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Art, Architecture & Ideology: Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany & Stalinist Russia

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“The Design of Hope and Fear”

The ideas of hope and fear are more similar than one would think. Both are powerful and convincing tactics that are commonly found in politics and war. Using ploys, such as these, can leave drastic outcomes that affect the future of unstable and stable societies alike. However, one must believe in these tactics for the outcome to be a success. One must determine what fear really is, and what good hope can do for them. Unfortunately, we humans are not always aware of distant dangers and don't know to fear them, until it is too late. “Fear is a distressing emotion aroused by a perceived threat” (fear). While, “Hope is a belief in a positive outcome related to events and circumstances in one's life” (hope). Both “hope” and “fear” rely on a belief that an occurrence or action will happen. Otherwise there is nothing to fear or to hope for. One can believe in the idea of “hope” and “fear” without needing a trigger. But often enough, visuals and sounds are used to help promote these emotions. These visual and audible cues can be designed to evoke both “hope” and “fear” and designed around the basic ideas of branding so that one will more easily recognize them. Like a modern-day McDonalds with their Golden Arch and sound of “do-da-doo-doo-doo...I'm loving it...” symbols and sounds are used to make

up strong brands. These basic principles used by McDonalds are not all that different from those used by massive political parties, like American Political System and the German Nazi Party. By further analyzing the usage of design and rhetoric in the 2008 American Presidential Campaign and the 1933-45 Nazi Campaign, the themes of “Hope” and “Fear” will surface.

Branding a campaign is more than just slapping a logo on something and sending it out. To design a successful brand, one must employ several key methodologies to reinforce the brand message. For instance, a plan of action must be created for one to effectively utilize the power of the campaign. This plan should be designed so that everyone in the target demographic can quickly access and understand the campaign goals. Also, a planned usage of the logo across many mediums is needed to insure that the overall image is complete and accurate. In addition to designing a campaign plan, one must utilize the meaning of color to make sure the campaign identity is appropriate and tactful. All of the methodologies should be direct and to the point so that they are most useful. When a design is too complex and not entirely clear, on first glance, the reception rate is drastically lowered. This leaves the viewer at a lost and feeling as if the campaign is not that important.

The leader of the Third Reich, Adolph Hitler, perfected the design of “fear,” as a political tactic. As a mastermind of manipulation, he used design to reinforce his master plan. Hitler gave away his secrets for effective propaganda in his book, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle): “Keep the message simple”; “Repeat it and repeat it again”; “Don’t admit doubts or qualifications”; “Always attack”; “Know that the biggest untruths will be believed” (Mein Kampf). He utilized each of these secrets perfectly. He turned a simple

symbol, the swastika, into a powerful logo that represented the Nazi party, the party's agenda, and eventually the repression of the Jewish population. By keeping the visuals simple and repeating them often, he was able to convey the message of national pride and power. He repeated the swastika on literally every surface imaginable. From banners, flags, and posters to clothing, uniform patches, and medals. The swastika was repeated religiously and eventually became synonymous with the face of the Nazi party, mass genocide of Jewish people, and the Führer, himself.

Throughout the Nazi Campaign, the swastika with its black, red, and white color scheme stood as a backdrop to notions of racial purification, nationalist regeneration, and world domination. Hitler had not been in control when the Nazis started using the swastika as an identifying mark of the party, but he made it official. With his own artistic direction, he turned the symbol into the most iconic logo of the 20th century. He used the color red to symbolize blood and power. A phrase that he often repeated was “blut und boden” meaning blood and earth. He wanted his followers to believe that their land was worth fighting for. This meant for them to fight, even if their blood had to be shed. He wanted to purify the land and to restore what he considered to be the natural rights of the Sanskrit people.

Hitler understood that once the people of Germany joined his belief system and succumbed to his idea of nationalism that they would be at his aid to help further his master plan. One of the easiest ways to make them think alike was to make them look alike. This was a theory that he strongly believed in. Once you get people to dress similarly, they are more apt to think the same and in this case think the way that he did. Different German groups like the Hitler Youth (Hitlerjugend) and the Women's

Organization (Frauenschaft) wore armbands that were public displays of support of the Nazi party. By wearing these armbands with the swastika patch on them, it was clear to everyone else what they believed in and gave a message of loyalty to their leader. The swastikas on these armbands were symbols that, for Hitler, truly embodied the spirit of the National Socialist Party.

In cities all across Germany, swastika flags blanketed the streets. In Munich, swastika banners hung across streets, creating a sky full of white banners and black swastikas. The sheer number of swastikas that covered the streets was ever-present and extremely powerful over the psychology of the people there. Even though the swastika was a symbol of national pride and power it also became a symbol of terror and death. As long as you were with the “team” and not against the “team” you were ok. But for the unfortunate non-Arian people of Germany, the presents of those swastikas were terrifying and overwhelming.

Hitler even made sure that the swastika was placed on the church alter in every church across Germany. He wanted for the people to make the association of religion and the swastika to help promote the Nazi brand. If the swastika was in every church, then that meant that it was a-ok, right? This was the thinking that Hitler was hoping would occur when the Germans went to church every week.

The swastika, in history, wasn't always a negative symbol. Actually, it wasn't negative at all till Hitler took control over it. Sanskrit for hooked cross, the swastika has been in existence for over 3,000 years. In fact, the swastika was actually a symbol that represented life, sun, power, strength and good luck. The hooked cross design can be found on numerous artifacts throughout history and in both Asia and Europe. The Greek key motif

found on ancient ruins in Greece and Italy incorporate the hooked cross. In the ancient city of Troy, it could be found on coins and pottery. Even in America during World War I, one could find the swastika on patches of the uniforms of the American 45th Division military. “At the end of the 19th century, German nationalists used the symbol on periodicals and for the official emblem of the German Gymnasts’ League. By the 20th century, it was a common symbol used in Germany to represent German nationalism and pride, for example, as the emblem for the Wandervogel, a German youth group” (The Swastika). Only since Nazi Party adopted the swastika on August 7, 1920, has it been associated with fear and evil. Hitler stated “the swastika symbolized the victory of the Aryan man” (Mein Kampf) after it was officially adopted. After World War II had ended, a new symbol had emerged in Germany that was commonly known as the “new swastika.” This new symbol was spread all over parts of Berlin, as well as other cities, as graffiti. The new mark was the somewhat ambiguous number “88.” “The letter ‘H’ is the eighth letter of the alphabet. So a double ‘8’ is a double ‘H,’ and an ‘H.H.’ was used to mean ‘Heil Hitler!’”(Sommers).

The arguable success of Hitler’s power over the German people can be found in the time frame for which he gained power. Germany was in a fragile state of being when he became the Führer. Having been struck with the start of the world economic depression in 1929, in Germany, the then Weimar Republic, social and political tension had increased. This left Germany with mass unemployment and many of the middle class people, who traditionally were fairly liberal, turned their backs and started leaning to the political right wing. Because of this unsettling economy, the people were desperate for change in a new direction. Hitler was the hope that the people had wanted. Only with

Hitler, they didn't receive the renewal of jobs and money as they had hoped; they instead received the totalitarian Führer.

Much like Germany in the 1930's, America in 2008 was in a time of despair and was longing for things to change. In the midst of a war against terror, the people of the United States of America were ready for a political change. The day came and went as the 44th president of the United States was inaugurated. President Barack Hussein Obama was elected under the premise of "Hope" and "Change." "His story is the American story — values from the heartland, a middle-class upbringing in a strong family, hard work and education as the means of getting ahead, and the conviction that a life so blessed should be lived in service to others" (The White House). With his limited political experience and wild card chances of being the first black president, he promised to be the "One" for change and to bring "Hope" back to the American people.

Not unlike Hitler, President Obama ran a very appealing and visually driven campaign. With phrases like, "Yes We Can," "Vote for Change," "Change We Can Believe In," and "It's about Time. It's about Change," Obama followed the key methodologies to a successful campaign. He kept the message simple and repeated it often. He was not only consistent in voice, but in visuals. Unlike Hitler, Obama had a campaign strategy team that hired Chicago-based Sender LLC (a brand development and design company) to design the compelling Obama "O" logo. Creative director Sol Sender, interestingly enough had never worked on a campaign logo. "We were looking at the "o" of his name and had the idea of a rising sun and a new day," according to Sender (Obama Logo). The logo was finally selected out of approximately 16 different visual directions and several rounds of revisions. The entire undertaking of the "O" logo, before

one was chosen and finessed, took less than two weeks in late 2006. However the final logo was not officially revealed until President Obama announced his candidacy for presidency in February of 2007. This is wildly different from the swastika that was over 3,000 years old. The final logo was actually very simple. Sender is quoted in an interview with David Airy, “The strongest logos tell simple stories.” (Logo Design Love). Set in the sans-serif typeface Gotham by type foundry Hoefler & Frere-Jones, the “O” logo is primarily just the letter “o” that is a patriotic navy blue with a red and white-striped horizon that mimics a rural fertile field and the stripes of the American flag. “John Slabyk and Scott Thomas, designers with the Obama campaign oversaw the customization of the logo for 12 different identity groups as well as for each state with 50 additional versions. There was also identity for Republicans and Independents supporting Barack Obama” (Obama Logo). Obama wanted to make sure that his logo was accessible by everyone and that everyone had a part in his vision and plan. Overnight this new identity became as synonymous with Obama and the word “Hope” as the swastika was to Hitler and word “Fear.”

President Obama’s new logo not only evoked hope and change but also spurred creativity with its usage. In posters and billboards across America, the “o” in the word “Hope” was interchanged with the “O” logo. The controversial street artist Shepard Fairey even designed and illustrated one of the most propagandistic images of Obama, during the 2008 campaign, that featured the word “HOPE” prominently. The “O” logo was plastered onto campaign buttons and stickers that could be found almost everywhere during the campaign. People had bumper stickers on their cars with their customized variation of the logo on it. Pastry novice across the United States made cakes, cookies and

even donuts out of the “O” logo. America was craving for a leader that could invigorate the people with a hope filled vision.

When comparing some of the similarities of the two leaders, it is hard to not compare their stage presence and podiums. When President Obama accepted the presidential nomination for the Democratic Party in Denver, Colorado, on August 28th, 2008, he stood on an impressive stage that harkens images of the Nuremberg rally, in Germany some 75 years prior. The similarities are uncanny. First and foremost, one cannot ignore the colonnade behind the podium. The stadium in Nuremberg has a massive building as the backdrop, with pilasters and columns lining the facade, and a large podium that protrudes out into the crowd so that the chancellor could speak amongst the people. Around the whole stadium are Nazi flags that rigorously repeat the swastika. Spectators shouted and waved smaller flags in support of the Führer. Similarly in Denver at the Invesco Field stadium, a stage was build with a walled backdrop of pilasters and columns. The podium is protruding out into the space as well. The American flag dots the stage with color and two large screens show live feed of Obama speaking as well as other campaign messages like “Yes We Can.” The crowd roared as they waved American flag and banners that said “Change.” Without even doing a side-by-side comparison, one can see how similar the two rallies were. Obviously the context is different and the people in 2008 were not about to be murdered in the upcoming years. But both rallies contained invigorating speeches that excited the audiences about change and hope for the future. They both were promising “Hope” for tomorrow. Hitler however, stuck to his secrets for effective propaganda by “keeping his message simple, repeating it often, and by knowing that the biggest untruths will be believed.” He promised over and over for a better future

for the German citizen's of tomorrow, but he neglected to say "unless you are Jewish." He garnered their trust and then held them captive of their loyalty to the party.

One would also have to compare the usage of photography and imagery of the leaders. The image of Obama by Shepard Fairey is well known today, because of the legal suit for the copy right of the original photograph that was used. But it is very similar to two images from the Nazi party. The first image that is up for discussion is a photograph of Hitler that was used as an emblem for the Nazi state. The portrait was by Hitler's personal photographer, Heinrich Hoffman. While this image greatly differs in style to Fairey's image, the application of the image is very similar. Both images were distributed across many publication platforms and became the quintessential image that was used to represent each of the leaders. The second image to compare the Fairey image to is an image that was created as a National Socialist Poster to represent the ideal socialistic male. The artist's name is unknown, but the image is very similar to Fairey's. The strong use of color and shape to define the form of the figure in an abstracted way speaks to both of the propagandistic images. The composition of both posters are similar, as well as the use of typography along the bottom of the image to convey a deeper message. With the Fairey poster, the message is obviously "Hope." But with the Socialist Poster it reads "Sa-Voran" or SA meaning Sturmabteilung, The German brown-shirts of the pre-war years or "stormtroopers" and Voran meaning "ahead." So altogether it means "stormtroopers ahead" which meant to keep going forth and to keep up the work. The messages of these posters are different but are both very commanding. They tell one what to do and who can help.

Even though the outcomes of hope and fear may be different, at the root of it all, they are pretty similar. Both Hitler and Obama have used some of the same tactics and design ploys to make their campaigns a success. The outcomes are the key differences. By looking at these two different people and their parties, one can conclude that power of a brand, whether good or bad, is all in the planning, usage and intent. If Hitler had not been so absurd with his master plans of purification, he could have been a great leader that would have been known for his ability to evoke change. Unfortunately though, that did not happen, and instead used the power of the Nazi Party and the symbology of the swastika to do bad things to people and to promote fear. And while Obama is not a dictator or an evil monster, some of his actions and design decisions do reflect traits that could be confused as totalitarian. Thankfully the fear of a totalitarian dictator doesn't plague Germans or Americans and that the hope for a better tomorrow isn't completely gone.