report

THE VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF POLITICAL LEADERS' WIVES IN THE MEDIA

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Introduction

This report is to support my Major Project outcome which consists of a series of three books. The books are visual studies of three women – wives of three main party political leaders: David Cameron (Samantha), Gordon Brown (Sarah) and Nick Clegg (Miriam).

The books provide a closer look into the way these women were represented by four major newspapers during the UK general election campaign in 2010. It covers the field of study defined as identity, audience and society but through the reflexive methodology it also investigates the design process and touches upon information design. It explores the way press photography is created, reproduced and read, applying the methodology of REFLEXIVE PRACTICE[1].

My research can be extended to the textual layer, a wider range of titles, other media and of course other leaders' wives. The methodology explored in the process can be applied to interrogate other subject matter and other media. The three books which form my Major Project resolution consist of over 200 images. The London College of Communication's Library was an invaluable resource for my methodology. The study includes images from the period 6 April – 15 May 2010 from The Guardian, The Times, The Daily Mirror and The Daily Mail. In total, the research looks at 214 photographs found in 102 issues. The period covers the time from the Prime Minister's announcement of the campaign up till the formation of the new coalition government.

In choosing the four titles I considered their political stance, type (mixture of tabloids and broadsheets) and press readership in the UK to pick a representative and diverse sample. According to the BBC News website

Final outcome of my Major Project

(30.09.2009) the Times, supported Labour in 2001 for the first time in its history and did so again in 2005. However, it backed the Tories at the European elections in June and Boris Johnson for London mayor, both of which may indicate a shift in support. Like the Sun, the Times is owned by Rupert Murdoch (News Corporation – from the author).' The same source describes the Guardian as 'Left-leaning, with a readership largely split between Labour and Lib Dem voters (...) although traditionally a Labour paper'. It is owned by Guardian Media Group. The article lists the Daily Mirror (owned by Trinity Mirror) as 'avowedly Labour supporting' and the Daily Mail, owned by Daily Mail and General Trust plc, as 'right-leaning with traditionally conservative values'.[2] Mediauk.com, a website dedicated to the media in the UK, lists the Times and the Guardian among the quality newspapers, the Daily Mail as a mid-market tabloid and the Daily Mirror as a mass-market tabloid. The Guardian and the Times are bought by people from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds, the Daily Mail by people from lower and middle class backgrounds and the Daily Mirror caters for people from working class backgrounds.[3]

[...] the reflexive tradition towards spectators and readers corresponds to the difference in structure of the message. While the depositary attitude clings to the classic, closed form of representation, the dialogic position works with an open, relational and generative form of presentation. Unlike the illusory transparency of the classic message as a window onto the world, it creates a dynamism in the message that makes the production process transparent. That mise-en-scène manifests the choices and manipulation of the mediation in relation to the economic, social and cultural relations in which the message has arisen. In practice this boils down to a rigorous, non-formalistic structure of unity in diversity, which breaks open the continuity of the message with the specific idiosyncrasies of the maker. J. Van Toorn, Design's Delight, 010 Publishers 2006, p.204

My interest in the role and function of the leaders' wives was prompted by the death of the Polish presidential couple on 10.04.2010 in a plane crash. I was then researching the idea of death in photography, following Roland Barthes' concept of presence and absence. The extensive media coverage of the Polish plane crash resulted in a large number of photographs of the late president and his wife. This coincided with media coverage of the start of the general election campaign in the UK, which featured many images of the candidates with their 'other halves' by their side. My attention was drawn to the contradiction that although the women were often referred to as 'the first ladies', they appear in the photographs as secondary, not the first. Even though they are present in those images, they are not really there.

Photographs of the politicians' wives marked in the newspapers

My work draws on two main sources of critical theory. The first one follows Roland Barthes' intimate and personal journey in search of PUNCTUM[4]. In my approach I am applying his framework to test it in the environment of news photography. The second source is Susan Sontag's understanding of the way we read images – layered in our socio-cultural context[5]. My hypothesis, following Sontag's logic, is that we not only read images like that – through the prism of other existing imagery – but we also make images like that, subconsciously or with intent. We know how to create iconic photographs – very specific images which stay in our minds, which sometimes have the power to change the way we see the world and sometimes pierce us, prick us, as they have this particular something – the PUNCTUM.

A photograph's **punctum** is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me). R. Barthes, Camera Lucida, Vintage 2000, p.27

Reading the explicit and implicit messages within the visual form to determine the range of meanings that might be communicated to an audience is the essence of Barthes' framework. In Camera Lucida, Barthes searches through his private photo library hoping to find the photograph which for him managed

[1] Van Toorn J., Design's Delight, 010 Publishers 2006, p.204

[2] mediauk.com/newspapers
[3] Jones B. and Kavanagh D., British Politics Today, Manchester University Press 2003, p.104
[4] Barthes R., Camera Lucida, Vintage 2000
[5] Sontag S, On Photography, Penguin Books, 1979, p.174

to capture the essence of his late mother. In my research, I wanted to see whether his framework could be applied to a different set of images found in the press, and with what effect. I have interrogated how the visual message is created and read. I found the tradition of reflexive practice especially appropriate for this kind of analysis. Jan Van Toorn sees visual journalism not only as a type of practice but as a duty of the graphic designer, who always operates in a socio-political reality. 'Communication design is not about an artistic message,' he argues, 'but a journalistic one. The difference between the two is that the rhetoric of visual journalism, unlike artistic rhetoric, is tied to the public domain by the commission situation.'[6]

Communication is not just the verbal or discursive form of conveying information, but also that of the visual, auditory, tactile and spatial use of language. That is why a visual journalism with a critical operational ambition has to free itself from the straitjacket of the sequential narrative by broadening the conceptual model of its vocabulary to include the synchronous hierarchy of the figurative. J. Van Toorn, Design's Delight, 010 Publishers 2006, p.210

Rick Poynor explains the background of critical work of Jan Van Toorn in his book 'Van Toorn: Critical Practice': 'Reflexivity subverts the assumption that art can be a transparent medium of communication, a window on the world, a mirror promenading down a highway,' writes film critic Robert Stam in a study of the reflexive tradition that Van Toorn read in the early 1990s. According to Stam, strategies employed by reflexive artists such as Godard (and we might add by Van Toorn) include narrative discontinuities, authorial intrusions, essayistic digressions and stylistic virtuosities. The purpose of these discontinuities and disruptions, as with Brecht's use of the alienation effect, is to demystify aspects of reality that we are inclined to take for granted and to break "the charm of the spectacle in order to awaken the spectator's critical intelligence." It is the very normality of ideology, notes Stam, that makes necessary an art which renders things strange. In an essay published in 1994, Van Toorn makes an explicit connection between Stam's lineage of reflexive artists and his own intentions as a designer: "through the critical orientation of its products," he writes, "the reflexive mentality raises questions among the public which stimulate a more active way of dealing with reality."'[7]

I have tried to apply reflexive practice in order to destabilise the messages created by the press to distance the reader and in that way engage him/her with the message in a different, unfamiliar way. I focused my research on the press photography as my main source of interest.

Semiotics of the Photographic Message

'The press photograph is a message', says Roland Barthes. This message is made out of three elements: a SOURCE OF EMISSION (creators of the message: photographer, editor etc), a CHANNEL OF TRANSMISSION (newspaper, the media) and a POINT OF RECEPTION (readers). A press photograph can change its meaning and the way it is read depending on changes in any of the three elements. It is not an autonomous object, it is a part of the structure which is in communication with other elements such as text (caption, title, article) and other elements on the page or spread.[8]
Barthes brought semiotics (or semiology) from the field of linguistics to the territory of images and used its method to analyse and deconstruct the way the images are created and read. His core concepts, developed from the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, were predominately built on the system of signs and signification[9]. In short, he identified two

levels of reading the sign: DENOTATION (what is pictured) and CONNOTATION (how it's pictured). Whereas the first level is a basic reading of what we see, connotation requires from the reader an application of his own knowledge and background. Barthes observed that in modern society the groups which have control over media (and visual language) generate meaning which results in the creation of myths. 'These meanings are seen as part of the natural order of things. Where these meanings came from and the process which transformed the meaning of the signs are either forgotten or hidden. This process of generating myths filters the political content out of signification. In today's society the modern myths are built around things like notions of masculinity and femininity.'[10]

Barthes says that photographers are agents of death[11]. He claims that it must be 'somewhere in a society.' Every photograph therefore kills its objects, captures it forever in the deadly moment, embalms it. Following that argument, I came to the conclusion that every presence in a photograph is the evidence of absence (as death is ultimately absence). This paradox seemed to me acutely visible in the photographs of the women who happen to be captured in the same image as their husbands – top politicians. I started wondering how absent those women really were. Their gaze and their stance often expose their absence. Barthes' source of emission (the photographer, editor) focus on the then prevalent narrative and use the human accessories to either ridicule or smooth out or strengthen the image of their husbands.

Sontag's Recycled World

In Unit 1 of my MA course I became fascinated with the concept that we read images through the prism of other images we have seen before. At that time I researched the analogies between sacred and renaissance art depicting scenes from the Bible and a contemporary photograph taken in 1930. I have applied that method of analysis, looking for that extra level of meaning throughout my studies. The similarities in the layout and stance, and even colouring, between the press photograph of Samantha and David Cameron or Michelle and Barack Obama and the couple in 'The Arnolfini Marriage' by Jan Van Eyck (1434) are difficult to ignore or dismiss as accidental. If we read images through other images, it is very likely we create the images according to certain conventions or patterns we have observed and learnt. There is no coincidence that all three elements of the press photograph message participate in the same reading, especially if they all operate in the same cultural background. The photographer recognised the scene

Photography does not simply reproduce the real, it recycles it (...). In the form of photographic images, things and events are put to new uses, assigned new meanings, which go beyond the distinctions between the beautiful and the ugly, the true and the false, the useful and the useless, good taste and bad. (...) What makes something interesting is that it can be seen to be like, or analogous to, something else. (...) There is a steady recycling of the artifacts and tastes of the past. Images of real things are interlayered with images of images. S. Sontag On Photography, Penguin Books, 1979, p.174

as similar to the one in Van Eyck's painting, the newspaper's editor chose this particular shot and cropped in such a way that the reader, who is also familiar with the same reference, will read the signs accordingly. A reader who receives such a message with an awareness of the deliberate analogy has an interesting semiotic riddle to unfold: to find and interpret the differences. Samantha Cameron is really pregnant, whereas Mrs. Arnolfini only appears to

[6] Van Toorn J., Design's Delight, 010 Publishers 2006, p.212
[7] Poynor R., Jan Van Toorn: Critical Practice, 010 Publishers 2008, p.96
[8] Sontag S., A Barthes Reader, Vintage 2000, p.194
[9] Crow D., Visible Signs, AVA Publishing 2003, p.56

[10] Crow D., Visible Signs, AVA Publishing 2003, p.62
[11] Barthes R., Camera Lucida, Vintage 2000, p.92

be. Samantha Cameron's stereotypical role as a woman/mother is therefore fulfilled. Interestingly, the blissful idyllic image of a fulfilled woman is a leitmotiv of the imagery depicting Mrs. Cameron.

I explored some linguistic clichés around the idea of a couple, particularly a married couple. Barthes applied the linguistic theory to the visual world. I took a linguistic form – metaphor (the other half) and tested it in the visual environment. I shuffled half-spreads between the same issue of the same paper and also between different titles of the same day's issues.
Later, I revisited this concept and experimented with cropping both the man and the woman in the picture directly in half (I used the shoulder width as the full length measurement). I then reassembled the halves joining them together. The effect was often humorous but it also exposed the immediate differences between the photographed figures: in size, stance, gaze, colours, focus (depth of field) etc. It made a literal visual translation of the expression: 'She/he is my other half'.

The Role of a Politician's Wife

'The current election campaign is another milestone in the evolution of the political wife. Samantha Cameron's pregnancy happened at just the right time to give a PR boost to her husband' campaign. She and Sarah Brown get as much, and sometimes more, media coverage than their husbands', writes Elizabeth Haywood, Peter Hain's wife, in her article 'Spouses of Parliament' published in The Guardian on 28.04.2010. Haywood draws from her own experience as a political leader's wife and discusses whether a spouse is doomed to be reduced to merely an 'appendage' or she (or he) can have her/his own career. She argues that '(Cherie) Booth was the first prime minister's wife really to break the mould. A top barrister with political ambitions in her own right, she continued a high profile career as a QC throughout Tony Blair's 10 years in office. Now, Samantha Cameron is creative director at Smythson, the luxury stationery firm; Ed Miliband's partner, Justine Thornton, is a senior environmental lawyer; Sarah Brown enjoyed a successful career in public relations before becoming an even more successful tweeter; and George Osborne's wife, Frances, is a bestselling biographer.'

She admits, though, that at the same time, the media focus on their appearance and in the last 25 years that pattern has become 'even more intrusive'. It seems as if the successful wives of the celebrity politicians are trapped in a media representation pattern which insists on portraying them as accessories, appendages to their husbands. Haywood, during her husband's deputy leadership campaign in 2007, was bullied by Peter Hain's senior team member to step back from her management position. Out of the three leaders' wives in the 2010 election campaign, only one stood out and publically announced she was not giving up her job in order to follow her husband during the campaign. Miriam Gonzalez Fernandez, Nick Clegg's wife, in her interview on ITV on 20.03.2010 told Marie Nightingale: 'I don't have the luxury of having a job that I can simply abandon for five weeks, and I imagine that that is the situation for most people in the country.' Telegraph online on 26.03.2010 reports: 'Her comments come after weeks of manoeuvring by the two main parties to make the most of their respective leaders' wives to humanise their pitch to voters. Mrs Clegg was interviewed at length but was clearly unhappy with the idea of being seen as an appendage to her husband. The 42-year-old, who has retained her maiden name of Miriam Gonzalez Durantez professionally, is head of international trade practice for the multinational law firm DLA Piper.'

My research has confirmed that Miriam Gonzalez Fernandez appeared in

Samantha Cameron in the Times, 14.5.2010

the press significantly less – having about a third of the coverage of the other two women. In the period I studied she made only one front cover (The Times 10.04.2010) and that was her big statement of independence from her husband. On the inside pages of the newspapers I studied, Miriam Gonzalez Fernandez was shown 20 times photographed with Nick Clegg and 15 times alone. Sarah Brown was shown photographed with her husband 69 times and 19 times by herself, in total 88 times. Samantha Cameron appeared 43 times by her husband's side and 44 times on her own, a total of 87 times. Samantha Cameron made 9 front covers, Sarah Brown made 7.

In episode 5.12 of 'Friends', Chandler takes his then new girlfriend Monica to a work party. On the next day he meets her in the coffee house and cries out: 'Hey! Everybody at work loved you last night! And they like me more just because I was with ya!' The essence of a woman's role by the man's side is reduced to an accessory which affects the way society perceives him. This woman's function becomes a paradox: on the one hand she is secondary, inferior to the man, she is in his shadow, but on the other hand she can either make or break his high status and image. That makes her extremely powerful and dangerous. Carla Bruni, wife of French president Nicolas Sarkozy, is notoriously in the centre of media attention. A former model, trying to maintain her singing career, she unmistakably plays an important role in managing her husband's media image, even though president Sarkozy wears higher heels to prevent his wife from appearing taller than him. Laura Mulvey in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' quotes Budd Boetticher: 'What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself, the woman has not the slightest importance.'[12]

Carla Bruni and Nicolas Sarkozy in the Times, 30.3.2010

The Invisible Wife Syndrome

Slavoj Žižek in his essay 'Looking Awry' brings up the 'Lacanian proposition that 'Woman does not exist, she is nothing but "the symptom of a man". Her power of fascination masks the void of her nonexistence'.[13]

I started my first visual tests with the printouts of scanned photographs, in order to preserve the originals. Following the practice of John Baldessari, I cut out the main subject of the image – the wife of the politician, leaving a hole in the spread. The rationale behind this idea lay in my hypothesis after Barthes that these women are in fact absent (dead). On the one hand I had pages of photographs with cut out silhouettes and on the other hand I had a small collection of paper 'dolls'. I experimented with photographing the silhouettes against white and black backgrounds, against the background of the following spread and also against the images of other women (found in 'Hello' and 'OK!' magazines which I chose as stereotypically feminine media territory to contrast with the 'masculine' territory). I also made several collages of the cutouts of the wives, which I then photographed but never glued the pieces

The concept of the blank was developed in literary reception theory as a means of activating the interpreter. Blanks, according to Wolfgang Iser, "set in motion the interaction that takes place between text and reader, and to a certain extent they also regulate it." They are "the unseen joints of the text, and as they mark off schemata and textual perspectives from one another, they simultaneously trigger acts of ideation on the reader's part. Consequently, when the schemata and perspectives have been linked together, the blanks 'disappear.'" The function of the interpreter that the blanks motivate can easily be associated with Baldessari's images. Except that in their case the blanks do not simply disappear in the act of interpretation but remain present as visual markers of the uncovering of normally hidden contexts, precisely because they cause other things to disappear.
Morgan J. and Jones L., John Baldessari: Pure Beauty, Tate Publishing 2009, p.246

[12] Mulvey, L., Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings. Eds. Leo Brandy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP 1999: 833-44, p.837
[13] Žižek S., Looking Awry, 1992

permanently to the background, leaving their ephemeral existence to only a short moment of being captured by the camera.

In the 2010 election campaign Samantha Cameron and Sarah Brown conformed to the role of a supportive wife. Samantha played a softening accessory to David Cameron's hard, strong image. In most images we see her smiling, in the second plan, subordinate stance, looking at her husband with attentive affection. Like on stage, the supporting role actors direct their gaze at the lead. Samantha Cameron is portrayed as a stereotype of a woman, through her flowery clothes, the focus on her hairstyles and shoes, including ridiculed mishaps and rubber boots. Her pregnancy accentuates her image as an ultimate woman/mother. Samantha usually looks at us with dreamy eyes, she's well composed and appears happy and satisfied in her role. There is one particular photograph published in The Times on 14.05.2010 showing her in a dream-like pose, with her lips slightly open, with the sun shining through her hair gently blown in the wind, on a blue sky background. She's looking away, but not looking at anything in particular, she appears to be within her own idyllic, womanly world. At different points all three women are shown gardening.

Sarah Brown very often appears 'absent', even in the photographs where she is captured with Gordon Brown. Her gaze is often directed internally. Comparing to the inward gaze of Samantha Cameron, hers is different: while Samantha appears she's found her place, Sarah seems lost. The media seem more scrutinizing and more cruel towards the image of Sarah Brown. The more her husband becomes ridiculed, the more her image suffers too. Gia Milinovich, wife of celebrity scientist Brian Cox, shares her experience in the article 'The Lady Vanishes: Invisible Wife Syndrome' published in The Guardian on 28.08.2010. She says how much she has to struggle to deal with the media invasion in her life, focus on her physical appearance and how difficult it is for her to keep her own identity and life separate from her husband.

Miriam Gonzalez Fernandez is the odd one out. She opted out from following the footsteps of the other two women. Her statement of independence was in a way a double bluff as she received significant support and her gesture was mainly admired and in general respected by the media. She didn't fully escape the media scrutiny, though. The press enjoys the image of a wife and would not let go without a fight. She was featured in style columns. The press tried to undermine her independence by persistently calling her Miriam Clegg, even though she had kept her maiden name.

A woman who knows where she's going is a breath of fresh air in that context (in the media). Gamman Lorraine and Marshment Margaret, The Female Gaze (Women as Viewers of Popular Culture), The Women's Press 1994, p.43

Women and the Media

In the 2010 election campaign we observed an unprecedented rise in media interest in the politicians' wives. 'News, Gender and Power' quotes Patricia Holland: 'Women are routinely presented: either as an anonymous example of uninformed public opinion, as housewife, neighbour, or as mother, sister, wife of a man in the news, or as victim – of crime, disaster, political policy. Thus not only do they speak less frequently, but they tend to speak as passive reactors and witnesses to public events rather than as participants in those events.'[14]

In my research into the role of media images of the politicians' wives I have looked at the general issue of the representation of women in the media. I have identified various articles which all point in the direction of feminist writing

Example of my 'blanks' visual tests

about how women are portrayed in the media, not as actual persons but as stereotypes.
'Stereotypes are usually defined as standardised mental pictures which provide sexist judgments about women such that their subordinate status within patriarchal society is symbolically reinforced.'[15]

Within this patriarchal society, the media are owned and managed predominantly by men. Suzanne More in her essay 'Here's Looking at You, Kid!'[16] points out that in the male dominated media the gaze is always structured as male. In 1995 in the UK 23% of news employees were women.[17] Today, among the chief editors of the four newspapers I used as the source of my research material there is only one woman (Carolyn McCall in the Guardian).[18]

Within the masculine narrative form women function not as speaking subjects but as 'signs'. In examining these narrative structures, they argue that 'since women are found so frequently in news stories, and since they always sign as "woman" (unlike men, who do not ordinarily carry meaning as "man" because the culture assumes maleness as given), their function as sign is unique[19].

Patricia Holland ('Politics of the Smile')[20] recalls that the Daily Mirror (incidentally one of the titles in my study) was launched in 1903 specifically as a women's paper, under a female editor Mary Howarth, with all-female staff. 'The experiment did not last long', says Holland, 'killed by what sounds very much like misogyny as well as by the failure of its narrow formula of tittle-tattle and gossip for wealthy women. "Women can't write and don't want to read" – was Northcliffe's (then the proprietor of the Daily Mail and the Daily Mirror) sour comment.'
Holland sees that decision as Lord Northcliffe's impatience and lack of will to give the paper a chance. The gendering of cultural forms provides another explanation to the difficulty in shifting a news medium towards the female zone. The scheme featured in 'Representation (Cultural Representations and Signifying Pracitices)', shows the division between Mass culture/entertainment (popular genre conventions, romanticised stereotypes, emotions, expressive performance, escapism, private domesticity, soap opera etc) which lie in the area of Femininity and High culture/art (realism, thought, real problems, the public world etc) on the side of Masculinity.[21]

'All mass entertainment is inferior, and is associated with qualities that are inherently feminising, while the cultural gold standard of realism is drawn into an alignment with values characterised as masculine. This is not to say that female cultural producers or characters do not operate within high culture: only that when they do, they tend to function on a masculinised territory and must abandon or suppress those features characterized as feminising.'[22]

Miriam Gonzalez Fernandez appears in the Times 10.04.2010 dressed in a white business-style blouse which looks very much like a man's shirt, on the backdrop of St. Paul's cathedral and a cloudy dark sky.

Miriam Gonzalez Fernandez in the Times 10.04.2010

14 Holland, P. 'When A Woman Reads The News', 'News, Gender and Power', 1998, pp.5-6

15 Carter C., Branston G., Allan S., News, Gender and Power, Routledge 1998, p.6
16 Gamman Lorraine and Marshment Margaret, The Female Gaze (Women as Viewers of Popular Culture), The Women's Press 1994, p.45
17 Ibidem, p. 38
18 mediauk.com/newspapers
19 Rakow and Kranich, Woman As Sign In Television News, 1991, in 'News, Gender and Power' p.7
20 Carter C., Branston G., Allan S., News, Gender and Power, Routledge 1998, p.21
21 Webster Goodwin Sarah and Bronfen Elisabeth, Death and Representation, John Hopkins University Press 1993, p.349
22 Ibidem

The visual symbolism of the pure, innocent white fabric and masculine clothing seems obvious in support of her bold statement. The choice of the background is also driven by visual rhetoric to underline the political intent. It's not the Houses of Parliament we see behind her, it's a strong, monumental building – a symbol of independent power. There is a price for shifting towards masculine territory: in order to be taken seriously Miriam Gonzales has to compromise her image as a woman.

Sarah Lawrence in her MA in Journalism 'Kiss & Tell: Tabloids and Their Representation of Women' points out that mass media in the West are experiencing the shift 'away from political life towards a more entertainment base orientation'. She expands that 'stereotypes and socialisation, pornography and ideology are perceived by feminists as the main instruments in conveying stereotypical, patriarchal and hegemonic values about women and femininity. In research on stereotypes it is said that media pass on society's deeply sexist heritage in order to secure continuity.'[23]

The Object of the Gaze

Who is looking at who? I examined the direction of the gaze of the figures in the photographs and compared them with the direction of the gaze in double portraits by Van Eyck, Gainsbourogh, Mabuse, Stubbs and others (National Portrait Gallery, London). The difficulty with this analysis is that it is in some cases almost impossible to judge whether the person is looking away or is caught in her or his own thoughts. The low quality of some press photographs can often cause the same problem in precise assessment of the direction of the gaze.

'The look is always potentially crazy: it is at once the effect of truth and the effect of madness. (...) Whoever looks you straight in the eye is mad.' Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, Vintage Books, 2000, pp.111-113

There is madness in the gaze from a photograph, but there is also the illusion of intimacy. Laura Mulvey in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' talks about a woman as an object of a male gaze: 'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Women displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfield to Busby Berkley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire. (...) The presence of a woman is an indispensible element of spectacle (...)'[24]

What happens when the object we are looking at, appears to be looking back at us? If we experience that sensation of being looked at from an image, I am sure it affects the way we read that image.

Slavoj Žižek explains, after Lacan, how the experience of sharing the obsessive gaze, surveying every intimate detail, is for us unpleasant and obscene: it defines the 'position of a pervert'. '(...) the antinomic relation between the eye

Example of my enlarged photocopying visual tests

and the gaze as it was articulated by Lacan in Seminar XI: the eye viewing the object is on the side of the subject, while the gaze is on the side of the object. When I am looking at an object, the object is always already gazing at me, and from a point at which I cannot see it. (...) This antinomy of eye and gaze is lost in pornography. Why? Because pornography is inherently perverse; its perverse character lies not in the obvious fact that it "goes all the way and shows us all the dirty details."'[25]

The dreamy eyes of Samantha Cameron looking at me, while her head is resting on her husband's lap (front cover of the Times, 4.05.2010), leave me with a strange perverse feeling of looking at something I shouldn't be.
If pornography looks closely at the intimate details, if it exaggerates and enlarges the imagery, what would

By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring common-place milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. (...) The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject. Benjamin W., The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, 1935

The Camerons on the front page of the Times, 4.05.2010

happen with the press photography if examined closer? I printed out my scanned images and experimented with photocopying them in enlargements: 200% and maximum 400%, also enlargements of already enlarged images, which resulted in some enlarged up to 800%. This method resulted in many images bleeding out of the limitations of the biggest possible on the photocopier format A3. Many images 'ignored' the narrative: the story or the meaning we could read in the originals. We started seeing fragments, body parts. Was I playing a role of the Lacanian 'pervert', the pornographer? Was I obscuring or revealing the truth? This method is opposite to the calculated way the message is formed by the media. The decision how to crop and turn the image was left to the photocopier. The technology recycled and reproduced the photographs according to simple criteria I set out: print as text (since we 'read' images) and enlarge 200% and 400%. That technique produced more graphic, continuous in tone and flattened imagery.

All Roads Lead to Shklovsky

The method of photocopying enlarged images exposes the production process and the technology used: we see very clearly the characteristic halftone pattern of the press print. The beauty of the raw printing process has been in the centre of practice of Dutch designer Karel Martens. His book 'printed matter / drukwerk', entirely published as FRENCH FOLD, has inspired me to apply the same method to my visual tests. Folding the photocopied A3 size images in half echoed my earlier concept of treating the material as the literal 'other half' but in this approach it was again the process, not me, which determined the 'natural' crop of the image.

Spread from Karel Martens 'drukwerk/printed matter'

Since I was working at first with the scanned printouts, not the originals from the newspapers, the enlarged images showed different detail to the press halftone pattern. I then decided to use the original newspapers and cut out the photographs, extracting all the textual content in order to be able to analyse only the visual part of the message, without any other elements added by the media.
Photocopying the originals and enlarging them allowed me to deconstruct

[23] Lawrence S., 'Kiss & Tell: Tabloids and Their Representation of Women' Journalism MA, LCC 2004
[24] Mulvey, L., Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings. Eds. Leo Brandy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP 1999: 833-44, p.837

[25] Žižek S., Looking Awry, 1992

the photographs and in a way bring them back closer to their original pre-mediation existence. At the same time, the photocopying process made them unfamiliar and often difficult to 'read' in a normal way. They are randomly oriented (some 90 degrees, other 180) and the process of perception is significantly prolonged.

Simon Watney in 'Making Strange: The Shattered Mirror' (published in 'Thinking Photography', 1982) quotes Victor Shklovsky from 'On Tolstoy's Diaries':
'Art exists to help us to recover the sensation of life, to make the stone stony. The end of art is to give a sensation of the object as seen, not as recognised. The technique of art is to make things 'unfamiliar', to make forms obscure, so as to increase the difficulty and the duration of perception. The act of perception in art is an end in itself and must be prolonged. In art, it is our experience of the process of construction that counts, not the finished product.'[26]

We can find the same quote in Rick Poynor's 'Jan Van Toorn: Critical Practice' (p. 95). It summarises the concept of OSTRANENIE (making strange) which paved the way for many artists, including the dramatist Bertold Brecht, painter and designer El Lissitzky, film director Jean-Luc Godard and designer Jan Van Toorn.
The critical practice of Jan Van Toorn has influenced my way of seeing the role of a graphic designer in contemporary society. Van Toorn scrutinises the social and political condition of the world but also interrogates the role the media play, including ownership and the way visual communication is distorted and coded before it reaches its audience. He proposes that 'our critical positions as professionals must be made visible in day-to-day practice'.[27] In terms of methodology this helped me formulate my own position and by re-authoring and re-editing the images I was able to interrogate the possible alternative meanings that can be read in them. Van Toorn uses different levels of mediation and intervention to the image: from editing or putting in a new context to cropping and collages. He uses his own material and newspaper and magazine cut-outs. Similar ways of intervention are used by John Baldessari: he uses found images, he remediates and re-authors them. He adds to and subtracts from images, using Shklovsky's recipe for making strange and creating new meanings for familiar objects and figures.

Jan Van Toorn's poster for 'De Beyerd' Visual Arts Centre in Breda

Conclusion

The source material of my final outcome was press photographs found at the London College of Communication library, which provided the back issues of the newspapers. The source material was at first scanned, printed and cut out for the series of visual tests. The final project utilises the original press cut-outs: photocopied into the form of three books: each dedicated to one of the leaders' wives.

For the statistical analysis of the images I employed the elements of information design. The visual representation of data helped me analyse a comparison of which 'wives' appeared in which titles, how many times, how often by themselves and with their husbands; and the patterns of their media appearances over the key events of the election campaign. Among those I

26 Burgin V., Thinking Photography, Carter C., Branston G., Allan S., News, Gender and Power, Routledge 1998, pp.154-176
27 Poynor R., Jan Van Toorn: Critical Practice, 010 Publishers 2008, p.122

Spread from Samantha book

included: the PM's announcement, the three televised debates, the 'biggot' gaffe made by Gordon Brown, polling day, the results, Gordon Brown's resignation and the new government. My final outcome reflects the statistics, so for example, the book dedicated to Miriam Gonzalez Fernandez is significantly thinner than the other two. This is a direct reflection of the amount of data there was available in the press in the period in question.

Most of the imagery depicts the three women at the beginning and at the end of the campaign. This can also be observed in the rhetorical books. Sometimes there are different photographs by different photographers of the same event or occasion. Although the books do not follow events chronologically, some patterns echo the timeline of the election campaign. We recognise the most significant moments: the Browns leaving Number 10 and the Camerons moving in, Samantha's happiness and Sarah's growing frustration.

The choice of paper was dictated by the recycled nature of my work. I tested several types and weights of paper on the photocopier I used: from recycled paper Fabriano of 120 g/m2 weight to much lighter newsprint. The chosen paper Sylvan Offset 80 g/m2 is appropriate for the recycled nature of the images, it supports the idea of revealing the material and technology. Similarly, the simple binding with the thread shows the method of bookmaking, the manual reproduction. This was the result of research into binding techniques (perfect binding, hot glue binding, stitching) in London binderies: Blissets, PIP, Shepherds and Wyvern (the final choice).

Producers of information try to hide their real aims and motives. Information becomes a commodity. Design is the ultimate answer to that. 'It is the designer's role and responsibility as a mediator, Van Toorn argues, to find ways to break open and demystify message, to make its provenance and manipulatory character visible in its form, so that the receiver can engage fully in the communication's argument.' 'in one way or another,' he says, 'the public must remain in a position where they can also measure the motives of the producer and mediator that lie behind the product, against their own experience of the world.' R. Poynor Jan Van Toorn: Critical Practice, 010 Publishers 2008, p.123

John Baldessari does not like to 'asphyxiate the piece.' He likes to give just enough to ' activate the mind'.[28] The enlarged press photographs, through the visible halftone pattern, show their origin, the visible lines of scalpel show the methodology and the French fold 'crops' the photographs into new images. The lack of covers presents my work as bare material – remediated and reproduced. It leaves the spine uncovered and exposes the binding process, just like the content of my books exposes the printing and reproduction process and just like the naked thread does not hide anything from the reader. I would like to invite the reader into a dialogue, to encourage 'active interpretation by the spectator'.[29]

My books follow the connective model of visual rhetoric, which invites the reader to engage with a new, unexpected form of the familiar narrative, made unfamiliar, strange. The process of perception is made difficult and is therefore prolonged, the narrative is unpredictable and non-linear, the 'reading' pace is

varied by the unpredictable changes in size, rotations and sudden areas of negative space. The 'strange' form helps articulate the content in a new way, generating a range of new possible meanings. There is no 'help' in reading: there are no captions and headlines, all the textual material has been removed, leaving the visual content to 'speak' for itself.

The 'nakedness' of the books reflects the vulnerability of the women depicted in them. Their smiles and frowns become lonely and eerie, taken out of their previous context. Do we see more humanity in the figures used by the media to improve the image of their husbands on their way to power? My practice allowed me to see more clearly the loneliness, absence, frustration, 'out-of-placeness' of these women. I believe that through the mediation and use of simple technology (photocopying) I have uncovered new signification in the photographs I researched. Perhaps, though, my methodology only exposed the original message, which the media tried to manipulate according to their narrative structure – as human accessories in the image-making process.

The revealing character in both form and content makes my work faithful to the reflexive theory and comments not only on the subject matter but also on design practice and technology.

Spread from Sarah book

Spread from Miriam book

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[28] Morgan J. and Jones L., John Baldessari: Pure Beauty, Tate Publishing 2009, p. 246
[29] Method and means of dialogic practice (insert), Van Toorn J., Design's Delight, 010 Publishers 2006

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