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Press Photography and Visual Rhetoric[1]

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INTRODUCTION

It used to be common practice for fish and chip shops to wrap their produce in old newspaper, thus giving rise to a derogatory description of the print media as 'tomorrow's fish-and-chip wrapping'.[2] The rock singer Elvis Costello even used this metaphor in his song 'Fish 'n' Chip paper' to refer to the superficiality and short life span of news stories. Similar to pop music, news is subject to fashion, triviality and chance factors. Just as songs make their way up the music charts, so news stories enter the running orders of news organizations. Situated in a highly competitive climate, they vie with each other to attain prime headline position. And while stories may come and go (from old favorites to one-hit wonders), the overall structure of the news remains intact. For instance, irrespective of the amount or relevance of possible news items, the *Ten O'Clock News* always lasts half-an-hour. Whatever might be the number or magnitude of the daily events happening in the world, there will always be 30 minutes of television news.[3] This means that, depending on competition (i.e. the other stories running that day), an item high on the agenda one day might appear at the end of the running order on another, or perhaps be unlucky enough not to feature at all. News photographs also fall into this strange pattern of luck and judgment. They can result from the opportune moment of a photographer being in the right place at the right time, or they can be highly contrived with little or no actual news content in order to amuse the reader. Nonetheless, the presence or absence of visual images has the power to make or break the worthiness of any news story.

Visual rhetoric is concerned with understanding how images communicate, how they function in a social and cultural environment and how they embody meaning. In the press context, photographs might be seen primarily as conveyors of information about important events in the world – but as we shall see – the structure of the news media and the expectations of readers somewhat complicate the matter. We have to regard press photographs as part of a complex network of cultural phenomena. Rhetoric is

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normally considered to be a persuasive skill, classically to convince us of a point of view; in the modern age, to encourage us to purchase goods. However, we can also consider it has a role in the formation of community identity and reinforcing our beliefs. Readers also look to photographs to convey something of the emotion of the event, or they can seek visual information that will amuse or entertain – and the news media are only too happy to comply.

THOUSANDS DEAD

In 1999 the journalist and television foreign-correspondent Michael Nicholson wrote an article for London's *Evening Standard* newspaper titled, 'Thousands dead in India – not many interested'. Critical of the workings of his own profession, Nicholson provided some important insights into what he called 'the chemistry of the news agenda'. His particular focus was the reporting of humanitarian disasters. Written during the week following the Orissa cyclone, when more than 10,000 died and two million people were left homeless, he asked some pertinent if rhetorical questions:

> How do you decide which calamities to cover and which to ignore, which tragedy will make the lead story and which will be consigned to a less conspicuous space?… Does the reader and viewer wonder at the decision that places the deaths of 217 EgyptAir passengers and crew above those of many, many thousands of drowned Indians?… Throughout this week, India's worst natural calamity this century has not appeared on the front page of any of our national newspapers and you have to ask, why? (Nicholson, 1999: 13)

Nicholson concluded that the Orissa disaster did not make the headlines because there were no pictures that could match the first eyewitness accounts. Even in instances when pictures do finally arrive, 'we filter out the worst under the banner of "good taste" and "decency", parameters set by editors determined not to cause offence' (Nicholson, 1999: 13). Most frequently the editor 'opts for caution at the expense of reality', selecting one image to epitomize the story, and thus arises one of the essential problems of visual imagery: To what extent can a single picture be representative of the wider situation? According to Nicholson, 'To convey the deaths of thousands you will be shown the body of one … at a distance, on the long lens' (1999: 13), in order not to cause viewers to turn away. How does this affect the impact of the item?

As a subject for academic research (particularly in the context of the social sciences), press photographs are especially problematic. As readers of newspapers we do look to the photograph to provide a visual identity for a story. The anthropologist Marcus Banks has remarked that this illustrative use of the newspaper photograph serves 'as a visual clue to allow readers to follow the story over the days as it unfold[s]' (Banks, 2001: 16). Often this clue puts a 'face' to the story, personalizing the words we read or hear. Our need to identify a story's face may be simply an instinctive response: when someone at the back of the audience asks a question, few present can resist turning round to get a view of the questioner. This is a basic psychological response whereby 'The visual system *hunts* for comprehension and clarity' (Gibson, 1979: 219).[4] Sensationalist newspapers tend to capitalize on this tendency, demanding that press photographers obtain mug shots of current news celebrities to capture the attention of readers. These shots do not just illustrate the story: their inclusion implies that seeing a person's picture enables us 'to take the measure' of them (Highfield et al., 2009). According to Elias (1991: 121), the human face has evolved as a 'signaling board':

> Its unique characteristics can serve as a reminder of the singularity of human beings… . The face is one of the chief instruments for indicating their feelings with which human beings are endowed by nature, that is, as a result of an evolutionary process (Elias, 1991: 120).

So the desire to scrutinize the photograph of someone in the news, whether a politician or

a mass murderer, may not necessarily stem from a ghoulish, voyeuristic desire, but from a natural reflex response closely related to our usual strategy for obtaining information about the world. Seeing someone's face can provide clues to their character and motivation.

> The face in Western culture … is central to building a picture of who someone is, and it is through expressive features of the face that we gain access to a perception of who someone 'really' is (Howson, 2004: 29).

But photography involves an additional factor in the process of information transfer: people tend to present themselves to the camera as they wish to be perceived, so that their photograph already carries a deliberate implicit message. Such signals can also be culturally determined. When sitting for a portrait photograph, 'The sitter addresses to the viewer an act of reverence, of courtesy, according to conventional rules' (Bourdieu, 1990: 82). These rules vary from culture to culture. While Sprague (1978) describes how photographic poses in West Africa conform to cultural conventions, this chapter later addresses the way choice of attire – the leather jacket for example – can carry iconic connotations and thus add layers to visual messages. It is no coincidence that the teenage killers who perpetrated the Columbine High School massacre of 1999 wore long trench coats similar to those worn by the merciless gunmen in the opening scenes of Sergio Leone's film *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) or the characters in Larry and Andy Wachowski's futuristic dystopian film *The Matrix* (1999) (see Ogle et al., 2003; Frymer, 2009). So when we read the report of a gruesome murder and ask 'What kind of person could do such a thing?', in publishing a mug shot of the perpetrator, newspapers are, in effect, replying, 'This sort of person'. A photograph is not, however, a person: whether static artificial displays of photographs in newspapers really deliver the information we seek as part of 'everyday' perception, in order to make good judgments, is a matter for contention.

AN UNEMPLOYED MAN

In his analysis of the way visual images can illustrate abstract concepts, Banks (2001) describes how newspapers use photographs like visual figures of speech: *metaphor* and *metonym*. While 'Visual metaphor can also involve a function of "transference", transferring certain qualities from one sign to another… *metonymy* is a function which involves using one signified to stand for another signified which is *directly related* to it or *closely associated* with it in some way' (Chandler, 1994).[5] Banks provides two hypothetical, yet quite commonplace and easily recognizable examples. First, for 'metaphor', he suggests 'an unemployed man can be photographed in a bleak urban wasteland, the empty building plots and boarded up windows standing as metaphors for the emptiness of his life and the closure of opportunity' (Banks, 2001: 18). Secondly, for 'metonym', 'a photograph of a single African child, stomach bulging due to malnutrition, stands for all starving people in that society' (Banks, 2001: 18).[6] As expressed by McQuire, such metonymic use of the image of the starving victim 'loses specificity and becomes emblematic, contributing to a media environment in which all images slide towards radical interchangeability. All peoples affected by famine can be made into the same archetypal victim… ' (1998: 59).

Of course, we are all familiar with these kinds of images, but how aware are we of the way this calculated use of visual metaphor and metonymy affects us in practice? If we take a specific example – Banks' unemployed man is a good one – to show photographically someone *not* doing something (that is not working), presents a considerable challenge. In January 1939 this assignment was allocated to photographer Kurt Hutton. He was commissioned by the weekly UK journal *Picture Post* to photograph the day-to-day life of an unemployed man living in Peckham, South London. Hutton's assignment, working with journalist Sidney

Jacobson, resulted in a published photo-story consisting of 17 photographs. Taken on the eve of the outbreak of World War II (1 September 1939) in the heyday of the photo-illustrated magazine, the images capture a world about to disappear forever, but highlight the problem of unemployment that stubbornly remains with us today. The distinction between metaphor and metonym is blurred.

Through the series of photographs, Alfred Smith is shown standing in the dole queue inside the labor exchange, his wife and children waiting outside. We follow Smith in his quest for a job, then his return home, unsuccessful. The settings for all these images are certainly 'bleak' (see Figure 17.1). However, the last lines of Jacobson's copy firmly place the unemployed man in Banks' metonymic category – that of the individual standing for all of those in the same state in a society. The copy reads: '… he is beginning to feel that perhaps there is no longer a place for him in our scheme of things, that he must change it or perish. He wants work, he cannot find it. And Alfred Smith is only one of two million' (Jacobson, 1970: 53). This metonymic dénouement, in which the circumstances of the individual are extended to embrace the wider group, evidently all anxious, like Alfred, to change the scheme of things or perish, implies a barely concealed revolutionary threat. Three years later, maintaining its campaigning standpoint, *Picture Post* returned to the issue of unemployment.[7] This time, concluding a sequence of nine photographs, a picture of Alfred Smith reappears from the 1939 *Unemployed* article. The earlier version had been captioned 'The Picture of Our Time: Alone, Walking for Miles, Trying to Find a Job' accompanied by a text that personalizes the article as Alfred Smith's story – but the 4 January 1941 article *Social Security* does not mention him by name. The photograph of Smith with a dog, simply captioned 'The Unwanted Worker', performs the function of the dénouement. In this context, while still maintaining its *metaphoric* function, the photograph has moved much closer to a *metonymic* role – standing for all unemployed workers in the industrial environment, like Banks' 'single African child… stand[ing] for all starving people in that society' (2001: 18). Metaphor and metonym are conflated in a single image with high impact.



Figure 17.1 ***Alfred Smith.*** **1939. Photograph by Kurt Hutton / Hulton Archive / Getty Images. Reproduced with permission**

In 1978, *Picture Post* editor Tom Hopkinson told me, in conversation, that the dog actually had no connection with Alfred Smith whatsoever. The stray had just wandered into the picture. While Smith has his back to us walking into the mist – Banks' metaphor signifying 'the emptiness of his life and the closure of opportunity' – we automatically connect him with the animal. The dog looks straight towards the camera, fixing the viewer with its gaze and, despite its accidental appearance in the photograph, it is the dog's *metaphoric* role that completes the picture. Does it matter that Smith is not a dog owner? So long as this is a feature article with a wider reference, not a specific news story purporting to record factual actuality, not really: the purpose of

the dog is rhetorical. It acts as a kind of narrator. While Smith walks away, hands in pockets with despondent demeanor, it is the dog that takes command of the situation.[8] Its eye contact challenges the reader as if to say 'Look! He's walking into an uncertain future. He's tried everything. What can *you* do about it?', thus reinforcing the campaigning standpoint of the article.

Azoulay takes a highly ethical standpoint, claiming that: 'It is very rare to come across a photographer who has intentionally created the situation [he or] she has photographed', offering as evidence that 'the public scandal erupting around a few such events is a testimony to their occurrence being rare and exceptional' (2008: 156). The instance of Smith's dog shows that random factors and chance occurrences can actually contribute to the creation of pictorial elements which are essentially fictional, but which add impact to a journalistic image and are therefore used to express and communicate – some would say interpret – facts. Azoulay's claim does not stand up to scrutiny: ethics can be flexible in journalism, as anyone who has worked in the news media knows. Many press photographs are designed and constructed from the outset to create a specific effect, particularly in the field of 'human interest' stories.

HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

> … the press photograph is an object that has been worked on, chosen, composed, constructed, treated according to professional or ideological norms (Barthes, 1977: 19).

Editors' ideas of 'good taste' referred to by Nicholson (see above) are not the only determinants of the way news pictures may be standardized. Many are posed to grab attention through sensationalism, 'hooking' readers' interest to sell the paper. Usually, these photographs fall under the category of 'human interest' stories, which can take the form of premeditated manufactured observations designed to amuse the reader. For example, in his *Pictures on a Page* (1978: 44–46), newspaper editor Harold Evans provides an example of a constructed Easter story, describing how a photographer took a newborn chick to London Zoo in order to photograph it on an elephant's trunk. I myself once heard of a photographer who hired an actor, dressed him as a London city gent – pinstriped suit, bowler hat and rolled umbrella – set him astride a 'space hopper', and instructed him to hop across Westminster Bridge. With Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament in the background, the crossing was photographed and captioned 'London businessmen find a new way to get to work'. The photographer had staged the photograph to include all the ingredients needed to appeal to the paper's readership. An image had been created by collating symbolic elements and effective clichés that comprise an internationally recognized stereotype – businessman, London. Then, by including the space hopper, a child's toy purporting to be a viable mode of transport, not only is the metonymic stereotype challenged but also the image teases the viewer, demanding investigation. The curious reader is impelled to seek further information as to how this bizarre situation had arisen, and this stimulus is effective, even if we immediately suspect that the image may be set up, pulling us in with a trivial trick. It is the high degree of artifice employed in the construction of press photographs – from Nicholson's editors who impose 'taste' to constructed images manufactured for purposes of mild entertainment – that raises a question as to their value for the serious academic study of their subject matter.

Items such as space hoppers provide ready-made props for frivolous news stories. Easily categorized as 'normal' if pictured as a simple child's toy, when they move into the adult world, they may not be so innocent. Newspapers can, it seems, just as easily imbue them with 'whacky' and dubious sexual connotations. Under the headline 'Hollyoaks hotties strip off', *The Sun* journalist Nadia

Mendoza proclaimed: 'The girls paired their saucy smalls with killer heels as they unleashed their bouncing bosoms while bopping along on space hoppers' (2 June 2008). This 'news' story concerned a photo-shoot for a pin-up calendar featuring six of the female stars of Channel 4's *Hollyoaks* soap opera.[9] The news value is minimal; the entertainment value is questionable. Here the editors have not exercised much of their power to avoid offence. If there is to be any academic value, or factual information, to be extracted from a story of this kind, it is to be obtained by reading between the lines and examining the motivation behind the pictures. While the immediate intention may be to titillate readers with pictures of pneumatic-breasted actresses spreading their legs around pneumatic toys, the creation of this rather desperate photo-opportunity can also be seen as indicating a response to dwindling audiences for the soap. Indeed, it transpires that while, according to BARB (Broadcasters' Audience Research Board), in the year 2000 *Hollyoaks* enjoyed viewing figures of over 3.5 million, by 2007 these had dropped to 1.2 million.[10] Desperate times, it seems, call for desperate measures – 3 months after the story appeared in the papers, the *Hollyoaks* soap opera launched its own range of perfumes! Notwithstanding such commercial impetus, according to Keeble, many of the newspapers' titillatory stories may also have a subversive humorous function:

> A lot of their contrived stories are based on down-right lies. But in a complex way, people want to be lied to, seduced into a fantasy world while at the same time seeing through the lies (1994: 164).

This commentary might certainly apply to the businessman on Westminster Bridge, but it would be even more apposite, in Keeble's terms, to the *Hollyoak* bouncers. Such stories, he suggests, may be 'built on the smutty, cheeky humor associated with holiday postcards and bare bottoms. It's guaranteed to provoke a giggle' (1994: 165). It would be easy to write off the *Hollyoaks* article as simple sexploitation, but Keeble's notion of the 'fantasy world' suggests a Rabelaisian impulse on the part of newspaper editors preoccupied with sexual innuendo where 'the elements associated with the bottom part of the body … are given comic privilege over the spirit and the head' (White, 1985: 105). Perhaps its promoters were anxious for viewers to perceive the series as comedy – even lighter entertainment than soap. And indeed there are strong elements of the carnivalesque 'world turned upside down' in the space-hopping businessman.

However frivolous or contrived, Keeble believes that as journalism, the human interest story 'stresses the importance of human sources as opposed to abstract ideas' (1994: 158–159); for readers it feeds 'a curiosity people have about others' (159), reinforcing the suggestion already made in the observations on human facial expression above. This function, as visual reflections of cultural phenomena, places such stories well within the domain of anthropology. At the same time, it is ironic that often the *Hollyoaks* story's brand of trivia and titillation is found in columns adjacent to reports of death and disaster in such tabloids as the *Sun* (as discussed by Nicholson above). From the editor's point of view, juxtaposing trivial sensation with serious world news is not necessarily adhering to a double standard. Eamonn McCabe, picture editor of the *Guardian* from 1988 to 2001, writes (about another 1930s photograph by Kurt Hutton):

> Although *Picture Post* set the standard for serious photojournalism, lighter material was also regularly included – you can't sell newspapers and magazines on news and politics alone; then as now, readers want to be entertained (2005: 48).

At first glance, this rationale seems unproblematic – classically paralleled by Shakespeare's deployment of the gravedigger's macabre humor in *Hamlet,* to counterpoint and leaven the tragedy of events at Elsinore. However, some apparently innocent examples not only indicate a blurring of the divisions between news and

entertainment but also between objectivity and narrativity:

> News and entertainment have never been absolutely separate, and there is no reason why they should be. The best journalists have always been good story-tellers. Story-telling is essential to journalism because it generates popular interest… . [N]ews has never been only about providing information in the narrow sense, but also a contribution to dialogue about values and collective identity, and that kind of dialogue is carried on largely through narrative (Hallin, 2000: 229).

The simplistic explanation is not always adequate. Campaigning groups routinely exploit the newspapers' propensity for the trivial and frivolous. For example, tempting the news media with their own constructed event – as aware of the international metaphoric value of Big Ben as the photographer of the space-hopping businessmen – on Monday 11 June 1984, Greenpeace activists climbed the Clock Tower, to unfurl a banner bearing the words 'Time to stop nuclear testing' (see Figure 17.2). On this occasion, the news media were eager to report the story, even though it had been purposefully staged by the protestors.

In the process of the stunt, an iconic picture – a single photographic image – was created, which captures the central message of the story. Some photographs are able, in this way, to transcend their immediate news context and themselves become international symbols.

STREET FIGHTING MAN

The Rolling Stones' 1968 song *Street Fighting Man* is an appropriate symbol of its era. Social unrest and street battles were taking



Figure 17.2 ***Greenpeace Protest*, London 1984. Photograph by Terence Wright /BBC Television News. Reproduced with permission**

place in numerous European cities ignited by a range of causes: the Prague Spring, American Civil Rights protests, 'Valle Giulia' student protest in Rome, protests against US involvement in the Vietnam War across the USA and in London's Grosvenor Square; the May demonstrations in Paris; a student demonstration turned massacre in Mexico City; the so-called 'Rodney Riots' in Kingston, Jamaica; and civil rights demonstrations in Derry, marking the beginning of Northern Ireland's 'Troubles'.

The second line of the Stones' song refers to summer and fighting in the street, and is a deliberate rephrasing of the seemingly innocent Motown hit *Dancing in the Street,* released 4 years earlier by Martha and the Vandellas (1964) – written by William 'Mickey' Stevenson, Marvin Gaye and Ivy Jo Hunter (Smith, 2001). Stevenson's inspiration for the song was the sight of people in Detroit cooling off in the jets of water from street fire hydrants.[11] To him, it looked as if they were dancing in the water: an image which was already something of a photographic cliché. Often used by newspapers to indicate the intensity of a heat wave, it is a theme that appears in the repertoire of many famous US photographers, for example, Weegee's (Arthur Fellig) *Cooling Down* of the 1940s and Bruce Davidson's (see Figure 17.3) *East 100th Street, Spanish Harlem. USA*, 1966.[12]

Cooling off in the jet of a fire hydrant can be seen as a minor act of civil disobedience, though especially pertinent as fire hoses were used to combat the US Civil Rights demonstrators. As an endorsement of his successful representation of the era, Davidson's photographs



Figure 17.3 ***East 100th Street, Spanish Harlem. USA*. 1966. Photograph by Bruce Davidson / Magnum Photos. Reproduced with permission**

of demonstrators struggling against jets of water appeared in the *Road to Freedom* exhibition in Atlanta, 2008.

> … his emphasis on the desperate attempt of these youths to continue to brandish their handwritten placards in the face of a brutal onslaught adds a distinct layer of emotional power to these pictures (Cox, 2008: 38).

However, it was unfortunate that in July 1967, while Martha and the Vandellas were on the stage of the Fox Theatre, Detroit, launching into their greatest hit 'Dancing in the Street', an outbreak of rioting and arson should break out in the city. Two years later, when their tour reached England:

> The British press aggravated [Martha] Reeves when someone put a microphone in her face and asked her if she was a militant leader. The British journalist wanted to know if Reeves agreed, as many people had claimed, that 'Dancing in the Street' was a call to riot. To Reeves, the query was patently absurd. "My Lord, it was a *party* song", she remarked in retrospect (Smith, 2001: 2).

While Jagger and Richards had been prepared to rewrite the second line of the song (changing 'dancing in the street' to 'fighting in the street'), making quite explicit the seditious interpretation of the lyrics, the US Civil Rights campaign had already adopted the original, with its newly acquired political connotation, as something of an anthem.[13] While this demonstrates the impact on popular music of the changing social, cultural and political environments, photographs, too, have the ability to attain an iconic status which epitomizes periods of civil unrest. In 1968, partly inspired by its US counterpart, in Northern Ireland the Civil Rights demonstrations and the counter-reactions to these protests marked the beginning of 'The Troubles'. One of the lasting images from this conflict is Clive Limpkin's photograph of a boy wearing a gas mask (Figure 17.4).

As a press photo, arising from a chance encounter, Limpkin's image contains as many significant ingredients and contradictory metaphors as the constructed photograph of the space-hopping businessman. While the



Figure 17.4 ***Boy Petrol Bomber*, Londonderry. 1969. Photograph by Clive Limpkin. Reproduced with permission**

primed petrol-bomb bottle suggests a lethally aggressive intent, and despite the subject's features being almost obscured by the mask, we are left in little doubt that this is the image of a child. The mask ostensibly acts as a means of protection, perhaps from the intended explosion; but a need for protection also implies a sense of vulnerability. From a practical point of view, the type of gas mask the boy is wearing would have been unlikely to offer any protection against the type of CS gas used by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) or British Army in 1969. Survivors of an earlier era, the filters in these masks deteriorate with age. However in addition, they contain blue asbestos, which presents a significant hazard to the wearer and would militate against their being used under modern conditions.[14] The reflection on the mask makes the precise direction of the boy's gaze indeterminate, but there is a clue to the location of the event: the badge on his leather jacket displays a map of a divided Ireland. The leather jacket itself can be seen in

popular culture as a metaphor of youthful rebellion, as instigated by the character Johnny Strabler (played by Marlon Brando) in László Benedek's film *The Wild One* (1953).[15] The jazz singer and film and TV critic George Melly (not particularly renowned for his studies of Sigmund Freud) aptly described the Brando character's simultaneous potency and threat to conventional society as 'a black leather phallus whom it was necessary for society to castrate in its own interests' (1972: 33). Melly continued by pointing out the trans-Atlantic influence of this image on the UK's youth culture of the 1950s and 1960s: '[Brando] was the link between the dangerous motor-biking nomads of America and their British working-class imitators' (33). Whilst activating the ethos of *The Wild One*, Limpkin's photograph is also representative of its own era, epitomizing and providing a metonymic image of the worldwide protest movements that characterized the last years of the 1960s.

Limpkin, photographing for the *Daily Sketch* – a national UK tabloid that was to fold 2 years later[16] – was not too impressed by the subject of his photograph, but recognized its potential for iconic status.

> If ever we photographers needed a symbol of the fighting, this was it. Wearing an over-sized gas-mask; a petrol bomb permanently in his hand, so it seemed; and a map of the whole problem on his jacket.
>
> For hours he taunted the police and troops, ignoring the cameras. He was about eight. God knows what he's advanced to now[17] (Limpkin, 1972: 121).

Referencing an earlier period of conflict, the significance of a photograph of a child wearing a gas mask was noted by the photographer August Sander in 1931. Although the petrol bomber is not exactly an infant, Sander's remarks shed an interesting light on Limpkin's more recent juxtaposition, emphasizing the connotation of the replacement of secure nurturing with destruction and violence:

> The newspapers are now preparing the populace for a coming bestial war in which poison gas will be used; they recommend gas masks to protect the lives of the civilian population. To photograph an infant wearing a gas mask, instead of being at its mother's breast, and to label the photograph as being from the Twentieth Century would be sufficient. It would express the whole brutal, inhuman spirit of the time in universally comprehensible form (Sander, 1980: 30).[18]

Eleven years later, the war that Sander had predicted in 1931 was well underway. And in the year following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, in 1942 an image was created more terrifying than Sander could anticipate: *The Mickey Mouse Gas Mask*, 'designed for small children in a valiant attempt to give them something that would work and still be fun' (Walk, 2010). War, toys and children: resonant subjects with connotations that recur in different contexts, juxtapositions and combinations throughout this survey.

Returning to the Derry *Petrol Bomber*, technically speaking, the wide aperture of Limpkin's lens has thrown the background out of focus – apart from the two blurred figures which frame the bomber, there is nothing to indicate the precise context of the boy. Does Limpkin's approach therefore merit criticism? The issue is controversial. The use of *differential focus* as a personal aesthetic to isolate the *figure* of the photographer's interest from the *ground* of the location is embraced by some photographers, abhorred by others. In the newspaper context, as long as it produces the desired results, either strategy is fair game. The basic ingredients of the photograph may have contradictory connotations (as implied by Sander) but the photograph as a whole might well have the effect of capturing viewers' interest, leading them to seek out further information – the crucial requirement of the front page or cover photograph. In some senses, Limpkin's photograph has given a human identity to civil unrest – even though, ironically, the boy's face remains obscured. Like the metonymic photo of Alfred Smith, it can be said to go some way to satisfying the public's need for news imagery – but at the same time

it communicates and expresses more than the individual circumstances of its capture.

Despite its virtues and high visual impact, as the visual component of a news story, the photograph of the boy in the gas mask would normally have a relatively short life, and could soon have been used to wrap fish and chips. But as news turns into history, some images are re-contextualized. Although the photograph shows us one individual, what does it contribute to the general picture of the events that took place? How effectively does it move viewers? While historian Ludmilla Jordanova questions the documentary value of Walker Evans's photographs of the American Depression of the 1930s, she admires them for their emotional iconic value: 'so much so that "the depression" and some kinds of documentary photography have become virtually synonymous' (Jordanova, 2006: 93).

In the case of Limpkin's photograph, we can view the boy from a number of perspectives: for example, as a local hero representing the outcome of the repression of an entire community; or (as Limpkin's caption would suggest), a young delinquent already set on the road to ruin. Given the appropriate contexts, the photograph could support the conflicting viewpoints of the British Army, Republicans or Loyalists as the three key players in the Northern Ireland Troubles. To confirm its iconic status, 25 years after the *Battle of the Bogside*, the boy in the photograph was 'canonized' through its renewed appearance. On a gable-end wall in the area known as Free Derry Corner in Northern Ireland, there is now a large painting of the boy, known locally as *The Petrol Bomber* mural, standing over 8.5 m (28 ft) in height, executed in the mediums of emulsion and acrylic paint. The 'Bogside Artists', William and Tom Kelly, and Kevin Hasson, titled their work 'The Battle of The Bogside' (1994), as a commemoration of the 25th anniversary of The Battle of August 1969.[19] While the artists openly acknowledge their indebtedness to Limpkin, they felt it necessary to resite the bomber, and took the liberty of adding the Rossville flats to the picture's background in an Adobe® Photoshop®-style montage. The flats (which were demolished in the 1980s as unfit for human habitation) formed the backdrop for the 'Battle' and the events of 'Bloody Sunday'.[20] The artists have also added clouds of CS gas and a couple of RUC policemen standing next to a burning building. While the muralists' (somewhat grandiose) interpretation of the *Petrol Bomber* is very different from that of Clive Limpkin, it does amount to significant praise for the photographer who first produced the image:

> Of all our murals, it is the one that appears to have the most appeal. Just as Michelangelo's Statue of David ushered in the new Republic and demonstrated Florentine 'virtus' and self-reliance, so also does the *Petrol Bomber* mural put a face on the struggle for civil rights and gives voice to the resolve of oppressed peoples everywhere. Its popularity is owed to that. (The Bogside Artists, 2009: no page reference.)

The internally uncontextualized original image is here appropriated to a particular cause (refocused from metonym to metaphor) by setting it in a very concrete background in time and place (see Figure 17.5).

Meanwhile, on the other side of the River Foyle, the petrol bomber makes yet another appearance, this time on a Loyalist mural (typical of the tit-for-tat exchange between rival political groups in the Province). In this context, the interpretation is less generous, but all the same constitutes a back-handed recognition of the importance of Limpkin's photograph, providing further endorsement of the image's iconic status, particularly as the image has by now been adopted (but partly obscured by a seventeenth- century cannon) by the opposition (see Figure 17.6).

Limpkin himself recognizes that the position of the photographer is not a neutral one to start with. 'The covering journalist not only runs the risk of being "used" in propaganda exercises, but also in creating and prolonging rioting by his very presence' (1972: 149). This sentiment is further extended by Carruthers: 'Not infrequently, journalists and photographers return from

war with the confession that they ceased to be mere observers and became "participants"' (2000: 273). The photographer's observation may not be neutral; but neither is it under his or her control: 'The photographer's intentions do not determine the meaning of the photograph, which will have its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it' (Sontag, 2003: 39).[21]



Figure 17.5 ***The Battle of The Bogside*, Derry. 1994. The Bogside Artists. Photograph © 2009 Terence Wright**

The rule of usefulness (to readers and/or editors) applies to the photographers themselves: 'We… would be sent out [to Northern Ireland] whenever trouble threatened… and brought back after a couple of weeks when the readers "grew tired" of Ulster' (Limpkin, personal communication, 4 March 2010). As far as Limpkin can remember, the *Petrol Bomber* never made it to the chippie,[22] and was never published in the newspapers – it appeared in print in his own book, *The Battle of the Bogside* (1972). Nonetheless, the image evidently captured the imagination of those who saw it, and has stood the test of time, to emerge as a national icon. Meanwhile, for the photographer himself, ruminating on the impact of his professional output, the position and longevity of serious journalism versus titillation provides a provocative full stop to this section:

> In 1972, my book, *The Battle of Bogside*, … showing three years of fighting in Northern Ireland won the Robert Capa Gold Medal from Life magazine "for superlative photography requiring exceptional courage and enterprise abroad". (My photograph of the first topless girl to appear in *The Sun*, however, has failed to receive any official recognition) (Limpkin, 2009).

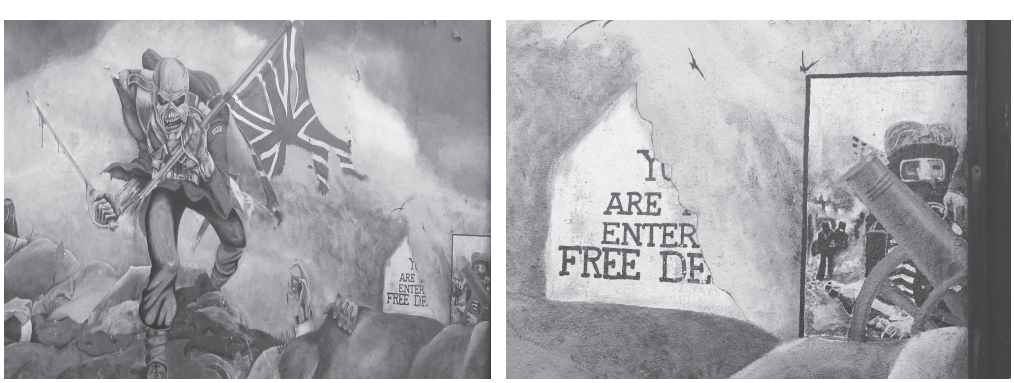


Figure 17.6 ***Loyalist Mural with Petrol Bomber Detail*** **(enlarged to the right). Artist/date unknown. Photograph © 2009 Terence Wright**

OUT OF AFRICA

In January 2008, reporter Lucy Adams and photographer Simon Murphy traveled to Northern Uganda to cover a story that had dropped out of the media spotlight: the abduction of children by the rebel group 'The Lord's Resistance Army' (LRA). A shaky ceasefire provided a window of opportunity for the journalists to see how people were coping with everyday life. Now that the children were returning to their villages, how would the issue of reconciliation be addressed? The outcome of the trip was an article titled 'A History of Violence' with 12 accompanying photographs. It appeared in Glasgow's *Herald Magazine* on Saturday 2 February 2008 (Figure 17.7). The cover photograph is of Dennis Oyeto, who had been abducted at the age of eight and forced to become a rebel soldier. At the time of writing, he was 18; but the photograph shows him holding a home-made toy gun that appears to have been tied together from old pieces of scrap metal, cloth, corks and banana leaves. As in the image of the Derry bomber, the subject's overall appearance is one of ambiguity – adults kill to protect children: but … is this a child, killing? This world is upside-down indeed. But unlike the Derry *Petrol Bomber*, Oyeto's age is difficult to determine, as we pick up mixed messages from his serious and mature expression. Certainly not one of childlike innocence – contrasted with the childish 'weapon' he is carrying. Oyeto's attire is part tribal, part worse-for-wear, disheveled Western – perhaps typical for the African degraded rather than uplifted by contact with Europe. These visual connotations are reminiscent of another Marlon Brando character: the insane Colonel Walter Kurtz, who has 'gone native'. Dennis would not look out of place in Kurtz's jungle-based renegade army unit operating during the Vietnam War, in Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* (1979).

However, unnervingly, there are closer affinities between the young tribesman and the old madman. The copy text reveals that young Oyeto is unable to remember how many people he has killed during his time as a soldier. Over a period of 7 years, he was forced to perform atrocious acts of cruelty, until he was finally able to escape and return home. Now he says he is a changed man. On the next page of the article, the photograph of Jenneth Oyella (Figure 17.8) is less obviously militaristic in appearance, but once again the copy reveals that her innocent, cheerful and friendly appearance belies her violent background. This is not a normal young woman.

Stories of abduction, enslavement, mutilation, murder and rape are not normally considered to be popular subjects, particularly for a local paper's Saturday readership. Their publication in this case is impelled by individual journalists championing a cause; that it is a 'cause' which does not form part of the current news landscape makes the task especially worthwhile.[23] Indeed, the story fulfills many of the recommendations made by the International Broadcasting Trust's report on global news coverage, *Screening the World*. African stories are almost always complex, but are all too often represented using simplistic tribal stereotypes delivered to audiences unaware of the overall context, which reduce them to banality. To counteract this lack of local knowledge, 'Covering off-the-agenda stories [is] a vital way of providing a context, alternative perspectives and variety that audiences say they want' (Scott, 2008: 27).[24]

In some respects, the *Glasgow Herald* journalist and photographer featuring the human cost of internecine war, emphasizing the personal in traditional style, were swimming against the retreating tide of foreign news reporting of the 'developing world', which has been subject to dramatic cutbacks by news agencies in recent years (as detailed by Scott 2008 and 2009, for example). They did include a local interest element, however, which linked the report directly with the concerns of readers (rather than devoting itself to issues with general, rather than neighborhood, impact): they interviewed a Glaswegian

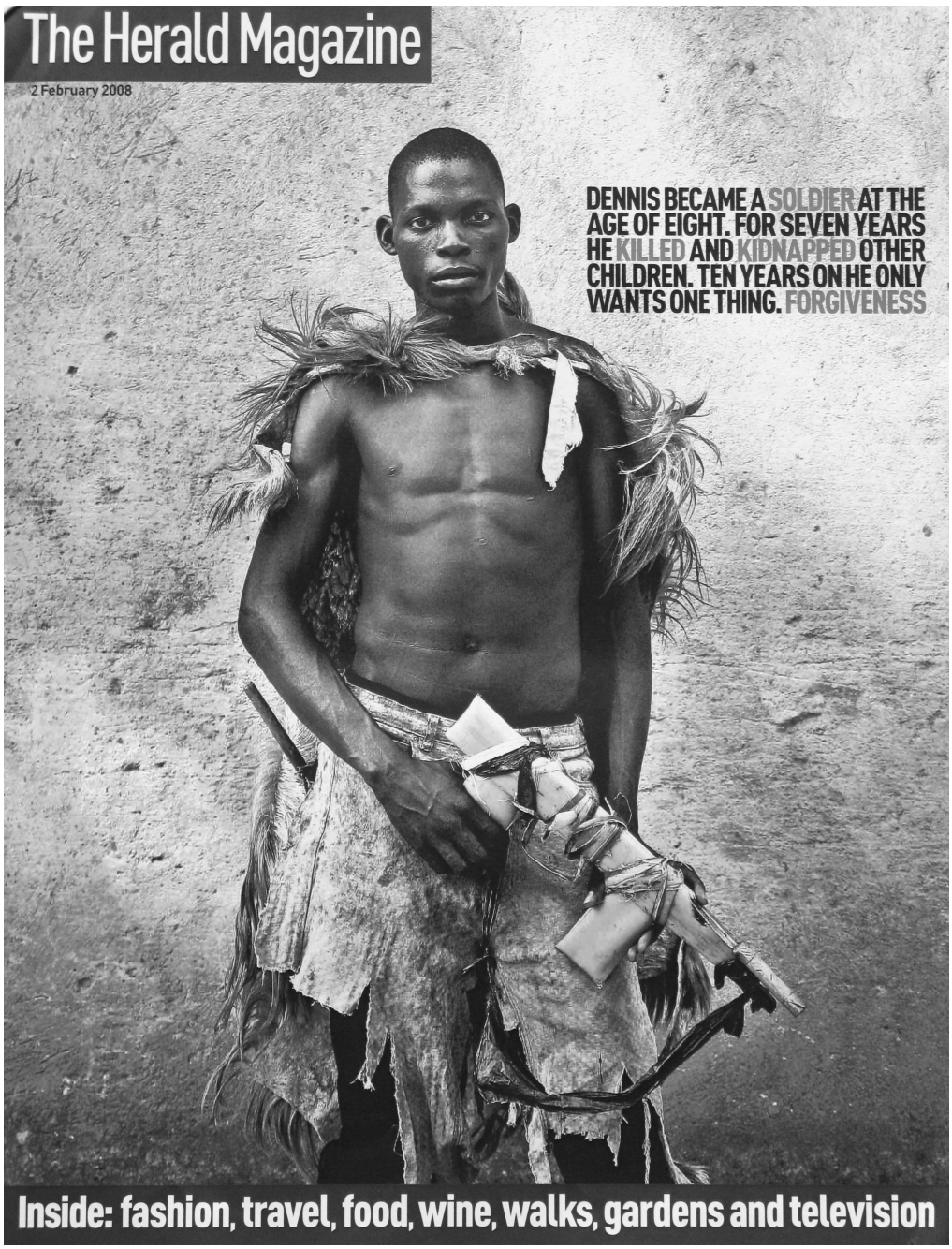


Figure 17.7 ***Dennis Oyeto*****. 2008. Photograph by Simon Murphy / the** ***Glasgow Herald*****. Reproduced with permission**

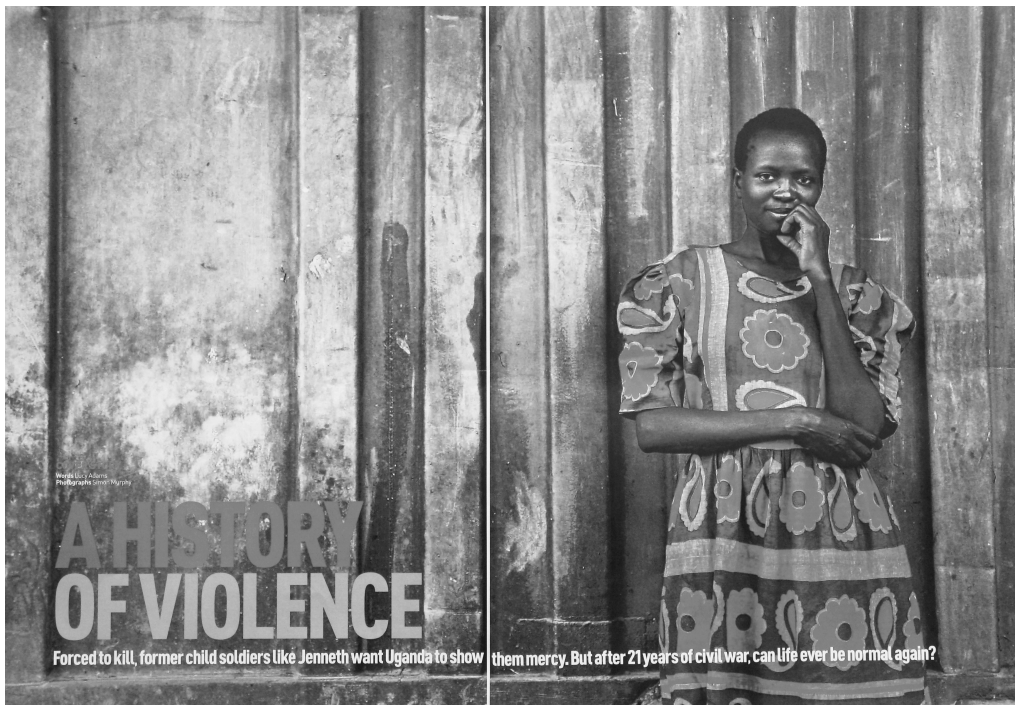


Figure 17.8 ***Jenneth Oyella.*** **2008. Photograph by Simon Murphy / the** ***Glasgow Herald.*** **Reproduced with permission**

priest, who runs a radio station in Uganda for the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF), with the aim of 'promoting the peaceful reintegration of former child soldiers in communities' (Adams, 2008: 9). Adams' six-page feature concludes with a call for action from readers, who are invited to donate money to SCIAF.

In 2008, the article won the local media section of the One World Media Awards. The virtues of such reporting are that both photography and text personalize the tragic and horrific situations in which some children and young people can find themselves. At the same time, the magazine has been generous in allocating enough space to allow the publication of a series of photographs to tell the story in some depth. Rather than dwelling on the sensationalist aspects, the article attempts to explain the wider context and circumstances of the subjects' plight. And in the UK environment, where television promotes holiday programs 'mostly about what tourists could obtain cheaply from the developing world' (Department for International Development, 2000: 3), the article offers the reader a route of positive action that they themselves can take to help relieve the situation. This is engaged, not trivialized, photojournalism. It captures attention not through sensationalism, sexy bouncing or quirky staging, but by offering an informed and thoughtful view of an issue considered by reporters, editors and readers to be of importance to us all. It does not offend the sensibilities of its viewers with overblown and numbing images of violence, but takes an approach where the metaphorical and metonymic properties of the image are juxtaposed to provide context and interpretation.

CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that photographers and journalists have long stipulated that the referential force

> matters in news photographs, it is the photograph's symbolic or connotative force … that facilitates the durability and the memorability of the news image (Zelizer, 2004: 130)

The standardization, and endless reproduction and echoing, of press photography means that in order to assess its value as a legitimate subject for study, we have to consider the wider social, cultural and political aspects of visual representation. Our understanding of the news is based upon 'assumptions about narrative, story-telling, human interest, and the conventions of photographic and linguistic presentation in news production' (Schudson, 2000: 192).

During the 1930s, it was the photo-illustrated magazine with the picture essay that constituted a central means of communicating in-depth news, social conditions (and titillation) to a broad readership. Nowadays, with few exceptions, newspapers and magazine features rely on one key photograph – but, in the best case, are unlikely to contain more than half-a-dozen images. A number of reasons have been cited for the demise of the photo magazine. Primary amongst them seems to be the proliferation of television journalism, which rapidly took over the role of satisfying the public's hunger for pictorial stimulation. This apparently does not apply to the current popularity of 'gossip' magazines such as *Hello* and *OK*, where color photo-stories can run as many images as their antecedents:[25] perhaps this is because the celebrities who constitute the pabulum of these TV-based magazines exist for the public as narrated images in their onscreen life, so the photoplay aspects of the journalism are a medium-specific phenomenon.

Another contributing factor may be that photography itself had changed. The advent of the 35mm camera, which brought about a more fluid relationship between photographer and subject, resulting in Cartier-Bresson's notion of 'the decisive moment' (not unlike Eisenstaedt's 'story-telling moment'), set the standard for a new style of photojournalism. This emphasis on the evocative nature of the single photograph is not easy to replicate or replace in the time- and moving-image-based medium of television, where frame necessarily succeeds frame to form a sequence. In traditional print journalism, rather than spell out the story over a series of images, emphasis was placed on the single picture that could partly describe and partly intrigue. The photograph's metaphoric and metonymic functions were critical to this end, and the art and craft of the photographer and editor largely depended on identifying and communicating them.

Bearing this in mind, we should certainly be wary of a naive use of newspaper photographs as evidence either of history or of sociological conditions, yet nor should we simply dismiss them as irrelevant representations of society. The best newspaper stories are based on meticulous research – and unlike academic histories – they chronicle not only events but also the interest these events have for human beings: subjects, readers/viewers and reporters. Their task is a delicate one. As Gjelten puts it:

> …journalists are storytellers, not social scientists or historians or criminal investigators. …When people are in anguish, or when they are elated, it is our unique professional responsibility to convey what they *feel* and not just the facts. …Too often, news coverage of tragedies dehumanizes the victims, and when their suffering is gruesome, the reporting can border on pornography. Stories that pander to emotion and offer no insight or analysis titillate but do not explain and may even distort what has happened. To manage emotion and to balance it properly with dispassionate observation is one of the greatest professional challenges… (1998: 26).

Addressing the issue of the academic value of studying the news, Burke suggests that the 'evidence' provided by journalists should always be examined in the context of its production, re-emphasizing that 'the historian cannot afford to forget the pressures of newspaper editors and television stations, concerned with "human interest" stories' (Burke, 2001: 151). In other words, the news media have to be treated as an anthropological

phenomenon in their own right. As this chapter has attempted to show, the content of news media is constrained by tight principles of organization and well-defined expectations of what the public wants/is able to take.

Finally, the rationale behind the pervasive flirtation with the lyrics of songs is to offer pop music as a metaphor for press photography. The music and lyrics of popular singers present a heart-felt rhetorical response to situations, unashamedly arousing equally intense feelings in hearers. Their effect is not dissimilar to the emotional impact of photographs of the American Depression of the 1930s, to follow out Jordanova's analysis (see above). News photographs are much more than mere 'mirrors' of society: they offer a description of states of affairs in the world and an evocation of context: certainly acting as signs of their times. As such, they offer a uniquely valuable source for the study of human history and cultural anthropology – always provided that they are approached with an informed understanding of the art, craft and constraints of their production.

NOTES

1 With thanks to Lucy Adams, Tom Kelly, Clive Limpkin, Simon Murphy, Maureen Thomas and the *Glasgow Herald* for their valuable help, cooperation and comments in the writing of this chapter.

2 In the 1980s this form of food packaging was banned as unhygienic – fears of toxins in newsprint. Recently, feeding the nostalgia market, some outlets have returned to this tradition, though it is rumoured that fish and chips are now wrapped in specially printed fake newspaper (see *Edinburgh Evening News,* 2009).

3 Only on very rare occasions (usually of disasters of a national or international scale, e.g. The World Trade Center attacks of 2001), will the news be extended beyond its allotted time slot.

4 The psychologist James Gibson refers to 'non-modal' forms of perception, 'cutting across the perceptual systems and transcending the "senses". Touching and listening accompany looking' (1979: 208).

5 Chandler provides a valuable discussion of the origins and use of these terms (Chandler, 1994: http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem07.html). Nonetheless, at the best of times, the exact definition of these terms in everyday language can become quite complex (see Geeraerts, 2002).

6 Elsewhere (Wright, 2008: 77), I discuss how Dorothea Lange's image came to stand for the American Depression of the 1930s and then moved on to become a universal symbol of motherhood.

7 *Picture Post*'s campaigning approach helped to pave the way for the post World War II Labour government.

8 This instance of using an animal to accentuate the human condition is neither unique nor confined to photography. For example, Roberto Rossellini, in his 1948 film *Una voce umana* (A Human Voice) included the dog belonging to the actress Anna Magnani in her role as central character to accentuate her sense of loneliness, despite conventional expectations that a dog would offer companionship. As Brunette put it, 'Curiously, the presence of a dog serves to heighten the woman's isolation even more, rather than relieve it' (1996: 87). In the Italian context it seems that dogs have a habit of getting into the picture. When Rossellini was filming *Roma, città aperta* (Rome, Open City), during a short sequence of a partisan attack on a German armoured column filmed on the outskirts of Rome, a dog runs towards the vehicles and then turns and makes a hasty retreat out of the frame. It would be quite in keeping with the tenets of Neorealism not to shoot the scene again as a dog could easily have done the same in 'real life'.

9 Not averse to sexual stereotyping, two *Hollyoaks* calendars are produced each year: 'Hollyoaks Babes', featuring female cast, and 'Hollyoaks Hunks', featuring the males.

10 Sourced from the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board [Online]. Available from: www.barb.co.uk [Accessed: 8 February 2010].

11 Sourced from *Songfacts* [Online]. Available from: http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=3313 [Accessed 5 September 2010].

12 In the movie context, Spike Lee's (1989) *Do the Right Thing* contains a scene which may have been inspired by these images and their connotations.

13 In 1984, Mick Jagger returned to the original and, with David Bowie, provided a 'camped-up' version with a video filmed in London's Docklands.

14 See Acheson et al. (1982). According to local artist Tom Kelly (in conversation) at the time of the *Battle of the Bogside* about 100 World War II gas masks had been found in an old army hut in the vicinity. They had proved quite popular with the children, though the CS gas crept into the masks from the back, making them useless from any practical point of view.

15 Truman Capote described *The Wild One* as 'the strange film in which [Brando] was presented as the Führer of a tribe of Fascist-like delinquents' (2008: 201).

16 Sourced from *On This Day* [Online]. Available from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/low/dates/stories/may/11/newsid_2860000/2860297.stm [Accessed: 5 September 2010].

17 Paddy Coyle, the boy petrol bomber, is now a man in his fifties. He still lives in Derry and works as a driving instructor.

18 Quoted from Kramer, Robert, 'Historical Commentary' in Sander (1980).

19 *The Bogside Artists* [Online]. Available from: http://www.bogsideartists.com [Accessed: 5 September 2010]. (See also Bogside Artists, 2009 and Kelly, 2001.)

20 'Most of those shot dead on "Bloody Sunday" were killed in four main areas: the car park (courtyard) of Rossville Flats; the forecourt of Rossville Flats (between the Flats and Joseph Place); at the rubble and wire barricade on Rossville Street (between Rossville Flats and Glenfada Park); and in the area around Glenfada Park (between Glenfada Park and Abbey Park)' (Melaugh 1996–2010).

21 And this is a common problem for both movie and still photographs:

> 'By some viewers, images of war are read in a straight-forwardly anti-war fashion, as necessary testimony to war's inhumanity. But others will regard war footage as evidence of the enemy's barbarity and affirmation of the necessity of fighting the good fight… ' (Carruthers, 2000: 71).

22 'Chippie' is a UK colloquialism for the local fish and chip shop.

23 Another example is Matt Frei's television coverage of the Afghan Refugee crisis of February 2001 (Wright, 2008:113).

24 The paper provides further contextualization in the form of a running chronology printed at the bottom of the pages outlining the key events in Uganda's history that led up to the story.

25 For example, a 1995 *Hello* article explaining why Princess Diana chose to speak out on television used 16 photos to tell the story (Wade, 1995) though admittedly parasitic on the other media form.

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