

# BROADLY SPEAKING

*In which MIKE HUDSON launches a diatribe concerning the usurpation by the internet of the broadside's historic role as an information and persuasion medium.*

A Broadsheet is any large sheet of paper with printed matter on one side only. When the text was of a strongly critical or political character the literati could not resist referring to the work by the term reserved by the Navy for the multiple canon bombardment known as a Broadside. Nowadays, the original printers' terminology of broadsheet is used to describe large format newspapers and other less intellectually contentious printings such as advertising material.

Perhaps the reason why the visual component of posters and broadsides is not taken as seriously as painting or sculpture by the art establishment is that the traditional function of art historians has been to compare and codify the 'forms' of art rather than the content. All too often artists themselves have neglected this aspect of printmaking in the mistaken belief that the discipline necessary to create a technically proficient work would militate against the creative process by which they profess to live. One need only point to Goya or Lautrec to give the lie to notions that there must be an adherence to a rigid hierarchy of methods and techniques in the pursuit of art. Because printmaking is generally a multi-production process, the 'art' collector unconsciously equates its

lack of exclusivity with a corresponding lack of value, irrespective of its aesthetic qualities. Also, there is a kind of condescension attached to work that has some element of the mechanical or industrial in its production. It was this perceived lack of 'prestige' that kept the printmaker a prisoner of his professional skill. It also kept him in a lower socio-economic group than the painter who, by the time of the Renaissance, had been elevated to the society of Popes and Princes where his work was circumscribed to that of a public relations chronicler of how the rich preferred to exhibit themselves, rather than how they really were.

The variety of approaches by vastly different cultural groupings across five hundred years makes it impossible to draw easy conclusions as to the motives of the originators of the 'politically sensitive' print, far less whether the message was even understood by the intended audience. But generally speaking, the rationale of broadside printing fell into two main categories; those made for adulatory purposes (records of triumphal parades, portraits of the mighty, religious subjects, etc.) and those more condemnatory (caricatures, satires and critiques of injustices etc.). Another — infrequently used for the first



300 years of the activity but now the most prolific — is the product or service advertisement.

From the very beginning of printing, pictorial interpretations of current events have been pinned up in market squares and other public places, rather like a kind of discreet graffiti. The need for as wide an audience as possible and relative ease of manufacture justified this early mass production process as the medium most suited for nonconformist expression. If nothing else, these dissenting views were a kind of light relief for the illiterate masses who were normally at the mercy of whatever their officials chose to disseminate from authorized documents that they were charged to read. It should be noted that when the *Magna Carta*, that paradigm of citizens' rights, was ratified in 1215, it was actually *signed* by only three of the 26 signatories. The others could only make their mark — after all, they had money enough to pay for literate services when they were seriously needed.



The *Incunabula* period, so named from the Latin term for 'swaddling clothes', is the era from the birth of printing up to AD 1500; altogether not much more than 44 years (if one takes Gutenberg's Bible as a starting point), yet a time that produced a list of editions totalling more than 38,000. How many copies that represents can only be guessed at, but a number of publications were reading primers for the principal European languages, so it is eminently possible that the increase in availability of the printed word was stimulus enough to increase literacy levels. However, since the ownership of books, by their price alone, was restricted to an intellectual and financial elite, it soon became clear that it would be artists rather than authors who were more likely to be sympathetic to the conditions of the poor; since the market place for books was exclusively the domain of the ruling classes, writers were hardly going to make a sale by advocating a more egalitarian society to the very group most dedicated to the status quo.

One can imagine the glee with which a farm labourer's family would view such images as *Peasant Beating a Rent Collector* by the Petrarch Master, or Nikolaus Manuel Deutsch's engraving of 1525 showing a group of peasants suspending a Pardoner by his arms. Unfortunately, and in spite of the seemingly revolutionary subject matter and intent of such pictures, as in almost all works of its kind until the end of the 18th century, the victims of 'everyman's' wrath are never shown to be Emperors or Kings. Thus, the basic problem of the inequity of the social system is never addressed — only the middlemen in the pyramid get strung-up — the pinnacle is left intact.



Above: An example of an official public notice; Royal proclamation, 1715, 42 x 31cm

Right: Nikolaus Manuel Deutsch's engraving of 1525 showing a group of peasants suspending a Pardoner. Approx. 22 x 18cm

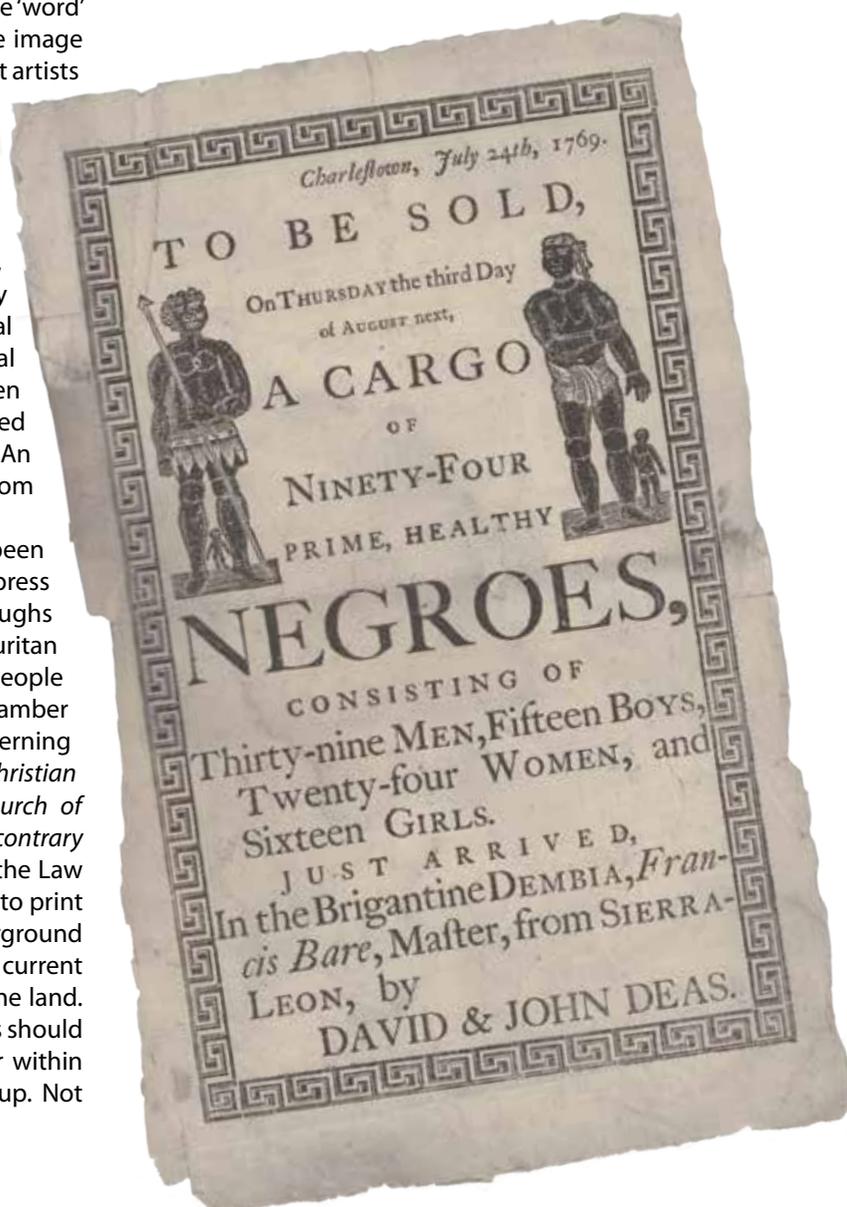
Paradoxically, the work of humanist printmakers proved to have a retrogressive effect on the cultural development of the masses. As printmaking was dependent upon paper and presses, the dominant artisan associations of the Stationers Guild, like the book printers, virtually ensured the 'take-over' of print-oriented artists. Once this sophisticated combination of word and image began to be widespread amongst the intelligentsia, previous artistic endeavours like church frescoes and murals were seen to be dated and even crude by comparison. It was considered to be an aesthetic duty that these teaching aids, (in fact the only popular forms freely available to the poorer classes,) should be destroyed or whitewashed over, thereby unwittingly removing the single most important source of educational inspiration available to the illiterate majority.

For the next three hundred years this marriage of text and image became the *ne plus ultra* of communication graphics. By the time of the American War of Independence however, with the grammatical and literary emphasis of the 18th century taking precedence in the Arts, the 'word' began to assume greater importance, leaving the image almost as an afterthought. This was the chance that artists had been waiting for; since they were no longer enforced to faithfully illustrate the text, they could begin to be less dependent on all the old conventions passed down by the more exalted 'art' fraternity. In tandem with the expansion of newspapers as venues for political discussion, because of its cheapness of production, lithography soon developed as a means of expression for liberal thought. Such unions re-established the political and social commitment of the print that had been largely lost when printmakers were suborned to work at the more conservative book trade. An altogether new visual rhetoric was to emerge from this expansionary period.

Right from the first years of printing there had been attempts to muzzle or otherwise control the press by various levels of government from local boroughs to the royal court itself. In the turmoil of Puritan pamphleteering leading up to the period some people like to call *The Interregnum*, the infamous Star Chamber of 1637 promulgated a draconian decree concerning printing of every description ... *that is contrary to Christian Faith and the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church of England, nor against the State or Government, nor contrary to good life, or good manners or otherwise...* Since the Law allowed for only 23 Master Printers to be licensed to print for the whole country it gave rise to many underground presses which only served to polarize the current differences of opinion that were soon to engulf the land. If the status quo was to prevail then the authorities should have learned to read the writing on the wall, for within a couple of years the game was well and truly up. Not

surprisingly, the government of 1643, having abolished the Star Chamber along with its decree, soon realized the danger of an unregulated press and promptly enacted new laws in all respects as reactionary as the Royalists' version.

The English Civil War produced all manner of rhetorical abuses of the Crown which no doubt contributed to the climate of opinion that led to the ultimate in disrespect for the monarch. By European standards, a royal execution was a rare phenomenon, for although factional assassination was as popular a method as any for removing a crowned head, the idea that a plebeian community could collectively and terminally agree to dispose of the concept of the divine right of kings was anathema to the coronet and ermine set. This 'sacred' state, established from 'time out of mind' was a serious impediment to any moves towards a republic, parliamentary democracy or even a secular dictatorship, since the general populace was usually just as convinced about this direct line to God as the monarchy itself.





Around the time of Napoleon's rise to power, a young impecunious actor/playwright in Munich, Aloys Senefelder, was searching for a cheap way to publish his plays. In a series of fortuitous accidents he stumbled upon a system of reproduction that was to change the direction of craft printing and, by the end of the nineteenth century, lead to a review of classical art appreciation itself.

In the beginning, lithography did not attract fine-art practitioners as one would have imagined it should. For the first time, here was a technique that gave a result much closer to the classical principles of drawing than any other available method of reproduction. Even more significant, because of its technical simplicity, an artist could produce his desired result by working directly on the stone himself without the need of an artisan/craftsman to 'translate' his drawing into print, as was most often the case with engraving and etching.

A word or two should be included here about the sudden expansion of jobbing work in the first few decades of the 19th century. Undoubtedly, the need for these various forms of mass communication was driven by the coetaneous energetic growth of retail services to the newly emerging industrial class and the politicisation of an increasingly literate public. Mercier's remarks about bill-sticking in post-revolutionary Paris could be considered quite modest in the light of the explosion of broadsheets that England's 'nation of shopkeepers' were responsible for a few years later.

Printing technology made more progress in this period than it had over the previous three hundred years. The newspaper industry, particularly in England, demanded bigger and faster presses, paper-making machinery, and methods of illustrating the news — and got them all, and more.<sup>1</sup>

The wooden screw presses of Gutenberg's time, still in service by 1800, were incapable of exerting great pressure over large areas. But the Industrial Revolution's iron, spring-loaded ones with their sophisticated, knuckle-jointed platen actions, made the process simple. It was this possibility above all that encouraged the development of the larger, blacker typefaces known as Egyptians or Fat Faces<sup>2</sup>. These robust, even rustic looking types changed the cityscape into a myopic's dream library.

One of the more curious aspects of this 'text only' period of broadsheet posting was that frequently — because of the poor literacy of the bill-stickers — the sheet could just as easily be pasted upside-down. At least with the illustrated versions that came to dominate the poster sites later in the century, the hapless paster knew which way was up.

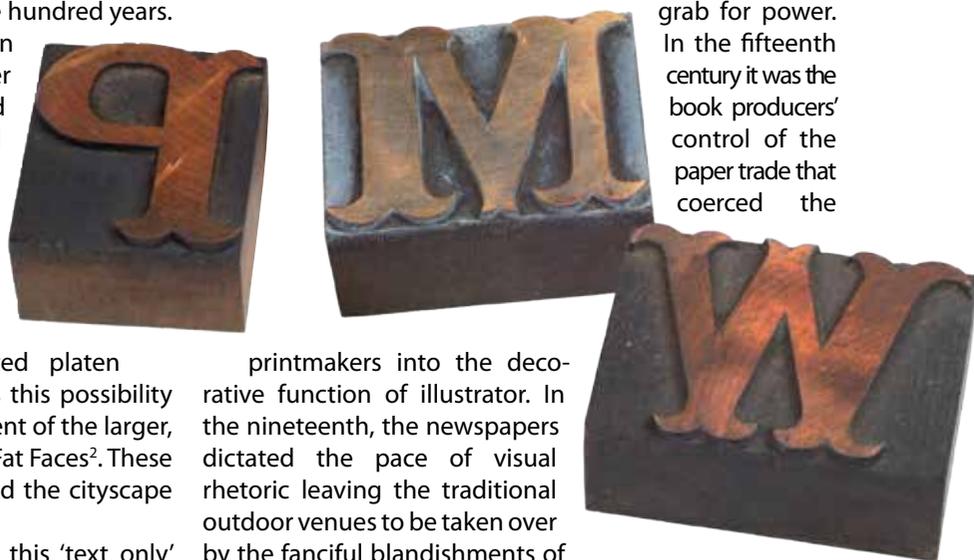
Knowing the way up was as much an attitude as it was a technique, and one to which, to his cost artistically, Goya

was so unfortunately addicted. In 1792 a severe illness left him completely deaf. For an ambitious, gregarious man, working his way up the social system, such a blow was devastating. But viewing the dissolute and unprincipled court society from his now silent world must have re-awakened his sense of justice.

The corrupt and backward-looking Spanish hierarchical society of dim-witted aristocrats and illiterate, church dominated peasants was, by the end of the 18th century, ripe for revolution. Goya had always been of a liberal persuasion and as court painter was in a perfect position to witness the impositions upon the populace meted out by both church and state. The series of aquatints known as *Los Caprichos* were undoubtedly the result of his heightened awareness of the suffering of the Spanish people and his moral outrage at the antics of the authorities in their efforts to preserve ill-gotten privileges.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the populist appeal of newspapers, artists were no longer constrained by classical drawing traditions, and so, by reducing essentials to line and eliminating all the previously acceptable surface-filling visual renditions established in imitation of the Masters, they made a clearer, more direct appeal to the general public. The dependence on classical allegory in the previous centuries presupposed a cultural grounding far removed from the general population. This was yet another reason (at that time) why the print was 'taken up' by the wealthier classes and only rearranged in subject matter when one or other ruling clique needed to mobilise the masses to support a

grab for power. In the fifteenth century it was the book producers' control of the paper trade that coerced the



printmakers into the decorative function of illustrator. In the nineteenth, the newspapers dictated the pace of visual rhetoric leaving the traditional outdoor venues to be taken over by the fanciful blandishments of advertising art. Today, the insidious capacity of television for encouraging gullibility in viewers of 'heroically' photographed consumer products has further diminished the critical eye.

The nostalgic view of 19th-century Paris that shows us the Impressionists, Baudelaire, Rodin, Courbet and the Can-Can etc., belies the true condition of turbulent and bloody insurrection that occurred at depressingly

Right: An astonishingly varied theatre programme from 1845 for the Adelphi Theatre, set in an equally astonishingly varied array of typefaces. 70 x 42cm.



regular intervals from the time of Napoleon through to the establishment of the Third Republic in 1879. Even then, any Rousseauesque notions of political equality still had to contend with the church, the military, most of the senior bureaucrats and the wealthier bourgeoisie with their equally determined beliefs that authority must come from above and that special privilege was justifiable, if only for themselves.

From this seesaw of radical demand and reactionary response, it was inevitable that the propaganda broadside would again be brought into play as a principal organ of subversion. It has proved to be unusually good fortune for us that out of this particular period of disruption came the means (lithography) as well as the man.

In over forty years, Honoré Daumier made more than 4,000 lithographs of protest, all in black and white and all by his own hand. When censorship inhibited his political work he turned a satirical eye upon the morals and manners of the bourgeoisie. Daumier was a man of his time — a time when the issues were clear and attitudes necessarily simplistic: Rembrandt may have had more soul but was never as committed while Goya had the insight but his compassion was not constant enough. Daumier's legacy is that rarest of things — the combined use of artistry and moral integrity in the pursuit of humanistic ideals.

In spite of the lifelong efforts of Daumier and his confreres to establish an intellectual force for progress based upon idealistic notions of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, European society was moving inexorably into more complex political relationships. Huge industrial monopolies, protective of their international status, could pressure governments in a manner unknown since the times of earlier dictatorial monarchs. Public 'taste' was tiring of the insistent demands of crusading 'social reformers'. Anarchy was as much feared by well-meaning socialists as it was by its more obvious targets. Soon, the radical magazine editors and proprietors began to favour a less savage kind of commentary and more 'jokes'. Economic pressures from the newly created advertising agencies and their demands for a more universal forum in which to place their bounty ensured a compliant media. The passive acceptance of similar impositions by the upwardly servile was a sign that mainstream society was either becoming more homogeneous or simply more united in its opposition to newly defined groups lower down the economic ladder.

As soon as the organs of public opinion, the newspapers, began to toe a (usually conservative) party line, the public, with an audible sigh of relief, contented themselves once again with being spectators at the feast, saving their energies for the periodic blood-letting of international aggression. Now that education reforms were beginning to blur the centuries-old divisions across the class barriers, the obvious objectives of the 'professional' satirists were no longer as sharply defined.

The essential ingredients for effective satire are urbanity and political sophistication. The public consciousness having been realigned to primitive Nationalistic values such as *La Gloire* in France, or England, Home and Beauty across the channel, allowed satire to degenerate into crude exhibitions of prejudice. Inevitably the gaze was re-focused on those perennial scapegoats of communal incompatibility, the foreigners. Although xenophobia is still with us and finding expression mostly within fundamentalist religious groups, at least the pictorial representations of its irrationality have mostly been legislated off the streets.

While it is obviously true to say that few graphic artists can be as original as Lautrec was in his day, it must also be recognised that the example of excellence he provided allowed many practitioners later this century to at least be as competent with more advanced technology than was the case with his own contemporaries. On analysis, however, one can see that this quantitative phenomenon is more to do with the huge expansion of advertising art activity over the more recent decades, rather than with any innate desire by graphic artists to develop an independent expression. Although commercial art was certainly responsible for rescuing mainstream painting from the chiaroscuro 'brown soup' fetish of last century, that seemingly altruistic act was only a by-product of its intrinsic appeal to a colour-starved public taste.

Since then we've had to co-exist with the even more moribund values of 'conspicuous consumption' and the concomitant visual babel of competing market forces. The standards set by Lautrec and his neophytes in their innocence have long been superseded by more fundamental imperatives that are concerned less with artistic integrity than with the bottom line.

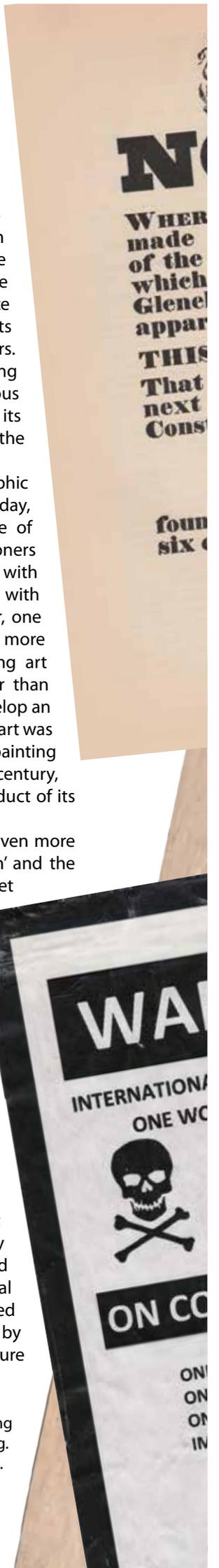
It is unlikely that traditional social concerns such as human rights will again be the impetus for a mass revival of poster art protest. The seductive pleasures of digital manipulation have diverted those more able and intellectually curious practitioners from their possible involvement in the ancient art of printmaking — just as book publishers did with woodblock cutters and advertisers with lithographic artists. The involvement with expensive monopolistic technologies, by definition, tend to negate an association and empathy with the culture of dissent. Political graphics have become a rather circumscribed activity with little public appreciation, and so, by default, reduced to the socially ambiguous posture of the limited edition print.

Some examples of broadsides and flyers ranging from the 18th century to the present day, including.

*Fizgig's Triumph*; 1763, 41 x 25cm).

*Fly nuisance*; 1924, 26 x 19.5cm

*Warning*; an ongoing conspiracy theorist's wet dream, 21 x 14.5cm





# NOTICE

AS complaint has been  
to the MAGISTRATES  
great number of DOGS  
are wandering about  
and its neighbourhood  
entirely without Owners,  
IS TO GIVE NOTICE,  
from & after SATURDAY  
the 28th instant, the  
Magistrates will SHOOT all

# DOGS

and wandering at large after  
6 o'clock in the evening.

By order of the Magistrates,

*M. Ward*

Clerk to the Bench of Magistrates.

Printed by R. THOMAS and Co., Government Printers.



# CAUTION AND REWARD

WHEREAS it has been reported to His Excellency the Governor, that ARDENT SPIRITS have been given by several individuals to the NATIVES present at GLENELG and the neighbourhood; His Excellency has ordered that this CAUTION should be given to all persons against such illegal and reprehensible conduct, and that the selling or giving of Ardent Spirits or fermented Liquors of any description to the Native population is strictly forbidden.

# A REWARD OF TEN POUNDS

Will be paid on the conviction of the Offender, to any person giving information of individuals who, after this notice, shall sell or give away Spirits or fermented Liquors to the Natives under any pretence whatever.

Information will be received by the Colonial Secretary; the Immigration Agent; the Storekeeper General; and by GEORGE STEVENSON, Esq. interim Protector of the Aborigines; and all persons are strictly forbidden to employ the Natives without the written permission of one of the above-named Officers.

Glenelg, Feb. 7, 1837.

Printed by authority of R. THOMAS and Co., Government Printers.

# F I Z G I G ' S T R I U M P H . A N E W S O N G .

To the Tune of; Stand around my brave Boys.  
Written by MURDOCH O BLANEY.

I.  
...at present be still,  
...jects have done;  
...or of Bute,  
...the Town.  
Tol de rol, &c.

# WARNING

AL BANKERS BRINGING IN  
ORLD GOVERNMENT



OMING HA

E WORLD MILITARY  
E WORLD CURREN  
E WORLD RELIGIO  
MPLANTED MICRO

# FLY NUISANCE

List of Recommendations drawn up by the Sub-Committee appointed at Conference re Fly Nuisance.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COMBAT THE FLY NUISANCE PROPOSED TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT.

1. All horses to be registered by Councils at a fee to be fixed. (Suggest 5/- per horse.)
2. Every stable to have covered pit. Pit to be compulsory unless half an acre per horse of yard room is available.
3. All pits to be cleaned at least once weekly. Some insecticide prior to removing manure to kill larvae.
4. All vehicles...

# CHOLERA AND WATER.

# BOARD OF WORKS

FOR THE LIMEHOUSE DISTRICT,  
Comprising Limehouse, Ratcliff, Shadwell,  
and Wapping.

...ITANTS of the District within

Obviously, these remarks can only be associated with technologically advanced communities of the so called 'Western' alliance. The not so pacific 'Dragon' economies and the ever shifting political hegemonies of Africa have, so far, added little to the visual commentary that developed in parallel with unilateral aspirations for social stability. From the caves of Kakadu or Lascaux, to the murals of Pompeii, the Bayeux tapestry and New York's subway, humankind has sought to express the concerns of the moment in graphic form.

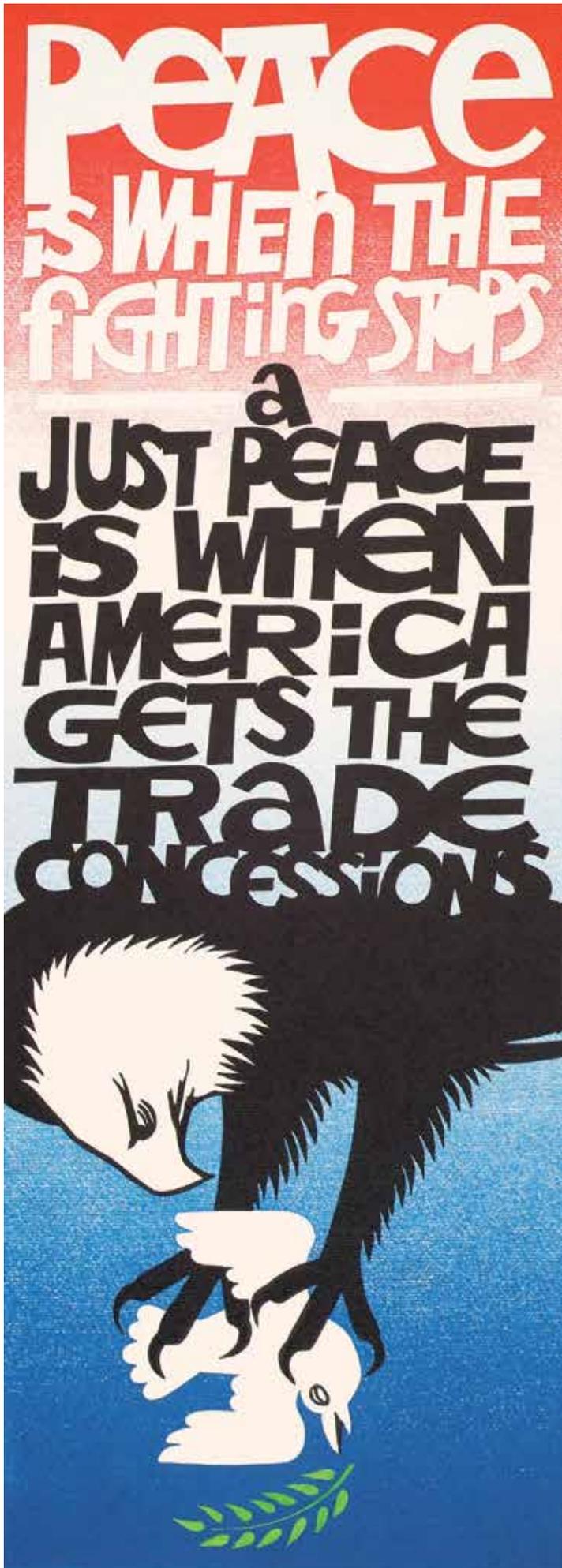
This monograph was written some 23 years ago in the context of printing in civil society for generally progressive, rather than purely commercial purposes and as an historical overview it can still stand as well as it did (with some minor editing). Irrespective of the usurpation by the Internet of the broadside's technical role as an information/persuasion medium since the time of this monograph's inception, there are still many and varied examples from around the world that make it plain that autographic images of protest haven't yet left the stage.

Today, the political landscape all too often is conceived, born and killed-off by the rapaciousness of the myriad social network sites on the Internet. Fake News, celebrity commentators and mainstream presentations of the status quo have seemingly conspired to reduce any pro-active communication to bland conformity of thought. Even the appellation Twitter guarantees a kind of juvenile thought space with no time for a reflective response, and with ever increasing use of emojis rather than a cognitive articulation that might last a little longer in the memory bank than the shrill squeakings of the Twitterati, is it any wonder that the printed word has lost much of its hard earned currency. There is much to commend in the viral networking of street protest. But Flash Mobs, Yellow Jackets, Pots and Pans, Sit-ins, strikes and other forms of civil disobedience are doomed to be as ephemeral as a football crowd's response to a goal — one great roar, whether for pleasure or pain, is only as good as its time of existence and then is forever lost to memory. The printed word hangs around. The fact that the broadside, as an organ of propaganda or information, has survived at all in the face of ubiquitous televisual presentations of generally opposing values, speaks volumes for its competitive ability. Ironically, it is perhaps those 'newsworthy' displays of protest rallies (complete with placards) so beloved of TV bulletins that have helped to preserve this diminishing art form thus far.

The practicality factor of being able to be 'pinned up in the market place' for the public to digest over a period allowed the medium to withstand such competition. But the passionate concerns of individuals, rather than corporations, are its greatest strengths as a survivor. It is, after all, within the means of an individual to present an independent, original idea that by its very origin is more likely to transcend the purely ephemeral topicality on offer from the trans-global marketeers of future schlock.

**DESPITE THE GREAT TASKS  
BEFORE US IN OUR OWN  
COUNTRY, WE REALISE  
-NOT LEAST DUE TO OUR  
HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE IN  
THIS CENTURY- THAT IT IS OUR DUTY,  
AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S WEALTHY  
NATIONS, TO CONTINUE TO MAKE  
OUR CONTRIBUTION TO SOLVING THE  
PRESSING GLOBAL PROBLEMS:  
IN THE FUTURE GERMANY  
WILL CONTINUE TO BE  
A RELIABLE  
PARTNER  
IN WORLD  
POLITICS.**  
HELMUT  
KOHLE  
1993





## NOTES

1) In 1803 the Fourdrinier brothers produced the first automated paper making machine. Within fifty years there were 413 improved versions in England and as many again across Europe. The inevitable increase in production stimulated the growth of 'rag-picking' as a service industry supplying recycled cotton waste as raw stock to feed the machinery until the substitution of chemically treated wood pulp which came on stream in 1854. At about the same time as the brothers were perfecting their machine, one Matthias Koops was filing for bankruptcy (even though he started with £71,000 of joint stock capital) having failed to make a go of two of his patents for paper making. One of them (dated 28 April 1800 No. 2392) was ... *for a mode of extracting printing and writing ink from printed and written paper, and converting the paper from which the ink is extracted into pulp, and making thereof paper fit for writing, printing, and other purposes.*

The first steam driven press cranked out an edition of *The Times* on November 9th 1814 and was able to produce an amazing 1,100 sheets an hour! The inventor, Frederick Koenig, after making several improved versions that doubled the output, eventually returned to his native Germany in 1817 almost penniless. A type casting machine from France known as the Polymatype, proved to be too provocative for the London typesetting fraternity who were still casting letters one at a time. This device of 1815 could produce up to 200 pieces in one operation. Eventually, in what can be described as a kind of nonchalant Luddism, the native founders bought him out and destroyed the machine...

2) Fat face types were 'swollen' versions of so-called Modern faces (such as those of the Italian founder Giambattista Bodoni) that were the forerunners of thousands of display faces. Generally credited to be the invention of Robert Thorne of London (1754-1820).

3) The main bone of contention as to why this magnificent series of 80 plates (and another of 82 plates, *The Disasters of War*, completed between 1810 - 1820), can only be considered as prints of high artistic value rather than broadsides in the full-blooded political sense, is that they were never exposed to public approval during Goya's lifetime. One should suppose it to be axiomatic that if a dissenting comment on current social behaviour is to have any relevance, it should at least be available for public view at the most significant time. To be absolutely fair, the *Caprices* were issued in 1799, but fearing reprisals from the Inquisition Goya withdrew them after only twelve days and they did not reappear until the 1860s, over thirty years after his death. However, because of their universal themes, as social documents they still have an impact today.

Wayzgoose Press broadsides

Far left: Detail from *Germany*, 1993, 35 x 25cm

Left: Post Iraq/Afghanistan invasion commentary from 2002, *War and peace*, 66 x 22.5cm