

Transculturation of Visual Signs: A Case Analysis of the Swastika

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Abstract

This study explores how the meaning of visual signs changes through the process of transculturation applied to the key Nazi symbol, the swastika. A historical case study of forty-two Nazi and pre-Nazi stamps is conducted to analyze key factors in the process of creating meaning. The study finds that timing, control, history, and universalism are key factors for the transculturation of the swastika. A preliminary model of transculturation is presented. Limitations and directions for future research are also discussed.

As the application and alteration of foreign elements into local ones through the transformation and adaptation of foreign and local features, transculturation develops in three-stages: first, the immigrant groups experience a loss of culture; second, elements from the various cultures are assimilated; and finally, a new culture is created during the third stage. Although the transculturation process may refer to the domination of one culture over another, with an ensuing loss of culture by the subjugated culture, recent scholarship considers transculturation a process of cultural “interchange,” “exchange” and “influence” (Spitta, 1995). The transculturation process has significant implications in the world today. However, only very few studies attempted to understand how new meanings become attached through this process.

The dynamic nature of transculturation is reflected in the ongoing cultural exchange between the individual and the community, which is a two-way process whereby all individuals and cultures involved are changed; this dynamic process can be explored through visual signs. Wittkower (1977) indicated that transculturation reaches back as far as the beginning of civilization itself and is based on universal or common elements as a foundation for the transculturation process. Although language is a key factor in the process of transculturation, visual signs may be even more powerful (Horn, 1998). Because human culture is increasingly visual, and transculturated visual signs are predominantly nonverbal, they are more easily accepted and “learned” by native speakers of different languages. The homogeneous appeal of visual signs across cultures is evidenced in movies, flags, pictograms and international and national icons. In addition, physiology and psychology of human perception, semiotics, and visual rhetoric all help explain the transculturation of visual signs.

The psychology of perception is an integral part of the process of human visual communication. Vision is a three-step process of sensing, where an object is revealed through light entering the eyes; selecting, where a combination of light, eye functions, and brain activities focuses attention on specific objects; and perceiving, when we try to make sense of what we have selected (Huxley in Lester, 1995). Moreover, Gestalt theory of perception asserts that the eye takes in a range of visual stimuli and the brain arranges and links these individual components into a coherent image by searching for the simplest solution to patterns of visual stimuli by forming groups (Arnheim, 1954).

Semiotic theory explains how humans create meaning from visual media messages in a world permeated with signs (Moriarty, 1996). The process is understood through social cognition and schema theory, which claims that mental categories are activated onto which new observations become attached. A particular visual sign will trigger similar mental responses in people from different cultures. An image will activate an area in the brain and at the same time activate the nodes close by. Semiotics provides the critical link between signs and their meaning created across different cultures.

Furthermore, the human mind forges a connection between a sign and the object, action, or idea for which it stands. Moriarty (1996) believed that the “visual communication process operates relatively untutored in our society” (p. 185). Visual communication lacks clearly defined arbitrary codes (which are typically available for linguistic visual signs). It is a dynamic and subjective process of attaching meaning to symbolic visual signs, which is influenced by the background and viewpoint of the observer, and is rarely taught in our society. This may lead to an extreme historical crisis situation, such as the Nazi rise to power, which triggers dynamics and responses beyond conventional rationality.

Finally, transculturation is successful because of global economic and information flow, but one key factor in its rapid spread may be the universalism of symbol systems, which facilitates adoption and adaptation of visual signs across cultures. In addition, transculturation of signs is achieved by juxtaposing and combining a familiar visual image with a foreign element. This ultimately alters the meaning of both elements, and results in a hybrid image. The hybrid, transculturated sign works because it appeals to various cultures in which at least one element is familiar. In order to further understand the process of transculturation this study attempts to examine the key Nazi symbol, the swastika, by analyzing how the meaning of the symbol changed and was transformed in the process of transculturation in Germany.

The Nazi Swastika

The Nazi swastika was taken from its ancient Indian roots as a good luck symbol (Davis, 2000). It was “modernized” and put into a political context, serving as a unifying symbol that evolved into the German flag. It served as a counterpoint to the Christian symbol of the cross; the German translation is “cross with hooks.”

Discovered in cave paintings and on artifacts dating from the Neolithic Age (8000-6000 BC) and the Bronze Age (3000 BC), the swastika has been found around the world; etched in stones and metals, on buildings, pottery, jewelry, and household tools in Africa, Americas, China, Egypt, Europe, Greece, India, Japan, and Turkey (Wilson, 1894). The basic design of the swastika is circular and implies dynamic movement, positioned either clockwise or counterclockwise. According to Liungman (1998), “The swastika’s spectrum of meaning is centered around power, energy, and migration” (Sec. 15.1, para. 9). The good luck symbol in India is depicted in a clockwise rotation, and the counterclockwise image is *sauvastika* which is associated with misfortune and bad luck. However, the Japanese connect “great luck and protection against evil powers” (Sec. 15.5, para. 2) to the counterclockwise rotation of the *sauvastika*, which was known as *manji* during the Middle Ages in Japan.

The four arms of the swastika represent the four levels of existence in Indian Jainism, i.e., the world of gods, the world of humans, the world of animals, and the underworld. The Chinese swastika (*wan tsu*) symbolizes the four points of a compass ca. 700 AD. The Boy Scouts of America had a badge with a swastika symbol, and Coca Cola Company used it in advertising.

Pre-historic usage of the swastika in Europe is concentrated in Britain and the Nordic countries. The Celtic design of the Old Norse amulet, Thor's Hammer, is similarly formed in the shape of a swastika, and is used by neo-Nazi groups today. "The swastika symbol has been used for thousands of years among practically every group of humans on the planet" (Falun Dafa, 2003, para. 4). In Germany, the *Hakenkreuz* (swastika) existed on religious and secular coats of arms long before the Nazi period.

Beginning with the 1870s unification of Germany, a movement of Pan-Germanism (*Alldeutschtum*) spread through Austria and Germany. The *Thule* society, for instance, sought to "evoke a Nordic connection" and drew "on a smorgasbord of references to German, Norse, and other Indo-European traditions" (Mees, 2000, p. 317). Its membership later included future Nazi leaders (Gonzalez, 1998, Sec. 15, para. 1).

Hitler may have first seen the swastika in a church where he was a choirboy and in illustrations of American Indians in the popular novels by Karl May (Gonzalez, 1998). Another exposure to the swastika came from Hitler's interest in Nordic Mythology, where it refers to the Nordic god, Wotan, a source of inspiration in the Wagnerian *The Ring of the Nibelungs* (Swastika.com, 2003, para. 12), which in turn relates to Hitler's obsession with Wagner and his mythology.

The design of the Nazi swastika is attributed to Hitler. Hitler recounted the design process in his book, *Mein Kampf* (1971). He wrote that the fledgling National Socialist party needed a flag that would be "a symbol of our own struggle" and that it was "expected also to be highly effective as a poster ... an effective insignia can ... give the first impetus toward interest in a movement" (p. 495). Hitler was especially attached to a swastika flag known as the *Blutfahne* (Blood Flag). This flag survived the *Beer Hall* coup on November 9, 1923. This "most glorious war flag of all times" (p. 494), the bloody and hole-ridden *Blutfahne*, was used to consecrate all Nazi flags in a succession of sanctimonious political rituals.

The Swastika and Transculturation

The swastika is a symbol of tremendous impact over time and across different cultures. The culmination of its use (and abuse) by the Nazis is grounded both in the transculturation process throughout history and the modern communication strategies employed by the Nazis. In order to examine how the meaning of the Nazi swastika changed and was transformed through transculturation in Germany, this study specifically focused on the appearance of the swastika in postage stamps. Other primary sources (e.g., money) and secondary sources (e.g., flags and films) were included as supplemental information.

Due to the pervasiveness of their distribution and usage, stamps provide a valuable tool for analyzing the transculturation process within a given culture; they are carriers of meaning on different levels and can give clues about the time in which they are created. While stamps often serve merely a commemorative or decorative purpose, they can become one of the many propaganda channels used by totalitarian powers.

Stamps were used as postage stamps within Germany and its occupied territories, and mailed to countries around the world. Stamps were used in Germany for general mail, military mail and official government mail. They were also used in the occupied territories, for foreign mail and airmail. The German citizenry used stamps regardless of ethnicity, age, gender, political affiliation, nationalism, patriotism, religious affiliation and social class.

The purpose of this paper was to examine how the meaning of the swastika was transformed in the transculturation process in Germany. The analysis was based on seven key categories: function, visual framing, content, environment, time, receiver, and channel.

Method

Transculturation is both a historical and a contemporary phenomenon. Consequently, this study applied an historical analysis to a case study. In order to establish validity, triangulation employing multiple pieces of information was used (Stake, 1995; Yin 1984) to explore factors influencing the meaning of the swastika.

Selection Procedure

A private collection of over 2000 German stamps issued between 1875 and 1948 was available to the senior author. Of these, 42 stamps were selected for in-depth analysis. Selection criteria were applied as follows: (1) for the 12-year Nazi rule at least one stamp for each year was selected, and (2) a number of pre-Nazi stamps were chosen to capture representative themes and design elements relevant to understanding the Nazi stamps.

Three themes emerged among the stamps: historical references, nationalism and patriotism, and youth. The historical motifs were the spread-eagle, Medieval iconography, Roman and German mythology, and the commemoration of historic personages. Themes of nationalism and patriotism included German unity, pride in German accomplishments, and optimism. The Nazis paid particular attention to the young (“Hitler Youth”) as guardians of the future. Stamps were analyzed to explore how the Nazis adapted and transformed motifs from these categories to create their unique vision, which propelled their propaganda machine. Table 1 illustrates thematic categories associated with the selection.

Table 1. Stamp Selection Thematic Categories

Historical References	Nationalism and Patriotism	Youth
spread-eagle	Unity	Aryanism
Roman mythology	Pride	Vigor and strength
German mythology	Accomplishment	Future
historic personages		
Medieval iconography		

Pre-WWI German stamps available in the primary source collection covered three time periods: Pre-WWI stamps from 1875, WWI stamps, and post-WWI stamps leading up to Inflation and end of the (democratic) Weimar Republic. The Nazi era stamps were divided into two phases: the early Nazi stage (1933-38) and the WWII years (1939-45). Table 1 illustrates the themes and motifs used in the analysis of the stamps, which were sequenced to illustrate the progression of sign usage:

1. Saturation of symbols: power, strength, nationalism and patriotism (early Nazi).
2. Myth-building (Hitler as heroic leader, military might, National Socialism as religion).
3. Decline and end (disappearance of swastika, focus on volunteerism and youth).

Cataloging and Classification

Stamps were digitized for grouping and reproduction. Two German stamp catalogs (i.e., Philex, 1977 & Michel, 1999) were used to identify the year of issue. The stamps were dated and numbered in chronological sequence.

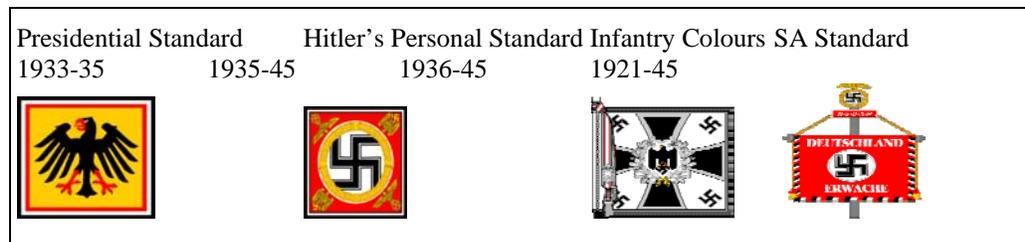
After the stamps were analyzed based on the progression of sign usage, a code guide was established based on seven factors affecting meaning creation, which was used to interpret the results of the analysis. In order to arrive at the factors, key elements of the Transactional Communication Model (Wood, 2004) were enhanced by Function and Visual Framing derived from the visual communication literature. The seven factors are:

- Function - How and where were the stamps used?
- Visual Framing - What is the significance of design features?
- Content - What are prevailing themes of individual design features?
- Environment - What is the significance of historical “place”?
- Time - How did stamps evolve from Pre-Nazi through Post-Nazi periods?
- Receiver -Who is the target audience?
- Channel - How was the message disseminated?

Analysis

During the pre-Nazi age the spread-eagle motif connected the second German Empire to the first Empire of Charlemagne, which were found throughout Germany on cathedrals, sculptures and bridges. The eagle was a reminder of a strong and unified country, and was adopted by the Nazis, along with the swastika, as the national symbol. Nazi flags prominently displayed the eagle (See Figure 1). The 1935 Nazi propaganda film, *Triumph des Willens*, reveals the significance of the eagle in Nazi iconography. The eagle is seen in monumental proportions. This was awe-inspiring to the audience of German soldiers and Nazi party members. The eagle carries an atmosphere of power, strength and unity.

Figure 1. *Nazi Flags with Eagles*



Fonts were an important tool for the Nazis; modern art trends were juxtaposed with imagery that had its roots in ancient history. The early Nazi stage represents a period of extensive use of Blackletter font. As reports of illegibility of the font trickled back to Nazi officials in 1933 (Heller, 1999), “the spiky ascenders and descenders and broken curves” (p. 56) was replaced by the modern block style types developed by Jugendstil and Dada artists (see Figure 2). Blackletter was branded *Judenlettern*, i.e., a degenerate invention of the Jews.

Figure 2. *Font Development*



The *Germania* series (1900-1920), marked the end of the *Crown and Eagle* series. The use of overprints and low quality paper (Michel, 1999) reflects the 1915 wartime losses and economic hardships of WWI Germany as stamp prices were raised to cover war costs (Fig. 3, A-2). Demoralization escalated as widespread poverty, social decay, and the return of wounded soldiers took its toll on Germans. This mood of despair created a fertile ground for extreme political parties such as the Nazis (See Figure 3, A-9, A-10).

Figure 3. *Pre-WWI and WWI (1900-1918)*



Mythological themes were used prior to the Nazis. Wagnerian operas and oak-leaf garlands signifying strength connected the Nazi regime to the heroic grandeur of Rome and to German mythology tales of heroism, magic and the superior German spirit.

During the Inflation period, the bankrupt German government produced more money to cover costs, creating a cycle of inflation and debt. The tradition of overprinting stamps begun during WWI psychologically connected each subsequent instance to that difficult time in history. It became the norm during times of political and economic crisis, and was used extensively by the Nazis as the tide of fortune turned against them during the waning months of the war.

German commemorative stamps adapted the neo-classical, heroic style common in Roman portraiture (Figure 4). This design is evident in subsequent postal portraits of Hitler, which typify the *Hitler-as-hero* myth. The idea of a strong and heroic leader of the German people was established long before Hitler came onto the political scene (Kershaw, 1987).

Figure 4. *Thematic Development*



Germany was portrayed as a country waiting for its leader who would guide it out of political, economic and social strife, which is reminiscent of Judeo-Christian religions, and harks back to the founder of the First Reich, Charlemagne. Germany was waiting for the second coming of the leader-savior; ultimately (according to the Nazis) this was Hitler.

The “Hitler myth” (Kershaw, 1987, p. 2) was rooted in Hitler’s megalomania. Fueling this obsession was his award of the Iron Cross during WWI, which he carried until his death. This attachment to the sign and the Weimar War flag is seen in the Nazi War Ensign; it combines the iron cross and the swastika. Hitler’s idealization of WWI inspired the Nazi flag (Figure 5).

Figure 5. War Ensigns with Iron Cross



The early Nazi stage represents a period of saturation of symbols when the eagle-swastika-oak leaf garland became the official Nazi emblem, and the font changed from ornate Blackletter to a simplified block style font. There was also a unification of stamp design. This was a Nazi innovation since random stamp designs from various states prevailed during the pre-Nazi period. This device had a similar optimistic psychological impact that the new Nazi currency had on Germans (Figure 6). Military stamps with the Nazi emblem, issued during the war (1942-45), conveyed a sense of pride, strength, power, unity and accomplishment.

Figure 6. Early Nazi Stage (1933-1938): Saturation of Signs



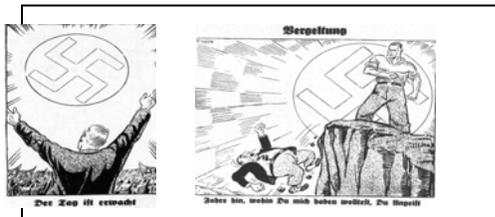
Figure 7 displays many of the components of Nazi visual rhetoric. A spread-eagle (airmail) is superimposed over the earth with the rising sun’s rays streaming from behind. The sun contains a red swastika seen in three-quarter view. The eagle is saturated in red, as is the bottom border with the text printed in a white Blackletter font on a red background.

Figure 7. Nazi Components



The swastika-sun equates the Nazis with the brightness and warmth of the sun, and the strength and power of an eagle. Hitler’s plan for world domination is metaphorically implied; the stamp signals that in 1933, Hitler begins to organize rearmament in Germany. The swastika associated with the rising sun is echoed in one of most widely circulated newspaper in Germany, *Der Stuermer* (published 1923-45). Its simple language, pornographic and anti-Semitic content, and sensationalist cartoon illustrations were popular among Germans, and especially young Germans (Figure 8).

Figure 8. *Swastika Sun*



The rising sun feature is indicative of the German connection with Japan during this period, which is seen in the swastika flag design (Figure 9). In 1934 the German and Japanese navies established relations (Donnini, 2002). Japanese culture permeated Europe, as European artists assimilated Japanese features to create a new style in art and print.

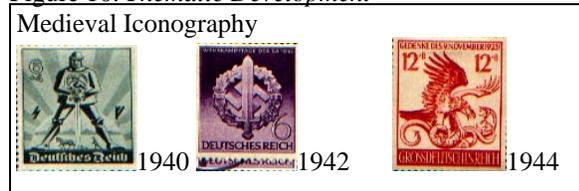
Figure 9. *Japanese Influence*



Stamps from the Nazi period represent the manipulation of themes. The stamps are divided into two time periods within the Nazi Era: 1933-38, during which time a saturation of Nazi symbolism and a focus on myth-building is evident; and the war years (1939-45), when major themes were myth building, nationalism and pride, and youth.

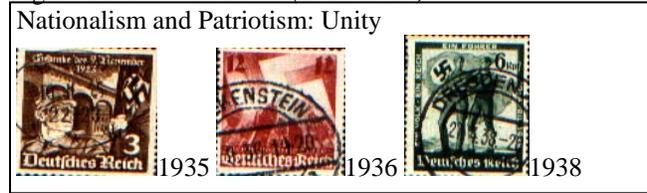
German Medieval iconography emerges as a theme throughout the Nazi period, such as Germano-Nordic myth, armour and weaponry, Romanesque architecture, clothing, religious art, and allegorical symbols (Figure 10). Nazi flags also employed Medieval signs which were used since the reign of Charlemagne.

Figure 10. *Thematic Development*



The concept of national unity and party strength was introduced early by the Nazis. Stylistic features, like three-quarter view, were used to enhance the emotional impact (Figure 11). This artistic device focuses attention because the brain is driven to complete the rest of the design. Strong colors and bold outline are also typical Nazi stamps design features.

Figure 11. *Pre-War Years (1935-1939)*



Stamps depicting aeronautical and military accomplishments encouraged feelings of pride among the soldiers and civilians (Figure 12). As Germany’s wartime success began to wane, the Nazis aimed at continued support for the war.

Figure 12. *Nationalism and Patriotism*



During the declining years of the war the swastika began to disappear from stamp designs. With thousands of Germans dying across Europe, the Nazis forcibly called upon the elderly, and young boys to fight. Children and youths were seen as guardians of the Aryan heritage. Stamps emphasized youth, optimism, the future and patriotism (Figure 13).

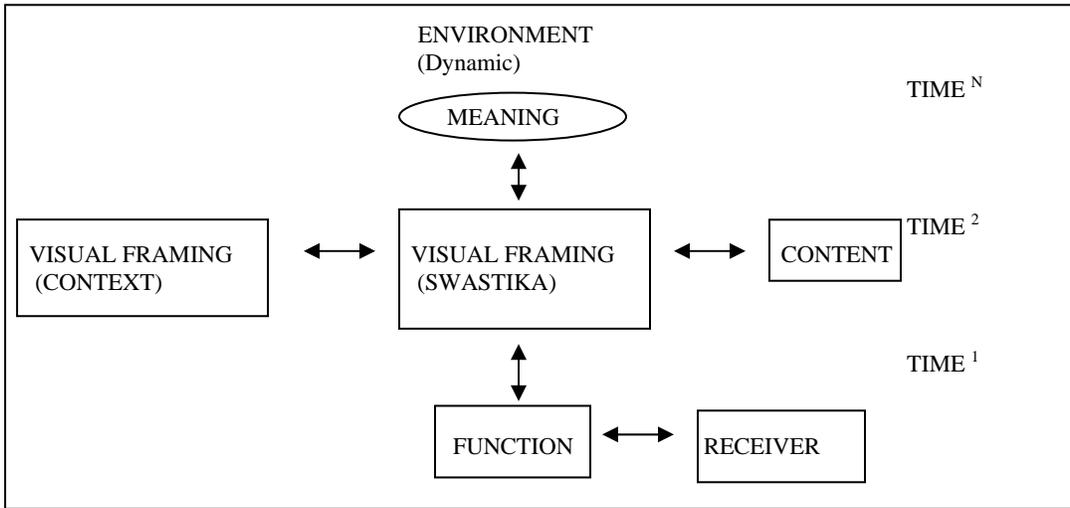
Figure 13. *The War Years (1939-1945)*



Interpretation and Discussion

This study focused on the transformation of meaning of the swastika by Hitler and the Nazis through a systematic program of borrowing, framing and adapting elements to fit their ideological agenda. The above analysis of the Nazi stamps, flags, currency, and media revealed how the seven factors, i.e., function, visual framing, content, environment, time, receiver, and channel work together in the transformation of meaning through the transculturation process. Figure 14 illustrates the dynamic relationship of these components.

Figure 14: *Factors Influencing Meaning*



Function

The Nazis used the swastika as a key symbol to create a strong presence and an identity. Eventually, it became part of their emblem and was seen as part of the German landscape. It became the official German flag and proved an effective propaganda vehicle. The swastika is documented in Nazi films; it was found on flags, banners and on uniform buttons. The swastika was proof of the power the Nazis.

The swastika was used in political settings as part of the Nazi propaganda campaign. Postage stamps and currency were used regardless of ethnicity, age, gender, political or religious affiliation and social class. The swastika on these everyday objects signaled to the German people a unified and stable government in the aftermath of the political, economic and social unrest of the post-WWI years, soaring inflation and unemployment.

Visual Framing (Context)

The Nazis created a visual context for their key symbols to achieve the greatest impact. They applied artistic and story-telling methods to appeal to the physiological and psychological sensibilities of their patrons.

Figure 15 illustrates the intentional placement of elements that break free of the frame and draw the viewer into the picture. This device is enhanced by the dynamic use of line and light, which implies action as the eye is encouraged to move along horizontal or vertical axes, or diagonally from foreground to background. Nazi stamp designers borrowed from Expressionist art, which they defamed as a Jewish degenerate invention.

Figure 15: *Nazi Visual Framing*

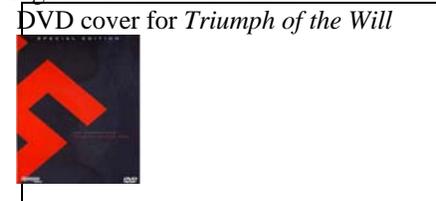


Visual Framing (Swastika)

Placing the swastika into the right visual framework enhances its power. The form and color of the swastika conjured up familiar images. The similarity between the cross and the swastika is significant in our ability to perceive it. Hitler gave precise specifications and measurements for the design; embedded in a white circle and in a field of red. The tension created by these colors forces the eye to move around the composition.

A striking feature in the Nazi stamps is the use of partial ($\frac{3}{4}$) view. This technique imbues the pictorial with interest and excitement. Gestalt theory explains the grouping tendency of the human brain, which is responsible for our ability to mentally visualize the missing components of the picture (Figure 16).

Figure 16: 2001 DVD Cover



Red as a feature of the swastika was successful in attracting visual attention. Hitler claimed that the red on their posters drew people into the Nazi meetings in the early days. He chose red to win over the socialists and to connect to the pre-Weimar flag (Hitler, 1971/1924).

Content

The Nazis combined the swastika with specific themes (Table 1) and exposed the public to this juxtaposition over time; they allocated new meaning to the sign, which fit their propaganda strategy. The Nazis used familiar subjects, and gave them new meaning through adaptations and transformations. The interpretation of the Nazi swastika was affected by the environment and culture (Germany) and time (post-WWI) it was presented.

Environment

Germany's location between European military powers after WWI and the Russian Revolution made it the focus for political unrest. The domination by extreme parties on the left and on the right increased political tensions. The NSDAP tapped into the existing anti-Semitism in Germany; the Jews became scapegoats to blame in post-WWI Germany.

Time

During the introduction of the 'official' Nazi swastika through Hitler's ascension to power in 1933, the party had limited access to official communication channels, but relied on rallies featuring flags and posters, public speeches, newspapers, and books. Once they gained political control, all available communication channels were used; this included official government communication, military and paramilitary organizations, party organization, mass media, and less traditional communication channels. Among these were postage stamps.

The analysis revealed content areas featured during the early (pre-war) stage of Nazi rule: saturation of symbols, myth development, and the values of stability and unity. As the war became imminent and anti-Semitism blatant, other motifs were added: military strength, soldiers, youth, Aryanism, and patriotism. Once the tide began to turn, the swastika became

less visible. The economic hardship of war, allied bombings, and an awareness of defeat changed attitudes towards the Nazis. These changes made the display of the swastika inappropriate. As the final days drew near the swastika became less apparent in Germany.

The stamps from this period were printed on cheap paper with poor quality ink. Overprinting stamps was a reminder of Germany's past disasters. Thematically, they reflect the focus on Aryanism, Patriotism, Volunteerism and Youth. However, towards the end of the war the eagle was more prominent than the swastika in the stamps.

Receiver

The Nazis persuaded their audience through mass media and traditional propaganda tools. Their media campaign won people over and gained compliance from others. They reached people in all walks of life by controlling print, film and radio. They removed signs of opposition, such as crosses and communist signs. The void was filled by the swastika.

Channel

Through persuasion tools, mass media and everyday channels, the Nazi swastika became a sign of nationalism, patriotism and hope. The Nazi regime transformed the "meaning" of the old swastika through transculturation.

This transculturation process, showing that time, environment and the reciprocal relationship of function, framing, content, and receiver (through the constant interaction of function, visual framing, content, environment, time, receiver, and channel), suggests that meaning is dynamic and subject to change. Figure 17 indicates their interrelatedness; converged in the "right" place and the "right" time for an unprecedented impact. It is clear that transculturation determines the relative importance and constellation of these factors.

Figure 17. *Factors Influencing Meaning*

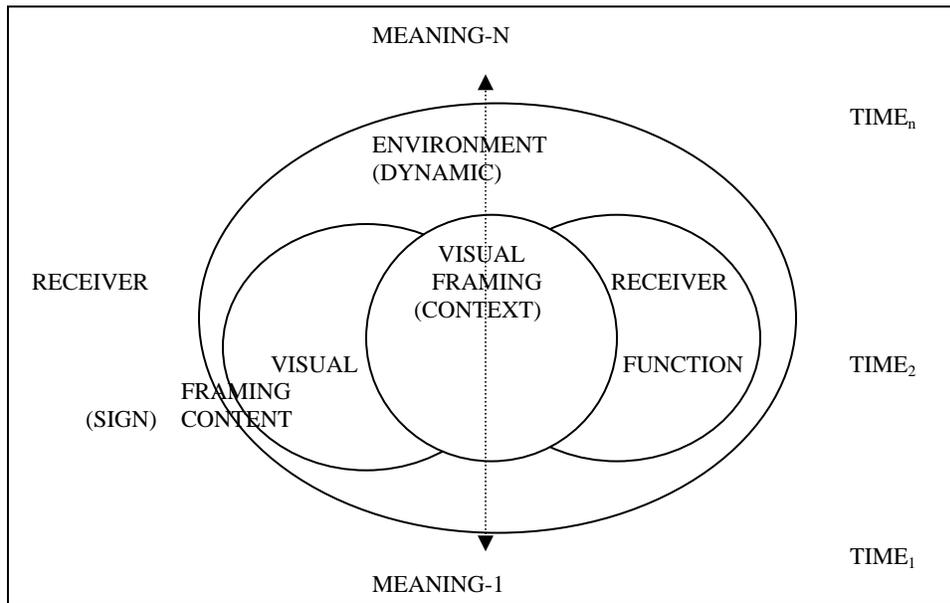


Figure 17 demonstrates that two factors emerged as dominant in meaning creation: visual framing of the sign and the function. This study revealed a reciprocal relationship between the two factors, they are co-determinate. The Nazis used the swastika (sign) on the stamps (function) to spread their propaganda. During the waning years of Nazi rule the Nazi swastika played a minor role in stamps designed for the general public, yet continued to be a strong presence on the stamps for the military to inspire the soldiers to keep fighting.

Sign and function both influence the contextual visual framing and the content. The propaganda message of the Nazi swastika on the Nazi-era stamp was enhanced by visual framing (design) and content (myth, history, nationalism and patriotism). As interdependent factors in the placement of the Nazi swastika they relied on the content and vice versa.

Time and the Environment are dynamic influences on receiver meaning. As time passes, the environment (Germany) changes (the Nazis come to power, WWII breaks out) and this affects the receiver's (German population) interpretation of the meaning of the Nazi swastika (e.g., from a sign of hope in the future to a sign of disillusionment).

Based on the study results, a preliminary Model of Transculturation was proposed (Figure 18): the meaning attached to the hybrid (i.e., the sign created from the mingling of local and foreign cultures) evolves over time in a dynamic environment. This study has shown that the Nazis took the swastika (hybrid) from a variety of local and foreign sources and adapted it to fit into their goals for Germany (Environment) during a time when the population was susceptible to new influences (Time). The hybrid Nazi swastika carried meanings, which changed over time as a result of historical events (History).

Figure 18: *Model of Transculturation*

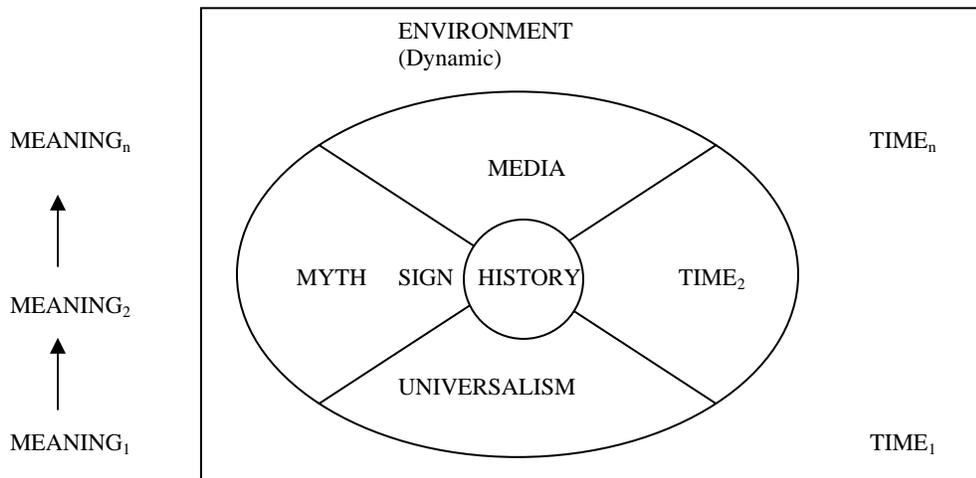


Figure 18 represents a specific application of Figure 17. Figure 17 illustrates how meaning develops, in a general sense, while Figure 18 demonstrates how meaning is created through the transculturation process. Table 2 represents a comparison of both models. The common factors are Environment and Time. Communication is dynamic and occurs within a certain place (Germany), and time (1923-1948, i.e. post-WWI through defeat and occupation).

Table 2. *Comparison of Models*

Factors Influencing Meaning Model	Model of Transculturation
Environment (Dynamic)	Environment (Dynamic)
Time _{1-n}	Time _{1-n}
Function	Media
Visual Framing (Context and Sign)	Universalism
Content	Myth
Content	History

Nazi stamps were among the extensive network of media channels used to spread Nazi ideology. The scope of their influence crossed linguistic and cultural borders enhanced by visual communication tools such as the Nazi swastika. The Nazis effectively applied universal design features such as composition, form and color to manipulate the way the swastika was seen and perceived (Universalism). The Visual Framing of the Context and the swastika itself (Sign) was intentionally designed to have the maximum affect on the viewer.

Myth and history are interrelated because mythology is the result of historical events or situations. Nordic mythology developed from stories about the Vikings. The Nazis drew on these stories along with medieval lore. They combined historical fact, canonization of personages, and attributes of piety, bravery, and accomplishment. Nazi propaganda took various foreign and domestic elements and systematically adapted and transformed them to create a sign with uniquely German meaning.

The results of this study help us understand how the meaning of the swastika was transformed and manipulated to serve the Nazi regime; a dark age in human history. Research constraints are due to the historical nature of this phenomenon, the limited availability of primary sources, and the complexity of the process. Available sources were original; but they represent a limited sample of stamps available during the Nazi era. Furthermore, limited information is available about the actual usage of the stamps, and their impact on the users and collectors. Stamps were a small part of the Nazi propaganda strategy. It is difficult to determine which role they played in helping to maintain all-encompassing grip on German society. Finally, because transculturation is an emerging intercultural communication concept more studies are needed to fully test the model.

Because the study of transculturation is a new interdisciplinary development, we hope this preliminary model will serve as a starting point for future work. A clearer understanding of causal relationships, sequence, and relative importance of the factors would increase the validity of the model. Future research should also explore questions such as "How did Germans respond to the swastika before and during the Nazi period?" and "What were purchase and usage patterns for stamps?" Moreover, the controversy surrounding the meaning associated with the swastika developed since the Nazis made this transculturated sign an ominous focal point of world history. Groups in different nations are re-claiming the original local meaning for the swastika as a beneficent sign. Taking a sign from another culture and transforming its meaning inadvertently results in an intercultural dialogue.

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