

Chapter 17

The Aesthetics of Fear and Power in Soviet Posters

Ömer Çakın

Ondokuz Mayıs University, Turkey

Mehmet A. Günay

Gümüşhane University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

The concept of aesthetics has been one of the most discussed topics from past to present. Marxists saw aesthetics as an aesthetic assimilation of nature and reality and defined it as the laws of artistic culture. In this sense, Russian artists did not compromise on aesthetics in the paintings and posters which they produced. In these artworks, where aesthetics are not ignored, it is possible to see how the government creates the hegemony over fear. On this account, governments can easily manage this orientation process by establishing domination of individuals and institutions with fear. The posters produced in the Soviet Union, which also functioned to direct the society, became one of the most important propaganda tools of the government. These posters, presented with an aesthetic value, played an important role in reflecting the will of the government to the society. This study reveals how the fear and power had been transformed into an aesthetic appearance in the Soviet posters through the semiotics analysis method.

INTRODUCTION

Since its foundation, the Soviet Union had made great efforts on building a new social structure. The low literacy rate was effective for the Bolsheviks to use the propaganda method in posters during this construction process. In the Soviet Union, visual arts had been used extensively in both internal and external propaganda activities. Eventually, posters had become a popular way as a means of spreading propaganda (Stepler, 2008: p. 37). The Soviet Union considered the posters as an effective way of communication and used them to guide and inform people. Consequently, posters had become mass media that had been used extensively (Ayhan et al., 2019: p. 106).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-4655-0.ch017

The Aesthetics of Fear and Power in Soviet Posters

Evaluating propaganda products, especially posters, reveals that propaganda generally focuses on the emotional weaknesses of people. These weaknesses include fear, anger, happiness, commiseration, safety need, protection, compassion, etc. In this regard, Lenin and Hitler, who use contemporary propaganda methods frequently, had mostly adopted the method that benefits from such emotions to spread their ideologies and take action (Rızvanoğlu, 2001: p. 4). Posters were used as a tool to trap the eye (Özerkan & İnceoğlu, 1995). Perception of posters in communication as an object beyond photography and the shock and punch effect of the passionate combination of an image with a sentence is the reason that posters were used by the leaders to make their mark in history (Seguela, 1991).

Soviet Propaganda activities were mostly aimed at imperialism, capitalism and especially Nazis. While the imperialists were portrayed in posters as ugly faced with top hat and frock, the Nazis were highlighted as monsters, barbarian, and fascist (İnceoğlu, 2013: pp. 29-32). Almost all hate-themed, anti-Nazi Soviet propaganda posters included the fylfot symbol. The Nazis were depicted in these posters as monsters and bloody barbarians. Many issues such as disgracing religion, opposition to imperialists, anti-communism, and the Nazis were tried to be imposed on the public through posters.

The Soviet Union implemented the collectivization policy and therefore, private ownership is not allowed. Land and goods owned by the individual were transferred to collective labor (Kolhoz). Within the framework of this policy, the lands, machinery, animals, and products of the rich peasants were confiscated and transferred to the state-owned collective farm. The lands owned by the noble, great landowners, and the church were seized (Turan, 2011: pp.312-313). The wealthy individuals who hide their property have been declared public enemies. In this sense, the Soviet Government opposed ownership and fight with property owners, ruined their reputation in the society by humiliating them with propaganda activities. Posters were also actively used for this purpose.

Lenin pointed out that the proletariat, a large segment of the society, was exploited by the capitalist class, a small minority. He likened religion to a spiritual drink and stated that all the labor was exploited in exchange for a heavenly reward, provided that people were obedient and patient (Lenin, 1965: p. 83). In this sense, especially in the construction of this new humanity, great efforts have been made to eliminate superstitions in the Soviet Union. According to the Bolshevik perspective, religion is considered as man's greatest. People were asked to abandon their religious beliefs and worship. Religion was seen as a bourgeoisie tool for the communist ideology to assimilate the proletariat. For this reason, propaganda activities were carried out against religion and clergymen.

This study aims to reveal how the fear and power themes are aestheticized in the posters in which the Soviet administration carried out its propaganda activities towards the total transformation of society. Therefore, concepts such as aesthetics, aesthetic communication, media aesthetics, media, fear, and power are discussed first, and posters prepared against religion, private ownership, anti-communism, Nazis, and imperialism are evaluated within the framework of semiotic analysis in the following sections.

AESTHETICS

The word aesthetic is derived from the Greek "aisthesis" or "aisthanesthai" terms. "Aisthesis" word means sensation and "aisthanesthai" word related to perceiving, feel, sense (Tunalı, 1998; Turani, 1995: p. 40; Shusterman, 2000). The Greeks used the concept of aesthetics in an epistemological context. In other words, the word "aesthetics" is an epistemological word used in the meaning of information revealed by

21 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-aesthetics-of-fear-and-power-in-soviet-posters/264699

Related Content

Exploring Fresh Insights in Psychological Contract Research: Unveiling Perspectives From the Global South

Kudrat Khuda (2023). *International Journal of Public Sociology and Sociotherapy* (pp. 1-16).

www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-fresh-insights-in-psychological-contract-research/335896

Nature of Tweets in the 2015 Nigerian Presidential Elections

Nwachukwu Andrew Egbunike, Noel Iheburand Ngozi Onyechi (2015). *International Journal of Civic Engagement and Social Change* (pp. 34-52).

www.irma-international.org/article/nature-of-tweets-in-the-2015-nigerian-presidential-elections/142486

Web Platform for Public E-Participation Management: A Case Study

Carlos Quentaland Luis Borges Gouveia (2014). *International Journal of Civic Engagement and Social Change* (pp. 1-22).

www.irma-international.org/article/web-platform-for-public-e-participation-management/120711

The Foundation of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in Education

Kendra V. Saundersand Nekea O. Sanders (2025). *The Power of Social and Emotional Learning for Student Success* (pp. 1-20).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-foundation-of-social-and-emotional-learning-sel-in-education/379545

Navigating the Australian Education System Refugees and New Arrivals: An Insider's View

Alfred Mupenzi (2022). *Handbook of Research on Teaching Strategies for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse International Students* (pp. 265-287).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/navigating-the-australian-education-system-refugees-and-new-arrivals/303749