

Review

by Prof. Plamen Shulikov, PhD (Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen) regarding a procedure for obtaining a doctoral degree in field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Manipulations in Communication), of a dissertation titled **Manipulation Techniques in the Language of Photography (Photographic signs and their visual impact on non-verbal communication)**, written by Ivan Aleksandrovich Zahariev, a full-time doctoral student in the Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising at Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication (Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski), with Prof. Venceslav Bondikov, PhD as an academic supervisor

Ivan Zahariev has an impressively focused professional career in the media. From the mid-1990s until today, he has been continuously involved in the media sphere - both as a photojournalist in main dailies and as a deputy chief editor. The journalistic dynamics of the daily newspaper is an obvious prerequisite for the inevitable professionalization of the photojournalist Zahariev. His management position at "168 Chasa" and "Bulgaria Today", I assume, has supported with personal experience his conviction that the impact on the public through manipulative photo techniques can be exerted not only by the immediate producers of photo images, such as photojournalists, but also by their supervisors. The doctoral student has academic teaching experience (at NBU). In addition, he is actively present in the national photographic life through participation in photo contests and through author's photo exhibitions. Among them, I would especially mention "Photo enlargement - photos from the Great Poetry Reading in the 65th Auditorium" (2018) as an unequivocal testimony to the author's journalistic sense of the significance of the current historical moment, and, judging by the title, as homage to M. Antonioni's film *Blow-up* (1966), and finally as a confirmation of the "trace theory" (K. Ginzburg) extrapolated to the field of photography (G. Didi-Huberman).

As briefly presented as they are, the stated circumstances are an indisputable argument for the appropriateness of the author's thematic choice. They make too many promises to the reader, insofar as the research approach to manipulative photo techniques is taken from the position of the photojournalist, i.e. it is substantiated through the author's personal photographic experience. Such a lucky meeting between practical experience and research ambition is rare not only in our country.

Suffice it to mention that one of the most inspiring works on photography (S. Sontag, 1977) intersects with practical photography too indirectly - through A. Leibovitz. R. Barthes himself discusses a photograph at length (1980), but does so from the position of a perceiver rather than a practicing photographer. The reader of "Camera lucida" never finds out whether Barthes even owned a camera. In our country, too, the situation is not much different, of course, with some exceptions from the more distant past (e.g. G. Georgiev), from the more recent - (e.g. V. Katsev, P. Burnev) or from our current times (e.g. Ts. Tomchev, Z. Galibov, Ts. Boyadzhiev, A. Bozhinov). In general, the theory of photography, as S. Sontag rightly claims, precisely because of the polemic of its relations with the pre-photographic pictorial convention, not only catalyzed the revision of the traditional "pro-Laokoonian" (after Lessing) art theory, but even ambitiously reached out to the prestige of a hypothetical general theory of the visual arts. Such a claim stimulates the priority of reflection over practical experience in today's interpretive approaches to the photographic noeme. In short, this clarifies somewhat the expectations that writing photographers would at least partially compensate for the asymmetry in their reasoning.

It is praiseworthy that I. Zahariev's dissertation adheres to similar intentions. They are presented most distinctly in Chapters II and III, the exposition of which is for the most part based primarily on the empiricism of photographic knowledge, it is, in a way, specific. In contrast, the first chapter (1/3 of the total volume of the study) is devoted to the concept of communication in its definitive scope, presenting the concepts of communication by C. Cooley, W. Schram, H. Lasswell, K. Hovland, S. Moskovichi, N. Luhmann, C. Berger, etc. As an indisputable testimony of the sense of measure demonstrated by the author, I accept his self-restraint to extensive comments on the compendiums of F. Dance, who systematized 120 definitions of communication, and of K. Merten, with a shockingly comprehensive taxonomy of as many as 160 definitions. The somewhat too extensive exposition in this part of the dissertation is in almost inevitable formal compliance with the standard academic requirements for a dissertation. At the same time, the review of the key concepts also has its functional purpose, as the author's interest is directed to those of them which, according to the author, "determine the intention of the communicator through the message to change the thoughts and actions of the perceiver" (p. 18). U. Schram's idea about the active audience as a full partner in the communication process was commented on with the same intent (p. 24-25). This also refers to the review of the basic communication models. Both Lasswell's 5Cs model, and Shannon-Weaver's model, and Schramm's "third" model, and D.

Berlo's SMCR model, and S. Le Roy Wilson's model, and especially the "square" psychological model of F. Schultz von Thun, to which I. Zahariev does not hide his bias, were called to accentuate the sometimes delicate differences in the meaning vectors of the photographic message, achieved through the assistance of additional "thought-stimulating stylistic means" (p. 36), which, correctly "translated" as manipulative techniques, are the narrow subject of the exposition in Chapter III. The previously introduced and discussed concepts, such as *contact units*, *masks*, *hidden transactions*, *manipulations/games* (p. 43) are also targeted in the perspective of the further exposition. In short, the overabundance of reflection not only does not conflict with the logical continuity of the narrative, but attributes it quite reasonably. As for the deliberate definitive hypertrophy of R. Barthes (*the photograph is a message without a code*), serving above all the receptive illusion of seemingly alethic identity between an object and a photo image, perhaps it is appropriate, with a little more sharpness than I. Zahariev did, to emphasize that a message without a code is absolutely impossible in human society, insofar as in the consumer construction of the resulting image inevitably a connotative correction is intervened through the stadium of the perceiver. In this sense, despite the shocking *graphic sadism* (V. Benyamin) of the photo image, its 'reading' is doomed to be carried out through species-changing, meaning-changing, a kind of catoptric (U. Eco) filters, whose most essential overall specificity, if not consisting entirely in their multiplicity (K. Metz), certainly cannot do without it. Regardless of this, I. Zahariev rightly insists on the uncontrollably powerful argumentative potential of the photo image, which, owing to the catoptric illusion of absolute referential identity, gives birth even to phraseologisms with claims to indisputable truth, such as the eparemia construction *seeing means believing* (A. Berger). I would add, that it even has the ability to create reality. Back at the beginning of the 1930s, such a feeling, even if only as a joke, was codified in the salon speech practice of the inexperienced public. The absence of the ubiquitous photojournalist Dr. E. Salomon from diplomatic events is accompanied by a firmly phraseological comment among the European political elite of the time: "If Dr. Salomon was not there, then nothing happened here." The game mode of the stereotyped reaction does not harm its indicativity, in as much as, as it is well known, in every joke there is some joke.

Perhaps the conclusion at the end of Chapter I needs a slight reformulation, in that "the camera, in addition to being a means of creating images, is already a means of their mass distribution... which means that it can also perform a manipulative function" (p. 96). The adverb

of time already, which marks a relative chronological limit between the technologically old and the technologically new functional resource of the camera, which gives the impression that during its analog existence it could not have produced manipulative effects. By the way, the very "birth" of photography, if we understand its 1839 patent certificate as a "birth certificate," contains in its own maieutic chronicles a testimony that manipulative potential is photography's birthmark. I am referring to the first christomatically known photomystification "Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man" (1840) by the then more alive than the living Hippolyte Bayard. I am convinced that I am commenting on an innocent slip, insofar as there is, of course, a chronological limit to the technological growth of the camera. More than obvious, this limit today is marked by the over-optimized capabilities of the digital camera to transform itself from a memorial tool into a tool for synchronous blitz communication - a circumstance promptly discussed by the author elsewhere in the text.

Chapter II deals with the utilisation of photography for manipulative purposes in the process of public communication. The chapter contains a thorough review of the full scope of ideas in the concept of manipulation. At their intersection, the status of manipulation as a "hidden government" is rightly indicated with reference to a work by V. Sheinov from 2006. I would deepen this retrospect to W. Lipman, who back in 1922 proposed the formula "secret government". It was through W. Lippmann that J. Creel's report on the activities of the Committee on Public Information (p. 172) from the time of W. Wilson's second presidential term was presented. This choice has its justification in the fact that W. Lippmann (along with E. Bernays) was drawn into the US government agency for wartime propaganda, and as a direct witness of its work from 1917 to 1919, fully satisfied the requirements of the good old positivism to refer to the sources. The report (G. Creel. How we advertised America, 1920) is available, however, and would add irrefutable arguments to I. Zahariev's thesis about the manipulative power of visual effects. Even what happened to the committee could be a similar argument. Towards the end of the war, it had to be closed so urgently that its astonishingly rich archive, including, for example, hundreds of kilometers of film tape for the column "The four minute men", was barely saved by J. Creel and his team. The reason why W. Wilson eagerly adopted Taras Bulba's famous words ("I brought you into this world and I can take you out") lies in the amazing "unity of thought" (W. Lippmann, E. Bernays) achieved among American society on the occasion of the image mainly German and Austro-Hungarian - a beast-like horned vandal holding a soldier's bucket, which is overflowing

with bloody eyeballs scraped from enemy skulls with a specially sharpened soldier's spoon. The Congress correctly estimated that the effect of such propaganda would be difficult to reconcile with the upcoming post-war trade exchange with the former enemy. Precisely in connection with the effectiveness of visually provoked visual associations, I. Zahariev appropriately discusses M. Bonner and R. Epstein's (p. 111) attempts to create a probabilistic anatomical model of common associative circuits by their place of origin in the brain. Such an anatomical "cartography" of associations somewhat too esoterically serves the long-standing axiomatic belief in cognitive psychology that recognition is greatly impaired outside of an intrinsic context (see, e.g., R. Solso). It is precisely the manipulative deprivation of context that ensures that freedom of visual associations, which actually leads the perceiver right into the trap set by the manipulator. Even if the receptive disagreement is not maliciously provoked, again the ubiquitous context (e.g. of the photojournalist and his editor) underlies the different, and often contradictory, assessments. This frequent axiological divergence, certainly familiar to I. Zahariev from his practice as both a photojournalist and an editor, is discussed through the impressive study of P. Bourdieu et al. on the sociology of photography "The Common Art" (1965): "The photograph which we see, and that which the editor sees, are not the same" (pp. 127-128). I am tempted to add that this aphoristic statement is strikingly identical to the no less aphoristic wording with which Y. Smith explained his parting with *Life* magazine, more precisely the editorial requirement to present only photographs with a huge depth of sharpness: "I'm tired of sacrificing depth of feeling for depth of sharpness." As a result of the preserved right of author's bias, as we know, appeared the shocking photo cycle "Minamata".

The question of the argumentative authority of the photographic image finds its historical support in the practice of G.F.T. Nadar to have the portraits produced by him signed by both the person in the photo and the photographer. I. Zahariev accepts the psychologist V. Nurkova's assumption that the proven (through autographs as well) cooperation of famous figures in the act of portraiture enhances the prestige of the photographer. Many photographers of the new era, however, are looking for quick success, popularity and recognition precisely through their choice to portray famous people, i.e. to use their popularity in their own interest. One of them, for example, is L. Clark, who managed to get hold of Picasso. There is a certain probability that the assumption is historically reliable for the 60s of the XIX century, considering that Nadar worked in direct competition with the Parisian "photo factory" of A. Dizderi, who literally industrialized

photo portraiture with over 60 hired assistants for making business cards with full-length portraits (V. Benyamin). Yet, are our current criteria relevant in evaluating the past, especially the more distant past? In an attempt at a relatively authentic reconstruction of the historical context in which the idea of copyright on the photographic image was formed in the second half of the 19th century, R. Barthes, for example, refers to landmark court cases in Western Europe, the subject of which he presents through the question "If the photographed garden is mine, then whose image is it?" The control over access to them, a goal of the "secret government", relies on their enduring cultural codification in the habitual practice of the community achieved precisely through a sense of closeness, a deep personal assimilation of their meaning range, part of which, of course, is the closeness resulting from the right of ownership by birth to the main ethno-cultural determinants of the community. I. Zahariev convincingly illustrates this mechanism through interesting examples. Without dwelling on the most widely-known among them, I will limit myself only to the study on the useful photometamorphosis of Picasso's *white dove* through the photo-image of Gagarin (P. Barashov), to the photo-image of our national metallurgist (V. Giltyai), executed according to the classicist imperatives of socialist realism, which, according to the perceptive definition of A. Sinyavski/ A. Tertz (1957), is "... semi-classical semi-art of the not-too-socialist-not-quite-realism". Here, of course, I am not referring to the technical merits of the photographs, nor to the competence of the photographers, but to the value-status *authority* of Picasso, through which I. Zahariev substantiates the conviction of U. Lippmann in the direct relationship between the image's ability to be embedded in personal ideas, from on the one hand, and the original *authoritative* uses of the same image, on the other (p. 182). A visual explication of the *argumentum ad verecundiam* (J. Locke, 1690), this faculty, understood not as an argument to modesty, as in the old formulation of J. Locke, and as an argument to authority, has its modern transformation in the practice of *namedropping* (omitting the names), correctly commented on by I. Zahariev (p. 311).

In conclusion, the laudable intention of the author to examine the total technical mechanism of manipulative influence on the public through photographic images should be fairly acknowledged, although the proposed attempt at a compendium of similar breadth of scope needs in places more taxonomic systematicity. The fact that I. Zahariev organises his narrative, especially in Chapter III, through the verification filter of his rich photojournalistic practice, as it were, is undoubtedly a contributing factor. I would even venture to suggest to the author, in case he intends to continue his work on the manipulative potential of photography, to rely above all on personal

experience, while, of course, intriguingly fictionalizing the narrative - something that he, as a philologist, is certainly capable of.

Based on the relevance of the researched topic, the qualities of the submitted text, the good bibliographic reference (about 200 sources in Bulgarian, Russian and English), as well as the fulfilled requirements for publication activity, I suggest that Ivan Aleksandrovich Zahariev be awarded a doctoral degree in professional field 3. 5. Public communications and information sciences (Media and communications - manipulations in communication).

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