

## ACADEMIC WRITING SAMPLE

### THESIS

#### Introduction

The role of the media, advertising, and art in political and social actions is a key in many instances of modern events. During the First World War, for example, the depiction of Germans by the Allied forces of France, Russia, and England played a significant role in fueling anti-German sentiment and bolstering national morale. Similarly, in Nazi Germany (1933-1945) and even before the Nazi party rose to power, the graphic depiction of Jews and Communists, the future victims of the Nazi agenda, was also decidedly significant in fueling national indifference, if not hatred, towards these groups, arguably facilitating their persecution.

In France, graphic art has a longstanding tradition as a catalyst of political and social dissent. In particular, it was a significant weapon in the anti-capitalist activity in May, 1968. An explosion of experimental street art contributed to the antagonism against the right-wing conservative government. Various key statements expounded the *Atelier Populaire's* radical program for the posters they created:

The posters are weapons in the service of the struggle and are an inseparable part of it. Their rightful place is in the centers of conflict — that is to say, in the streets and on the walls of the factories. To use them for decorative purposes, to display them in bourgeois places of culture, or to consider them as objects of aesthetic interest is to impair both their function and their effect (Street Art 4, 2006).

An assessment of the various examples of the poster art produced during the May, 1968 protests in Paris by the *Atelier Populaire* and other anti-capitalist activists, reveals that several themes were prominent

within and characteristic of the movement. The typical poster features an image and a political slogan referencing one or other of the causes of revolution. Overwhelmingly, the metaphors used in the posters compare the revolution to a full blown war against the government and capitalist regime of the country.

## **Purpose of the Study**

In the mid-1960s, Pierre Bourdieu questioned the ambitions of militants in the popular culture and popular education movements. He questioned the desire to achieve democratization through various strategies of “cultural action”. In particular, Bourdieu called the cultural militants “naïve” and “wrong-headed” for attempting to bring culture to the general public (Rigby, 1991, p. 131).

General de Gaulle came to power in 1959 as President of the Fifth Republic and cultural militants emerged to help implement the active Gaullist cultural policy. The implementation strategy was headed by André Malraux at the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

The interest of the Ministry of Culture in corporate patronage dates back to 1965 when Malraux, who had been Minister of Cultural Affairs for the last six years, wrote to the Vice President of the Conseil d’Etat : ‘Je me préoccupe de provoquer en France un véritable mécénat culturel à l’exemple de ce qui existe à l’étranger’ (Cabanne, 1981, p. 202).

In May, 1968, the general worker’s strike is credited as having caused the collapse of the De Gaulle government. According to the analysis of Singer (2002), Kurlansky (2004), and Castoriadis, Lefort, and Morin (1968) , among others, the majority of the protestors were espousing left-wing causes, calling for socialist movements and calling for an end to the ‘old society’.

Any study of the political unrest surrounding the events of May, 1968, and the position of De Gaulle’s government at the time, however, must endeavor to determine the extent to which the artistic expression surrounding the issue was a by-product. Since this issue is fundamental to understanding the effect and power of art as a form of propaganda and, perhaps more literally as a political tool.

For some time now, Western consumers have been aware of the use of unconscious advertising and have been aware of the general power of marketing as a means of controlling opinion and driving specific action on the part of consumers. Many consumers have developed a definite cynicism and marketing 'fatigue' due to over-exposure to marketing and advertising efforts by companies and even more recently by political entities. The build-up to the 2008 Presidential Elections in the United States provides a good example of the extensive use of marketing and advertising messages, not only by commercial entities but also by partisan groups.

The notion that public opinion can be manipulated by advertisers and the realization that advertising, the so-called 'marketing shark', is an aggressive threat to society in many respects because of its subversion, is recognizable as a definite trigger of French activism against the capitalist, image-driven economic agenda. The protests of May 1968 did not typify the outrage against the underlying agenda of the 'marketing shark; but rather established a mode of expression of the public outrage that previously had not been realized with anywhere near such ferocity. Although advertising is in general, an accepted concept, there is a definite need to question to extent to which this mainstream capitalist, image-driven agenda of advertising in France was ultimately undermined by the graphic expression of public outrage during the May 1968 protests.

This paper will explore the role of graphic design, visual art, and forms of advertising in the context of these protests in France, with particular reference to the role played by the *Atelier Populaire* in capturing the popular expression of outrage. The proposed structure will focus on the investigation and analysis of the significance of graphic design as a form of expression during the Mai, 1968 protests, in connection with the role played in the various riots by the *Atelier Populaire*.

## **Research Questions**

These are the principle research questions upon which this study is focused:

- Was the anti-capitalist propaganda a cause of the political revolution, a catalyst, or a by-product?
- What role did graphic art play in fueling the antagonism of the general public against the anti-capitalist government?

## **Justification for Research**

Modern society is heavily dependent upon advertising and marketing but this dependency may well be symptomatic of a dependency upon symbols and images as a means of communication and self-expression. The consumer-driven world relies on advertising – visual images and narrow range of linguistic devices such as slogans – to sell products and services, establish brand identities, and generally build and facilitate customer loyalty to specific companies. At the same time, modern, media-driven politics relies heavily on the use of advertising and imagery. Politicians use visual forms all the time to communicate their message to voters come election time. Not only that, political activists, by which we mean individuals and groups active in politics, regularly use images and graphic advertising to transfer ideas and interpretations of information to their target audiences. Just as graphic design facilitates the commercial sales, it also facilitates the “selling” of ideas and beliefs to the general public.