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**The Relationship Between Volkswagen and German
National Identity**

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Introduction

The headline on the promotional packet celebrating 100 years of business for Knubel, the largest Volkswagen dealer in Germany's Münsterland region, reads, "Mit dem Käfer sind wir groß geworden" (or, "with the Beetle, we have grown up"). This admiration though, is not Knubel's alone, but it is instead shared with the entire people of the country of Germany.

For almost eighty years, Volkswagen and its automobiles have been one of the few points of national pride for Germany. When driving in Germany, it is difficult to miss the throngs of Golfs, Polos, Lupos, and Passats driving down the country's sixty-eight hundred miles of Autobahn. Volkswagen is the largest seller of automobiles in Europe's largest country, and boasts the best-selling car (the Golf) in Germany as well. Before the Golf, the Beetle, or Käfer as it is known in Germany, was not only the best-selling car in Germany, but also the world. Today's Volkswagen AG owes its entire existence to the creation of this car, which was its first model, and indeed the essence of the ideals behind the company. The Beetle was an international automotive icon, having the longest production life of any car in the world by far. In Germany though, the Beetle is a symbol of the country's struggle for survival and freedom, while representing the German traditions of automotive and industrial excellence. Now that Volkswagen AG has risen to be the fourth largest automobile maker in the world (the second largest German-based automotive firm), is partially state-owned (20% of Volkswagen is owned by the state of Niedersachsen or Lower Saxony), and one

of the country's largest employers, the relationship of Volkswagen to the German people and state is undeniably strong.

However, this relationship was not always as fruitful as it currently is. In fact, the very idea that Volkswagen is an entity and ideal owned and created by Germany is dubious at best. A glance into the past and a sight of the present reveals that Volkswagen is ill-described as "German." As Volkswagen was founded in a time in history from which the German people are trying to escape, and also as its birth and resurrection relied heavily on the influences of non-German entities, there are many contradictions which would defy such a strong relationship. Nevertheless, this connection between Volkswagen and German national identity is still very prevalent, and the reasons for this will be examined in this work.

In order to do this, the idea of national identity, especially as it pertains to Germany, will be examined. This form of identity, as we will see, must also be complimented with the notion of collective, or group, identity, as evident in this case with Volkswagen, and its connection to this national identity. As a result, we find that the collective identity of this icon (also referred to as a symbol, or brand in the context of a corporation) is a building block towards creating German national identity. Using current theories on national identity (especially those pertaining to German national identity) as a guideline, this paper will examine this relationship, in order to prove that a strong bond between Volkswagen and the national identity of Germany exists.

Das Volk and their Identity Crisis

The German people have throughout time been the epitome of a people in constant search of an identity. The divisions made and borders drawn in the dynamic history of the country, whether from outside forces or from within, have forced the German people to alter their sense of belonging in a national sense, while also greatly affecting them on a personal level. In essence, the study of German culture must be undertaken very carefully in order to capture the unique sense of identity that German history has created. Angelika Bammer describes German studies as, “the cultural construction of an understanding of Germanness and the critical interrogation of that concept.” (Denham, Kacandes, Petropoulos 32-33) In order to understand the strong relationship that has been constructed between Volkswagen and German national identity, such a critical interrogation must be done.

This concept is, as Bammer continues, “on the most general level, an inquiry into what German means: who and what is German? How so and why?” (Denham, Kacandes, Petropoulos 33) What will follow is the explanation of the extent to which Volkswagen has become a part of the concept of “Germanness” or “Deutschtum”. Consequently, this work will attempt to show that Volkswagen has become a critical element of this concept, and it has helped to build the idea of a national identity pertaining to Germany and its people.

When studying Volkswagen, the importance of national identity becomes crucial, since the two entities are dependent upon each other. What this relationship entails actually is a relationship between a group entity and a national entity, with each having their own identity. In fact, these identities seem to go hand-in-hand, as we find that the group identity (Volkswagen) becomes a construct of the larger national identity (Germany).

Though the group identity may be simple to trace, as its components are finite, the difficult aspect of this examination hence becomes that of national (or as it also refers to in the case of Volkswagen and Germany, cultural) identity. Alison Phipps writes that, “however productive, questions of cultural identity are also limited and problematic. However ‘imagined’ the German community, it also takes on and expresses itself in ‘real’, material forms because the people who live in that geographical locale and who travel from their homes within it engage in the human activity of making culture, of living.” (Phipps 7)

The model for this work, in order to analyze and prove the relationship between these two identities, is that of the work of Stuart Hall. Hall is the most prominent thinker in the realm of cultural studies, and attempts to break down the idea of a nation as a semi-natural entity, while relating it to individual and collective identities. The main idea of Hall’s work in his article “The State in Question” in The Idea of the Modern State, is that national identity is not a natural being, but is instead a construction of human association, strengthened by its relationships with smaller and more substantial group and individual identities.

“The state is a historical phenomenon,” writes Hall, “it is a product of human association- of men and women living together in an organized way; not of Nature. Thus, there have been times when ‘the state’ as we know it did not exist.” (McLennan, Held, Hall 1)

What is important to note in Hall’s definition of a state, is that “it is a product of human association.” This indicates the dependence of the existence of a state upon humans, or in other words, those who are actually natural beings. Despite complexities found in modern states which may lead one to believe that a nation is more than just a human product, Hall contends that this is the “legitimacy of the state’s powers” (McLennan, Held, Hall 16), which are given to it by the people. These complexities then, are masks that legitimize the powers that a state has. These powers can only come as a product of human association. Hall writes further, that “... its power has to be materialized- i.e. it must acquire real, concrete, social organizational form, with real tasks, using and disposing of real resources, through a set of practices in the apparatuses of the modern state machine.” (McLennan, Held, Hall 20)

Due to this construction, Hall contends that a state cannot operate independent of its society. He writes, “Because the ‘separateness’ of the state from society is institutionalized in the various apparatuses of government and the state machine, it does not follow that therefore the state is autonomous of society. If the state were autonomous, then it would be wholly outside the play of social forces and relationships, moving exclusively under its own impetus.” (McLennan, Held, Hall 22) Therefore, it becomes obvious by Hall’s definition that the state’s

identity is created by these social forces, which can also be defined as collective identities.

Germany is no exception to Hall's model. It was built as the product of a human desire for a nation to be contained within certain borders based on historical precedent. It functions with the powers approved by its people. Its identity is dependent greatly upon its people and the collective identities contained within it. Volkswagen, as a collective identity of its own, is one of these many identities which helps to create the larger national identity.

However, the idea of a German national identity has incessantly been under scrutiny. This, supporting the argument of Hall, is because of the historical background of the nation. The modern German state had not even existed until 1871. The country was formed through the efforts of Otto von Bismarck after settling as 39 independent states after the reign of Napoleon in 1815. Only loose language and cultural ideals bonded the country before the unification. In the years between 1871 and 1919, a strong central government was created in Germany, enhancing a sense of national identity. This was reversed by the Treaty of Versailles, which allotted all guilt for World War I on the side of the Germans. What followed was a period, known as the Weimar Republic, which was arguably the most chaotic time in German history. Here, hyperinflation and the economic crisis of 1929 worsened the state of Germany, which contained millions of starving citizens without work. Political anarchy ruled, as conservatives created the Dolchstoßlegende (or "stab-in-the-back legend"), blaming the Jews and left-wing sympathizers for the terrible situation that they found themselves in. This

led to the assassinations of many left-wing politicians, and general anarchy within the state.

Then when Hitler was finally appointed as chancellor in 1933, he sought to return Germany to a simpler time, when the “problems” of communism and modernism threatened “his” land and people. Though this seems a great contradiction (in fact, we will see many contradictions later), as Hitler himself was an Austrian by birth, and quite concerned with modern technology (as we will see in the case of Volkswagen’s production), the German people were willing to unite in order to remedy their situation. As Wilfred van der Will writes, “The attractions that National Socialism had for the insecure masses were formulated into an effective slogan by Hitler himself... Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer.” (Burns 107)

In fact, the myth of the “Volk” became one of Hitler’s and propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels’s primary obsessions. These politics primarily show what Hall describes as the attempt at creating a pure and original people in order to build national identity. Of course, these people were complemented by their own origins and narratives, as supplied by the leaders of the Third Reich.

Van der Will writes further: “By concentrating on the lure of the Volk, the myth of social unity, and the evocation of an imagined German community, Nazi demagoguery departed from the established party-political divisions of traditional class politics. Significantly, National Socialism was able to exploit and accommodate quite divergent class interests because its rhetoric derived from a Weltanschauung anchored in an organic concept of society. This was expressed in

symbolic representations of the nation's unity structured by cultural hierarchy."

(Burns 107-109) It seems as if Hitler and his fellow national socialists had successfully made something out of nothing by constructing a strong sense of national identity for people who lived between borders that had only been drawn some seventy years before.

The symbolic representations of which Van der Will speaks were numerous during the Third Reich. Of course there is the strong image of the swastika and the multiple parades and speeches by Hitler, but one of Joseph Goebbels's most important ideas, was that of the Kraft durch Freude (or "Strength-through-Joy") organization. This federal undertaking was designed to reach the German people on a personal level, allowing them to enjoy their lives in the Third Reich. This included the organization of all recreation, travel, sport, and leisure-time activities under the supervision of the government. (Nelson 59) This organization becomes important, when it takes on the role of supervising the production and the distribution of the very first people's car, the Beetle. This is in fact, the very first time the German public is introduced to "their" car. However, the Volkswagen program under the Third Reich becomes a microcosm of the KdF program, in that the pleasure of the "Volk" was not actually the primary concern to those in charge. Instead, as Van der Will points out, "Clearly the aim (of the Strength-Through-Joy organization) was to create a work-force with a loyalty to National Socialism that had learnt to appreciate the beauty not only of the technical environment and its objects, but also of an art itself. The work-force was to be better motivated and, as far as possible, deproletarianized." (131)

Germany was in for one of the largest forcible indoctrinations in history. And at the focus of this, was the people and “their” automobile. But was this really their automobile? If not, to whom did it belong? Further, how did it end up as a cultural and national icon despite its dubious origins?

The Great Contradiction of the People’s Car

The early history of the Volkswagen automobile and its company is riddled with the devastations caused by national identity. With a founder whose German nationality was dubious at best, a political system using the car as a means for its own political end, and a foundation and resurrection attributed to foreigners, the idea that the Volkswagen belonged to the German Volk, or people, seemed, at least at that time, quite doubtful.

That founder, Ferdinand Porsche, the world-renowned automobile engineer, race car builder, and bearer of the name seen on some of the finest cars in the world, is accredited with being the first man to fabricate the idea of a car for the European masses. At that time, in the early twentieth century, the automobile was a luxury only for the wealthy. Southern Germany boasted the homes of Mercedes-Benz and Auto Union (Wanderer, DKW, Audi, and Horsch) automobiles, which few citizens in that country could afford. Nelson writes, “Almost to a man, the leaders of European auto companies discounted the general public and certainly the worker as a potential customer. The worker in Germany and Austria bicycled to his job if he did not take the bus or trolley. When he had

saved enough money, he bought a motorcycle perhaps, but never a car.” (Nelson 12)

Economic reform, with the advent of the Dawes Plan in 1923 however, gave the common German economic strength. Porsche, then with the Austro-Daimler firm, conceived his idea of a “people’s car,” or “Volksauto.” Here, Porsche initially conceived the idea of a small coupe or sedan with very low horsepower and cost, yet with a penchant for dependability. Though the executives at Austro-Daimler were adamant about catering to the few, yet distinguished wealthy of Austria, they acquiesced to Porsche by building the small, six-cylinder ADM automobile, which actually experienced decent success for such a low-horsepower vehicle. Clearly, Porsche was running the course towards fulfilling this dream. As Nelson writes, “In Porsche’s mind, the 1920’s and the social changes in Europe meant an opportunity for Austro-Daimler. They could now produce a small car for everyman, much as Henry Ford was doing with such spectacular success in the United States. Yet, despite Ford’s example, Porsche’s idea was a radical one not only for Austro-Daimler, but for the entire auto industry. Even in the United States and despite the impact of Ford sales, cars remained mostly for the well-to-do, and many were luxury models imported from Europe.” (Nelson 12)

Though the ADM was still expensive enough for very few to be able to purchase it, the ideas which Porsche began to manifest were catching on greatly in European automotive circles. Though not the fastest car, it provided a well-

documented durability that had never been seen in automotive design to that point.

Porsche's fight to successfully create a true people's car would take many turns before the car could actually come to fruition. After battling with Austro-Daimler management, he headed to Germany's Daimler-Benz, where he was technical director and also a board member. Here however, he bickered with management over the creation of his small car. Management told him that the car would be too expensive to produce, and certainly would not sell, because the common man was more worried about what to eat (Nelson 16). He then established a shop in Stuttgart, where he further developed his technical ideas for the Volksauto, with a few suitors desperate for his services due to his immense technical knowledge and innovation, but the poor economic state of Germany would, time and time again, deter his plan.

During all this time however, political forces were negatively impacting the development of what would become the Volkswagen. Firstly, the Treaty of Versailles had left both of Porsche's places of work in shambles. The identities of the citizens of both Austria and Germany were immediately changed. Austria, the once-proud kingdom of Austria-Hungary, was now insignificant in the grand scheme of European power. (Nitske 20) It was clear to see that Porsche's idea of a small car would have had trouble becoming a powerful concept in the vast and unregulated world automobile market of the time. This is, as Hall would describe as a historical construct, the element of an emphasis of a foundation or border, that contributes greatly to national identity. How was Porsche supposed to sell his

car for the “common man” to a market where the common man did not have any sense of his own market or identity? Similarly, the Treat of Versailles’s War Guilt Clause had shifted Germany’s borders, and led it to the great economic disarray that plagued the Weimar Republic. Not only did the common German lose his sense of identity, he was also worried about how to survive.

In fact, Porsche himself became a microcosm of the common man to whom he was trying to appease with his automobile. The treaty had greatly affected his life as well, as the borders surrounding his home town of Maffersdorf were switched from Austrian to the newly created Czechoslovakian territory. Hence he was a Czech citizen, living and working in Austria and Germany. His own national identity became a construct that he himself found difficult to understand. The foundation that had established him as an Austrian from his birth had suddenly changed because of factors beyond his control. Porsche himself has even been quoted as saying, “Maffersdorf is my home. I do not like to change nationalities like I change my shirt” (von Frankenberg 22). Clearly the state of Europe was in disarray, as people struggled to define themselves and move forward, while incessantly changing politics were governing every facet of human life. Porsche, like many of his time, had his dreams interfered with by watered-down and overly constructed politics. Little did he know, a similar force would soon help him achieve his dream of a people’s car.

This force became the Third Reich, led by Chancellor Adolf Hitler and his Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels. Hitler and Porsche would soon combine forces to create one of the grandest contradictions of national identity

and culture in history. Both, born in Austria, were to build one of the greatest symbols of a unified Germany. In this vain, the pinnacle of the construction of national identity becomes evident. The nation of Germany, went from being in tatters as far as their identity was concerned, to being one of the most nationalistic countries in history during the time of the Nazi regime under the guidance of Hitler. However, the difference between Hitler and Porsche, was that Porsche did not care how little or how much Hitler desired to create a morally unified Germany. Porsche actually did not concern himself for politics at all. Instead, his concerns lied with Hitler's ability to help him mass-produce his dream, a car for the common man. Hitler though, conversely used Porsche as a means to his own political end, in attempting to unify the German people through the symbol of his Volksauto.

Hitler proclaimed in the 1933 auto show, that "a nation is no longer judged by other nations by its miles of railroad track, but by its miles of paved highways." He promised to build a vast network of them (Nelson 29). Further, Davies notes that Hitler wrote in Mein Kampf at a parallel time, that he wished to break the "motoring privileges of the upper classes" (Davies 26). However, it is often claimed that Hitler conceived the idea of a car to fill those roads ten years earlier during his imprisonment. The idea though, was not original, or "German." His dream of a common man's car actually stemmed from the book of an American, Henry Ford. Robert Davies details that Hitler's vision came while reading Ford's My Life and Work, and Hitler became enticed with the success of Ford's production ideas that allowed him to cheaply mass produce Ford

automobiles, which in turn led to the United States leading the world at that time in automobiles per citizen. Hitler even recognized Ford's contribution to his ideals by bestowing a German national honor upon the automaker in 1938.

Ferdinand Porsche looked up to Ford as well. Nelson describes Porsche holding his first meeting with Ford in early 1937 as the "high point" of his maiden visit to the United States. In fact, he was described as idolizing the then aging Ford, and that Porsche was "determined that his cars would be produced along American lines." (Nelson 53) Porsche and his crew even returned again that same year, and Porsche gained more ideas for his then in-progress Volksauto from American automobiles.

Here we see one of the early contradictions of the life of Volkswagen. In World War II, Hitler would call German forces to fight against the Americans, though his ideas of automobile manufacturing, which he wished to be a focal point of the Nazi era to his people, were indeed American ones. Further, even the well-lauded designer of the car took many of his cues from the US. In Porsche's first visit, the entourage which followed him begged Ford to make a visit to Germany. He declined, citing that war was imminent. Nelson writes, "Porsche was astounded. He and his colleagues looked at each other with the naivete of those who read only the technical press. 'No!' said Porsche. 'We cannot believe that! We live in an era of economic improvement, in which many problems exist which take time to solve. Why should there be war?'" (Nelson 54)

Such contradictions are plentiful when studying the foundation of Volkswagen, especially in its rapport with the Nazi government. Likewise, these

contradictions become very important and are essential to the relationship examined here, since these contradictions reveal constructions that point out exactly Hall's theory on national identity. Thus, we begin to see that the Third Reich was using Volkswagen to achieve a national and cultural unity.

Clearly, Hitler had his people duped. As a leader who drove his country from political and economic turmoil to prosperity, he developed the skills necessary for his people to believe in him and his cause, no matter how extreme it seemed to the outside world. Propaganda minister Goebbels had the responsibility of making the German people believe that Hitler was doing the right thing for the German people. Using many elements that Stuart Hall would describe as elements to construct national identity, the government would speak of things such as narratives that supported the left wing's "stabbing in the back" of the German people to attempt to unite them, borders that historically belonged to Germany, and of the racial purity that was naturally instilled the "German people" (no matter how long those "people" have been united). Volkswagen became one of these deceptions as Hitler and Goebbels produced the idea of Volkswagen as a symbol for the German people.

The society in which Hitler and Goebbels created, that of the Third Reich, was one of attempting to eschew modernism as a threat to the common German's way of life. The recent rise of the SPD (Socialism Party of Germany) and Communism there were, according to Hitler, the bearers of this threat. Instead, the Nazi party relied on the foundations, origins, and traditions of their country (which were loose at best for the country as a whole) to elicit a feeling of a

superior German race. However, a great contradiction of this regime, was that of modern tools used to achieve this feeling. Volkswagen, along with the Autobahn, was one of the primary tools. The modern technology used in the development and production of the car were indeed state-of-the art, and, as noted earlier, some of this was not even the product of German thinking. Whereas modern technology was an item of fear in the Third Reich, especially as Hitler distrusted the large industrialists, the Third Reich itself was a large industry creating modern technology. Van der Will writes, "... this process exacted a profound psychological price and inflicted on German society traumatic experiences in a crisis where everything that was modern appeared to spell political and social division, alienation, and proletarianization." (Burns 105)

Instead, it becomes evident that Hitler and the Nazis were using Volkswagen as a political pawn in the grand scheme of the Third Reich. The first evidence of this, is seen in 1938. Here, Robert Ley, the leader of the German Labor Front, first praised the Volkswagen as "the greatest social work of all time and all countries." (Nelson 59) At the same time, the Nazis proposed a layaway plan, in which a German worker belonging to the Labor Front could set aside money before the car is delivered to them. The money was sent to the Kraft-durch-Freude (or Strength-through-Joy) foundation, which was part of the Labor Front, and financed the production and development of the Volkswagen. At this point, the factory was not even close to completion. The 336,668 Germans who invested in this plan rested their faith on the government to follow through on their promise (Nelson 61). Instead, it appeared as if the Nazis were only

producing a short-term revenue stream. Nelson notes that the contract that potential buyers entered into with government to participate in the layaway program heavily favored the interests of the Nazis. "It neither mentioned price nor even obligated the State to deliver a Volkswagen once the last payment had been made... The nastiest part of the contract was its non-cancelable and non-transferable nature. Workers who missed an obligatory weekly payment or who decided they could no longer afford to make payments risked losing every single mark they had put into the scheme" (Nelson 62-63). In all actuality, every mark of the 280 million that were invested in this plan was to never to come to fruition. Preceding and during the war, not a single civilian Volkswagen was produced, let alone delivered to a German Labor Front member, who never saw this money again.

Obviously, Hitler seemed to have more in mind than just the satisfaction of his people. Where was the possible lost money by a German worker who could not afford the layaway plan to go but to the coffers of the Third Reich? And what did the Reich have to lose by keeping all of this money? Here, we begin to see that the Führer was using the people for his own political good, whether consciously or not. Though Robert Davies contends that Hitler was genuinely interested in creating the Volkswagen for the good of the German people, I find this at the very least somewhat disagreeable. Though the idea may have interested him while in prison in 1923, at the time it was purely conceptual and idealistic. Instead, when he comes to power and has control of his "Volksauto" idea, it is obvious that he thinks differently. Davies cites the Hitler speech at the 1934

Berlin Motor Show, "It is a bitter thought that millions of good and industrious people are excluded from the use of a means of transport that, especially on Sundays and holidays, could become for them a source of unknown joy." (Davies 26) However, I find this just to be an example of the idealistic and misleading rhetoric that got Hitler to his position in the first place. After all, rhetoric was an important weapon for a man who actually had his own minister of propaganda, and was charged with turning a nation around that had learned to expect chaos. Instead, Hitler's rhetoric was an important part of the beginning of this turn-around. The word could not hide Hitler's actions though, as the contradictions of Volkswagen began to come to light just before production began in 1939.

When the production lines were being founded for Volkswagen, there was an unmistakable foreign presence running the operations. Porsche and his crew of German industry and Nazi leaders recruited most of the management staff for the plant from the United States. Most of these were Detroit-trained offspring of German parents. They had the automobile production experience that Porsche longed for, the German heritage that Hitler desired as the face of the operations, and these workers could make more money than they did in Detroit. Conversely, they were in charge of managing the front-line workers who mostly were slave laborers. Nelson estimates that two-thirds of the work-force at the Volkswagen plant during World War II were slave laborers. How then, does it become acceptable and legitimate for Hitler to have the ones building the car for "his people" to have very little connection with these "people"?

Hitler's real intentions became even more obvious in 1940, when the Nazi leader asked Porsche to convert all focus on designing, testing, and production to that of war vehicles. From that point on, the only vehicles bearing the Volkswagen name were those of the Kübelwagen and Schwimmkübelwagen, which were well-designed military transportation, given only, of course, to the Nazi army. Hitler and Porsche's "people's car" was, just as soon as it was given to them, taken away.

Further, by March of 1945, the plant and its corresponding city were almost completely destroyed. The plant, which was supposed to house the birth of the common German worker's car, was now 60 percent destroyed. The city that was supposed to house the millions of German workers to build these cars was nothing more than the tattered remains of a forced labor camp. Instead of the great glory of the factory that Hitler proclaimed at its groundbreaking in 1938, the "Strength-through-Joy" city and its car were nothing more than a lost cause full of sunk costs for the Third Reich. As noted before, not a single civilian Volksauto was ever built during this time, but the military profited greatly during the war, though they did not win the war. Hitler had lost his priority of engendering a car for the masses in favor of his own war. Never did Hitler show through his actions the least bit of intent for creating such an automobile, only instead, through his spoken promises and as a facade for his war. Similarly, the Führer hardly ever set foot in his own creation. Only at the ground-breaking ceremony, and in the passenger seat on the way to the bunker where he would kill himself (Davies writes, "He chose a Volkswagen for his trip because it was less conspicuous than

his usual Mercedes limousine.” (Davies 26)) did Hitler experience the “joy” of riding in the KdF car. Ironical as it may be, this also seems a microcosm of the Nazi leader’s use of the Volkswagen as mere rhetoric and a tool for his own interests.

Therefore, it would be very feasible to believe that a German citizen would view Volkswagen as purely an association of a regrettable time in their own history, especially since national identity itself is defined as a historical construct. After 1945, it seems that German national identity would separate itself from Volkswagen because of this association. However, the opposite of this would occur, and Volkswagen would embed itself even deeper as a building block of German identity, further revealing the constructs that are inherent in the idea of national identity.

The Reconstruction of Volkswagen

In March of 1948, as Henry Ford II and his confidante Ernest Breech met with British Generals and Heinz Nordhoff (who would later lead Volkswagen to its modern prominence) to discuss the automaker’s proposal to buy the beleaguered factory, Breech turned to Ford in the middle of the discussion and remarked, “Mr. Ford, I don’t think what we are being offered here is worth a damn!” (Nelson 3-4)

Little did Breech know the potential for this large but misdirected automaker, which today trails Ford’s company by two slots in the size of world automakers. How Volkswagen would reach this point would become a very arduous and trying exhibition of political will and national identity. National

identity becomes even more important as Volkswagen's recovery progresses, especially as it parallels the lives of the German people. However, it would not be a solely "German" effort to resurrect this franchise, instead it would be a conglomeration of British, American, and German forces that would achieve this. As Nordhoff once noted, "... by one of the ironic jokes history is sometimes tempted to produce, it was the Occupation Powers who, after unconditional surrender, brought Hitler's dream into reality." Remarkably though, the company remained a staple symbol of German national identity, revealing itself in the meantime as an element of the construction of this identity.

In the waning moments of World War II, the British Army took control of the troubled and nearly destroyed plant at Fallersleben. The town and factory were facing uncontrollable riots and unrest. Most of the slave laborers had left, and the remaining workers were German nationals who desired to work only to survive. Though the British gladly took their war prize, they had a great liability on their hands. Though they could have easily shunned the Volkswagen factory because of this, they decided instead to keep the plant alive in order to feed the remaining laborers. "Refugees from East Germany and from the territories handed over to Poland poured into the area, into nearby camps, and gravitated toward the Volkswagenwerk," writes Nelson, "The British soon found themselves with a mile-long white elephant on their hands and with thousands of people who expected help from them. The plant was the only source of work; something had to be done. They decided to start the plant operating again, at least temporarily." (Nelson 98)

These workers had to have something to build and someone to sell it to, however. This solution came in the British themselves, who needed transportation to support the vast British empire. Nitske writes, "... the need for automotive vehicles for municipal, police, and postal services was great. Any vehicle in operation condition was eagerly accepted by the solicitous group." (Nitske 186) Also, the British soldiers were amazed at the technical quality of the German machines being built there. Many had witnessed the military vehicles that Porsche had designed in Africa, and they held great value to the soldiers, as one Kübelwagen was worth the value of two Jeeps in military trade (Nelson 97).

Soldiers also held the tiny KdF cars in high esteem as well. They enjoyed its sprightly nature and great endurance. Nitske describes the British soldiers as "clamoring" to drive these vehicles that they had seen in action. (Nitske 185) However, the British public, who actually received the first shipments of commercial Volkswagens, did not see eye-to-eye with the soldiers. The vehicles produced there would not benefit the British at home, as the automobile market there was quite saturated. Further, a British commission sent to inspect the factory and the car wrote in 1945, "To build the car commercially would be a completely uneconomic enterprise... it would mean no undue economic competition on the world market against British products." (Nelson 98)

Clearly, there was little reason for the British empire to continue to fund the production at Wolfsburg (as it would be named by the British after the castle on the land) other than for the humanitarian aide of the German people. As British Major Hirst once noted, "This factory belongs to the German people, and I am

here to see they get it.” (Nelson 102) Here, we see no more lines drawn to differentiate between countries, only human-to-human interaction with the intention of creating good for the other without borders defining them. Two formerly warring entities made of human construction, were from 1945 to 1948 in Wolfsburg, working together to reconstruct the identity of one of these.

Further, we see that this beginning of Volkswagen’s reconstruction needed the help of foreign countries. Not only did the British help restart production, but the economic reform in Germany in 1948 by all of the Allied powers assisted in moving the automobiles to the public. Nordhoff once quoted, “(the) new life of the Volkswagenwerk actually began with the currency reform and that everything that had happened before that period was of little or no interest.” (Nitske 196) Now it becomes evident that the “people’s car” would be birthed with the aide of other “people.”

Without the assistance of these outside powers, Volkswagen would simply not exist today. Instead, it would probably be remembered as Hitler’s grand failed experiment. Nelson writes, “The car itself seemed a sorry reminder of Nazism to almost everyone. To foreigners and most Germans, it was a shabby product out of a noxious past; to others, it was a galling reminder of Hitler’s failure, here as elsewhere.” (Nelson 115) Even in its rebirth, the Volkswagen remained a concept without an identity. It would instead be up to the work and words of a German to give the Volkswagen and the people it was intended for this piece of their identity.

This German, was Heinz Nordhoff, who was put in charge of the Wolfsburg factory by British Colonel Radclyffe. Nordhoff, though inheriting a run-down franchise that was dependent upon the aide of foreign governments, was successfully able to rebuild the image of the company, and subsequently, a portion of the identity of his nation. While remarking on the fortune of the company to have Nordhoff at the helm, Carl Hahn, who worked with Nordhoff to rebuild the Volkswagenwerk noted, "Volkswagen hatte das Glück und den Vorzug, von einem Mann geführt zu werden, dessen Charisma die Corporate Culture von Volkswagen ebenso wie das Image eines neuen Deutschlands prägte." (Nordhoff 12)

Hahn quotes this succinctly, as Volkswagen and a new Germany were both growing at a parallel time. In fact, it seems as if one was dependent on the other. While Volkswagen relied on the currency reform in Germany to spark the demand for automobiles in Volkswagen's home market, the German people were looking for a symbol of hope that, like them, something positive would come out of the remains of World War II. Nordhoff took a number of steps to insure that this would occur, and that Volkswagen would be that symbol of hope.

In his years leading Volkswagen, Nordhoff would become the main constructor of this element of German national identity. He achieved this through what is known in Germany as a "Wiedergutmachung." This theory, meaning "to make good again," has carried a lot of meaning since the country's inception. It requires that Germany attempt to return itself to glory after a period of instability by separating ties with the past. After World War I, Germany had to attempt to

reconstruct its political system by the urging of the Treaty of Versailles, which manifested itself in the Weimar Republic, and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent reunification in 1990, German identity had to be reconstructed. No less is this true in the period after World War II in Germany. The Wiedergutmachung provides evidence of the construct of national identity, as Germany had to be “remade” by the use of human force. Nordhoff was that human force for Volkswagen during this period. As he himself said, “the future would begin when one severed all connections with the lost past.” (Nitske 190) Nordhoff’s problem though, was that the company who’s glory he was trying to restore was a product of that past.

Nordhoff was also once quoted, saying, “It was really an overwhelming undertaking to make these people believe in their future at a time when one Chesterfield cigarette had three times the value in buying power of one hour of hard work. They had to be convinced that there was a future which would be won by themselves. It could be won only by the hard work of creating something of value.” (Nelson 132)

However, Nordhoff was able to accomplish a Wiedergutmachung through his cunning abilities of factory management and speech. Using the tools of economic reform and aide by the allied powers, Nordhoff was able to increase worker pay at Wolfsburg, as the average wage for a Volkswagenwerk worker was as high as 2.27 marks per hour as compared to a German industry average of 1.72 in 1955. In doing this, he was increasing worker morale, as well as that of the rest of the country, who looked to Nordhoff’s operation as guidance. Though

Nordhoff could have opted to use more expensive materials during production, he declined in favor of investing the money into human capital. The result of this is well-defined by Nitske. "He believes that an ever larger production with consequently lower prices of the manufactured product makes for a more stabilized economy than high prices and, in the event of diminishing demand, smaller production rather than a lowered unit price." (Nitske 197)

Here, we see that Nordhoff was not just concerned with Volkswagen, but with the entire German economy. Nordhoff, knowing that in the second year of his reign the production of Volkswagens consisted of 99.7% of German automobile production (Nitske187), was aware of his responsibility in the Wiedergutmachung of his company and his country. Further, Nordhoff once stated, "Es wird an uns liegen, aus dieser nun grössten deutschen Automobilfabrik einen ausschlaggebenden Faktor der deutschen Friedenswirtschaft zu machen..." (Nordhoff 46) This provides evidence of a growing relationship between Volkswagen and Germany in the period after World War II, which became essential to the success of Volkswagen and the reconstruction of German identity.

Nordhoff also used his talents as a speaker to reinforce and legitimize his goals of resurrecting Volkswagen. Often he would address the factory at meetings to boost morale, and would, later as the growth of the firm progressed, meet with shareholders to do the same. These became widely acclaimed as Nordhoff attempted to, in a parallel fashion, separate Volkswagen and Germany from the past and lead them into the future. Heidrun Edelmann once remarked the following about Nordoff's famous speeches at Volkswagen, "Sie sind

hochinteressante Zeugnisse nicht nur der Nachkriegsentwicklung des Volkswagenwerkes im besonderen, sondern auch des Aufstiegs der deutschen Automobilindustrie im allgemeinen, ja mehr noch, der gesamten Ära des Aufbaus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.” (Nordhoff 15)

These speeches, captured in Reden und Aufsätze: Zeugnisse einer Ära, help to explain the role of these speeches in these rebuilding years. As part of the Wiedergutmachung, these speeches contained statements from separating the Volkswagen of Nordhoff’s time from the past to showing optimism for the future. For example, at the celebration of the production of the 20,000th Volkswagen in 1948, Nordhoff emphasized that, “... diese Fabrik nicht mit dem Gelde der 280,000 Volkswagensparer gebaut ist, die im Vertrauen auf den tausendjährigen Bestand der Dritten Reiches mit der DAF...” (Nordhoff 49) This shows an example of Nordhoff separating the firm from the Volkswagen of the Nazi era. Consequently, Nordhoff attempted to focus on the future of the company, showing that it will move forward from this regrettable time. For instance, at the celebration of the production of the 50,000th Volkswagen in 1949, Nordhoff stated, “Ich brauche nicht im einzelnen darauf einzugehen, wenn ich das nach meiner Meinung allein Wesentliche heraushebe: Es wird wiedergearbeitet in Deutschland!” (Nordhoff 69)

Progressively, Nordhoff would attempt to sever ties with the foreign governments that aided them in the rebuilding process. He did this by attempting to lead his workers to believe that the Volkswagen was once again, for the German people. For instance, he replaced the sign in front of the factory that

stated “Wolfsburg Motor Works” to that of “Volkswagenwerk,” meaning that once again, the factory was working for the people of Germany. (Nelson 134) By doing this, Nordhoff was instilling confidence in his workers that it was alright to have pride in Germany once again, as well as the Volkswagen. Indeed, he was actually building German identity through the pride he was instilling in his workers. As Guenter Kittel, who would later become Vice President for Parts in Wolfsburg, would say, “The workers took a real pride in the idea of helping the words ‘Made in Germany’ stand for top craftsmanship once again.” (Nelson 141)

Nordhoff was obviously on his way to rebuilding the image of Volkswagen, and the parallel of this to that of Germany itself becomes undeniable. The brand of Volkswagen had been reborn through the efforts of Heinz Nordhoff, and this brand had come to be a narrative for the German people. Just as the Volkswagenwerk had suffered through the forgettable years of the Third Reich and was able to rebuild itself into a well-functioning and healthy entity, so had the people of Germany. The Germans had finally embraced the Volkswagen as “their car,” and had accepted it as a symbol of their larger, national identity.

For Volkswagen, this would only be the beginning of a strong relationship with the whole of German identity. For decades, Volkswagen would undertake a massive advertising campaign to legitimize the connection between Germany and the automaker, as it solidified itself as a symbol of the German people. Today as a result, Volkswagen is the highest-selling brand of automobile in this automobile-industry-rich nation, and is owned in part (20% in fact) by the current German

state of Niedersachsen. And though it is now a global corporation, Volkswagen's ties to its homeland are still very much in tact. In fact, Volkswagen is the largest taxpayer in Niedersachsen, contributing greatly to the economy and the German people.

We must not forget though, that Volkswagen's position as a point of pride to Germany, as Hall would point out, is merely a construction built by the efforts of Porsche, Hitler, and Nordhoff among many others. It has become a symbol of identity for Germany that has helped to bind its people together for decades, as the significance of the narrative of Volkswagen is not lost on German culture. Volkswagen has indeed over the last eighty years helped in defining the "Volk." The relationship between the collective identity entailed in Volkswagen's brand and German national identity is now undeniably strong, as the "people's car" has become a building block for the definition of its people.

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