to consider. For example, attacks on King George III were at least as rife in British prints as they were in the 13 American colonies during the 1770s and thereafter. One cited by Donald, for example, shows someone farting at the king's picture (p. 162).

Yet, on the other hand, it was common to see patronizing depictions of the Scots and the Irish, very heavy-handed satires on the supposed French and Italian addiction to fashion, invitations to gasp in scandal at

what was thus presented as the feminization of male manners in those nations, and the consequent risk of emasculating English men miserably ensnared in the vogues of contemporary fashion. In parallel, any signs of women's assertiveness were trenchantly attacked, such as the comportment of those women who ran the Parisian salons in the decades before the French Revolution. Also, in those instances where aristocratic license was under fire (usually as a way of ridiculing aristocratic authority), aristocratic women's sexual improprieties were much more viciously castigated than men's. Hallett (1999) has proposed, in an intriguing intertextual analysis of prints as a whole in Hogarth's era, that the more radical satiric strategies began as challenges to the London elite's earnest pretension to define itself as "polite" society, and the prints that celebrated that claim ended by being absorbed into that project, merely registering discrepant features of London's increasingly commercialized life rather than critiquing it root and branch.

A further mixed feature of political printmaking in Britain later in the century was that with the coming of the American and French Revolutions and the consequent turbulent political mood in London, the prints of the 1790s barely reflected the widespread street protests and agitation which caught up a wide assortment of artists, printers, pamphleteers, dissident ministers, and political activists, such as William Blake, Thomas Spence, Robert Wedderburn ("the Devil's Engineer"), and Thomas Evans (McCalman, 1988; Thompson, 1993; Wood, 1994). This near silence may partly or even mainly be explained by the heavy penalties, especially harsh during the years 1795-1803, for public expression of pro-Revolution sentiment. Because the individuals and their circles conducted much of their political activity in tavern debating clubs, the groups involved were small enough to make it hard for the many spies the government put into service to escape detection. By contrast, prints had to be seen, had to be paid for, and their sources, both printers and artists, could easily be identified.⁸ This was especially true for the most fashionable print shops.⁹ The cheaper shops, however, typically produced pamphlets and woodcuts rather than prints. The conclusion is also plausible that the more fashionable the print shop and its stable of artists and journeymen, the more cautious its own radicalism, in part because of its greater proximity to the power structure.¹⁰

Interpreting the situation during these successive decades demands considerable subtlety, because the satirical print depictions of the British crowd during the 1790s also generally emphasized its free-

dom and independence, its collective vitality, often drawing contrasts with the more subjugated publics of continental Europe. John Bull, already a symbol of the British public, was repeatedly portrayed by both Gillray and Cruikshank at this time as the target of energetic propaganda from those for and those against the French Revolution and as a force that "like Aristophanes' Demos is ever ready to destroy his creators" (Donald, 1996, p. 162). Given the French Revolution's pendulum lurch from the establishment of democratic governance to the Terror, the sources of this imagery are understandable; yet, was not the depiction of the tough John Bull a little more than simply flattery?

Thus, an analysis of these radical alternative media in Britain during this period illustrates, as a number of cases we have examined also do, the ambiguity and negativity of their contents, sitting cheek by jowl with their more insurgent messages. Not least, the definition of what constituted radical at that time needs bearing in mind throughout. Patricia Anderson (1991) has rightly emphasized how "working people's taste embraced every level of cultural expression: literary, lurid, radical, religious, respectable, morbid, moralistic, serious, sensational, salacious, educational, escapist" (p. 180). Similarly, McCalman (1988), in line with Bakhtin and the political pornography we noted in Chapter 13, argues that "humour, escapism, sex, profit, conviviality, entertainment and saturnalia should be admitted to the popular radical tradition, along with the sober, strenuous, and heroic aspects which are more customarily described" (p. 234).¹¹

POLITICAL SATIRE IN GERMANY

Germany's radical media tradition offers some interesting examples of satire and caricature in the later 19th and into the 20th century, further elements in the alternative political culture already mentioned in the discussion of labor movement songs. Indeed, one could almost draw a line from the newspapers *Kladderadatsch*, *Simplicissimus*, and *Der Wahre Jakob*¹² through to Expressionism, Berlin dada, Georg Grosz, the pioneer photomontagist John Heartfield, and—to one side—Käthe Kollwitz, all of whose work had tremendous influence on other political graphic art all over the world throughout the 20th century (see Allen, 1984; Lewis, 1971; Hinz, 1981; Evans, 1992; De Micheli, 1978). However, at no point

was this a simple success story. There were flaws, sometimes severe and on occasion abysmal, in most of these radical media.

Kladderadatsch had sales of 50,000 in 1890, *Simplicissimus* 86,000 as of 1908, and *Der Wahre Jakob* toward 250,000 in the latter year, rising to nearly 400,000 by 1912 (Allen, 1984, p. 3; Rothe, 1977, p. xiv). Copies also passed through quite a number of hands. The genre had international influence as well,¹³ known as *Witzblätter*, usually translated as "comic papers," except that *Witz*, like *wit*, has a sharper, more attacking sense than the word *comic*. The glaring contradictions in Germany in that era were a heavenly gift for satirists and cartoonists: a dynamic industrial sector that every year generated a larger and more organized labor movement, juxtaposed with the pitiful idiocies of the semifeudal Kaiser regime. "Emperor jokes" (*Kaiserwitz*) were part of these newspapers' stock in trade. Potential penalties, however, included fines, imprisonment, exile, and loss of one's livelihood.

Kladderadatsch used language, including satirical verse, *Simplicissimus*, cartoons as well. *Kladderadatsch* focused on the royal court's lackeys and their political antics, whereas *Simplicissimus* included the impact of those antics on the working classes. An example of the former's approach is the description of an onlooker rushing forward to salvage a cigarette butt from the horse manure into which the Kaiser had discarded it, and "gladly" licking it clean. An example of the latter is one cartoon's depiction of savage military discipline, a soldier lying nearly dead on the parade ground from his flogging.¹⁴

Kladderadatsch's critiques, however, were within tighter bounds than *Simplicissimus*. The paper was anti-labor union, thought German colonialist adventures were merely an error of political judgment, and evinced increasing distaste for new artistic trends. *Simplicissimus*, by contrast, took pains to stay on the artistic cutting edge and campaigned for a coalition between centrist and labor political forces. However, its cartoons tended to present workers as downtrodden, half-starved, illiterate victims deserving of pity rather than solidarity. Despite its lampooning of traditionalist patriarchy, it still portrayed British suffragists "with undisguised disapproval" and educated women "as a strange, slightly humorous phenomenon" (Allen, 1984, pp. 168, 177). It depicted Balkan peoples in ethnically disparaging terms and was even prone, despite its several leading Jewish staff writers, to represent Jews as themselves responsible for sparking anti-Semitism. Ironically, the paper was often perceived as "typically Jewish" because of its subversive critiques

of religion and the established order (Allen, 1984, pp. 131-132, 188-194, 215-216).

Came the First World War, however, and both papers doughtily swung behind the Kaiser. During the postwar Social-Democratic regime, many traditional targets were missing, and the writing seemed to lose its bite. When Hitler came to power, he was initially defined by both papers as a passing fad, and then, both actually swung into line behind the Nazi regime. These terrible conclusions to their history are important to bear in mind, for they illustrate more than simply the corruptibility of journalists or the fear inspired by the Nazis. They also remind us how satirical humor can become its own pure rationale.

A different example of the achievements and the limits of satire is the immensely influential political artist George Grosz (1893-1959), a great admirer of Hogarth, Goya, and Daumier, who often said he had no trust in or affection for the general public. He simply shared a hatred of their common enemy, the bourgeoisie, and in particular of militarism (Lewis, 1971, p. 67). His fierce paintings of the rapacity of the German capitalist class and his depictions of the blood-drenched heartlessness of the country's military caste during the First World War occupied a middle ground between the roles of attacking journalist and attacking artist. His Berlin dada context constituted a fertile location for this fusion of roles. He illustrated a substantial number of books printed by Berlin's newly founded Malik Verlag publishing company, set up as an independent leftist venture without any party sponsorship. Of 36 books issued by the firm in from 1919 to 1921, 18 were illustrated by Grosz, three consisting of his portfolios. Over the next 10 years, eight books of his own artwork would be published by Malik Verlag.

Unlike Daumier, who ridiculed to produce ironic humor, Grosz produced what Beth Irwin Lewis (1971) has called "cruel, painful, and biting derision [of] the essential naked ugliness and sad reality of men" (p. 122). Exposés of official hypocrisy and lies were his forte, yet, like *Simplicissimus*, he never depicted any opposition. He mostly portrayed workers as resigned to their lot. Thus he never really went beyond his searing visual invective directed at brutal generals and money-obsessed businessmen, some of whose representations found their way into cartoons and illustrations around the world throughout the 20th century.¹⁵ From the mid-1920s onward, he became very famous and his work very popular in Germany, but his drawings were increasingly devoid of any political edge.

Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung

John Heartfield (1891-1968) and Georg Grosz initially worked very closely together. Both were involved with Malik Verlag, which had been started by Wieland Herzfelde¹⁶ in part to publish Grosz's drawings. Heartfield and Grosz had already been involved in a series of radical magazine projects, spurred by the 1919 murders of Marxist leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.¹⁷ Their first magazine, *Jederman* (Everyman), instantly banned after the first issue, set out "to drag all that the Germans have loved up till now into the mud and to expose all the German ideals to fresh air" (cited in Lewis, 1971, p. 70). Other magazines followed, some also banned, but the one for which Heartfield is particularly and justly famous is the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* (Workers' Illustrated Newspaper). In the 1930s, through Hitler's accession to power in 1933, it sold about half a million copies weekly. It then was forced to move to Prague, where many fewer could be sold, and then again to Paris in 1938, following the Nazi seizure of Czechoslovakia. Heartfield subsequently crossed the English Channel and placed his services at the disposal of anti-Nazi propaganda efforts there.

HEARTFIELD AND PHOTOMONTAGE

His contribution was in photomontage. Within the Soviet Union in its earliest years, and within Germany itself, this technique of pasting together excerpts from still photographs had already begun, but Heartfield took it to a new level. One of the practical challenges pushing him in this direction was that the Workers' Photography movement, a German Communist Party-led effort to put communication technology in public hands, had achieved rather patchy results.¹⁸ Ideally, the best photos taken by the workers themselves would have appeared in *AIZ*, or in a previous magazine, *Der Knüppel* (The Cudgel), which Heartfield and Grosz edited from 1923 to 1927. However, in the absence of sufficient material of quality, Heartfield took to using pieces out of mainstream photos, placed together in a montage, to rework into socialist meanings and critiques (compare the situationists' notion of *détournement*, and culture-jamming).¹⁹

One of his best-known montages shows Hitler as a puppet in the hands of top industrialist Thyssen. It exactly copied a drawing by Grosz of postwar chancellor Ebert (under whose authority Liebknecht and Luxemburg were murdered) in the hands of Stinnes, yet another tycoon.

But the use of the photographs, especially, perhaps, given the relative newness of photography at that time, gave a new twist to the image, a new force probably drawn in significant measure from the public's powerfully ingrained perceptions of realism. Heartfield also created montages across a double-page spread and sequences of montages from page to page. He also colored parts of his montages for heightened effect. His works often drew on fairy tales, proverbs, and famous or notorious sayings by powerful figures of his day.

Grosz's international influence since then on political poster art has been extraordinary. In Germany, one of his most brilliant followers in the 1970s and 1980s was Klaus Staeck (1985). The poster art of ACT-UP in the period 1987-1992 owed much to Heartfield's work (Crimp & Rolston, 1990). Just as Grosz drew on Hogarth, Goya, and Daumier, so, too, was he a source of inspiration along with them for British print caricaturists such as Ronald Searle and Steve Bell and their U.S. counterparts such as Al Hirschfeld, David Levine, Sue Coe, and Sara Schwartz (Heller & Anderson, 1992, pp. 40-52, 100-102, 104, 149). Film and television animation equally owes a massive debt to these forebears. The "claymation" techniques developed by Britain's Roger Law and Peter Fluck in the 1980s TV satire *Spitting Image* and *Kukly* (dolls), a Russian TV satire program modeled on the British series, created brilliant, splendidly pungent versions of these earlier traditions.

POLITICAL POSTERS AND MURALS

Posters effectively date as a mass medium from the latter part of the 19th century. From the outset, they have often been used as radical media and have been quite intensively analyzed (cf. Gallo, 1974; Paret, Lewis, & Paret, 1992; Philippe, 1982; Quintavalle, 1974). A particular example of radical poster use that demands commentary is the *dazibao*, usually translated "big-character posters," in China in the period 1978-1979 (Chen, 1982; Sheng, 1990; Widor, 1981). In this saga, a mixture of political forces, some of them highly reactionary, is evident once again, confirming the importance of making careful distinctions when analyzing radical media.

China's Dazibao

Dazibao had been a notable feature of revolutionary mass communication in China for much of the 20th century. They could be anonymous—very wise in view of likely punishment—had no graphics, and were cheap, quickly assembled, and effective. The recent background to the *dazibao* of 1978-1979 was the Cultural Revolution (1964-1976), in which Mao Zedong was struggling to regain his personal ascendancy. For a while, he incited the teenage generation in revolt against his enemies in the Communist Party leadership. They dutifully posted masses of *dazibao*, denouncing the "capitalist-roaders." Mao even had the constitution amended in 1966, in part to legitimize the posting of *dazibao*, but then to his cronies' chagrin, the posters came to be used intensively against them in 1976 during a pivotal mass demonstration in Tien An-Men Square.²⁰ That demonstration was drowned in blood but left an indelible imprint in people's minds in Beijing.

Two years later, in the winter of 1978, the government proclaimed that the 1976 demonstration should not have been repressed, and imprisoned demonstrators were freed. The following day, a 200-yard brick wall in Xidan to the west of Tien An-Men Square became the location to post a new wave of *dazibao* critiquing many aspects of contemporary Chinese life, even Mao's legacy, and soon thereafter his successor, Deng Xiaoping. It quickly became known as the Democracy Wall²¹ and attracted many readers as well as open-air public discussions and speeches. Some of these *dazibao* were very long, consisting of numerous sheets, equivalent to a very lengthy journal article or even a small book, such as perhaps the most famous of them all, Wei Jing-sheng's²² call for democracy. One very popular *dazibao*, however, was extremely short, a poem consisting of a single character for the word *Net*, which condensed into this one image the sense of being hemmed in at all points and the frustration deeply felt by young Chinese in particular.

These new *dazibao* quickly spread to other urban centers in China as well and simultaneously prompted a flood of unofficial journals and non-poster publications, some of them campus-based. Chen (1982), who counted over 130 such publications, also notes,

It was a fresh start, heartily embraced. The excess of demand over supply, proof of the journals' popularity, was too striking to be ignored by

the authorities. Though they were inferior to the official journals by being mimeographed, often illegible and roughly bound with poor editing and often poor writing, nevertheless their ample variety of content, bold approaches to sensitive subjects and, most of all, prompt response to current events and to readers' demands outweighed this. (pp. 1, 65)

When we examine the history of *samizdat* in the Soviet bloc in Chapter 22, we shall see a similar pattern of media content far outweighing the technical deficiencies of its production.²³ On the other hand, Soviet *samizdat* was clandestinely circulated, and its writers, at least of the secular material, were typically from the top intelligentsia, whereas many *dazibao* contributors were from humbler backgrounds. A certain parallel definitely exists, however, with the role of certain official Soviet newspapers as voices for reform factions in the Soviet leadership, both in the period 1956-1964 and later, during the second half of the 1980s.²⁴ Deng's intention in permitting these *dazibao* and the free journals was, like Mao's, to try to dislodge his political opponents. When the free expression of opinion overflowed the bounds he had set for it, he promptly banned the journals,²⁵ imprisoned many media activists, and had the constitutional right to publish *dazibao* deleted—rather in the same way that Mao banished his teenage battalions from the cities once they had served his purpose (although this was done ostensibly so they could “learn from” the farmers in the remote countryside).

As Sheng (1990, p. 235) comments, the 20th-century history of *dazibao* is in significant measure the history of struggle in China over the public sphere and for free speech.

Muralists in Chile

Political murals effectively present a spectrum from something fairly close to graffiti through permanent artworks, such as those by Mexican muralists Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros.²⁶ Among many interesting examples of murals as radical alternative media, Kunzle (1983) vividly describes the work of the Ramona Parra²⁷ brigades in Chile through the murderous U.S.-backed coup of September 1973. Composed mostly of teenagers, some in their very early teens, these brigades produced work that was strictly collective for the most part. In the run-up to the 1970 elections at which the socialist coalition won a plurality,

they worked in groups of 10 to 12, largely at night and at high speed to avoid police reprisals or clashes with muralists from conservative political parties. Part of what they did was simply fighting for communicative space with the other parties, often painting out and then over each others' slogans. Public sphere struggle yet again.

After the Popular Unity coalition won, its advocates no longer needed to worry about the police, but the war of the walls continued. They only used city walls without further ado, however, always taking care in villages to request local permission. They did not paint over or deface billboards advertising U.S. products, and they entirely avoided the walls of churches and schools. Some of their work continued to be short slogans or statements, one of the most popular being that of the internationally renowned Chilean poet Pablo Neruda in response to the election victory, *Me has dado la patria como un nacimiento* (You have given me the fatherland like a quickening into life²⁸). Other work, such as the 10-foot-high by 400-foot-wide Rio Mapocho mural in the center of Santiago, which took 30 people 15 days to complete and which traced the modern history of Chile, was awash with symbolic representations, a number drawn from Siqueiros, Rivera, Picasso, and pre-Columbian artistic sources. At their height, up to 150 Ramona Parra brigades were in operation.

The Great Wall of Los Angeles

Thus, just as Russian icons and religious painting elsewhere were often dedicated to communicating religious truths to an unlettered public, so the painting of murals was a form of accessible political communication but especially a reclamation of social truths typically denied in hegemonic discourse.²⁹

Baca, Neumaier, and Angelo (1985) describe the origins and making of the Great Wall of Los Angeles, a mural that runs for over a third of a mile along the concrete-lined former path of the Los Angeles River. The most extensive example of the murals, which became a very visible part of the cityscape from the early 1970s onward (especially in East Los Angeles, historically a Chicano zone), the Great Wall sought to portray the many cultural strands that made and continue to make the city what it is: Chicanos, Oklahoma Dust Bowl refugees in the 1930s, African Americans, Koreans, Japanese Americans interned during World War II, and many more.

For this mural, as for the Chilean examples cited and for many other political murals, collective labor, not only in execution but also in conceptualization and design, is a major hallmark of their production process. At the same time, these accounts emphasize the division of labor involved in collective activity. Kunzle (1983) notes the central role of the gifts of the *trazador* tracing out the initial letters 8 to 10 feet high, which will then be filled in by others, whereas Baca and her colleagues (1985) talk about "orchestrating people's best skills, using their better abilities, putting them together where they match; it's geometric in proportion; it multiplies the power that you have by taking the best" (p. 73).

Murals in Irish History

Rolston (1991) provides an absorbing account of three kinds of political murals in the struggle over the public sphere in Northern Ireland.³⁰ The traditional Loyalist Protestant murals that had been in place for many decades defensively rehearsed certain tenets of that version of Irish history, such as King William's liberation of Ireland from the threat of papal domination in 1690.³¹ Catholic Nationalist murals were a much later development, at their height in 1980-1982. Unlike their Loyalist counterparts, they typically addressed immediate issues, particularly the agonizing deaths of Bobby Sands and nine other political hunger strikers in 1981-1982, as a result of Prime Minister Thatcher's refusal to respond to their demand for political rather than criminal prisoner status.³² There was a huge mobilization to support the hunger strikers, and the murals were integrally part of that campaign, often put up at very high speed to be timely. A number were paint-bombed by Loyalists or British soldiers but then quickly repainted. (The third type of mural was sponsored by the British government, although without much effect, as one tactic in its attempt to normalize local political life in Northern Ireland.)

Some of the insurrectionary nationalist murals were in Irish; some fused religious themes with political ones, such as the figure of Jesus watching over a political prisoner in solitary confinement; some made links to Palestinian and anti-apartheid struggles; some portrayed past and present heroes of the nationalist movement; some depicted armed guerrillas in action; and some outlined the history of British repression in Ireland. In the period after the hunger strikes, the political party, Sinn Féin, took more control over which murals were painted, and at that

point, the predominant theme became armed struggle against the British. Other issues, such as women's community activism or prison conditions in general, took a back seat. The Provisional Irish Republican Army's (IRA's) long obsession with an elitist militarism seemed to be winning out against the new forms of community activism simultaneously being developed at that time by Sinn Féin, its political wing. By the mid-1980s, the nationalist mural movement had subsided, perhaps a victim of struggles within the wider political movement.

Muralists and other public artists, like the theater activists cited earlier, redefine artwork audiences; instead of addressing a tiny knot of fellow artists, critics, and curators, they reclaim the streets, the public realm, an interactive, counterhegemonic sphere:

It is not art for public spaces [*as such*], but art addressing public issues. This art is dependent upon a real and substantive interaction with members of the public, usually representing a particular constituency, but not one that comes to art because of an identification or connection with the art world. Such work must reach those for whom the art's subject is a critical life issue. This work deals with audience first: the artist brings individuals into the process from the start, thus redefining the relationship between artist and audience, audience and the work of art . . . [It] recognizes that art is made for audiences, not for institutions of art. (Jacob, 1995, p. 54)³³

Summary: We have noted throughout how the pungency of all these mind-bomb examples is frequently meshed with their mixed and contested politics. The alternative public sphere is not a secluded convent in which only the purest of radical thoughts circulates. These examples also quite often contain more levels of meaning than one would suppose, perhaps in significant measure because of their compression of so much into so little. At the same time, they do provide suggestive evidence for the argument I have made earlier, that—like some other forms of radical communication we have examined—their particular contribution within and at the edges of social movements and alternative public spheres is on the level of conscious memory, as distinct from more ongoing media, which tend to feed unconscious memory in the form of definitions and frameworks. This very combination, as Breberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994) more generally argue, has had a great deal to do with the power of radical media.