

FODOMEX – A scientific project

Photojournalism and photo-reportage in Mexico from 1968 to this day: Visual History and National History

Although photojournalism and photo-reportage are part of the information at the same level as the written press, the radio or the Internet, they are two phenomena that are not considered yet as a real specialty on research. It seems logical inasmuch photography- taking in consideration the variety of different kinds of photography- either is a well delimited area of research. Art Historians, Visual Communication researchers, Historians, Sociologists or Anthropologists take these phenomena into consideration in all their work, sometimes centrally managed but more often on a marginal basis. Neither in France nor Latin America, photography has not become yet (as Literature or more recently Films) a research field of study per se. It's Omnipresence in the contemporary world and in particular in the information field should however lead to more systematic reflections with the aim of deciphering and questioning the uses of photography

Our Hypothesis is Photojournalism and Photo-reportage leave a mark on those who receive them by offering some vision of the world, the Author's one and the one of whom posts it; Society as a whole and as the receptor of these visions has the right -and even duty- to question them. Our project focuses on two types of photographic productions:

- Photojournalism: Photography production for the information press(written or the Internet) that accounts for precise events
- Photo-reportage: Long- term Photographic Production mainly on Social and Politics issues, which is articulated around a series, generally commented by the author of the images.

We chose to join Photojournalism and Photo-reportage insofar as we consider that these two practices share the fundamental objective of informing (although this statement may need to be qualified with regard to the most contemporary practices). The Artistic and Aesthetic purposes are implicit in these productions but do not constitute their very essence.

It is necessary to point out we want to analyze both the practices of photographers and the uses of the photographs, that is to say the contexts of presentation, posting or the exhibition of the images with associated discourses. This reflection on the uses seems fundamental to us, taking into consideration people like Gianni Haver who upholds a joint reflection about authors and support¹.

The subject of Photojournalism and Photo-reportage in Mexico from The Seventies up to now involves interviewing different actors linked to the visual information sector: photographers, journalists who work in collaboration with them, members of the press that post images and particularly people in charge of the photography departments, Press and Images agencies as well as editors and managers of cultural institutions who publishes and exhibits the work of photographers.

¹ HAVER, Gianni (dir), *Photo de presse*, Lausanne, Editions Antipodes, Coll. Médias et Histoire, 2009, 278 p.

With the long-term goal to extend the Project to other Latin American countries, for a start it seems appropriate to focus our research onto one of the “largest countries” of the continent. As we intend to see how Photojournalism and Photo-reportage offered a vision and the comprehension of the most recent Latin American History, it is logical to start with an influential country of said geographical area². Mexico is a traditionally marked land by image and has constantly encouraged iconographic productions either pictorial or mechanical. Exchanges between Mexican and foreigner photographers were and remain multiple since the end of the XIX century and the arrival of traveling photographers. The Mexican photographic production was enriched by such exchanges and it is today one of the most valuable of the continent both from the artistic and documentary point of view.

The time limits from 1968 to our days were defined according to two criteria: Respect for the phases of political history and the desire to work on the most recent history of the country since it is a period of important changes at the political level and significant economic development. In Mexico, the events of 1968 and the crisis of the eighties forced the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) government – the governing party since the 1930’s- to initiate a process of democratization which ends in the year 2000 in the victory of an opposition candidate, Mr. Vicente Fox Quezada, in presidential elections. At the end of the 20th century, there is a search for democracy associated to sustained economic progress. The rise of violence linked to drug trafficking changed again the panorama. Our hypothesis is that the Mexican photojournalists and photo-reportages attempted to account for these developments and we wonder about the paths they took to achieve this purpose.

This project wants to answer some simple but essential questions to understand the operation and analysis of the scope of visual information: Which are the characteristics of photojournalist and photo-reportage production in Mexico? What are the main themes and the privileged uses? Which discourses were associated with the publication or exhibition of the photographs and with what glance on the contemporary History of the country? Finally, how the different actors in the sector are positioning themselves in relation to the other information sectors and other national practices? As authors and diffusers of images, what role do they play in the elaboration of a National History?

This FODOMEX project is interested in cultural and social phenomena linked to the information channels. Through the analysis of the photographic medium we will try to understand how the relevant political and social events can be transcribed, molded and transmitted. Reading History made by photographers and diffusers corresponds with a certain vision of this History that is offered to an audience that in general has no training in understanding the images; Hence the need to make explicit this offer of information to contextualize it in order to make it more readable.

The first objective of this Project is to focus photojournalism and photo-reportage as a research object per se, that is to say consider it as a singular field of research with its own characteristics. This implies

² What is proposed here for Mexico is inspired by the work done for other geographical areas, for example The United States of America: HARIMAN, Robert; LUCAITES, John Louis, *No caption needed: iconic photographs, public culture and liberal democracy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007, 419 p. This publication led to the creation of a blog (nocaptionneeded.com) dedicated to the “discussion on the role of photojournalism and other visual practices in a democratic society”.

using, as well as continues to develop, a specific applied methodology. Our ambition is to continue to create, experiment and consolidate the instruments for the analysis of the press photography, that is to say the Icon textual documents: newspaper page or illustrated magazine, photographs published on the Internet, exposed images with footnotes and accompanying texts, etc.

The second objective is to elaborate a state of things (in the most comprehensively way) about Photojournalism and photo-reportage in Mexico over the last forty years in order to delineate the major themes, define the practices and uses and identify the main actors and their role in the development of this visual information media. Through this panorama, we want to evaluate objectively the place occupied by this media in the country, understand the role it can play in building a national History and make our results known to the different scientific communities(Mexican and French obviously but more broadly to The Latin American and The European)