Photographing History, understanding contemporary

Photojournalism:
a travel story around the world

Guides for teachers of secondary school

Introduction

Archivio Publifoto Intesa Sanpaolo Bank, Members of People-s
Liberation Army (PLA) *helps farmers with the peaking of
medicinal plants, Kwangtung province*, July 1969
(China Photo Service)

William Klein, *Barber Shop*, 1956 from *Memoria e passione.
Da Capa a Ghirri. Capolavori dalla collezione Bertero*

Photojournalism has its roots in war photography of the second half
of 19th Century, it documented the landscape and participants rather
than the frontline battle, creating a positive and romantic propaganda
portrait. In 1925 the first compact camera was built, it was an advance
in technology that allowed photographers to be more dynamic and be
more in the middle of the action. From the 1930s through the 1970s
photojournalism saw its "golden age", turning its interest towards
daily ordinary life and covering every aspect of modern society all
around the world.

Introduction

The two images were snapped in this lapse of time. The former picture is part of the Publifoto Archive, acquired in 2015 by Intesa Sanpaolo Bank. The Archive contains images, taken by the best photographers of the time, of the crucial episodes in Italy and around the world, over a period stretching from from 1937 to the early nineties of the 20th Century, almost half a Century of history told in illustrated newspapers and magazines. We know nothing about the authors but they were foreigner photojournalists from different parts of the world that collaborated with the most popular Italian Agency, giving the chance to readers to travel around the Globe. In the picture communist soldiers from the People's Liberation Army, one of the largest military forces in the world, are helping farmers peaking medicinal herbs. It shows as, after 1949, political control over image production in China created a visual hegemony that glorified socialism. In 1966 Mao Zedong launched the so called "Cultural Revolution" and he encouraged his personality cult. Just after his death occurred in 1976 photographer cautiously started to explore over the country borders.

The latter photo instead is by one of the great photographers of the 20th Century: William Klin. He gives his personal touch to the pictures, representing daily life in Italy. Klein is renowned as one of the best fashion and street photographer of his time. He used to say "I approached New York like a fake anthropologist, treating New Yorkers like Zulus" and he constantly investigated reality with a raw approach that served him to capture his subjects with honesty.

By the end of the 1970s, information was more readily available through other sources than photojournalism but fortunately it succeeded telling stories in a more powerful way than any other form of journalism.

Learning objectives

- Learning how to read pictures, describing the image and his composition;

- Retracing codes, values and beliefs of the photographers and comparing them;

- Analyzing the meaning of the image for the photoreporter in relation to the its historical meaning;

- Analyzing critically the news and comparing them with the sources they come from;

- Learning newspaper history and making;

- Evaluating the effectiveness of the image for today.

Introductory brainstorming

- Ask students to think about the last foreign country they visited and if they took a camera with them. Why do people like to take photos when traveling? What did they found more interesting about the country? What do they usually take pictures of when traveling?

- Ask students to imagine to plan a trip abroad. How do they get informations about the place to visit? Do they consult newspapers to know about it? Do they think newspaper images from the world are an objective representation of it?

- Considering that photojournalism has shaped the way we view the world since the mid-19th Century, ask the class to think of images of China released by the press. Which kind of subjects and topics do they remember the most? Do they consider the current representation of China is different from the portrayal of 50 years ago?

- Ask them now to turn their gaze to Italy. Since the 18th Century Italy has been one of the most visited country in the world, thanks to his art, history, his beautiful landscapes and delicious food. Try to look at Italy from an external point of view: what do they think tourist want to see and remember? Do they suppose that visitors interests correspond to the Italian ones? Inhabitant and visitor: do they look in the same direction? Do they see the same thing?

Remember to the students that usually people prefer to show off the best part of themselves, hiding limits and faults, in the same way usually Nations and States try always to diffuse the best image of their selves.

Image-based discussion

Questions for students

- Look close to the two photographs and describe the subject and the main elements in each composition.

- Do you imagine what purpose these pictures might have served? Have you experienced a sort of connection with them, explain why.

- Photographer records reality but the photograph is never a true representation of a scene, it's a representation of how we see the world. Photojournalists observe the world as unique witness of the moment, a decisive moment about an event that newspapers want to show to audience. Ponder the most relevant actions or instants represented in the two images. Do they send the same message?

- Are you informed of standard newspaper sections in Italy? Combine the photos with one or more of these sections. Could you find the images on the newspaper front-page?

- Think about the points of view represented in the works. Which direction the photographer was looking to? What is shown to the viewer?

- Work on the American idea of "latin lover" and reflect on the "icons" of Chinese Communism: are they powerful images? Consult online nowadays photos on the same subjects and compare them with the two pictures. What has changed?

- The mass-circulation of newspaper declined after the Television's arrival in the 1950s. In the 1990s the explosion of the Internet increased the range of media choices available to the reader. Open the following link and compare the images. How are the same topics represented? What do you notice?
  China Wants Young People Working in the Countryside, in Learningenglish, 2018
  https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/china-wants-young-people-working-in-the-countryside/4491109.html

Activities / Homeworks

Social media allows news to reach a wider audience than before
and to get information from the inside of the fact. We used to relate
Internet and social media to democracy but we have to be aware of
the fact that "[...] Misinformation can spread on social media just as
fast (or faster) than reliable information. [...]", as Erica Chenoweth
writes in his article *How social media helps dictators*, November 16,
2016 on "Foreign Policy".
Read the article below and make a concept map regarding differences
and similarities between dictatorial regimes use of media to the
uncontrolled use of new social media.

*How social media helps dictators. It's been hailed as "liberation
technology." But it has a darker side*
https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/11/16/how-social-media-helps-dictators/

References

Archivio Publifoto – Archivio Storico Intesa Sanpaolo
https://asisp.intesasanpaolo.com/intesa-front/publifoto-agenzia.html

M. Svensson, *Visualising labour and labourscapes in China from propaganda to socially engaged photography*, from "On a Chinese screen"
http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/n5364/pdf/article20.pdf

William Klein, In Pictures, from TATE Youtube
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7g9IksGqiUM

Newspapers Behind The Scenes, 1970s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eZBD4U6RD4

Telegiornale RAI
https://www.raiplay.it/video/2011/07/Il-primo-TG-7a79cc76-c32f-41f9-b4f3-7add1882692f.html

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which will allow to end the activated considerations, click here:
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