

Learning to see: Three approaches to journalistic photography interpretation

Contemporary society becomes increasingly visual, while the formal education does not always follow these dynamics. Although good education should provide students with certain qualifications, such as the ability to interpret, create and think in terms of images, that is, visual literacy skills (Avgerinou, 2001), the classroom activities often lack of real engagement with visuals. Thus, the question remains if today's learners are visually literate citizens, and if not, how the formal education can help them to achieve this goal? In this paper, I argue that visual literacy is an essential teaching, crucial for the socialization process of today's new media participants, who are required to constantly interact with images. In addition, each attempt towards visual literacy development is an important step for learner's individual growth in visual sensitivity, which, in a longer perspective, can lead to more conscious participation in contemporary visual culture.

In this paper, I present and discuss three various approaches and tools for the interpretation of journalistic photographs, which can be used as exercises in visual literacy. The first tool, the Press Photograph Story Analysis model, was inspired mainly by Peirce's Sign Theory. The second one is an intertextual approach to photography interpretation, which concentrates on connotative content analysis with minor attention to photographic context. The third tool is a compilation of elements of visual semiotics, visual rhetoric, Barthes's concepts of *studium* and *punctum*, Barrett's (2010) principles for interpreting photographs, and compositional interpretation (Rose, 2012). The tools are illustrated by extracts from students' interpretation of journalistic photographs. All presented approaches were designed to facilitate learning and teaching in the higher education context.