

PAUL PETER



PIE CHAND

Political Graphics,

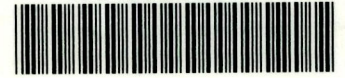
education

and agitation

by Gene Cooke,

VISUAL 199,

COMMUNICATION 1/6



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IN THE 'nineties we can boast of near futuristic data and information systems that our predecessors could never have imagined possible, except maybe in the pages of a Jules Verne novel. Every day live news stories from around the globe are beamed directly to our living rooms. From its early beginnings in 1973 the Internet has grown to include more than 20 million users in 180 countries and is seemingly limitless in its future possible uses. We also have the CD Rom which according to Bill Gates, founder of the Microsoft software company, is "one of the harbingers of the information superhighway" (Swerdlow, October 1995, p. 16). However, according to visual communicator Michael Hardt, the networks are already experiencing data jams, a sort of "informative constipation" (Hardt, 1995) and people are having difficulty reading the information. Another drawback is that with so much knowledge it is hard for us to edit it all.

Important information which effects us personally, nationally or globally is a small part of the myriad and is threatened because of this. It would be in danger of being ignored totally were it not for people who make it their task in life to highlight the issues for us. The people in question are the political and social commentators of the world.

This thesis in general is about the supply of information and resulting education, not merely in a scholarly sense, of the masses. It centres around political and social commentators and, in particular, one time graphic designer and now self-styled graphic agitator and educator, Paul Peter Piech. He is in many ways an ideal choice for the central topic of my thesis. Piech, in his role as a graphics tutor, has had a close working relationship with many colleges and educational institutions including NCAD's Visual Communications department. The prints produced by him during his terms here as a visiting lecturer



combined with others donated by him have resulted in quite a large collection of his work. This collection, while an informal and uncatalogued one, constitutes an archive of Piech's work comparable with that of the V&A's print room collection. It is this collection and, more importantly, contact with Piech thanks to his connection with the College that have served as the primary sources of information and research material for my thesis. Previous published works on Piech have concentrated on his distinctive pseudo expressionistic style. They have talked at length about his use of lino, how it suits his energetic temperament and enables him to produce his ideas quickly. This speed of production sometimes causes misprints or misspells which he leaves. In my research I have more than once read that he paid £15 for his Gem Thompson press which forms the hub of his private press, the Taurus Press. These are very nice pieces of analysis and information in themselves but they tend to stray a bit away from what I think, and what he infers in his correspondence, Piech is actually about.

Piech is a politically and socially motivated graphic designer. The important elements in his work are continuous; they are the events that are happening everyday in the world. What my thesis will try to do is to place political / social commentators within their environment, attempting to show where their work and thoughts come from and lead to; in short why they do what they do. This discussion will briefly cover the German Expressionists and the American Social Realists as a backdrop to Piech, who I would see as being representative of many of the social commentators of our time in both mind and deed. He also acknowledges the influence of the groups mentioned and people like Ben Shahn on his work, so he is a more than convenient link in the chain. When writers in general

cite Shahn and the Expressionists, among others, as Piech's influences the discussion tends to move to a comparison and contrast of their relative visual styles. For me this is slightly superficial. He also fits into the same mode of thought, influence and experience as they do. These people produced their graphics in response to situations which they felt people should know about. As a result my emphasis will not be on the stylistic attributes of individual pieces, although it will be mentioned. It is their function and content, relative to the background of their producer and production, that is more important; communication of ideas based on the informed opinion of the artist. One could possibly question the place and importance of posters, particularly Piech's posters, which use the somewhat dated technique of linocut, as a contemporary mode of communication. It is in its very "simplicity" that its success lies though. According to Steven Heller, the poster can "at least stand out within the indigestible and complex web of electronically transmitted information with which we are bombarded" (Heller, 1995, p. 60), a sentiment which is echoed and compounded by Piech's work

CHAPTER I:
Piech's background
and influences.
1.1 Childhood in
Brooklyn.

EVERY ARTWORK is a result of several influences and experiences on the artist. An artist's influences are not merely visual though; artists are also the products of their cultural environments.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the area of political and socially motivated art and graphics as this artform is dependent on society and its issues. Paul Peter Piech is no exception to this and his work is a combination of visual influences, which will be discussed in due course as it becomes necessary, and the lessons he has learned in life.

As quite often happens, the events that prove to be most influential in later life were, at the time of their happening, low on the artist's list of priorities in life. While Piech was growing up in the 1920s there were events happening that, while unknown to him at the time, would prove to be of major importance to his life and work in later years. The political scene in Germany was producing a special breed of artistic commentator and something similar, but to a lesser degree, was happening in America. Artists such as Ben Shahn and the Mexican born Diego Rivera to name a few, were using their respective artforms to highlight the ills that they saw in society. But at the time Paul Peter Piech had other more important things on his mind. When you are a child there is nothing quite so important as the events that are happening in your own small section of the world.

Childhood is a time of education and learning unequalled at any other time of your life. In a few short years you learn the very basics such as walking, talking, thinking and a multitude of other necessities. It is also a time of learning values, which are influenced by your parents, your contemporaries, the environment; the very atmosphere around you. Piech maintains that this "atmosphere" stayed with him throughout the years. In

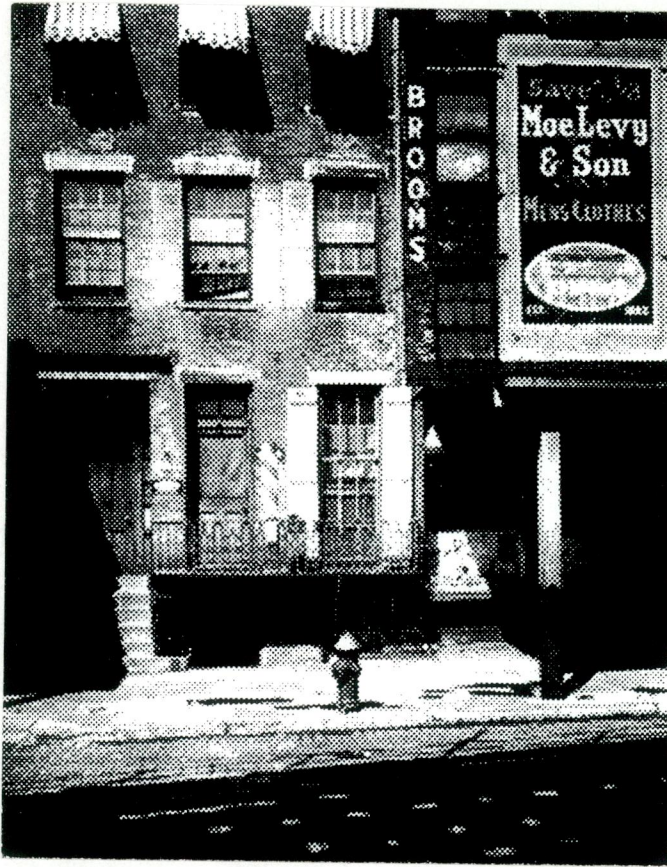


FIG. 1.1, A typical domestic dwelling in New York City, photographed by Walker Evans, (c. 1934).

fact, he considers it one of the only reasons that a great portion of his “graphics are devoted to justice, freedom, fighting bigotry”(Piech, September 1995, p. 1), such were the lessons he learned.

In 1913 Piech’s parents left the deprivation and poverty of the Ukraine for the wealth and prosperity of the American Dream. Far away hills are quite often green and they soon found that for newly arrived Europeans the dream could sometimes turn into a nightmare. They coped, however, even though the hardship of life itself was continually compounded by other events back in Europe and in America itself.

From 1916 onward mainland Europe was in almost constant turmoil; World War I raged over much of the land. In Russia they were witnessing the downfall of their Monarchy and the violent and bloody birth of a new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics which was, as we know, to have effects on the world as a whole for many years. America was involved in the war at quite a late stage and, consequently, suffered very little either financially or physically. It was, however, a different story for the emigrant population. Brooklyn, the area of New York (FIG. 1.1) where the Piech family lived, was a hotch potch of nationalities including Europeans. Events in Europe had greater implications for them and they were more aware of them as a result. While the Piechs, like many others, had left Europe behind, it was still their heartland. As the events unfolded it became clear that, even should they want to return or if they were let, their homeland would never be the same place for many European emigrants.

Paul Peter Piech was born in 1920. The war had finished as had the revolutions and risings. Even though he was born in New York, he was born into a European community. The sense of family and nationality were very strong among the emigrants

and Piech learned a lot about his roots. Brooklyn was, as mentioned, a varied mix of communities at the time and Piech was in the middle of it all. In school he shared classes with Irish, Germans, Jews, Italians, etc. and he says himself that he was able to “assimilate this free education and experiences of different nationalities and cultures”(Piech, September 1995, p. 1). This influence is very evident in the global nature of his work even today as will be seen.

Brooklyn, as well as being an area of great social mix and culture, was also a strong working class area and was hard hit when the American Depression came about in 1929. This was to be a time of great hardship for people that would last into the thirties. This was also to be the start of another of Piech’s great learning periods as he witnessed how his parents and those around him coped with life and existence in the depression.

Piech remembers that his parents “always managed to work through it” by taking on any “menial jobs that were available”(Piech, August 1995, p. 1). He respected them for this but hated the fact that they were trapped in the awful web of life and that such jobs were a necessity and not a matter of choice. Such events impressed upon him the ills that people had to suffer based on their position in society. He recognised that status in society could be a result of a whole range of things, be it nationality, the language you speak, your beliefs or culture, anything at all.

The Depression was not the only problem at the time, although many problems emerged in its wake or as a direct result. Not all people were willing or able to work their way through the hardships. As the employment situation worsened, the crime rate escalated. When speaking of his neighbourhood Piech says that it was “colourful and cosmopolitan”. However, it



FIG. 1.2, A wounded soldier being treated in the trenches.

was at the same time “very tough” and it became known as a “Murder Incorporated Area”(Fielding, 1995, p. 9). This was a term that was to become synonymous with the Mafia and other gang related activities. It was quite easy to get involved in this and many of Piech’s friends at the time did. A lot of them ended up either in jail or dead in the end.

The lesson of survival through work that he had learned from his parents stood to him and he managed to change his situation through education. As a result of this he obtained a place in the Cooper Union School of Art in New York. While at the time of his entrance he was low on the list of successful applicants, he was determined to make something of himself and by the end of his college career he had become one of the top students of his year. In order for us to understand the type of education that Piech obtained it would be useful to return to Europe, and in particular Germany at the time of the First World War to see where the influences on his tutors and their, work practices, were coming from.

1.2 Piech’s
Expressionist
educators.

From 1914 onwards World War I raged across Europe, with Germany playing a large part in the destruction. This conflict was to introduce a whole new era of warfare that was to have a profound effect on the state of both Europe and people’s minds afterwards. Trench fighting, rapid firing weapons, heavy artillery and biological warfare were all new horrors never before witnessed (FIG. 1.2).

As to be expected, there were many after-effects of the War on all the countries, including Germany. The German economy was in tatters. The massive cost of the War, combined with the reparation payments they had to make to the other countries after they had lost, produced a huge national debt. In

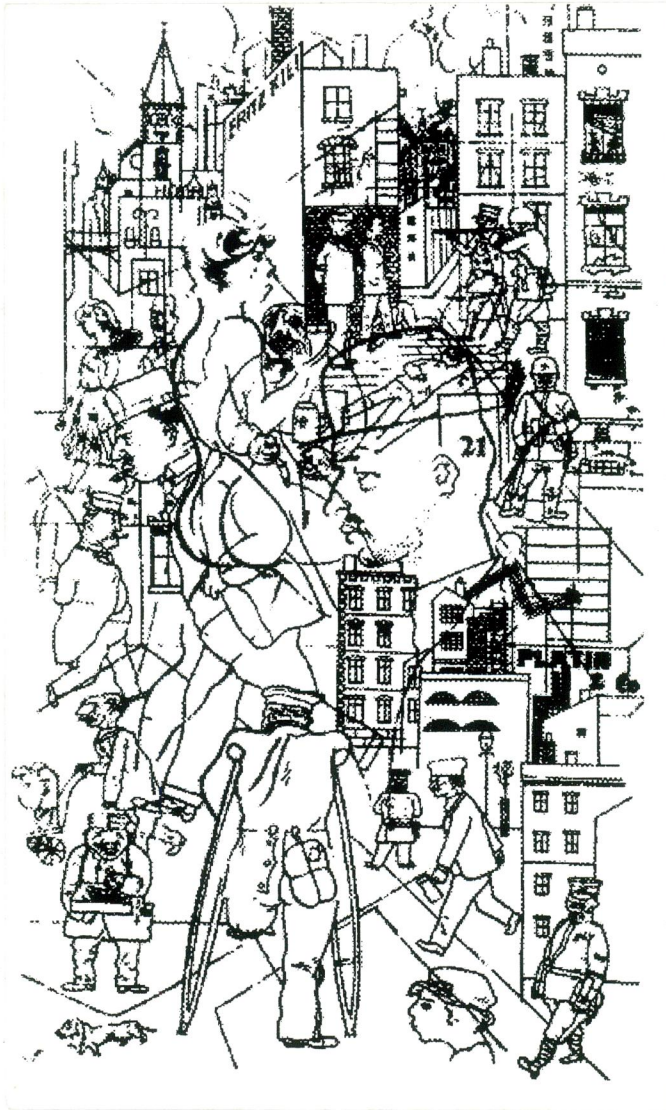


FIG. 1.3, Cross Section, Grosz's commentary on German street life as he saw it, from his book *Ecce Homo* (*Behold Man*), (1920).

1921 the exchange rate with the dollar was 349 marks; less than a year later it had increased to 4.2 million marks.

The destruction had its effects on the people in other more visible ways. All the men of a fighting age had gone to War and as a result nearly an entire generation was devastated. Many families had lost one or more sons and often the ones that did survive came home either mentally or physically scarred. Far from receiving a hero's welcome on their return, many of the soldiers came back crippled outcasts. Mental scarring was a relatively new trauma; previous conflicts had never had the severe psychological effects that have become a factor of warfare since World War I. Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, Shell Shock and the effects of nerve gas were in evidence among many of the veterans.

Out of the negative abyss came a positive light, a new critical awareness. Men from all walks of life went to war, including the artistic population of Germany, its writers, painters, playwrights, etc. The experiences they had in the War lasted with them through life. They saw the War as a pointless waste of lives, and the system that produced it as a waster of lives. In the ensuing political and social turmoil after the War these artists were among the first to recognise potential problems in society and the first to make comment. Collectively they were known as German Expressionists, but this was an umbrella term which included several smaller groups in various different cities.

The characteristic awareness of these artists can be seen in the work of George Grosz. For example, his piece *Cross Section* (FIG.1.3), from his book *Ecce Homo*, displays many of his fears for the future while commenting on the present. The piece shows a cross section of society and common events at that time, fat cat business men, ruined buildings, back street executions. We can

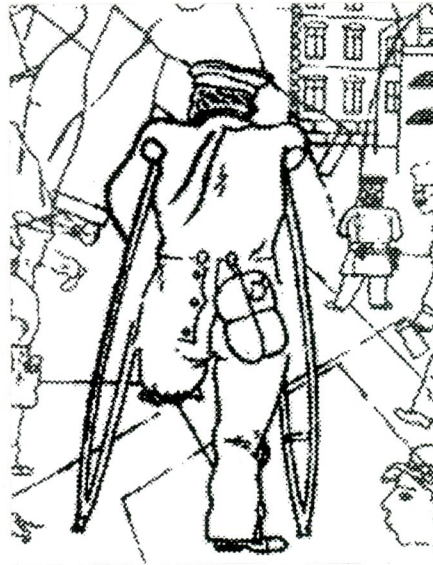


FIG. 1.4, Many German soldiers returned home as unwanted cripples instead of heroes, (detail of *Cross Section*, 1920).

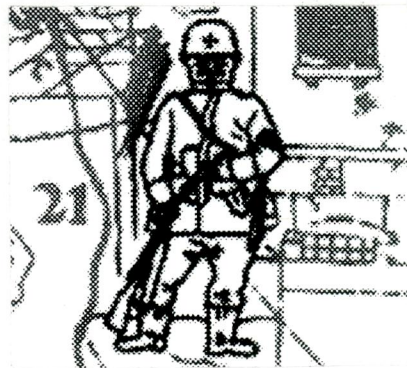


FIG. 1.5, Armed members of the Nazi party were already a common enough site on the streets to be included in *Cross Section*, (1920).

also see in FIG. 1.4 the crippled war veterans mentioned above, etc. Grosz has also illustrated a uniformed, armed member of the Nazi Party (FIG. 1.5) among all of these ills of society. He saw their dangerous potential, even though at the time, 1920, the Nazis were not major players in the political world.

The art of social and political commentary was not a new one in Germany. In 1896 in Munich, the capital of Bavaria, the satirical magazine *Simplicissimus* was established. Before long it had attained a reputation for itself of "high class mockery of the pompous and contradictory society" (Zeman, 1984, p. 12) around it.

The Expressionists, no strangers to satirical comment, were regular contributors to the periodical. During the period between the wars there were a variety of small edition magazines in the same sort of vein. Grosz, Paul Weber, John Heartfield and his brother, among others, were involved in the setting up and running of magazines like *Die Neu Jugend*, (*the New Youth*) and *Die Pleiten* (*The Bankruptcy*). Their input worked on several levels. Stylistically the publications took on a very Expressionist look, but as well as bringing their style, these artists also brought their interpretation of events that were going on. In effect there was the birth of an underground opinion that was contrary to the government approved one. The success of such ventures depended largely on the use of private presses. While censorship did not exist initially as legislation at the time, society frowned on non-establishment art and literature. The Empire had quite often "harassed" artists for their social convictions and "proletarian posters" (Gay, 1974, p. 3). As a result, small privately run presses enabled people to print whatever they wanted in fairly large editions.

With the social discontent after the War came political

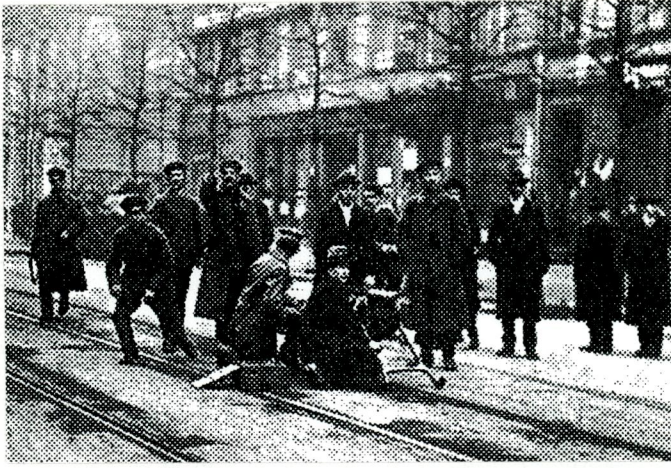


FIG. 1.6, Armed revolutionary workers and soldiers on the streets of Berlin during the Spartacus uprising, January 6 1919.



FIG. 1.7, *Karl Liebknecht Memorial*, a woodcut by Käthe Kollwitz, (1919-1920, 50cm.x 35cm.)

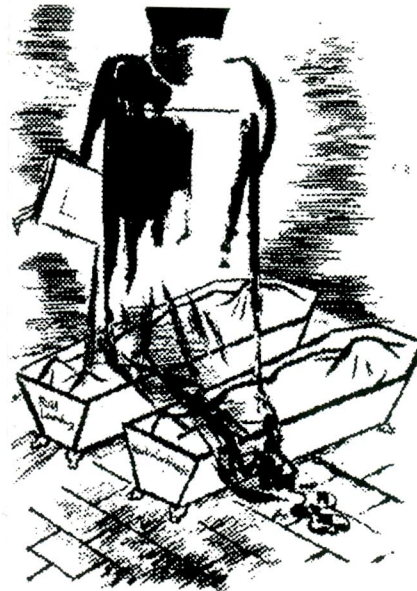


FIG. 1.8, *Remember*, Grosz's depiction of the deaths of Liebknecht and Luxemburg shows a German hangman judge looming over their coffin, (1919).

instability. The era saw the emergence of new parties and groups that covered every end of the political spectrum. The political scene began to reach a high level of intensity, so high that it had started to become dangerous to speak out, verbally, artistically or otherwise. It had become necessary for artists either to commit and suffer the consequences, or depart from their critical commentary on the political situation. As would be expected, some backed down in the interests of personal safety but the majority of these artists had strong political opinions and continued to comment. Many of them, due to their beliefs, allied with the Liberal and extreme left groups.

As a result of this political instability Germany was to become the scene of many violent uprisings from 1918 onward (FIG. 1.6). The state in its attempts to control these risings enlisted the help of militia groups comprising war hardened veterans. Typical of their involvement was the brutal and extreme quelling of one of the first risings in 1919, that of the Spartacists, a left wing group. In a subsequent clear up operation the leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, were murdered. This, because of the strong links between the artists and left wing politics, sent shock waves through their community. Many, like Grosz and Käthe Kollwitz, expressed themselves artistically. Kollwitz showed a personal and public sympathy and sadness at the loss of Liebknecht (FIG. 1.7), and Grosz showed the malice behind the murders (FIG. 1.8).

Violent political faction fighting and risings, combined with continuous strikes incurred by the financial situation became common events on the city streets. This was to remain so until the unified violence of the Nazi party and its armed wing came to power in 1933 by virtue of being the most brutal faction.

It was this rise to power that saw the end of political comment. The Nazis would tolerate no dissension and set about gradually bringing the media under the exclusive control of Goebbels and his Propaganda Ministry. There was no place any more for private presses and they were either closed down or absorbed into the Nazi media machine. There came a time when the Expressionists had to shut up, get out or cease to exist. Some disappeared, some stayed and ceased to criticise but many, due to necessity, left the country.

Much of this collective European artistic knowledge and social consciousness found its way to America and into the education system. It was through them that Paul Peter Piech obtained much of his education at the Cooper Union, an art college in New York. The Expressionists and other artistic refugees, who found teaching jobs there after fleeing from the might and malice of Germany, taught him the artforms and ideals that they had learned both there and in Europe. Georg Salter taught him calligraphy and letterforms; Joseph Breitenbach, photography; Eugene de Lapotecki, typography and Hans Moller was one of his visual communications tutors. He also learned about their more political nature, their approach to their work and its role, and these became another set of values that he would carry to later life.

1.3 Piech's American predecessors and influences.

Piech's early artistic influences did not only come from Germany. The events that were shaping his life as a child in Brooklyn were being witnessed and felt by more established artists at that time in America. Whereas Piech cites these experiences as the impetus for his later work other artists, like Ben Shahn, were in a position to comment on events as they happened. For the purpose of this thesis I will concentrate

primarily on Shahn when talking of American socially and politically motivated artists. This is not to say that he was the only one at the time; there were a lot of artists at the time who were politically involved who can be loosely grouped into a movement called the Social Realists. In an attempt to show the connection that I think exists between Shahn and Piech, and other artists, my emphasis will be on Shahn's work relative to his motivation; the world he lived in.

While these politically sensitive artists were based in America a lot of their influences came from Europe and the rest of the world. Shahn himself was born in Kovno, Lithuania, and spent the first 8 years of his life there until he moved to New York in 1906. In the 'twenties Shahn returned to and toured mainland Europe and the "political ferment" he experienced changed his "own view of life" (Prescott, 1982, p. v). This political ferment was the same one that the German Expressionists were devoting so much of their artistic efforts to. For an American, albeit an emigrant American, Shahn was to experience more of European, particularly the social and political German, art and culture than many others because of his travels.

At that time there was a strong anti-German attitude that had prevailed in America since the First World War, but it was by no means a feeling harboured by everybody and particularly not the artistic community. Exhibitions of the Expressionist style had begun, the first one in 1925 organised by the German Art Historian William Valentee at the Anderson Galleries, New York. A small independent group known as the Harvard Society followed on from this lead. The Society was started by a collection of students in Harvard who exhibited the work of both contemporary American artists and as much of the modern European art as they could lay their hands upon. At a time when

both Shahn and his friend Walker Evans exhibited there regularly the gallery was host to several German shows. Included in this was an Expressionist exhibition which included the work of people like Klee, Beckmann, Grosz, Heckel, Hofer, Kirchner, Kokoschka and Nolde. They were also the first to hold a Bauhaus show outside Germany in 1931. It was through these galleries that many people that couldn't travel around Europe got their first taste of its art and social issues.

America was not without its own problems at this time. The most major of these would have been the Depression in the early 'thirties and the Dustbowl that followed it in the American heartland. In general the artistic response to events in America were slightly different from that of mainland Europe. In Europe it was up to the artists themselves to make comment and quite often it was against the wishes of the prevailing political powers. In America the government at the time invited the artists to help them deal with and comment on the problems. The artists were to fulfil a dual role; they were to beautify the country in an attempt to lift the spirits of the people and they were also to document the ills that were ongoing around the country. The fact that artists were working for the government calls into question the level of independence that they had in their artistic expression but the issue of government intervention in art and the media and censorship will be discussed later.

Shahn at this time was working with Diego Rivera painting murals as part of a group called Art Front but he eventually became part of a government run organisation called the FSA (Farm Security Administration). This was set up with the aim of easing the plight of dispossessed farmers from the Dustbowl. The organisation was divided into different sections, informative, photographic, painting, administrative, to mention



FIG. 1.9, A destitute family on the road at the time of the dustbowl, photographed by Ben Shahn, (October 1934).



FIG 1.10, (at left), New York City scene photographed by Shahn in 1932.



FIG 1.11, (bottom), *Willis Avenue Bridge* based on several of Shahn's visual encounters including FIG. 1.10. (1940, 78cm.x 57.5cm.)

but a few.

The photographic section of the FSA was run by a man called Roy Stryker and their objective was to tour the country documenting what they saw. This was done in an attempt to show people that the effects of the Depression were still going on around America even if the cities had gotten over the worst of it. Officially Shahn was not a member of this section of the FSA but he would sometimes go on the field trips with his friend, the photographer, Walker Evans. On one such occasion he was given a camera and Roy Stryker was more than impressed with the results; Shahn could actually take photographs that meant something (FIG. 1.9). As a result of this Shahn went with them on most of their trips until he was officially regarded as a member of the group. These trips provided him with a massive collection of visual images, both photographic and drawn, and of experiences of other people's hardships that he would not otherwise have seen. This collection of visual experiences was to prove very useful as a source for his later work as in FIGS.

1.10&1.11. Shahn says of his work that his attempts to focus on the "ills of society" were not done in "bitterness but in the hope of eradicating these obstacles" (Prescott, 1982, p. v). This eradication would take the form of educating people against making the same mistakes again by showing them the results of the mistakes.

Both Shahn and Evans had a great effect on the work that was produced by the group and Stryker rated their opinions very highly. Their work was shown to newcomers to the group as an example of the desired style and content of the FSA's work. Shahn convinced Stryker that if the photographs were to have any effect and not be ignored they needed to show the bigger social picture in their work. It was not enough to merely show

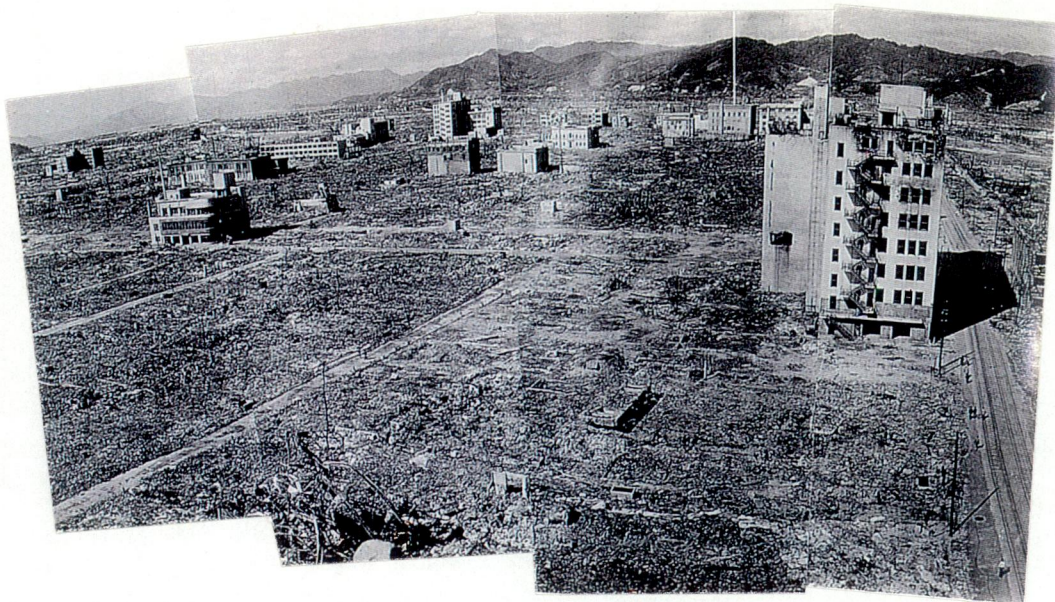


FIG. 1.12, The devastation of Hiroshima 2 months after they were the targets of an American nuclear strike, photographed by Shigeo Hayashi, (August 6 1945).

the barren land, according to Shahn one had to show the effects that this "eroded soil has on a kid who looks starved" (Guimond, 1991, p. 111).

America eventually came through the effects of the Depression and the Dustbowl. By the time that Piech had finished at the Cooper Union School of Art the country had by and large sorted its affairs out economically and, relatively speaking, socially. Relative, that is, to social affairs in previous years. Poverty was still a problem and race relations would continue to be unresolved for many years.

1.4 The lasting effects of war.

Nothing remains the same and stability is only there to be shaken as America and the world at large were to find out fairly soon. The outbreak of World War 2 was the start of an era of great change that went on even after the War was over; its effects are still visible in the present day reshaping of Europe. Mankind thought that there was no way that warfare could be as violent as that of the First World War but they managed to surprise themselves with a whole new set of horrors. Saturation bombings, Hitler's Blitzkrieg, lightning fast warfare involving combined tank and air attack, genocide and countless other atrocities dwarfed those of First World War by comparison. It also saw the emergence of the new mass destruction machine of the era, the nuclear weapon, whose power was to stun many and to bring a nation to its knees (FIG. 1.12). Nuclear Weapons and in particular their disarmament have since proven to be a major topic of protest. This protest was initially headed by CND (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) in the late 'fifties and early 'sixties. In the early 'eighties NATO and the Soviet Block embarked on a massive deployment of short to medium range missile throughout Europe which prompted a new vigour in the

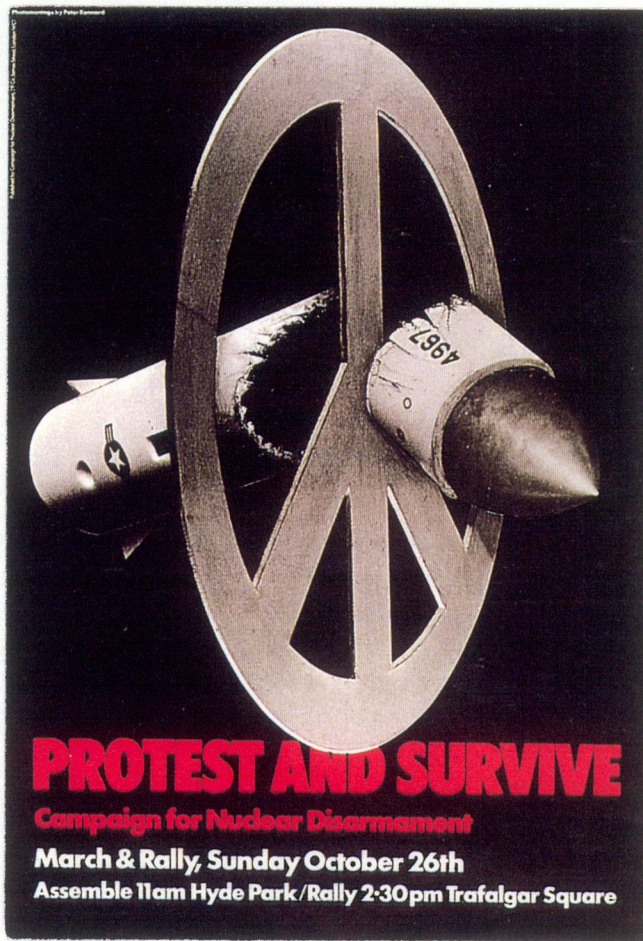


FIG. 1.13, *Protest and Survive*, an example of the kind of poster that Peter Kennard was producing for the CND as part of their revitalisation, (1979).

Nuclear protest. CND aided by the artist Peter Kennard started a more high profile form of visual protest as in FIG. 1.13. Also a few years later, in the early 'eighties, there was the establishment of the Women's Peace Camp around Greenham Common Base in protest at their housing missiles at the site. Piech and many others took part in the visual protest of the time and still do.

America was for a time spared the direct effects of and involvement in the War. The continuous sinking of their civilian fleet by German submarine groups and the bombing of their Pacific naval bases by the Japanese prompted their entry into the conflict. As with Germany's artistic population in 1916, America's creative community was profoundly affected by the Second World War. Shahn was to continue his work for government agencies, as we will see later, but many signed up to fight on the frontlines. Piech was among these and saw service as a sergeant in the 8th Air Force with whom he was stationed in England and France. He says that the War was a "strange one" but like many, he felt that it was a worthwhile fight against the "ravages of dictatorship and evils of fascism" (Piech, September 1995, p. 2).

The 8th Air Force was responsible for the high altitude, precision, daylight bombing runs on occupied Europe. It was because of this practice that at the beginning of the conflict the group's "casualty rates were higher than those of any other U.S. combat force" (Allen, 1994, p. 105). In the three years that the group flew combat missions, 20,000 of its airmen were killed and another 9,300 wounded. Death became a common factor in the life of everybody at the 8th. Those back at the bases were not spared either physical injury (the German's targeted airbases in their own bombing raids) or emotional loss. As one new arrival was advised, "Don't get to know anybody too well. It hurts too

much to lose a friend". It reached a stage when to improve morale the ground crew sleeping areas were separated from those of the aircrews as they could not bear the sight of the missing airmen's empty bunks.

After the war Piech returned to England to marry Irene, a Welsh nurse that he had met there while on leave. As part of a GI Bill education scheme he was able to continue his studies in print at the Chelsea School of Art.

CHAPTER 2:

The early years of
Piech's career.

2.1 The guiding light
of Advertising.

THIS THESIS has so far attempted to discuss the world in relation to Piech, and vice versa, as he was growing up. His influences and education are discussed as background to his work as a political commentator. They are the events that were to play an important role in his life as a political commentator, but this role in his life did not begin for some time. After he had completed his studies at Chelsea he again returned to the world of advertising and graphics. It was during his time as a designer that he met many people who helped and guided him along the way, his graphic parents so to say. They ranged from E. Mc. Knight Kauffer in his student days in New York, Robert Jones at Columbia Record Company in Bridgeport to Ashley Havinden at W.S. Crawfords in London. His experiences working with and for these people, he says, created a "platform" for his "dedication in teaching graphics to the younger generation" (Piech, 1987, p. 58). This interest in education was also to play an important role in his later career decisions.

In the 'fifties Piech made a name for himself as both a freelance graphic designer and as an artistic director of the highest quality. At this time he was living in London, this would change as his career started to take a new direction. His portfolio from the period is vast but a discussion of individual commercial pieces would probably do little to shed light on his subsequent work in political graphics. He did however work on quite large projects such as the one for Avery, who were at that time a leading name in the manufacture of scales, among other things. His exit from the world of advertising was a gradual one, beginning around 1953 with the start of his own private Taurus Press. Some of the initial productions from the Taurus press were collections of poetry such as *War and Misery*. The identity of the press was the astrological symbol of the bull's head, used in



FIG. 2.1, The Taurus Press logo used by Piech on his letterhead.

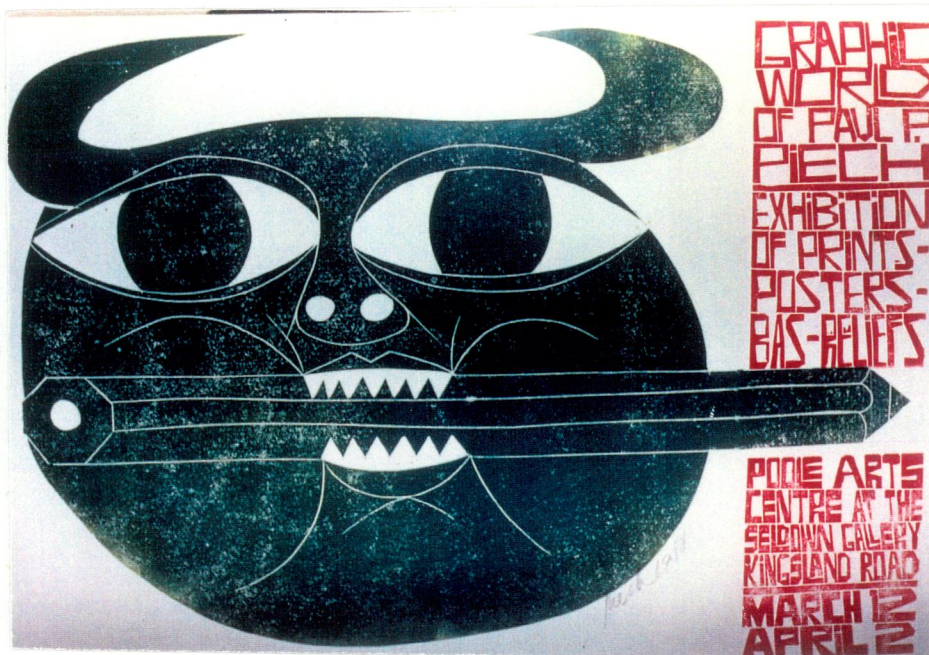


FIG. 2.2, *Graphic World of Paul Peter Piech*, a promotional poster produced by Piech for his one of his own exhibitions, (1988, 44cm.x 64cm.).

different forms, for example on the letterhead (FIG. 2.1) and in an exhibition poster (FIG. 2.2). He continued to work freelance and on more personal projects for some time but eventually pulled out of advertising altogether by the end of the 'fifties because he "knew when to quit" and he "didn't want to get an ulcer" (Davies, 1979, p. 7) .This was followed by a move away from the big lights of London to Wales.

This was the time when his private press truly came into its own. As mentioned Piech had several graphic guiding lights, one of whom was Robert M. Jones who he worked with in the late 'forties. Jones had set up the Glad Hand Press and Piech says that he guessed "some of the excitement must have rubbed off on" (Cain, 1971 p.4) him to start his own Press. The Taurus Press became the means for Piech to produce his own ideas and criticisms visually. To people who question his stepping from the high powered world of advertising to the seemingly lower artform of political graphics, he replies that he does not see the step as being a huge one. In advertising you give something an identity so that it targets consumers and they take notice and consume. He had merely moved onto ideas and opinions instead of products.

2.2 The private presses and censorship.

Private or small independent presses have held an important place in the world of printed information since the turn of this century. There are several reasons why this is, one of the main ones being that they are not as open to censorship as some of the larger bodies might be, as mentioned when discussing Germany at the turn of the century. This is a major factor in the world of political commentary. Another reason is that the presses can operate outside of current trends or tastes and are responsive to the change and experimentation that is only possible on a



FIG. 2.3, Book cover design by Kurt Schwitters, (1919).

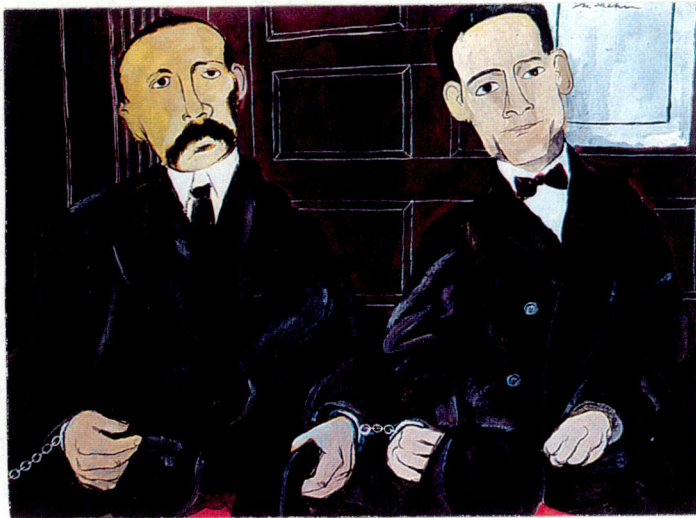


FIG. 2.4, *Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco* by Shahn, centres around the wrongful conviction in 1921, and subsequent execution of 2 Italian Americans for murder. The case was widely disputed and protested throughout America at the time, (1931-32, 35cm.x 25cm.).

IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR THESE THING,
I MIGHT HAVE LIVE OUT MY LIFE TALK-
ING AT STREET CORNERS TO SCORN-
ING MEN. I MIGHT HAVE DIE, UN-
MARKED, UNKNOWN A FAILURE. NOW
WE ARE NOT A FAILURE THIS IS OUR
CAREER AND OUR TRIUMPH. NEVER IN
OUR FULL LIFE COULD WE HOPE TO
DO SUCH WORK FOR TOLERANCE, FOR
JUSTICE. FOR MAN'S UNDERSTANDING
OF MAN AS NOW WE DO BY ACCIDENT.
OUR WORDS - OUR LIVES - OUR PAINS
NOTHING! THE TAKING OF OUR LIVES -
LIVES OF A GOOD SHOEMAKER AND A
POOR FISH PEDDLER - ALL THAT LAST
MOMENT BELONGS TO US - THAT
AGONY IS OUR TRIUMPH.

FIG. 2.5, (bottom), *Immortal Words* by Shahn, this was based on a speech by one of the brothers at the trial, (1958, 50cm.x

smaller scale of production. From the 1900s on there was an emergence of private presses in Germany. These presses came to be used extensively by the contemporary artists of the day, such as the Expressionists. Curt Glaser said that the experimentation reached such a level that by 1919 they had “destroyed the unit of the page”(Lang, 1976, p. 15) (fig. 2.3), or rather, that they were not using the accepted unit.

Because censorship was not as prevalent in America as it was in Germany, present but not prevalent, the Americans did not initially depend so much on private presses in what they thought of as their culturally free land. People like Shahn did, however, exhibit in the smaller independent galleries or the up and coming modern art Galleries at the time, because quite often his work strayed somewhat from accepted consensus on certain matters. An example of this is his collection of gouaches on the Sacco and Vanzetti (FIG. 2.4) case and his depiction of the Dreyfuss case. Even when they were shown at the Harvard society, already mentioned earlier, President A. Lawrence Lowell of Harvard used the college police to tear down posters for the event as he said that they would need “planning permission”(Weber, 1992, p. 123). This was seen at the time as a convenient way of censoring or chastising the show and its content. This was quite futile as It continued to be a topic for Shahn’s work for many years (FIG. 2.5)

Perhaps one of the first occurrences of major censorship in American media and information, but by no means the last, was at the time of the Second World War. It was during this campaign that the U.S. Government made its “most systematic and far reaching effort in its history to shape the visual experience of the citizenry”(Roeder, 1993, p. 2). The people who were responsible for nearly all domestic and armed forces war



FIG. 2.6, Images which featured badly misshapen bodies were quite often withheld by the OWI, in this case because of the unnatural shape of the bodies right leg.



FIG. 2.7, Non combat deaths were normally not presented to the public, this soldier fell to his death accidentally, in addition to this he was also not in uniform at the time.

information were the OWI (Office of War Information). While the OWI did not have the same amount of control over the media as Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry, what was interesting about this campaign was that the Americans borrowed informative techniques from the British posters of World War I and Goebbels' German Newsreels from the late 'thirties. Many former government agencies were absorbed into this new agency, including much of the FSA and Roy Stryker's photography unit. The majority of the photography unit's founders such as Evans and people like Shahn had left in the late 'thirties as the unit began to change as a result of pressure brought to bear from the powers that be about its emphasis. Shahn afterwards worked as an artist for the OWI and quite often saw classified images and information from the war. He was "horrified by the destruction and desolation" (Prescott, 1982, p. vii) he saw both by Axis and Allied troops. Needless to say very few of these images would have made it to the public as they ran contrary to the image of the conflict that the OWI wanted people to see. Shahn left after working there for a year after a disagreement about the imagery being used. Piech and other servicemen heard more of the true War than the general public but the OWI controlled much of the armed forces information as well.

It was this form of censorship and that which followed the War that in many ways acted as a catalyst for the rise in popularity of independent and small presses both in America and elsewhere. Many of the journalists, photographers and servicemen who had documented or fought in the War found that only a sanitised section of their story had been told. There was a huge difference between events as they were and events as they were seen to be by the public at large. Unheroic (FIG. 2.6), accidental (FIG. 2.7) or just plain stupid deaths or actions of

Allied troops were played down or not shown at all. In later life many artists (visual, literary, photographic, etc), either financed their own projects or turned to the private presses to produce their work or views as they intended. Artists were of the opinion that the public should be able to see all sides of the story, to be better informed. This was the motivation of many of the German Expressionists also, they had seen battle and they had seen death and had no wish to see it again, and it was this bigger picture that created a more informed opinion. With more such opinions, possibly less people would be so quick to jump into conflict.

It is a common pitfall to think of censorship as something that happens to other people in other countries, say in the previously oppressive regime of South Africa. Perhaps it may have happened a long time ago but not anymore. Americans have the First Amendment, Freedom of Speech. It is only in recent years, with the release of government documents from the period, that the full extent of American censorship during World War 2 has been realised. Similar policies were in existence in the Gulf War, particularly regarding the death of servicemen in so called "friendly fire", killed by their own side. A possible defence is that information must be protected in times of War. However, most people are aware of the peace time years of McCarthy, the time of "reds under the bed", when a "peep of protest" was enough to have you labelled "neurotic if not actually subversive" (Guimond, 1991, p. 141). In 1983 an exhibition by a group called Liberation Graphics, in New York at the United Nations, of 50 Palestinian posters was forced to close on its first day because of complaints from Israeli representatives.

It was this sort of a political scene that formed the backdrop to Piech and his political protest. Having seen the lies

or the absence of real information Paul Peter Piech has always remained, through his years as a political commentator, faithful to supply of information in an effort to better educate people. This is not to say that Piech's words are the ultimate and only truth; they are an informed opinion, but the more opinion and information we have, the broader our knowledge. The questioning of Piech's words is perhaps pedantic, as we will see in the next Chapter that he very rarely uses his own words.

CHAPTER 3:

His role as an
educator.

3.1 Words of wisdom.

From being taught himself to teaching people about graphics and eventually teaching them with graphics have proven to be relatively easy steps for Piech. This is not unbelievable given his background and influence. The artists whom he respected used their artforms in an attempt to bring about change for the better. Like them Piech is an educator, not a scaremonger. In an effort to show not just the ills of society but its good side as well Piech quite often uses the words of some of the greatest humanitarians that this world has seen. It has been a feature of Piech's work for many years that he uses quotes from various different sources to illustrate his point. Thus the quotes that Piech uses come from any variety of people: Martin Luther King, Presidents Nixon, Kennedy and Roosevelt, Gandhi and many more. One might ask of him why he uses the words of others so much, rather than his own, but Piech has freely admitted, with reference to the poet Blake, "he could write and I can't. That's a pity" (Davies, 1979, p. 7) . This has not altered the value that words have for him and their power to "move nations and individuals" (Minhinnick, 1991, p. 1).

When Piech uses a quote it is not merely a repetition of the original message, for each of his prints becomes a personal statement. This does not mean that the message is his. I would see his work as being a vehicle for opinions he agrees with or ones that he thinks people should see. It is this process of selecting the quotes and working on them, cutting them printing them etc. combined with his distinctive style that gives them the personal touch. If the language, or words, exist already to say what you want and how you want it, why create new ones? just add your accent to them. In the early years of Piech's life as a protester the words of Martin Luther King were, and still are of immense value to him both personally (Piech had

I NOW BELIEVE
 THAT THE POTENTIAL
 DESTRUCTIVENESS OF
 MODERN WEAPONS TOTALLY
 RULES OUT THE POSSIBILITY
 OF WAR EVER AGAIN
 ACHIEVING A NEGATIVE
 GOOD. IF WE ASSUME
 THAT MANKIND HAS A
 RIGHT TO SURVIVE, THEN
 MUST FIND AN ALTERNATIVE
 TO WAR AND DESTRUCTION
 IN OUR DAY OF SPACE
 VEHICLES AND GUIDED
 BALLISTIC MISSILES THE
 CHOICE IS EITHER CONVICTION
 OR NONEXISTENCE KING



FIG. 3.1, *I now believe*, a poster illustrating the words of Martin Luther King, commissioned by the UN and produced by Piech. The poster talks of man's need to find alternatives to war and destruction as a means to survive, (38cm.x 12cm.)

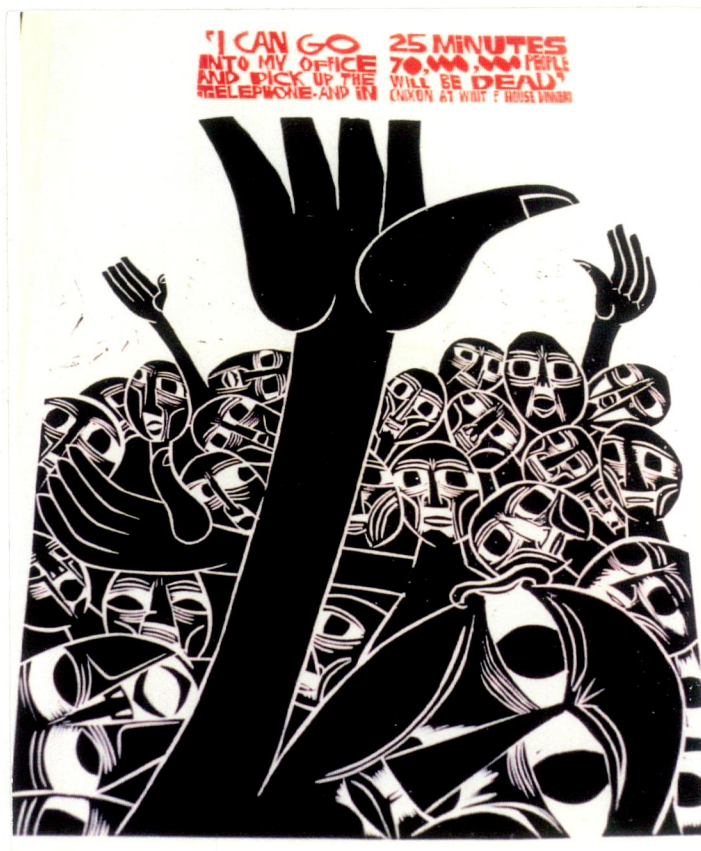


FIG. 3.2, *I can go into...*, a Nixon quote illustrated by Piech, (1971, 72cm.x 52cm.).

seen him on a visit to London) and as a source for his posters. Initially Piech made a series of 105 posters entitled *Words and Wisdom of Martin Luther King*, but the collection has kept growing since. *I Now Believe* (FIG. 3.1), is stylistically typical of a Piech poster. The type may differ slightly from poster to poster but this is a characteristic of hand cut type, which can retain a certain consistency without being repetitive or identical. This free typographical treatment lends itself to the effect that somebody is speaking to you; it looks and feels more like a speech than if the words had been typed. Piech gives this element to the words of King that some people would probably like to see carved in gold and revered for their insight. Piech reveres them but does not lose sight of their origin and birth. Martin Luther King was a simple enough man who wished to talk to everyman; he had an overriding belief in equality. The poster is and has been since its creation a mode of information that spans class, moreso in our age with heightened literacy. As such it is well suited to the job of universal communicator. Piech believes that standard and conservative book layout has stifled and trapped the words as with poetry which he says often becomes "imprisoned in books" (Minhinnick, 1991, p. 1). It is up to the poster to release them. Piech does this so that they may become more accessible, maybe not as much as when they were first said, but more than if they were locked in some history book.

Piech reminds us also that there are words that have been said that must not be forgotten, not because of their good, but bad intentions. He shows this in the Nixon quote *I can go into my office and pick up the telephone and in 25 minutes 70,000,000 people will be dead* (FIG. 3.2), which was said at a White House dinner. There is no real judgement in Piech's poster, though he



FIG. 3.3, *In Nixon We Trust*, Piech plays upon the American presidential crest to satirise the position that Nixon was in at this time, (1973)



FIG. 3.4, (at left) *Falklands, Falklands...*, produced at the time of the Falklands conflict, (1984, 76cm.x 51cm.). FIG. 3.5, (at right) *Ally of Apartheid*, highlighting Englands links with South Africa and its oppressive regime, (1988, 49cm.x 76cm.).

presents the words as they were said and illustrates the fear and despair of the masses. The words condemn themselves; Piech is just making it easier for us to see and understand. This is not an exercise in history though. While it is interesting maybe for us to look back at political criticism, the posters were not produced for us, even though the events may have effected us in time. They were produced for people at that time. Piech made this poster in 1971 when Nixon was still in office. It was made with the intention of showing people what their President was really like and what he was capable of, or at least what he thought he was capable of. This questioning of his validity as a President was to be acted out by later events in history, most notably the Watergate scandal (FIG. 3.3).

Piech uses this technique of self-condemnation in several of his posters including one using Margaret Thatcher's words at the time of the Falklands conflict (FIG. 3.4). The figure is seen as having nothing else to say apart from "Falklands, Falklands.....". At the time she could think of or speak of nothing else. There is no question of peace or of the human loss. Possibly the only judgmental aspect of Piech's poster is the rather pathetic figure the "Iron Lady" cuts, her eyes again saying a lot about who she is. There is no sign of the strength of a world leader or any vestige of compassion. She is reminiscent perhaps of a toy doll who has been wound up but can only say the one irritatingly monotonous line. Another trait of Piech's images is the variety of uses the same image can be put to, recycling them so to speak. Using the basics of any print and the addition or subtraction of other elements Piech can create any number of variations on the original. *Ally of Apartheid* (FIG. 3.5) sees the change from the pathetic doll figure of Thatcher in *Falklands, Falklands* with a change of visage and statement, to a more menacing figure.



FIG. 3.6, *Join the Resistance*, another variant of the *Falklands, Falklands* print by Piech, (1988, 49cm.x 75cm.)

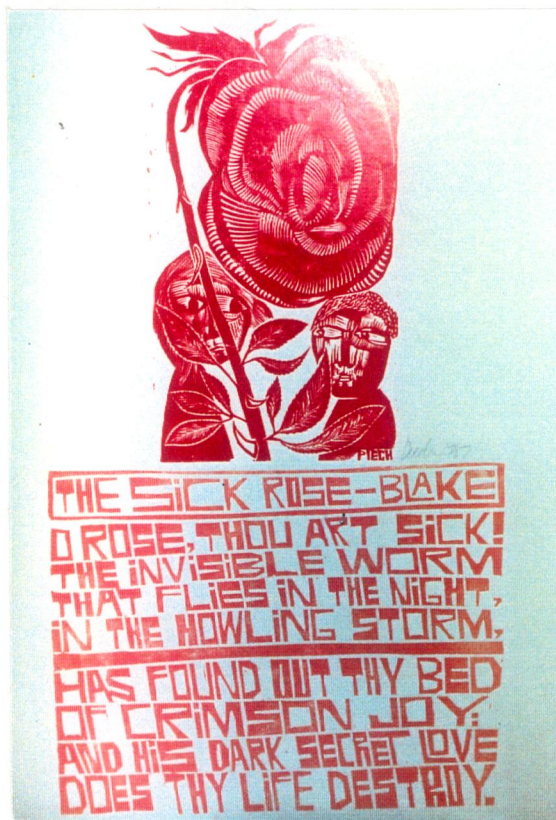


FIG. 3.7, *The Sick Rose-Blake*, the softer edge of Piech's critical blade, (1987, 44cm.x 64cm.).

3.2 Freedom of the words.

Much the same has been done when producing *Join the Resistance* (FIG. 3.6). Thus he has made at least three prints from the initial one.

It must be added though that there is more than the one side to Piech's graphic statements. The Taurus press is as appreciative of poetry as of protest and sometimes both at the same time. There is a softer side to the Taurus press and it is in the poetry of Blake (FIG. 3.7), Donne, Whitman and others that we find another of Piech's great loves. I must admit initially when the research started for this thesis I, and a few other writers that I found, thought that Piech was presently producing nothing but works of poetry and had retired from protest, which I saw as a weakness. I discovered though that I was wrong on both counts. He has not, as will be seen, retired from protest (he might never I think). What I thought was weakness, the change from biting words of criticism to the flowery words of poetry, was wrong also. For him the best poetry is one of the most powerful ways of communicating ideas; it transmits not only words but feeling, a complete experience.

Walt Whitman, himself a fellow New Yorker, for me seems to hold a special place among the Piech's posters. Possibly he was poetically what Piech is visually. He is seen as a lover of "raw life" and the "poet of democracy and the brotherhood of all men" (Carey, 1967, p. 326). Like Piech, he was a humanitarian and loathed the useless wasting of life. This belief was based in his experiences of death and warfare in the American Civil War, much like the Expressionists or Shahn or Piech. Piech has produced many poster poems of Whitman's work and in these presentations he illustrates for us what sort of a man he was, and what sort of poetry he wrote. Certain parts of the body hold an

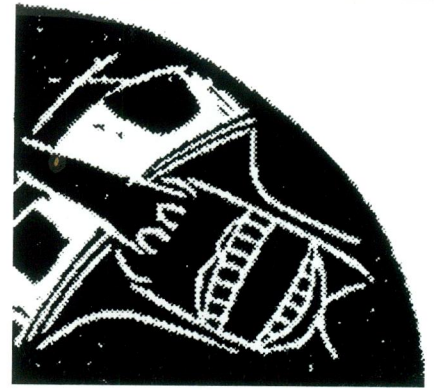


FIG. 3.8, (above) a detail from *I now believe* (FIG. 3.1).

FIG. 3.9, (at left), *I am a radical*, one of Piech's posters of the words of American poet Walt Whitman, (1991).

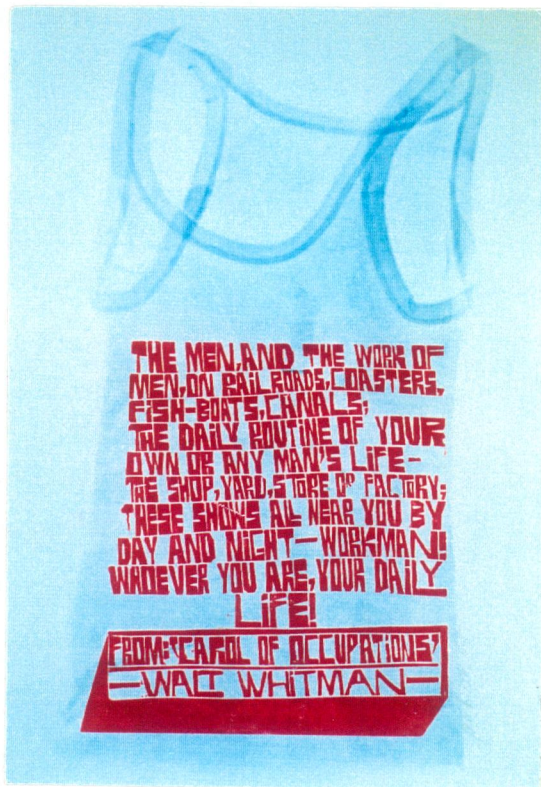


FIG. 3.10, *Carol of Occupations*, a poem by Whitman about work, printed by Piech, (1991).

importance for Piech and convey a lot of the emotion of his figures, the hands and the eyes in particular. If you look back at the eyes of the figure in *I now believe*. (FIG. 3.8), and contrast them with those of Whitman in *I am a radical*.. (FIG. 3.9).

Whitman's eyes are those of a friend while the others are those of a victim, Piech can convey this subtlety through the somewhat basic but expressive medium of linocut. Whitman also brings out the more experimental side in Piech in a work like *From 'Carol of Occupations'* (FIG. 3.10). The poem is about work and working people and the sights, sounds and life of a worker. To illustrate this Piech uses what is possibly a slightly humorous media stereotype of the working class, the sleeveless vest.

Although as most presses in existence are antiques people are loathe to let stick just anything under them, owning your own has certain advantages. Piech is able to do what he wants to achieve the desired effect, in this case using an actual sleeveless vest for the print.

In my research I read an article on Whitman which seems to underline the sentiments that Piech holds towards the use and abuse of poetry and words in general. The writer despite his love for books read "Whitman and other poets only under duress" and for a long time *Leaves* by Whitman sat on his bookshelf. However, when he browses through it a passage that he had underlined years ago "shines like a beacon, a voice I long ago heard but did not answer" (Swerdlow, 1994, p. 117). It is this late accidental discovery of poetry as a result of preconceptions developed in a school or elsewhere that Piech is trying to avoid. Poetry does not have to be a chore. It should become an enjoyment so that people can hear its message and meaning and remember it. This is a thinking that Piech tries to apply to all words, not just poetry.

At a time when Tennyson was writing of the glory of the Charge of the Light Brigade, Whitman said the war was “nine hundred and ninety nine parts diarrhea” (Swerdlow, 1994, p. 138). Whitman felt that the real war would never make it into books but he wrote about it anyway. It is for this reason that I see Piech and himself coming from the same mindset. Both express opinions and ideas that deserve to be heard but get passed over or ignored, Piech is determined not to let it remain ignored.

CHAPTER 4:

The results of his own
education.

4.1 The World's issues
belong to everyone.

AS MENTIONED earlier, I thought that Piech had retired from life as a political commentator to concentrate on other projects but I was mistaken; his commentary is continuous. There are many reasons why he does what he does, but to describe in general terms the impetus behind his work, he uses the Second World War as a reference point. For him the War should have seen the end of man's evil on man but as he says himself, since the war "some 146 international conflicts have killed millions upon millions" and are still killing people. To change this we must "forgo past habits and start changing life's attitudes" (Piech, September, p. 2) in an attempt to put an end to the arms race and intolerance to other nations, creeds and cultures. This is why his work is continuous; there is always something to talk about, or to highlight.

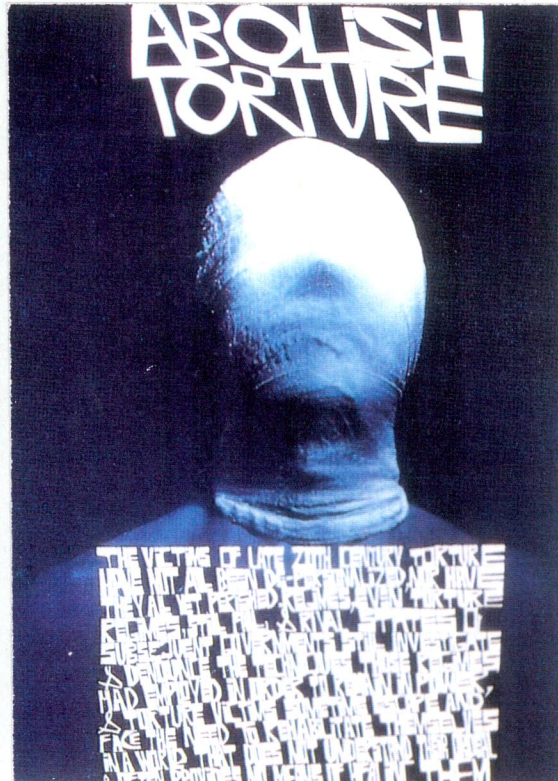
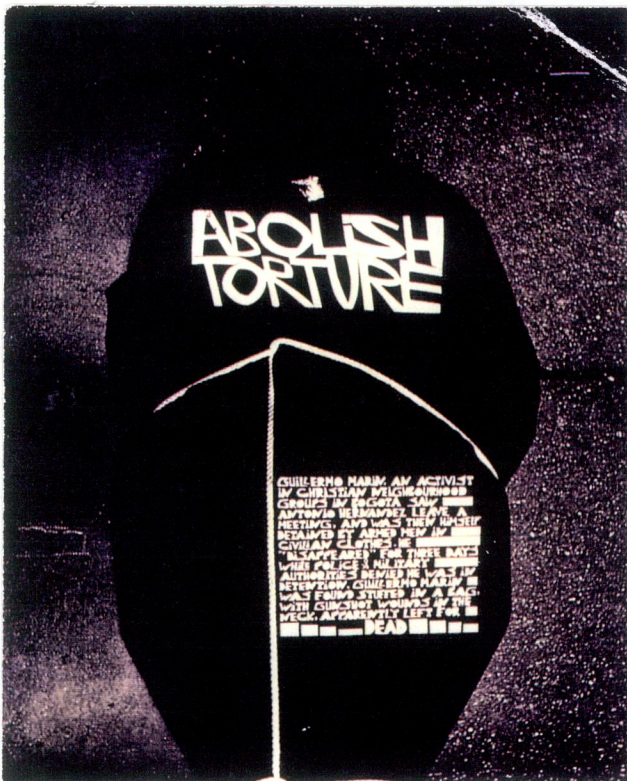
Piech helps this by not limiting himself topically; the issues can be in his backyard or across the world. Hand in hand with our new communications networks comes a decreasing of the size of the world. As mentioned in my introduction we have too much information; we are vaguely aware of it all but are not focussing on what is important for our future. Another problem is that perhaps the information we need is held back. Quite often though the media is to be blamed, not necessarily the journalists but the controllers. In America "bad news about the homeless,.... atrocities in El Salvador could be overwhelmed by the 1986 Miss Liberty ceremonies"; the news and media had become "a feel good" (Guimond, 1991, p. 256) enterprise and were not interested in total coverage. Even more recently British news coverage was said to be suffering. However their problem was slightly different to the American one. According to journalist Marc Harris on Channel 4's *Right To Reply*, in England programmers were listening to survey groups and not to



FIG. 4.1, (at left), *North American "Rambo" Figure*, Piech's critical view of the Reagan administration and its tactics. Colonel North was exposed as part of a gun running operation known as the Irangate affair, (1988, 50cm.x 75cm.).

FIG. 4.2, (bottom left), *Abolish Torture* by Piech and Espinosa talks of police brutality in Bogota, (1988).

FIG. 4.3, (bottom right), another poster in the series talks of the role of torture in political power struggles, (1988).



journalists. News and information were vetted on a “taste and decency” level to the point where they started to become “sanitised” (Harris, 1995). In America the amount of coverage that topics get can quite often be a result of a greater ongoing political agenda. In the past the mainstream media have “cooperated” with the government by “vilifying uncooperative or leftwing governments” and “either ignoring or praising cooperative right wing” countries, America’s so called “client regimes” (Guimond, 1991, p. 189).

While the mainstream media may have towed the party line Piech and others recognised the true face of America’s political policies. President Reagan and top members of the military, like Colonel Oliver North, were seen to be “partners of international terrorism” as depicted in *North American “Rambo” Hero* (FIG. 4.1). Along with the backing of Amnesty International and in conjunction with the photographer Gustavo Espinosa, Piech produced a series of posters titled *Abolish Torture*, to highlight world atrocities, of which FIGS. 4.2&4.3 are examples, which went on tour around the world. These works show another experimental side to Piech’s work. He linocut the text for Espinosa’s photomontage and in doing so they joined the two unlikely media of photography and linocutting. The exhibition came about when Espinosa, a Colombian born photographer, given his experiences in South America decided to do a photographic project on torture. He asked Piech to do the text and the result was a collection of such power that the London branch of Amnesty would not take them up, but the Derby one did.

The texts describe the world of torture in general as well as specific cases. The text supplied by Piech is in his usual freestyle, but having said that, there are slight but noticeable

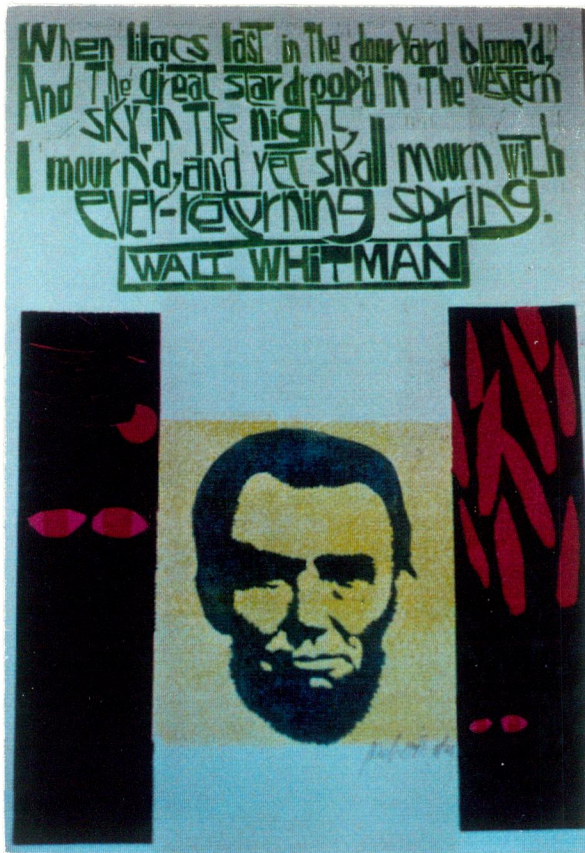
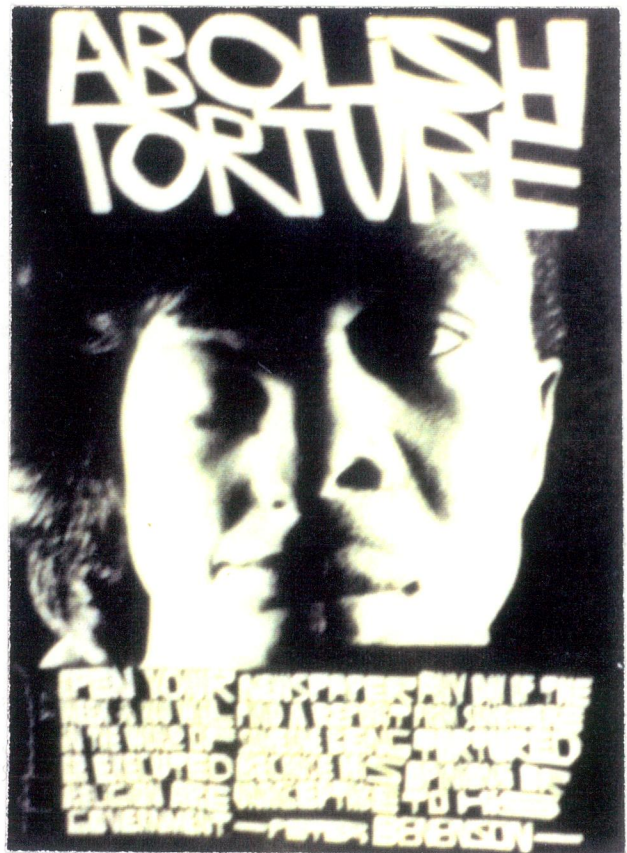
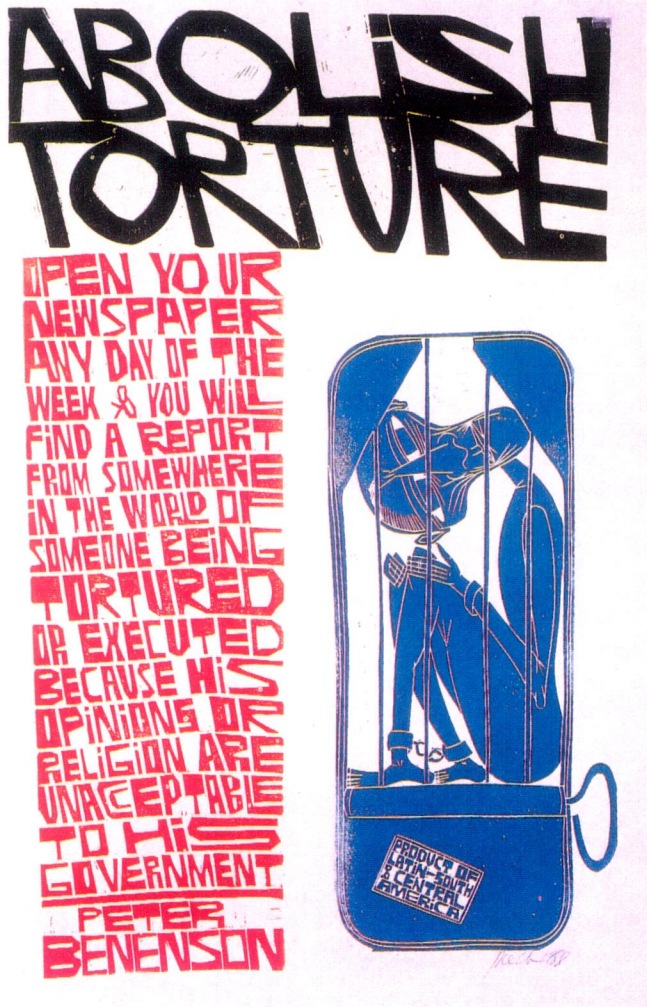


FIG. 4.4. (at left), *When Lilacs Last*, another of Piech's interpretations of Whitman's poetry, (1991).

FIG. 4.5. (bottom left) *Abolish Torture*, based on a quote by Peter Beneson, both the type and image are supplied by Piech, (1988).

FIG. 4.6. (bottom right) the same poster as FIG. 4.5 with the exception that the image was supplied by Espinosa, (1991).



stylistic differences between Piech's texts. When comparing a poem poster like *When Lilacs Lost...* (FIG. 4.4), with the text in any of the *Abolish Torture* posters you can see the contrast. The torture text is tight; it is a block of text which very rarely strays outside of a preset shape. One could almost compare it to a blackness of a page of gothic text even though the typeface is completely different. Even the letterforms are tight and crude, relative to Piech's other work. There is no space, the type is claustrophobic and visually a brick wall. The poem by comparison is free on the page, it is not constrained within a shape and it has room to move. The letterforms are more elegant and slender. We see the emergence of curves, which never play a large part in the torture posters. If the visual effect of the *Abolish Torture* text is a brick wall then the letterforms are bricks. They are rigid, while still retaining the originality and personality of Piech's letterforms. Whitman's poem tends to be more comfortable and in effect easier or more visually pleasing to look at. The *Abolish Torture* is harder to read, not harder in terms of illegibility, but aesthetics. Why should posters about torture have the same aesthetic qualities as a poster poem? The topic is an ugly or distasteful one and the poster echoes this fact both in image and type.

When he had done the text for Espinosa, Piech set about producing his own set of posters, which were linocut type and image based, using the same text. There is an interesting contrast between the two sets of images (FIGS. 4.5&4.6) Piech's prints and Espinosa's photographs, but the type understandably retains the traits already mentioned. Espinosa tends to focus on the victims and their sufferings in portrayals which can at times be quite graphic. Even when he visualises the bigger picture, he does so in a limited way. In the two posters illustrating America's role in the

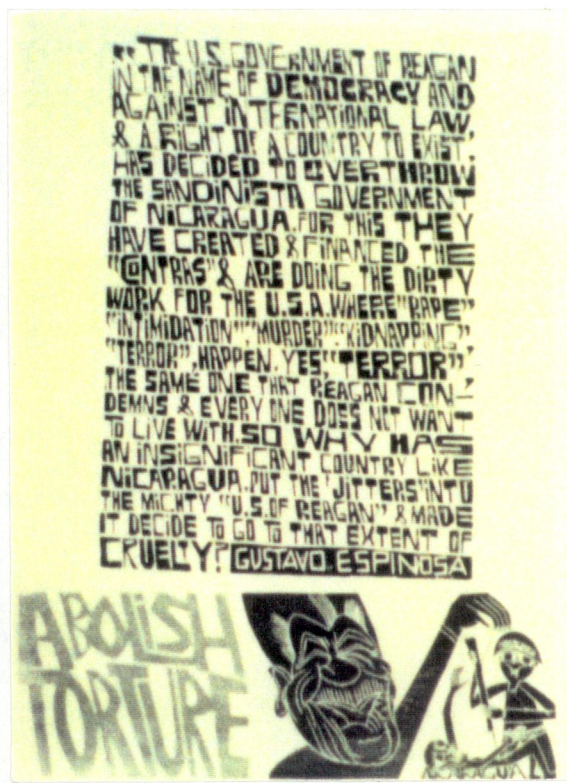
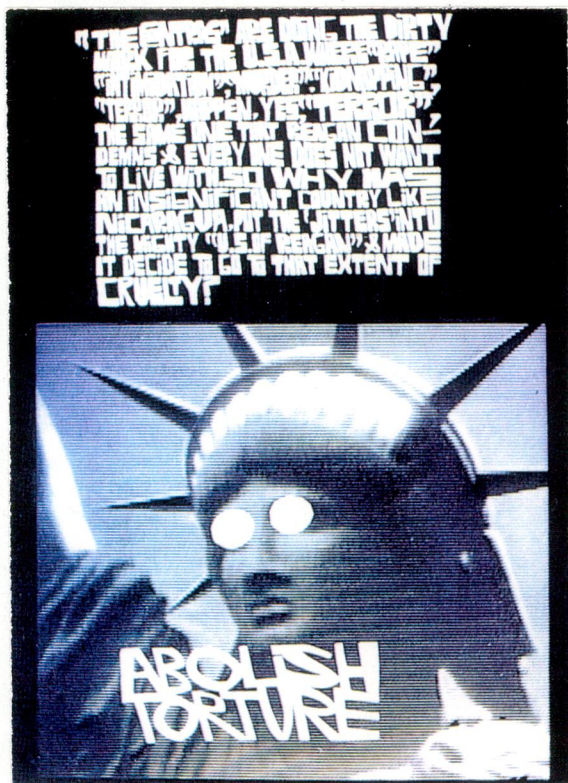


FIG. 4.7, (at left), and FIG. 4.8, both posters have the same text, which discusses America's intervention into the affairs of Nicaragua, FIG 4.8 is done entirely by Piech.

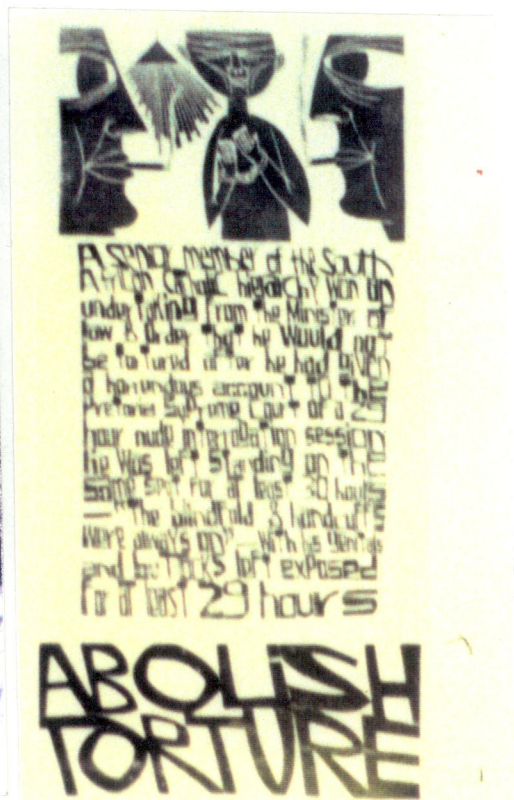
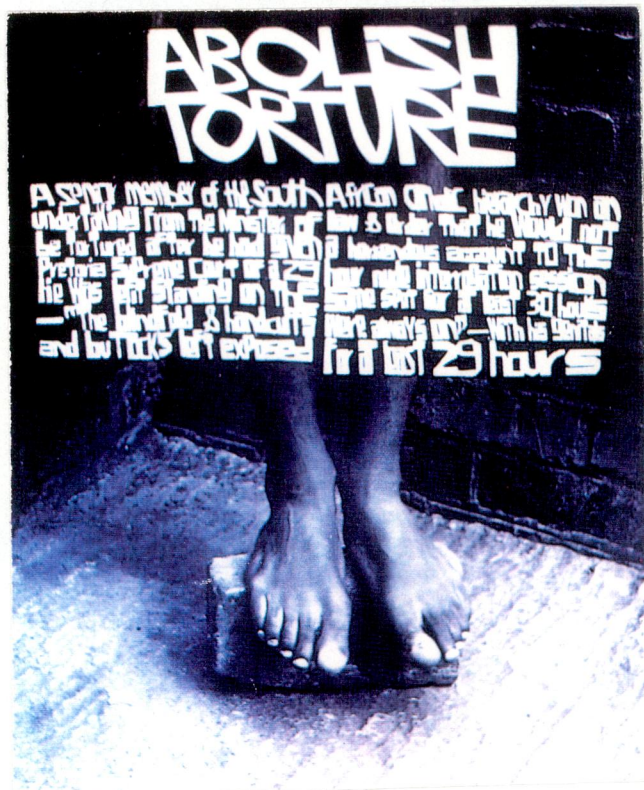


FIG. 4.9, (at left), and FIG. 4.10, discuss the ordeal of a member of the South African Hierarchy who was forced to stand on a brick, while interrogated, naked and blindfolded, for 29 hours.

world of torture Espinosa blocks out the eyes of the Statue of Liberty (FIG. 4.7). This is presumably to say that America is blind to the proceedings. There is more to it than that according to Piech's poster of the same. Far from being blind, America, now personified by Reagan in FIG. 4.8, has a direct role in things. Reagan is the puppet master controlling the contras in their overthrow of Nicaragua. Look at the eyes and facial expression of the characters. Nicaragua is understandably terrified: the contras look quite helpless; the only one deriving any enjoyment from this is Reagan.

The same can be said in FIG. 4.9 where Espinosa is centring his attention on the victim, in this case using his feet as a symbol for the whole. The victim was not on his own; the room also contained his torturers, seen in Piech's FIG. 4.10. Espinosa portrays the suffering in a way that we see only the suffering; we don't see the cause. We could give the victim our sympathy but we cannot stop this from happening if we don't know why or by whose hands it happened. Piech is showing a "relationship between the torturers and victims" as torture is a "social violence" (Diederich, 1988, p. 73) between people, whatever their incitement.

Part of this different point of view on the same topic comes from the artists' different experiences. Espinosa comes from South America and the subject is close to him as he has seen the suffering. Piech, by virtue of his years and experience, is in many ways more world wise, born in New York, European roots, lived through the war, lived and worked in London, even though he does now live in rural Wales. When Piech sees an ill he views its wider effects on the world. His experiences and influences have already been mentioned and it is these which allow him to look out for all humanity.

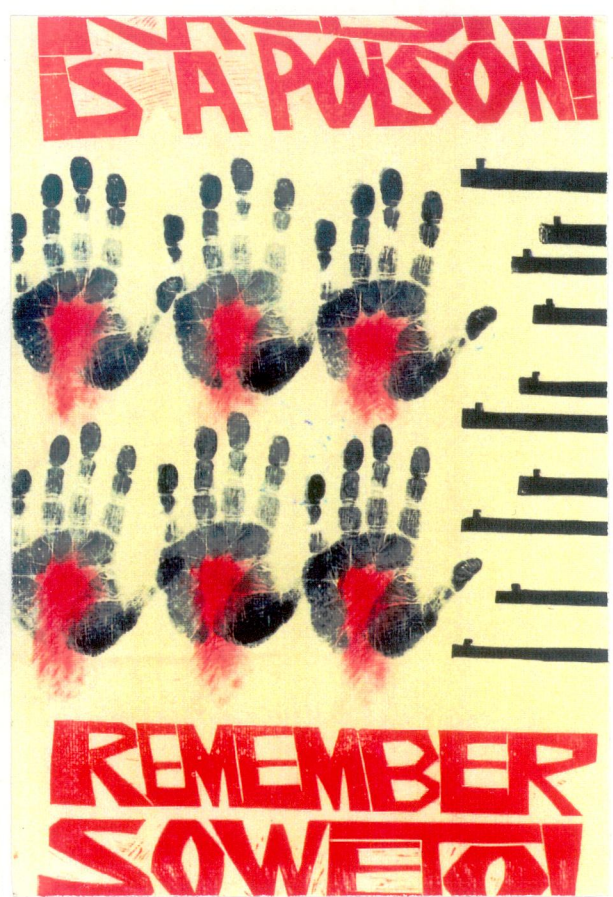
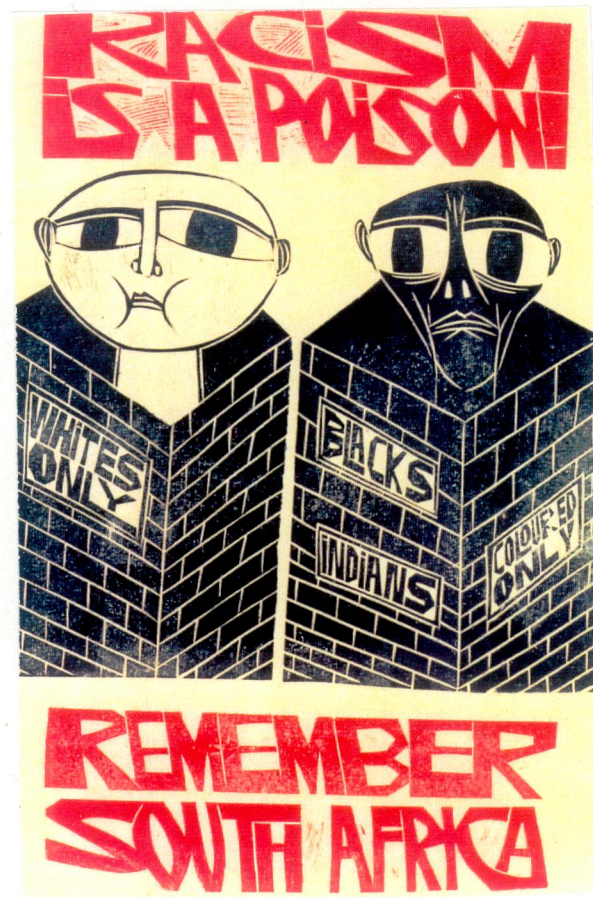
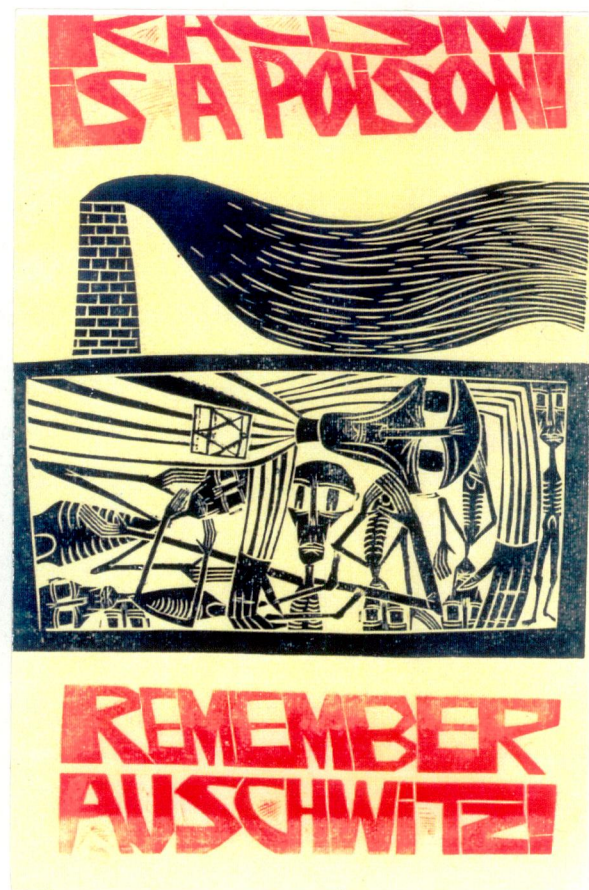
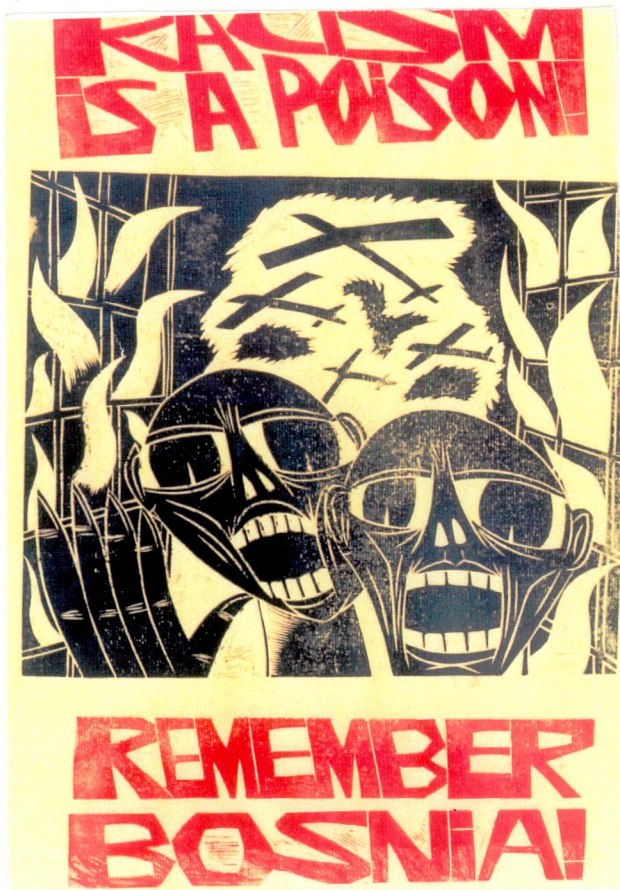


FIG. 4.11, (top left), FIG. 4.12, (top right), FIG. 4.13, (bottom left) and FIG. 4.14, (bottom right) are all part of a series entitled *Racism Is A Poison* which Piech is presently working on.

4.2 Time heals all wounds but history has a habit of repeating itself.

This wide field of vision spans time as well as distance. He has seen many things pass in his time but, like warfare, many of them recur. Typical of this is racism, an atrocity which Piech and many others are currently concerned about. At present Piech is working on a series entitled *Racism Is A Poison* (FIGS. 4.11 to 4.14). Piech does not see any difference between the racism now and any other he has seen; it is all racism. His posters show this racism was in Soweto, in Solingen, in Auschwitz, in the U.S.A., in Bosnia and in South Africa and he asks us to remember that. To Piech we are all living on "this little ole earth" and certain "issues around the world concern everyone". This is why he does what he does. His posters and prints are designed to move people to action, be it "protest or positive non violent action" (Piech, September 1995, p. 2) it is perhaps better to inform than to inflame. Piech's use of the title *Racism Is A Poison* is interesting. Poison is an all consuming entity, affecting everybody it touches, regardless of guilt or innocence. Until a cure is found, the people who harbour race hatred are poisoned and the victims of race hatred are victims of this poison also. As in the *Abolish Torture* series, where we are shown the relationship between tortured and torturer, there is a relationship between both sides of a racist divide. We can see this in FIG. 4.13. Both figures seem to be restricted by the regulations of a racist government. The whiteman in his whites only box is just as bricked in as the blacks or indians in a coloured only box.

In many of Piech's posters the parts of the body are symbolic, but in FIG. 4.14 Piech has printed his own palm print which seems to add a more human element to it. Like torture, racism is a social injustice; people are the ones who suffer. The bleeding palms also seem to suggest often what is considered by some as the most supreme sacrifice and suffering, the crucifixion



FIG. 4.15, (top left), Piech protests against the use of nuclear weapons by anybody, (1982, 85.6cm.x 65.7cm.)



fig. 4.16, (left), 3rd World Hunger by Piech criticises the spending of money on weapons while elsewhere people starve, (1991).

of Jesus. This use of the crucifixion to imply suffering runs through much of Piech's work such as can be seen quite clearly in Piech's condemnation of nuclear weapons in FIG. 4.15. The body is nailed to a nuclear missile by other smaller missiles in a parody of the crucifixion.

This poster shows another of Piech's traits; he is fair. In his condemnation of nuclear weapons condemns both the Americans and the Russians. Unlike the American media of the '70s and '80s he does not display the wrongs of Russia and ignore the ones of his own homeland. This shows his ability to see the total picture with all its implications. To illustrate the point better perhaps we can look at a poster printed by Piech at the time of the outbreak of the Gulf War (FIG. 4.16). The total picture is that it was not just Hussein who was involved in the killing; the weapons on both side of the divide came from many different places. The weeping person is crucified on a cross of the world's weapons stockpile. This is not in any way to say that either side was right or wrong. As Piech said already of the Second World War, they thought that the war was the solution and that they were fighting a just war against evil, but it solved very little in the long term. This is the bigger picture. For Piech the bigger picture is that while everybody is trying to increase their weapons or sell them to the highest bidder, humanity is suffering. The weeping figure is suffering but also while all this money is exchanging hands people in the Third World still starve. For them the arms race means very little but Piech is possibly suggesting that it would be better to turn the machines of destruction into machines of production.

True to his belief that we are all part of the one world, he also concerns himself with the slightly smaller, less worldly causes as well. He worries about the more immediate things that



FIG. 4.17, *Oil Slicks... No Thanks*, an image produced by Piech in conjunction with Friends of the Earth, highlighting the dangers of offshore drilling to Wales. It is used on an address label for envelopes by them.

may affect Wales, his home. In conjunction with bodies like Friends of the Earth Wales he produces work which highlights, for example, the danger of oil leaks to the coast of his home (FIG. 4.17). In recent years in addition to his exhibitions in Europe and the rest of the globe, he also takes part in shows with the artists of his locality. The world may be a smaller place but home is always where the heart lies.

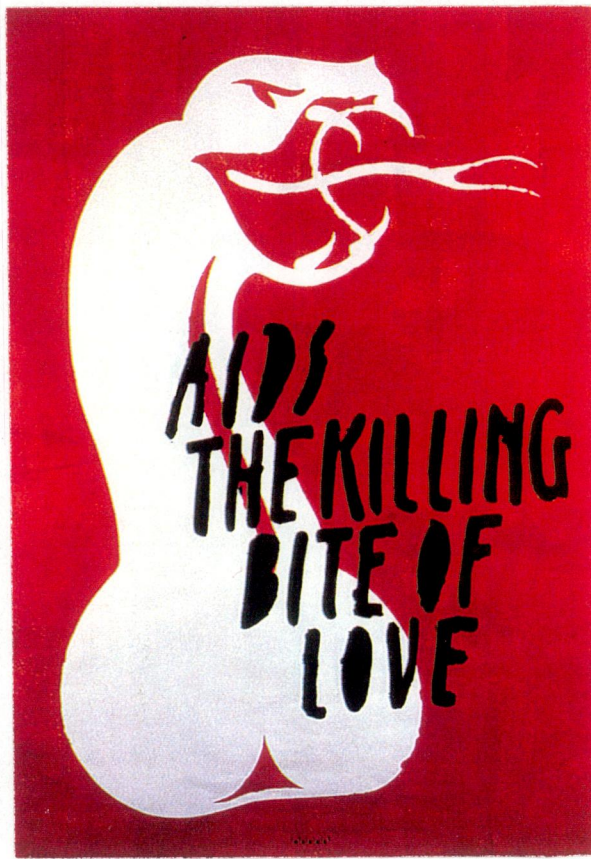


FIG. 5.1, *AIDS the Killing Bite of Love*, one of the entries at the Chaumont Poster exhibition 1995.

IN CONCLUSION:

POLITICAL, OPPOSITIONAL, critical, social, call it what you will, graphics has for many years been an almost underground artform in varying degrees depending on the political situation at the time. It is, however, losing this underground tag, in this new age of awareness, in favour of a more open but still critical artform. To say that it has gone commercial would be wrong. To retain its individuality and credibility as a source of independent opinion the voice of criticism must remain to a large extent independent. Their graphics tend not to be expensive pieces of design. Instead, they work on the more easily mass produced medium of the poster, so much so that social graphics "probably accounts for the majority of posters worldwide" (Banholzer, 1995, p. 53). Piech's prints can cost anything from a couple of pounds up, that is if he doesn't give them away. People now seem to have more time for political graphics, seeing it as being informed criticism rather than purely reactionary. Last year's annual Chaumont International Poster Exhibition was run on the theme of political / social graphics and design. This is in contrast to the previous years' themes of film, cinema or music, etc. The jury was in fact headed by Paul Peter Piech who commented that much of the work "hit the issues right on the head", an example of which is FIG. 5.1. His only criticism was that the some of the work had only been done for a special occasion by artists who were truly commercial. They tended to avoid the political topics until it "became very apparent in their country" (Piech, September 1995, p. 1). The exhibition was widely attended, providing a massive audience that many of the topics might not have normally gotten but probably deserved.

This is another new phase in the development of political graphics: the wider dissemination of the message to people who before never got the chance. All over the world artists like Piech

exhibit their work either independently or with the aid of organisations such as Amnesty International, Friends of the Earth and others. There is also an emergence of groups dedicated purely to the area of political and social graphics. The Centre for the Study of Political Graphics is responsible for maintaining an educational and research archive of documents and posters. The centre tries to bring its collection to as many schools, libraries, galleries, etc. as it possibly can every year.

I have tried to put forward my thoughts on the nature of Paul Peter Piech's work and how I see it as representative of the purpose of political graphics in general down through time. The reasons for producing critical graphics are not ones of fame, most commentators remain quite anonymous, or of money Piech lives modestly in a small town in Wales and probably doesn't wish for much more. The graphics are there to educate and to change people so that they may change events. In a letter to Piech, a senior curator at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, says that Piech's posters about apartheid have become history and he hopes that his "other causes will follow them in due course" (Gaon, 1991). I sincerely doubt if Piech is of the opinion that he can single handedly solve every ill in this world. His, or anybody else's, political posters can be appreciated as works in their own right but I don't think that he and others consider them as an end in themselves. It, as Daniel Walsh, ex-marine and self-proclaimed "Communication Therapist", says, is the "the ongoing debates that spring from the interpretation of that art" (Heller, 1995, p. 65) which is what will make the injustices of today the histories of tomorrow. Like Piech said when he heard the French had restarted their nuclear tests, we will have to wait "to see what visually transpires from here on".

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