

Digital Realist Montage

Geoff Broadway 1997

Introduction

The term realism is, by its very nature, a complex and controversial one and its various contemporary applications have been met by either confusion, indifference, or charges of irrelevance.¹ At the heart of realism is the view that there exists a reality beyond that of surface appearances and which exists independently of consciousness but is simultaneously graspable by consciousness. Moreover, realists argue 'for an understanding of the relationship between social structures and human agency that is based upon a transformational conception of social reality.'²

The overall aim of this paper will be to assess what is meant by these definitions of realism, investigate specific attempts to apply it in the realm of art and assess how this formulates the basis for my own creative practice.

Part One looks at the various definitions of realism and charts some of the issues which surround it. It will aim to show that realism itself is a fairly complex term and that it will need some theoretical work in order to map out various properties. Here I will identify the realism, specifically defined as critical realism, which forms the foundation for my own approach and emphasise why it is still an important philosophical category.

Part Two will consist of an investigation of realism and its influence in the realm of art by specifically focusing on the technique of montage with particular reference to three applications of it made during the inter-war period. These practices will be assessed in conjunction with the theoretical developments of the time. It will thus consider the montage practices of John Heartfield, Fernand Léger and Sergei Eisenstein and will be underpinned by a brief account of the theoretical debates around realism conducted between Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht and Georg Lukács. It is here that we will see, as Raymond Williams points out, when it comes to the question of defining a realist art practice and its subsequent claim that 'the business of art is, first and foremost, to show things as they really are....it does not end, but only begins the controversy in art and literature.'³ The problems of

defining an effective realist art practice will become clear in this section, with each of the practitioners and theorists discussed holding different views of what actually constitutes realism. It will be made clear in this section that the problems of defining a realist art practice are inherent to realism itself. As Paul Wood suggests, realism:

seems to suggest an orientation on, rather than a direct connection with, reality. In fact, competing definitions of reality are at stake. In a world where different realities are perceived very differently by different interest groups, where there is constant process of struggle against hegemonic definitions of what the world is like, 'Realism' is always going to reverberate beyond some bare conception of 'style of art.'⁴

In talking about this period, I will be discussing the opposing formulations of realism as represented by the Stalinist socialist realist on one hand and leftist avant-garde positions on the other and explain why these differences are so significant. The socialist realist formulation that 'art is at its most progressive when it is showing recognisable people, doing recognisable things in recognisable settings.....and is therefore more 'accessible' and politically accountable than other forms'⁵ and the leftist avant-garde's understanding that realism was not just about how the work relates to the 'surface appearance of things' but how in effect it 'reveals the underlying essences'⁶ will be explored.

The overall aim of discussing the practices and debates of that mid-war period is that they have a central role to play in helping to formulate and reclaim the ground for developing what might be considered a contemporary critically realist art practice. Moreover, it can be seen that the importance of continuing to discuss notions of a critical realist practice is particularly urgent with the dominance of post-modernism partially represented by formulations such as the 'The End of History'⁷ and the irredeemable 'loss of the real'⁸ which threatens to neutralise any capacity for realism and its attempt to 'reveal the real'.

The aim of Part Three will be to consider montage as a contemporary realist device which will be discussed in particular reference to my own practical work. It will thus map some of the contemporary theoretical considerations that have informed my own montage practice and discuss an example of that practice. In doing so, this section will briefly re-cap some of the central notions of realism most pertinent to this enquiry that have developed as a result of Parts One and Two. It will then move on to discuss the potential use of montage as a contemporary realist device.

Here I will discuss notions of popular form and popular engagement and suggest that the pervasiveness of sophisticated montage practices in the realm of advertising may have facilitated the potential renewal of montage as a critical device. Considerations will also be made here of the significance of the emerging digital technologies, both in terms of the debates about the 'loss of indexicality' of the photographic image and in its potential as creative tool. These formulations will then provide the foundations to bring the practical component of my research project into the discussion. Here I will specifically focus on one example of the digital realist montagist work which I have produced. I will do so by describing my production method, discuss what the work aims to organise and explain how this might allow it to create a realist effect.

Part One

1.0. Contextualising Realism

Before I move to discuss the term realism itself it will be worth stating why it is still such an important philosophical category. With what can be identified as a move to the right in the dominant fields of western intellectual thought, largely represented by the term post-modernism, approaches to notions of truth, ideology and critique have been disconnected (and seemingly neutralised) from any approach which describes the world in rationalistic or 'truthful' terms. Although Postmodernism contains many different (and often opposing) positions simultaneously, the central tenets (as espoused by its most prominent ideologues: Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard) amount to a position which fragments and relativises any attempt towards a unified theory of reality, arguing that such a position is no longer (if it ever was) attainable. Thus Lyotard's conception of science as 'just one amongst a range of incommensurable language games and one which no longer exerts any privileged claim in respect of knowledge and truth,'⁹ Baudrillard's 'world of images, of hallucinatory evocations of a non-existent real'¹⁰ and Foucault's conception of the history of discourses or 'structures of representation' as being marked by 'a series of ruptures, or 'epistemological breaks', which make it strictly impossible to compare them in point of scientific truth, accuracy, scope or explanatory power,'¹¹ all serve to deny the possibility of grasping a coherent account of reality. Although I do not have the space here to go into detail to refute these specific points

in turn,¹² it will be argued that it is the category of realism which enables an understanding of how reality can be grasped, therefore allowing it to be open to transformation. In doing so, we will see what is represented by postmodernism and how it does 'a great service to the interests of state and corporate power in diffusing the idea that there really is no difference between things as they seem, things as they really are, and things as they might be according to the values of enlightened critique'¹³ and allows us to switch off from the implications of the 'outdated' transformative potential of critical thought and:

learn to enjoy these heady New Times where what counts is no longer an appeal to truth - to some reality beyond appearances - but rather the willingness to just get along, exploit the various forms of fantasy gratification.¹⁴

1.1 Understanding Realism

It is the philosophical concept of realism that allows us to approach a coherent understanding of the material world and enables a critical resistance to the (fashionable) relativist formulations described above. However, it must also be observed that realism itself is one of the 'most controversial and disputed debates in the history of philosophy'¹⁵ and it is clear that this term has no 'fixed' meaning, thus it can mean very different things according to various philosophical positions. Different philosophical understandings of how we perceive the world will result in radical different pictures of what is reality. As Roy Bhaskar, who was instrumental in developing the concept of critical realism, puts it,

it should be appreciated that all philosophies, cognitive discourses and practical activities presuppose a realism-in the sense of some ontology or general account of the world. The crucial question is: what kind?¹⁶

Bhaskar's critical realism may be seen to be in keeping with a Marxian notion of realism¹⁷ and is a theory of knowledge that professes to understand and reveal the underlying structures that constitute reality. Critical realism is formulated out of strands of other notions of realism. While it adamantly rejects these realisms as inadequate theories of knowledge, it simultaneously extracts parts of these theories for its own use and thus allows us to grasp reality. The two major theories of realism that provide the kernel for critical realism are empiricism and conventionalism and, for the purposes of

clarity, will be very briefly mapped out below.

Empiricism, or positivism (as it is sometimes known), is based upon the premise that knowledge can be only be gained through directly experiencing the object and explains the real world 'where things are independent of consciousness and theories...but is accessible through sense experience'.¹⁸ For the empiricists there is an independent material world which can only be known by directly experiencing it. For Marx this was a flawed theory of knowledge and he argues 'science would become superfluous if there was an immediate coincidence of the appearance and reality of things'.¹⁹ To get to the real, as Lovell points out, it is necessary to

go beyond the surface appearance of things, beyond the manner in which social relations are experienced, in order to arrive at knowledge of these social relations.....appearances taken at face value are misleading.²⁰

Conventionalism or idealism, is the converse of empiricism. Although conventionalism can be seen to be a critique of the empiricist argument which fails to consider the complex relationship between subjective appearance and objective reality, it holds the view that reality is 'ultimately ideal in character, and can be seen as a construct or creation of mere ideas, interpretations.'²¹ We relate to and understand the world through different sorts of language systems and it is this activity that is the site of the real for conventionalism: It is a world constructed by theories alone. With no rational procedure of choosing between these theories or identifying a 'correct' one, with each theory being as valid as the next, the result is the relativism which is so popular with much of postmodernist thought. The problem with this theory of knowledge is that by making reality a function of language there is a gap between the discourse theory and the social reality that the theory seeks to address. This separation becomes, as Lovell again suggests:

the complete substitution of discourse analysis for analysis of social reality. Discourse analysis is never far from the temptation of treating social reality itself as a discursive other, rather than as a reality external to discourse but to which discourse refers.²²

Critical realism then rejects most of empiricist and conventionalist arguments as inadequate, but it does acknowledge that certain elements within these theories have some use value. The empiricist identification of the real solely with what can be experienced is seen as false,

but critical realism does share with it the belief that there is an external world or independent reality which can be known. Similarly with conventionalism, critical realism rejects the belief that nothing can be said or known about the external world and that language is the site of the real while conceding that 'knowledge is socially constructed and that language, even the language of experience is a social construct and theory impregnated.'²³

So critical realism is a theory of knowledge which states that there is an objective material world which is knowable, or in the language of classical German philosophy, 'reality has a being-in-itself, an objective being, independent of consciousness, which at the same time is graspable by consciousness'.²⁴ But how can we know this reality, the relationship between the subject and object, if for a large part the empiricist and conventionalist accounts are to be rejected? The answer lies in the concepts of materialism and the dialectic.

Materialism in its simplest form states that everything in the world is constructed of matter. Sean Sayers observes:

All reality is material, there is nothing in the world but matter and motion. Consciousness is matter organised and acting at its most complex and developed level...this is philosophical (or ontological) materialism²⁵

and insists that 'there is no consciousness independent of matter'.²⁶ It thus follows that things and ideas about things are not and cannot be separate or unrelated though this may appear to be so in experiential reality. The dialectic is based upon the idea of the concrete unity of opposites²⁷ and is, at least for Marx and Hegel who developed the concept, 'no magic formula. On the contrary, it is a fully developed, systematically worked out philosophical theory and view of the world.'²⁸ Central to the notion of the dialectic is the unity of the subject and the object through knowledge. It acknowledges the fact that the subject and object are both 'distinct but also united'²⁹, meaning that relations between the two can hold both united and contradictory positions at the same time.

A classic Marxian example of this would be the objective and subjective nature of the working class. As an object it generally accepts the ideology and values of the ruling class and therefore its relatively unimportant and seemingly naturalistic position³⁰ in society, but as a subject it is a class which has a central role in the capitalist economic structure, where everything in that society is fundamentally based around the extraction of

surplus value at the point of production in the form of profits. If the working class becomes fully aware of this, it is able to penetrate the dominant ideology of the state and become self-conscious of what Marx would call its 'historic role,'³¹ thereby transforming itself from the object of history into the subject of history. It is materially the same working class which hold both positions simultaneously and in contradiction. Moreover, it is the first state which contains the potential for the second within itself. We can see that there is a relationship between subject and object beyond that of appearances and it is in the understanding of the dialectic and the material that enables the penetration of the object and thus reveal the subject.

So critical realism is the understanding that beneath surface appearances and experiential reality are relations 'which interact and interpenetrate and which are constantly being transformed into each other in the course of practical activity and in the development of consciousness and knowledge.'³² The relations of subject and object have a dynamic unity, but can also be in opposition at the same time and it is this that the dialectic allows us to understand. It provides us with the theoretical tools on the basis of which we can begin to understand the world, are able to conceive or 'reveal' the underlying structures and relations of the material world and thus change it. These structures and relations are not, as Roy Bhaskar points out, 'spontaneously apparent in the observable pattern of events; they can only be identified through the practical and theoretical work of the social sciences'³³ and to be able to penetrate these relations it is not just a matter of applying

either a set of substantive analyses or set of practical policies. Rather, it provides a set of perspectives on society (and nature) and on how to understand them. It is not a substitute for, but rather helps to guide, empirically controlled investigations into the structures generating social phenomena.³⁴

It is this conception of realism which will provide the main point of orientation for this paper.

Part Two

2.0. John Heartfield: From Dadaism to Realist Production

John Heartfield's anti-fascist photomontages produced for the German Communist Party's (KPD) AIZ (Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung - Workers Illustrated News) magazine are seen by many as the pinnacle of an effective avant-gardist critical intervention in social reality. Before I move to explore John Heartfield's interventionist work, it will be worthwhile briefly charting the practices from which his critical montage emerged.

The Dada art movement (1916-24) was one of the first groups of artists to seize upon the potential of montage as a critical device to engage with the reality of a 'discredited culture', seen as responsible for the mindless slaughter of the first world war. The most radical participants of the Berlin group- George Grosz, Hannah Höch, John Heartfield and Raoul Hausman- seized upon this new technique: the random combination of found photographs 'together with cuttings from magazines, newspapers, lettering and drawing...formed...a chaotic, explosive image, a provocative dismembering of reality'³⁵ (Fig 1). Montage, as Hausman put it, 'tore a visually and cognitively new mirror image from the period of chaos in war and revolution', and observed that 'they knew that their method had an inherent propagandistic power that contemporary life was not courageous enough to absorb and to develop.'³⁶

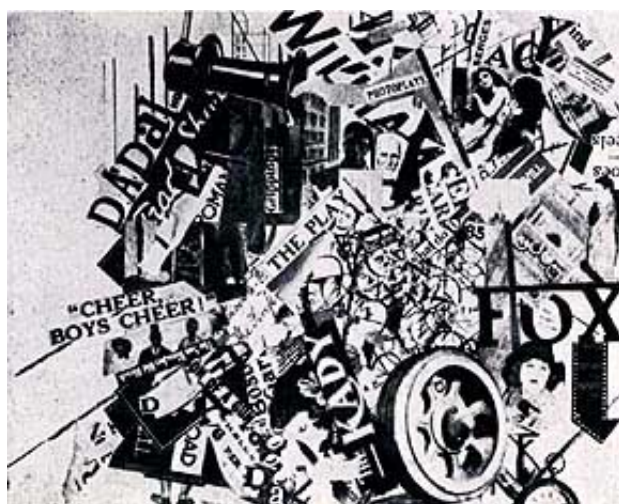


Fig. 1. John Heartfield, Dada Photomontage (1919)

Aiming to produce work which was 'a stab in the eye of good taste'³⁷ they rejected all methods and identifications with a 'bankrupt' bourgeois art world with its unrepeatable, private and exclusive production of the art object. The term 'artist' was rejected in favour of one more in keeping with the new productive practice of montage which, according to Hausman, 'translates our aversion to playing the artist, and thinking of ourselves as engineers we want to construct, to assemblage our work.'³⁸ Turning

their back upon bourgeois culture, the Dadaists opened themselves up to reflecting the transforming modern world of mechanisation, industrialisation, mass communication and revolutionary developments in the sciences. By appropriating and re-combining fragments from this world, the Dadaists sought to 'subvert the voice of society by saying in pictures what would have been banned by censors had it been said in words.'³⁹

But in doing this the Dadaists were not seeking to reveal the dialectical 'inner reality' of this new culture- instead they sought to detonate and distort it by 'a refusal of harmonising perspectives' and played upon the 'discontinuities and shock-effects that montage allowed.'⁴⁰

The Dadaists confused the chaotic and essentially reflective characteristics of an experiential and perceptual reality with reality itself and, combined with a practice which still led to the production of the disdained art object, they found themselves up a intellectual dead-end. Heartfield himself acknowledges as much: 'our mistake was to have concerned ourselves with art at all...we saw then the insane end-products of the prevailing social order and burst out laughing...we did not yet see that a system underlay this insanity.'⁴¹ Nevertheless, Dada's centralisation of photomontage, and with it, its transformable and re-constructive potential proved to be instrumental in developing the highly articulate, emotionally charged and mass circulated realist montage work which Heartfield went on to produce.

The acceleration of the German economic and political crisis, which manifested itself as both heightened social instability and a rapid explosion of political extremism on both the left and right, was reason enough for Heartfield to join the German Communist Party (KPD) in 1922. This had a profound impact upon Heartfield's work - he later recalled this transition from Dadaist to communist as 'a change from a protest against everything to a systematic and consciously guided art propaganda in the service of the working class movement'⁴² and it was here that he found the intellectual tools which provided a coherent and radical world view which allowed him to produce such unified and focused work.

The continuation of the photomontage techniques developed during his Dada years enabled Heartfield to produce biting political satire which found its way onto numerous dusk-jackets, into advertisements, street posters and the worker's press, allowing him to create an instant 'instruction' or critical revelation about a particular aspect of contemporary reality. Louis Aragon observed:

As he was playing with the fire of appearances, reality itself took fire around him.....John Heartfield was no longer playing. The scraps of photographs that he formally manoeuvred for the pleasure of stupefaction, under his fingers began to signify. 43

It was the combination of the manner of signification with the method of its distribution that is an important component to the realist nature of his work. Vehemently spurning the trivialities of the art world, Heartfield explored the mass distributive potential of the press to intervene, inform and enlist its readers in the fight against fascism. In effect he was seeking to transform the relations of cultural production in a way which would democratise that production in favour of the working class which (for him) ultimately moved towards a socialist transformation of society. With his method the singular production of the 'art object' was displaced as the work itself existed as photogravure reproductions. As Walter Benjamin put it: 'the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility.'⁴⁴ Benjamin developed his ideas about the importance of understanding production (itself derived from Brecht's phrase of 'functional transformation'⁴⁵) in his 'Author as Producer' where he emphasises that it is not enough to produce revolutionary content to have realist effect but to attempt to transform the very methods and practices of the productive processes. What was most important for Benjamin 'was not the 'attitude' of a work of art towards the existing mode of production, but how it in fact stood in relation to production.'⁴⁶ Citing the capabilities of the bourgeois press in 'assimilating, indeed of propagating, an astonishing amount of revolutionary themes without putting into question its own continued existence or that of the class which owns it'⁴⁷ as evidence for the need to transform this means of production for the ends of socialism, Benjamin was theorising what Heartfield himself was attempting to do in practice with his work in AIZ. Heartfield attempted to transform the audience from passive viewer to active collaborator, 'to transform the institutional relations in which the realist works would circulate and be consumed' and 'therefore transform 'consumers' into 'collaborators.'⁴⁸

The montage work itself fused disparate photographic images into a fictitious but spatially convincing form and aimed to penetrate the ideological shroud of bourgeois reality, reveal the hidden structures of class relations and 'lay bare the real menace of fascism'⁴⁹ in a popular and accessible way. For this effective visualisation of the Marxian dialectic Heartfield continued to centralise the

photograph as being the most suitable medium by which to uncover the manufactured myths of the bourgeoisie. As John Berger notes, 'the peculiar advantage of photomontage lies in the fact that everything which has been cut out keeps its familiar photographic appearance. We are still looking first at things and only afterwards at symbols'⁵⁰ and it was surely this immediate referent quality that qualified it for Heartfield's special attention.

Heartfield's use of allegories, reliance on word play, his exemplary satirical edge and his almost organic assimilation of elements into a near seamless whole ensured the visual success of the work. Heartfield maintained several key themes through his work which reflected the Comintern's⁵¹ own analysis of fascism which saw it as the 'final manifestation of capital.'⁵² 'Adolf the Superman: Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk' (Fig. 2) was one such direct reference to the huge financial support that Hitler received from the German bourgeoisie- Heartfield sought to make it clear that Adolf himself was just a mere tool of the giant industrialists, financiers, and landowners. In this montage Hitler is typically portrayed delivering his Nazi rhetoric but his body has been transformed by means of an x-ray which reveals that he has gold coins for vertebrae and a swastika for a heart.⁵³ The documentary element is subverted by this x-ray effect which serves to indicate that a deeper reality is at play beneath the surface of the image. Similarly in 'Instruments in Gods Hand? Toy in Tyhssens hand!' (Fig. 3) we can see a variation of the same theme whereby Heartfield again employs the device of creating a unified and symbolic visual space which plays on the technique of the documentary by which to counter the rhetoric of Nazi propaganda. Here we see industrial giant Thyssen as the puppet master, clearly pulling the strings of a jumping-jack Hitler, with his mechanical, cardboard body. Mikhail Bakhtin has observed that 'the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity.'⁵⁴ Heartfield, by taking the very tokens of the Nazi's ideological hegemony and transforming them into an object of ridicule, revealed the constructed nature of reality itself through such a 'lowering'. Thus, with such a juxtapositional use of the caption, the work clearly deflates the divine aspirations of that 'superman'.



Fig.2 . John Heartfield, ADOLF THE SUPERMAN: Swallows gold and spouts junk. AIZ 11, Number 29, 17 July 1932, Page 675



Fig.3 . John Heartfield, INSTRUMENTS IN GOD'S HAND? TOY IN THYSEN'S HAND! IN AIZ 12 Number 31, 10 AUGUST 1933, Page 529 Acomp text: "in the fulfilment of his task, the führer perceives himself as God's instrument."

Heartfield also fought the Nazis on the cultural terrain which was all important in establishing ideological hegemony. In 'Der Krieg' (Fig. 4) we can see Heartfield appropriating and transforming one of Hitler's favourite paintings by Franz von Stuck of the same name (1894). Depicting a Teutonic horseman crossing a corpse-ridden field, complete with swastika shaped lightning and Hitler riding pillion, Heartfield re-interprets and transforms Hitler's 'noble' romanticism into the reality of Nazi militarism. David Evans points out the importance of the

context of Heartfield's insertion in AIZ: this particular image is intended to be seen 'as a scripto-visual epigraph' to play off against an accompanying article 'Against the East we want to ride! The Third Reich arms for war.'⁵⁵ Further more, it can be seen to be a direct comment upon Hitler's real aims as stated in Mien Kampf 'to revive the drive to the East in emulation of the Teutonic Knights of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.'⁵⁶



Fig. 4. John Heartfield, THE WAR
A Painting by Franz von Stuck. A Timely Montage by John Heartfield, in AIZ 12 Number 29, 27 July 1933, Page 499

Many of Heartfield's photomontages produced for AIZ were designed specifically to be seen 'in context', juxtaposed with neighbouring articles, the poignancy of which would be lost if viewed outside of the publication.⁵⁷ It is the ability of his photomontages to engage directly with specific socio-political circumstances by use of the pseudo document, caricature and satire combined with his attempts to transform the methods of production and distribution through AIZ which constitutes another important factor in the realist nature of his work.

Heartfield's use of montage at this point in time enabled him to engage with popular sensibilities, avoid the isolation of much avant-garde practice and thus function as an 'ideological interrupter' when inserted into the specific context of pre-nazi Germany.⁵⁸ Fundamentally, it was the existence of both a large (and international) workers movement which provided the cultural structures which he could utilise and, crucially, the theoretical rigour of the communist party which provided the intellectual springboard from which to launch his work. Critical realist art, as Lovell suggests, must pre-suppose some 'knowledge of the nature of that reality to be shown' and

then 'transcribing that which is known, through art by using the rules and conventions, or 'signifying processes' which are held appropriate to the work.'⁵⁹ It was the combination of the theoretical position of Marxism with the experimentation, fluidity and independence of the leftist avant-garde that enabled Heartfield to produce work of such impact, coherence, and social relevance which is still of vital importance to the realist debate today.

2.1. Léger v Socialist Realism

I want to now discuss a more specific case of realist practice which can be seen to be in sharp contradistinction to the realism effected by Heartfield's practice. By discussing Fernand Léger's contribution to 1937 Universal Exhibition in Paris, I want to broaden the discussion out to international realist debate and its consequences for artists seeking to contribute to an increasingly urgent political agenda.

The cultural debates organised by the French Communist Party in the mid 1930's at the Maison de la Culture in Paris provide us with a useful starting point. Taking place at a time when the strategy of the Popular Front was being adopted by the left as the most effective way of fighting fascism, with its emphasis on class collaboration rather than class struggle, it was a period where the general debate about realism was orientating around what sort of art could best serve as a left-wing oppositional force. The discussions around realism had long come to a closure in the Soviet Union with the 'consolidation of Stalin's rule and the codification of socialist realism as a 'progressive' international force.'⁶⁰ Thus, with its political prestige and control of the European communist parties (via the Comintern), it was this cultural position which dominated the conference. However, the international discussions around realism and the related issues of form, content and effectivity was far from the Stalinist orchestrated debates witnessed within the Soviet Union in the early 30's - throughout this period there was opposition and presentations made of other, more complex notions of realism, notably in the writings of Brecht, Benjamin and Aragon. Although the weight of socialist realism was reflected within the Maison de la Culture debates, galvanising most artists 'who wanted their art to have some place in a world that increasingly demanded commitment of one kind or another,'⁶¹ there was still space for alternative definitions to be made. It was here

that Fernand Léger pointed to his notion of 'new realism', which he describes as the freeing of 'colour and geometric form' and stated that 'the play of formal contrasts in a work of art could...be used to achieve more appropriate representations of the condition of modernity.'⁶² Rejecting the restrictive prescriptions of figurative socialist realism, Léger outlined a practice that was free of imposed restraints in favour of a modern art that could depict the world in both its complexity and diversity. Léger argued that it was the technique of montage which embodied this new art, castigating the 'technically conservative conceptions of realism as an 'insult' to the masses' and stated 'it is officially to pronounce them of incapable of rising to the level of that new realism that is their age.'⁶³

Shortly after the conference, following a wave of mass strikes and factory occupations, a Popular Front government was elected in France. A new department for Sport and Leisure was established which aimed to give art a new public role and it was through this that Léger was commissioned to produce five public panels for the 1937 Universal Exhibition in Paris.

The panels produced were consistent with the 'machine aesthetic' that dominated his previous paintings and represented the view that technology symbolised the heart of the new order and was the 'source of a new beauty'.⁶⁴ The panel entitled 'Work' (fig. 5) that was installed in the Pavilion of Education consisted of the assemblage of technological and architectural photographic elements juxtaposed into a dynamic, unified form. The centralisation of technological elements reflects Léger's identification with a modernist notion of progress through technological advancement. Although this position is in keeping with Lenin's maxim of 'socialism is soviets plus electrification,' the means by which this is represented, with the elements organised to symbolise a new world which centred around and under the control of the worker, is very different from the works organised under the prescriptions of a Stalinised socialist realism. 'Work' represents Léger's 'realism of the ideal,' an ambiguous position that represented the influence of the avant-garde in that 'radical changes in economics, politics, and science had reached the cultural world.'⁶⁵ It was by this method that he aimed to produce a 'popular, contemporary and collective art.'⁶⁶

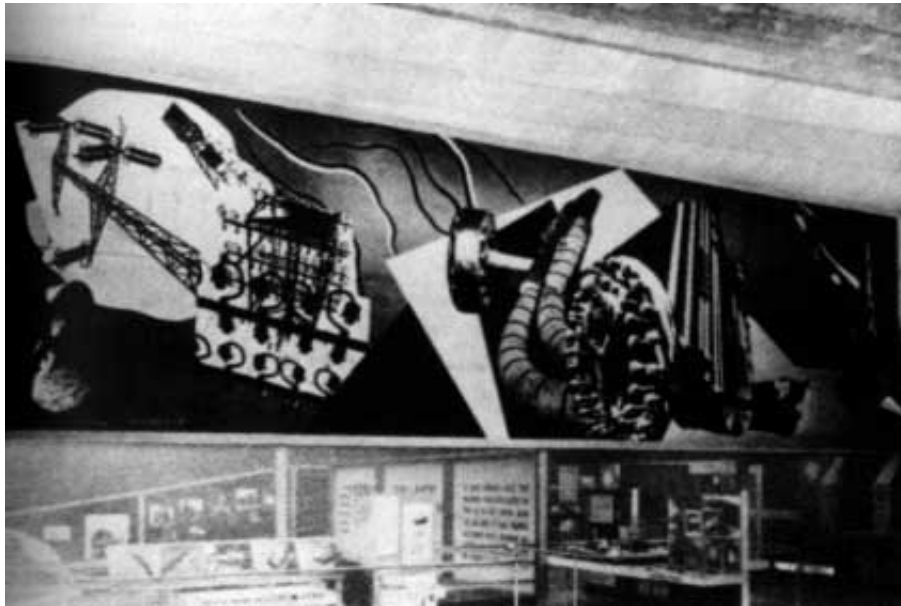


Fig.5 Fernand Léger, *Travailler* (work) 1937, photomontage (now destroyed), Universal Exhibition, Paris

Léger's theoretical position on the aim of his work can allow a voluntarist reading of his practice: in the absence of any real popular leftist movement with any sense of what it might mean to make 'collective' work, he moves towards fulfilling an abstract ideological position. Indeed, the work's organisational function can be located more in a fetishised technological modernism than as any sort of critically realist approach that has been discussed so far- the 'revealing things as they really are'. But realism is more than just about what the works content is organising. What is of direct interest here is the insertion of this content, the ideological commitment to a world socialist vision, through the form of photomontage into the context of the Universal Exhibition. Léger's work stood in stark contrast to both the German and Russian Pavilions, the former with its classical Aryan stereotype 'Comradship' (Fig 6) and the later's similarly heroic 'The Worker and the Collective Farm Woman' (Fig 7). Léger's experimental, dynamic approach to producing work can be seen to resist and disrupt the dominant views of representational forms embodied in the art championed by both the Stalinist and Nazi states. By seeking to solidify the means of representation and formalise the relationship of art to the state, both championed a practice which closed down the possibilities of other methods of production and representation. Léger's realism goes some way to revealing the monovision of these positions- it becomes evident in both the Soviet and Nazi preferred practices that there is an absence of space for the process of speculation and questioning over what sort of art can best engage with contemporaneity.



Fig.6. Josef Thorak, Kameradschaft (Comradship), 1937, bronze, height 670cm for the National Socialist German Exhibition, Paris



Fig.7. Vera Mukhina, The Worker and the Collective Farm, 1937, bronze, height, c.12m, for the USSR pavilion, Universal Exhibition, Paris

It is the very use of heroic and classical devices which becomes the main instrument by which both the Nazi and Soviet states aim to produce an accessible, public and didactic art. This served not only to reinforce the ideological hegemony of the Soviet and Nazi states and

their right to represent the real, but also their right to own it. It is worth briefly looking at what sort of reality is being organised or 'revealed' by socialist realism and look at the role of art in both the Nazi and Soviet state at this time.

It is no coincidence that there is apparent similarities between the favoured classical style of the Nazis and that of Soviet socialist realism and their resistance to the 'decadent and degenerate' traits of the avant-garde. The Soviet and Nazi states were economic mirrors of each other. The only difference between them was of the ideology employed to construct and legitimatise the state and hide the real nature of social relations. In Nazi Germany any reference to the concept of realism was abhorred and disqualified because this was associated with Soviet culture and (ironically) with the 'degenerate' modernist avant-garde. However, this did not prevent the Nazi state from promoting an art which had the same cultural effect as their ideological enemies in the Soviet Union. It will be useful to briefly map out why a so-called socialist state's attitude to cultural production appeared to be very similar, if not identical, to its opposite Nazi number.

By 1937 the close registration of social reality with the ideological description of reality had very much come adrift within the Soviet Union. With the concentration of political power in the hands of Stalin in the late 1920's, the smashing of the remaining workers movements and the exile of Trotsky, the Soviet Union began to develop, with the first Five Year Plan, as an independent 'state capitalist' state with its own industrial base and able to compete on equal terms, both economically and militarily, with international capital. The support for the experimental practices of the avant-garde was dropped at the same time as the commitment to world socialist revolution was dropped under Stalin's maxim of 'Socialism in One Country'. All facets of institutional and cultural life were co-opted to cementing this change of ideological direction. Indeed, there was no longer any desire or place for artistic experimentation: what was needed, it was argued,⁶⁷ was a culture that would reflect and support the ideological needs of the Soviet state and establish itself as heir to the legacy of Marxism. By 1934 the consolidation of socialist realism had taken place. With its implicit privileging of traditionally inspired and popularly accessible figurative forms, (Fig.8) it became virtually impossible for art to be both critically realist and simultaneously fulfil the prescriptions of socialist realism.

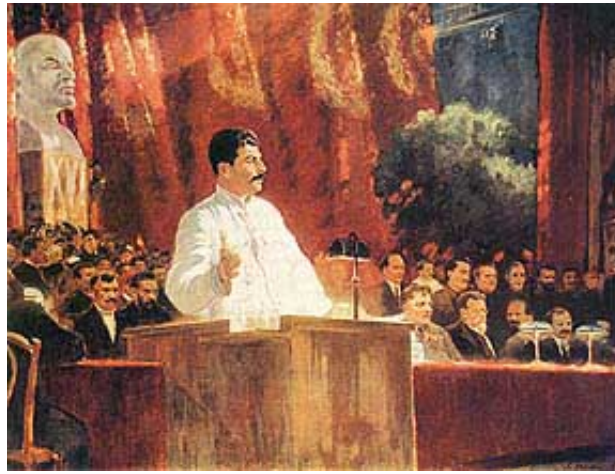


Fig.8 Aleksander Gerasimov, Stalin at the Sixteenth Party Congress of the Russian Communist Party 1929-30 , oil on canvas

On the international front the biggest threat for the Soviet Union was the rise of fascism- not however because of its complete atomisation of workers organisation or its anti-Semitic and racist ideology (and its in human consequences), but on the basis of capitalist competition. Nazi Germany with its explicit expansionist aims was seen as a serious economic threat to the Soviet Union. Hence, as we shall see later on in more detail, what was needed to counter this threat were collaborations and alliances with the bourgeoisie of other capitalist states against the growing threat of fascism. This was reflected in the cultural policy of socialist realism which rejected radical transformative conceptions of art as proposed by the leftist elements within the avant-garde. This is a crucial point. The Soviet Union had changed materially and no longer needed to make any connection with any Marxist understanding of realism with its dialectical approach. Its own register with reality had changed and now had a vested interest in covering up 'the real,' hence its hostile dismissal of the avant-garde and its volatile, experimental approach.

If we now go back to the 1937 Universal Exhibition in Paris it becomes clear just how much Léger's montage practice was at odds with the general cultural production of the time. By the mid 30's the Communist Party, who by this stage 'caught a cold every time Stalin sneezed',⁶⁸ dominated the Popular Front and put forth the line of socialist realism as an effective method to resist fascism. And it is here that Léger's realism stands in stark contrast to socialist realism's ideological mantle and thus takes on a sort of critical function. This work may indeed be a long way from the direct activist/transformative approach

demonstrated by Heartfield, but nevertheless it represented a critical interruption of the dominant cultural practices by a tactical use of montage which challenged the now normalised closure of the experimental and critical capacity of art. It is in this capacity that Léger's work can be identified as effective realist approach.

2.2. Eisenstein's Montage

The use of montage as a radical and effective technique which has some sort of realist register can be mapped in the experiments and practices of the Russian avant-garde following the 1917 workers revolution. The Constructivists recognised that by appropriating and recombining fragmentary photographic elements into a new synergetic form they could create a 'new iconography of representation'⁶⁹ which would provide an important bridge from 'abstraction to material' and from the illusionistic and the 'symbolic general to the concrete and real particular.'⁷⁰ The re-orientation of the avant-garde's practice from its former abstract work to direct representational imagery⁷¹ can be seen as an attempt to engage with notions of the 'everyday' as a site of ideological and political struggle which saw everyday reality essentially as contradictory and open to change. For Rodchenko, Gustav Klutis and El Lissitzky, photomontage was a useful tool for revolutionary propaganda with its potential to bring 'abstract political and social ideas, commands and necessities...within the scope of comprehension of even the most illiterate peasant.'⁷² But this also marked an attempt by the avant-garde to resist the emerging 'house style' of figurative socialist realism and continue with an experimental, transformational view of arts role in society. As John Roberts describes, it became 'a synecdochal expression of revolutionary transformation itself.'⁷³ In many ways, one of the most interesting exponents of montage during this period was not in the field of photomontage but rather in the medium of film.

It was Sergei Eisenstein who saw the ability of montage to reveal the hidden, 'fabricated artificial character of the assembled spatial structure' of film, and that it replaced the perceptual space of Renaissance vision with a 'fragmentation and multi-faceted changeable space.'⁷⁴ Drawing on early modernist practice (Charles Dickens, W. Griffiths), Eisenstein developed sophisticated montagist principles including his theory of the montage of attractions and the montage of oppositions. As a director, he saw that the use of montage

presupposes a level of general culture.. allowing him not only to be familiar with life but also to understanding it correctly, presupposes his capabilities to observe life, to cope with observations, to think about them independently and finally, it presupposes a certain degree of artistic ability, which enables him to transform the inner, hidden context of real phenomena into a bare, clearly visible and immediately comprehensible context.⁷⁵

Eisenstein saw montage as capable of 'revealing the real' by means of consciously engaging the viewer to construct their own meanings, within a certain set of parameters defined by the producer. Not only was montage the convergence of disparate and dissimilar elements organised into a spatially disorientating form but became the very nature of the 'unifying principle'.⁷⁶ What he meant by this was the establishment of an awareness of the meaning of each shot prior to montage and the subsequent production of a third meaning stemming from its juxtaposition. This unifying principle elucidates the important role of the audience in creating the montage effect by sharing the journey that the author took when making the work: 'the spectator not only sees the represented elements of the finished work, but also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and assembly of the image just as it was experienced by the author.'⁷⁷ It is the active, cognitive abilities of the spectator which are paramount in Eisenstein's conception of montage. The crucial difference between representation as singular fact or recording of event and the effect of the 'montage principle' is that the latter 'achieves that great power of inner creative excitement in the spectator which distinguishes an emotionally exciting work from one that stops without going further.'⁷⁸ The potential of montage to plough-up 'the psyche of the spectator'⁷⁹ is an essential concept for Eisenstein where the continuity of film space and time is disrupted with exact precision 'to produce certain emotional shocks in a proper order within the totality- the only means by which it is possible to make the final ideological conclusion perceptible.'⁸⁰ In the film 'Strike' (1924), the suppression scene is comprised of two separate and unrelated scenes rapidly inter-cut together: the put down of the workers and the singular death of an animal in the slaughter house. The extract reproduced below indicates this sequence as recorded by Alexander Belenson⁸¹ Abbreviations are Close-up (c.u), Medium Shot (m.s), and Long Shot (l.s).

1) The head of a bull jerks out of the shot, beyond the

upper frame-line, avoiding the aimed butchers knife.

2) (c.u) The hand holding the knife strikes sharply-beyond the lower frame-line.

3) (l.s) 1,500 persons role down a slope in profile.

4) 40 persons raise themselves from the ground, arms outstretched.

5) Face of a soldier taking aim.

6) (m.s) A volley of gun-fire.

7) The shuddering body of the bull (head outside of frame) rolls over.

8) (c.u) Legs of the bull jerk convulsively. The hooves beat in a pool of blood.

9) (c.u) The bolts of a rifle.

10) The bulls head is fastened with a rope to a bench.

11) 1,000 persons rush past the camera.

12) From behind bushes, a chain of soldiers appears.

13) (c.u) The bull's head dies of unseen blows (the eyes glaze).

Originally intended to be purely an educational film, 'Strike' evolved to be a experimental vehicle for the dialectical ideas of Eisenstein. The unavoidable re-negotiation of meaning of both scenes, encouraging allegorical effect that draw acute conclusions from the montagist action, reveals what for Eisenstein is the reality of this pre-revolutionary conflict between representatives of capital and labour. This latent reality is effected by means of creating a dialogue with the audience, communicating an ideological message while simultaneously reproducing the (supposed) reality of post capital/labour conflict in revolutionary Russia.

The general principles of Eisenstein's montage can be seen in contrast to that of the western avant-grade where the potential of montage is seen as an oppositional force (Heartfield, Benjamin, Brecht) to the dominant bourgeois culture and therefore aimed at exposing the contradictions of class society. In post-revolutionary Russia these contradictions no longer (again supposedly) existed, therefore Eisenstein's montage was 'harnessed to the

construction of the Soviet system that had claimed to eradicate all class structure.'⁸² Benjamin's own conception of realism is of interest here- for him it was not just a matter of simply replacing a bourgeois narrative with a Marxist one, but one of making aware the fabricated and constructed nature of reality itself. Benjamin's commitment to montage is 'a commitment to resisting the reifying constraints of linear system building. Montage enacts the heterogeneous as the critique of premature synthesis.'⁸³ Inherent in Eisenstein's method of montage practice is its ability to represent reality as a multi-dimensional, changeable space which emphasises the active role of the audience in creative interpretation and thus stands as an testimonial opposition to the figurative closures and passive contemplation of full-blown socialist realism.

Any attempt at describing the realism of Eisenstein's work has not only to consider the way that the material is being organised to create its meaning but also, as I have already stressed, the context in which the work is being produced. Through the ideas which informed the production and the devices employed to interpret them, Eisenstein's work can be understood to be creating a sort of realist effect but awareness must also be made here to the problems of co-option. The consequences of the consolidation of Stalinism discussed earlier necessarily played a part in determining at least some of the parameters and ideological direction of the work- as early as 1927 the anniversary film 'October' was subject to delay and alteration to suit the current political climate.⁸⁴

The 1905 anniversary film 'Battleship Potempkin' (1925) serves as an illustrative point in understanding that realism is a specifically temporal category, not a timeless adoption of a particular technique.

Eisenstein represents the Potempkin mutiny and the Odessa steps massacre, both synecdochal for the 1905 revolution in general, by a process where 'the sensation of fear on the quarter deck, panic and machine like murder on the steps, tension on the waiting ship, could only have been communicated by this revolutionary cutting method.'⁸⁵ Made from within a culture where class conflict had been resolved, Potempkin reworked history from a Marxian derived perspective using the most innovative montage strategies for effecting a sort of realism. As observed earlier, critical realism for this enquiry is about how a work serves to reveal 'underlying essences' of a particular moment which makes it temporally and context dependant. This is where the issue of co-option becomes pertinent. In claiming the ideological mantle of films such as Eisenstein's Potempkin, the state is able to legitimise

itself as heir to socialism. Before Stalinism emerged as a serious counter-revolutionary force, the Soviet Union's ideological register with reality still largely originated from a dialectically materialist position. This put it in a diametrically opposing position to the ruling classes generally distant relation with, and view of, reality which for reasons which determine its own continued existence, it cannot fully acknowledge.⁸⁶ As the Soviet state's political role changed so did its orientation with reality. Its ability to co-opt productions such as Potempkin in supporting its own (now inverted⁸⁷) strategy of being heir to the legacy of the worker's revolution must be borne in mind when we consider such notions of realist effect. Of course, these post-production factors are far beyond the control of the individual producer and it cannot be used as a simplistic argument which neutralises all that is genuinely significant in Eisenstein's method, but we can see here that there are problems with attempting to discuss Eisenstein's work in terms of it having any critically realist effect. By saying this the aim is not to doubt the importance of the innovative strategies of Eisenstein's theory and practice in trying to 'reveal the real' by his exploration of his various montage techniques, but to outline the sheer complexities of trying to define a critical realist practice.

2.3. Some Theoretical Undercurrents: Brecht, Benjamin and Lukács

Georg Lukács, one of socialist realism's theoretical advocates,⁸⁸ presented a model of realism which provided an important theoretical target for both Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht. Lukács suggested that the bourgeois realist novel, the classic literary form with its closed text and typifications of character 'which organically bound together the particular and the general,'⁸⁹ was a suitable model for contemporary realist practice. Very much in keeping with a Leninist understanding of cultural development,⁹⁰ this form represented for Lukács a continuation of the cultural foundations laid by the 'former' bourgeois to 'create a picture of human relations in all their roundedness'.⁹¹ For Lukács this was unachievable by any of the possibilities opened up by modernism, hence not only did he see its attitude as unwelcome but saw in it the potential to be highly reactionary to the point where it could be viewed as a fellow traveller of fascism: a Trojan Horse within the socialist camp.⁹² For Lukács all modernist works were falsifications which both reflected and reproduced 'the anomie and cynicism of capitalist relations'.⁹³ The techniques of montage- the fragment and

interior monologue- were described as formalist and therefore translated into a sort of political retreat. For Lukács the documentary/factography approaches to art (epitomised by Heartfield's practice) were inappropriate because they blurred 'the line between art & science and fetishising facts' and that these 'abrupt shifts were to be avoided in favour of gradual passages and developments.'⁹⁴ Heartfield's anti-fascist montage practices were thus seen by Lukács as, at best, no more than a 'good joke' and at worst 'intellectually unable to penetrate the surface of life's reality.'⁹⁵

This position was virilantly opposed by both Brecht and Benjamin who accused Lukács's version of socialist realism as a 'deluded and timeless formalism.'⁹⁶ With a reliance on outdated methods this realism was inappropriately based upon the cultural products of a class whose relevance and radicality had been lost and superseded by the very dynamics of capitalism itself. What it meant to live in the constantly transforming 'modern world' could, in both Benjamin's and Brecht's eyes, never be adequately engaged by the 'historical forms of individuality of the Balzacian or Tolstoyan type-hence to refurbish such figures in new conditions would actually be a signal flight from realism.'⁹⁷ For them it was fragmentation, the interruption and re-ordering of reality by some sort of montage technique which seemed to offer the most effective approach to creating a relevant realist practice. The dissolving of contradictions so desirable for Lukács realism of imaginary resolution was again the converse of Brecht's and Benjamin's position. Roberts explains: 'it wasn't the imaginary totality that would lead the artist to realism but the fragment....for if the artist is truly to inhabit the contradictions of the bourgeois order, bourgeois reality had to be made available in a form that actually embodied these contradictions.'⁹⁸

Benjamin's unfinished 'Passagen-Werk' (Arcades Project) clearly reveals his understanding of need to use contemporary forms in order to challenge the 'false consciousness' of dominant ideological relations. For Benjamin it was through fragmented representation that this realm of dreams⁹⁹ could be penetrated and effect 'the dialectic of awakening.'¹⁰⁰ The need to organise and produce work which could engage with reality in a contemporary and therefore relevant way is central to Benjamin's position. The cultural effects of industrialisation which 'caused a crisis of perception due to the speeding up of time and the fragmentation of space'¹⁰¹ could only be overcome by constructing 'synthetic realities'¹⁰² out of the very conditions from which they are produced. In other words, the most effective way to overcome the

fragmentation of bourgeois reality via technology is not to re-employ out-moded methods of representation but to emulate the very effects of the technology and thus 'give back to humanity that capacity for experience which technological production threatens to take away.'¹⁰³

It was thus the photograph which both Benjamin and Brecht identified as the most appropriate medium to engage with reality. Moreover, it was through the technique of montage, the potential of the 'semiotic fragment....to estrange familiar objects and identities by drawing the disparate and disconnected phenomena of social relations together'¹⁰⁴ which seemed to provide the key to the impasse of the ambiguous nature of the 'straight' photograph. Brecht's now famous remark that a photograph of the Krupp's factory tells you nothing about the conditions and relations that lie within and Benjamin's observations that straight, 'documentary photography ran the risk of turning a rubbish heap..... into an object of aesthetic contemplation'¹⁰⁵ pointed towards the importance of a montagist strategy.

Benjamin characterised Heartfield's work, with its free association and re-combination of unrelated elements, 'as delivering the constant shocks and interruptions in the viewer's associative processes that marks the coming of a new form of art'.¹⁰⁶ This is also evident in Eisenstein's work with his 'ploughing up the psyche' of the spectator and in Brecht's own notion of Epic Theatre. Brecht's thoughts on realism translated into his own theatre productions where he employed the device of montage to re-represent 'conditions by allowing the actions to be interrupted.'¹⁰⁷ This interruption was crucial to his conception of realism- the aim was not to reproduce conditions (as in the case of bourgeois art) but rather disclosing and uncovering them through this method.

Lukács, in failing to acknowledge the importance of the notion of contemporary and popular engagement allowed him, according to Roberts, to close

down the possible representation of social contradiction by not so much instrumentalising content but by instrumentalising form and lacked a critical sense that artworks are made out of the social contradiction that they seek to represent.¹⁰⁸

But it also must be stressed that Lukács himself was certainly no narrow thinker. Given that the first and foremost priority of Soviet policy was the survival of the Soviet Union itself, Lukács's position could be seen as a tactical one. The main enemy of the Soviet Union was

seen to be the expansionist threat of Nazi Germany and not traditional bourgeois democracy. Socialist realism in a Lukácsian sense was effectively a strategy to forge allegiances with the most progressive sections of this bourgeois to ensure its survival. We saw how the Popular Front in France was based upon the alliance of revolutionary communists with the most progressive liberal democrats as it seemed to many to offer the most effective political resistance to the rise of fascism. By ignoring serious political differences in the name of a 'common cause' the formulation was thus: only after the fight against fascism was successful could there be any talk of resuming the struggle for socialism. In the light of this we can see that Lukács's realism was in part based on this attempt to forge 'alliances with mature bourgeois-classical heritage'¹⁰⁹ and goes some way to explain his fervent hostility to 'offensive' revolutionary proletarianism, represented by the leftist avant-garde and the likes of Heartfield, Brecht, and Benjamin, which might upset potential allies in the bourgeois camp.

A realist theory and practice which represented either a transformational concept of the artwork's relations to production or as producing a general critical effect went against the ideological needs of the Soviet state. This is a crucial point- socialist realism represented a closing down of the ability of artists to intervene to produce counter-hegemonic descriptions of reality, the practices which were at the core of Brecht's and Benjamin's position. It is this function of socialist realism which is at the centre of both Brecht's and Benjamin's hostility to it. Brecht, in discussing the socialist realists, observes that

They are, to put it bluntly, enemies of production. Production makes them uncomfortable. You never know where you are with production; production is the unforeseeable. You never know what is going to come out. And they themselves don't want to produce. They want to play apparatchik and exercise control over other people. Every one of their criticisms contains a threat.¹¹⁰

It is clear then what is at stake in this aspect of the realist debate. Realism for Benjamin and Brecht was not about applying this or that pre-given form which would then mechanically 'reveal the real.' Rather, it is an inherently unstable category, itself full of the contradictions of reality itself, and which transforms itself as reality itself is transformed. Montage, in the context discussed, was seen by the practitioners and leftist modernists as the most suitable technique at this given point in time. Nowhere was it argued that inherent to montage was a realist capacity. The main problem with the socialist realist position is that

it becomes a naturalistic and formalist position which detaches from realism its flexible and critical nature. Although Lukács himself cannot be lumped together with those who reduced socialist realism to a form of naturalism, his position under the ideological umbrella of the Soviet Union prevented him developing any identification with or a recognition of a contemporary and complex notion of an effective realist practice.

2.4. Summary of Part Two

The montage practices discussed in this section can be seen to differ considerably in how they relate to the concept of realism. Léger's rather deterministic and abstract realism, reflecting the relative isolation of the leftist avant-garde in 1937, stands in sharp contrast to Heartfield's immediate interventionist approach, facilitated by the theoretical positions of the German Communist Party and the existence of a receptive workers movement. Eisenstein's highly developed theoretical foundations allowed him to produce innovative filmic work which centralised a dialectical understanding of 'the multi-faceted world', reflecting in turn the early Soviet Union's own close register with, and control of, reality. Central to each of the practitioners discussed is the use of montage as a tactic, a strategy which allowed an engagement with the material world. As I have sought to point out, montage was not an inherently realist device but it did provide these practitioners with what seemed to be the best means to engage with the real at that point in time. There was no illusion that montage practice in itself equals realism- one only has to look at the late montage work of former radical Gustav Klutsis who was co-opted to propagandise for the first (and brutal) Five Year Plan as the Soviet Union reinvented itself as a major competing capitalist power.¹¹¹ Indeed, it is clear that montage can be just as easily used to hide the real as to reveal it. Brecht himself was adamant that realism itself 'has to be won and re-won in the new conditions'¹¹² in which it finds itself. As Terry Eagleton points out,

Brecht's rejection of Lukács nostalgic organism, his traditionalist preference for closed symmetrical totalities, is made in the name of an allegiance to open, multiple forms which bear in their torsions the very imprint of the contradictions they lay bare.¹¹³

Thus it is not a technique but an attitude which is informed

by theory developed elsewhere. The conditions for this have to be artistic freedom, ('art is not capable of turning artistic ideas dreamed up in offices into works of art'¹¹⁴), albeit a highly informed one, which chooses its own devices in which to be 'realist.'

Realism for both Brecht and Benjamin can be described as a dialectical, transformational and ultimately a context dependent approach - using the most suitable methods and techniques in both the production and dissemination of the artwork at the time in question. During the inter-war period montage seemed to offer the left modernists the possibility to intervene in a world which was becoming dominated by pre-described forms. It was here that realism proved to be a rallying point for the most politically advanced sections of the leftist anti-Stalinists, anti-fascists of the period, with prescriptive socialist realism on the one hand and the re-invention of classical mythologies on the other. But it must also be made clear that the formulations that were developed during this period in terms of the techniques used for realism should not become universal ones. As Brecht comments:

We must not derive realism as such from particular existing works, but we shall use every means, old and new, tried and untried, derived from art and derived from other sources, to render reality to men in form they can master. We shall take care not to describe one particular historical form....of a particular epoch as realistic...and thereby erect a merely formal...criteria for realism...Our realism must be wide and political, sovereign over all conventions.¹¹⁵

Part Three

Realism is not something secure and given, something conceptually and technically conservative, an avenue of retreat from the searching questions of the modern, but something radical and risky- to be won precisely, from the conditions of a modernity that has so often been experienced as dissuasion from realism of any kind. The social relations of developed capitalism have given rise to a culture industry whose principle motifs have been distraction and fantasy. It is this condition that debates about a modern realism have striven to resist, and against which it finds its most appropriate measure.¹¹⁶

3.0. Realism and the Popular

Before I move on to discuss my own practice I would like to briefly reiterate some of the central tenants of critical realism. The inherent problem in any attempt to define what can be considered effective realist art and what devices might be best used to produce realist art ultimately stems from trying to translate what originates as an epistemological realism into some sort of realism in art - a link which, as Terry Lovell suggests, 'is at best tenuous.'¹¹⁷ If, as Lukács argues, all art is form of knowledge¹¹⁸ then realist art must be able to distinguish itself from, and go further than, other practices if it is to claim to 'reveal things as they really are'. Not only does it aim to show things as they really are but is fundamentally derived from some theory of the nature of the reality to be shown and the methods which must be used to show it. It can be established that it is in the realm of science that the proper task of knowledge production and validation is achieved, but art may then use this to produce knowledge in different ways. So, as Lovell points out, 'its status of truth as valid knowledge is determined elsewhere than in art, and in the univocal language of science and history rather than the polysemic language of art.'¹¹⁹ The effectivity of any critical realist art will not then be determined by directly mirroring the real but by 'reference to independently acquired knowledge of that to which they refer.'¹²⁰ As indicated in Part One, this formulation must translate into an art practice which is necessarily unstable and context dependant- therefore the crucial question for contemporary artists attempting to be critically realist is: what is the nature of reality at this point in time and what is the best approach to critically engage with it? There can of course be no prescriptive and timeless formulae which will satisfy these questions. However, I can at least attempt to define the considerations which have informed my own montage practice, and to do so I will briefly continue the discussion of the ideas of Brecht and Benjamin, particularly their notions of popular form and engagement.

As we have already seen at some length, realism for Brecht was

not a purely artistic and formal category, but rather governs the relationship of the work of art to reality itself, characterising a particular stance towards it. The spirit of realism designates an active, curious, experimental, subversive- in a word, scientific attitude to the social institutions and the material world.¹²¹

his definition did not stop there- he went on to emphasise both accessibility and aesthetic pleasure as key facets of effective realist practice. For him realism is more than just

the correct political line inserted into this or that pre-given form. It embodied the combination of both aesthetic pleasure and the utilisation of popular forms as a means to ensuring the effectiveness of the work. Of course, these are not inherent properties by which to measure all realist practice against but considerations which might ensure the most effective and accessible realist practice. By attempting to combine both aesthetic pleasure with popular form, Brecht and Benjamin saw a way of both communicating with 'the masses' whilst avoiding the isolation and elitism of the avant-garde. Although by their very nature the most popular forms (advertisements, cinema, television, photography) can be seen to be generally dominated by bourgeois ideology, there was still seen to be a space for a creative practice which represents an interventionist and subversive strategy. Accordingly, to then use these forms to effectively intervene in 'reality' to deliberately alter perception (Brecht's *Verfremdung*¹²²), the artist must then utilise 'the most complex, modern technology in addressing the widest popular public.'¹²³

What has to be considered here is the different conditions in which Brecht and Benjamin developed these ideas, both in terms of the current nature of popular culture and the relevance of employing the most advanced technological means to create a realist effect in late C20th conditions. Frederic Jameson raises problems with the contemporary application of such a popular concept, namely the 'totalising system' of today's media world which denies access to potentially counter-cultural use by artists¹²⁴ and points to the system's ability to 'co-opt and to defuse even the most potentially dangerous form of political art by transforming them into cultural commodities.'¹²⁵ In many ways there is no denying the weight of Jameson's argument and to identify Benjamin's formulations that utilisation of the most contemporary technology 'promises the breakdown of cultural (and ultimately social) hierarchy'¹²⁶ as an 'exaggerated technological optimism.'¹²⁷ But any criticism must be weighed up in the context in which he was writing. As we have seen, one of the central tenets of Benjamin's 'Author as Producer' is a transformational approach to the relations of production: utilising the most technically advanced representational technologies as the most suitable vehicle is fundamentally linked to a strategy which centralises an overall change in the relations of production as a whole. Conditions of the time were very much different from our own. While Benjamin was developing these ideas, there existed a large international worker movement, particularly strong in pre-fascist Germany, which had attempted to create its own cultural spaces and institutions and 'was able to

present technology as an emancipatory force.'¹²⁸ Although Benjamin identified the development of both the new image technologies such as film and the popularisation of the techniques of montage as a way of responding to the material changes in modernity, 'with its increasing rapidity and abruptness of life,'¹²⁹ he cannot be charged with wholesale technological determinism. Benjamin (as well as Brecht) was well aware that although the new technologies may have the potential to represent 'reality' in an appropriate (dialectical) way, their operation within the dominant power structures ensures that their general function tends to be the reverse. We will return to this issue of technology in a moment. The issue of popular form and popular culture is pertinent here if one takes its central role in shaping the sensibilities of the vast majority of the population. Theodor Adorno indicated popular culture's capacity to transform and co-opt the most contemporary and radical techniques of production and, according to Dominic Strinati, he saw it shaping and perpetuating 'a 'regressive' audience, a dependant, passive and servile consuming public.'¹³⁰ Nowhere is this more evident than in the sphere of advertising, which makes full use of both innovative creative techniques and the most advanced digital technologies in order to manufacture artificial desires and 'to deny and suppress true or real needs.'¹³¹ Jameson's Marxian formulation that the 'reification of late capitalism- the transformation of human relations into an appearance of a relationship between things- renders society opaque'¹³² is indeed tellingly revealed through the cultural space of the advertisement. By directly borrowing the mechanisms and techniques of art- particularly that of montage- advertising literally plays against Brecht's notion of 'Verfremdung' by naturalising objects in un-natural contexts 'so that it takes on its meaning from its surroundings.'¹³³ Thus Benjamin's radical potential of montage¹³⁴ as a means to effecting social critique, where it 'was not a 'style' but a set of techniques and concepts that organised artistic production in the interests of social transformation,'¹³⁵ could clearly be seen to be assimilated. Indeed, as Roberts points out,

the production of interruptive visual effects through the juxtaposition or superimposition of atemporal elements were now commonplace design moves in advertising and mass culture generally, signifying not so much the link between fragmentation and social critique but between fragmentation and the pleasures of the turn-over of the commodity.¹³⁶

There is no doubting the negative and socially fragmentary effects of commodity culture as seen through the medium of advertising. But it can also be argued that the

persistence and familiarity of montage in these forms facilitates a renewed sense of capacity for popular engagement. Although as Jameson rightly noted earlier that there are severe limits in the expanding media space for 'radical' intervention, it is also true that the flourishing of highly sophisticated codes in advertising has created a highly literate audience capable of engaging with complex montagist work. Timothy Druckrey argues that it is our increasingly media saturated culture, particularly through the development of the television, which has revolutionised perception with 'the end of spatial representation of form, and the origin of a spatial representation that is activated by an affinity with temporality, narrative, and media.'¹³⁷ It is clear that any contemporary attempt at utilising montage in any realist sense will have to take these considerations into account. But to acknowledge the persistence and appropriation of montage as a popular device does not therefore equal its neutralisation as an effective disruptive technique or mean that its potential as a critical category is exhausted. As Roberts again points out, montage is 'not simply a design-technique but a means of moving into unforeseen spaces created by the intermixing of previously unrelated elements.'¹³⁸

Before taking this discussion onto an example of my own montage practice I want to briefly return to the issue of productive technology with regard to digital imaging. Here I want to consider its relation to chemical photography and outline why it can be seen to have renewed montage's potential for critical engagement.

3.1. Digital Montage and Contemporary Practice

Michelle Henning has observed that

it has often been claimed that the new digital imaging technologies will precipitate radical changes in perception, in consciousness, and ultimately in society. Not only will we never see the world in the same way again, it will never be the same again. Commentary on digital technology appears dominated by utopian and dystopian prophecy.¹³⁹

The pervasive view that we are entering a new phase of representation through the advent of these new technologies is clear, and that, despite all the hype about these developments, the cultural role of chemical based photography is in irreversible decline. But to acknowledge this is not to say we are now entering a whole 'new world' constructed out of images which have irredeemably lost

any connection to reality¹⁴⁰ because of their digital and therefore abstract nature. As Roberts again suggests, these technologies 'do not transform cultural relations on bloc',¹⁴¹ but instead continues to exist within the same cultural structures of the chemical-based image and its shared cultural modes of perception. It is the way that images are used in our culture that largely determine their meaning and this is not largely determined specifically by the technology which was used to produce it. While we can no longer talk about the analogous 'footprint' (what Roland Barthes called its 'being thereness' and 'indexicality' of the photograph¹⁴²) in the same way this does not alter the fact that the generated meaning of an image is culturally specific and is not inherent to the technology of production. If we consider for example how meaning is produced in a certain text we can establish that it does not always operate in a certain fixed way but is variable, depending upon the relationship of the viewer and the text. Thus, as Henning again observes:

it is not possible to categorise one cultural text as inevitable working in this way or that...how an object, image, film, etc stages its relationship to the past, its place in history, is dependant not just on its own qualities or form, but on this encounter.¹⁴³

The digital image is primarily a cultural object before it is a technical one, referring to representational codes that exist outside of the image. As Martin Lister explains, 'the ambiguously complex meanings of photographs have to be understood as the result of technological, cultural, ideological and psychological processes in which indexicality is but one element.'¹⁴⁴

William J. Mitchell observes that the digital image now constitutes a new kind of object and can 'yield new forms of understanding, but they can also disturb and disorientate by blurring comfortable boundaries and encourage transgression of rules upon which we come to rely.'¹⁴⁵ Digital imaging does allow us to 'yield new forms of understanding' only if we approach it from the premise stated above- the notion that all images and attributed meanings are culturally constructed and are not inherent to the image itself. Lister describes the "infection" of the stable analogue photographic image by its intrinsically fluid and malleable digital code'¹⁴⁶ and cites Kevin Robins when he suggests that 'the new image revolution allows us to see new things and to see in new ways.'¹⁴⁷ These new ways of seeing can be articulated in the way that digital images can reveal and lay bare the inherent constructed nature of all photographic meaning by establishing that meaning does not come solely from the

image's indexical link to the real world but from the contextualisation and organisation of the material in question.

The qualities of these new imaging technologies that are most pertinent to this enquiry is their suitability for intervention into the construction of meaning, in this case by the means of montage. A medium which, as Mitchell describes, 'privileges fragmentation, indeterminacy, and heterogeneity and that emphasises process and performance'¹⁴⁸ can be seen as an ideal tool for co-option into a contemporary montagist strategy, with its ability to seamlessly recombine and blend photographic fragments in a way which was unthinkable (and impossible) with chemical practices. This is not to fall into a technologically deterministic position- as Lister rightly points out, the digital image is just as capable as hiding its manipulated nature as well as fore-grounding it.¹⁴⁹ But it is the premise of this project that the manipulation of images via these new technologies allows a potential intervention in the construction of montage works which can be used to reveal the 'real', to get beyond the surface appearances and reveal things 'as they really are' by a dialectical engagement. It is from this position which I want to discuss my practical approach, one which can be seen to share Kevin Robins view that in considering the differences between different image technologies

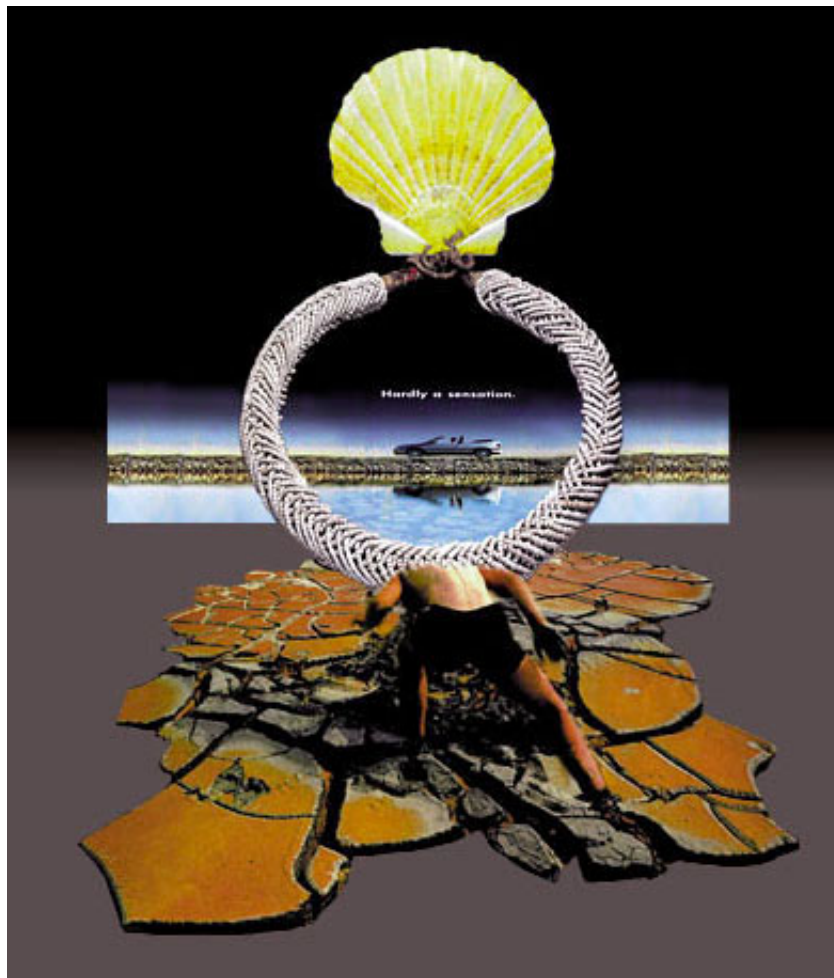
we would then consider our image culture in terms of its productive diversity, and we would be concerned with the possibilities (creative and also technological) for originating 'new' - insightful, open, moving- descriptions of the world.¹⁵⁰

3.2: Air & Water

Air & Water is taken from the series 'The Glass' (see appendix 1) which consists of six images and constitute the practical aspect of this research project. The strategy I have adopted in creating these digital montagist works begins with the appropriation of images found in various parts of our immediate culture- magazines, newspapers, books, video, internet and so on. The images are digitised, fed into the computer and then transformed and recombined by making full use of the computer's capacity to seamlessly blend and manipulate the digital information. The aim is to create dynamic montagist work which operates in a dialectical way by orchestrating the image fragments to both generate and yield new meaning.

The main agenda of the work is an exploration of the relationship between the so-called third world and that of the first (or that of the north/south)- a relationship of cultural, political and economic power which is integrally linked to the global economy. It is this which forms the basis from which we relate to and understand what in sociological terms can be described as 'the other'. This relationship permeates all forms of cultural life, including the construction of our own identities- the 'us' verses the 'other'. As David Morley and Kevin Robins point out, 'this supremacy was on the basis of reason embodied in modern science and technology, that Europe had triumphed throughout the world and made itself the universal point of reference.'¹⁵¹ This work explores this 'universal point of reference' through juxtaposing of elements to 'create fissures or interruptions'¹⁵² in the dominant forms of representation. The work thus seeks to indicate relations which are hidden behind these domination modes of popular representation by attempting to reclaim the technique of montage as a critical category.

Air & Water seeks to dismantle the imaginary of popular representative forms and get to 'the real'. The elements in *Air & Water* are: a scanned scallop shell; a C19 Nigerian necklace; a Volkswagen car advertisement; a figure struggling through polluted land. There are two distinct themes operating through *Air & Water*, one derived directly from the political sphere and the other from a more sociologically developed framework.



'Air and Water 'by Geoff Broadway: from the series [The Glass](#)
Digital Montage

The original causal factor for the production of this piece is the on-going role of the Anglo/Dutch multi-national Shell and its role in Nigeria. Its role is seen by many to be responsible for the brutalisation of the Omani people and the execution by hanging of 13 civil rights workers.¹⁵³ This piece explores the connection between the effects and relations of a part owned British multi-national who are operating to supply the first world consumer with the cheapest possible oil. The Nigerian necklace is organised to penetrate and absorb the struggling figure in the polluted land at the point of the neck whilst its other end is seen to be tied through the shell. This necklace becomes noose as the Nigerian military state (which receives 90% of its revenue form oil export) becomes the tool of multinational interest. The cracked and polluted land can also be seen to extend past the necklace into the space of the car advertisement, and is seen to extend under the water right up to the shore along which the car is driving. The necklace also penetrates the advertisement, with its shells appearing to feed directly into the water. The Volkswagen advertisement's original function seeks to elevate and celebrate the disconnected experience such travel offers. The text 'Hardly a Sensation' is crucial to the

establishment of this operation. It is also this factor which provides the montage with its disruptive charge, facilitating a bleeding out and potential shift as it encounters the other images. This reversal of the function of the advertisement (which Sut Jhally identifies as a process of 'emptying out' of 'real meaning' to a point where 'the real is hidden behind the imaginary'¹⁵⁴) allows the operation of the image to take on alternate definitions. The text's function becomes increasingly unstable, resisting the advert's intention and starts to ironically comment not only upon the pervasive and destructive activities of fetterless multinational operations world-wide which are hidden from public view, but also upon the celebration of the highest form of individualism which the free-market promotes where social responsibility is rejected¹⁵⁵ in favour of a desensitised hedonistic lifestyle. Thus the ultimate striving of western consumer culture towards increased individualisation and the reduction of capitalist relations to that of 'between objects' and with it the invisibility of both the origin of these objects and effects of this material existence has around the world becomes open to contention through this manner of visualisation. To further strengthen this, the organisation of the material serves to refer to the geographical outline of Britain, thus bringing the staging of the 'action' onto a familiar territorial space.

Although the insertion of the work which constitutes *The Glass* is within the location of the gallery, the material is organised to reach out beyond this space and engage, as stated earlier, with a popularly developed visual sensibility. Of course, there are serious problems with this approach, namely the question of popular accessibility (by which I mean the problems of the limited and specialised function of the gallery environment rather than the accessibility of the work itself). But ultimately this siting has to be a tactical decision. In the current absence of public spaces allowing a critical intervention or any alternative resistive cultural organisation then this is the main option at this point in time. ¹⁵⁶ This does not however mean that the work drops its aim for 'non-specialist inclusion'¹⁵⁷ - it is my view that the very manner in which the material in *The Glass* is organised and the knowledge which it is based facilitates its function as a sort of critical realist practice.

Part Three: Summary

In this section I have sought to map some of the key factors which have informed my own montagist artwork and identify how it might be considered as a sort of critical realist practice. In doing this I have outlined some of the

central notions of critical realism which have largely resulted from the ground covered in Parts One and Two. In considering a suitable method for creating a contemporary 'realist effect' I also have assessed the position taken by Brecht and Benjamin on the popular and pleasurable capacity of the artwork.

In acknowledging both the increased closure of the 'media world' with its lack of space for potential counter-cultural use, it is possible to see that contemporary conditions are far from similar to those in which Benjamin and Brecht operated. Whereas technology in the early 1930's could be seen to have a transformative potential in its use by the workers' movement, today it can be observed to be increasing the fragmentation and alienation of late capitalist commodity culture.¹⁵⁸

In considering how artists may 'key into' this culture in a popularly accessible way, I have indicated that advertising (with its pervasiveness use of montage and production of a literate audience) may provide a useful starting point. It is here that the use of montage may be seen able to recover its critical capacity and reverse Adorno's observation that

the principle of montage was supposed to shock people into realising just how dubious any organic unity was. Now that the shock had lost its punch, the products of montage revert to being indifferent stuff or substance.¹⁵⁹

Through the use of montage it may be possible to facilitate a reversal of the alienating operation of advertisements and thus contribute to a realist practice and its agenda to reveal the real. Although there are still manifest problems with this formulation, access being a paramount one, this notion has formed an important foundation for my own montage work.

Considerations of technique has been accompanied with considerations of the productive technology with the development of digital image processing. Here I have sought to make it clear that although the chemical photograph's dominant cultural role is set to be eclipsed by the electronic one, it does not follow we are entering a 'post-photographic era' where the image cannot be said to refer to 'reality' in a concrete way. Here I have stressed that the function of the image in contemporary culture is of a far more complex nature and that meanings are determined for a large part outside the image itself.

It is here that I have located the development of digital imaging as providing the artist with a creative medium which privileges interventionist approach. The ability to

rework, blend and transform digital imagery into a coherent and seamless form has provided another important foundation for my own montagist work. In discussing one example of my work I have identified the working method involved and made clear what is its main agenda. It is here that I have tried to assert that the work I have produced for this project creates a sort of realist effect. This can be seen to be because of the theories of knowledge which informs the work and the way the working method organises the found imagery to engage with popular sensibilities.

Part Four

Conclusion: Digital Realist Montage

This paper has sought to consider the philosophical term of critical realism, explore how it has been applied within the realm of art and attempt to develop a contemporary application of it through the use of montage. In this conclusion I want to very briefly summarise the key points that have been made throughout this paper.

In Part One of this paper I identified the term 'critical realism' as an inherently unstable philosophical concept which ultimately aims to provide an understanding that there exists a reality below that of surface appearances. By exploring the various components of realism I have identified Bhaskar's term of critical realism as forming the basic orientation for this paper.

I have tried to make it clear that realism is not a fixed theory which applies a uniform interpretation to any given phenomena in order to understand it but, rather, that realism is a unstable category which is (like all social phenomena) in constant transformation and simultaneously in contradiction. As Roberts points out

we need to be clear that realism as a historical category and philosophical method is not a form of monism; realism is not an unstratified theory of fixed things and fixed relations. On the contrary, realism's assessment and recovery of the world is based on the socially produced and self-qualifying nature of signification, in which things and their relations and their representations are in dynamic

The importance of the dialectic was outlined here, identifying that contradictions are at the very heart of all things and it is this which allows critical realists to identify the dynamics inherent in reality. Realism therefore is not a fixed description of reality but more an orientation which allows the possibility of developing a graspable (and therefore transformational) notion of reality. It is here that I have also emphasised the importance of continuing to develop critical realism in order to resist the relativism represented by various postmodernist positions which sees any attempt to 'reclaim the real' as both naive and untenable.

It is clear that we cannot get to the real by merely reading off the surface appearances of reality. As Lovell describes:

appearance and essence diverge. It is in the collective class interests of the bourgeoisie to take these appearances at full face value, while it is in the interests of the proletariat to penetrate to the essential reality.¹⁶¹

Therefore if we are to talk about what the world is really like and how we can engage with it through art, a clear understanding of what reality is will be needed. Critical realism provides us with such a basis.

In discussing the technique of montage in the light of specific practices and theoretical developments during the inter-war period we have seen that trying to create a realist effect in art is bound-up with problems and contradictions. This is because, as both Roberts and Lukács pointed out, any realist art will necessarily contain within itself the contradictions of the conditions which it purports to reveal.

The central issues for a critical realist art practice is not only the consideration of the theories of knowledge which informs the work, but the temporal use of a particular technique and how this is organised (or inserted) to create the realist effect.

The three montagist examples discussed in part two served to show how diverse this may be in practice. Heartfield's interventionist approach was dependant upon both his relationship with the German Communist Party

and the existence of established cultural institutions of the worker movement. Eisenstein, operating in very different conditions, approached realism from a position where the contradictions of bourgeois culture had been eradicated. Initially reflecting the Soviet Union's close register with a dialectical understanding of reality, we could also observe how his films later became open to co-option by the Stalinist counter-revolution. When seen in this context Eisenstein's realist capacity was lost as the ideological reality shifted. Léger's realism comes from a very different position to that of Heartfield and Eisenstein, reflecting not only the modernist perspective he held but also the isolated conditions for any independent critical practice during that period.

In assessing these practices and the theoretical exchanges between Brecht, Benjamin and Lukács, the foundations for a contemporary conception of a critically realist montage practice were laid. In extracting what I consider to be some of the most relevant aspects of Benjamin's and Brecht's ideas, I moved on in part three to outline what this might be.

By acknowledging the very different conditions of this period to those discussed above I have assessed how montage might still be used, despite its pervasiveness in popular culture, in producing a critically realist art practice. In identifying the conditions of late C20th capitalism the aim has been to develop a realist approach to art which will meet and engage with these new conditions. As Jameson points out,

under these circumstances, the function of a new realism would be clear; to resist the power of reification in consumer society and to reinvent that category of totality which, systematically undermined by existing fragmentation on all levels of and social organisation today, can alone project structural relations between classes as well as class struggles in other countries, in what has increasingly become a world system.¹⁶²

It is this notion of realism that has shaped the montagist work which constitutes the practical aspect of this project. By utilising the most contemporary form, (that of digital montage), I have tried to make work which is in keeping with a Brechtian and Benjaminian notion of popular form and engagement to create a contemporary realist effect.

As a final point, it needs to be re-stated that there are as many ways of revealing the real as there are of 'covering it up'. It is the premise of this paper to suggest that when it comes to attempts to 'reveal the real' through art, it may

well be through a renewed practice of montage which provides an effective way of doing so.

Footnotes

1 The latter of these points is generally represented by the position of postmodernism where any attempt to map reality in a coherent way (and therefore open to transformation) is doomed to failure, being a 'patently outmoded and discredited set of ...ideas'. Norris, C, 1996, p 181

2 Bhaskar, R, 1989, p 3

3 William, R, 1976, p 218

4 Wood, P, 1994, p 254

5 Roberts, J, 1992, p 196

6 *ibid.* p 65

7 Francis Fukuyama's essay 'The End of History' (later re-issued as *The End of History and the Last Man* 1992) seeks to naturalise capitalism's world domination as part of a universal evolutionism. See Fukuyama, 1992

8 This position is best represented by Baudrillard with, according to Christopher Norris, his 'sweeping pronouncements about the demise of truth, the eclipse of the real, the irrelevance of theory, the obsolescence of critique, the collapse of all distinctions between fact and falsehood, knowledge and ignorance, episteme and doxa, science and ideology.' Norris, C, 1996, P 183-4

9 *ibid.* p 158

10 Callinicos, A, 1989, p 145

11 Norris, 1996, p 168

12 It is, however, not too difficult to challenge some of these central tenets. The notion that there is no longer any 'real' or 'truth' for example, can be refuted by asking from what critical standpoint is this statement made? If, as Baudrillard remarks, we are now experiencing the 'demise of truth' or the 'eclipse of the real,' then his own position must be also included in this observation. If there is no longer any truth then his own observation must also be part of this 'no truth premise'- it is an untenable contradiction.

13 Norris, C, *op.cit.* p 182

14 *ibid.* p 183

15 Sayers, S, 1985, p 3

16 Bhaskar, R, 1989, p 2

17 Realism itself does not itself equal Marxism- but Marxism can be described as a realism. See Lovell T, 1980, p 9

18 *ibid.* p 10

19 Quoted by Lovell T, *Ibid.* p 23

20 Lovell T, *ibid.* p 23

21 Sayers, S, 1985, p xv

22 Lovell, 1980, p 29

23 *Ibid.* p 29

24 Sayers, S, 1985, p 35

25 *Ibid.* p 11

26 Ibid. p xv

27 Ibid. p 32

28 Marx, K, Quoted by Sayers, 1989, p 32

29 Sayers, S, op.cit. p 4

30 In today's postmodern culture even the recognition of the existence of a class society is something which is denied in some quarters-hence John Major's statement about a classless society. Of course, it can be argued he doesn't actually believe this himself but that this is for the benefit of its 'ideological effect' -the general perception of social reality.

31 Marx suggested that the only class capable of becoming fully aware of itself and its central role in the historical process was the working class and as such could be the only class which is capable in bringing about genuine socialist transformation and thus human liberation.

32 Sayers, S, 1989, p 15

33 Bhaskar, R, 1989, p 2

34 Ibid. p 3

35 Ades, D, 1976, p 7

36 Quoted by Buchloh, B, 1982, p 43

37 Evan, D, Gohl, S, 1886, p 13

38 Ades, D, 1976, p 7

39 Ibid. p 10

40 Roberts, J, 1994, P 149

41 Ades, D, 1976, p 10

42 Evan, D, J, 1992

43 Ades, D, 1976, p 13

44 Benjamin, W, quoted by Beth Irwin Lewis, 1980, p 38

45 Benjamin, 1992, p 22

46 Wood, P, 1994, p 325

47 Benjamin, W, 1992, p 23

48 Wood, P, 1994,p 236

49 Ades, D, 1976, p 17

50 Ades, D, ibid. p 13

51 The Comintern was the abbreviation of the Third Communist International, set up help bring about international revolution. The controlling force was the Soviet Union because of its political prestige following the 1917 revolution.

52 Lewis, B, I, 1980, p 70

53 Harry Graf Kessler, one of Heartfield's early patrons, was so taken by the power of this particular montage he funded the production of a full-size poster to be posted upon Berlin's kiosks which again emphasises the distributive aspect of his work

54 Bakhtin, 1984, p 192-3

55 Evans, D, 1992, p 14

56 Evans, D, *ibid.* p 14

57 The need to establish the object in art is very powerful. In the recent 'Art & Power' exhibition (at the Hayward Gallery London, 1996, touring) which included numerous examples of Heartfield's work, it was evident that great lengths had been made to present the original 'camera ready' montage work rather than the mass produced/circulated reproductions that they were meant to appear as.

58 Although Heartfield continued to produce biting political montages after he fled to Prague following the Nazi's seizure of power, the availability of his work in Germany was seriously restricted after this period.

59 Lovell, T, 1980, p 65

60 Roberts, J, 1994, p 196

61 Wood, P, *ibid.* p 256

62 *Ibid.* p 200

63 *Ibid.* p 60

64 The Open University, 1983, p 58

65 Honnef, K, Pachnicke, P, 1991, p 55

66 The Open University, 1983, p 58

67 It was the AKhR (The Association of Artists of the Revolution- formerly AKhRR) which helped establish the foundations for the development of socialist realism. Very much a resistive force against the 'empty abstractions' of the avant-garde, proclaiming that 'we will depict the present day: the life of the Red Army, the worker, the peasants, the revolutionaries and the heroes of labour. We will provide a true picture of events and not abstract concoctions discrediting our Revolution in the face of the international proletariat' (AKhRR 'Declaration', 1922)

68 Wood, P, 1994, p 312

69 Buchloh, B.H.D, 1991, p 61

70 Andel, J, 1981, p 186

71 It can also be observed that the avant-garde's re-orientation towards representational work can be seen as a defensive response to the accusations of irrelevance and elitism directed at them by the AKhRR.

72 Lodder, C, 1985, p 187

73 Roberts, J, 1997, p 30

74 Honnef, K, Pachnicke, P, 1991, p 50

75 *Ibid.* p 61

76 Eisenstein, S, 1969, p 19

77 Roberts, J, 1997, p 33

78 Eisenstein, S, 1969, p 37

79 Roberts, J, 1994, p 149

80 Eisenstein, S, 1969, p 181

81 Belenson, A, 1925, p 59

82 Roberts, J, 1994, p 150

83 Roberts, J, 1997, p 51

84 Leyda, J, 1973, p 239

85 Leyda, J, *ibid.* p 196

86 A Marxist position would identify the inability of a ruling class to have a direct register with reality because it would reveal the inevitable contradictions of its own class position and suggest its inevitable downfall, thus its need to create a 'false-reality' or 'consciousness'

87 Although, as I pointed out, the Soviet Union's was now moving towards a state capitalist economy, it still had great stakes in maintaining the notion that it was indeed socialist, an illusion which survived right up until the revolutions of 1989.

88 Although Lukács's ideas in many ways coincided with the strategies of Stalinism, it has to be made clear that he was very resistive to the closed-down practice embodied in the Zhdanovist variety of socialist realism, which he codedly castigated as Naturalism. See Jameson, F, 1992, p 202

89 Roberts, J, 1992, p 198

90 At its simplest, Lenin (and Trotsky- see his book *Literature and Revolution*, Redwords, 1991. p 213-242 for a detailed account) saw socialist art as a continuation of the best elements of bourgeois culture, not a complete rejection of it.

91 Roberts, J, 1992, p 198

92 It has to be remembered that Lukács saw his theoretical position originating from within an already established socialist state and therefore that the defence and consolidation of that state was paramount -over and above that of any thought of spreading the revolution westwards (see Hallas, D, 1985, pg. 60-86). Lukács point about 'modernism as fellow traveller of fascism' is more than slightly ironic considering Hitler's own appropriation of various forms of totalising bourgeois culture ('Der Krieg') and his own extreme aversion to modernism which he saw as 'Degenerate'.

93 Roberts, J, 1992, p 198

94 Wood, P, 1994, p 320

95 Lukács, G quoted by Pachnik, P, in *Morally Rigorous and Visually Voracious*, John Heartfield, *op.cit.* p 43

96 Livingston, R, Anderson, P, Mulhern, F, *Aesthetic And Politics*, 1992 p 63

97 *Ibid.*, p 63

98 Roberts, J, 1992, p 200

99 By this he meant the 'dream cast' by the phantasmagoria of bourgeois commodity culture, a society based upon the abstract exchange of products which has no conception of their origins. This can also be interpreted to refer to the role of ideology in manufacturing and perpetuating the (false) consciousness of this reality.

100 Walter Benjamin quoted by Susan Buck-Morss, 1989, P 261

101 Buck-Morss, S, 1989, p 268

102 Walter Benjamin quoted by Susan Buck-Morss, *ibid.* p 268

103 Buck-Morss, *ibid.* p 268

104 Roberts, J, 1992, p 200

105 Benjamin, W, Quoted by P. Wood, 1994, p 300

106 Roth, N, in Pachnicke, P & Honnef, K. 1991, p 26

107 Benjamin, W, 1992

108 Roberts, J, 1992, p 199

109 Wood, P, 1994, p 320

110 Brecht, B, quoted by Benjamin, W, in *Aesthetic and Politics*, 1992, p 97

111 The Nazi's hostility to modernism did not prevent themselves from at times utilising montage themselves. Also we can see in Mussolini's fascist Italy the incorporation of a

futurist style which made extensive use montage to support its ideological needs.

112 Brecht, B quoted by Wood, P, 1994, p 325

113 Eagleton, T, 1976, p 161

114 Brecht, B quoted by Wood, P, 1994, p 325

115 Brecht, B, in *Aesthetic and Politics*, 1992, p 83

116 Wood, P, 1994 p331

117 Lovell, 1976, p 64

118 'different from science, but sharing the same goal, that of showing things as they really are', Lovell, T, 1980, p 68

119 Lovell, T, *ibid.* p 91

120 Lovell, T, *ibid.* p 91

121 Jameson, 1992, p 205

122 Brecht 's notion of 'Verfremdung' - the so-called estrangement effect, that of staging phenomena is way what 'seemed natural and immutable in them is now tangibly revealed to be historical, and thus the object of revolutionary change' Jameson, F, 1992, p 206

123 Jameson, F, 1992, p 208

124 One of Noam Chomsky's central tenets in his books 'Manufacturing Consent' and 'Necessary Illusions' is that built into the structures of bourgeois democracy is some space for counter hegemonic activity,(even if this is for the large part illusory) to create the notion of democracy. Hence it is possible (in an extremely limited way) to gain access to these channels- witness for example the current controversy of Chris Morris's arguably realist 'Brass Eye ' recently screened on Channel 4.

125 Jameson, F, 1992, p 208

126 Henning, M, in Lister, M, 1995, p 231

127 Strinati, D, 1995, p 85

128 Roberts, J, 1997, p 59

129 Henning, M, in Lister, M, 1995, p 229

130 Strinati, D, 1995, p 64

131 Strinati, D, 1995, p 60

132 Jameson, F, 1992, p 212

133 Williamson, J, 1985, p 69

134 I am not arguing that Benjamin himself held constantly to this position- his notion of montage 'as becoming the basis for political progress' (Roberts, J, Domini p 149) was firmly tied, as I have said, to that of the potential for the transformation of the reader/spectator into a active producer, thus transforming the relation of cultural production.

135 Roberts, J, 1994, p 149

136 Roberts, J ,1994, p 150

137 Druckrey, T, 1994, p 6

138 Roberts, J, 1994, p 151

139 Henning, M, in Lister, M, 1995, p 219

140 The Simulacrum of Baudrillard's postmodernism where images and all social interaction have lost their referent to reality being 'reduced to an exchange of signs uprooted in material existence'. Henning, in Lister, M, 1995, p 219

141 Roberts, J, 1997, p 20

142 Barthes, R, 1977

143 Henning, M, in Lister, 1995, p 24

144 Lister, M, in Wells, L, 1997, p 280

145 Mitchell, W, J, 1994, p 223

146 Lister, M, in Wells, L, 1997, p 259

147 Lister, M, *ibid.* p 287

148 Mitchell, W, 1994, p 8

149 See his discussion of Pedro Meyer's CD-Rom 'I Photograph to Remember', Lister, M, in Wells, L, 1997, p 285

150 Robins, K, in Lister, M, 1995, p 47

151 Morley, M, Robins, K, 1995, p 137

152 Druckrey, T, 1994, p 5

153 'Due to Shell's oil operations in the Niger Delta (Nigeria) , the Ogoni people have lost their farmlands, fisheries and livelihood. Following demonstrations against Shell, the Ogoni have been massacred, tortured and gagged by the Nigerian Military. Shell's appalling environmental double standards are to blame for the plight of the Ogoni people and Ken Saro Wiwa's death sentence today.' Paul Horsman, Greenpeace International. Source: One World News Service, 31 October 1995

154 Jhally, S, p 185

155 But even when adverts try to play the 'socially responsibly 'card, such as in the recent Benetton campaign, this can be equally read as privatising social responsibility and projecting consumer purchase as a means to being socially aware. As Henry A. Giroux points out while discussing Benetton's ad campaign, these images 'are stripped of their political responsibilities and reduced to a spectacle of fascination, horror and terror that appears to primarily privatise the viewers response to social events'. Giroux, A, in Becker, C, 1994, p 198

156 Of course there are other options for the dissemination of artworks. Some artists see the development of the internet (the world-wide computer network) as a potential medium which avoids cultural hierarchies and enables wide-spread dissemination of work. While there is obviously potential for the creative use of these spaces it also has to be made clear that these spaces themselves do not exist outside of, or escape from, dominant cultural relations. Indeed, factors of access are also very relevant here, as Jonathan Crary points out: 'the inescapable yet continually evaded truth is that participation in the emerging information, imaging and communications technologies will never (in the meaningful future) expand beyond a minority of people on this planet' Crary, J, 1994

157 Roberts, J, 1997p 280

158 This is, however, not to say that this translates into a assertion where the increasing use technology always equal more fragmentation but to emphasis that the way technology is used by any given society will be determined by that societys dominating structures. As described above, the dominant structures of late C20th capitalism can be identified as increasing individualism and celebrating 'fantasy gratification'.

159 Adorno, T, W, 1984, p 223

160 Roberts, J, 1997, p 8

161 Lovell, T, 1980, p 70

162 Jameson, F, 1992, p 212

Bibliography

Books

- Ades, D, *Photomontage*, Thames & Hudson, 1976
- Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, Brecht, Lukács, *Aesthetic And Politics*, Verso, 1992
- Adorno, T, W, *Aesthetic Theory*, RKP, 1984
- Andel, J, in *Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism 1914-32* (ed. Strailev A) Rizzoli Int, 1991
- Bakhtin, M, *Rabelais and his World*, Bloomington/Indiana University press, 1984
- Becker, C, (ed), *The Subversive Imagination: Artists, Society and Social Responsibility*, Routledge, 1994
- Benjamin, W, *The Author as Producer*, reproduced in *Thinking Photography*, (ed), Victor Burgin, Macmillan, 1992
- Barthes, R, *The Death of the Author in Image Music Text*, London, Fontana, 1977
- Belenson, A, *Cinema Today*, Moscow, 1925
- Bhaskar, R, *Reclaiming Reality*, Verso, 1989
- Binns, P, Cliff, T, Harman, C, *Russia, From Worker's State to State Capitalism*, Bookmarks, 1987
- Bowl, J (ed.) *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism*, The Viking Press, 1976 (revised and enlarged 1988)
- Buck-Morss, S, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, The MIT Press, 1989
- Buchloh, B. H.D, *From Factura to Photography* pub. in *The Contest of Meaning* (ed. Richard Bolton), MIT Press, 1991
- Bürger, P, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Minnesota, 1994
- Burgin, V, (ed.) *Thinking Photography*, Macmillan, 1992
- Callinicos, A, *The Revolutionary Ideas of Marx*. Bookmarks. 1983
- Chomsky, N, *Manufacturing Consent*, Vintage, 1994
- Chomsky, N, *Necessary Illusions*, AK Press, 1994
- Collier, A, *Critical Realism, An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy*, Verso, 1994
- Druckrey, T, in *Aperture, Metamorphoses: Photography in the Electronic Age*, Aperture, 1994
- Eagleton, T, *Criticism and Ideology*, Verso, 1976
- Eisenstein, S, *The Film Sense*, Faber, 1969
- Evans, D. John Heartfield, *AIZ/VI, 1920-38*, Kent, 1992
- Fukuyama, F, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Harmondsworth/ Penguin, 1992
- Grosz/Heartfield, : *The Artist as Social Critic*, Exhibition Catalogue, University of Minnesota, 1980
- Hallas, D. *The Comintern*, Bookmarks, 1985
- Jhally, S, *Codes of Advertising*, Routledge, 1990

Jameson, F, *After word in Aesthetics and Politics*, Verso. London, 1992

Leyda, J, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, Allen & Unwin, 1973

Lewis, B,I, *George Grosz: Art & Politics in the Weimar Republic*, University of Wisconsin, 1973

Lister, M (ed), *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*, Routledge, 1995

Lovell, T, *Pictures of Reality*, BFI Publishing, 1980

Lodder, C, *Russian Constructivism*, Yale University, 1985

Lukács, G, *History and Class Consciousness*, Merlin Press, 1968

Mitchell, W, J, *The Reconfigured eye, Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*, MIT, 1994

Michelson, Kraus, Crimp, and Copjec, (ed's) *October- The First Decade, 1976-1986*

Norris, C, *Reclaiming The Truth, A Contribution to a Critique of Cultural Relativism*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1996

Morley, D, Robins, K, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*, Routledge, 1995

The Open University, *Modern Art & Modernism: Léger*. The Open University Press, 1983

Pachnicke, P & Honnef, K, (ed.) *John Heartfield*. Abrams, 1991

Roberts, J, *Selected Errors: Writings on Art and Politics*, Pluto Press, 1992

Roberts, J, *The Art of Interruption (forthcoming)*, Manchester University Press, 1997

Robins, K, *Into the Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision*, Routledge, 1996

Sayers, S, *Reality and Reason: Dialectics and the Theory of Knowledge*, Blackwell, 1985

Strinati, D, *An Introduction to the Theories of Popular Culture*, Routledge, 1995

Taylor, B, *Art and Literature Under The Bolsheviks, Volume 1, the Crisis of Renewal 1917-1924*, Pluto, 1991

Taylor, B, *Modernism, Post-Modernism, Realism: A Critical perspective for Art*, Winchester School of Art Press, 1990

Trotsky, L, *Literature and Revolution*, Redwords, 1991

Wells, L, (ed), *Photography- A Critical introduction*, Routledge, 1997

Williams, R, *Keywords*, Fontana, 1976

Williamson, J, *Consuming Passions: The Dynamic of Popular Culture*, Marion Boyers, 1995

Willett, J, *The New Sobriety: Art and Politics in the Weimar Period 1917-33*, Thames and Hudson, 1987

Wood, P, *Realism and Realities, Pub in Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art between the Wars*, Yale/The Open University, 1994

Articles

Buchloh, B, *Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art* Article in *Art Forum* Sept, 1982

Crary, J, 'Critical Reflections' in *Artforum*, February 1994

Roberts, J, 'Montage, Dialectics and Empowerment', Pub. in *Domini Public* by The Centre D'Art, Santa Monica, Barcelona, Spain, 1994

