

The Visual Politics of Wars

Edited by

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CHAPTER TWO

EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF WAR PHOTOGRAPHS

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Abstract

Using the concepts *media picture* and *war photography*, this paper will examine the construct of emotion in visual communication research. The explanation of emotion emergence used in this paper rests on the Component Process Model by Scherer (1984a; 1984b; 1987). Based on this, a model of the emotive potential of picture features is proposed and proofed against the example of selected war photographs by James Nachtwey. In order to do this, an exploratory, semi-structured interview study with 30 subjects was conducted. It can be concluded that the depicted protagonist was perceived as being most emotive especially if they are a child shown suffering in a home surrounding, and/or are of European origin. Viewer empathy, involvement, and their ability to verbalise their own emotional state were primary determinants of the strength of emotional appeal.¹

Keywords: Nachtwey, war, photographs, emotion, interview

Introduction

Photographic images of war have always been used to accentuate and lend authority to war reporting and prompt an unprecedented emotional visual coverage. The pictures we see of dead and wounded civilians and soldiers in times of conflict become social artefacts that may or may not stir our emotions or move us to action. Recognising the evolution of the nature of war, this chapter examines the role of pictures in representations of

¹ This article is an abridged version of Gerth (2015).