II. POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY

IDEOLOGICAL STATUS OF VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF POLITICS: ANALYSIS OF CZECH ONLINE NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS[1]

Jana Teplá

Charles University in Prague,
Faculty of Social Sciences,
Department of Media Studies,
Smetanovo nábřeží 6, 110 01, Prague 1, Czech Republic
E-mail: janatepla234@seznam.cz

During the first direct Presidential election in the Czech Republic in 2013, Czech newspapers tended to support one of the final candidates. The main aim of this study is to interpret the strategies of photographic representations of the two final candidates in online medium *Lidovky.cz*, which had publicly declared to support the right-wing candidate, and to compare these strategies. The theoretical context of this research is built upon a visual studies approach to culture. It is mostly inspired by the issues of visual literacy, critical analysis of visual culture, image based research and by the concept of ideologies defined in terms of social knowledge, society and discourse. A semiotic analysis was used for uncovering the patterns of visual representation.

Keywords: Czech Presidential candidates, ideologies, online media, photographs, semiotic analysis, visual communication.

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Introduction

The general issue of this paper is mythologization of reality in photographic images. Particularly, this study deals with the patterns of visual representation of political actors in the example of Czech online news photographs of Presidential candidates published during the first direct Presidential election in Czech Republic. The theoretical context of this research is built upon a visual studies approach to culture. It is inspired

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mostly by the issues of visual literacy (Elkins 2003), critical analysis of visual culture (Hall 2003; Stocchetti, Kukkonen 2011), image based research (Prosser 1998; van Leeuwen, Jewitt 2002) and the concept of ideologies defined in terms of social knowledge, society and discourse (van Dijk 1998).

In this research, a semiotic analysis was used for uncovering the patterns of visual representation. The main aim was to interpret the strategies of photographic representations of two final candidates during the Czech Presidential election in January 2013, Karel Schwarzenberg (who politically represented the right wing) and Miloš Zeman (who politically represented the left wing), and compare these strategies. The comparison has revealed specific ideological mechanisms of the construction of meanings of political images used by Czech online newspaper daily *Lidovky.cz* – an online version of Czech newspaper daily *Lidové noviny*, which had publicly declared to support the right-wing candidate, Schwarzenberg – during the campaign. In this approach, I focused on photographs mainly as symbolic forms carrying latent meanings which might have served as tools of power for a specific media institution. I also dealt with images in a context of their "use", which is a context of agents (media) who use them intentionally (Stocchetti, Kukkonen 2011). The basic approach of this work is a critical theory of visual culture with focus on Czech media discourse.

Image and ideologies

When analysing photographic myths, *Mythologies* of Roland Barthes (2004) are traditionally mentioned. In Barthes' theory, modern myth is a discourse that may consist of speech, text, or image, and carries values. The world order represented by myths seems natural, although it is a result of human actions, and that is the reason myths have huge ideological impacts (Barthes 2004). In present days, it is the approach of visual studies, which deals with images as ideological objects and their interpretation. This discipline – or rather, this approach to culture – first developed in 1990s in the United States, where it was based on the history of art, while in Europe it was inspired by semiotics and British culture studies. What has both approaches to visual culture in common is the reference to Barthes and Walter Benjamin. In this Marxist tradition, the general purpose of visual analysis is to uncover the "false consciousness", which means to uncover the unconscious meanings of images and to reveal ideas that formed the very production of images (Elkins 2003).

Visual studies definition of culture is inspired by British culture studies. They understand visual culture as a "socially shared praxis of the production of meanings based on visual representations" (Sturken, Cartwright 2009: 11). The aims of visual studies are: to decode visual media; to understand the reason we rely on visual forms in many areas of our everyday life; and to reveal how images in different culture contexts change their meanings. From this point of view, it seems that images or media texts are active agents who lead us to specific meanings and expressions when mediating the meaning of the world. But, as Matteo Stocchetti and Karin Kukkonen (2011) supposes, we should rather understand images as tools of agents, which are used for production of ideologies. Therefore, we should not talk about the "power of images",

because images themselves have no power, but the power is rather given to them (Stocchetti, Kukkonen 2011). Stocchetti and Kukkonen assume, that after the "pictorial turn" (Mitchell 1994), at the beginning of 1990s, the biggest error in visual culture studies was to analyse images for their effects on viewers and for their magical power. But from Stocchetti's and Kukkonen's point of view, visual communication is powerful, because it "binds the viewer in a communicative relation, where agency is hidden and meaning is ambivalent" (Stocchetti, Kukkonen 2011: 4). Images are therefore mere tools in hands of political or media agents who use them intentionally and the power of images lies in the way of their use, which is never politically neutral or socially insignificant. The use of images either supports or rejects the contribution of values in society, which makes visual communication a political process. To uncover the ideological context of the use of images, Stocchetti and Kukkonen (2011) suggest creating a critical visual theory with three following aims of critical visual analysis:

The first aim is to eliminate the wrong imagery and to reveal visual myths and other forms of intentional use of human knowledge for manipulation. The second aim is to deconstruct the visual communication process, which means to transform images from natural phenomenon to symbolical signification (political approach to visuality is necessary here with emphasis on the use of images). And the third aim is to realize, that the difference between "public" and "private" in society is vanishing, and that this process is part of a technological control. In political discourse, it is the public use of images which is important, because using images in public sphere is politically influential (Stocchetti, Kukkonen 2011: 27). In critical visual analysis, images should be understood as forms of activities, which are used by agents for achieving their goals. Images are part of the process of negotiating values in society and if they are put out of context (interests, media, circumstances, space and time), they do not mean anything (Stocchetti, Kukkonen 2011: 30).

We can understand ideologies, which are part of the context of images in use, as a complex of beliefs, values and ideas of a specific social group. In Teun A. van Dijk's multidisciplinary theory (van Dijk 1998), ideologies are analysed in terms of social knowledge, society and discourse and van Dijk also claims that ideologies are not reserved only for dominant groups but they can also work as a "basic impulse for change or rejection" (van Dijk 1998: 26) as well. It is due to a preferential access to, and control of, media and education, that some elite groups have privileged status in the process of formation and dissemination of ideologies. Media, political and educational institutions are used for effective circulation and realization of ideologies, because ideologies can be formed only through the use of language, discourse or communication (van Dijk 1998).

Those ideas mentioned above create important basis for my research and I believe it is necessary not to forget them in any research that deals with political images in public space. In my paper, considering those ideas, the photographs of Presidential candidates published in online medium are the tools of political manipulation used in public sphere and my goal is to critically deconstruct the images and proove the importance of institutional and ideological context when studying potential political influence of photographs.

A semiotic analysis of images

Semiotic interpretation is a qualitative method used for analysing texts or images. In visual analysis we use it in cases when image isolated from the author as visual fact is chosen as the subject of interpretation (Sztompka 2007: 84). Semiotic analysis deals with the construction of social differences through signs. It is based on the assumption that photographic image is a complex of signs with latent culture meanings. Its aim is to reveal the mechanisms of the production of meanings through images, which means, to reveal the ideological status of images (Rose 2001: 99). Barthes' (1977) categories of denotation and connotation are commonly used here. In image analysis, denotation is everything visibly represented in the image, or everything to which the image is directly related. Contrary to it, connotations are more complicated associations, ideas and feelings provoked by images / signs and they are formed historically and culturally. It is the process of connotation in which the author's intervention to a photograph becomes evident. By using many techniques (cut-out, distance, focus, lighting or shot angle) the photographer places signs formed by a specific culture code in his photograph (Barthes 1977).

Gunther Kress defines three types of visual semiotic analysis: descriptive, interactive and compositional (van Leeuwen, Jewitt 2002: 141). *Descriptive meaning* is mediated through the actors in the image (people, places or things) and the emphasis is put on syntax – the relation of elements in the space of image – which can be narrative, or conceptual. The narrative structure is dynamical, if the picture contains a vector directed from an actor to a target (i.e. eye to eye contact). The conceptual structure is rather stable, if the picture does not contain any vector and its role is to define, analyse or classify the actors. *Interactive meaning* is produced by images which create relationships between viewers and the world represented in the photograph, and this way images force viewers to take a specific position in that relationship. There are three factors that influence this kind of the production of meanings: distance, contact and point of view. Finally, *compositional meaning* has four sources: information value, framing, significance and modality. Information value can be read in a placement of elements in a composition of the image (right-left, up-down, central-periphery); framing is a source that connects or disconnects elements in the image; significance is determined by the fact that some elements in the picture are more visible than others (by size, colour, tones); and modality value shows us the degree of correspondence between what we see in the picture and what we see in reality.

I chose Kress' semiotic approach to analyse the photographs, because it helps to find the stereotypes of visual representation (in this paper, it uncovers visual patterns of representation of the candidates); it helps to find qualitative differences between the visual patterns of representation (it uncovers different photographic strategies of visual representation of the candidates); and because it also works with the social context (it uncovers the important role which specific media institution with specific ideological context plays in the strategies of photographic representation of the candidates).

Interpretation of photographs of
Czech Presidential candidates

The main research question of this study is: How differently did the online medium *Lidovky.cz* visually represent both candidates? My intention is to show the difference between visual representation patterns of both candidates and point out the potential ideological power the medium used through photographs. For this paper, three pictures of each candidate were selected in two weeks of online news coverage during the campaign before the final election round (from the 12th of January until the 25th of January 2013). I chose only the pictures where the candidates were not photographed together, because the relationship between the candidates was not an issue of this study. If I wanted to analyse all the photographs of the candidates published on the server, a content analysis would have to be applicated here. But this was not an aim of the research, the aim was rather to show the possibilities of semiotic analysis for application in qualitative research in visual representation of politics.

Photographs of Karel Schwarzenberg

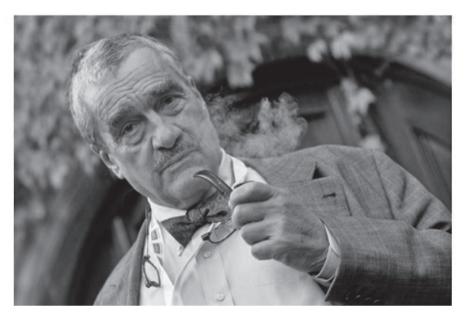**Fig. 1.** Karel Schwarzenberg, *Lidovky.cz*, 12. 1. 2013

Fig. 2. Karel Schwarzenberg, *Lidovky.cz*, 13. 1. 2013

Fig. 3. Karel Schwarzenberg, *Lidovky.cz*, 22. 1. 2013

Denotation level

Schwarzenberg is visually represented as a man happily smiling and with his hands waving to his audience at some political meeting (Figs 1, 3) and in a leisure time as a man smoking his pipe (Fig. 2). In the photographs, he is captured alone without other people around him. He is neatly and formally dressed in any occasion (Figs 1–3).

Connotation level

1. Descriptive meaning (the relations between elements of the representation).

We can talk about a conceptual structure of representation in the photographs of Schwarzenberg, because there is no dynamic vector or action in the pictures. Instead, there is a symbolical meaning that defines the identity of the actor. Symbols are usually emphasised by their size, position, colour, light or by some other subjects in the photograph. In these pictures of Schwarzenberg the symbolical structure of the man himself is evident, as he was photographed alone and with a light pointing out his face and palms (Figs 1, 3) or his head and his hand holding a pipe (Fig. 2). He is represented as a symbol of grace, humanity and tradition.

2. Interactive meaning (the relations between actors and viewers):

Contact: The man is facing the viewer, but is not watching straight at him (Figs 1, 3). This could be interpreted as a social contact between the viewer of the picture and the actor, and as a significant relationship between the man and his audience, who cannot be seen in the picture and whom he is waving at. We can also interpret this phenomenon as the actor's accessibility to the viewer, who feels to be one of his many other viewers and supporters in the audience. In Fig. 2, the man is looking straight at the photographer, which creates even more significant contact between him and the viewer of the picture.

Distance: The distance of capturing the candidate is small, as we see only the head and shoulders of him. This means that the viewer can approach the man's individuality and personality. Being so close to him, the viewer can almost feel to have an intimate relationship with him (Figs 1–3).

Point of view: The view from below can be interpreted as the actor's power over the viewer; the viewer is looking up to him, even adoring him. At the same time, the actor is facing the viewer and that means the viewer is not a passive voyeur, but rather part of this scene, in which he is being protected by the actor (Figs 1–3).

3. Compositional meaning:

Information value (placement of elements in the composition). The actor's head is placed in the centre and up, and his waving hands are on sides of the picture (Figs 1, 3). Usually, what is in the centre of the picture keeps the surrounding elements together. In the example of Figs 1 and 3, we can see that the face of the man – the symbol – is directly connected with his hands, which is a simple and direct message to his unseen audience. In the picture with the pipe (Fig. 2), it is rather the pipe, the smoke, the glasses and the bowtie that are in the center of the photograph and therefore they

create the symbol of Schwarzenberg's personality. And usually, what is placed up in the picture is a sign of an ideal, of something most ideologically important; in the contrary to what is placed down in the picture, is usually closer to reality. Here the candidate is represented as being close to the ideal (Figs 1–3).

Framing (connects or disconnects elements). In all three pictures, the framing of the background does not play much important role, because the background is in soft focus and the photographer zoomed in only on the man's figure.

Significance. If something is more significant than other elements by size or colour in the pictures, it is the man's face with wide smile and his hands waving (Figs 1, 3) or with his hand holding the pipe (Fig. 2). We can see the excitement, happiness and heartiness of the man (Figs 1, 3) as well as his original personality based on aristocratic tradition.

Modality (value of reality). The relatively high naturalistic modality of the photographs is given by the fact that we see expressions of very common human emotions, such as smile and hands waving (Figs 1, 3), which are generally understood as positive signs when communicating with other people. We can also see the man in a relaxed and common situation for him, in which he acts naturally (Fig. 2). Therefore, the pictures seem to create a very simple and natural message to the viewer.

Photographs of Miloš Zeman

Fig. 4. Miloš Zeman, *Lidovky.cz*, 12. 1. 2013

Fig. 5. Miloš Zeman, *Lidovky.cz*, 20. 1. 2013

Fig. 6. Miloš Zeman, *Lidovky.cz*, 22. 1. 2013

Denotation level

Zeman is visually represented as a man in a relation to other men standing around him. (Figs 4–6). He is captured with representatives of the Czech communist party (Fig. 4), with hunters in the woods (Fig. 5) and with one of the men from his Presidential campaign team, both surrounded by photographers (Fig. 6). He is dressed formally on political occasions (Figs 4, 6) and less formally in his leisure time (Fig. 5).

Connotation level

1. Descriptive meaning

We can see a narrative structure of representation of Zeman, because there is always a vector between the actors in the photographs. In Fig. 4 the vector aims from the chairman of the communist party to a certain place on the table (the chairman is pointing his finger at, and looking at that place). There is an action in the picture as well, because it seems that the candidate is obeying an order of the chairman, who is saying something to him. In Fig. 5 the vector aims from Zeman and from the man behind him to the actors walking beside them (they are looking at the actors, who cannot be seen in the picture). There is an action in the picture, because the men are talking to each other and they are walking from one place to another. In Fig. 6 the vector goes from the man on the left to Zeman and from the cameras to Zeman (the man on the left is looking at Zeman and the camera lens are aimed at Zeman). The action can be seen here again, because the man on the left is saying something to Zeman, who is listening to him. The photographs are narratives that tells us a certain story, where there is no emphasis put on the identities of men or their symbolical meaning, but rather on the story, where in Fig. 4 the chairman is commanding the candidate, while the third man (the member) is controlling the whole situation from behind; in Fig. 5 the hunters and Zeman, who does not belong to their group because of his clothes, are walking somewhere in the nature, talking to each other; and in Fig. 6 the man on the left and Zeman are celebrating a success in the campaign, the man is the one who congratulates Zeman and the whole situation is being captured by many photographers, which signifies an important event for media.

2. Interactive meaning:

Contact. Zeman has no eye contact with the viewer of the pictures (Figs 4–6), which makes the identification with him very hard. The candidate is also photographed in profile (Fig. 4), which means he is represented as "the other" (from different social group) whom the viewer does not relate to.

Distance. The candidate is captured from a relatively great distance, because we can see almost the whole figure (Figs 4–6). The greater distance from the actor means he is represented more as a type then as an individual and so the viewer cannot create a close relationship with him.

Point of view. The pictures are taken from the eye level of a standing men (Figs 4–6). This refers to equality between the viewer and the Presidential candidate. The candidate does not have power over the viewer and vice versa.

3. Compositional meaning:

Information value. In Fig. 4 the image could be interpreted as a unification of the communists and Zeman, because the candidate is standing at the party's logo. In Fig. 5 the main information is that Zeman is related to nature, to ordinary people and that he is not much fashionable in any occasion. In Fig. 6 we can see that Zeman is during the celebration moments controlled by many photographers and that he has a positive relation to alcohol.

Framing. Zeman is represented as a different identity from other actors in the photographs (Figs 4–6). This disconnection is made by different style and colour of the clothes he is wearing (Figs 4–6) and by empty space between him and other actors in the picture (Figs 4, 6).

Significance. The most significant elements in the photographs are: the red poster of the communist party (Fig. 4), the hood on Zeman's head (Fig. 5) and the photoflash (Fig. 6). These elements are therefore more important in the representation of the candidate than his own identity.

Modality. The level of modality of the photographs is relatively high, because we can see the candidate in moment actions, which cannot be easily arranged or faked (Figs 4, 5); as well as relatively low, because he is undoubtedly posing to photographers (Fig. 5).

Conclusions

In the example of six photographs of Czech Presidential candidates published in two weeks in Czech online medium *Lidovky.cz* during the Presidential campaign, I tried to prove that the strategies of visual representations of political actors may differ in relation to ideological context of a media institution. Concretely, this online medium, which had publicly declared to support Schwarzenberg during the Presidential campaign, represented him in *a symbolical structure; as ideal; with whom the viewer makes a close relationship; with emphasis put on his identity and personality.* On the other hand, Zeman, as his opponent in the election duel, was represented in *a narrative structure; as type; with whom the viewer does not identify; with emphasis put on his relations to the Czech communist party, to ordinariness and to media interest.* Although I believe visual communication played an important role in the manipulation of public opinion during the Presidential campaign, it was Zeman, who was elected Czech President, and so we may consider other political or social factors that influenced the voters' choice.

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VIZUALIOJO POLITIKOS REPREZENTAVIMO IDEOLOGINIS STATUSAS: ČEKIJOS NAUJIENŲ NUOTRAUKŲ, PASKELBTŲ INTERNETE, ANALIZĖ

Jana Teplá

Santrauka

Per 2013 m. pirmuosius tiesioginius Čekijos Respublikos prezidento rinkimus Čekijos laikraščiuose vyravo tendencija paremti vieną iš finalinių kandidatų. Pagrindinis šio tyrimo tikslas – interpretuoti ir palyginti dviejų finalinių kandidatų reprezentacijų nuotraukose strategijas interneto medijoje *Lidovky.cz*, kuri viešai pareiškė palaikanti dešiniojo sparno kandidatą. Teorinis šio tyrimo kontekstas paremtas vizualumo studijų priartėjimu prie kultūros ir yra inspiruotas ginčijamų vizualiojo raštingumo klausimų, vizualiosios kultūros kritinės analizės, įvaizdžiu pagrįsto tyrimo ir ideologijų, apibrėžiamų socialinės žinijos, visuomenės ir diskurso terminais.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: kandidatai į Čekijos prezidentus, ideologijos, interneto medijos, nuotraukos, semiotinė analizė, vizualioji komunikacija.

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