The Iconic News Image as Visual Event in Photojournalism and Digital Media

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

Media Studies

At Massey University, Manawatu

New Zealand

Samantha Diane Kelly

2013
Abstract

This thesis shows how the uses and meanings of the iconic news image have changed with the emergence of digital media. Most of the iconic photographs of the twentieth century were produced by photojournalists and published in mass circulation newspapers and magazines. In the twenty-first century, amateurs have greater access to image producing technologies and greater capacity to disseminate their images through the Internet. This situation has made possible the use of iconic news images to support political agendas other than those promoted in the media institutions and beyond the range of censorship imposed by those media.

In order to demonstrate the functions and understand this unprecedented situation, this thesis explores how iconic news images produce meaning. I consider formal definitions of iconic news images but adopt Nicholas Mirzoeff's theory of the visual event to explain how the meanings of iconic news images are impacted by historical context, media institutions and viewer responses. This dynamic model of visual communication allows us to see that iconic news images indeed function as events and that there is a political struggle over the creation, staging, publication and interpretation of those events.

The thesis develops this argument by analysing a series of historical examples. The images range from the iconic news images of World War II used in the official propaganda for the war effort, through the combination of amateur and professional images used in the 9/11 visual canon, to the activist images of the ongoing Syrian Civil War. The significance of 9/11 is that although some images produced by amateurs did
become iconic (for example Holocaust photographs or from the Kennedy assassination) it was not until the 9/11 attacks that the amateur production of the image began to be directly assimilated into mass media.

What this means is that the media institutions are no longer the sole arbitrators of the images that represent world events. Instead, using digital media, anyone including the media institutions, activists, military and terrorists create events that are so powerful in their traumatic impact, that they have to be published. Protest and terrorist movements have long understood that their impact depends on media coverage. Now images themselves can be more directly mobilised through digital media to reach viewers. They no longer require the media institutions or their resources.
I would like to express my special appreciation and thanks to my advisor Dr Allen Meek, you have been a tremendous mentor for me. I appreciate that you read my numerous revisions and helped me make sense of the confusion.

I am deeply grateful to my husband Chad for his support. The support of family and friends has been amazing through this process and I am very thankful for each and every one of you.

I dedicate this thesis to Dr Scott Eastham (June 10th 1949–October 4th 2013), who was an inspiration to my pursuing my interest in Media Studies, and whose passion for the subject has had a lasting effect within my studies.
### Contents Page

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Images</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Thesis Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Setting the Frame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2.0: Chapter Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1: The Limitations of Semiotics</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2: The Visual Event</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3: Chapter Summary</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Demystifying the Iconic News Image</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3.0: Chapter Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1: Defining the Iconic News Image</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2: Theorising of the Iconic News Image</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3: Chapter Summary</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Four: The 9/11 Spectacle

Section 4.0: Chapter Introduction 52
   4.1: The Spectacle of Fear 54
   4.2: The Iconic News Images of 9/11 64
   4.3: Chapter Summary 75

Chapter Five: Comparative analysis

Section 5.0: Chapter Introduction 77
   5.1: Defining Digital 79
   5.2: The Digital Visual Event 88
   5.3: Chapter Summary 95

Chapter Six: Propaganda of the Iconic news image

Section 6.0: Chapter Introduction 97
   6.1: Propaganda of the Deed 99
   6.2: The Iconic News Images of Digital Media 103
   6.3: Chapter Summary 121

Chapter Seven: Thesis Conclusion 123

Appendices 128

Bibliography 151
List of Images


Image 15 Thomas E. Franklin ‘Flag Photo’ retrieved on September 15, 2013 from http://respondingthroughart.blogspot.co.nz/2012/04/flag-mania-reading-assigment.html ........................................................................................................ 139


Image 26 Dennis Draughon ‘Abu Ghraib Nam’ retrieved on May 01, 2014 from http://napalmobiography.com/?attachment_id=102 ................................................................. 146

Image 27 Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes ‘Goya’s Inquisition: from Black Legend to Liberal Legend’ retrieved on November 15, 2013 from http://journals.all-languages.org.uk/2012/08/goyas-inquisition-from-black-legend-to-liberal-legend/.... 146


