

AFTERIMAGE

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EDITORIAL

This issue is not meant to be a pessimistic note about human nature, it is dedicated to Photography and War, a topic that, unfortunately, never goes out of fashion. In 1973 Donald McCullin asked the question *Is Anyone Taking Any Notice?* in a book published by the MIT Press. James Natchwey echoed it in 1999 with his *Inferno* (Phaidon). It took the events of 9/11/2001 to make the world press and readership pay attention, an attention that seems to have been carefully monitored. Although through this issue of *Afterimage*, you will find roots and room for frustration if not pessimism, we do hope that by providing a variety of points of view, we will help in the current debate. This magazine will always be open to your responses, and any information you, the readers would like to share with us and between yourselves. We need exchange of information and discussion. In this respect, text and images play a crucial role. Examples abound. David Douglas Duncan's *I Protest!*, mildly echoed Emile Zola's *J'accuse!* (but Duncan may not be any Zola after all!). In an editorial "Who Cares?" about Cornell Capa's first show of *Concerned Photographers* that Carl Chiarenza wrote in *Contemporary Photographer* (Vol. VI, #2, 1969), he evoked "social criticism, protest, and commitment", and asked "Will we look at the photographs in this issue and say, Who cares?"

More than ever the distribution of war images, or rather their lack of, and its corollary, "hard" or now what one has to call "soft" censorship raise questions of the utmost importance in our western democracies and cultures. The control of images has always been pointed at as the evidence of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships, from fascism, to stalinism (to remain in the western world, the one that patronizes, the one that colonized, now post-, or neo-colonizes, and "globalizes" the rest of the planet). We have just been through times when Americans could become "un-American" by the simple fact of stating facts, in the way as, in the past, Germans could be "unGerman", or Italians "unItalian" meaning then anti-Hitlerian or anti-Mussolinian, or some French people were unFrench by taking arms against a government collaborating with the invader after 1939, or by opposing the colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria. These people have always been called "terrorists" by one side, freedom fighters by the other, nothing new. China still has its "enemies of the people." Are photographers, film and TV crews that cast a critical eye on the deeds of foreign armies in foreign lands, on civil wars sometimes verging on genocides, "enemies of the people" too? What is our responsibility, as audiences and consumers, when people die under western fire while a TV plays the latest episode of *Friends*, *Survivor*, *The Bachelor*, *The Fear Factor*, or *Miss America's Pageant*? What adjective applies: normal, paradoxical, pathetic, ironical, logical, obscene, or plainly cynical? Here again, opinion may just be a matter of vantage point. Speaking of vantage points, if 9/11/2001, not 1973 (who of the spectators of the above-mentioned "spectacles" remembers or knows about 9/11/1973 anyway? Who cared? Who cares?), has changed something, if not "twisted or perverted" our perception of the world, it is the vantage point from which we are now looking. At least it did so for a while, long enough for some people to applaud, vote for, and then against ...war. Even one of the most famous and "decorated" photographers, James Natchwey, could write, four years after the publication of his coffee-table book, *Inferno*: "On September 11 history crystallized, and I comprehended that I had actually been photographing different phases

of the same story for over twenty years, the conflict between two worlds, between two value systems, Islam and the West." (*VII: War*, 2003).

How can someone who came out as a concerned, compassionate, and thoughtful human being suddenly turn into a crusader, with the same rhetoric as the one used a thousand years ago, the same Manichean approach of the world, one we are far too familiar with, one that only brings pain, violence and death? Pain and fear made Natchwey lose his philosophical and compassionate distance, and ignore two facts: Islam was a religion and a culture at its climax at a time when the rest of us were barbarians (so much for our "civilizing" role!), and it has been part of the western world almost since day one, and more now than ever, as much as Judaism, Christianity or atheism; as much as bigotry and enlightenment, wherever they come from. Secondly, taking the tree for the forest (MacBeth did) may transform the world and life into "a tale full of sound and fury, told by an idiot, meaning nothing." Peace and probably happiness are about building bridges. The destruction of one bridge, in Mostar, Bosnia, stood as a perfect metaphor for intolerance, stupidity, and the evil wind that blew over former Yugoslavia and brought destruction and death. War photographers were there to document the event; they became participants in the awakening of the western world to what was happening there, as well as in the making of a symbol. James Natchwey, Gilles Peress, Simon Norfolk, and many others brought images back from Rwanda so that the western world, the "civilized" world would not forget what it turned its back to and in some respect engendered.

It is hard after looking at Philip Griffith Jones's images in *Vietnam Inc.* in 1971, or more recently *Agent Orange*, Natchwey's portrait of that Tutsi man whose face was badly cut by three strokes of machete in *Inferno*, McCullin's black and white photographs of that starving albino boy in Congo, of that father with his two dying sons in the "dead body tent," or of that man carrying his dead wife in Bangladesh, all in *Is Anyone Paying Any Notice?*, Salgado's visual testimony of the disastrous drought in Sahel in his book for *Médecins Sans Frontière* (Doctors Without Borders), Gilles Peress's pictures of heaps of corpses in *The Silence*, that color photograph by Ron Haviv of a Serbian paramilitary kicking in the head a Bosnian middle-aged woman lying on a side-walk, to pretend that it did not happen, that all was staged. These images are there to remind us that it did happen, that it happens. If reportage images, and their epitome, war photographs and films do something, simply sometimes because of their content and the trigger effect they have on some of our basic instincts, it is to remind us that this happens, and this should be changed.

In order to provide our readers with information on the contemporary scene, this issue of *Afterimage* examines the latest trends in war photography. They originate with concerned photographers and artists that have tried to find different formats to express themselves, strategies that cross boundaries. Such examples have been Peter Hujar and his *Rwanda Project*, Luc Delahaye's portfolio, *History*, and the huge panoramic color prints shown in various festivals including ICP's triennial, Simon Norfolk's two latest books, Paul Seawright's *Hidden* (reviewed in these pages). Websites, books and exhibitions have been responses designed by some to address the narrowing of the normal channels of distribution and exposure. James Natchwey and VII, the agency he co-founded a few days before

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EDITORIAL (CONTINUED)

9/11, seemed another good illustration of this trend, one we had not focused on yet. Their show at the International Center of Photography as well as the recent release in DVD format of *War Photographer*, a 96-minute film by Christian Frei (Icarus Films, 2001) on Natchwey, a documentary that won many awards, triggered our interest. We tried to reach several practitioners and interview them; the result can be read in these pages.

The recent conference of the Society for Photographic Education allowed us to add two portfolios to this thematic issue. Both are the results of very thoughtful, in-depth and long-term projects. In *Reserve*, Joseph Mougel, a young photographer, and a member of the National Guard Reserve, retrospectively looks at himself and his colleagues. Showing them both in uniform and civilian clothes, giving back each individual their full identity, Mougel bridges the gap between the army and the rest of the population, reminding

LETTER

From Bill Arnold

I went to the pay what-you-want-night the opening week for the Whitney Bi-Annual. The line stretched around the corner, down 75th Street and around the next corner on to Park. All that anticipation without celebration, no one talked. After dutifully shuffling along for forty minutes, I started through the labyrinth. Having only paid a dollar, I did not feel robbed only saddened. People snaked along looking, I think hoping to find something. The next night I went back to the Whitney to see Peter Hutton's film *Skagafjörður*. I think that seeing magnificent beauty ennoble the soul and humbles the ego. When an artist shows us the grand and beautiful, we see that we have a place in it, even if though it be only a vantage point. The corollary is that when shown what debases us, our soul compresses and our ego inflates.

I went to the Jewish Museum and saw a wonderfully shiny boiler plate menorah. Also Jotti Jacobi's "Stieglitz smiling", 1938; "Marc Chagall and Daughter" laughing and "Paul Robeson", gentle, 1952. Her early work was developing, but with the war she did portraits which relied on the identity of the subject.

I also saw Loretta Lux show. I completely agree with Jill Conner's take. I wrote when I was there "When was the last time

us all of the primary role of the institution: taking care of its civilian population. Jane Alden Stevens went back to the killing fields of WW I and their cemeteries. The respectful and melancholic underpinnings of her many travels are conveyed through a series of black and white panoramic images recently printed in the book and catalogue, *Tears of Stone*.

The production of this issue has been possible thanks to a broad variety of collaborators either here at Visual Studies, or around the world, and I would like to sincerely and personally thank everyone: here at VSW, my assistant, Betsy Phillips who took the responsibility of a full page after discovering images of the liberation of a German concentration camp that her father-in-law had kept since the war; Sally Petty and Bill Johnson at VSW Research Center; Joanna Heatwole, Kristin Miller, Kris Merola, three graduate students here, who, in spite of their own deadlines were of a great help; VSW that finally provided us with new printers; Suzanne Bestler, a student intern at *Afterimage* and above

T.O.T.H.E.

it was fashionable to rob children of their childhood?"

I look forward to seeing the work of Christian Cravo, as well as Mimmo Jodice. I doubt that anyone, not even Sally Mann, can reach the essence of death. And I really liked Mark Osterman's tone. Such an interesting publication.

Diane Arbus: Revelations at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art December 2003

Entering this exhibition is like walking into a Richard Serra spiral. Immediately you slow down. There are many pictures and time to look. The sequencing is not chronological. Each picture stands alone, yet follows from the previous one like word in a sentence. In her very early work you can see her willingness to just try things. There are notebooks, lists and letters. Her thoughts and one dream are on the walls. In one of her self-portraits she looks back at us with an expression similar to other faces in the exhibition. She shows us what she sees in other people. But nobody smiles or seems to enjoy themselves except a "Jewish Couple in NY, 1963" and a few institutionalized women in 1970. Most of Arbus's people are proud to have been picked out. They accept their situations. No one is resigned. A few are wary, but not hostile. Everyone is calm. Some are monumental, most are just solid. All are looking straight at us or at Arbus, but she is looking down into her camera waiting and from the consistency of

all the writers and photographers whose work you will enjoy in these pages. Almost everyone we contacted responded and helped: thank you, VII, Bill Arnold, Alexandra Boulat, Christian Cravo, de-MO, Fotofest in Houston, ICP, Magnum, Paul Shambroom, Chris Steele Perkins, SPE, Anthony Suau.

Bruno Chalifour

PS: Our next issue will present reports on two international festivals, Fotofest in Houston and Contact 2004 in Toronto, an open letter to Susan Sontag on her *On the Pain of Others*, a response to A.D. Coleman's remarks (AI, 31-5) on our copyright/moral rights article (AI, 31-4), an essay on Christian Boltanski, and reviews by new reviewers.

EDITOR

her pictures, finding what she is looking for. It is not Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment", intoxicated by life's possibilities. It is a sober and stripped down view of this life. Everyone tries to be themselves, but gets beaten and dismissed in their efforts. She takes the time to notice and record. And she always sees the same thing. It is not by accident that the "Blind Couple in Their Bedroom, Queens, 1971" look at the camera in the same way that the other sitters do.

When these pictures were first exhibited, they were called "freaks". Now these same people are "misfits". We have changed. With time, they seem less threatening, but boxed in. Like us they have made their lives, but unlike most of us they stand out while we tend to blend in. Through Arbus's skill and the distance that time brings, we see the price that life extracts, if you believe that photography is a mirror. If photography is a pencil, then these pictures are a perspective, a honed point of view. In this show there are two pictures of crying babies. Terrified, overwhelmed and powerless. Arbus focused her camera and triggered the shutter. This, like all the other pictures, was what she was looking for. She found it, her vision. We, however, cannot live with these pictures, we can only visit them in a museum. They are adept and arresting. We see her view of life and, fortunately, know where it leads.

ON JAMES NATCHWEY AND VII

From *Inferno* to *War*: A Few Considerations on James Natchwey, VII, and War Photography.

Bruno Chalifour

"Even in the age of television, still photography maintains a unique ability to grasp a moment out of the chaos of history and to preserve it and hold it up to the light. It puts a human face on events that might otherwise become clouded in political abstractions and statistics. It gives a voice to people who otherwise would not have one. If journalism is the first draft of history, then photography is all the more difficult, because in capturing a moment you don't get a second chance."

Hundreds of years from now, when our descendents are trying to understand the time in which we are living, photography will be a crucial part of the record. In the present tense, photography is critical in helping create an atmosphere in which change is possible, not only possible but inevitable. It does this by making an appeal to people's best instincts: generosity, the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, the willingness to identify with others, the refusal to accept the unacceptable. In the long run, photography enters our collective consciousness, and more important, our collective conscience. It becomes an archive of visual memory, so that we learn from the past and apply its lessons to the future."

James Natchwey.

These were the words that James Natchwey pronounced as his receiving speech at Tel Aviv University last year when he shared the Dan David Prize (\$1,000,000) in the "Present" category with documentary film-maker Frederick Wiseman. The very first sentence of this statement alludes to what may be the challenge and the strength of the still image in the twenty first century: how it diverges from other visual media with which it competes for expo-

sure and attention, and how for over 150 years it has completely changed the way history has been recorded and the way it will be perceived. Photographers such as Natchwey, from Riis to Hine and many others, have provided the human collective memory and mind, with invaluable information for the future understanding of our times. Before photography, only the memory of those who could afford chroniclers would survive. Along with the advent of photography, the very focus of historians shifted; from *L'Ecole des Annales* to various schools in sociology and anthropology, scholars turned to vernacular culture, and the study of "how the other halves live" around the world. The least that can be noted here is an obvious synergy. However, and in spite of its accomplishments, documentary photography has been heavily stigmatized lately by postmodern doubts and well-deserved criticisms as well as by our culture of "infotainment" (or "entertainment"). "The news that is fit to print" may not always be the one that is fit to analyze and remember. There have been many examples, from *The New York Times* to *The Sunday Times* (1)—only to quote two of the most prestigious daily news providers—of news and images worthy of world attention that competed for the front page with fashion shows... and lost. The immediacy of television and video images, and our too easily passive fascination for the moving image, have deprived photo-journalists (as well as "pen" journalists) of their traditional audiences. Moreover the recent concentration of image banks and image distribution networks has resulted in the disappearance (de facto even if their names still survive in some few cases) of numerous photo agencies (Viva, Sygma, Sipa, Gamma, etc. ...) and the firing of scores of photographers. If the twentieth century saw a paradigm

shift, it is probably in the way that control moved from the word to the image. From the individual, to the corporate world, and even public spheres, everyone wants to control not only their own images but any image that could be used as evidence against any of their flaws or wrong doings. From Corbis to Getty or Hachette, a few private enterprises have made it their goal to hold the visual memory of the planet, and to control the distribution of visual information. In controlling the distribution of images they end up controlling their content. Only the ones that "fit" the definition of the content that is appropriate are distributed. The notion of "appropriate" can be greatly affected by what is "commercially correct." And the market has its reasons that do not always follow reason.

Some fifty years ago, a group of five reporters, who had photographed on the same front during the Spanish Civil war and WW II decided to take control of their own destinies and productions. From this idea "Magnum" was born in 1947. It still survives and its members are still among the elite of the profession although a few of them have been expressing reservations about decisions taken in the recent past concerning either the work produced by some new members, or the recycling of the prestigious archives in exhibitions, books, postcards and posters—a strategy that allows some financial gain but that undercuts the celebrated in-depth approach of the agency, often showing images outside of the context in which they were taken or they were supposed to be shown. It is a truism to say that a photograph without a caption is to a new audience what a blind person without a dog can be in an unfamiliar space. Documentary photographs shown in