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the contested and embedded visual language of anti-surveillance protests

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# IMAGES OF SURVEILLANCE. THE CONTESTED AND EMBEDDED VISUAL LANGUAGE OF ANTI-SURVEILLANCE PROTESTS

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## ABSTRACT

*This contribution provides an analysis of images produced and employed in protests against surveillance in Germany in 2008 and 2009. For this purpose, a method of visual analysis is developed that draws mainly on semiotics and art history. Following this method, the contribution examines a selection of images (pictures and graphic design) from the anti-surveillance protests in three steps: description of components, detection of conventional signs, and contextual analysis. Furthermore, the analysis compares the images of the two major currents of the protest (liberal and radical left) in order to elucidate the context in which images are created and used. The analysis shows that images do not merely illustrate existing political messages but contribute to movements' systems of meaning creation and transportation. The two currents in the protests communicate their point of view through the images both strategically and expressively. The images play a crucial role in formulating groups' different strategies as well as worldviews and identities. In addition, the analysis shows that the meaning of images is contested and contextual. Images are produced and received in specific national as well as issue contexts. Future research should address the issue of context and reception in greater depth in order to further explore the effects of visual language on mobilisation. Overall, the contribution demonstrates that systematic visual analysis allows our understanding of social movements' aims, strategy, and collective identity to be deepened. In addition, visual analysis may provide activists themselves with a tool to critically assess their visual communication.*

**Keywords:** Visual analysis, protest movements, surveillance, semiotics, art history, culture

## INTRODUCTION

In Autumn 2008 a new protest wave emerged in Germany. For the first time since the protests against the population census in the 1980s, a protest movement against governmental surveillance and control developed and received considerable attention from the mainstream media. With annual, nationwide demonstrations under the slogan ‘freedom not fear’ (‘Freiheit statt Angst’) the protests succeeded in raising critical awareness about data protection and surveillance. This wave of protest – parts of which were coordinated across Europe – was sparked by the German government’s decision to implement data retention.<sup>1</sup> It brought together different political actors: established activists encountered a new generation of protesters – young and internet-savvy – and Free Democrats met the radical left. Images played a significant role in these protests. The ubiquitous production of pictures (with Closed Circuit Television, for example) is, among other things, one of the reasons for the protest. Concurrently, pictures were ubiquitous in the protest repertoire as symbols, posters, banners, flags, stickers, photos, logos, caricatures, installations, and performances.<sup>2</sup> This contribution analyses the visual language of these protests. More specifically, it compares the images created and employed by its two major currents, the liberal and the left spectrum.

Images are crucial means to express a political message. In doing so, images are not mere illustrations of this message; rather they are part of the production of social and political reality (Doerr & Teune, 2012; Frey, 1999; Maasen et al., 2006; Gamson, 1992). In this vein, they serve to make the invisible (e.g. surveillance) visible (Münkler, 2009) and thus have considerable political power – in particular with respect to social movements. Despite their ubiquity in political communication, however, analysis in the social sciences has focused on text rather than images (de Opp Hipt & Latniak, 1991; Jäger, 1999). Social movement studies have also largely neglected visual analysis (cf. Doerr & Teune, 2012) – though there are exceptions (e.g. Lahusen, 1996; DeLuca, 1999).

Only more recently have movements’ visual languages received more attention. Several scholars have explored movement images in a broad sense with respect to the media

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<sup>1</sup> This development stands in the context of what has been considered the “rise of the surveillance society” (Lyon 1994). For an overview of this debate see Haggerty & Ericson (2000), Lyon (2001), and Garland (2002). For the European context, ever more important due to the European Union’s increasing legislative and executive rights, see Hempel and Töpfer (2009).

<sup>2</sup> The central role of artistic contributions in surveillance-critical debates has led to the creation of new concepts such as “artveillance” (Brighenti, 2008). For an overview on research about resistance against surveillance see the special edition of the journal “Surveillance and Society” (Huey & Fernandez, 2009), as well as Marx (2003) and Monahan (2006).

images produced during protest events (e.g. Delicath & DeLuca, 2003; Fahlenbrach, 2002; Juris, 2008; Teune, forthcoming), political colours used and worn (Sawer, 2007; Chester & Welsh, 2004) as well as art (Adams, 2022). Other scholars have analysed movements' images in a narrower sense, focussing on graphic designs used on posters, flyers, and patches deployed in campaigns (e.g. Doerr, 2010; Mattoni & Doerr, 2007; Doerr & Teune, 2012, Ullrich & Lê, 2011). These contributions reveal that movements' images both draw from as well as counter existing visual codes. Alice Mattoni and Nicole Doerr (2007), for example, show how visual depictions of precarious workers in the Euro May Day Parades aimed to subvert popular culture while drawing on the aesthetics of saint portrayals.

The analysis of social movements' visual languages provides crucial insights into movement dynamics, with respect to both strategic and expressive aspects. First, images have a strategic function similar to frames (Snow & Benford, 1992). They are employed to highlight certain issues, raise awareness, and mobilise people (Adams, 2002; Fahlenbrach, 2002, p. 142). At the same time, images are embedded in an existing stock of visual codes. While these codes may be challenged to some extent, social movements largely need to stay within their confines in order to get their message across – either with respect to society at large or to their specific subculture. In this way, images are also an expression of belonging to a certain group (Casquete, 2003) or general cultural context. This means that the analysis of images provides insights into the formative conditions of the activists' outlook on the world. Visual analysis, hence, combines the framing approach's dominant strategic "lens" (Johnston, 2009: 5) with an emphasis on expressive aspects like worldviews and belonging coming from the sociology of knowledge, discourse analysis and New Social Movement theories (Buechler, 2000; Johnston, 2009; Heßdörfer et al., 2010; Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2012). In addition, it allows the issue of reception and its potential discrepancy with the producer's intentions to be addressed.

This contribution analyses a selection of images produced and employed by activists involved in the protests against surveillance. The analysis focuses on images in a narrow sense by addressing only two elements of social movements' visual expression (Doerr & Teune, 2012): images and graphic design – leaving out performances of the body and arrangements of objects. The analysis concentrates on the variety of expressive and strategic aspects of the images, while reception is covered only anticipatively. The paper's main purpose is of an empirical nature. We will focus on the comparison of the visual languages of the two major currents within the anti-surveillance protests in order to explore the various layers of meaning and the context in which they are employed. Due to the lack of elaborated methods for visual analysis in movement research, we develop methodological tools

borrowed from outside political sociology – thus also reflecting the authors' different backgrounds in art history, cultural studies and sociology.

The following first provides an overview of the protest coalition against surveillance and its major political cleavages. Second, we introduce our analytical approach to images drawing mainly from art history and semiotics. A subsequent part analyses and compares the liberal and left currents' visual languages revealing, on the one hand, the meaning images transfer beyond illustration and, on the other, how movements' 'imagineering' is contested yet embedded in a specific cultural and historical context.

## **PROTESTS AGAINST SURVEILLANCE IN GERMANY**

The point of departure of the protests against surveillance in Germany was the Federal Parliament's ratification of a number of policies related to the collection, processing, and storage of – often personal – data: the introduction of a national health card system, the blocking of websites, and above all the permission to store data about internet and telecommunication use without a specific reason (data retention). Alongside the annual 'freedom not fear' demonstrations, protest was expressed in a variety of activities at local or regional level (e.g. info stalls, demonstrations, activist performances, lectures, camera plays and many more).

The protest coalition was supported by a broad spectrum of actors ranging from the *FDP* (Liberal Party), the Green Party, trade unions, and *Die Linke* (The Left Party) to autonomist anti-fascists and other radical left groups. In addition, a variety of individuals, associations, and NGOs took part in the mobilisations, among them groups specialising on the issues of surveillance, control and repression, lobby groups, and professional associations such as the medical association *Freie Ärzteschaft*. Thus, the issue concerned resonated in a wide organizational field and related to a wide range of political questions such as internet freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of press, democracy, transparency, economic inequality, and social exclusion.

The broad interest in the issue of surveillance also reveals itself in the emergence and success of the German *Piratenpartei* (Pirate Party). Founded in 2006 following the Swedish prototype, the party has a strong focus on the issues of surveillance and data retention, while offering comparably little substance on other policy fields. Heavily shaped by computer affinitive youth and small IT entrepreneurs, it campaigns against surveillance and for a free internet as well as transparency in politics and administration. It has had some electoral success in recent years, gaining about 8% of the votes in 4 federal states since 2011. While

this electoral success is currently forcing the party to broaden its programmatic scope, the party contributed considerably to the anti-surveillance protests due to its presence in activities (with banners and party flags) and, more recently, by advocating its claims in institutionalised politics.

The central role in this broad coalition was played by the *Arbeitskreis Vorratsdatenspeicherung* (German Working Group on Data Retention, abbr. *AK Vorrat*). This group was the major organiser of the analysed protests and contributed considerably to establishing surveillance as a contentious issue. The *AK Vorrat* is an association of civil rights campaigners, data protection activists, and internet users – partly stemming from the hacker-community – as well as associations and initiatives against excessive surveillance and the unfounded storage of personal data. The *AK Vorrat* campaigns for ‘more data protection, for the right to privacy, for unobserved communication and for more respect of human dignity, in particular the right of informational self-determination’<sup>3</sup>. It is a loose national network with several local sections, without formal membership and organised mainly via mailing-lists. It is supported by civil rights organisations, in particular *FoeBud e.V.*<sup>4</sup> and, depending on the occasion, also by larger organisations such as trade unions and parts of the left-liberal parties. Within the anti-surveillance sector, the *AK Vorrat* functions partly as an intermediary network. The AK primarily belongs to the liberal current of the protest (see next section), but it ensures ties to most sectors through its open structure and the possibility of organisational and individual affiliation, and thus also to groups of the libertarian left which are generally only marginally institutionalised in any formal way.<sup>5</sup>

### *Two major currents within the protest coalition*

While the opposition to surveillance provided an umbrella for various groups to organise and mobilise jointly, the coalition remained heterogeneous. Different analyses of the problem’s causes, conditions and solutions underlie an abstract consensus about the rejection of data retention and increasing surveillance (cf. Helle Panke e.V., 2010). The different perspectives go hand in hand with certain action repertoires, relations to militancy and civil disobedience and, last but not least, visual realisation of the surveillance critique. The most significant cleavage within the broad protest coalition can be found between the liberal and the left

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.vorratsdatenspeicherung.de/content/view/13/37/lang,de/> [1.11.11], translation by the authors.

<sup>4</sup> For several years this association has presented a negative prize for excessive surveillance, the ‘Big Brother Award’

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed account of the protest movement and the cleavages therein see Leipziger Kamera (2009) and Ullrich & Lê (2011).

(radical) spectrum. This does not mean, of course, that all actors can be identified as either liberal or radical left groups. The ideal-type distinction drawn here highlights the extremes in order to clarify the different points of view.<sup>6</sup> Differences manifest themselves both with respect to protest culture and framing efforts. Furthermore, the liberal and left currents have different perspectives on surveillance and its relation to the state and law.

The liberal current is constituted by established political actors such as the liberal FDP, large parts of *Bündnis90/ Die Grünen* (Green Party), trade unions such as the public sector union *ver.di* and the youth organisation of the DGB (German Federation of Trade Unions), the *Jusos* (Youth organisation of the *Social Democratic Party*), some lobby groups and civil rights organisations as well as large parts of the *Piratenpartei*. These groups' main point of criticism concerns the growing competences of the state in restricting its citizens' freedom through surveillance. This point of view draws on classical liberalism – not anti-statist, but with reservations about too strong or too authoritarian a state.

While accused of excessive surveillance, the state and its institutions, especially the German constitution,<sup>7</sup> are also seen as the framework in which good solutions can be realised. Accordingly, these groups prefer conventional and non-confrontational forms of protest and distance themselves from militant forms.<sup>8</sup> Next to classical forms of protest on the streets (demonstrations with posters) and lobbying, protest is frequently expressed in direct democracy measures (petitions) and legal pressure (appeals to the constitutional court) (Steven, 2009; Steinke, 2009)<sup>9</sup>.

Moving from the liberal to the left spectrum, the critique of the surveillance state becomes more fundamental and turns into a radical critique of the (liberal democratic) governmental system. Groups constituting the left spectrum are: radical left and anti-fascist groups (e.g. *SAV*, *Antifa*), *Rote Hilfe* (a solidarity organisation supporting politically prosecuted activists from the left spectrum) as well as Berlin-based groups critical of surveillance (*Out of Control*, *Seminar für angewandte Unsicherheit*). Despite ideological differences, these groups base their critique on an anti-statist and anti-capitalist stance.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Groups located between the liberal and the radical left spectrum are: the youth organisation of the Left Party, the Association of Republican Lawyers, and some civil rights organisations (*Humanist Union*, *Committee for Fundamental and Human Rights*, *International League for Human Rights*).

<sup>7</sup> On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the German Constitution, for example, activists staged protests against surveillance with info booths and actions, among them the symbolic burial of the Constitution and the announcement of its death in obituary notices.

<sup>8</sup> This was especially the case after excessive police violence (sic!) during the demonstrations in Autumn 2009.

<sup>9</sup> In particular, the lawsuit filed against data retention drew a great deal of attention since it put a provisional end to data retention.

<sup>10</sup> The (statist) 'old' left radical current (such as the Communist Party) was much less active in these protests.

Accordingly, the analyses, positions, and political styles of the liberal spectrum are considered insufficient.

The anti-statist and anti-capitalist perspective is relevant to both the left current's goals and its forms of protest. The aim is not to improve the liberal state but to level fundamental criticism at the political form of statehood, specifically the police, secret services, and armed forces. Accordingly, more confrontational protest forms are preferred and cooperation with governmental organs of repression is largely rejected.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, following an anti-capitalist perspective surveillance is interpreted as a means of the exclusion of marginal social groups. Hence, left groups do not primarily address surveillance as everybody's problem as the liberals do, but stress its selectivity: socially marginalised groups are affected by governmental surveillance and control to a significantly higher degree, especially precarious workers and the unemployed, as well as those who do not have fundamental rights to start with such as refugees. This selectivity is attributed not only to the hysteria about terrorism after the events of 9/11 but to the acute and enduring crisis of capitalism.

## **A METHOD FOR ANALYSING PROTEST IMAGES**

The goal of this part is twofold: first, drawing mainly on art history and semiotics, a three-step analytical approach to analysing images is developed. Second, the visual expressions of surveillance critique of two currents are analysed and compared, drawing conclusions about their perspectives on surveillance and its relation to the state. The analysis focuses on a selection of images from the protests against surveillance. Based on the above distinction between the two currents<sup>12</sup>, we have selected pictorial representatives which draw from symbols and icons widely shared in each current. Due to the limited size of this contribution, only one image per current is analysed in full detail. The other analyses are kept short, blurring to some extent the distinction between the three analytical steps while highlighting certain aspects of overarching importance.

### *The analysis of images beyond protest research: semiotics and cultural sciences*

Research on political communication in the social sciences can benefit greatly from the various techniques of visual analysis developed in art and cultural sciences – often developed

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<sup>11</sup> During demonstrations in Leipzig and Berlin in 2008, for example, left demonstrators jeered at coordinators' attempts to obsequiously fulfil the police restrictions imposed on the protesters or to thank the police for its presence.

<sup>12</sup> See also Ullrich & Lê (2011).



long before the pictorial turn in the humanities of the 1990s (cf. Mitchell, 1994). For our analysis we draw especially on semiotics, the history of art, and, partly, cultural studies and discourse analysis. These offer fruitful approaches to decoding political images, as they allow the analyst to distinguish between different levels of significance and meaning. First, drawing on structural linguistics, most prominently developed by Ferdinand de Saussure (1960), semiotics distinguishes between the two sides of a sign (in our case an image or a part of it), that is between the *signifier* and *signified*. While the signified concerns an idea or concept (e.g. a flag), the signifier is the means of expressing this concept (e.g. a piece of coloured fabric). Because there is no fixed or universal relation between a sign's two sides, we cannot take what we see as immediate access to the intention of the image's producer, nor can we be sure about what kind of meaning a viewer attributes to the image. Second, following the work of Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1985), two ways in which signs convey meaning are identified: while *denotation* concerns the decoding of a sign at a simple level, often on the basis of conventional conceptualisations (e.g. a piece of specifically coloured fabric = flag), *connotation* links the sign to broader cultural themes and concepts (e.g. a flag = nationality) and its evaluation (Barthes, 1972, 1985; Eco, 1968).

To be able to transfer these distinctions into a concrete methodology, recourse to the interpretative scheme by Erwin Panofsky (1975 [1957]) is helpful. Panofsky has played a crucial role in developing a methodology for analysing artwork. While his concepts have been developed for a different subject (i.e. renaissance art)<sup>13</sup> and long *before* the cultural and discursive turn in the social sciences and humanities, they nevertheless offer useful analytical tools for the present analysis. In particular, this analytical method allows the scholar to take distance from the visual material and differentiate between different layers of meaning. Panofsky distinguishes three layers of meaning, which partly overlap with the basic distinctions just introduced (see table 1):

- ♣ *Primary or Natural Subject Matter* (pre-iconographic description): analysis of the purely material configurations of colours and shapes, as well as 'natural' beings or things (e.g. animals, women/men, a table)<sup>14</sup>.
- ♣ *Secondary or Conventional subject matter* (iconography): analysis of the composition of the motives and images (e.g. anecdotes or allegories) as carriers of meaning for whose identification knowledge of the conventional meaning patterns is required (e.g. a man with a knife represents St. Bartholomew in a renaissance painting).

<sup>13</sup> In this context it should however be mentioned that art sciences have not only dealt with high culture but also with mass culture, e.g. Baxandall (1985) and Kemp (1985).

<sup>14</sup> The concept of 'natural things' follows an outdated, pre-discursive turn theory of science. Yet the following steps can compensate for this shortcoming.

- ♣ *Intrinsic Meaning or Content* (iconology): analyses of the meaning or content of an artwork, which can only be grasped when one knows the founding principles of a nation, an epoch, a class, a religious or philosophical conviction” (Panofsky, 1975, p. 40). This means full meaning can only be understood, when the technical abilities, cultural webs of meanings and discursive context are known, which – modified by its creator – are condensed in the artwork.

These distinctions also draw attention to the difference between the intention of an image’s producer and the image’s reception. While there is no objective interpretation, analyses can approximate the meaning conveyed with respect to the socio-cultural context in which the image is placed. Culture functions as a filter between signifier and signified, denotation and connotation. In highlighting the significance of the socio-cultural context in which an image is produced and interpreted, Panofsky’s third level of meaning anticipated a central theme in cultural studies. Merging semiotics with post-structuralist discourse theory, cultural studies scholars emphasise that meaning is not only produced through language but also more generally through a culture’s practices, beliefs, institutions, and political, economic, or social structures (Hall, 2003; Bryson et al., 1994). In this way, cultural studies draw attention to the possible difference between the context of an image’s production and its reception. Combining these overlapping approaches, the following analysis will proceed in three steps, each rising in level of abstraction (for an overview see table 1). Due to the limited length of the paper, the analysis cannot cover all possible symbolic references and iconological meanings. Instead it exemplarily highlights possible interpretations.

### *Three steps of analysis*

The first step of analysis entails extensive description of the image’s components (pre-iconographic, basic denotation). This entails the description of lines, colours, forms and their arrangement. Typically, art historians start with the image’s foreground, proceeding over the middle and finally to the background. This method allows the beholder to take distance from the image’s general and holistic impression and the subjective associations it invokes. This step aims to detect the image’s visual elements on a very basic level and to avoid leaving out elements unnoticed at first sight.

The second analytical step focuses on the detection of denotative or conventional content. The aim here is to identify symbols, metaphors, allegories, and allusions created in the combination of motives on the basis of conventional meanings. This requires knowledge

of the specific symbolic and metaphorical meanings referred to through the image's detailed arrangements (iconography). These conventional meanings refer, for example, to well-known sacral or political motives (such as St. Bartholomew as the man with the knife, or a swastika as a symbol of Buddhism as well as German National Socialism). They also refer to particular 'moods' conventionally linked to, for example, specific combinations of colours and/or forms. Dark colours for example are usually associated with a 'negative mood' in a Western/European context. Due to the link established to broader themes, this step partly entails what has been introduced as 'connotation'.

The third and last step draws on both iconological and connotative analysis in order to identify the broader themes and claims alluded to in the image. In this step the conventional meanings identified in step two are related to the specific cultural and political context of the image's production and dissemination. In order to do this, the researcher identifies underlying concepts which are characteristics of the culture or epoch in which the images are produced or shown in order to elaborate the diverse possible meanings of the images. For example, while the sacral iconography of St. Bartholomew as the man with the knife may have remained rather stable over time to Christian viewers, for non-religious viewers or viewers practicing a different religion these sacral meanings may be inexistent. For the issues at stake in this paper this means that: depending on the political beliefs and convictions of producers and beholders, motifs in images may have quite different meanings. Throwing a stone may signal heroic resistance for one person or movement sector but mere destructivity for another. This variability of meaning applies to both the production (a symbol can be used with different intentions) as well as the reception (the symbol can be read differently). In the following analysis, the contextualisation of the image will often proceed using comparisons and will include the consideration of textual elements. Comparisons in particular are crucial to reveal consensus on context specific meaning.

Rising level of abstraction from the image			Panofsky	Paper analytical method
Sign	Signifier	Form	Primary or Natural Subject Matter	<b>1<sup>st</sup> step: description of image components</b>
	Signified (concept)	Denotation	<i>Secondary or Conventional subject matter</i> (iconography)	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> step: Detection of conventional signs</b>
		Connotation		
			Intrinsic Meaning (Iconology)	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> step: Contextual analysis</b>

Table 1: Layers of meaning and methodological steps

## VISUAL ANALYSIS OF PROTEST AGAINST SURVEILLANCE

### *The visual language of the liberal current*

#### *Data retention and Big Brother*

The first image<sup>15</sup> to be analysed in detail is a poster by the *AK Vorratsdatenspeicherung* (German Working Group on Data Retention) that appeared on a number of occasions<sup>16</sup>.

First step: the image displays a face in close-up in the background; only two wide-open, blue eyes as well as a shadow above one eye indicating an eyebrow are visible. In the image's foreground, between the eyes and the place one would expect to see a nose the viewer sees a black figure from the back – only the face is turned and its profile is visible. On account of his male features the figure can be identified as a man. Below, filling almost half of the poster's space, white and red letters in different fonts and sizes state: 'Wir beobachten dich' ('We watch you'; white, bold and in capital letters), 'Weil wir dich lieben!' ('Because

<sup>15</sup> <http://wiki.vorratsdatenspeicherung.de/images/Eyeballs.png> [30.10.12].

<sup>16</sup> For copyright reasons, this image as well as the following three cannot be reproduced in this volume unfortunately.

We Love You!'; white, the word love in red, in a different font and italicised), and 'Deine Bundesregierung' ('Yours; the (Federal) Government'; bold, smaller and different font). At the bottom, the web-address of the *AK Vorratsdatenspeicherung* is written in black letters on a blue background.

Second step: the large eyes together with the invisible base of the nose give the face a child- or doll-like appearance, often seen in cartoons or manga drawings. The male figure displays a defensive posture (the upper body bent back and arms splayed out) that seems to be directed towards the outsized face. Moreover, the image draws on and alludes to different existing aesthetics. First, the male figure's features are similar to the depictions of workers found in the posters of workers' parties in the 1920s and 1930s (though they usually only used two-tone prints). The male figure's hat also points to this: it is a flat cap often associated with workers or non-noble subjects. Second, the simplified and planar style of the drawing is reminiscent of the aesthetics of film posters from the 1950s – thriller and horror movies in particular due to the indication of shock and/or excitement conveyed by the wide eyes. Finally, the eyes in conjunction with the text allude to a particular story: George Orwell's *1984*. In this dystopian novel Orwell depicts an omnipresent surveillance state dictating the lives of its citizens. The eyes of the ruling party's leader, *Big Brother*, are a frequently returning image in visual realisations of this novel, along with the famous slogan: 'Big Brother is watching you', similar to the text 'We are watching you' in the picture. The grey bottom line and the generally dark lower parts of the image invoke a gloomy, frightening mood.

Third step: through the visual reference to the Orwellian surveillance-state as well as allusions to cinematic depictions of fright, the image evokes a horror scenario with its roots in *governmental* surveillance. In this vein, while the eyes stand for surveillance (as well as horror), the male figure can be interpreted as surveillance's counterpart: it is the subaltern goal and victim of surveillance. Since the liberal current usually does not refer to legacies of workers' struggles, the image's depiction of a worker may be interpreted as a reference to vulnerability and potential resistance by the non-privileged population. This first of all reveals that the state is the image's central addressee. It is surveillance by the state - not by corporations or other entities - that is repudiated. Second, the image highlights the threat to the individual. The horror scenario evoked decries surveillance as excessive and interprets it as an attack against the individual and his/her privacy. The close-up of the face amplifies this as an invasion of intimate spaces. This points to the liberal groups' focus on privacy and citizens' rights, which – as central legitimising principles of liberal democracies – they aim to

defend against attacks by the state. Data retention is interpreted as a sign of growing surveillance and the reduction of privacy by the state.

Furthermore, the image ironically denounces the government's claim of good intentions by contrasting the horror scenario of surveillance with the seemingly well intended 'Yours, the (federal) government'. Similarly, the doll or child-like eyes may be read as a reference to feigned innocence. In this vein, the image implies that surveillance is not worth whatever it is said to be good for (e.g. security). The rejection of the advantages of surveillance refers to the post 9/11 discourse about whether security justifies restrictions to civic freedom. In line with the demonstrations' longstanding slogan 'freedom not fear', this image strongly supports the claim that restricting freedom through surveillance in order to increase security is not legitimate and only creates a climate of insecurity. The threat posed by the state is even more evident in another image from the liberal current analysed below.

#### *German democracy and its historical others*

Warning against data retention, an article published on the website of a commercial technology magazine in 2009 takes up a report written by the hackers association *Chaos Computer Club* on data retention. The next image to be analysed<sup>17</sup> stems from this article linking the issue of data retention with governmental surveillance at the working place.

The image's dark blue background is dominated by a picture of the former German minister of the interior, Wolfgang Schäuble (2005-2009). The image's lower foreground displays the silhouettes of people at work: they are sitting at desks or stand facing each other. Yellow beams of light lead down from the interior minister's eyes to the people, who have a white-yellow mist above them. The head of the former interior minister is immensely larger than those of the people – a depiction that alludes to his superiority. The image's build-up hints at two 'totalitarian' systems: on the one hand, the centrality of Schäuble's head is reminiscent of the iconic image of the Big Brother in the 1956 film adaptation of Orwell's *1984* (even the eyebrows resemble those of Big Brother). On the other hand, the image's build-up is almost identical with the film poster<sup>18</sup> of the Oscar-nominated German movie *Der Untergang* (The Downfall, 2004) depicting the last days of Adolf Hitler's life. The head and shoulders of Bruno Ganz, the actor who portrayed Adolf Hitler, sit enthroned above several small silhouetted figures and a tank surrounded by white mist. As a statement about present

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<sup>17</sup> <http://img4.magnus.de/Bundestrojaner-was-technisch-m-glich-ist-r599x585-C-726da535-62642322.jpg>

<sup>18</sup> <http://imagecache6.allposters.com/LRG/56/5663/T2GUG00Z.jpg> [30.10.12].

conditions or a future scenario, the reference to this film poster and, with it, to Germany's dictatorial and repressive past, dramatises the issue of surveillance significantly.

The comparison to the Third Reich is even more explicit in an image<sup>19</sup> that has been circulated on various websites critical of surveillance. The image is divided into three parts. The depiction of the former Interior Minister's head in the middle is framed by two German flags with Federal Eagles on the left and right side. Across all three parts a heading asks in large white letters 'Wollt ihr die totale Überwachung?' ('Do you want total surveillance?'). In the image's lower foreground much smaller white letters state 'Totale Überwachung ist sicherste Überwachung!' ('Total surveillance is the most secure surveillance!'). The image combines symbols of the Third Reich and the Federal Republic of Germany. The text is written in old-German lettering<sup>20</sup> and refers to Joseph Goebbels' (Reich Minister of Propaganda) infamous 1943 *Sportpalast speech*, when he asked his audience 'Do you want the total war?'" The colours of the Federal Republic's flag, its Federal Eagle as well as the image of Schäuble refer to the present German state.

In a similar way, parallels are often drawn with another German authoritarian regime: the German Democratic Republic (1949-1990). Image 1 combines a black illustration of the head of Wolfgang Schäuble (alluding to the man held responsible for surveillance at that time) against a white background with the very popular surveillance critical slogan 'Stasi 2.0', ironically implying a remake of the GDR's Ministry for State Security (the 'Stasi'). This reference to the central surveillance institution of the GDR functions as a powerful denunciation of the present state's surveillance. Over the last two decades, the GDR has replaced the Nazi period as the ultimate other of German national narratives (Zuckermann, 1999: 8) and has become a symbol for the absence of freedom and democracy, which are supposed to be central assets of today's Germany. Blurring this distinction in the protest images thus strongly signals a danger to democracy.

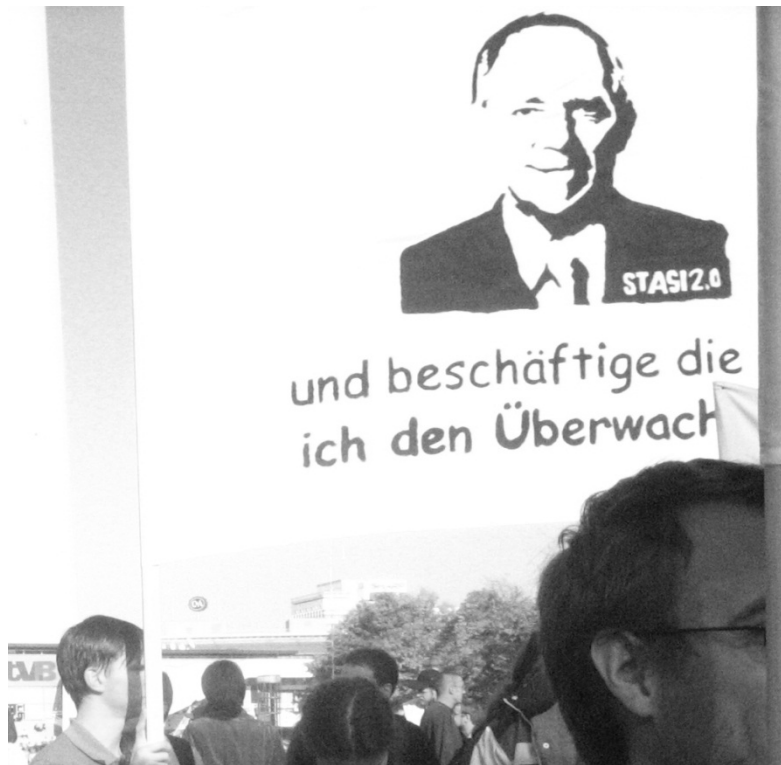
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<sup>19</sup> <http://4topas.files.wordpress.com/2007/12/ueberwachung3.jpg> [30.10.12].

<sup>20</sup> It is the font most often used to refer to the Third Reich, though in fact it does not constitute the most commonly used font of the Nazi era.

The prominent symbol of Wolfgang Schäuble's face with the slogan 'Stasi 2.0' (on a banner at a 'freedom not fear' demonstration in Berlin, 2008)

(Photo: Priska Daphi)



[image 1]

The analysis of the images of the liberal current reveals the emphasis on the threat posed to privacy, civic freedom and ultimately democracy by the government. The allusion to past authoritarian regimes in Germany not only drastically highlights the dangers associated with surveillance; it also substantiates the liberal current's strong focus on the state. It is the German state that is held responsible. This can be derived from the reference to the federal government in the first image and the former interior minister in the second, fourth and fifth images. Other agents of surveillance such as corporations are neglected. At the same time this implies that changes should also occur within the framework of the state. In comparing the present government with the Third Reich and the GDR it is not the state as such that is questioned but its form. Hence, the liberal critique identifies the state as both the cause and solution to the problem: on the one hand, it is held accountable for excessive surveillance; on the other, alternatives should occur within its confines.



### *The visual language of the left current*

In the left's visual language, particular protagonists such as Wolfgang Schäuble or the character of Big Brother are much less common. Much more typical are depictions of specific governmental organs of repression, in particular the police.

Image 2 is a poster calling for participation in the (radical) left bloc at the 2011 'freedom not fear' demonstration published by the group *Out of control*.

'Uns wird's zu bunt', *Out of Control*, 2011

<http://www.outofcontrol.noblogs.org>



[image 2]

First step: two pink horizontal lines divide the image into three parts. The upper and lower parts contain text and surround the middle part which contains images. The upper part's text in white, smeared capital letters reads: 'Uns wird's zu bunt' ('For us, it goes too far'). The lower part states in smaller letters: 'Überwachungsstaaten wegputzen!' ('Polish off' surveillance states!') and provides information about the demonstration. The image's middle part contains several icons separated by dots. The icon furthest to the left representing a round head is dark red, nearly black, with a light area around its eye. The head's open mouth points in the direction of simplified depictions of a camera, a police officer's head, a DNA-strand, and RFID waves (Radio-Frequency-Identification).

Second step: the icon on the left can be identified as an altered version of the very popular *Pacman*, a computer game in which the round-headed Pacman eats his way through various dots and other objects. With his hungrily open mouth Pacman mirrors the second line's theme of eating ('polish off'). In place of his usual yellow colour, the *Pacman* on this poster is dark red/ nearly black. The white space around his eye indicates a (radical activist's) mask. The other icons substitute *Pacman's* usual 'food' and depict specific aspects of surveillance: a camera, a policeman, DNA, and RFID.

Third step: the image combines a radical critique of surveillance states with a popular computer game. Despite the radicalism of the critique and the measures implied against it ('polish off') this combination has a rather playful tone. The game *Pacman* and its pixel style is very popular today among computer-savvy youngsters. Its icons can be found on T-shirts, stickers and other merchandise. The allusion to this game hence locates the image and its producers in a young and trendy scene. At the same time, the image clearly signals active and radical resistance against surveillance through its particular pairing of visual elements and text. This is due first to the depiction of a masked *Pacman* (resembling an anarchist's balaclava) and the substitution of his 'food' with objects of surveillance. Second, the text underlines the radical position with the call to 'Polish off surveillance states'. The opposition to surveillance *states* – not just surveillance – marks the left groups' anti-statist stance: the solution is not a change within the state. Instead, the state is identified as inherently prone to surveillance and hence needs to be abolished. Also, the use of the plural – surveillance states – reveals that it is not a single state (Germany) that is addressed. Rather, it implies the more general problem that we live in an era of surveillance states.

In addition to the opposition to surveillance states, the inclusion of the RFID in *Pacman's* 'food' reveals that surveillance is not only attributed to the state but also corporations (RFID is not only used in ID cards, but also in customer cards as well as in price tags or entry controls in companies). Furthermore, the first line of the text denounces other, more 'colourful' solutions to the problem of surveillance: 'Uns wird's zu bunt', literally translates as 'For us, it is too colourful' and figuratively means 'That's enough!'. It is a play on words which not only seems to criticise excessive surveillance but also distances itself from the 'colourful', i.e. non-radical parts of the protest. The distinction between black and colourful groups is common in left protest mobilisations. In anti-fascist mobilisations, for example, the radical autonomist groups and their predominantly black clothing (the 'black bloc') are distinguished from the moderates who often describe themselves as 'colourful instead of brown' (brown being the colour of Nazis).

A similarly militant message is employed in a poster against the creation of a European police authority (image 3).

‘Monitoring European Police’

<http://www.euro-police.noblogs.org>



Image 3, published on a blog about the monitoring of the European police, comprises three parts. The central part shows two faceless and simplified police-figures in full combat gear walking slightly to the right, facing the viewer. Above, in an urban landscape of skyscrapers, a camera behind the policemen points away from them to the left and a helicopter flies to the right. This ensemble in blue is bordered by yellow stars, referring to the flag of the European Union. The left part of the image depicts a piece of broken glass, while the right part states ‘Monitoring European Police!’ in red letters and the blog’s website in smaller letters. The policemen in full combat gear together with the cameras and helicopter display the force and ubiquity of surveillance/control. The text ‘Monitoring European Police!’ calls for the table to be turned and the police to be monitored instead. In this vein, the broken glass pane in the left part of the image implies destruction (of a camera for example) and may be read as a call for militant action.

The call for militant action is more explicit in image 4, which constitutes an instruction to saw off surveillance cameras. Published by the alternative news-website *Inforiot*, the image displays a camera sawn off by a large red saw with red arrows on both sides indicating sawing-movements and headed by the equivocal text: ‘Wir haben etwas gegen Überwachung!’ (‘We have something against surveillance’ - the play on words working similarly in English and German). The red arrows on each side of the saw allude to an instruction manual and suggest that this is easily done.

'Wir haben etwas gegen Überwachung!'

<http://www.infortiot.de>



[image 4]

The analysis of the left current's images reveals, first, the radical critique of the governmental system and surveillance. The inclusion of various aspects of surveillance (police, cameras, the storage of biological data, Radio-Frequency-Identification, helicopters) clearly points to the more fundamental level of critique: surveillance by the police/state is (albeit only marginally) connected to commercial and scientific surveillance. Furthermore, the second image extends the issue of surveillance from a national to a European level due to the reference to the 'European Police' and the European Union.

Second, the images clearly suggest militant forms of resistance. Unlike the dramatisation of surveillance and the passive depiction of the threatened citizen in the liberal current images, the images of the left current stress active resistance including the destruction of surveillance equipment: a masked *Pacman* alluding to the dress-code of the black bloc (image 2), depiction of resistance in the form of broken glass (image 3) and sawing off cameras (image 4). In this, the police are a central addressee as the reference to policemen in images 2 and 3 reveals. This has to do with the fact that during protests collective empowerment vis-à-vis the police is crucial, for example through the enforcement of transgressions. Creating spaces free of governmental surveillance and control during demonstrations is not only the means to an end but also an end in itself (cf. Haunss, 2004).

Comparing the images of the two currents, three central differences can be highlighted. First of all, while the liberal groups primarily address the government, the left groups issue a more fundamental critique of the state and focus on resisting the police. Liberal groups see the framework of the (democratic) state as both the cause of and the framework for

a solution to increasing surveillance, and focus their efforts on ‘restoring’ or strengthening citizens’ rights. Accordingly, the liberal groups’ images conjure up horror scenarios by drawing comparisons with dictatorships or totalitarian regimes – both fictional and real – implying the present democratic regime is in real danger, or, more precisely, needs to be reinstated to its pre-9/11 constitutional status. It is not the state as such, but specific tendencies and, quite prominently, people that are criticised.

In contrast, left groups – drawing on an anti-statist and anti-capitalist stance – level a radical criticism at the state and the capitalist world order and place the issue of surveillance and control in the context of social and political exclusion (especially through the depiction of riot police).<sup>21</sup> The left groups’ images emphasise control by the state and repression by the police as part of the rejected system’s structure. Accordingly, radical left imagery puts an emphasis on militant resistance against state institutions, civil disobedience and the creation of spaces free of governmental control. While the liberal current’s images depict the observed as passive victims, the left current emphasises active resistance.

Personalisation and references to dramatic dystopias or authoritarian/totalitarian regimes are not as common in the image repertoire of the left current because these groups do not see the present democracy as endangered by surveillance, but rather surveillance as one of the central characteristics of the capitalist state both before and after 9/11. Their struggle is not only about protecting rights that are being lost, but fighting for a new social order. In order to make this claim, the left groups use playful rather than dramatising imagery.

## CONCLUSION

Two basic observations summarise our analysis and are applicable beyond the movement sector under study. First, the use of images within political mobilisations is contested. Images depict different perspectives – both strategically as well as expressively. Second, all three aspects of images – strategy, expression and reception – depend on the discursive context in which they are embedded. These points show that the analysis of protest images with a systematic methodological approach can significantly deepen our understanding of different aspects of social movements.

First, the analysis of the images used in protest against surveillance shows that a broad repertoire of images is employed. Despite an abstract consensus on the opposition to surveillance as well as participation in joint protest events, the images are contested in the organisational field dealing with the issue. This is due to the fact that the liberal and left

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<sup>21</sup> For other examples see Leipziger Kamera (2009: 132-179).

currents' different perspectives are reflected in as well as formulated through these images. Only certain aspects of the image repertoire are shared across the different groups (in our case the reference to the state as the agent of surveillance and a visual dramatization of the issue at stake).

Through the images, the two currents voice their points of view not only strategically but also expressively.<sup>22</sup> On a strategic level, the images are intended to highlight a situation, and should convince the viewer of the need to act. The images explicate the group's particular analysis of problems and how best to solve them. In addition to consciously intended effects, the images entail particular worldviews and meaning systems that constitute a sense of belonging and draw the borders of the own groups (cf. Melucci, 1996). In this vein, all the images identify an opponent that differs from and thus demarcates the own group (i.e. the state, the police). More specifically (and possibly intended as such), image 2 even distances itself from more moderate allies.

Second, this contribution reveals that the meanings of images (intentional as well as expressive) are embedded in specific contexts. Movements, like other social actors, form(ulate) their ideas and messages embedded in a culturally and discursively pre-formed setting that enables and restricts their universe of what is imaginable and sayable (Foucault, 1974). Hence, an image's producer can only include strategic and expressive meaning within this framework, within the socially structured arrangement of 'what makes sense'. Hence, despite their variety, meanings entailed in images are not arbitrary, nor merely chosen from a 'tool kit' (Swidler, 1986). In this vein, the analysis showed that images are created in reference to other images which are iconic for surveillance, such as *Big Brother* or other cultural models (e.g. specific aesthetics, genres or basic legitimising principles like democracy and freedom).<sup>23</sup>

Many contexts can be relevant in this respect: place, time, issue field or 'culture' more generally. The national context seems to be of particular formative power as the frequent historic allusions to the German past (the GDR and the Third Reich) reveal. In fact, the allusion to the Nazi regime seems to be common among left-libertarian movements in Germany (cf. della Porta, 1999). The comparison with the Nazis is still among the strongest methods of political dramatization and stigmatisation available in the German political context. Generally, national past and politics of remembrance offer a political language and

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<sup>22</sup> Our analytical distinction between strategy and identity should not, of course, be mistaken for an ontological differentiation. In movement praxis both aspects go hand in hand and, as James Jasper (1997) for example has shown, strategic decisions depend on the group's identity (cf. Daphi, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Accordingly the reiterated use of a set of symbols and signs is part of the stabilisation of this discursive structure. Movements play a double role in this field as they reproduce their formative conditions as well as try to challenge their limitations (at least in cases of radical or transformative movements).

interpretive frames for several issues<sup>24</sup> (cf. Ferree et al., 2002; Ullrich 2008, 2012; Daphi, forthcoming).

This contribution confirms the significance of *both* national context and issue related contexts. In fact, it showed that the interplay of both is decisive in shaping movements and their image production. The images revealed the strong interplay of these two dimensions: while the national context provided certain options for allusion and comparison, only one current picked this up. Only in the liberal current, with its focus on the loss of democracy, are these contrasts useful. The radical left current, on the other hand, does not rely on the dramatic horror scenario due to its strong general critique of the state. In other words, they do not see Western liberal democracy in opposition to surveillance, but surveillance as an expression of the capitalist (though formally democratic) state.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, it should be noted that a viewer's discursive context affects how they interpret an image – though this aspect is not explicitly addressed in this contribution. Whatever strategic and expressive aspects images entail, they may be interpreted in a variety of ways and detached from the context of their production or the producer's intentions. For example, the allusion to Nazi Germany may be primarily seen as a mere dramatization to mobilise people or as a genuine demarcation from dictatorship as part of the producers' conception of themselves. It also may be interpreted as a statement about structural similarities between present-day and Nazi Germany, or as a relativisation of the Nazi atrocities. For future research it will be fruitful to analyse the different possible meanings of images and to reflect on the effects for mobilising strategies.

Thus, visual analysis provides a crucial key deepening our insights into how social movements work. Through their various layers of meaning, images communicate messages differently than texts, and add crucial information. While strategic aims may also be analysed with respect to leaflets and other explicitly formulated textual material, images condense central claims and add symbolic layers. Images do more than illustrate existing political messages: they play a crucial role in formulating groups' different strategies as well as worldviews. In this vein, images are not only a product of movements, but also part of the symbolic practices which constitute the movement and its identity, and are embedded in national and sectoral contexts. A systematic visual analysis (including distancing and thick description) is hence key to explaining social movements' aims, strategies, and collective

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<sup>24</sup> Without wanting to fall into the trap of reproducing “holistic nationalist clichés” (Koopmans and Statham 2000:31).

<sup>25</sup> This adds to radical left groups' caution with historical comparisons. The radical German left decreased their use of Nazi-references since a long and ongoing debate about the singularity of the Shoah and the specifics of German National Socialism raised activists' awareness about the politics of remembrance. Hence, potential accusations of relativising the Shoah are avoided.

identities. In this vein, visual analysis could also provide a crucial tool to explore possibilities for and restrictions to coalition-building in and between movements. Finally, visual analysis may provide movement actors themselves with a tool to reflect critically on their visual communication.

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