



Pictures Creating Image

A Curated Exhibition of Illustrated Magazines as Foreign Propaganda 1930-1945

Patrick Rössler

The years between World War I and World War II saw a struggle of political systems, including foreign propaganda rooted in elaborate magazine designs and distributed outside the country of origin. These illustrated press pieces aimed to highlight the achievements of fascist, communist, and democratic societies alike – and often were produced in different languages for global distribution. ICA's exhibition "Pictures Creating Image" presents selected highlights of this genre from a variety of countries, displayed in scarce vintage copies hardly ever on display.

Exhibition on occasion of the 67th Annual ICA Conference
INTERVENTIONS: Communication Research and Practice
Sapphire Ballroom C, Hilton Bayfront, San Diego, CA

Opening lecture: Friday 26 May, 11am

Gallery Open: Friday 26 May, 2pm-6:15pm
Saturday 27 May, 8am-3:15pm
Sunday 28 May, 8am-6:15pm

Booklet design: Danielle Weisheit (2017)

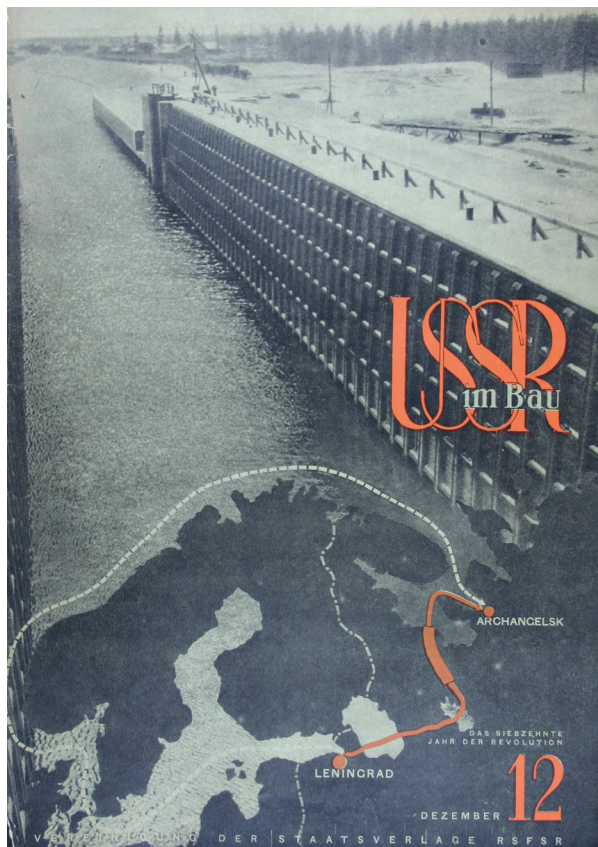
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USSR in construction

(1930-1941)

The prototype for all modern propaganda magazines was undoubtedly SSSR NA STROJKE, published between 1930 and 1941 in four different languages (Russian, English, German, and French; a Spanish edition was added later), first by the state publishing house of the Russian Republic, later by ISOGIS, the state publisher for the graphic arts. The leading class soon realized that magazines were to play a key role in both teaching the people to read and proselytizing for socialism. The magazine was intended to gain friends for the Soviet Union abroad, and for that purpose the international editions, among them USSR IM BAU and USSR IN CONSTRUCTION, were produced. All of them were based on an identical layout and content, with the translation of the texts marking the major difference to the original Russian edition. Already the first issue emphasized that photography should be the major tool to depict the construction work going on in the USSR, because it was assumed to express more than an article even if that article was brilliantly written.

Founded on the initiative of the writer Maxim Gorky, who was a member of the editorial board until his death in 1936, it was the highly estimated Mikhail Koltsov, editor-in-chief of the nation's first illustrated magazine called OGONYOK and first editor of the influential photo magazine SOVETSKOE FOTO, who took responsibility for the monthly issues. He also assembled leading artists in the Soviet Union as freelancers for the production team of a particular issue, as each was devoted to a distinct topic. The layout and art direction of El Lissitzky (often in cooperation with his wife Sophie) and Alexander Rodchenko (together with his partner Varvara Stepanowa) mark a well-known highlight of avant-garde graphic design. But besides the roughly 25 numbers contributed to by Rodchenko and Lissitzky, many other issues, designed e.g. by Nicolai Troshin, Max Alpert, or Arkady Shaiket, also follow the compelling visual language developed chiefly by Lissitzky. Usually there was a separate team of three to four designers who were briefed by the editorial board for the topic; the assignment was placed only after the



maquettes were approved. Lissitzky is quoted with the assertion that “the word layout does not adequately describe the whole nature of our work. I would go so far as to say that the work involved in the presentation of an issue [...] requires no less effort than a painting. And it makes no less of an impact on the public”. The concept of USSR IN CONSTRUCTION made use of all achievements in contemporary typography and printing technology, including constructivism in mise-en-page, photomontage, strong colors, paper folds, die-cuts, and gatefolds. Probably most impressive was the treatment of photography in general, which was printed in toned rotogravure and often used the monumental page size (appr. 12 by 17 inches or 30 x 42 cm) for full-page illustrations. The visual language often applied tightly cropped pictures on a previously unseen scale filling the large pages as a whole, and together with the contrasting close-ups and long-shots, the overall impression was cinematic in the tradition of Eisenstein’s movies.



◀ Cover of the special issue “The White Sea Channel”, USSR in construction No. 12, December 1934 (A. Rodtschenko/W. Stepanowa)

◀ Cover of the special Issue “Soviet Gold”, USSR in construction No. 5, May 1937 (A. Rodtschenko/W. Stepanowa)

Cover of the special issue “Red Army”, USSR in construction No. 2, February 1933 (El Lissitzky)

Photomontages for the special issue “Moscow Metro”, USSR in construction No. 8, August 1935 (N. Troshin)



Americana

(1932-1933)

For many years, no other country in the world – not even the U.S. – was able to produce a foreign propaganda magazine that could compete with the powerful design of USSR IN CONSTRUCTION. In the early 1930s, all parts of the Western World were shaken by an economic depression, so exerting an influence on publics in other countries seemed less relevant. A certain exception was marked by AMERICANA, a short-lived satirical magazine published by left-wing authors in New York. Its spreads are dominated by full-page cartoons, most of them with a political background taking a critical stance towards capitalism and militarism. In later issues, photography was included as a means of visual storytelling, juxtaposing impressions from the life of the poor with headlines referring to the world of the upper class.

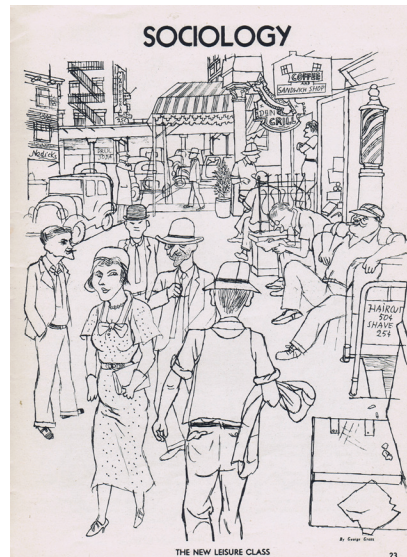
Although circulation was small and only few copies have survived up till now, AMERICANA is important for our topic because the editorial board of three included George Grosz, one of the most prominent artists of Weimar Germany, famous as a founder of Dadaism and member of the Communist party. He contributed several original drawings to AMERICANA, including, for instance, his depiction of the “new leisure class” in the U.S. called “Sociology” and printed in the very first issue. Notably, this involvement in opinion building of the American audience was highly unusual in those days and occurred well ahead of the Nazi party ruling Germany from 1933 onwards, forcing almost all avant-garde artists into emigration, among them Grosz as one of the first persons leaving Germany. The magazine, however, had printed an insightful article named “Monster Hitler” as the first contribution to his series of “Nazi Atrocities” as early as 1932. These and other propaganda attacks against the Nazi party were not able to prevent the so-called “Third Reich” from arising out of German elections in November 1932.

George Grosz: “Sociology”, Americana Vol. 1, No. 1, November 1932

Cover “Jack-in-the-box”, Americana Vol. 1, No. 11, September 1933

Cartoon “The German version of Genesis”, Americana Vol. 1, No. 11, September 1933

- ▶ Modernist Cover “Beach beauty”, Italia No. 9, July 1936
- ▶ Cover “In Italy’s glorious sunshine”, Italia No. 10, August 1936
- ▶ Cover “Olympic Games Berlin”, Nippon No. 7, May 1936
- ▶ Cover “Flower”, Nippon No. 16, 1938



Italia

(1932-1943)

A completely different motivation led to the publication of *ITALIA*, a monthly magazine promoting the beauty of Italian landscapes and its wealth of historic sites. Issued by the national tourism authority ENIT (Ente nazionale industrie turistiche), its main objective was to attract travelers from all over the world, to foster the nation's status as one of the prime targets for an increasingly mobile middle class in mostly Western nations that could now afford to visit one of the cultural hotspots in Europe. Similar periodicals had emerged in other countries (such as *GERMANY* edited in three different language editions, for instance) but what makes *ITALIA* particular is, on the one hand, its use of a modernist visual language oriented towards the "New Typography" developed in the 1920s at the Bauhaus and elsewhere. The skillful designs of the Pizzi & Pizio Studios Milan/Roma combine photography and graphics to a montage style that was far ahead of its time.

On the other hand, and this makes *ITALIA* crucial for our topic, it served as a propaganda tool as well by highlighting the progress of the country under its fascist regime. Although Mussolini remains almost invisible in the magazine, his ideology becomes apparent when looking at the achievements of his "new" Italy. The hidden message behind the impressions of happy sunbathers and ancient ruins celebrates an authoritarian regime running a state effectively and beneficiary for its population. While aiming at foreign visitors at first-hand, *ITALIA* works as a well-designed propaganda tool at a second glance.



Nippon

(1934-1944)

In the 1930s, Japan still appeared to be far remote from the Western world, both in terms of culture and society. Its deep spirituality, however, attracted intellectuals from all over the world, and by the same token the nation aimed at presenting itself as open for innovation and Western influence. This message was conveyed almost perfectly by *NIPPON*, a magazine published in English and Japanese editions between 1934 and 1944. In 36 issues altogether, leading graphic designers from Japan that had been educated at the Bauhaus and other major institutions in Europe and the U.S. produced an elegant and distinguished portrayal of Japan between tradition and modernity. Special issues covered particular topics (e. g. the role of women in Japanese society), while most of the content presented a variety of cultural events and historical sites, urbanism and landscapes, even companies and their products. Page design followed pretty close what *DIE NEUE LINIE*, a lifestyle magazine from Germany once launched by former Bauhaus masters, promoted with global success: a lavish spread design with a sans-serif typeface, a mix of illustrations and large photographs, and the use of white spaces to create the impression of a well-organized page. Thus *NIPPON* propagated the image of a nation in transition, embracing the modernist movements while estimating the spirit of their ancestors. Today, issues of the magazine are often exhibited and serve as early documents for the emerging functionalism in Japanese culture and design.



Deutschland

(1934-1944)

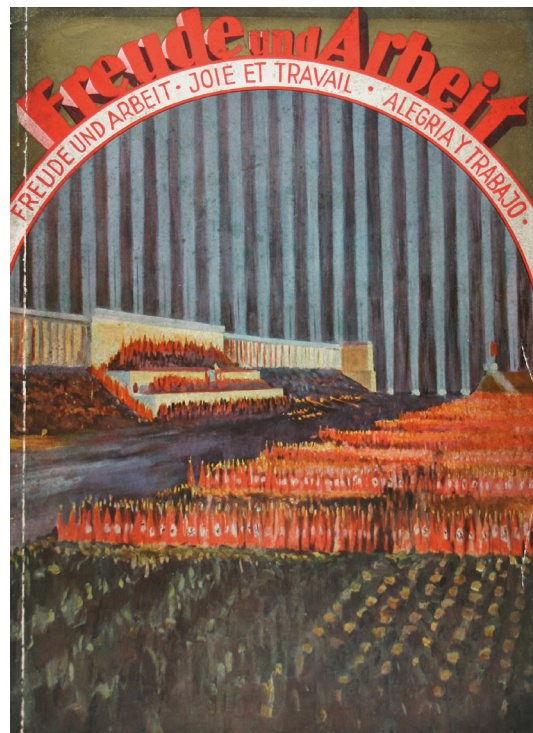
From a today's point of view, the Nazi regime maintained three important publications aiming at worldwide audiences, which were meant to advertise the Fascist ideology concealed behind a façade of modern journalism and layout: FREUDE UND ARBEIT ['Joy and Work'], BERLIN - ROM - TOKIO, and SIGNAL. All of them joined DEUTSCHLAND, a travel magazine published by the Reichsausschuss für Fremdenverkehr in a German and several foreign language editions, which were intended to inform about travel opportunities for tourists. Resembling ITALIA (see above), it is mostly apolitical and focused on depicting the beauty of the landscape and the appeal of traditional culture. Still, it served an important function by creating the impression that under the National-Socialist regime, both tradition and modernism exist in a peaceful coexistence. Leaders were highly interested in showing a global audience that, despite the wave of emigrations, an intellectual life still exists in Nazi Germany. As a consequence, DEUTSCHLAND features industrialization and the "domesticated avant-garde" of former Bauhaus artists as well as the artistic traditions of medieval painting and the acclaimed German crafts. The overall tone of the periodical is a positivist one, without any reference to anti-Semitism, anti-Communism, or the Nazi dictatorship.



Cover of Deutschland Vol. 1, No. 2, May 1934

Herbert Bayer: Poster advertising the exhibition "German people, German work"; back cover of Deutschland Vol. 1, No. 2, May 1934

Cover "Troups and flags celebrating the Reichsparteitag", Freude und Arbeit No. 10, 1937



Freude und Arbeit

(1936-1943)

From an art director's perspective, the magazine FREUDE UND ARBEIT combined propagandistic value and innovative graphic design better than any other German publication in history. Founded as the official outlet of leisure-time organizations in Germany and its friendly nations, it was published as a mixture of up to six different languages and sold in 44 countries. During the 'Second Congress for Leisure Time and Recreation' in Hamburg 1936, which succeeded an earlier event in Los Angeles 1932, an 'International Central Bureau Joy and Work' was founded in the German capital, and the magazine arose from a voluminous brochure issued on occasion of reviewing this congress. "We brought over fifty nations together in Hamburg with the idea of providing means for the leisure time and recreation of their fellowmen [... This] is certainly the best way of creating good feeling and mutual respect between nations", stated the first director of the office, Dr. Robert Ley, in his introduction for the magazine's first issue.

Published monthly until 1943 with more than 100 pages per copy, the regime positioned FREUDE UND ARBEIT as a visual competitor to USSR IN CONSTRUCTION (see above). It boasted modernism in layout to be its singular purpose, based on the consideration that the magazine had to work as an almost nonverbal medium, with the graphic presentation ensuring the communicative purposes. Editor-in-chief Walter Kiehl recruited, among others, former Bauhaus students Kurt Kranz and the Neuner brothers, who exerted a strong influence on the art direction of FREUDE UND ARBEIT. It promoted the montage of sometimes insignificant photos to sumptuous spreads, which set standards beyond the decline of Nazi Germany. Its propagandistic value became most apparent in a special issue juxtaposing the nation's wealth and poverty in Russia, using (among others) pictures of starving and dying children. Another issue was completely devoted to illustrate programmatic phrases from a Fuehrer's speech, thus drawing a shiny picture of the German society and its living conditions. The periodical was an expensive calling card for the regime, and although the layout only apparently based on the paradigms of 'new typography', FREUDE UND ARBEIT was the first popular magazine to maintain a full color layout.

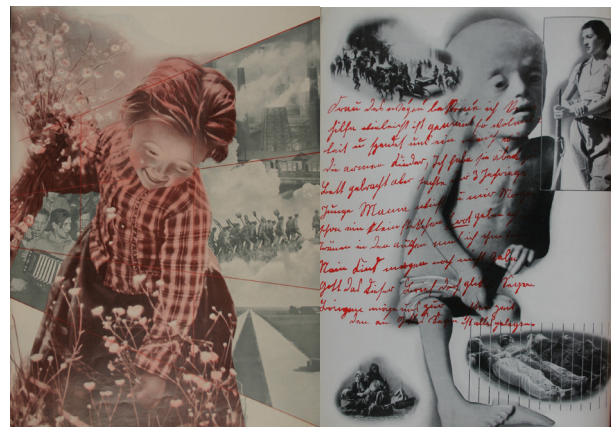
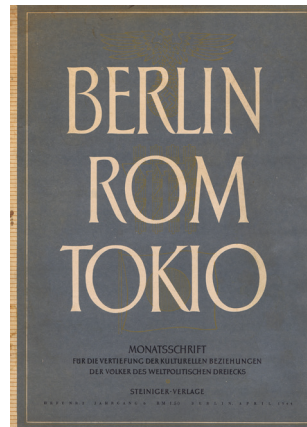
Spread "Childhood in Russia and Germany",
Freude und Arbeit No. 4, 1937

Cover of Berlin Rom Tokio, Vol. 2, No. 1, January 1940

Berlin – Rom – Tokio

(1939-1944)

With Japan entering the war in 1941, another high-class magazine was launched that was meant to be devoted to 'the deepening of the cultural relationships of the nations assembled in the triangle of international politics' (subtitle), addressing the Axis powers Germany, Italy and Japan. Named after the national capitals, BERLIN – ROM – TOKIO was almost a clone of NIPPON, produced in large-size format on art paper and backing the Fascist war through intellectually demanding coverage. Wartime entered the pages of this magazine only in form of a general reasoning on the political situation, and the majority of reports dealt with profusely illustrated cultural issues. Just like other influential magazines of the Nazi era, clumsy propaganda was hidden behind the curtain of serious argument, and dressed in a very beautiful graphic design intended to convince its readers of the progressiveness of its creators.



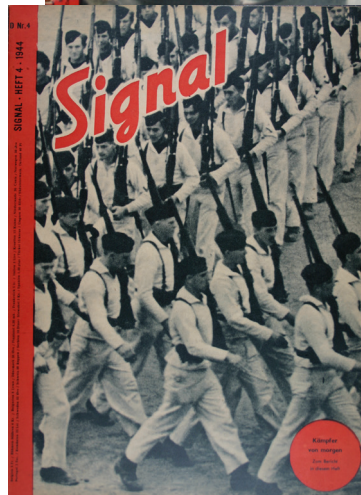
Signal

(1940-1945)

Originally published as a special edition of the BERLINER ILLUSTRIRTE ZEITUNG, the foreign department of the German Armed Forces ("Wehrmacht") produced the bi-weekly news magazine SIGNAL which was not available in Germany. Representing the state periodical with the highest circulation (appr. 2.5 million in 1943), the editors established altogether 20 (!) versions in different languages, among them, of course, English, French, Italian and Spanish, but also the Slavic and Scandinavian languages and even Arabic. Texts were translated in-house and embedded into a shared spread design, and copies were sold at dumping prices in each country to undercut all local competitors. The reasons for this momentous undertaking were strictly propagandistic - to promote the German spirit and culture in the occupied territories as well as in the still neutral countries, mainly in Europe. The perspective emphasized Germany as the decisive power in a rising new Europe, avoiding all indications for a rule by force in favor of cultural supremacy. Hence, the editors claimed their periodical to be 'the magazine of the New Europe'.

Between April 1940 and March 1945, readers obtained a serious publication with international flair and a clever mixture of texts that dealt in a relatively sober and factual way with everyday matters and entertainment, but merely hinted at the events and effects of the war. Exceptions were, however, the reports from the front line, illustrated with impressive pictures taken by the photojournalists organized and specially trained in so-called 'propaganda divisions' (PK). Not a word was written on anti-Semitism, atrocities of the Holocaust, or the 'subhuman creatures' in Russia. This concept of 'propaganda on cat's paws' was also supported by Nazi officials like the regime's highest censor, Goebbels, who used to evaluate each issue personally.

The American magazine LIFE probably served as a model for the concept of SIGNAL. In turn, LIFE commented in March 1943 on the most relevant propagandistic counterpart in the U.S., VICTORY, that it was nothing more than a timid imitation of SIGNAL, with only half of SIGNAL's circulation and lacking its intense style of propaganda. Observers credited SIGNAL as being the best propaganda magazine of all time, British newspapers conceded SIGNAL's uniqueness, and even in the post-war period editors are cited with the assessment that its collected volumes exerted a strong influence on news journalism.



Cover story "Fighters of the Future", Signal No. 4, February 1941

Cover story and spread "German aircrafts in British skies", Signal No. 4, February 1941