

Year one ba-hons photography image analysis

[Design](#), [Photography](#)



Photographs are one of the media or instruments of visual representations. It is an embodiment of visual elements which appear as symbols and are linked together to convey several meanings. According to McLean (1973), they are pictures which have many characteristics and attributes in common with other images (quoted in Noth 1995: 461). They play an important role, along with film, in broadening the visual field for examination and analysis and in molding critical approaches to visual representation (Chaplin 1994: 80).

This paper aims to present an image analysis of Nick Ut's Trang Bang (1972). It will narrate a brief biography of the artist then it will reveal the photograph's visual elements and their corresponding meanings. It will also identify the underlying symbols behind the image and demonstrate their impact on the society. Furthermore, it endeavors to express and to show the implication of photographs with regards to visual culture and visual literacy. Nick Ut (b. March 29, 1951-) whose real name is Ut Cong Huynh is a Vietnamese photographer. His photography career begins when he has been introduced by his mother to the Associated Press office in Saigon; he is 14 years old then. The occurrence on the rainy day of the 8th of June, 1972, the epoch when the Americans and South Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, draws attention with his career when he shoots Kim Phuc—a nine year old girl—running and blaring naked in down Route 1 (Ut 2007); the photograph is entitled as Trang Bang.

Trang Bang, a gelatin silver print, depicts the June 8, 1972 event when the children and their families run away and flee the village of Trang Bang down Route 1; their bodies are being burned and seared by napalm (Faas and <https://assignbuster.com/year-one-ba-hons-photography-image-analysis/>

Fulton n. d.). The image encompasses five children that are running and screaming and behind them are militant troops, walking after the terrified kids. The focus of the picture is the naked little girl who is squealing. Figure 1 Children Fleeing an American Napalm Strike, Trang Bang, June 8, 1972 Her stretched arms bestow a line element in the image which illustrates balance and symmetry.

The eyes of the spectator will usually fix on the dead center due to the strong and powerful expression of Kim Phuc, revealing an excruciating pain. Nevertheless, if the focus of the picture will be given to the screaming boy on the foreground whom is said to be Kim Phuc's brother Phan Thanh Tam, technically speaking, Ut demonstrates the rule of thirds in his masterpiece due to his manipulation to the placement of the subject which is off the center; therefore the eyes of the spectator will definitely turn and fix with the other elements in the whole picture per se.

He also displays a shallow depth of field in the photograph because only the subjects of interest or focus are enhanced—the shrieking and running children, the other element—the troops—is quite out of focus due to the blurry details of the figures. The black smoke on the background gives a strong contrast in the picture. The said photograph is a historical account that records and synthesizes the incident of June 1972. It analyzes and demonstrates the notion of horror and agony during wars which can be pulled out from the facial expressions of the children especially Phan Thanh Tam's.

He summarizes and encapsulates the terror, fear and affliction of the people during the Vietnam War (Pyle 2000). That image can imply a lot of things if it will be based to John Berger's Way of Seeing theory (1972): it is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe (Berger 1972: 7-8).

With that, it can be hauled that whatever the interpretation or analysis of the spectators with the image, it will still be anchored on what he or she knows regarding the event that has transpired in Vietnam during the year 1972.

The photograph is a representation of the reality that it portrays (Noth 1997: 46). However, Eco (1984) disagrees because according to him, a photograph can lie (quoted in Noth 1997: 461), by which Berger (1984) states that the result of the treatment and manipulation of the reality is that to a definite level, " the photographer creates the reality of the photograph (quoted in Noth: 461).

Nevertheless, in the case of Nick Ut's Trang Bang, it cannot be implied that the photographer has altered and manipulated the reality that he has documented during the occurrence in 1972 because the reproduction of the image, which have been placed in newspapers, magazines, etc. , creates a different perspective from the original photo that is taken by Ut. The reproduction delineates a cropped image of the original (Look at figure 1 and 2). Figure 2 Napalm Bomb Attack, Vietnam

It shows that the original, which has been signed by Ut, encompasses other elements in the picture, for instance, the official member of the press who looks like fixing his camera, the lines on the background which probably signifies the napalm. The manipulated image appears more closely to the spectators and constructs a more focused representation of the event. Because of the reproductions, Ut cannot be blamed for the cropped photo because of the intervention of the press with regards to the dissemination of the image to narrate the historical event.

It is definitely the press's responsibility as to how they will broadcast and transmit the information with wide, visual consumers all over the world. According to Gillian Rose in her *Visual Methodologies* (2001), the novelty and advantage of photography branch out from its most evident potential: it is about rendering that particular moment in time (quoted Mirzoeff 1999: 67) by which Ut demonstrates in his *Trang Bang*. In accordance with what he said during an interview, "the girl was running with her arms out. She was crying, 'nong qua! Nong qua! (Too hot! Too hot!). She had torn off all her clothes.

When I saw she was burned, I dropped my camera beside the road. I knew I had a good picture. I got her into our van and took her and the family to the Cu Chi hospital." (quoted in Pyle 2000). Moreover, his magnum opus implies that photography makes achievable ways of seeing what is unimaginable then (Mirzoeff 1999: 68). It does illustrate that the language and expression of the photograph is to combine naturalism and realism. The artifact then evolves to be reality (quoted Molyneaux 1997: 80). Nick Ut's *Trang Bang*

may be manipulated or not, it still conveys a scheme of meanings and symbols.

The implication of an image is created from an interaction of a myriad of schemes and codes. A photograph is not a realistic illustration of what is real in spite of its appearances. It is a material that has been produced in an elaborate manner and approach of production and has been dispensed, circulated and consumed by a set of social relations (Forrester 1996: 140). Burgin (1982) has argued then that a photograph presents itself as something that cannot be disagreed with in which he states as “ an offer you cannot refuse” (quoted in Forrester 1996: 142).

Trang Bang being an object of representation communicates with its spectator about the Vietnam War that happens in mid-1972. Nick Ut, as one of the war photographers, has to deal with the lack of viewing space for his work because he is confined and restricted to what he sees in the lens compared to other artists who can demonstrate an array of symbols and emotionally-driven and affecting scenes however, war photographers are offered with revolutionizing and altering the reality into an allegorical and symbolic masterpieces (Marien 2006: 46).