

2012

# The Power of Design in Nazi Anti-Bolshevik Propaganda, 1937-1943

Grace Janzen  
*Ouachita Baptist University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors\\_theses](https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses)

Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), and the [Political History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Janzen, Grace, "The Power of Design in Nazi Anti-Bolshevik Propaganda, 1937-1943" (2012). *Honors Theses*. 39.  
[https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors\\_theses/39](https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses/39)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Carl Goodson Honors Program at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact [mortensona@obu.edu](mailto:mortensona@obu.edu).

# **SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL**

This Honors thesis entitled

**“The Power of Design in Nazi Anti-Bolshevik Propaganda,  
1937-1943”**

written by

**Grace Janzen**

and submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for completion of  
the Carl Goodson Honors Program  
meets the criteria for acceptance  
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

Dr. Kevin Motl, thesis director

Dr. Bethany Hicks, second reader

Mr. Donnie Copeland, third reader

Dr. Barbara Pemberton, Honors Program director

April 16, 2012

THE POWER OF DESIGN IN NAZI ANTI-BOLSHEVIK PROPAGANDA, 1937-1943

GRACE JANZEN

THESIS PAPER

CARL GOODSON HONORS PROGRAM

OUACHITA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

SPRING 2012

The Nazi regime has gone down in infamy as one of the most self-consciously coercive regimes in history. When studying the National Socialists, men of power and influence are found in abundance. Individuals such as Hitler, Himmler and Hess receive credit for the influence they held over German society during that era. Organizations of individuals, such as the SA and SS, are also well recognized for their ability to control the masses. But in analysis of power during Nazi rule, one group is almost universally overlooked: the designers and graphic artists of the Ministry of Propaganda. The Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, and his extraordinary execution of thorough propaganda campaigns have been discussed in detail. But few consider the subtle yet powerful effects of visual communication in Nazi poster propaganda and the tremendous influence of men like Hans "Mjölnir" Schweitzer, one of the most renowned designers employed by the Ministry of Propaganda. Their work was vital to the production of materials through which the Nazis virtually controlled the opinions of the nation. The contributions of men such as Schweitzer significantly contributed to the success of Nazi poster propaganda by emphasizing specific messages expressed in the pieces through visual communication, often in a manner not consciously noticed by the viewer.

The use of racial propaganda was a prominent component of Nazi rule in Germany. Through its use, the Nazis gained the ability to shape and mold the public opinion toward specific population groups seen as threatening to the Nazi conceptualization of a new Aryan German identity. The group most famously targeted by Nazi propaganda was the Jews. However, while anti-Semitic propaganda was most definitely prevalent in Nazi Germany, propaganda was also leveled against the Bolsheviks. From the 1920s on, with a brief remission in the years between 1939 and 1941, anti-Bolshevik propaganda was widespread in Germany. The general messages that the Nazi party intended to communicate about the Bolsheviks in their propaganda, and

specifically through the posters they circulated, were often apparent through the text. But these messages were also expanded and reinforced through visual communication. An analysis of the elements of design used in Nazi anti-Bolshevik poster propaganda reveals the underlying assertions the Nazi party desired to communicate to its viewers about the Bolsheviks.

A number of books and articles have been written about Nazi propaganda from a historical perspective. Most of these deal with the types of propaganda that the Nazis used, the messages that they intended to convey, and the historical context of the propaganda pieces. Joseph Goebbels and the Ministry of Propaganda are also well represented in historiographic literature. Several writers have even explored the use of visual propaganda and symbolism in Nazi Germany as advertising and branding campaigns. Two notable examples of this type of work are B.J. Altenhofen's article, "Solace in Symbols: Discovering Cultural Meanings in Symbolic Propaganda"<sup>1</sup> and an article by Nicholas O'Shaughnessy entitled "Selling Hitler: propaganda and the Nazi brand"<sup>2</sup>. These works examine the National Socialists as an historical example of a marketing campaign and review the methods of establishing the Nazi party brand, of which the visual elements were a component. But the main focus of these works is the broad topic of marketing, and do not address the graphic design elements specifically. While there are

---

<sup>1</sup> This article provides an examination of the I♥NY logo as a piece of propaganda from a historical sociological perspective. Altenhofen discusses the cultural background of New York City at the time the logo was designed, and points out how design elements were used to send messages that the state of New York believed would increase tourism. The article involves Nazi propaganda by drawing comparisons between the techniques used in the I♥NY logo and visual symbols used by the German National Socialists, most notably the use of hyperbole and the "bandwagon technique".

<sup>2</sup> O'Shaughnessy's article examines the Nazi party as a marketing campaign. He outlines the "product" (the ideology of Hitler and the National Socialists), and then looks at Nazi propaganda as the marketing tool used to sell the product to the German people. The article discusses the messages the Nazis intended to market through propaganda, and the use of Jews and Bolsheviks as "the enemy" to create fear, thus making the "product" of Nazi ideology more appealing.

plenty of published works that discuss the historical context of Nazi propaganda and the messages behind the propaganda pieces, there is nothing that specifically analyzes the visual elements and design principles that were used to enhance these messages. The purpose of this essay is to synthesize the historical context and graphic design elements of Nazi anti-Bolshevik propaganda and bridge the gap between historiography and visual analysis.

\* \* \* \*

In order to uncover the visual communication embedded in the propaganda of the Nazi party regarding the Bolsheviks, one must consider the historical context of the propaganda pieces. The functioning of the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda as well as the changes in the political relationship between Germany and the Soviet Union play an important role in determining the meanings that were conveyed through the use of design principles in Nazi propaganda.

The *Reichspropagandaleitung*—Nazi Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda— was a very organized operation, in which Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, micromanaged every aspect. The use of propaganda by a modern government was still relatively novel, having been developed most significantly during World War I. In the time between 1914 and 1918, both the Central Powers and the Allies began to employ propaganda in their war efforts. Propaganda fulfilled several different functions when used by the governments during the war. It was used by both sides to “rally the home front and the soldiery in support of the war, maintain or boost morale, weaken the enemy’s will to fight, and win over public opinion in neutral countries.”<sup>3</sup> Anti-German propaganda was used to great effect by the Allies in World War I, and Hitler remembered the successful tactics of the United States and Britain when integrating the use of propaganda into his own regime. Hitler established the German Ministry of

---

<sup>3</sup> Steven Luckert and Susan Bachrach, *State of Deception: the power of Nazi propaganda* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009), 2.

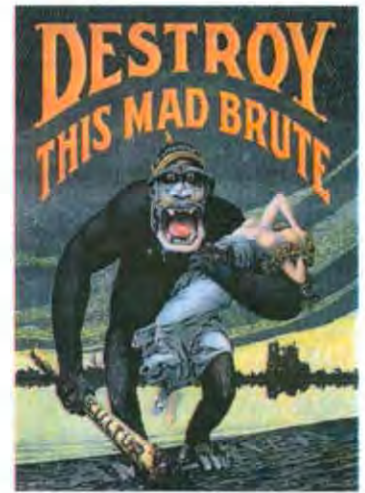


Propaganda when he became Chancellor in 1933. Its approach to creating propaganda messages was heavily influenced by what Hitler deemed to be the successful strategies of British and American anti-German propaganda in World War I, which, in his mind, significantly contributed to the German defeat. He outlined these reasons for British and American propaganda success in *Mein Kampf*, and Goebbels incorporated these strategies into Nazi propaganda in World War II. Chief among these methods were the simplistic, emotional, straightforward presentation of content, the emphasis on a few key points, the honing in on one common enemy, and the dehumanizing and demonizing of that enemy.<sup>4</sup>

The Ministry of Propaganda used a variety of outlets to spread propaganda to the German people. While the visual aspects of propaganda were manifested mostly through posters and film,

Nazi propagandists also used radio and campaign speeches, books, placards, leaflets, brochures and word of mouth as methods by which to influence public opinion. Goebbels was very aware of the German public mindset on issues, and the propaganda campaigns reflected and directed these opinions. He held conferences almost daily in which he communicated with the leaders of the Ministry of Propaganda the messages that were to be conveyed through the various types of propaganda to present a unified campaign.

In the messages of Nazi anti-Bolshevik propaganda, there was a strong and conscious association between Bolshevism and the Jews, thus combining two of the Nazi party's enemies to create one enemy that the German people could rally against. This affiliation was



World War I recruitment poster for the United States Army. Hitler and Goebbels appropriated the use of emotionalism and dehumanization of the enemy in early American propaganda for the production of Nazi propaganda.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 14.

accomplished by the claim that “the Bolsheviks were the archetypes of ‘Jewish criminality’, the scum of subhumanity, an anti-world of loathsome hatred and perverted envy, committed to the destruction of everything good and beautiful.”<sup>5</sup> Historian Robert E. Herzstein also put forth that Bolshevism was “a doctrine which secures the World War of the Jews.”<sup>6</sup> In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler asserted that “[Germans] ought to recognize the kind of attempt which is being made by the Jews in the twentieth century to secure dominion over the world.”<sup>7</sup> He claimed that they had begun this campaign in Russia, and were next turning their sights to Germany.

The use of anti-Bolshevik propaganda by the Nazis mirrored the political relationship of Germany and the Soviet Union. In the time between the world wars, there was strain between Germany and the Bolsheviks. German feelings toward Russians had traditionally been “a mixture of superiority and fear.”<sup>8</sup> Very early in the existence of the Nazi party, Bolshevism was targeted as an enemy. Anthony R. Rhodes, a British scholar, states that, “by 1921, anti-Communism was firmly established as one of the major themes of Nazi propaganda.”<sup>9</sup> Anti-Bolshevik propaganda addressed the Bolsheviks as both a political entity and a racial group. The National Socialists emphasized the “stab-in-the-back” legend to enhance the negative feelings of the German public toward communism, especially during their campaign for power. According to this legend, the reason for the German defeat in World War I and the resulting harsh repercussions against German was the betrayal of German leftists.<sup>10</sup> This marked the beginning of Nazi mistrust of and animosity towards communism. After the Treaty of Non-Aggression

---

<sup>5</sup> Robert Edwin Herzstein, *The War That Hitler Won: Goebbels and the Nazi Media Campaign* (New York: Paragon House, 1987), 351.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 364-5.

<sup>7</sup> Zhynek A.B. Zeman, *Nazi Propaganda* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 84.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Richard Rhodes, *Propaganda* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1976), 37.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Binyon. “Bitterness of defeat may be directed at the West.” *The Times (United Kingdom)*, n.d. *Newspaper Source*. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.



between Germany and the Soviet Union was signed in 1939, the production of anti-Bolshevik propaganda ceased, though Goebbels made an effort to keep the separation between the Germans and Russians prevalent. Though the Bolsheviks were no longer portrayed as a dangerous enemy, the racial differences between Germans and Soviet Slavs were emphasized in order to keep the separation between the two groups. "Goebbels, who evidently saw the pact from the outset for what it really was — a political-power alliance for a limited period — and therefore tried to prevent the emergence of a pro-soviet climate of opinion."<sup>11</sup> This approach made it easier for the Ministry of Propaganda in 1941, when the Germans launched Operation Barbarossa, to revert back to anti-Bolshevik materials, though this time with a different angle.

In Goebbels' conference with leaders of the Ministry of Propaganda on 5 July 1941, he outlined the Nazis' revised approach to Jewish-Bolshevism:

Germany's squaring of accounts with Moscow is now uncovering and unmasking the greatest Jewish swindle of all times. The 'workers' paradise' is now revealed to the world as a gigantic system of cheats and exploiters, in which the workers are compelled by the most bloody terrorization to live in an indescribably pitiful existence in inhuman conditions. This system where Jews, capitalists and Bolsheviks work hand in glove, has created a quite inconceivable degree of human depravity. What millions of German troops are seeing there today is a picture of the lowest possible social living standard — from the pitiful hovels and lice-ridden homes, neglected roads and filthy villages to the bestial drabness of their entire existence. By means of their diabolical system of Bolshevism, the Jews have cast the people of the Soviet Union into this unspeakable condition of deepest human misery. The mask has now been torn off this greatest confidence trick ever practiced in the history of mankind. The struggle in the East means the liberation of mankind from its crime.<sup>12</sup>

Goebbels used information of conditions in the Soviet Union, which German soldiers saw as they marched through the country as evidence against Jews and Bolsheviks. This evidence of the

---

<sup>11</sup> Willi A. Boelcke, ed., "Praised be what makes us hard," in *The Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels: The Nazi Propaganda War, 1939-43*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Ewald Osers (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970), 16.

<sup>12</sup> Willi A. Boelcke, ed., "The veil drops," in *The Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels: The Nazi Propaganda War, 1939-43*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Ewald Osers (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970), 177.

effects of Bolshevism, which was attributed to Jewish influence, resulted in two main messages that were sent through Nazi propaganda. First was the continued emphasis of the contrast between the Slavs, who were vulnerable to the influence of Bolshevism, and the Germans. This focus coincided with the second emphasis, which was the ineffective and destructive nature of Bolshevism. These two themes were used not necessarily to generate feelings of hostility towards the Russian people in general, but to steer public opinion away from Bolshevik sympathies. "There is only one slogan which must be proclaimed again and again, and that is our fight against Bolshevism," Goebbels asserted during another Ministry of Propaganda conference. "Today Russia is waging her war under the slogan of nationalism and can therefore find support among all sections of the nation. Our propaganda slogan for the East must therefore be that we are not against the Russian nation but only against Bolshevism."<sup>13</sup> Goebbels also likened the Bolsheviks both to bacterium and to rats, which can survive in worse conditions than domestic animals because they are used to living among filth.<sup>14</sup> These comparisons were also translated into visual associations in poster propaganda.

Following the German defeat at Stalingrad, anti-Bolshevik messages became the primary focus of Nazi propaganda. On 12 February 1943, just after the German army surrendered at Stalingrad, Goebbels urged the leaders of the Ministry of Propaganda that "the struggle against Bolshevism and the danger of the Bolshevization of Europe are at present occupying our friends and enemies in an equal measure. Our struggle against Bolshevism must now dominate all

---

<sup>13</sup> Willi A. Boelcke, ed., "Do you want total war?," in *The Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels: The Nazi Propaganda War, 1939-43*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Ewald Osers (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970), 320.

<sup>14</sup> Willi A. Boelcke, ed., "Don't be too fair," in *The Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels: The Nazi Propaganda War, 1939-43*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Ewald Osers (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970), 254-5.

propaganda media as the great and all-pervading propaganda theme."<sup>15</sup> Goebbels also emphasized the importance of Nazi propaganda using the fear of Bolsheviks overrunning Germany as incentive to maintain support for the German army. "The theme 'Europe as a Russian slave camp,' which Goebbels played on right up to the end, was undoubtedly effective in keeping the Germans fighting. 'Strength through fear' he called it."<sup>16</sup> The Ministry of Propaganda used these fundamental themes to spread a picture of what could become of Germany. "If the Russians penetrated into Germany, [Goebbels] warned, the young German manhood would be carried off to Siberia while her womanhood would be delivered to the lust of savages from the steppes."<sup>17</sup> And, the Nazis added, the destruction and decimation would not stop in Germany. Hitler asserted that "the Jewish-Bolshevik rulers alone have endeavored, from Moscow during the past two decades, to set on fire not only Germany, but the whole of Europe."<sup>18</sup> In order to prove this point, and to counter the spreading rumor that the Bolsheviks would only kill those in the Nazi party, Goebbels encouraged the spread of propaganda that showed victims who were "workers and other members of the broad masses in the territories overrun by the Bolsheviks."<sup>19</sup> The German defeat at Stalingrad and the fear it produced within the Nazi party heavily influenced the messages of their anti-Bolshevik propaganda, both in textual content and visual communication.

\* \* \* \*

In order to convey messages about the Bolsheviks in their propaganda, the Ministry of Propaganda employed certain established fundamentals of design in their posters. The use of

---

<sup>15</sup> Boelcke, "Do you want total war?", 330.

<sup>16</sup> Rhodes, 37.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Zeman, 100-1.

<sup>19</sup> Boelcke, "Do you want total war?", 333.

these fundamentals allowed the Nazis to emphasize and reinforce the messages that were spread throughout their propaganda campaigns. Some visual messages were more obvious than others. Since visual communication through design was not an area in which the typical German civilian was proficient, the messages were often arrived at subconsciously. Knowledge of design and the methods of visual communication can help one discern how the themes the Nazis intended to transmit regarding the Bolsheviks were infused into the visual design and layout of Nazi propaganda posters.

There are five basic principles of design: unity, emphasis, balance, rhythm and contrast. In addition, there are other theories of design that can contribute to visual communication. Two important theories for the analysis of Nazi propaganda are those of color and eyeflow. The use of these principles and theories, and the successful interaction between them achieve visual communication. There are also rules that accompany the use of the principles of design, and the intentional breaking of these guidelines creates tension and discord in a composition, which can serve just as much to communicate as following the rules.

The principle of unity creates the feeling that all the elements that are contained in a piece belong together and were meant to be in the composition. "Unity means that a congruity or agreement exists among the elements in a design; they look as though they belong together, as though some visual connection beyond mere chance has caused them to come together."<sup>20</sup> Unity can be created by placing the elements in the same area of a composition, by repeating the same element, sometimes with a variation, or by connecting the elements of a composition by eyeflow.

The principle of emphasis is crucial to design, and especially for the designers of Nazi propaganda. Emphasis reveals the object that should be considered of greatest importance in a

---

<sup>20</sup> David A. Lauer and Stephen Pentak, *Design Basics*, (Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008), 27.

composition. A focal point is made to stand out from the rest of the piece, either by being a different color or value than its surrounding, or by a differentiation in size. A designer may also use eyeflow to direct the viewer's attention to the focal point, or literally set the object apart by isolating it from everything else in the piece in order to draw attention to it. By making one part of a piece stand out, the principle of emphasis shows the viewer what to think of as the most important element of the composition.

Balance in terms of design can be defined as "the distribution of visual weight within a composition."<sup>21</sup> If a composition is balanced, the "visual weight", or attention that is attracted from each element, will be equal on both sides of the piece (top and bottom, or right and left). A balanced image presents the message of stability and security. When a composition is unbalanced, "a certain vague uneasiness or dissatisfaction results. We feel the need to rearrange the elements in the same way that we automatically straighten a picture on the wall."<sup>22</sup> Balance can be either symmetrical, in which both sides contain the same elements in the same pattern, or asymmetrical, which is composed of different elements that are arranged in a way that draws equal attention to both sides of the composition. This type of balance can be achieved through color, pattern, or the negative space (areas that surround the item). By either making the composition balanced, or intentionally removing the stability that a balanced piece produces, a designer can impress a mood or feeling upon his viewer, simply by being aware of where he places each piece of his design.

Rhythm, in the context of design, refers to the movement of the viewer's eye across a piece and the repetition of elements throughout the eyes' path. The "rhythm" that the elements create for the eye can be smooth, spread out and flowing, or very regulated and even regimented.

---

<sup>21</sup> Lauer and Pentak, 90.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 90.



The later gives a piece a structured, planned look, while the former creates a sense of disorganization or improvisation.

The final principle of design is contrast. In a composition, "Contrast stresses the visual differences in size, shape and color between the elements to enhance the perception of a message intended. Contrast also draws and directs viewer's attention to specific areas of information."<sup>23</sup> Contrast is used to articulate the hierarchy of importance of the components of a piece to the viewer. It can be achieved by varying the size, shape, value or color of an object, and can be used to create a focal point or to direct eyeflow.

In addition to the principles of design there are theories of design, two of which are especially important to the analysis of Nazi propaganda and the messages regarding the Bolsheviks that were intended to be sent through the visual aspects of their design. The first of these theories is color. Each color contains three properties: hue, value and saturation or intensity. Hue is the technical term for what is generally meant by referring to "color". Red, orange, yellow and green are examples of hue. The term "color" refers to the more specific variation of a hue, depending on its value and intensity. The value of a color measures the lightness or darkness of a hue. Adding white to a pure hue is referred to as tinting, while adding black is known as shading. The value of a color increases or decreases depending on the amount of white or black it contains. The final property of color is intensity, or the brightness of a color. The intensity- or perceived intensity- of a hue is affected by its complement. According to color theory, a hue's complement is its opposite on the color wheel. Thus, red and green, orange and blue, yellow and violet, are complementary hues. Mixing a hue with its complement will decrease the intensity of the color. Eventually, if enough of the complementary hue is added, the

---

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Resnick, *Design for Communication: conceptual graphic design basics* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 25.

color will become grey or brown. On the other hand, a color's intensity may be visually increased so the color appears brighter and more vibrant by placing it next to its complement. Color theory and the interaction between colors play very important roles in visual communication, especially in the works of Nazi poster propaganda.

A second theory that is valuable in the analysis of the visual communication of Nazi propaganda is that of eyeflow. A designer considers what he puts in a composition, and where he places it in order to first draw the viewer's attention to the piece and then direct the eye through the piece, usually ending with or returning to the focal point. Eyeflow can be conducted through lines, real or implied, from one object to the next, or the arrangement of shapes. When a human or animal is depicted in a composition, the viewer naturally tends to look at the eyes first, then follow the line of sight of the image. A designer can use this knowledge to direct eyeflow in a piece that includes living creatures.

The interaction of the principles of design rarely stand on their own. Most often, the elements of the principles overlap multiple times in one composition. For example, color can be used to create a focal point, while simultaneously creating a sense of unity through the color scheme. The arrangement of identical objects can establish unity, balance and rhythm. Although individually defined, the principles of design interact and intertwine with each other to communicate through a design piece.

Knowing the principles of design is necessary to understanding the visual communication a piece contains. However, it is also important to understand that these principles can be fluid in their application and interpretation. Because of the unique elements in a composition and the varying interaction between the different parts and principles contained in a design piece, generalized translation of visual communication cannot be cleanly applied to every design. But if

one understands that the individual elements of a composition were arranged as they were for a reason and is aware of the principles of design, underlying messages intended by the designer can be uncovered.

• • • •

With knowledge of the elements of design, it is possible to analyze the visual aspect of what the piece is communicating, and the extent to which Nazi designers infused their compositions with elements that produced extremely negative messages regarding the Bolsheviks becomes very apparent. The following analysis uses examples of Nazi anti-Bolshevik propaganda to illustrate the ways in which the Nazi propaganda office used design elements in their posters.

Two examples of Nazi anti-Bolshevik propaganda come from the Great Anti-Bolshevik Show. This exhibition was a collection of propaganda pieces created by the Central Propaganda Office, and traveled to major German cities in order to spread the information through the Reich. The exhibition was set up as an educational exhibit of materials, and was accompanied by a booklet discussing what the Nazis claimed was the dangerous nature and negative effects of Bolshevism in Russia. It also served to draw connections between the concept of Bolshevism and the Jews. The exhibit was displayed throughout Germany from 1937 until 1939, when anti-Bolshevik propaganda went dormant as a result of the Hitler-Stalin pact.

The poster for the Great Anti-Bolshevik show in Berlin (Image A) is an example of how visual elements were used to spread meaning in Nazi propaganda. The artist is unknown, but because it was a product of the Propaganda Office, Goebbels would have approved the piece before it was displayed for the public. The title of the poster is "Bolshevism Unmasked". The program that accompanied the exhibit expounded upon the idea of the "mask" that the show—

supposedly—removed. Soviet Russia was called the “worker’s paradise”. However, the propaganda pamphlet states that “Behind this peaceful mask of an impossible and insane vision of human happiness... was the foundation of the Jewry’s plan to build an secure world rule”, and that “Incapable of any creative accomplishments, [Russia’s Jewish leaders] destroy all social order, destroy all culture and all ethnic life, creating chaos in which humanity threatens to collapse.”<sup>24</sup> The poster reflects the argument that the Bolshevik is responsible for death and destruction of civilization. The poster sends the message that if Bolshevism spreads, communists will kill and destroy anything in their path. The artist uses the visual elements of line/eyeflow, perspective, color and contrast to send these messages. There is an implied line from the head of the dead man in the bottom left corner that continues upward and diagonally through the Bolshevik’s robe to the whip, and ends in the upper right corner at the Bolshevik’s face and upraised hand. This creates a visual connection between the Bolshevik’s actions and the death of the man in the lower left. The entire composition accentuates this line, through the flames in the background and the Bolshevik’s body. This line also adds to the element of perspective, which makes the Bolshevik appear to be larger than life and looming over his victims. The colors that are used also add to the visual message that is sent through the poster. Red and green are complementary colors, and so when placed next to each other, as they are in the dead man’s skin, his blood and the flames in the background, they make each other appear more vibrant. The red makes the tinted green skin appear sickly, and the low-saturation green contrasts with the highly saturated red of the blood, making it look more vibrant and shocking. The contrast between the light colors used in the victims and the dark colors used on the Bolshevik also add to the negative

---

<sup>24</sup> Randall Bytwerk, “The Great Anti-Bolshevist Exhibition,” 1937, accessed 14 April 2012; available from <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/anti-bolshevism.htm>; Internet.

message that is sent through this poster about the Bolsheviks, along with other pieces in the Great Anti-Bolshevik Show.

The Great Anti-Bolshevik Show contained other anti-Bolshevik propaganda posters created by the Nazis. The poster advertizing the exhibition (Image B) also demonstrates how visual elements were used to convey messages in Nazi propaganda. As with the previous image, the artist of for this poster is unknown, but it was also part of the Great Anti-Bolshevist Exhibition that was created by the Central Propaganda Office in 1937. The poster sends the message that it is the Bolshevik goal to take over the world. This reflects the message that the Nazi party attempted to spread about the Bolsheviks, and complements the content of the Great Anti-Bolshevism Exhibition. The artist uses complementary colors to make the redish-orange stand out more and appear more vibrant. By using a human skull for the spider's head, the artist gives the villain human qualities (or gives the Bolshevik negative, spider-like qualities). There are also significant messages associated with the image of the spider. By using a spider to represent Bolshevism, the propaganda poster connects the negative aspects of spiders to the Nazi's enemy. The spider can be linked to the idea of a predator that is about to kill and eat its prey, the association with being trapped in a web, and the dangerous, poisonous nature of spiders. By using a spider to visually represent the Bolsheviks, the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda linked the Bolsheviks to negative ideas of domination and death. The artist also added an element of discomfort by portraying the Bolshevik spider much larger than life. In addition to giving the spider the appearance of overshadowing its victims, this deliberate skewing of proportion visually reiterates the message that the Bolsheviks intended to take over the entire world.



Another poster that emphasizes the claim that world domination was the goal of Jewish Bolsheviks is "The Jewish Conspiracy against Europe" (Image C). This poster was distributed in France in 1943 during the German occupation. The intended audience was the citizens of occupied France, and was circulated in order to justify the harassment and deportation of Jews that occurred, and to lend credibility to preexisting stereotypes and intolerance of Jews in France.<sup>25</sup> As propaganda, the image served as an attempt to connect the alliance between Great Britain and the Soviet Union with a malicious Jewish plan of domination. This message is iterated both through the text and the visual elements.

There are several visual elements in play that assist in the communication of the message of the intended domination of the Jews through Bolshevism. The emphasis of the piece is the slyly smiling Jewish face at the top of the piece. The viewer's eye is directed by the implied line of the Jew's line of sight to the center of the poster, where the personified Britain and Soviet Union are shake hands. Because of the line of perspective, the clasped hands appear to be closer to the viewer than their bodies, thus emphasizing the fact that they have just made an agreement. The piece has a nearly symmetrical visual balance, with one person on each of the sides of the composition, and text situated on the top and bottom of the poster. In the center of the poster, the Jew's face and the handshake on top are balanced by the large landmass of Europe underneath. Color also plays an important role in the visual communication that takes place in this piece. "The design is well executed, with excellent use made of the contrasts between the clear blue of the sea, the deep red of Great Britain and Soviet Russia, and the steely grey of Hitler's Europe."<sup>26</sup> In addition to the contrasting hues, the interaction between the differing saturations and values

---

<sup>25</sup> Peter Young, ed., *Illustrated World War II Encyclopedia* Vol. 24 (H.S. Stuttman, Inc, 1978), 3286.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

contribute interesting visual messages to the piece. The Jew is surrounded by a dark value, which gives him an ominous appearance. Also, by using highly saturated colors of blue, red and yellow for most of the composition, then depicting the Jew with a low-saturated, light tint of green makes the Jew appear sickly and diseased in comparison to the other elements of the composition. Throughout the elements that appear in this poster, negative visual messages regarding both Jews and Bolsheviks that were intended for the occupied French are apparent.

Another anti-Bolshevik propaganda poster that was distributed in a German-occupied territory was entitled "Never!" (Image D). This was designed in 1941 and circulated in occupied Belorussia after the Germans began their invasion of Russia. The intent of the poster was to sway public opinion toward the Germans.<sup>27</sup> The text reads "Germany is fighting and your efforts will save Europe from Bolshevism."<sup>28</sup> The image of the poster coincides with the message that Bolshevism was deadly and to be feared. In the piece, Bolshevism is shown as a ravaging wolf. The focal point of the poster is the wolf's vibrantly red, bloody mouth. From the focal point, the eye is drawn upward toward the wolf's eyes and the hammer and sickle emblem stamped on the forehead, thus distinguishing it as Bolshevik. From there, the viewer's eye follows the line of the wolf's body to the skull at its feet, and finally to the text at the bottom of the poster. The elements of the image at the top of the poster are balanced by the dark text at the bottom. Contrast plays a significant role in the visual communication of this piece. By making the upper right corner of the poster dark, the artist creates the illusion that the wolf is emerging from a dark and dangerous place. The majority of the composition has very little color, and what color is used is dull and washed-out. This makes the vibrant red of the wolf's mouth to appear even more red, bloody and shocking.

---

<sup>27</sup> Young, 3284.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

The final poster in this analysis is titled "Victory or Bolshevism!" (Image E). The poster was designed by Hans Schweitzer who was one of the most renowned graphic artists for the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda. This poster was created as part of a propaganda campaign in 1943 after the Germans were defeated at Stalingrad. The campaign was organized by the Nazi Central Propaganda Office in response to the German defeat by the Russians.

As part of the campaign that it was created for, the poster is used to inspire Germans to fight against the Russians after the defeat at Stalingrad. The poster vilifies the Bolsheviks and presents an ultimatum between winning and being overcome by Bolshevism. The message that is sent is that Bolshevism will lead to death and destruction. This is communicated through visual contrast between the lightness of the German side and the darkness of the Bolshevik side of the poster. This contrast visually emphasizes the dichotomies of the Germans and Bolsheviks. On the left side of the poster, the German is presented as feminine, vulnerable and endangered by the masculine brutality of the male Bolshevik representation on the opposite side of the poster. The Germans, depicted as a smiling mother and child, are visually associated with happiness and nurturing, which contrast strongly with the distressed and deprived images linked with Bolshevism. The Bolshevik is also visually shown as filthy and unkempt, while the Germans are clean and tidy. The emphasized contrast between the Germans and Bolsheviks in this poster is accentuated through the visual contrasts the poster contains.

The poster embodies the ideal that a German defeat would result in the rise of communism, and that this would in turn bring death, disease and destruction on Germany, as well as the violation of Aryan purity. The message would still be clear to the audience during the original campaign, but they may not have jumped directly to the conclusion that this poster was propaganda and that the Nazi party was trying to influence them against the Bolsheviks.

Through the use of the elements of design, the propagandists of the Nazi party emphasized and reiterated the messages that were communicated in the text of anti-Bolshevik propaganda posters. Because the visual aspects of the posters were not often analyzed by the audience, the communication of the design was more subtle and easily accepted than verbal or written words because it affected the subconscious feelings and thoughts. The points that were made by the posters reflected the themes of the Nazis regarding Bolshevism: that it was dangerous and would lead to death and destruction of Germans if the Jews were to fulfill their goals through Bolshevism and invade first Germany and then the rest of the world. Because designers for the Ministry of Propaganda were able to manipulate the components of each poster to visually communicate these messages in a way that subconsciously supported and extended the impact of the written propaganda, their often unacknowledged contributions were invaluable to the success of what has become known as one of the most extraordinary propaganda campaigns in history. Stephen Heller, a graphic design analyst who has researched the use of symbolism and branding in totalitarian regimes, concludes, "Graphic designers have power. They are used sometimes. They are misused sometimes. But they contribute to the power of the state. They contribute to the power of a party."<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Steven Heller, School of Visual Arts, *Paul Rand Lecture Series: Steven Heller on Branding the Totalitarian State*, video, 22:59, 27 April 2007, iTunes U.





Image A: "Bolshevism Unmasked." 1937.





Image B: "Poster for the Great Anti-Bolshevism Show." 1937.





Image C: "The Jewish Conspiracy." 1943.





Image D: "Never!" 1941.



Image E: "Victory or Bolshevism!" 1943.



### Works Cited

- Michael Binyon. "Bitterness of defeat may be directed at the West." *The Times (United Kingdom)*, n.d. *Newspaper Source*. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Willi A. Boelcke, ed. "Praised be what makes us hard," in *The Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels: the Nazi propaganda war, 1939-43*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Trans. Ewald Osers. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970. 14-26.
- Willi A. Boelcke, ed. "The veil drops," in *The Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels: the Nazi propaganda war, 1939-43*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Trans. Ewald Osers. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970. 174-89.
- Willi A. Boelcke, ed. "Do you want total war?," in *The Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels: the Nazi propaganda war, 1939-43*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Trans. Ewald Osers. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970. 312-32.
- Willi A. Boelcke, ed. "Don't be too fair," in *The Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels: the Nazi propaganda war, 1939-43*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Trans. Ewald Osers. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970. 251-81.
- Randall Bytwerk. "The Great Anti-Bolshevist Exhibition." 1937, accessed 14 April 2012; available from <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/anti-bolshevism.htm>; Internet.
- Steven Heller. School of Visual Arts. *Paul Rand Lecture Series: Steven Heller on Branding the Totalitarian State*. Video recording. 22:59. 27 April 2007. iTunes U.
- Robert Edwin Herzstein, *The War that Hitler Won: Goebbels and the Nazi media campaign*. New York: Paragon House, 1987.
- David A. Lauer and Stephen Pentak. *Design Basics*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008.
- Steven Luckert and Susan Bachrach. *State of Deception: the power of Nazi propaganda*. Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009.
- Elizabeth Resnick. *Design for Communication: conceptual graphic design basics*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003.
- Anthony Richard Rhodes. *Propaganda*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1976.
- Peter Young, ed. *Illustrated World War II Encyclopedia*. Vol. 24. H.S. Stuttman, Inc, 1978.
- Zbynek A.B. Zeman. *Nazi Propaganda*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.



## Bibliography

### *Primary Sources*

- Willi A. Boelcke, ed. *The Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels: The Nazi Propaganda War, 1939-43*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970.
- Randall Bytwerk. "Program for the exhibition *Bolshevism: The Great Anti-Bolshevist Show*," 1937, accessed 14 April 2012; available from <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/anti-bolshevism.htm>; Internet.
- Randall Bytwerk. "The Soviet Paradise" 1942, accessed 14 April 2012; available from <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/paradise.htm>; Internet.
- Randall Bytwerk. "Directive for the Anti-Bolshevist Propaganda." 1943, accessed 14 April 2012; available from <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/bolshevist.htm>; Internet.
- H.R. Hopps. "Enlistment poster." 1917. Published in *State of Deception: the power of Nazi propaganda*. Steven Lukert and Susan Bachrach. Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009. 16.
- Hans "Mjölnir" Schweitzer. "War propaganda poster, 'Victory or Bolshevism'." February 1943. Published in *State of Deception: the power of Nazi propaganda*. Steven Lukert and Susan Bachrach. Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009. 137.
- "Poster for the exhibition *Bolshevism: Great Anti-Bolshveist Show*." 1937. Published in *State of Deception: the power of Nazi propaganda*. Steven Lukert and Susan Bachrach. Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009. 65.
- "Propaganda poster, 'Bolshevism Unmasked'." 1937. Accessed 14 April 2012; available from <http://www.bytwerk.com/gpa/posters/ohneMaske.jpg>; Internet.
- "Propaganda poster, 'The Jewish conspiracy against Europe'." 1943. Published in *Illustrated World War II Encyclopedia*. Vol. 24. Peter Young, ed. H.S. Stuttman, Inc, 1978. 3287.
- "Propaganda poster, 'Never!'." 1941. Published in *Illustrated World War II Encyclopedia*. Vol. 24. Peter Young, ed. H.S. Stuttman, Inc, 1978. 3285.

### *Secondary Sources*

- B.J. Altenhofen. "Solace in Symbols: Discovering Cultural Meanings in Symbolic Propaganda." *A Review of General Semantics* 67 (2010): 156-63. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Michael Binyon. "Bitterness of defeat may be directed at the West." *The Times (United Kingdom)*, n.d. *Newspaper Source*. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

- Willi A. Boelcke, ed. *The Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels: The Nazi Propaganda War, 1939-43*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970.
- Ernest Kohn Bramsted, "The Russian Campaign: Before and After Stalingrad (1941-1943)," in *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda, 1925-1945*. n.p.: Michigan State University Press, 1965.
- Robert Edwin Herzstein, *The War that Hitler Won: Goebbels and the Nazi Media Campaign*. New York: Paragon House, 1987.
- David A. Lauer and Stephen Pentak. *Design Basics*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008.
- Steven Luckert and Susan Bachrach. *State of Deception: the power of Nazi propaganda*. Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009.
- Nicholas O'Shaughnessy. "Selling Hitler: propaganda and the Nazi brand." *Journal of Public Affairs* 9 (2009): 55-76. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Elizabeth Resnick. *Design for Communication: Conceptual Graphic Design Basics*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2003.
- Anthony Richard Rhodes. *Propaganda*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1976.
- Zbynek A.B. Zeman. *Nazi Propaganda*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.