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### Caple, Helen - *Photojournalism: A Social Semiotic Approach*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 237 pp. Hardcover ISBN 978-0-230-30100-9

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When the press is dead, the photographer will go elsewhere to publish the stories that are important to tell, and there will be countless opportunities for them to do that. But press photography is being challenged on so many fronts that it is hard to imagine that the professional photojournalist will retain a role within those traditional news organisations for very much longer.

Helen Caple, author of *Photojournalism: A Social Semiotic Approach*, is clearly concerned about the continuing relevance news image on the printed page (or digital). Caple acknowledges that the traditional paradigm of news sourcing and distribution has been turned on its head by digital technologies and is slowly subsuming the role of the traditional daily newspaper and suggests that her own analysis of image and text may also be doomed to share the fate of newsprint.

Nevertheless, her discussion of the semiotics of the image is useful. Caple has written an informative book for visual semiotics researchers providing them with a set of tools with which to closely investigate the role of the image in the press. She has included an extensive review of the literature that she has drawn from in order to develop those tools and has used an extensive bank of images from popular press. Just as a journalist crafts a story by using particular writing devices so to does the photojournalist.

In Caple's examination of these devices she explores and analyses the ways in which photojournalists capture images in order to accentuate the efficacy of the image; whether the image evokes a particular emotion, feeling or mood; using light as a device, or whether it tells the audience what it intends to tell, by its choice of framing etc. Caple also importantly examines the image coupled with the words on the page; whether what we think the viewer is seeing is in fact what the image is about.

Caple cites a study by Macken-Horarik who point out:

> … for developing analytical tools capable of accounting not only for the complementarities of meaning distributed across words and pictures, but also for the relations held between words and pictures… because so much of political argumentation is writ large in media communication and depends for its effectiveness on visual data (Macken-Horarik, 2003, p. 1).

Caple offers where the political discourses are current, important and often volatile and where images can reinforce positive or negative feelings that influence a community's discourse.

The still image has had a long heroic history in press photography, but, the author also acknowledges that, '…the press photograph has had a "bad press"' (p. 3) . As an example of this, Caple quotes Robert Taft, the photography historian who in 1938 described photographs used in the tabloids as '…trite, trivial, superficial, tawdry, salacious, morbid or silly' (p. 4) . I'm sure we recognize these descriptions in relation to images we see

in our tabloids today; but we also know that photojournalists have given us a rich and powerful visual understanding of the world.

Caple's motivation in providing researchers with a method for the investigation of the position and value of the photograph is clear, she says, the press photograph in the news story is still by and large considered secondary to the text that it accompanies. As a photographer herself, her response to this is to provide a means of evaluating the photograph as a way of understanding its value and importance as a medium of communication.

In the chapter *Evolving Practices* Caple returns to the niggling and inescapable fact that the press photo as it sits on the page is disappearing, because the page itself is disappearing. She quotes the late David Carr – a media writer for the *New York Times*

> The newspaper that lands on doorsteps… is really an artefact for negotiation, between finite space and infinite news, between news that never stops and presses that must roll, between the desire to make it perfect and the desire to make sure it is produced (2011, p. 16).

Much of Caple's analysis depends on the premise of finite space, but the Internet has given us infinite space for infinite news and where the image sits on the page in relation to the text no longer revolves around a finite page. I think many of us used to have our first taste of the day's news stories as we read over the morning paper with an early morning coffee, but now stories come to us almost by chance when we find ourselves being diverted from a social media site to a devastating story that has just hit that site or when idly surfing the net and being side-tracked by an enticing, or horrifying, image or being alerted to an event through a Twitter feed.

I wonder then, how do we understand and make sense of news. The stories that we gather are not necessarily related to the local or global discourses that most concern us so how does this random accumulation of image and text impact on our understanding of news. These are not new questions, and where I find this book most interesting is in trying to understand how we might evaluate the stories and pictures using the same analytical investigation that Caple employs – how to read and evaluate images and image and text in the context of the Internet.

## About the reviewer

Pauline Anastasiou is the Director of Photography at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. Pauline is a Core Member of the Centre for Communication, Politics and Culture at RMIT. Pauline's research projects have included work on the archiving of memory and the impact that new technologies have had on the gathering, editing and the telling of family stories. She has been involved in several projects exploring the use of mobile media and is a member of the Photo Imaging Research Network. Her latest work is centered on affect theory in relation to lens-based image making.