Propaganda

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Abstract: Hendershot considers the relationship between propaganda as art and its audience.

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Creative Statement

Propaganda has been a prevalent method of influence in human history. Often utilized by powerful figures to continue to exert influence and authority over the populace. In more modern times it is prevalent in capitalist societies as methods of advertisement to again influence audiences. For my final project I will be exploring the relationship between visual propaganda and its audience. I am particularly interested in exploring the relationship between art and audience. The relationship between visual art and audience changes due to the nature of the art piece.

Visual propaganda, [un]like traditional art, is made to influence its audience to think a certain way about the topic they are perpetuating. In my opinion, propaganda is a dishonest form of art that does not carry a morally sound relationship with its audience, the viewer. I define a healthy relationship between art and its viewer through the understanding that art exists as it is and provokes thought rather than intentionally seeking to coerce. Visual art as propaganda can be analyzed with the same methods that we visual analyze art. We can consider aspects like Site of Production, Site of image, and Site of Audience. Utilizing these sites, I have found that one can thwart the intended manipulation of the visual propaganda by taking these critical steps when viewing a form of propaganda. By using these three sites as tools, the viewer can decipher the motive and purpose behind a piece of visual propaganda and change the relationship with the piece, potentially making the propaganda less influential. We may also use the pieces of propaganda to critically reflect on culture and society, the context in which the piece was derived. It allows the viewer to be less a victim of manipulation by propaganda and more of a critical viewer.

For my final project, I have created five small propaganda posters of my own with a slightly sarcastic tone in the words displayed. These are handmade collage pieces. I made the posters to represent common forms of propaganda I have found in my research including, environmental, industrialization, beauty, and mental health. “Just be Happy” — for this poster I found a portrait taken of an actress in a magazine where she looks extremely happy. I felt the photo itself was attempting to promote an illusion of happiness. I decided to state literally the meaning behind the poster. This is to represent propaganda in mental health stigma in media and culture and

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how it is unwanted to feel depressed but how easy it is to feel happy. “I Heart Clean Air” — this poster was created to represent environmental propaganda. Often, I found environmental propaganda produced by the government that portrayed the government themselves as allies to the cause. I included pictures of glaciers melting and pictures of money wrapped around material products to showcase the hypocrisy. “Industrialize Your Mind” — in this poster I chose the image of people standing in front of an industrialized scene. I drew smiles on their faces to show a kind of conformity that comes with industrialized culture. “Be like us” — this poster was created to represent propaganda surrounding beauty and the promotion of a uniform in physical appearance. I took an image of a group of models posing together. To exemplify uniformity, I colored their clothes all black, and I blocked out their eyes with a red strip, to add to their anonymity, further giving this image the feeling of automatons.

*Figure 1: Collage. Created by Naomi Hendershot.*
Figure 2: Detail of collage. Created by Naomi Hendershot.

References
