

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

CONTENTS

NOTES FROM THE FIELD page 2

WAR AND PHOTOGRAPHY

ON WAR PHOTOGRAPHY...
by Bruno Chalifour pages 4-5

LAGER NORDHAUSEN
by Betsy Phillips page 6

HOLOCAUST PHOTOGRAPHY IN CYBER SPACE
by Brian Delevie & Isshaela Ingham page 7

ALEXANDRA BOULAT
interview by Joanna Heatwole page 8

FAZAL SHEIKH
essay by Kristin Miller page 9

PAUL SHAMBROOM
interview by Robert Hirsch pp. 10-11

ANTHONY SUAU
interview by Kristin Miller page 11

CHRIS STEELE-PERKINS
interview by Bruno Chalifour page 12

PORTFOLIO
Photographs by Joseph Mougel pp. 14-15

SHOWS REVIEWED pp. 12-13

BOOKS REVIEWED 17, 21-23

BOOKS RECEIVED page 23

NOTICES pp. 24-28

GALLERY
Photographs by Jane Alden Stevens page 28

Cover by James Natchwey, Bruno Chalifour, Betsy Phillips and Kris Merola.

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