

# Online Catalogue



activist graphics  
images  
pop culture

london**print**studio  
gallery exhibition  
14 february to 31 may 2008

**AgitPop:**  
**activist graphics, images, pop culture**

**14 february - 31 march 2008**

**Free Events:**

**6 march 7.00pm gallery talk and film screening**

John Sinclair in discussion with Damon Taylor

**Join John Sinclair**, poet, activist, founder of the Detroit Artists Workshop, manager of the MC5, and Chairman of the White Panther Party, along with Damon Taylor for a lively discussion in the london-printstudio gallery.

The talk will be followed by a screening of 'Twenty to Life' - a film about John's life and work.

**20 march 7.30pm gallery talk and film screening**

50 Years of CounterCulture -

from the Beat Generation to a New Waste Land

**Michael Horovitz presents** 'Fifty Years of CounterCulture - from the Beat Generation to a New Waste Land', including a screening of Wholly Communion\*, recording a ground-breaking moment in the development of London's effervescent counterculture.

(\*1965, directed by Peter Whitehead, Gregory Corso, Harry Fainlight, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, Michael Horovitz, Adrian Mitchell, Alexander Trocchi)

gallery talks and film screenings are FREE.

no booking necessary. telephone 020 8969 3247

for more information.

**The following artists and organisations represented in the exhibition**

**Groups and Organisations**

Atelier Populaire  
Butt Trust  
Hapsash and the Coloured Coat  
Paddington Printshop  
The Poster Collective  
Red Dragon  
Red Hill Films  
See Red  
The Derelicts

**Artists**

Richard Adams  
Pieter Boersma  
Jesus Barraza  
Chila Berman  
Bernadette Brittain  
James Cauty  
Andrew Courtly  
Godfried Donkor  
Michael English  
David Goldenberg  
Bert Grepink  
Christinwe Halsall  
John 'Hoppy' Hopkins  
Mike McInnerney  
Brian Jones  
Eve Kask  
Rita Keegan  
Diego Mena  
Richard Mock  
Kristina Norman  
Opland  
Emily Perry  
John Phillips  
Johannes Phokela  
Jamie Reid  
Eladio Rivadulla  
Flavianna Rodriguez  
Joe Strummer  
Stefan Szczelkun  
Tjebbe van Tijen  
Martin Walker  
Nigel Weymouth  
Heathcote Williams

london**print**studio wishes to thank the following organisations and individuals who have loaned archival material

Aquarium Gallery  
Beat Books  
Michael Horovitz  
International Institute of Social History  
The Imaginary Museum  
Mike Lesser  
Simon Lewandowski  
John Marchant  
Gregory Sams  
Stefan Szczelkun  
Tjebbe van Tijen  
Wilf Walker

Some items included in the exhibition are available for sale, including cuban posters (£50) and photographs by John 'Hoppy Hopkins (£45) please enquire at london**print**studio

Posters and books related to the exhibition are available for sale from Beat Books (<http://www.beatbooks.com>)

# AgitPop: Activist graphics, Images and Pop-Culture 1968-2008

John Phillips February 2008

Could youthful sexual frustration topple a government? Could a student protest in a swimming pool spark a revolution? In January 1968, as France's Minister for Youth and Sport opened Nanterre University's new swimming pool his speech was disrupted by a group of students frustrated by their university's strict segregation of male and female dormitories. When repressive policing confronted demonstrators, more disruptions, occupations and an ever-widening series of demands, spread to campuses and factories across the country. By mid-May, over 10 million workers, comprising two-thirds of the French workforce, had joined the strikes, and President de Gaulle had fled the country, to plan military intervention against the student-worker alliance that came to be known as Paris, May '68.

This movement was not organised through traditional political parties or labour institutions. It possessed no singular agenda. May '68 was a plethora of voices demanding: radical reforms in education, workers control of factories, press and media freedom, the transformation of art, an end to the Vietnam war, a quotidian revolution, and the reorganisation of football. Its witty critiques of politics, cinema and urban design were expressed through thousands of manifestoes and slogans. It led to the fall of the Gaullist government, but what did it have to do with printmaking?

At the height of the protests students occupied the print department of Ecole Des Beaux Arts, Paris, established the Atelier Populaire and created posters to support the occupations and strikes. 'Posters', they declared 'are weapons in the service of the struggle and are an inseparable part of it.. Their rightful place is in the centres of conflict, that is to say, in the streets and on the walls of the Factories'. These simple, witty images were viewed by a global audience, and inspired artists around the world to support activism in their own neighbourhoods and communities.

Forty years on from Paris '68, this exhibition celebrates a radical tradition in poster making and graphic design, and its association with pop culture. The exhibition features work produced by individuals and collectives who have wanted to affect radical change. It is neither a comprehensive overview of the period nor an academic history. It is meant to give a sense of connections, networks and influences at play.



Atelier Populaire



Tjebbe van Tijen

While the work of artists of many different nationalities is featured, some sections of the exhibition feature work produced locally. This area, and neighbourhoods close by Notting Hill, Ladbroke Grove, North Kensington, were at the centre of London's underground culture in the 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's, and home to an extraordinary array of artists, writers and musicians, who I'd like to thank for helping us mount this exhibition.

### 1968 –a year of revolt and rebellion

The exhibition begins with the posters produced during the events in Paris of 1968, when students in Paris joined with striking workers to very nearly bring down the right-wing Gaullist government. Across Europe and North America, 1968 was a watershed year. There was revolt and political action in cities from Chicago to London to Mexico City. The posters produced by the Atelier Populaire (the 'People's Workshop') in Paris give a sense of the energy and optimism of the time. Parallels can clearly be drawn with the DIY aesthetic of the punks who were to follow.

The events of 1968 did not simply happen in a vacuum. In Britain through the late fifties and early sixties the rise of a 'New' Left created a new political and social agenda in which political issues such as worker's rights, nuclear disarmament and women's liberation were becoming increasingly visible. Similarly the rise of the British underground scene centred upon the music of up-and-coming musicians such as Pink Floyd and Jimi Hendrix, meant that the young people of the time, with their long hair, jeans and rebel fashion styles, were a walking announcement that the times were a'changing.

### cuba and its influence

The Cuban revolution of 1959 - and the Cuban posters produced after the revolution- were an extraordinary inspiration for the poster makers and graphic designers of the 1960's. In these striking images the protagonists of the Cuban revolution become icons – we see Che Guevara forever caught as a handsome young revolutionary, while Castro becomes a pop art urban guerrilla.

### community action in the 1970's and 80's

Spurred on by the events of 68, and in response to their own circumstances, in the 1970's and 80's an increasing number of community groups began to create posters and graphics which dealt with issues such as gender equality and squatter's rights. This willingness to intervene – to set things up and make things happen – has contemporary resonances in the actions of Reclaim the Streets. This loose grouping of road-protestors and political activists have staged actions and events intended to take back the streets from cars and attempt to refashion public space in a more human and humane way.



Anon.



John Phillips



The Poster Collective

## politics in the gallery

Protest and political engagement does not take place exclusively on the street. The gallery space itself has been a forum for debate and dissent. In the works shown here racial politics are confronted; and the work is presented as art – but with an explicit agenda. As with all art, the message must be negotiated in a dialogue between the viewed and the viewer.

## images in the digital age

The digital age has created a new range of creative possibilities. The easy availability of technology means that individuals can intervene in the sign-systems in which they are immersed. Organisations like Adbusters take the manipulation and subversion of advertising and branding to a new level. Their spoofed adverts and joke statements reveal the absurdities we face in the age of mass advertising.

Finally the vibrant screen printed images of the Mexican Chicanos, fighting for indigenous rights and the interests of peasant farmers demonstrate how, even in the age of the laser printer there is a place for the hand-made image. They show that the poster is still powerful and point to a future where dissent is alive and well - forty years after the tumultuous event of 68.



Richard Mock

**WAR.**



**DON'T DO IT.**



Jesus Barraza & Flavianna Rodriguez

# Agit-Pop: Picturing the Revolution

by Damon Taylor

Contemporary communication technologies unite us as never before; in the world of Youtube and Facebook we can be in touch with thousands of friends at a keystroke and ideas and messages can travel around the world in moments. Such a situation has at the same time led to a fragmentation of communities as endless numbers of individuals sit isolated, staring at their private screen, clicking at the buttons like lab-rats in an enormous experiment. We have yet to see the true potential for the internet and informational revolution in the transformation of social life, yet it seems clear that we stand at some sort of cross-roads, or event horizon, at which the next move renders the possibilities manifest and life, as it is lived, is changed for ever. As we alter how we 'meet' each other, organise and express ourselves so we will come to see what the digital age has to offer in terms of radical politics and utopian rebellion.

In 1968 a similar watershed was reached. In Paris students took to the streets and optimistically proclaimed the beginning of a new age in which the old order would be over turned. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of May students and staff at the École Nationale Supérieure de Beaux Arts occupied the studios and print shops of the institution to form the Atelier Populaire, a 'people's workshop' which went on to produce a mass of posters and wall newspapers to be pasted up in the streets and on the barricades which went up around the city. Their intention in this action, as their statement of the time has it, was to 'Give concrete support to the great movement of the workers on strike who are occupying their factories in defiance of the Gaullist government'.<sup>1</sup>

The graphics produced, by means of silk-screening, lithography and stencilling were produced quickly to give voice and visual form to the concerns of the demonstrators. Perhaps crucially, they were also anonymous, in that no single artist or designer was credited. Rather they were created to be collective expressions of a movement. Members of the Atelier met each day in a 'general assembly' to discuss the choice of slogans and designs as the direction of the protest was thrashed out through argument and debate. This means of production is then recognisable in the aesthetic of the work as the sometimes crude but undeniably powerful visual language of strong symbols and simple graphic devices is meshed with the shouting voice of the slogan. This hectoring tone is then subverted from within by the often gnomic demands and instructions communicated through the format of the poster.

These Situationist inspired exhortations were seldom



DEBUT D'UNE  
LUTTE,  
PROLONGÉE



Atelier Populaire



'concrete'. Much of their strength lies in the expansiveness of what is being demanded. 'The beginning of the long struggle' is straightforward enough and has echoes of more orthodox Marxist rallying cries, but 'under the Paving Stones, the beach' suggests a more surrealist approach to the revolution. In this way they were direct descendents of the Dadaists and a certain anarchic element within revolutionary politics which, rather than establishing a rational programme for action begins to create echoes of a new world, almost creating a space which can come to be inhabited by new ways of being.

More recently the increasingly visible street/graffiti artist, Banksy, can be regarded as a direct heir to some of the methodologies of the Atelier Populaire. He uses stencils, makes the same sort of abstruse statements and witty visual barbs and his usual limited palette of black, white and red all tie him to the legacy of the students of 68. However, despite the growing popularity of such work it must be observed that Banksy functions as an Atelier of one. For all the sloganeering of his work and its primary functioning as art to be experienced in an urban environment, this is an individual making points rather than the result of any form of collective action. Similarly, though he has made an effort to remain anonymous, on one level the appellation 'Banksy' is enough to give authorial voice to statements which may have retained more power had they remained anonymous fragments of street life. We may also take him more seriously as the producer of political graphics if a piece such as Riot Cop were not on sale with a guide price of £50,000.

Perhaps the greatest contribution that the Atelier Populaire made to the development of radical communication, that is to say the dissemination of information and messages counter to the dominant ideology, was the idea that it is possible to just set up a studio and do it. This example led to the establishment of politically motivated print studios such as the Red Dragon Collective and without such experiments it is unlikely that publications such as Sniffin Glue, a home made punk fanzine produced by Mark Perry in 1976, would have ever been created. The influence may not be direct, but it can be argued that the fact of earlier attempts to create within limited means and for maximum effect opens up the cultural space for new strategies to develop. Particularly through the production of material which is culturally highly visible, such as street graphics and pop music, a climate of making can come into being – one in which it seems possible to create and have new voices heard.

This DIY approach to the making of visual material had its counterpart in the 'buy a guitar and learn three chords' strategies of punk music and it was in the production of graphics for bands such as the 101ers (later to become The

*'Le patron a besoin de toi, tu n'as pas besoin de lui.'* - *'The boss needs you, you don't need him.'*

*'Travailleur: Tu as 25 ans mais ton syndicat est de l'autre siècle.'* - *'Worker: You are 25, but your union is from the last century.'*

*'Je suis marxiste tendance Groucho.'* - *'I am a Marxist of the Groucho tendency.'*

*'Soyez réalistes, demandez l'impossible'* - *'Be realistic, ask for the impossible.'*

*'On achète ton bonheur. Vole-le.'* - *'Your happiness is being bought. Steal it.'*

*'Sous les pavés, la plage !'* - *'Beneath the cobblestones, the beach!'*

*'Comment penser librement à l'ombre d'une chapelle ?'* - *'How can one think freely in the shadow of a chapel?'*

*'Dans une société qui a aboli toute aventure, la seule aventure qui reste est celle d'abolir la société.'* - *'In a society that has abolished all adventures, the only adventure left is to abolish society.'*

*'SEXE : C'est bien, a dit Mao, mais pas trop souvent.'* - *'SEX: It's good, says Mao, but not too often.'*

*'L'alcool tue. Prenez du L.S.D.'* - *'Alcohol kills. Take LSD.'*

*'Cours, camarade, le vieux monde est derrière toi ! Run, comrade, the old world is behind you!'*



Clash) and The Sex Pistols that the collective space of the print shop met the necessarily social world of popular music. This then had the dual effect of giving a visual coherency to disparate elements of a culture which independently may have had little impact, whilst at the same time allowing this culture to recognise itself – literally to see itself - and therefore develop a sense of its own existence. Jamie Reid's scissors and glue ransom note aesthetic referenced both the iconic power of pop-art and the raw energy of the Atelier posters.

The rough strength of punk in both its musical and visual form was therefore drawn from the sense that people could get together, do things and get things done: even if the product was only a poorly stapled photocopied 'zine, or a three minute pop song.

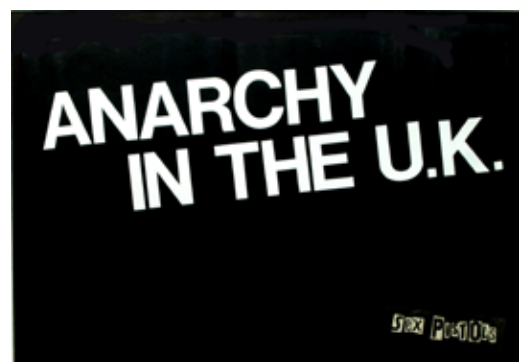
Pop and politics have come together before of course. In the graphics produced as part of the Cuban revolution, the subject matter (worker solidarity, the importance of social development in terms of education and health care etc.) is familiar enough. However, not only do the posters produced echo the soviet Agit-Prop posters of the 1920's in their messages, they are just as daring in their design and their attempt to render a message visually. The work produced in Cuba after 1959 can be described as revolutionary not simply because it dealt with subjects pertinent to the political action, but rather because in its synthesis of pop-art motifs and usages with didactic messages these posters did a great deal to create the pop sensibilities of much radical visual material which was to follow.

It is perhaps ironic that this was quite literally the use of capitalism's armoury in the pursuit of international socialist revolution. Though the role of designers such as Eladio Rivadulla and the filmic drama brought to the posters by such practitioners has been much documented, it is less often mentioned that the Havana office of the American advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson, went over to the revolution in its entirety.<sup>2</sup> This then brought the visual sophistication of commercial advertising to the 'revolutionary tools' of political communication which were intended to bring the message of socialist ideology to the Cuban population.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly evident in the striking image of Che Guevara (taken from Corda's iconic photograph) which has since gained such currency as to have become something of a cliché in our own visually over-loaded age. This was therefore the assimilation of pop aesthetics and the slickness of advertising into the process of creating symbols of utopian rebellion around which people could cohere.

The birth of the British underground scene is generally



John Phillips



Jamie Reid



dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 1965 and the International Poetry Incarnation (as documented in Peter Whitehead's film *Wholly Communion*). It may seem perverse to attribute such a precise point of origin to what must clearly have been a gradual cultural gaining of ground, yet as Andrew Wilson has argued, the main effect of this event was to render 'a seemingly newly minted countercultural community startlingly visible'<sup>4</sup>. In reading the contemporary accounts of the event what is striking is the extent to which those who attended were galvanised by seeing each other, by the sense that they were not alone in their freakish optimism and desire to create something new. This sense of a culture existing because it could be seen to exist was then built upon through events which took place at the All Saints Hall in Notting Hill Gate (which would subsequently morph into the UFO club in a move to Tottenham Court Road) and one-off gigs and happenings such as the *The 14-Hour Technicolour Dream* and the *Legalise Pot Rally* of 1967, and the visual material that accompanied them.

In America in the late 1960's the psychedelic posters of designers such as Victor Moscoso, Wes Wilson and Rick Griffin gave visual form to demands for a new way of being. In their posters for the Fillmore, the Avalon Ballroom and other assorted events and happenings the visuals throb and heave with both the undulations of an LSD trip and the pregnant possibility of both the event they advertise and the epoch they represent. In London the work produced is equally redolent of the hallucinogenic experience but is less expansive and more lyrical. The work of Michael English and Nigel Weymouth under the name Hapshash and the Coloured Coat has a nostalgic quality to it often found in British utopian thinking that can be traced back through Morris and Ruskin. Though the line and arrangement owe much to the English illustrator, Aubrey Beardsley, the sentiment appears to be more rooted in the tradition of the Pre Raphaelites as a lost and now re-discovered arcadia is invoked. What is different from Morris's *News From Nowhere*, however, is that this is an idyll for which the soundtrack is Jimi Hendrix.

What is conspicuous is the extent to which the aesthetic of 1960's British psychedelic posters captures these nuances. Michael McInnery's poster for the *Legalise Pot Rally*, for example, clearly looks forward in its swirling invocation of a world just being discovered. Yet it now seems to be infused with an almost melancholy yearning for a realm of nymphs and faeries which has been forever lost. Similarly in Hapshash and the Coloured Coat's *Hendrix at the Fillmore*' (also produced in 1967) dynamic forms and striking chromatic contrasts combine with a rendering of Hendrix as a Native American shaman striking out across a mythical landscape to create an image which manages to be at once



John 'Hoppy' Hopkins



Michael English & Nigel Weymouth

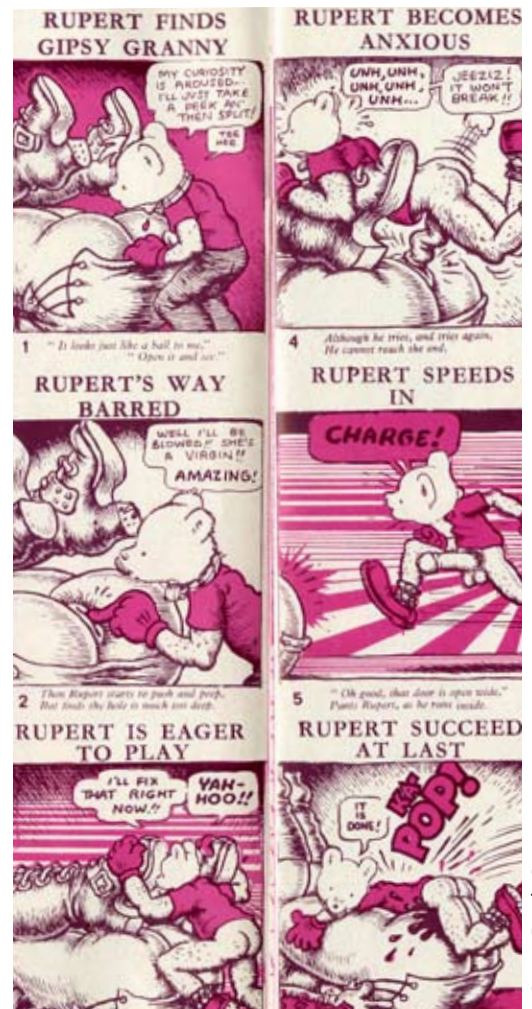


futuristic and archaic.

Even more vital to the development of a sense that a British scene existed was the establishment of publications such as International Times (later to become IT after legal threats from The Times) and Oz magazine. Although these counter-cultural organs never achieved what could be called mass circulation what they certainly did do was to provide a sense of identity for the developing underground. It should also be noted that in their persecution of the producers of these magazines, through various obscenity trials and drug busts, the authorities perhaps did more to publicise the presence of a counter culture to the wider public than the protagonists would ever have been capable of left to their own devices. That the often cynical and certainly misogynistic (though undeniably technically accomplished and sometimes very funny) work of a comic artist such as Robert Crumb could also be seen as a voice of the underground on both sides of the Atlantic only goes to demonstrate further both the breadth of material that could be included in this category and the hunger many felt for a visual language which did not belong to a perceived establishment or prevailing culture.

What is interesting in charting the development of the underground in Britain is the extent to which both music and design interacted to create a sense of a cultural presence. In this way it was the reproducibility of both music and graphic design that allowed for the shared experiences which then made it possible for a culture of resistance to feel itself to exist. By the 1970's the growth of Notting Hill Carnival, the rise of punk and the growing militancy of squatters groups and feminist politics can all be seen in the graphic material of the time. In this way marginal and marginalised sectors of the population were creating their own sound-track and establishing a visual identity that set them apart from the mainstream of British culture and politics.

Though other channels of communication such as the seven inch single and the 'zine or magazine have obviously been important in the political development of a culture of resistance in Britain since the sixties, it is perhaps the poster which offers a certain clarity in demonstrating the way in which particular social conditions allowed for this to happen. The poster, as with all other visual media, is a meeting of elements in space, not only in the two-dimensional compositional space of the picture plane, but in its reception as an object in social space. The poster, perhaps more than any other visual medium, must exist by definition in relation to those who see it and experience it in a public context. To display a poster is always to make a political point. To look at one is to enter into a political relationship and to make one is to make a declaration, whether the content is the



SchoolKids Oz



Joe Strummer

exhortation to buy a certain kind of deodorant or squat an empty building. What was essential to the development of the poster as a tool of political communication in the 1970's was the way in which it was produced as part of a collective effort on the part of small print studios staffed, often for free, by those determined to make a difference. This was a period, therefore, when political communication was developed out of shared space through collective effort, and the resulting material was specifically designed to be experienced in the public sphere.

One of the reasons that there could be a cultural flowering in West London in the late 1960's was there was the physical space for it to happen. The un-renovated housing stock grouped around Notting Hill and the Harrow road meant a community of itinerant drop-outs, hippies, revolutionaries and creative types could take over flats, houses, old schools and commercial buildings to produce their jerry-rigged cultural output. This could then be shown off to the locals, giving a sense of cultural coherency, and disseminated to the wider population to advertise the presence of this new cultural force. In such an atmosphere experiments such as the London Free School could find a home while musical revolutionaries such as Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso could find shelter. It was in the basements and back rooms of the collapsing grandeur of Georgian and Victorian streets that small magazines could be produced and posters printed that always carried along with their overt messages the subtext 'we are here'. That the groupings were often short lived and the revolution often little more than a half formed desire was not as important as the sense that all of this existed because it could be seen.

Therefore it finally becomes clear that the possibilities of Agit-Pop are defined by a three way nexus which depends upon the commitment of individuals, the technology available and the space in which material is produced and disseminated. The events of 68 formed a concrete example of what could be achieved by a small group of dedicated and motivated individuals coming together to exploit the resources available. Then, the medium was the hand printed poster, in the 1970's the photocopier opened up new vistas of possibility and now we appear to have the unlimited potential of digital technology. It must be noted, however, how each medium is born from and exists within its own historically specific political context. It will therefore have its particular strengths and limitations and it will draw upon the influences and structures of power available to it in its inception. This should then lead us to ask what is possible in the production of radical graphics now that the screen and the laser printer have become the medium through which we craft and disseminate our messages. The detourned commercial messages of Adbusters may be



Bernadette Brittain & Martin Walker



Richard Adams



See Red

admirable in their intention but it must be asked whether, because of the medium through which they are created and presented, they can ever be any real challenge to a world of commercial imagery that is so far reaching as to be almost ubiquitous. Similarly, the ongoing war in Iraq has stimulated a huge response in terms of people producing graphic protest, but this still leaves the question of where it is to be seen and who sees it.

Since the 1980's a growing professionalism and institutionalisation in community action has fostered a sense that change is in the hands of officially sanctioned cadres, as we the mass of the population are cast as impotent consumers. However, one glance at the internet makes it clear that there is a hunger for a sense of community and a real feeling that people want to change the situation in which they find themselves. What may be necessary, however, is to re-awaken a sense of there being both the physical and psychological space in which things can happen. To a large extent the artists may have been forced out of metropolitan centres by astronomical property prices and a relentless system of gentrification designed to make the city safe for consumer capital. But nothing lasts for ever and change will always come.

The easy availability of high technology is already revolutionising the production and distribution of music, as people in bedrooms wired into the net make their own work and send it straight out to their audience. In the 1990's and early 2000's actions such as those of Reclaim the Streets and various anti-capitalist demonstrations have shown how space can be re-appropriated and technology can be harnessed to the organisation of mass protest. On a more playful level the phenomenon of the flash-mob has similarly pointed towards what may yet to come as we learn to wield the power we have in our hands. It will be interesting, therefore, to see what comes when we can turn the tools we have to visually imagining the world we are about to make.

1 <http://www.art-for-a-change.com/Paris/paris.html> (Accessed 06.02.08)

2 Gott, R. Cuba: A New History, University of North Carolina Press, (2006) p1.

3 McQuiston, L. Graphic Agitation: Social and Political Graphics Since the Sixties, Phaidon (London, 1993) p.88

4 Wilson, A. Spontaneous Underground: An Introduction to London Psychedelic Scenes, 1965-68 in Grunberg, C. and Harris, J. Summer of Love, Liverpool Univeristy Press (Liverpool, 2005) p.66 Butt Trust

