

The Visualization of Migration

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Abstract

This article focuses on the election posters for the initiative *Gegen Masseneinwanderung (Against Mass Immigration)* launched by the national conservative Swiss People's Party (Schweizer Volkspartei) in February 2014. Based on qualitative visual analysis, I discuss how sociospatial phenomena are visualized to convey political messages. First, I undertake the important task of identifying discursive and visual elements of the image, as well as the image–text pattern in order to understand how meaning is created. Second, I investigate the concrete praxis of the image: How do images argue, substantiate, and demonstrate in a way that allows viewers to make meaning out of them? Third, I follow a productive step of contextualizing the praxis of the image. To understand how visual messages are effectively conveyed, and how images help to create a politically strategic context and persuade viewers, involves examining the narratives and contexts that the images rely on in order to be understood by viewers. Visual analysis allows for insights into the ways in which visual constructions of reality are created. Furthermore, this article offers methodological strategies that are key to understanding how images are used to depict and construct realities and how these realities are accepted as true, as it is the case with the posters designed for the *Against Mass Immigration* initiative.

Keywords

visual geography, visual construction of migration, visual practice of conviction

Introduction: Message as Images

On February 9, 2014, the Swiss electorate voted for the federal initiative *Against Mass Immigration*, a proposal launched by the Swiss People's Party (SVP), aimed at limiting immigration through quotas (website: Federal Department of Justice and Police). The high turnout of 55.8% and the unexpected approval show that the message of the SVP had reached the electorate. In the run-up to the vote, the SVP promulgated the problems caused by mass immigration, such as overcrowding of Swiss roads and trains, an unacceptable burden on the social services as well as “increasing foreigner crime” and “wage dumping”. To convey these messages, the SVP continued a tradition that had already seen success with past initiatives (the 2010 *Ausschaffungsinitiative-Deportation initiative*; the *Initiative gegen den Bau von Minaretten* in 2009-*Initiative against the Building of Minarets*, website: *Ausschaffungsinitiative*, *Minarettinitiative*): political argumentation through the visualization of sociospatial problems resulting from migration.

In response to the referendum, the Swiss Federal Council and parliament were given three years to develop a new approval system for migration. On December 22, 2016, Switzerland and the European Union (EU) agreed on the option of “priority for Swiss nationals”, which does not limit the free

movement of EU workers to Switzerland but may require Swiss employers to give priority to candidates based in Switzerland.

Theoretical Approaches: Visualization as Practice

Methods from social science, humanities, and cultural sciences such as anthropology, art history, and philosophy, as well as psychology and cognitive sciences, provide access to the image. Anthropological and culturalistic approaches understand images as cultural assets representing a cultural means of expression (Belting, 2001; Stoellger & Gutjahr, 2014). Art history focuses on the analysis of form (iconology) and interpretation of image (iconography; Smith Pierce, 2003; Warburg, 2010), and in philosophy, images are processed as an extension of thought and speech. In this sense, they are gestures of showing, and subsequently questions arise: Who is showing something, what is being shown, how is something being shown, and

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for what purpose (Dumont & Wiame, 2014; Wiesing, 2005)? Cognitive science is concerned with the question of how the image comes into sense and sense into the image. In this context, images are representations of the invisible, unspeakable, or unconceivable and a product of cognitive performance (Bauer, Liptay, & Marschall, 2008; Friebe & Hoffmeister, 2008).

Discourse perspectives (Foucault, 2001; Maasen, Mayerhauser, & Renggli, 2006), to which I refer in the following, understand visualization as the practice of constructing reality. This means that visualization does not reproduce verbal statements in a descriptive way, representing things and their interconnections, for example, “in the picture is a black person”, but rather produces things and the relations between them. Looking at our example, this means that not only the skin color is rendered linguistically, but *black* is perceived as the opposite of *white* and attracts attention. In addition, this attribute is given priority over other attributes, and moreover, invoking a person as *black* is accompanied by connotations that generate expectations of certain actions and/or abilities. Therefore, images evoke conventions and conditions on which phenomena unfold on the basis of seemingly logical and valid social interactions. Images are, like words, elements of sociocultural negotiation processes, based on which practices are organized and disciplined. They are not representations, but powerful vehicles for constructing sociospatial reality (Kapferer, 2012; Lefèvre, 2003; Mitchell, 2005, Stocchetti & Kukkonen, 2011).

This perspective is the consequence of a paradigm shift within the science of the early 20th century, known as the “crisis of representation” (Freudenberger, 2003), which involved questioning the objective depiction of reality. This shift, incorporated within the context of cultural studies, became increasingly popular at the end of the 20th century. Heralded by Fellmann’s (1991) *imagic turn*, Mitchell’s (1992) *pictorial turn*, Sachs-Hombach’s (1995) *visualistic turn*, and Gottfried Boehm’s (1994) *iconic turn*, there has been an growing interest in the analysis of images within the humanities, as well as social, cultural, linguistic, film, and natural sciences (Endter, 2011; Hüppauf & Weingart, 2009; Stöckl, 2004; Voss, 2009; Wenzel, 1995; 2013). Irrespective of which *turn* is used to analyze images, they all represent a shift from “the images of reality to the reality of the images” (Fellmann, 1998, p. 188) and are all methodologically meaningful for a subsequent analysis of images in the context of a widespread presence of images in media, politics and science.

Visual Geographies

It has taken several years for geographers to become interested in visual analysis, even though geography is itself an image-producing discipline. Endeavors in the discipline to depict the world as accurately as possible seem to have hindered any critical reflection of the processes and contexts of visualization (Schlottmann & Miggelbrink, 2009, 13). Even though the traditions of critical cartography (Engelwood, 1974; Harvey,

1989; Peters, 1976; Tuan, 1978; Wood & Fels, 1992/1998) and landscape research (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988) should have encouraged a turn to the image, visual analysis has only become relevant in geographical research in recent years (Schlottmann & Miggelbrink, 2009). Since the millennium, visual geographies have become epistemologically as well as methodologically reflective about the production and consumption of images by society and geographical science. Most significantly, it has gained relevance due to the growing importance of geographical information systems, the rapid spread of images through print and television media, and the increased influence that the visual has on sociospatial notions of the world due to Web 2.0 (Fleischmann, 2004; Roberts, 2013; Rose & Tolia-Kelly; 2012; Zimmermann, 2009).

Why would geography find an interest in reflecting on visualizations? Is there anything specifically geographical about images? According to Schlottmann and Miggelbrink (2009, p. 18), the geographical component of an image does not manifest itself on the level of the object, because images themselves cannot create meaning. Rather, the geographical component is reflected in the “geographical interests in social spaces and relations”. The meaning of an image becomes relevant for a geographical analysis if the elements of the image are used to construct a seeming unity of society and space. If social phenomena are explained by locating them and these sociospatial connections are charged with specific characteristics so that arguments such as “there/here it is like that” become valid, the image produces geographical realities and is interesting for visual geographies. Thus, studies on visual geographies do not focus on spatial patterns such as landscapes, but rather are interested in visual practices aimed at doing geographies, a concept based on action theoretical geography (Werlen, 1997). Visual geographies focus on practices of localization, which create social-spatial representations, meaning that they assign specific meaning to spaces.

Visual Geographies as Arguments and Narratives

For visual geographers (Schlottmann & Miggelbrink, 2015), images are visual practices, meaning that they construct a concept of places, people, and things. In the SVP initiative, however, they serve primarily to construct a (political) argument. In this context, images are a medium that appears to show the truth, provided they are persuasive. Boehm (2004, p. 32) argues that the persuasiveness of images stems from their “ability to access something [...] that is elsewhere”, like, the invisible (god), the foreign (oriental), the complex (globalization), and/or the future. With respect to our object of investigation, Boehm is inspiring, as these political images provide access to the future in the form of the threat of so called *mass immigration* and the rising levels of criminality associated with growing numbers of foreigners.

Here, it is worth mentioning the importance of using the practice of spatial justification as a means of reinforcing

arguments, as noted by Felgenhauer (2007) in his work *Geography as an Argument*, in which he refers to the theory of argumentation proposed by Toulmin (1958) and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958). In Felgenhauer's understanding, space is a consequence of argumentative practices. In turn, this supports the notion of grasping space as a product of visual argumentation practices. On the above premise, any examination of the formulation of statements about space and their underlying logic must be accompanied by a questioning of the organization and use of symbolic elements of images and their power to generate belief.

Furthermore, Fuchs (2006) sees images as narrative mediums. Images are being used successfully if they convey a message. This is most possible when the image displays or refers to current social narratives, for example, about migration or foreigners. Here, contingency is created, because the viewers can link previously existing knowledge to their needs, fears, and expectations. Thus, the narrative is filled with content and appears real.

Discourse analytical approaches of narrative theory (Fludernik, 2006) assume that the construction of the social world takes place through the act of storytelling. For Fludernik (2006), the story or narrative is not, however, merely a production of events, but rather an act in which the narrator relies on privileged narrations, typical patterns of storytelling and familiar contemporary elements to establish credibility. These familiar forms of narrating stem from collective cultural knowledge, which is reproduced through visualization processes and conveyed through the image. The narrating image, thus, is a visual practice of producing meaning because it tells *things* in a specific way and generates specific logic within specific contexts. This also means that visual analysis cannot exist without reference to social context. The image unfolds its narrative only because of the viewers' interpretations and only with reference to the viewers' knowledge and familiarities (Cohn, 2016).

Methodological Approaches: Reconstruction of Meaning and Strategy

Visual geographies (Schlottmann & Miggelbrink, 2009, 2015; Wintzer, 2015) understand images as more than a representation of discourse. Thus, their operationalization must allow a comprehensive understanding of the image as a visual medium of reality construction. The following operationalization therefore aims at a reconstruction for the purpose of exposing the visual construction of reality and its reinforcement.

Object Level

History of art (Heywood & Sandywell, 2011; Sachs-Hombach, 2003) has a long tradition of image analysis, which includes descriptions of the image as well as the reconstruction of its underlying social structures. Acknowledging these approaches is important in establishing the preliminaries to gaining access to the image. The epistemological question of *what* is shown

shifts to *how* something is shown (Warburg, 2010). In this sense, my analysis should look at how viewers deal with what is portrayed. Furthermore, it is important that I investigate the visual and image–text pattern. According to Barthes (1964/1970), image and text are not all that different; a word creates an optical image when the social context is known, as emphasized before. If we read the word *Switzerland*, for example, we think of certain images associated with that country. However, the image differs from the text in its forms of applicability. The image is “generally more ambiguous than language” and can thus be used in “different communicative situations, which implement various pictorial speech acts” (Stöckl, 2004, p. 95).

Thematic Level

Panofsky (1932) has worked out three levels of iconological interpretation: (1) generally identifying the pictorial objects, such as people, structures, colors, forms, and so on; (2) linking elements to known narratives, such as a cross representing Switzerland; and (3) accessing the basic principles such as that foreign people immigrate to Switzerland. Imdahl (1994) further developed iconology by aiming in particular at the reconstruction of meaning. In this context, the analysis of the image targets its theme, such as that foreign immigration to Switzerland brings problems. Bohnsack (2010) transformed Imdahl's iconic approaches and demonstrated how promising Mannheim's (1964) documentary method of textual reconstruction of meaning can be for visual analysis. Reconstructive methods try to respond to the question of what a word stands for, addressing the rules and basic themes of thinking. Following Bohnsack (2010), I then ask, on a thematic level of image analysis: What does an image stand for and which meanings are underpinned visually?

Narrative Level

In the epistemological debate, it was noted that images are successful in their circulation if they display consistency and persuasiveness through their narrative. For the narration, narrators require elements that are linked to general, worldly descriptions, such as *mass immigration*, *crowded streets*, and so forth. Understanding is evoked through referring to a specific reference system, such as the concept that the nation state of Switzerland is overcrowded. On the one hand, this can localize the element both spatially and temporally. On the other hand, due to the linearity of events, it can trigger the perception of a cause-and-effect relationship. Subsequently, to follow the analytical approach, I pose the following question: What are the temporal and spatial reference systems and narratives that are tied up with the practice of visualization?

Furthermore, it is important to analyze rhetorical means of narration. In the course of the analysis, I noticed that I used metaphors myself to translate the visual into language: for example, “they get closer”, “suffering under the burden of”, “perspective points to infinity”, and “Switzerland is being trampled down”. It might be that the use of metaphors does

not only help me as an analyst in understanding and communicating about the image. It is also part of the very significance of the image, as well as its way of producing and reinforcing knowledge. New approaches use metaphor theory as an element of the thought process and, thus, as mirroring a way of cognitively classifying what is felt or perceived. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) presuppose that people gather experiences from their environment used to understand the unfamiliar. This suggests that the abstract is comprehended only through the experienced. Daily experiences are thus used to express unknown phenomena (Schäffner, 1996, as cited in Hülse, 2003, p. 218).

Enforcement Level

By basing my argument on the theory of narrative, I turn to the viewers and their interpretations. Without considering the perception of viewers, image analysis would be superficial. Burri (2001, 2008) bases her arguments on practice theory as understood by Bourdieu's (1976) and Latour's (2007) concept of artifact theory. She argues for a sociological approach to the visual and provides a three-dimensional path to the praxis of visualization: (1) visual value, (2) visual performance, and (3) visual persuasiveness. First, Burri (2008, p. 348) claims that value is an imagery "which is constituted in practice through the cultural practices of seeing and interpreting". Second, the organization of visual signs and their specific arrangement is considered. The *visual performance* of images is expounded according to specific rules, which are rooted in "socio-technical conditions and cultural structures of experiences" (Burri, 2008, p. 349). Third, images have a certain authority that unfolds from their apparent objectivity. This dimension is known as *visual persuasiveness* and draws on how compelling the image is and its charisma.

Image Analysis in Practice: Four Levels of Reconstructing Visual Practices

Table 1 offers an overview of the visual theory approaches as well as their methodical implementation vis-à-vis the image analyzed in this study (Figure 1).

Results

The SVP posters were the main vehicles of political propaganda for the *Against Mass Immigration* initiative. In the weeks leading up to the vote, they were put up as posters in public places, as well as disseminated over the Internet, and published in newspapers and magazines. The posters were designed by Alexander Segert, head of the company *Goal*. Segert has been designing the advertising for the SVP for 14 years and has led other important campaigns (website: goal, political communication). Three of the posters (Figures 1–3) were printed, and one was used online (Figure 4; website: Masseneinwanderung).

Understanding the Message: Simplification as a Basic Principle

Segert achieves understanding through simplifying the message because the "scarcest resource in our lives is attention" (website: Goal, political communication). In order for a campaign to be successful, in the sense that the message reaches the target group, a central argument and emotions must be communicated. For this, one

must ensure that the message is communicated in a focused way; no background noises, just the essential message, and that the needs, wishes, and desires of the customers are addressed in that message instead of conveying general arguments, and that emotions are embedded in the target group (website: goal, about us).

This is above all "a question of courage. To have the courage to use the whole budget and all means of the campaign to focus on a single, central argument. The SVP has that courage" (website: Berner Zeitung, 25.11.2010).

This pattern of resorting to basic principles such as many foreigners, fear, and problems shapes the posters produced for the initiative. First of all, simplification is reflected in the fact that there are only a small number of elements. There are only a few forms and figures, all clearly shaped: feet, houses, cars, trees, and roots. One might think that such reductive visualization would suggest that each element is chosen with care, to allow for concrete connotations meaning that the interest groups can generate understanding. However, in their reductive nature, the images include empty spaces that do not point to a simple understanding: Feet, trees, and houses generally allow a range of connotations. Within a specific sociospatial context, various interpretations become possible. While seeming paradoxical, according to Grutschus and Krilles (2010, p. 9), absence is a "fundamental characteristic of the human understanding of the world" which can generate "ontological conviction" precisely because "it is deprived of [the concrete]".

Relying on Derrida's (1972/1981) theory of absence, Grutschus and Krilles (2010, p. 10) suggest that significance is not achieved by filling these gaps. On the contrary, absence and the resulting space it opens up allows the construction of reality to develop. Thus, the people are not fully depicted. Nevertheless, or maybe because of that, the image conveys the message of immigrating masses, highlighting the anonymity and foreignness of the mass. It is not clear where these people are from, how many there are of them, and what makes them immigrate; they are depicted without heads (Figure 1). The car, house, people, needle, rubbish, and pistol (Figure 2) as well as the tree and its roots (Figure 3) reflect a complex discursive collection of problems. Here, however, they are not specifically named but receive meaning only through the effect they have; Switzerland (the map) is beginning to crumble, as spaces become tight and filled with conflict for those inhabiting them.

Table 1. Levels of Visual Analysis Using Figure 1.

Visual Theory	Analysis Question and Answers
Image as object Image and text pattern	<p>What does the image display? It is made up of three colors and split into thirds: The lower two thirds consist of a red surface with a white cross. The text is in white, and the top third of the image is white. It portrays human legs and feet, or rather black boots; the legs are also clad in black. In color and shape, they are all the same and have no identifying features. The legs and boots are moving toward the red area, crossing the boundary between white and red. How is meaning generated? Recognition: The Swiss People's Party uses almost exclusively the colors black, red, and white. The people cannot be identified, consisting only of black legs and feet (there is no upper body or head), they are undifferentiated. They are moving from the back to the front. The perspective is from below, causing the feet to appear large when stepping onto the red area. There is no differentiation in the background, which just shows many people coming from somewhere. The red area is being "trampled" on. People are marching on</p> <p>The speech act/text of "mass immigration" is accompanied by an instruction: "stop". An exclamation mark, as well as the large, clear and bold text amplify this message. There is no other text; "mass immigration" refers directly to the unspecified number of feet. The text allows contextualization of the symbolic, even iconic display of feet and legs stepping on the red ground: It is the masses trampling over Swiss territory. Or rather, they are immigrating. Through the text, the imagery can be tied up with a specific meaning of the visual: mass and immigration. The conception of the mass is that of many, uncontrollable, impossible to gain overview of, or to organize</p>
Image as theme/ motif	<p>What meaning is generated? The white cross symbolizes Switzerland as a nation state, with an area. This area is being "invaded" by "other people", who are not Swiss, but come from an indefinite and undefined place: the background. These people are anonymous and unidentifiable. There are many of them and they enter Switzerland freely (here, I refer back to the text: mass immigration). The figures are dark and seem threatening because they are unidentifiable and are coming closer, and growing larger. Due to the perspective, Switzerland appears plain and small. The message of the text is an imperative: "stop mass immigration!". This can be read as a call for action, and everyone is addressed. What does the image stand for? For a political opinion within Switzerland. Segregation between the inside (Switzerland) and the outside (other). A specific area that belongs to certain people, where others are not welcome, and must be stopped. What themes are used? Mass immigration; the feeling that too many people are coming from outside, that Switzerland is being trampled underfoot under the weight of "mass immigration." How is what addressed? Mass immigration as black feet and legs. Switzerland as a red area with a white cross. Statement as text. "Mass" refers to the many legs in the background. The perspective implies infinity and eternity. Cropped bodies are anonymous, so nothing is known about the people stepping over the red and white surface</p>
Image as narrative Rhetorical resources Visual metaphor	<p>What rules are to be understood? Switzerland as a country of immigration. More people entering than desired. What does the image trigger? A threat, with people coming and showing no respect because Switzerland is being trampled underfoot. How does what appear as what? Switzerland appears as a helpless, passive space; immigrants as strangers. How does this become real? Not being able to differentiate individuals means that "they" could be anybody (but "us"). There are no numbers, just endless people who form a black, foreign "mass". What is the implicitness of the visualization and the viewing? Everyone wants to come to Switzerland. Metaphor for space: Perspective from below—suppressed/inferior to/ subjected to/crushed under the weight of; Perspective of coming closer—threatening/unstoppable/crushing/ infinity, trampled/crossing the Swiss border. Container metaphor: The red area offers a contrast to the white area, a reference to an outside, another location. The use of this indoor/outdoor metaphor is even more pronounced in the other posters (Posters 3 and 4). Ontological metaphor: mass immigration. Movement metaphor: enter Switzerland</p>
Image as a practice visual value visual performance visual persuasiveness	<p>What is the visual symbolism of this image? Surface, cross, feet, legs. How are the visual elements of the image organized? Feet and legs face forward, toward the camera, appearing larger. The area cannot be defended. Culture of seeing: front—back, big—small. This perspective creates a sense of coming toward me. How are visual symbols used? Perspective, enlarged body parts. What is made visible? People who come to Switzerland, crossing the Swiss border. What is not visible? People who travel out of Switzerland. Which people come, how they come, and who they are? How does the visual persuade? Simple color symbolism, simplified symbolism, area, Switzerland, people, many, perspective, match between text and image, text confirming the many. No information on facts or figures. Being overrun, trespassing as a visualization of the fear of foreign infiltration</p>

This is an example of a versatile symbolism which could be understood differently in different sociospatial contexts. The message is understood in a certain way because the possibilities for connotations are restricted to the specific statement and discursive practice. The label "stop mass immigration" allows for a problem-oriented framing of the symbols and furthermore offers an understanding of these problems by suggesting a cause-and-effect relationship. Thus, the simplification of the forms and figures is enlarged by the discursive practice. Complex social issues are reduced to a single argument: Because of

mass immigration (cause), Switzerland has specific problems (effect) which must be stopped (consequences).

The simplification can furthermore be found in the use of colors as well as their occurring text-image-color pattern. In the case of Figure 4, this tradition is broken and the text-image pattern is expanded by the use of numbers. This disruption in the tradition of radical reductiveness can be explained by the use of that image, which is used to campaign over the Internet. Viewers will only come across it if they have already displayed an interest in the topic because it appeals to them and they look



Figure 1. Poster in a public space “Masseneinwanderung stoppen!”.



Figure 2. Poster in a public space “Ja zur Initiative gegen Masseneinwanderung”.

for more information on the initiative’s main website (<http://www.masseneinwanderung.ch>). In the other cases, the figures display the red and white colors of the Swiss national flag, which makes it possible to differentiate Switzerland as a nation state. Moreover, there is another effect produced by adding another color—black, which in spite of appearing in various forms (it is used, for the text, the trees, the feet) here represents



Figure 3. Poster in a public space “Masslosigkeit schadet”.

the negative and ominous (the EU and bilateral relations with them,¹ mass migration). This recurring pattern of the colors red, white, and black makes its highly recognizable (Edelman, 1985; Elliot, Fairchild, & Franklin, 2015; Hattenhauer, 1990); first, with regard to identifying Switzerland (red, white) and possible attempts to contrast the nation state with the other (represented by the color black). Furthermore, this color scheme is in line with a tradition found in other posters of the initiative, where black has also been used to portray the negative (e.g., the black sheep; website: Ausschaffungsinitiative).

Feeling the Message: Visualization of Emotions

According to Boehm (2004, p. 32), images can generate understanding by showing something; “il fait voir”—they allow one to see. According to Link (2006), images can only do so if the viewers already have sub- and pretexts that provide “perceptual capacities, to see reality—as it is appears to be” (p. 20). This means that images are symbolically charged with meanings from a stock of knowledge which the viewers access to understand the image. We have learned to see meaningful symbols, which, so Link (2006, p. 53), enables us to link emotions to images. This is Alexander Segert’s goal. In an interview with the *Welt* (website: Give Voice to the Fear), he presents himself as a man “that gives a voice, an image to the fear that is already felt by the people”. But what are the fears felt by the Swiss people? On one poster, people in black boots trample on the Swiss flag. On another, the bilateral agreements are represented as a fruit-bearing tree with black roots. These roots exert pressure on Swiss territory, which is separated from the territory around it as if it were not connected to the rest of Europe. In that image, the foreign—here the tree and the bilateral agreements—threatens and destroys the familiar—Swiss territory, and the nation state. In all the examples, a seemingly socio-spatial problem is abstracted, visualized, and linked to the comparison between *Switzerland/familiar* and *not Switzerland/foreign*. Moreover, the SVP’s initiatives are successful because estimates and statistics on migration are displayed subjectively in a way that is easy to understand: a train compartment, apartment, garden—individual spaces that are threatened by mass immigration, producing a narrative of “better to remain amongst us.”

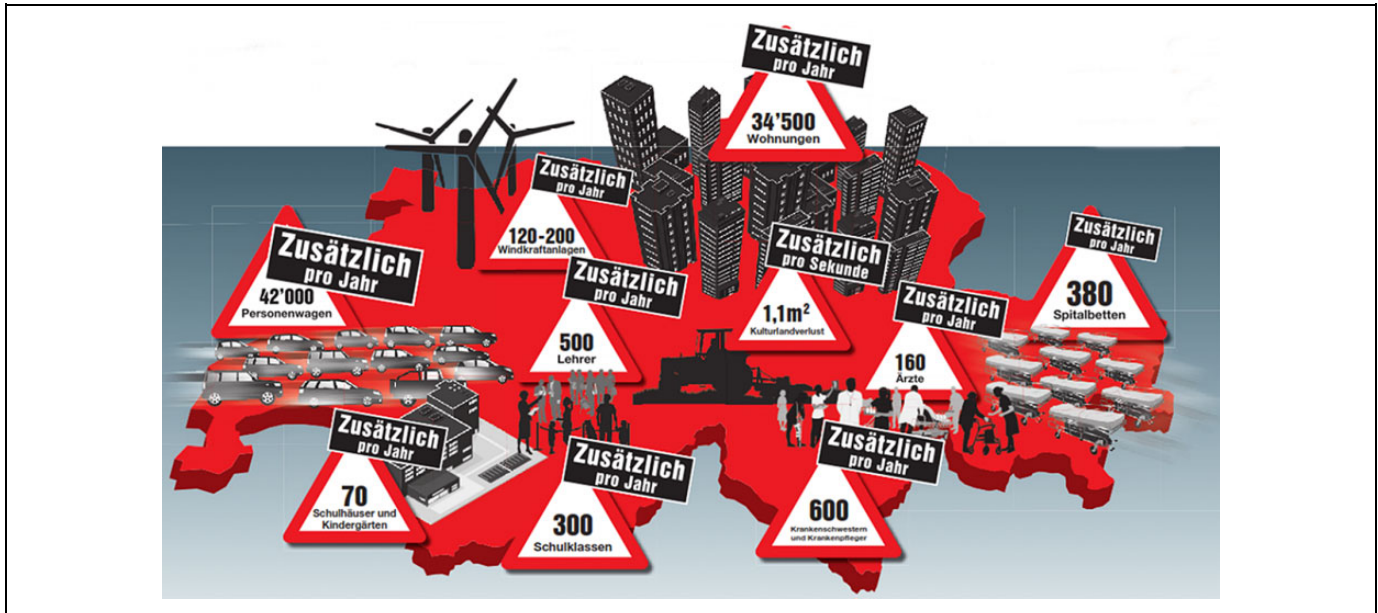


Figure 4. The argumentarium (<http://www.masseneinwanderung.ch>).

This narrative is found in the symbolism of *the boat is full* (Figures 2 and 4), *the root of all evil* (Figure 3), and *trample over Switzerland* (Figure 1), all of which generate a sense of the collective. In order for a collective symbolism to be effective, Link (2006) argues that a threshold has to be exceeded, a “pain—or load limit” (p. 33). It then becomes possible for migrants to not be perceived as individuals but as a mass and for migration to trigger a fear of denormalization, namely, the fear of a shift “from the normal state to a state of abnormality”.

By presenting mass immigration as a phenomenon that triggers a range of problems, for example, land loss of 1.1 m²/s, housing shortages, problems for the transport and energy supply as well as overburdening of the education and health systems, residents begin to fear foreigners, and even more so groups of foreigners. Talking about and showing mass immigration through visualization produce a feeling of a loss of overview as well as of being lost to the masses as individuals. This fear of the mass, visualized through the headless and bodiless shapes, is conveyed by anonymity. It thus comes to be seen as a threat, despite individual positive experiences with foreign nationals not holding Swiss passports. The reference to *the mass* holds great significance, as the message thus appeals to people who in their daily life enjoy friendly and professional relations with foreign nationals, for example, people without a Swiss passport. Talking about *the mass* makes it legitimate to say: “I have nothing against you, but if there are too many . . .”.

Homogeneous Switzerland: Visualization of Sociospatial Relationships

According to Mayerhauser (2006, p. 74), society’s “code of differentiation” is changing over the course of globalization. While there are vertical hierarchies (top–bottom) in a welfare

state, these have been expanded by a horizontal distinction (inside–outside) that regulates access to economic, social, and cultural participation in the 21st century. Kriesi, Lachat, Selb, Bornschieer, and Helbling (2005) show that it was not by chance that the SVP addressed the issue of asylum and migration in the early 1990s. Even though the SVP has been making its mark as an advocate of the people since the 1970s and has positioned itself critically vis-à-vis the EU, the emphasis on the interior, on Swiss values and lifestyles, and on outward differentiation has increased since the collapse of the bipolar world in the 1990s.

The idea of differentiating Switzerland from the rest of the world is presented on the placards of the *Against Mass Immigration* initiative. On these posters, Switzerland is depicted as a nation-state, shown by a simulation of a 3-D visualization of the state and its borders, or a white cross on a red background. A homogenic space is visualized through the references to the colors red and white and the Swiss cross. The homogeneous structure is visualized in such a way that it differs from and is threatened by the outside world (through migrants, drugs, and crime), leading to the collapse of everyday life and the nation state.

The fact that the posters of the *Against Mass Immigration* initiative are based on homogenization has several advantages. First, it makes it possible to distinguish between a Switzerland without any problems and foreign countries with problems. Second, this can thus set in motion the validation of the narrative of “everything was better in the past”. Third, sociospatial problems can be attributed to external causes. Fourth, the dualistic conception of the inside and the outside enables viewers to position themselves. They can then self-identify as *Swiss* or *non-Swiss*. This is accompanied by dualistic connotations of belonging or not belonging, of being local or foreign, of feeling at home or threatened.

Convincing Through Image: The Message as Visual Metaphor

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors reflect thought patterns and the need to organize the world. Thus, people use concepts for spatial and temporal orientation that allow the localization of people and things (up/down, near/far, inside/outside, and earlier/today). This is particularly relevant for the initiative because an inner and outer perspective in the sense of Switzerland and *the others* can be established.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also mention structural metaphors that enable the transfer of meaning from the known (pain experienced by stepping on it) to the unknown (Switzerland as home to the Swiss). Through “trampling over Switzerland” and the bottom-up perspective, the individual feels personally threatened. The approaching boots are large and the spectator feels small and at their mercy. The visualization of “being small” is also used in Figure 2, where Switzerland is represented as a limited space. Also in Figure 3, Switzerland appears at the mercy of the roots, representing the EU. The concept of *smallness* is reinforced by the symbolic representation of Switzerland as a flat surface, which makes it appear passive. The option of becoming active is presented in the form of becoming involved in the vote on mass immigration.

In addition to structural metaphors, ontological metaphors play an important role in conveying messages. Mass immigration is an ontological metaphor that transforms a complex situation into an entity, something understandable, quantifiable, identifiable, and comparable. From a linguistic point of view, *mass immigration* is also understood as normalization, a strategy for avoiding discussions about the existence of a social and spatial phenomenon. By formulating adjectives or verbs as nouns, it enables a narrative about the effects but not about the existence of a problem. If we take the statement “masses migrate to Switzerland”, we see that this statement can be confirmed but also rejected. However, a statement about *mass immigration* can only be discussed in terms of the degree of impact (a few too many), but it is not possible to objectively reject the normalized statement.

Persuasion Through Image: The Message as a Comic

The posters do not incorporate photos but rely on a form of communication that is often used to tell stories in sequence: the comic. Sackmann (2010, pp. 6–9) distinguishes three principles of storytelling through the comic: the continuous narrative as a story or event in one image, the integrated narrative as a chronological order of events, and the separated narrative as a story in many images. In the latter, like in a comic, not all scenes are shown as is the case in a movie, but the readers can still make sense of the story by inductively filling in the gap between one image and the next; depending on individual interpretation or a reader’s point of reference, there is more or less room for interpretation. For example, the comic consists of two pictures. In the first, a boy is playing football and the second shows a broken window. In reference to Derrida’s (1972/1981) theory

of absence, we can state that the absence of a particular thing can trigger strong connotations. Linking this to the theme of the comic, also shaped by simplification, we can claim that each poster represents the first image in a comic, namely, the beginning of the story. The storyline, or how the story develops, is then completed in the minds of the viewers. Thus, using a comic style is another visual practice, through which ideas about mass immigration and its consequences, as well as political conviction to “stop” *mass immigration* are generated.

Furthermore, the comic style generates another narrative performance that guarantees even greater success in convincing the viewers. McCloud (2001) argues that comics use symbolic forms to represent emotions or other invisible things. The stylistic elements of exaggeration and pointed emphasis are used. McCloud gauges the comprehensive forms of contextual and formal abstraction, ranging from photographic or photo-realistic representation to symbols. He considers the caricaturist representation of the characters of particular importance, as it allows readers to identify easily with these characters. A caricaturist representation is sufficiently concrete to allow the recognition of persons or objects. At the same time, it is not very concrete, meaning that the viewer’s own emotions, desires, and fears can be projected onto it. An interesting aspect of exaggeration and targeted emphasis is their degrading quality.

The comic series *Tom & Jerry* illustrates this point: In each of the 161 episodes, a cat and mouse chase each other in unrealistic and comical scenarios. The stories include extreme violence, resentment, rage, and assassination plots which, in real life, would end in certain death. As a comic, *Tom & Jerry* makes it possible to express something that may be inexpressible in a society: The impossibility of the coexistence of two different ways of life exemplified here by the cat and mouse (Rathmann, 2004). Is the SVP suggesting this impossibility? Through the stylistic elements of exaggeration and belittlement used in the posters, it is easier for people to agree with its messages. If the posters were to contain more realistic elements of style, such as films or photos, it might be harder to gain approval, as the elements could be perceived as too drastic. However, the posters appear childishly simple and playful, or at least more so than a realistic photo or film would. Both these elements generate agreement.

European Perspective on Swiss Mass Migration Initiative

What are the consequences of a political strategy of this kind? The SVP has established itself as the strongest party in Switzerland. The *Against Mass Immigration* initiative adds additional pressures to Switzerland’s internal and foreign policy, especially concerning its relationship with the European Union and the international agreement on the free movement of people between it and Switzerland. What are the consequences outside Switzerland? The themes used by the SVP have triggered debates about the party’s right-wing radicalism all over Europe (Hildebrand, 2017; website: Schweizer Rundfunk, The Guardian, Challenges). Even though the SVP has repeatedly denied

right-wing or racist agendas and has interpreted such accusations as defamation by political opponents and the press, the party has to be accountable for the fact that its posters have served as templates for many right-wing parties throughout Europe. The themes of the poster for the 2009 initiative *against the construction of minarets* as well as those for the *deportation* initiative (2010) were picked up and reused in right-wing circles in France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. The National Socialist Party of Germany (Nationalsozialistische Partei Deutschlands) has copied the SVP's speech and in its advertising uses the phrases: "role model Switzerland—stop mass immigration! National referendum now!" (website: Deutschlandfunk).

These emerging themes as well as the increasing flood of images in global communication emphasize the importance of reevaluating the discursive nature of radical right-wing parties in Europe, as has been done by Langenbach and Speit (2013) as well as Skenderovic (2009). Here, I argue that in order to deepen understanding of themes and their persuasiveness, there is a need to add to this research a comprehensive examination of visuality.

Conclusion: Visualization as Political Strategy

Through language, people express their worldviews, as well as their desires and needs. Academic methods of text analysis provide access to the construction of social reality through language. Applying text analysis allows identification of the relationship between language practices and the conceptions and ideas about the social world. Text strives to comprehensibility, and text analysis identifies the linguistic practices it uses to achieve this comprehensibility (in German: *Nachvollziehbarkeit*).

Image analysis extends this discursive comprehensibility through the development of visual comprehensibility. It offers an approach to the question of how images are used alongside language to trigger emotions and generate desires. In respect to my contribution, this presents the question of how images are used for making political statements through using political posters? In German, the term for comprehensibility, *Nachvollziehbarkeit*, can be rearranged to *Nachvollsehbarkeit*, to explain how a message can be visualized to gain (political) persuasiveness.

In order to reconstruct the visual practices of persuasion, I have linked visual approaches from art, the social sciences, and geography with principles of narration and argumentation theory. These approaches allow us to understand the power of the images. Images create belief and assertion by creating a reality in which the viewer can believe. This is particularly relevant when, as in this instance, the image is part of a political negotiation process.

In view of the above, I have shown first that the visualizations of mass migration initially mean a reduction in signs, symbols, and color. This reductive visualization and the absence of specific symbolism such as concrete persons, their skin color, or the use of drugs create a powerful space for

connotations. These connotations are emotionally charged with a sense of threat and fear. According to this argument of cause and effect, migration is an external force (cause) that deformatizes and triggers (effect) sociospatial problems in Switzerland. Furthermore, the dualistic conception of Switzerland as an interior space and of migrants as coming from an exterior space is of great importance here.

For one, problematic situations can be regarded as originating externally rather than being caused by anything or anyone within Switzerland. Second, the national identification of the viewers and the fear of alienation from outside can be conceptualized. Third, such internal and external perspectives can be emotionally charged with meanings such as local and foreign. By applying text analysis tools from narrative and metaphor theory to visual analysis, I have further demonstrated that this emotional charge is supported by a visual aspect: the reference to familiar patterns of visual storytelling using comic-strip images.

Despite these extensive results, this work has limitations. On the one hand, the work is based on the assumption that images are powerful instruments of political conviction. To date, there is no known work that has examined this thesis in cognitive psychology for Switzerland. In other words, it has not yet been proven that people have made different political choices after viewing a political poster. For this, a reference to approaches from cognitive science would be fruitful. Bruner and Postman (1949), for example, emphasize perception as a complex process of recognition and interpretation of visual stimuli. Applied to the research object of this article, the election posters of the SVP can be considered stimuli and mental representations of knowledge, ideas, political aims as well as social symbols and/or social metaphors. Current work can provide helpful insights in this respect (Balçetis & Lassiter, 2010). On the other hand, images provide the presentation of ideas, emotions, and desires beyond language. However, image analysis ultimately only requires the translation of the image into language in order to communicate the results via images. This is an immanent reduction in image knowledge and image communication. This reduction cannot be circumvented as academia prioritizes linguistic communication, contrary to art or music.


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Note

1. The symbols displayed in Figure 3 (tree, Switzerland) were first used by European Union (EU)-friendly parties. There, the tree would grow in the middle of Switzerland, standing for positive

aspects of the bilateral relations between Switzerland and the EU, which so to speak make Switzerland a fruitful place. The Swiss People's Party adopts the symbolism but depicting the tree as a surrounding element that pressurizes and crushes Switzerland. Back in 2010, the deportation initiative used the symbolism of the tree covered with fruit. The posters depicted the felling of the tree, thereby suggesting that the bilateral agreements weaken Switzerland.

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