

Press release

War and Propaganda 14/18

20 June to 2 November 2014

Press conference: 19 June 2014, 11 am

Opening: 19 June 2014, 7 pm



unsigned; Boys, Come Over Here, Poster for the British recruitment, 1915, 101,6 x 127 cm, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg.

World War I is considered the first global mass-media event of modern times. When it started in August 1914, presumably no one anticipated that the horrific combat operations would drag on for four years and cost more than seventeen million lives. Regarded at the time as a “new weapon” in warfare, the propaganda efforts of the participating nations are today thought to be one cause of the war’s unexpected duration and intensity. Against the background of the research into mass psychology taking place at the same time, they exploited the arsenal of the mass media and tested innovative propaganda strategies in the battle for public attention at home and abroad. The masses were considered uncritical, impulsive and impressionable by the political leaders. With tales of atrocities and heroism and the constant repetition of key messages, the opinion makers endeavoured to generate effective images and create a bellicose mood. In Germany the war was presented as the “seminal catastrophe”, for the French it was the “great war”, and for the Poles the “national liberation”. A hundred years after the outbreak of World War I, with an exhibition entitled “War and Propaganda 14/18”, the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg (MKG) is providing insight into the broad spectrum of mass manipulation carried out during the period in question. The show features examples of the most important forms, structures and methods of opinion control – the same methods which, hand in hand with the further development of the modern mass media, are encountered in our own time in ever new and ever more subtle forms in the context of conflicts and military disputes. More than four hundred objects from the German Reich, France, England, the U.S., Russia, Italy and Austro-Hungary are on view in the show. The exhibition shows posters, films, sculptures, photographs, illustrated magazines and objects of everyday life such as children’s toys or patriotic emblems. Historical audio recordings and music from the period of the First World War as well as graphic work by artists and postcards are further important aspects of the exhibition.

Mobilization: At the beginning of the war, the German Reich as well as the countries of the Central Powers’ enemies – Great Britain, France and Russia – pursued a strategy of euphorization that relied strongly on music as a vehicle of national pride and optimistic confidence in victory. The voices expressing criticism of the unfolding events were drowned out. Loyalty to the authorities and feelings of honour and solidarity merged with political and economic interests: an entire industry sprouted up around the publication of printed matter related to the war. In 1914, the recruitment campaigns in England (where compulsory military service was not introduced until 1916) deliberately and successfully employed the new medium of film along with already well-known advertising media such as the poster. Within a good twelve months, more than 12.5 million posters were printed from 164 designs. The arguments ranged from participation in a great sporting adventure to the threat of losing face in the eyes of wives, friends and family. The professional work of the War Propaganda Bureau in London made itself felt in the far corners of the Empire; the European conflict became a world war.

Demonization: The hate propaganda of the Entente, in particular Great Britain, France and Russia, was based on extremely simple pictorial formulae and their continuous repetition. Far from weighing the pros and cons of different viewpoints, it pursued its aims with the aid of suggestive slogans, stereotypes and emotional persuasion. The German

enemy was typified as bloodthirsty, ruthless, and bestial. Whenever the events of the war permitted such an interpretation, particularly the British and French propaganda institutions seized the opportunity to produce a new variation on the Hun topos. Dissociation from the enemy was intended as a means of strengthening people's identification with their own nation and their allies. With regular reminders of actual or fictitious acts of German military violence in Belgium, for example, this demonization fuelled fear of a German invasion. Propaganda systematically polarized opposing parties; the war was presented as a moral necessity requiring the unconditional support of every individual. The German side also subscribed to the strategy of producing images designed to demonize its enemies, but without comparable success.

Participation: Whether at public mass gatherings or in the privacy of one's home, the war found its way into the very midst of people's everyday lives. Solemnly celebrated collective events relied on participation to strengthen the community and its endorsement of the war on the home front, and to raise funds to finance military operations and war relief. Urgent appeals were made to the population to join in the effort. Nor did the nationalist propaganda stop at the doors of nurseries. Militaristic toys and patriotic children's books also made light of the war and reproduced the enemy stereotypes of the adult world. Publicly circulating propagandistic statements thus permeated the private family sphere and militarized the everyday lives of all generations. Even without a specific government order, elaborately staged campaigns and widely diverse media served to spread attitudes such as patriotism and animosity.

Authenticity – Images of War: Real-life action in the war zone took place remote from the daily lives of the folks back home. All the greater was the longing of the latter for authentic pictures from the front. Illustrated weeklies catered to this tremendous demand. The reports they featured were dominated by drawings and photographs. Official war painters and specially commissioned draughtsmen and photographers recorded the activities on the basis of first-hand experience or second-hand descriptions. The picture captions supplied the patriotic tone and often distorted the facts, irreversibly robbing the war images of their credibility and verisimilitude. Some one hundred professional press photographers and countless private photojournalists travelled the fronts. Their pictures, however, which appeared in illustrated magazines, were subject to the state censorship.

Film Propaganda: At the outbreak of war, the film medium had not even reached the age of twenty. Nevertheless, cinema was already a mass cultural phenomenon and accordingly employed as an innovative propaganda medium. Films of the time were silent, but usually screened with musical accompaniment. Linguistic elements were conveyed by intertitles that often contribute decisively to the cohesiveness of the filmic narrative. Cinema served as an agent of patriotic experience and a source of information and entertainment in one. From the fictitious feature film to documentary and promotional productions, a wide range of film genres competed for the interpretational sovereignty of the moving picture and the manipulation of the mass public.

Advertising Campaigns: The simplest and most inexpensive means of conveying propaganda messages to the public was the poster. From the modest notice to the more sophisticated text poster to highly inventive image propaganda, in World War I the poster came to be one of the very most important mass media. It had its origins in the advertising sector, and in all of the warring states it was accordingly advertising artists who took the lead in the novel employment of the poster for political purposes. State propaganda advertised war bonds, called for the population's collective self-denial in view of the shortage economy, and urged people to send "Liebesgaben" ("gifts of love") – parcels from home intended to strengthen morale at the front. Until about 1916, however, the commercial character of the war posters was criticized by the majority of the population as inappropriate. The perception of the poster changed in the course of the war years; the public underwent a process of inurement, and people's reservations dwindled. The mass-scale advertisement of war bonds became all the more aggressive as a result, and from 1917 onward, all of the warring countries worked with the strategy of emotionalizing the public.

The most important advertising medium was the poster, which very successfully called upon the members of the population to contribute their personal assets. The Central Powers, consisting first and foremost of the allied German Reich and Austro-Hungary, adhered to the practice of regular war bond campaigns in the autumn and spring. The Entente Powers, for their part, carried out their campaigns as necessitated by the course of the war events and the ensuing financial requirements. Following the military defeat, the money that had been invested in Germany and Austria was lost. Propaganda thus ultimately contributed to the obliteration of major assets.

Human beings proved to be particularly effective propaganda instruments. Above all in the U.S., Hollywood movie stars served to spread official opinions. Directly after the USA entered the war, numerous famous people like Charles Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford put themselves at the service of the patriotic cause, advertising the Liberty Bonds or calling on men to enlist. In an age without radio, public speeches were an especially effective way of addressing the masses. In order to generate a positive attitude towards the controversial entry into the war, the American *Committee on Public Information* (CPI) created the Four Minute Men, a nationwide network of volunteer propaganda speakers. By the end of the war, more than 75,000 men and women had held more than 800,000 speeches, and are believed to have reached around 400 million people at cinemas, theatres and public rallies.

Memento: In the spring of 2014, the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg and the *Hamburger Abendblatt* jointly asked the Hamburg public for personal keepsakes of World War I. The objects placed at the museum's disposal, many of which belonged to family members who never returned from the war, are personal voices which break through the anonymous drone of the propaganda. At the same time, state opinion control in the form of morale-boosting slogans, heroic images and idealized newspaper headlines are found even in private photo albums and everyday objects. This ambiguity is also reflected by letters from the front sent by former MKG employees, or in private pictures of the front by the draughtsman Friedrich Elling. The line between authentic memory and propaganda commonplaces is hazy.

Lenders: Schloßparkmuseum, Bad Kreuznach | Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin | Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin | Museum Europäischer Kulturen – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin | Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz | Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin | Stiftung Deutsches Technikmuseum Berlin | Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin | Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn | Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr, Dresden | Marinekommando, 1. U-Bootgeschwader, Eckernförde | La Camera Stylo Film Collection GmbH, Hamburg | Elke Dröschner, Hamburg | Internationales Maritimes Museum Hamburg | Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietzky | Stiftung Historische Museen Hamburg – Altonaer Museum | Stiftung Historische Museen Hamburg – Hamburg Museum | Jürgen Hach, Kiel-Schulensee | Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, Leipzig | British Film Institute, London | Imperial War Museums, London | Victoria and Albert Museum, London | Filmoteca Española, Madrid | Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten Baden-Württemberg, Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen, Mannheim | Dithmarscher Landesmuseum, Meldorf | Münchner Stadtmuseum | Spielzeugmuseum Nürnberg | Gaumont Pathé, Paris | Lobster Films, Paris | Roy Export S.A.S., Paris | Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte, Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart | AG Loiperdinger + Pinschewer, Trier | Deutsches Harmonikamuseum, Trossingen | Library of Congress, Washington D. C. | Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung, Wiesbaden | and two private collectors

Catalogue: A catalogue has been published in conjunction with the show, edited by Sabine Schulze, Leonie Beiersdorf and Dennis Conrad, with texts by Leonie Beiersdorf, Frank Böhme, Dennis Conrad, Simon Klingler, Philip Rosin, Maryam Schnepfer, Friederike Schütt, Sabine Schulze, approx. 224 pages, approx. 180 colour illustrations, 20 × 28 cm, bound, 25 €.

The exhibition is being made possible with funds from the Department of Culture and the IT-Globalfonds of the Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg, the Hubertus Wald Stiftung and the Justus Brinckmann Gesellschaft.



Cooperation partner:



Hamburger Abendblatt

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Press images: Download at www.mkg-hamburg.de

Opening times: Tues – Sun 10 am – 6 pm, Thurs 10 am – 9 pm | Entrance: 10 € / 7 €, Thurs after 5 pm 7 €, up to age 17 free
