

Through the Objective lens: The ethics of expression and repression of high art in photojournalism

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Keywords: *objectivity, ethics, art, photojournalism, journalistic professionalism*

Art and photojournalism exist in what Susan Sontag has termed “febrile rivalry.” Their moral and epistemological battles concern authenticity, truth, and the nature of reality. Despite this, photojournalism consciously or unconsciously attempts to emulate the painter’s techniques and sensibilities. The constraints of the photojournalistic professional identity, however, mean that artistic affinities are repressed, at great emotional and ethical peril to the photographers themselves as well as to the detriment of the people whom they serve. Using numerous examples of photojournalism and of art from the Renaissance through the early twentieth century, this paper will examine how photojournalism mimics art in terms of staging, composition and explicit reference to specific genres and works of art, examining the ethical implications of photojournalism as a repressed art form.

Only with effort can the camera be forced to lie: basically it is an honest medium: so the photographer is much more likely to approach nature in the spirit of inquiry, of communion, instead of with the saucy swagger of self-dubbed "artists."

--Edward Weston, early twentieth century photographer

Ever since 1839, when Louis Jacques M. N. P. Daguerre enabled the lens culture of the West to realize itself as photographic, art, or more specifically painting, and photography have existed in what Susan Sontag has termed "febrile rivalry." The characteristic of their conflict is partly aesthetic, though it is much too simplistic to attribute it to some competition over the style of realism popular at that time. Their struggles touch on deeper and more fundamental epistemological battles dealing with authenticity, truth, and the nature of reality. Photojournalism, deemed the lowest form of photography after photography as artistic expression and documentary, exacerbates this schism profoundly and irreparably. Certainly the acrimony flows two directions but art and photography's struggles belie the inextricable relationship they share.

Beginning with the idea of sight as worthy of contemplation and inquiry with the likes of Ptolemy and Augustine through Bacon and Descartes, vision became the privileged way of knowing. It is important to note that once the technology for extending the eye became available as it was in Renaissance Europe, the lens took on the status of what Bolter (1984) calls a defining technology, which he explains as something that "develops links, metaphorical or otherwise, with a culture's science, philosophy or literature; it is always available to serve as a metaphor, example, model or symbol." For example, when Galileo looked to the heavens with a compound lens in 1610, "our culture's fundamental beliefs were permanently reshaped on the basis of lens-derived understandings." (Coleman, 1998) As scientific and artistic practices became increasingly intertwined, painting, in subject, philosophy and artistic elements, was transformed and photography found its ideological genesis. The lens was destined to have both technical and artistic application. For example, in the Northern Renaissance it became a passion, a convention, and even almost a game to insert microscopic detail in every painting, such as the marks on the buttons of a man's coat (Frazier 2000). Moreover, studies of nature would replicate every hair on the animal. This phenomenon in painting was precipitated by the same cultural focus on the lens that scholars argue became the precursor to photography (Coleman, 1998; Ranciere, 2004). That is, photography as an idea was born long before the technology to realize it. Indeed, I contend that photography and photojournalism have, consciously or unconsciously, emulated the painter's techniques and sensibilities. This mostly unacknowledged debt has remained so because of what supposedly separates them—an ontological, moral and epistemological chasm hidden in the photojournalists' own repressed affinities with the artistic bent and in part as a result of the constraints of their professional identity.

In order to sketch out the contours of this division, we must examine who photojournalists think they are, and consequently what they think they are rightly doing in the world. Photojournalists partake of the journalistic ethos that they are scientists of a sort, collecting evidence of what has happened, accurately portraying the state of the

world, and observing the events in it. Mostly, they see themselves and are seen as detached recorders. This is the only way they see themselves as moral, for only in this way do they discover truth and portray reality. As Howard Chapnick (1995) has written, “the integrity and purity of press photography and photojournalism are inviolable. The fountainhead of journalistic photography is its testament to truth.” The meaning of this, he concludes, is that “the elements in a news or journalistic photograph cannot be moved, reordered, reconstructed, directed, manipulated or managed. The journalistic photographer photographs what is, not what was, or what might have been.” (9) David Goldblatt (1995) more succinctly observes, “the camera has been used simply to photograph what was there.” (18) Photojournalism, then, becomes little more than “an ancillary technology for illustrating written reports” (Griffin 2001, 449). The moral language with which photojournalists describe this commitment to be visual scribes reveals a deeply seated belief in the unassailable immutability of the photographic image and underscores a worldview in which objective reality is not only accessible but can reveal itself fully through the unsullied lens. The transparency of the camera represents the honesty of those who wield it.

The objectivity of impartial observer, however, stands squarely in the way of the emotive, perspectival and expressive identity of artist. Wilson Hicks, executive editor of *Life* magazine in the 1930s, posed this striking contrast: “Art derives out of the imaginative life of the artist...In photojournalism, the photograph is derivable only out of reality itself.” (28-30) Art and the evidentiary photograph are at odds, prompting Paula Rotha (quoted in Tucker 1984) to comment, “Beauty is one of the greatest dangers of documentation.” (42) The interpretive nature of painting seems diametrically opposed to the photograph, which, in our culture reifies and proves. And so, painting and photography, two branches of the same visual tree, represent, on the surface, two purposes, two versions of morality, two sources of knowledge. Photography, as manifest through photojournalism, monitors and presents the external world, is morally responsible to represent reality, and to the extent that that representation is accurate, is a purveyor of fact. Alternately, painting is inherently expressive, “an effort,” as Andre Maurois has said, “to create, beside the real world, a more human world,” and as such proffers a subjective beauty and interpretive reality. It is no wonder that the tension runs so high; both take the moral high ground for providing what is essential to the human experience. Thus photojournalism stands in judgment of art, as Susan Sontag (1977) explains: “Photographers who came to maturity in the 1940s or later are bolder, openly snubbing art, equating art with artiness. They generally claim to be finding, recording, impartially observing, witnessing, exploring themselves—anything but making works of art.” (127) Artists, for their part, complain that photojournalism has no aesthetic sense, their images are banal and rote, unoriginal and literal. Baudelaire, who viewed photography as an encroachment upon the arts, common and delusional, lamented, “A vengeful God has granted the wishes of this multitude. Daguerre was his Messiah. And now the public says to itself: ‘Since photography gives us every guarantee of exactitude that we could desire (they really believe that, the idiots!) then photography and Art are the same thing.’”

But the ties are clear, as much as either side may want to repudiate them. Understanding art in its various iterations and philosophies is essential to any deep comprehension of visuality in media (Gombrich, 1960)¹. Photojournalism bears crucial resemblance to the artistic in three essential ways that this essay will explore. First, both art and photojournalism engage in staging, or the very explicit positioning of shots. Although photojournalists disavow this practice, they do manipulate the frame in aesthetic ways. For example, the renowned photojournalist James Nachtwey, in order to obtain a shot of displaced, war-ravaged citizens in Bosnia, sat in a burnt-out building behind a shattered window to create a dramatic frame for the right subject to pass by.² Second, photojournalists are sensitive to the elements of composition, as the previous example also illustrates. Line, texture and light are every bit as important to the photojournalist as they are to the painter. Third, the most striking resemblance of all to painting, however, is photojournalism's explicit referencing of particular paintings, in theme and content. This is compelling evidence of their common visual heritage and the photojournalist's implicit desire for his or her own artistic expression. Furthermore, we can see that both painting and photojournalism participate in a larger symbolic field. The essay also will explore the important meanings these similarities bear. The cost of photojournalism remaining a repressed artistic form holds serious moral implications for a society increasingly reliant on visual images. It is my contention that embracing the artistic in photojournalism can hold transformative power for photojournalists and the public they serve.

Staging

Photojournalism's unwavering commitment to objectivity and to revealing an independent reality makes staging a particularly problematic concept. The very idea that photojournalists could in any way affect the outcome of a visual image is antithetical to their professional ethos and a violation of their sacred and binding relationship to truth. Thus staging, whether it be creating the event or rearranging it for a more photogenic outcome, creates conflict in the photojournalist. Not surprisingly then, Luis Rios (2004), director of photography for the *Miami Herald*, objects strongly to the reliance on "photo opportunities" for American political coverage, even though the staging comes from the candidates themselves and not the journalists. His worry is that journalists will lose their credibility even by association with the practice of tampering with reality. A photojournalist's staging is a violation of the journalists' edict never to participate in, make, or affect the outcome of a story. In journalistic lore, the negative object lesson is editor William Randolph Hearst, who, in the tawdry days of Yellow Journalism, famously commented, "The modern editor of the popular journal does not care for facts.

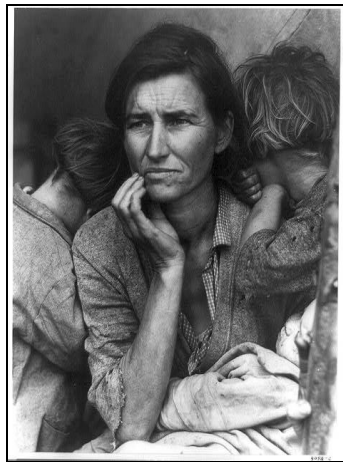
¹ Nowhere is this link more literal than in the 1999 "Portraits" project of Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto, who demonstrates that painting and photography are intimately connected. Sugimoto self-consciously recreates the portraits of Henry VIII and others by Hans Holbein the Younger using lighting identical to that of the sixteenth-century painter. Photographing wax figures using this lighting technique produces what looks remarkably like a photograph of the painting, if not the painting itself.

<http://www.hirshhorn.si.edu/sugimoto/index.html>

² See for example the Christian Frei documentary, *War photographer* (2001).

The editor wants novelty. The editor has no objection to facts if they are also novel. But he would prefer a novelty that is not a fact to a fact that is not a novelty.” Its haunting extreme opposite is the almost daily routine of journalists who watch and photograph unspeakable trauma without involvement.³ But photojournalists *do* stage. It’s part of the journalistic tension, now more than a hundred years old, between the story model, using narrative techniques that resonate with the human condition, and the information model, fact-driven journalism committed to objectivity and impartiality that took over the industry in 1896 when Adolph Ochs reconceptualized the *New York Times*. Coleman (1998) has called this the directorial function of photography, evoking a performance from controlling props, sets or actors, what he terms the “real work of photography: making things look, deciding how a thing is to appear in the image.” Barthes (1981) describes photography simply as “a kind of primitive theater,” a thought echoed in Ryan’s (1995) description of the documentary portraiture of Annie Liebovitz as “a form of theatre that is part fantasy and part soul-baring.” (34) By looking at photojournalistic examples and their artistic counterparts, the parallels between the two reveal insights into how both use staging for artistic expression—one implicitly, and the other explicitly.

Despite the wild hopes of seventeenth century lentocentric culture to infinitely extend the eye, vision is not boundless. The eye’s natural limitations create boundaries that continually frame and reframe our sight, a feature the camera famously replicates. Therefore, framing is an issue of borders, inside and outside the frame as the primary demarcation. Because objects, people, space, are always either inside or outside the frame, it becomes impossible *not* to stage a photo in this sense. One effective example of this is Dorothea Lange’s iconic photograph, *Migrant Mother*



http://www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/lange/aa_lange_power_2_e.html

The photo makes effective use of the tight shot, focused on the mother and her two children, faces streaked with dirt and despair. Her worry is evident, her plight

³ When journalists dare to defy this edict, the consequences are severe, as when CBS reporter Morley Safer was censured for dropping his microphone to help drowning victims whose makeshift rafts were sinking just off shore.

demonstrable. Yet we do not see where she is, anything about her physical surroundings, and especially, we do not see that Lange omitted three of her children from the photo. Why? No room? It was a conscious decision on Lange's part, for purposes of explicit reference noted below but also deliberately staging a sympathetic image the viewer could commonly identify with. Obviously, given its stature among documentary photography and Depression-era images, Lange's decision was aesthetically and (one could argue) politically or ideologically effective. Yet it was not the objective reality of migrant life that photojournalists and others wish it to be. Lange's deliberate choices gave the picture meaning rather than flatly transmitting information about what one migrant woman looked like.



<http://www.wfu.edu/academics/art/pc/pc-durer-melencolia.ht>

Juxtaposed with Durer's "Melancholia," we see that the image of the despairing woman is made more dramatic when surrounded by props that symbolically create more meaning as to the nature of her despair. In Lange's photograph, the mother has children she cannot feed, cannot provide for, cannot comfort. In "Melancholia," the tools of science that are supposed to bring knowledge and understanding are ultimately unfulfilling; she is spiritually empty. The objectivity that photojournalists want to cling to is elusive and ephemeral. The photojournalist always makes calculated decisions regarding what is in or out of view. The photo, then, is not a thin slice of external reality, but a constructed reality.

As the deliberate manipulation of actors and action to create a dramatic scene, staging is generally considered the antithesis of candor and thus the opposite of the journalistic project. While painting is commonly considered an appropriate realm for fiction, photojournalism derives its cultural authority and authenticity from its express ability to present events as candidly as possible. This practice is an extension of objectivity and one important basis for the public perception that news photographs bring readers truthful, accurate events as they naturally occur. Photojournalists cannot intentionally position people to create certain events as painters may, but they do seek those moments that *appear* candid to illustrate particular points or to appeal to human interest. One way to do this is through depicting private moments. As an example, consider the spontaneity of the Steve Bent photograph of the nursing infant. The

starving Ethiopian child tries to suckle the mother, who can offer her child only a withered breast. Though Bent could not order this intimate scene, and as such it is candid, photographing such a moment was not accidental, but offers an emotionally compelling image of a fundamental intimacy gone awry. Another example of this journalistic spontaneity is Bill Beall's Pulitzer-Prize-winning photograph of a policeman bending down to speak to a little boy who has strayed across the boundary of a parade route. It is clearly meant to be touching, to pull the heartstrings as Beall "looks in" on a private, candid moment of improbable negotiation. Despite the fact that paintings can be staged with impunity, artists also can give their images the quality of spontaneity. Look for example at the Fragonard painting entitled, "The swing."



[http://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org:8080/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultLightboxView/result.t1.collection_lightbox.\\$TspTitleImageLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=4&sp=2&sp=Slightbox_3x4&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=6](http://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org:8080/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultLightboxView/result.t1.collection_lightbox.$TspTitleImageLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=4&sp=2&sp=Slightbox_3x4&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=6)

The action could easily be that depicted in an enterprise photograph in photojournalism. The woman flies high in the air on a swing while a young man, hidden in the bushes, receives a serendipitous opportunity to look up her dress. Whether lighthearted and whimsical or more sobering and dramatic, the "candid" shot enables photojournalists to employ the artistic technique of staging without risking their professional credibility or surrendering cultural authority. Thus both painting and photojournalism share the ability to craft indelible images, each in their own way generating the visual elements that can most resonate with their publics.

Clearly, photojournalists employ staging techniques with some proficiency and even panache, though they generally would not admit of it. Their parallels to painting in terms of technique and symbolic vocabulary are similar and striking enough to warrant this conclusion. This makes their resistance and reluctance to acknowledge this affinity all the more surprising, but wholly unnecessary. In the realm of painting, staging has provided some of the most meaningful and aesthetically satisfying experiences for generations. This visual practice does not have to mean the images are manipulative or corrupt. If photojournalism can recognize that staging can draw out some of the best

purposes and ends, and if it can release the unrealistic and even damaging insistence on portraying some literal objective reality, its practitioners will be free to employ their considerable creative powers to speak to their audience at a level that is deeper to the human experience, and ultimately closer to the goal the journalistic ethos had hoped to achieve from the beginning.

Composition

Painting and photojournalism share another trait that joins them to the artistic project and makes photography indebted to its closest medium. Susan Sontag (1977) astutely observed, “What is compelling [about photography] is what it shares with painting, the composition.” (107) The visual ingredients that blend into making an optically coherent and ultimately stirring image are line, texture, and light. Though artists have employed them differently with various emphases and outcomes, these building blocks have provided the foundation of the visual image. While they are discussed separately below, it is difficult to separate them in the practice of constructing visual images. Likewise, photojournalists have adopted these tools to form their creations, but conceptualize them so as to remain objective. That is, these elements of composition are merely the vehicle for content, invisible transportation of the subject matter to the viewer (Schwartz, 1992). The best of photojournalism, though emphasizing certain elements over others at various moments, reveals artisans expert at crafting an image in a process not unlike painting.

Line is an important tool of the artist to produce aesthetically interesting and pleasing images in painting and photojournalism. Its more communicative use is to create particular types of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface as well as to emphasize certain elements of the image by leading the eye toward them. For example, Ingres in the work *Une Odalisque* was known for painting women’s arms stylistically.



http://www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/detail_notice.jsp?CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673226311&CURRENT_LL_V_NOTICE%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673226311&FOLDER%3C%3Efolder_id=9852723696500815&fromDept=false&baseIndex=58&bmUID=1149865890795&bmLocale=en

Though the length was unrealistic upon close inspection, it gave the woman a curved shape that was aesthetically satisfying in the whole. Likewise, photojournalism textbooks refer to constructing a c or an s-curve, for example, what the textbooks call

“leading lines,” one of the key compositional elements of a news photograph. In a self-aware way, photojournalism is especially interested in these latter functions as useful ways to transport the reader to the event. As for the aesthetic dimensions of line, photojournalists hold an ambivalent relationship there, reminiscent of the historic tensions between presenting things in such a way as to spark or maintain reader interest, but also to appear uninvested in anything but the purely informational or neutral presentation of images. The Pulitzer-prize-winning photograph of “Tragedy in the Surf” and Winslow Homer’s painting, “Summer Night”



http://artchive.com/artchive/H/homer/homer_summer_night.jpg.html

provide an example of how photojournalists and painters create space and draw the eye to the most important feature of the image. In the Homer painting, a vast expanse of ocean and skyline provide the backdrop for a couple standing close together, dancing. Though they are not in the exact center of the painting, Homer uses the vast expanse to create the sense of aloneness and to draw the eye to the only figures or content in the picture. Figures in silhouette blend in with the beach and the surf so as to be invisible, further making the two women the only interesting content on which the eye can focus. Jack Gaunt’s photograph of a couple alone on the beach uses the same technique to focus the viewer’s eye on the two. The sea and surf make a vast expanse, almost identically proportionate to Homer’s painting, the couple off to one side of center. Like Homer’s image, they are close together, loosely holding one another in a dance-like stance, only they have just lost their infant son, suddenly washed out to sea. The viewer’s eye in both cases is drawn immediately to the couple as the sea, surf and lack of other content make a line pointing toward what the artist/photographer wishes it to see. So both painters and photojournalists use line to their advantage in an aesthetic project in which they guide the viewers’ gaze and craft dimensions for them that can encourage inhabiting the world these images create.

Texture was celebrated in Renaissance painting of both the Italian and Netherlandish types. Italians famously delighted in their folds of clothing, but the Dutch were masterful at velvets and other tactile textiles. In both cases, the results were palpable.

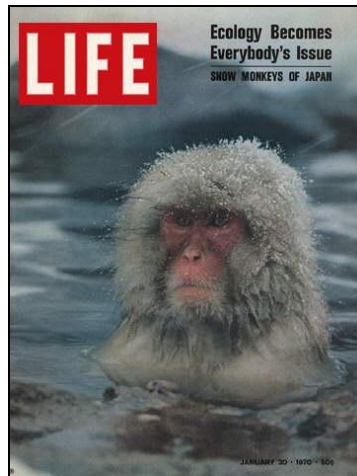


In Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding*, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/cgi-bin/WebObjects.dll/CollectionPublisher.woa/wa/work?workNumber=NG186>

for example, the rich velvet of the bride's dress was the Northern version of decadence. The technique lived on in Monet's rendition of natural elements, bringing out their tactile qualities with color, such as the puff of steam as a locomotive pulled into Lazare Station



<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/cgi-bin/WebObjects.dll/CollectionPublisher.woa/wa/work?workNumber=NG6479>. The Renaissance emphasis on the corporeal and heightened senses as symbolic of the fulness of life, the celebration of our humanity, is one that photography has emulated, but in a way consistent with its own news values. The photojournalistic translation of texture is often found in nature, wherever those natural images are newsworthy. Given journalism's emphasis on realism, this is not surprising. Take for example the moving image of the Japanese snow monkey for *Life* magazine



<http://www.life.com/Life/60th/classic/cv013070.html>.

With a humanlike quality to his face, his sad expression is poignant, every hair on his head frozen in tiny ice crystals, like a bearded man caught in a blizzard. The monkeys' habitat vanishing due to climate changes is the news, but the aesthetic appeal of the shot is the palpability of the ice on his hair, the tactile quality of his head. This tangible quality is replicated in the human figure as well where texture tells a particular story. In the case of Michael Wells' closeup photo of a child's tiny, black withered hand in the healthy, strong and large hand of a white missionary in Uganda, the leathery texture of the boy's skin narrates the ravaging effects of starvation better than words or even a wider angle

http://www.worldpressphoto.nl/index.php?option=com_photogallery&task=view&id=184&Itemid=115&bandwidth=high. The texture of the human form can also speak volumes about the cruelties of war, where it is often employed. Consider Kenneth Jarecke's photo of the Iraqi soldier incinerated by a rocket in the Gulf War



<http://www.amherst.edu/magazine/issues/05winter/war/jarecke.html>.

So gruesome that it wasn't published in the United States, the image is a testimony to the grim realities of combat.⁴ Sometimes, the interplay of human and

⁴ Interestingly, similar images, equally controversial, have emerged from the Iraqi War. Photos of dead American soldiers whose charred bodies were hung as trophies were available on the Internet but not widely circulated among the press.

element create their own texture with newsworthy quality. For example, Salgado's photo of American oil workers trying to cap wells during the Gulf War looks remarkably similar to the photos of marine wildlife after an oil spill



<http://www.nytimes.com/specials/magazine2/oilfields.jpg.html>.

Helpless men shimmering in crude petroleum have a statuary quality to them as they combat the destruction of their fellow men. In each case, texture, vital to painting since the Renaissance and before, is central to photojournalism's ability to tell its stories. Emphasis on the material thus becomes another link between painting and photojournalism even as the latter has adapted the technique to its own communicative ends.

Light is one of the most obvious of shared elements between painting and photography, and a key to truly distinctive photojournalism. Luminescence is expressive by virtue of its sheer symbolism. The interplay of light and shadow are used to make meaning, to evoke emotions in the viewer by creating mood and drama. Although both painters and photographers routinely employ it, and even feature it to express themselves, photographer Art Kane (1972) has gone so far as to claim, "The only tool the photographer has to paint with is light. We do not have pigment. It is easier to accept or record similar conditions in black and white photography and still express the truth." Note here that even if Kane cannot acknowledge the expressive quality of light, he thinks of the photographer's craft in terms of a type of painter, one whose only artistic device is light, though his role is as purveyor of truth in some objective sense rather than creator. When we examine the works of such painters as Caravaggio and Rembrandt, artists whose striking use of light stirs the soul without necessarily great variety in color or stunning form or line, it becomes obvious how powerful light can be to make one's expressive mark. Take for example Caravaggio's rendering of St. John the Baptist in the wilderness.



<http://www.nelson-atkins.org/art/CollectionDatabase.cfm?id=1130&theme=euro>

The painting is quite simple, little in the way of color or props, just the brooding figure of John the Baptist, half in a strong source of light, the other in shadows. The juxtaposition of him in a stark environment with little else than light to suggest affect creates a powerful presence. The sparseness of the setting, the harshness of the light lends an intensity to John that nothing else could achieve. In fact, it is almost like an Ancient Near Eastern news photograph. Monet, Degas and Raphael have to some degree employed light to lend mood, such as Degas' studies of Parisian ballerinas in the footlights



http://www.expo-degas.com/1_3.cfm?id=-1667587294, or Monet's study of the Cathedral at Rouen at different times of day.



http://www.clarkart.edu/museum_programs/collections/impressionist/content.cfm?ID=34&marker=7&start=7
<http://www.learn.columbia.edu/monet/swf/>

Photojournalism often employs the same technique. Black and white photographs with strong contrasts between light and dark give an empty, harsh feel to the photograph and emphasize the subject more intently. One need look only at W. Eugene Smith's last masterpiece to see the riveting use of simple light and shadow



http://www.masters-of-photography.com/S/smith/smith_minamata_full.html.

Here a woman bathes her 15-year-old daughter who suffers from a type of mercury poisoning caused by rapid industrialization in post-War Japan. Light and shadow alone create the severe agony of her infirmity contrasted sharply with the mother's tender touch and gaze. Clearly both photojournalist and artist employ light aesthetically to create meaning. Through the image, that interpretive enterprise joins the canvas to the frame.

Basic elements of composition so familiar to the world of the painter are no stranger to the photojournalist either, as we have seen. Line, texture and light form powerful aesthetic images that sear our consciousness and communicate at a visceral level as well

as an intellectual one. They do this in part by functioning as a set of symbols we can all access culturally. Photojournalists do well to employ these devices in their work. If the photojournalist's task is to help people make sense of their world, unveil the human spirit and help people understand if not identify with one another, these elements are in fact essential toward that goal. Creatively and skillfully wielding these tools is the mark of an artist executing a unique vision that can be illuminating and elevating for all who encounter it.

Referencial

Though staging and composition are more implicit techniques, not consciously detected by most readers as imitative or influenced by painting, explicit referencing is more directly observable. Explicit referencing makes use of an image directly from a painting, or contains elements similar enough to see the photograph as after the tradition of the painting. Explicit referencing can best be thought of as the artistic convention of form. Form is the element that most draws on culture to perform its work, and is the largest in scope. Here it is the image in the whole that evokes ideas and events that meaningfully speak to the human condition. This classic imagery often holds the status of "iconic" which for our purposes would include familiarity for the greater portion of a society, and elicit strong emotional responses. In many cases, the image is reproduced widely and depicts some historical event, but not always (Hariman and Lucaites, 2003). The photographer may be consciously and deliberately imitating, or following a more latent aesthetic sensibility. The result can bear remarkable similarity, be an iconic or familiar image, or simply have a striking parallel for the reader who may be familiar with the history of western painting. In any case, explicit referencing allows the journalist certain opportunities connected to artistic/humanistic epistemology that professional journalism cannot readily provide.

First, explicit referencing grants photojournalists access to the overt values found in these iconic images, and thus enables them to communicate those values without direct responsibility for them. Similar to the reasons for the journalistic technique of quoting authoritative sources, when an image is repeated, the journalist does not have to acknowledge his or her own voice in communicating values. (Sigal 1986; Tuchman, 1978). Professional journalistic ethos is adamant regarding the inappropriateness of the journalists' own values entering their work; only journalistic values of news judgment and newsgathering procedures are acceptable. The journalist may communicate fact, but not his or her own values regarding the story. Journalists often find this a constraining aspect of their work in part because values, a type of moral tension that gives drama an ineluctable appeal, makes news stories equally interesting (Hughes, 1968). Journalists obviously write to be read, but have to balance the appeal of value-laden narrative with the information model's intractable demand for objectivity. Along those same lines, photojournalists click the lens to be looked at. Journalists manage this tension by writing about the values of others. Photojournalists can use the values of images by explicitly referencing them. Consider the example of Alfred Eisenstadt's photo of an old rabbi in Jerusalem. He seems to have been caught in the reverie of study, surrounded by books, bespectacled, bearded and wrapped in phylacteries, a serene

Journalists do discuss or portray emotion in reporting on events and issues and the human responses to them (and to hold the interest of readers), but they are of two minds about this practice. For one thing, information needs to be objective, not maudlin or overwrought. For another, emotion is often thought of as manipulative or exploitive (Rosenstiel and Kovach, 2005). Journalists are often accused (sometimes rightly) of taking advantage of this. Moreover, journalists themselves are not supposed to have emotions, display emotions or allow them to influence their work in any way.⁵ Journalistic practice, with its close spiritual ties to procedural liberalism and deontological thinking, shares their deep distrust of emotion (Merrill, 1974; Christians, Ferre and Fackler, 1993). Explicit referencing, however, is a means of freeing the journalist from worry about emotion's misuse in light of their professional ethos. Photojournalists can model after painted images to access the emotion that would otherwise be unavailable to them, just as journalists quote others to represent viewpoints they may share or with which they sympathize. One feature of painting that particularly draws on emotional material is its frequent and skillful use of metaphor and allegory. This is especially true of religious iconography and themes, such as connections between war photography and Crucifixion imagery. Take for instance the photo by James Nachtwey of the Nicaraguan soldier whose compatriots are carrying him after he had been shot



<http://www.jamesnachtwey.com/>.⁶ His arms are extended, eyes closed, an explicit reference to images of Christ being pulled off the Cross. There are others, including many images from some of the best photojournalists during the Vietnam War.

⁵ Even during a catastrophic event such as September 11, journalists did not allow themselves normal human emotions, or else apologized for them.

⁶ To see this image, click on “Deeds of War” and go to the second photograph.



http://www.artchive.com/artchive/T/titian/titian_pieta.jpg.html

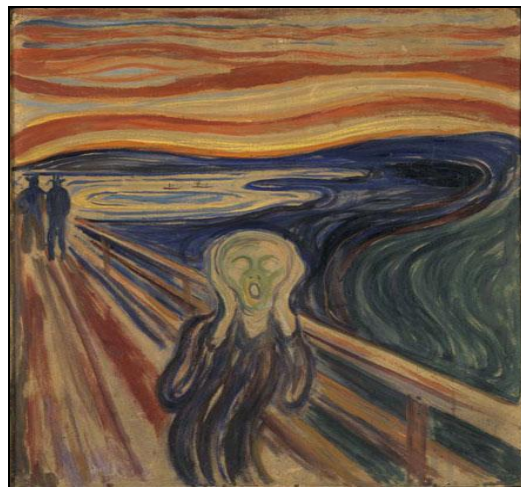
An equally close parallel to the classic theme of the pieta, that moment after Christ's followers have carefully laid his lifeless body at the foot of the Cross, is the photo by W. Eugene Smith that ran in *Life* magazine, the quintessential outlet for excellence in photojournalism.



<http://www.life.com/Life/millennium/photos/smith.html>. In a small Spanish village, a dead man's body is prepared for burial. His family hovers mournfully over him one last time to say good-bye. The moment of death is one of the most emotionally wrenching in the human experience. For the faithful, the death of a spiritual leader or martyr is even more profound, with great historical significance. Consider further John Paul Filo's Pulitzer-prize-winning photograph of the tragedy at Kent State University in 1970.



<http://www.may4.org/> ; <http://www.cnn.com/COMMUNITY/transcripts/2000/5/4/filo/>.
Four students were shot and killed by police during a protest against the Vietnam War. After one student fell, a woman knelt beside him, obviously in emotional agony and shock, in the classic pose of the pieta but reminiscent of the expression of Edvard Munch's *Scream*.



<http://www.munch.museum.no/work.aspx?id=17&wid=1#imagetops;>
<http://www.munch.museum.no/ekko/en/>



That photojournalists would use familiar images, particularly religious ones, to access this emotion is not surprising, but it is demonstrative of the utility of explicit referencing to bring to the fore an aspect of being human that is otherwise suspect or professionally unavailable to traditional photojournalism. Emotion is what human beings most respond to. It is what makes a news photograph compelling and thus what photojournalists must portray in order to complete their mission of not just recording, but being seen. For

photojournalists endeavoring to walk that fine line between emotional expression and exploitation, a template already having negotiated that boundary is attractive indeed. Furthermore, drawing on these explicit forms alleviates the journalists' own ambivalence regarding the legitimacy of their own emotional perspective in composing the frame. Thus explicit referencing does important emotional work the photojournalist is constrained from accomplishing on her own.

Further, explicit referencing enables journalists to comment on the world around them, which the bounds of mainstream journalism precludes them from doing. Although human beings naturally make meaning and interpret the world around them, journalists are not permitted this human impulse except in artificially constructed intellectual enclosures such as political analysis television shows, syndicated columns and editorial pages, and their increasingly dichotomous personal lives (Lehrer 2002). Ironically, photojournalists are expected to deliver interesting, meaningful visual images but make no sense of them. But in order to so deliver, photojournalists must make some kind of meaning out of the world they see (Bird and Dardenne, 1988; Darnton, 1975). In other words, they must mine their artistic side. By using explicit referencing, photojournalists' commentaries can be embedded in the commentaries already in place through these iconic images. Return for a moment to the famous Dorothea Lange image of the Migrant Mother. Lange's assignment was to depict, but it would be unrealistic to expect her not to comment on the immense physical poverty, social inequity and human suffering of her subjects. Indeed, she has done so by framing the mother and her two children as an explicit nod to the Madonna, more specifically to Raphael's famous rendering.



http://cartelen.louvre.fr/cartelen/visite?srv=car_not_frame&idNotice=13820

One could certainly point to the aesthetic dimensions of framing the shot as she has in order to explain its impact, but that would be incomplete. She is ostensibly saying something more, commenting on not just the circumstances, but the inner strength of character and drawing a parallel between this Madonna and *the* Madonna. Both are poor materially, both admirable in character, both, then, arguably the quintessential mother figure, nurturing and protective, and representing the values that are the bedrock of humanity. Lange could not resist the inclination to comment, not merely transmit, and the work of artists before her clearly paved her way. Thus explicit referencing is liberating to photojournalists, free to "quote" the meanings of the artists who preceded them and to make their own meanings under this guise. In this way photojournalists

walk the fine line between their professional boundaries and their creative impulses in order to give the public a richer and more complex social portrait.

Although Benjamin (1968) thought that mechanical reproduction made it impossible for photography to be artistic, Benjamin himself lends support to that observation with his worry that the camera cannot help but beautify. In 1934 he observed that the camera turned even poverty into “an object of enjoyment.” (quoted in Sontag 1977) For Benjamin, art must have a quality he terms “presence.” That defining quality clearly has a place in both painting and photojournalism, as evidenced in the remarkable ability of each to position the viewer tangibly in a world evocative of the human condition while simultaneously heightening its aesthetic characteristics.⁷ Both can create drama as well as foster increased understanding of human elements below the surface of appearances. The notion of explicit referencing only emphasizes the connection between painting and photography. The latter is not a cheap imitation of the former, but a counterpart to it and an extension of it. That photojournalists explicitly pay homage to the creative medium preceding them lends support to the idea that they are linked in an aesthetic enterprise whose project is a deliberately expressive one. Though photojournalists may be uncomfortable acknowledging their own expression as paramount, occasionally some at the top of their craft at least can describe their work as reflecting the deepest part of our existence. Photographer Sebastiao Salgado (1995) has called photography “the purest expression of humanity” that “pieces together the very soul of our society.” As discussed above, the Vietnam War photographs of Luc Delahaye or Larry Burrows who repeatedly used the pieta motif to portray wounded soldiers are tapping the meanings already put in social consciousness through centuries of western art



<http://www.life.com/Life/millennium/photos/burrows.html>.

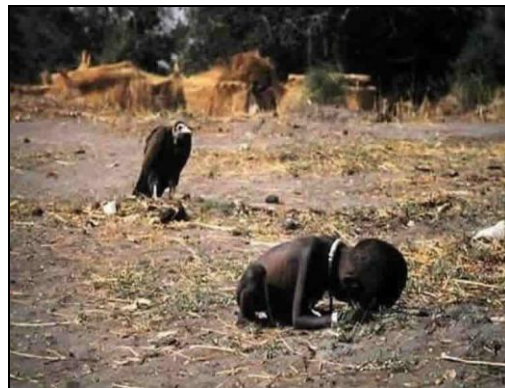
Only by drawing on the cultural vocabulary of painting can explicit referencing make these kinds of cultural meanings possible.

⁷ In fact, the aesthetic nature of news photographs is betrayed in the ongoing controversy regarding the stylization of human suffering. Some argue it is wrong to see beauty in the pain of others, but the very fact that photojournalism has been criticized for its beautiful images out of poverty and starvation reveals its imitative bent to follow the artist’s portrayal of the human condition, which is always stylized.

The evidence is demonstrable that photojournalists evoke some of the most powerful images in western culture with regularity. Clearly they are accessing a culture of images that have already proven themselves to be meaningful across generations. Rather than view this practice as derivative, it simply provides further demonstration of the fundamental and inextricable link between painters and photojournalists. It further establishes the notion that both painters and photographers access a common symbolic vocabulary that obviously exerts great influence. Certainly painters and photojournalists put their own creative stamp on the images they call forth even as they participate in perpetuating those images' cultural authority. It is this artistry that captivates and moves us all.

Ethical Implications

Ever since Freud theorized the unconscious mind in 1923, the concept of repression has held cultural purchase and evolved into a colloquial understanding of that which is unbearable for someone to face. For our purposes, repression is a means for the human psychology to suppress ideas and events that are deemed so reprehensible, so morally or physically repugnant, and so discordant with ideas of what is good or appropriate, that they become literally unthinkable. Unable to deal with what is, these human minds construct powerful narratives as totems to replace the unbearable with an alternate certainty. This type of strategy is at times effective, but sometimes these narratives can be damaging. Equally serious, they can function as obstacles to the happiness, freedom, or other life-affirming goods that would benefit not only the repressed subjects but their communities. Such is the case with photojournalism's ambivalence toward its artistic identity. Some see the folly of the photojournalist steadfastly rejecting art as its epistemology, like photographer W. Eugene Smith (quoted in Coleman 1998), who once wrote, "The first word I would remove from the folklore of journalism is the word objectivity." If the project of journalism, and by extension photojournalism, has always been at least in part to set the world right or to point to its inequities, then the repressive narrative that separates journalism from its artistic sensibilities and origins is the barricade preventing that goal. Consider as an example of the counterproductive influence of the professional ethos the simple image of a child in the Sudan who has collapsed on the way to a food distribution center



http://flatrock.org.nz/topics/odds_and_oddities/ultimate_in_unfair.htm.

She is naked, her emaciated limbs unable to support even her tiny frame. She has simply fallen head first to the ground, and as she squats there in a posture of prayer, exhaustion or despair, a short distance away a lone vulture patiently awaits. The child appears to be alone, her death imminent. In artistic terms this resembles a *momento mori*, the hour of one's death rendered aesthetically, with the Devil, or the Angel of Death equanimously looking on, ready to collect another soul. The painter paints for the same reason the photographer shoots: to evoke emotion, to move us, and to bring a moral message about the fragility of life, the plight of our fellow human beings. As Iris Murdoch (1970) notes, art enables, perhaps exclusively, the steady contemplation of the human condition. Without the artist's humanistic mission, what is the photograph for? Showing just one child to bring information regarding an expansive famine seems counterintuitive and inaccurate. The journalistic technique of "putting a human face on a social issue" is really a thin guise for a deeper, more emotional and artistic enterprise. Moreover, this photograph, which won a Pulitzer, did not win for its impartiality, nor for its ability to convey information. It won for its ability to move us to pity, the same reason a painting burns into the minds of generation after generation. Few can ever forget this photo once they have seen it. This example serves to highlight the grave consequences of denying the journalism-art connection as well as the advantages of embracing the artistic project.

Journalists repress the artistic at their peril. In a society ever more dependent on the visual to communicate, the embrace of narratives regarding objectivity, neutrality and the veracity of the lens do a disservice to the journalists as well as their publics. First, the creativity of the journalists themselves is frustrated. Photojournalists are hardly the hacks their critics make them out to be. They have a creative eye, cultivated and worked at vigorously as much as any artist. Journalists generally go into journalism with the idealism promised them by the story model discussed earlier. It is only the constraints of the information model that disillusion them to either leave the profession or find a creative outlet. Clearly in the examples given in this essay alone it is apparent that photojournalists pride themselves on visually interesting shots, not for technique's sake alone, but to communicate a message, and to move the audience. To say that photojournalists are mere manipulators, charlatans of the artistic gestalt is unfair. Equally important, photojournalism under this repressive shadow does the public a disservice in two important ways. One, it misleads the public into believing that images have verisimilitude to an objective reality for which there can be only one clear meaning. Thus it creates an unattainable expectation for photojournalists to fulfill. Two, using artistic images without artistic ends gives the public powerful messages without the ability to make meaning from them. At the least, it robs people of the opportunity to use images to increase their understanding of the world around them. This absence of meaning also can contribute to a voyeuristic culture who uses images carelessly or gratuitously. Clearly the artistic is not only an important and legitimate part of the journalistic identity worthy of cultivation, but its suppression or neglect renders the photojournalist unable to complete the task consistent to its *raison d'être*.

Embracing the artistic can hold transformative power for photojournalists and the public they serve. The promise of the artistic image is both fulfilling for the

photojournalist and enriching for society. First, the photojournalist is allowed to employ his or her creativity. In journalism, many practitioners give up and leave the business because they feel constrained creatively by the procedures and values of the journalistic enterprise.⁸ (Carr, 2004) Clearly photojournalists have a vision of the world they wish to express. Great photojournalists such as Dorothea Lange and Margaret Bourke-White have said as much. (Bourke-White, 1963; Tucker, 1984) When photographers go to the scene of some important event, they do so with a creative vision. They know that their pictures will be seen if they make them moving and unique, not just informational. As photojournalists become more comfortable with their ties to the artistic, it will liberate them to even more explicitly improvise and regenerate what are already quite meaningful visual experiences. This visual eye, as satisfying as it is for the photojournalist, can be revelatory for the public as well. Photographs can show not just the external environment, events and people, but a deeper level of meaning, one that readers can connect with, identify with, and use to understand not just the happenings of our world, but make meaning from them. As Hanno Hardt (2004) has said, photojournalists contribute to the narratives of their societies. The values embedded in an artistic vision can encourage and enhance that function. Moreover, photojournalism can also serve as a social tonic. Just as personal photographs connect groups throughout generations, across distance and despite difference, these public photographs have utility toward that same end. Photographs that embrace the artistic are more free to communicate social values, the values that hold societies together, give individuals within them a sense of belonging, and increase empathy, or greatness of soul, one of the important marks of a moral society (Bok, 1999). Yes, the artistic can much more greatly enhance the substantive meaning of practicing photojournalism for all concerned.

Since its inception, photojournalism has exerted a profound impact on the lives of its subjects and readers through powerful images—people, places and events whose elements are artfully combined to move, challenge and narrate. Employing an artistic technique such as staging or using essential building blocks from painting such as line, texture, and light provide the template for meaningful creative expression and link photojournalism inextricably to art. Moreover, news photographs often directly reference familiar painted images to put a fine, obvious but no less powerful point on an important interpretive statement. Thus photojournalistic images are not impartial slices of objective reality. If they were, they would carry far less weight. Rather, both photojournalism and painting use the symbolic, though their medium and materials may differ. Doing so inescapably means that photojournalism is employed in a linguistic practice, which is inherently meaning making. Symbols are not just reflective of culture and the meanings embedded in them, they are constitutive of them (Taylor, 1979). Thus, photojournalism's real work is in helping the public make sense of a complicated world, which bare facts alone are woefully inadequate to do. It forms memorable

⁸ One example of a journalist who has balanced this tension is Public Television's Jim Lehrer, who is scrupulous about the news/editorial separation. He has not voted in decades to avoid conflict of interest, but he has written some dozen novels to express his creative impulse.

images that represent significant ideas⁹. In a microcosmic sense, its delicate task is to bring someone's story to the fore in a way that is more than just or fair, but complex and meaningful. In a larger sense, photojournalists' task is to illuminate the human condition. Great photojournalism does not show; it expresses. For that reason, influential photojournalists are the ones who have artistic vision. Ryan (1995) gave high praise when she termed the work of photojournalist Sebastiao Salgado "painterly." (37) Undertaking this visual labor carries ethical implications, for making images that influence is both a great privilege and a grave responsibility. As Iris Murdoch (1970) has written, "Art is not a diversion or a side issue, it is the most educational of all human activities and a place in which the nature of morality can be seen. Art gives a clear sense to many ideas which seem more puzzling when we meet with them elsewhere, and it is a clue to what happens elsewhere....Art... reveals to us aspects of our world which our ordinary dull dream-consciousness is unable to see." (p. 87-88) We dare not stifle the creativity that makes moral imagination possible.

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⁹ Barbie Zelizer (2004) has written, "images do not become memorable on their own. They rely on decisions taken in newsrooms, with news editors, photo editors and page editors deciding to use new photos in routine and familiar ways."

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