

A Visual Analysis of German Propaganda Imagery

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In the time of World War One the world saw a huge amount of propaganda imagery arise. Governments will of course need to get the people to on their side and the most powerful tool they have is effective imagery. Artists at the time were an invaluable resource, so much in fact that Lucien Bernhard was actually called away from fighting in the trenches to lead the German poster effort. (Cabarga 18) Most posters used a variety of tactics from fear to nationalistic imagery to effectively create a mood, which would make the nation's citizen's help support, the war effort. A large number of posters were produced just to create an overall atmosphere in the cities to remind the citizen's the union was at war. (Stanely 17) What elements are present in some of the more successful posters of that time and why do they manage to capture the audience's eye? Turn to German propaganda then, where an art revolution was already under way and would continue strong till the 1930s.



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An excellent example of political propaganda through posters is Lucien Bernhard's *DAS ist der Weg zum Frieden – die Feinde wollen es so! Darum zeichne KRIEGSANLEIHE* (THAT is the way to peace- the enemy wishes it so! So give to the WAR LOAN!) This poster was done in 1917 during World War I and successfully imitates a medieval woodcut using an armored fist as the imagery. This poster very effectively communicates the strength that Germany has behind it. It pulls the viewer's eye downward at a strong 45-degree angle. The fist is iron tight, which creates a lot of strength within the image and thus implies the country can handle itself. The armor is also very pointed which again adds to the notion of strength in the German union. The fist meets right up with the s in the word *das* that creates a lot of tension within the piece. The first and last words are far larger than the rest and are orange which helps to add emphasis to the beginning and ending of the phrase. The text alignment and the image come together to create strong negative spaces that push the reader's eye down and back through the image, reinforcing the German's message of strength.


The poster is set up in such a way to strongly give the suggestion of the German tradition. The typeface used in the poster is an Gothic Old Style that is a traditional ordinate German style. (Cabarga 17) The imagery itself is very reminiscent of German woodcuts. This was more than likely a conscious decision on Bernhard's behalf as many propaganda posters all over the world from this time period use heavy doses of nationalism in them. For instance Howard Chandler Christy's *Fight or Buy Bonds* from that time period attempts to create a sense of nationalism through dramatic use of America's flag. It differs from Bernhard's poster with its sweeping use of romantic imagery. Bernhard's solution for the need for nationalistic imagery is very unique in that it conveys the notion to the viewer without throwing a flag in the reader's face.



Lucien Bernhard's *DAS ist der Weg zum Frieden – die Feinde wollen es so! Darum zeichne KRIEGSANLEIHE*, Germany 1917



Howard Chandler Christy's *Fight or Buy Bonds*, USA 1914-1918

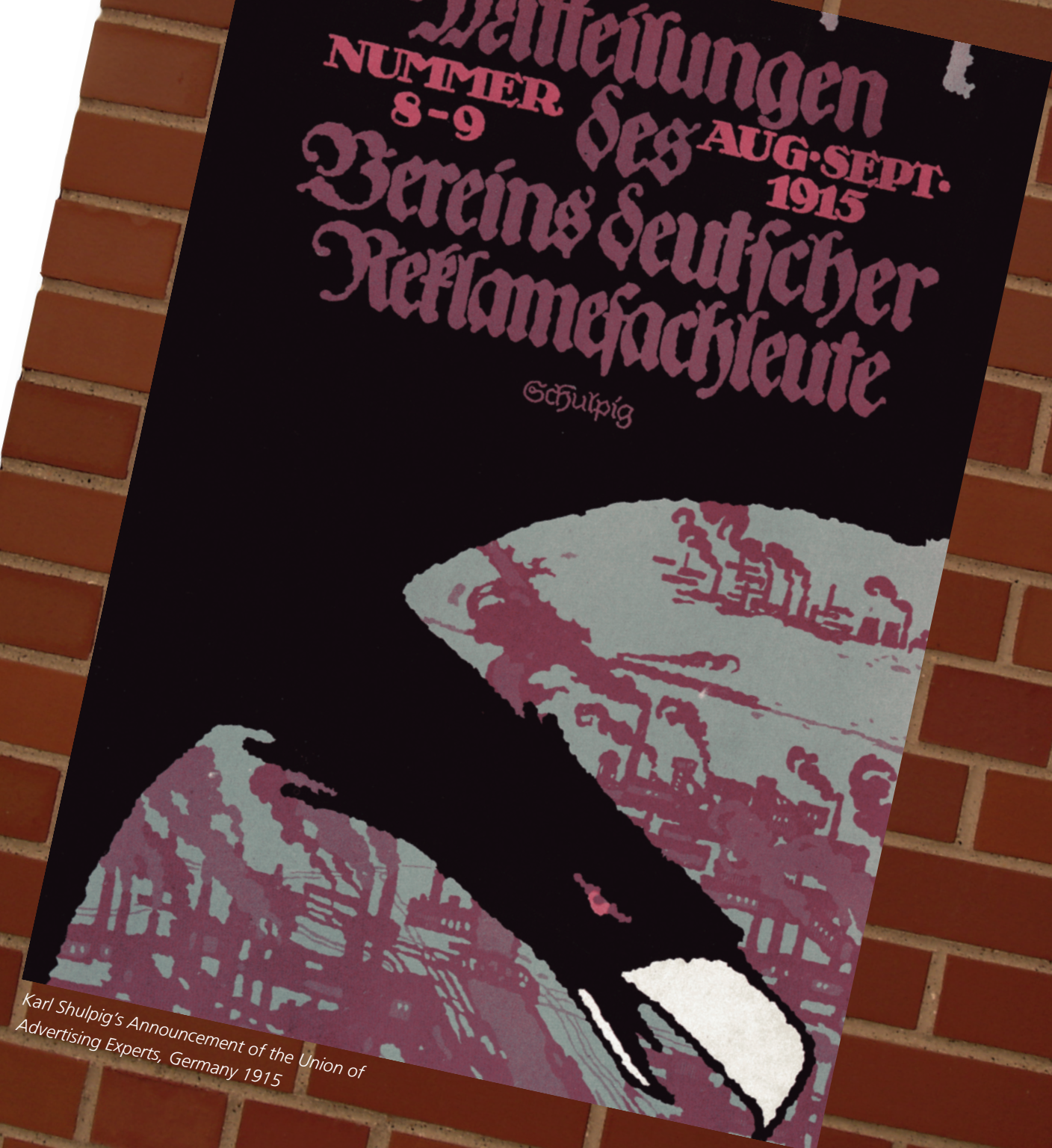


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Karl Schulpig's cover for the *Announcement of the Union of Advertising Experts* in 1915 is another excellent example of a successful propaganda image. Schulpig's cover really gets the viewer to look deep into the image as the eagle creates a very strong negative form. The eagle is drawn in a strong sweeping motion that suggests Germany is on the move. The black form engulfs over half the image but keeps the viewer interested by the sharp angle of the bird's head going all the way to the edge of the image and the interesting texture that the text creates in the upper portion of the image. The issue number and date are a different shade of red thus framing the title and enhances the overall texture of the image. The green and red pastel colors are excellent choices for the image in the background because they bring forward the black of the eagle's body but especially the white of its beak jetting forward. The colors also blend together to create a very foggy effect. The eagle's eye is a brighter shade of red from all the other red in the area; consequentially it causes the eagle to stare right up into the viewer. The gaze is piercing and determined much like the wartime Germany.

The image is very suggestive of war because Schulpig successfully brings an ominous feeling to the viewer. The smoke from the factories in the background could be an indication of Germany's industry creating arms for the war. (Cabarga114) The eagle figure in the image is a representation of Germany; the eagle has been used in Germany for quite some time as a national symbol and would later in fact be perched atop a swastika when the Nazis would come to power. (Cabarga 111) The eagle is aggressively drawn on the page, which would indicate that that is precisely how Germany intends to fight the forthcoming war. It covers the factories, which lets the viewer know that Germany has war secrets that it intends to guard so that its enemies may not see them. The image also brings a feeling of darker days on the horizon and that its citizen's should want to plan accordingly. (Cabarga 111) The image is very good at playing at the fears of the people.

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Karl Schulpig's *Announcement of the Union of Advertising Experts*, Germany 1915



Artist Unknown, Back Them Up!,
Great Britain 1939-1945

Propaganda imagery is an effective tool that governments have used and will continue to do so to gain public favor on their behalf. It is the job of the artist however to make sure that the audience stops to notice it. Through the use of contrast, negative shapes, subject matter the artist can create the government's opinion within the people's own ideology. Nations depended on an artist's knowledge of such meticulous details in wartime to recruit and gain public favor. Germany was really on the forefront of propaganda in the days of World War One and would unfortunately use many of these same techniques in the Second World War when the Nazis come to power. Propaganda imagery has proven itself to be a most effective tool for governments to influence the way their citizens think.

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