

Reaching Beyond the Photograph, redefining the Press

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Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesphotographiques/3126>

ISSN : 1777-5302

Éditeur

Société française de photographie

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 30 novembre 2010

Pagination : -

ISBN : 9782911961267

ISSN : 1270-9050

Référence électronique

Thierry Gervais, Christian Delage et Vanessa R. Schwartz, « Reaching Beyond the Photograph, redefining the Press », *Études photographiques* [En ligne], 26 | novembre 2010, mis en ligne le 27 février 2012, consulté le 22 avril 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesphotographiques/3126>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 22 avril 2019.

Propriété intellectuelle

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- 1 Perhaps no technology has done more to alter the visual landscape of modernity than the appearance of photographs within the mass press. This visual landscape has also come to stand at the center of the formation of what we consider 'global consciousness.' As historian of photography Gisèle Freund remarked in 1936, 'Photography opened a window, as it were. The faces of public personalities became familiar and things that happened all over the world were his to share. As the reader's outlook expanded, the world began to shrink.'¹ It is the alchemy of the photographic image combined with the public vision and distribution goals of the press that work to create a global vision. This role has made photojournalism one of the most influential of photographic discourses.
- 2 Several of the articles in this new issue of *Études photographiques* began as part of a colloquium, 'Caught in the Act: Re-Thinking the History of Photojournalism,' organized in June 2009². The essays by Thierry Gervais, Jason Hill, Will Straw, and Vanessa Schwartz are indebted to that larger group's conversation. Some of the important materials explored at the colloquium include, at Rockefeller Center, the American government's Office of War Information's own sort of photojournalism (Laura Wexler), the seemingly incongruous status of war reporting in a fashion magazine (Becky Conekin on Lee Miller during World War II in *Vogue*), the important contribution of early newsreels to news practice (Magdalena Mazaraki), the effects of photography and film on modern city life (Stéphane Füzesséry), the shared aesthetics of photography and film as exemplified by the Film and Photo League (Christian Delage), the powers, perils, and possibilities of the representation of children as and in the news (Anne Higonnet), and more recent developments of amateur photojournalism on the web (André Gunthert) and the market for photojournalistic images as art photography in the work of Luc Delahaye (Richard Meyer). These papers addressed such problems as the powerful decontextualization of the press image, its broad and often unpredictable circulation, and its aestheticization - fundamental issues but ones that could not be fleshed out here due to the space

limitations of a single journal issue and the other publication commitments of the authors.

- 3 This issue of *Études photographiques* follows in the footsteps of that of June 2007, *La trame des images. Histoires de l'illustration photographique* [The Image Screen: Histories of Photographic Illustration]³. That issue challenged the accepted account of newspapers – assumed to be impartial – as simply coming together with recorded images, pointing to editorial choices dictated by competition and various economic criteria. Within this analytical framework, the authors analyzed photographic production in terms of its relations with the modes of distribution and emphasized how permeable the barrier is that ostensibly separates the two – photography and the press. Finally, the articles shone a spotlight on the aesthetic ambitions of news photographs, which harmonize with the editorial goals of the media of distribution. In this issue, number 26, the authors go even further, revealing the photograph's shortcomings as a news vehicle and the solutions adopted by the editors of illustrated newspapers and magazines to remedy its inadequacies. This issue also looks beyond the production of images to focus on the role of editors in chief and art directors, those men and women who every week labor in the shadows to construct the narrative of current events in images. For them, 'stolen' pictures, photographic sequences, and retouched photographs became means for articulating a position or, for some, a code of journalistic ethics.
- 4 More specifically, this issue examines how press photographs were connected to other visual modes such as cinema, studio photos, and radiophotography. Taken together, several of the essays demonstrate that the press and its images were not hermetically sealed as a singular discourse but rather were influenced by and helped to shape related image cultures. The articles highlight and help define photojournalistic practice in an intervisual field. This issue features articles where authors have paid careful attention to the archives of both the production and diffusion of images – reading the images as historians – and by doing so the images are contextualized and made to resonate with broader social and cultural issues.
- 5 The self-conscious 'image' of the photojournalist is described in his own representation in images in the press (Thierry Gervais and Vanessa Schwartz) and in the formation of such organizations as the National Press Association (Vincent Lavoie). But such self-consciousness also bears witness to the way the press itself, through a specifically visual rhetoric, questioned the neutrality of information thought to characterize modern press practice. This is particularly revealing as we often consider the project of photojournalism to have been an enthusiastic and naïve engagement with presenting 'things as they are.'⁴ The essays demonstrate this more complex awareness through such cases as the employment of obviously retouched images in radiophotography (Jason Hill), in the changing look of pulp crime tabloids (Will Straw), and in the strategic uses of black and white as opposed to color images (Audrey Leblanc). They argue that the history of photojournalism has always included a sophisticated critique of visual objectivity – long before such issues became generalized as part of the easy manipulation of images during the digital age. The press, they suggest, has even contributed to transmitting ideas about the fallacy of reliable information.
- 6 Finally, these articles look at practices associated with mainstream news sources (such as *L'illustration* and *Paris-Match*) as well as those established by intellectual tabloids such as *PM*. They insist that such genres as the pulp true crime image and red carpet and paparazzi photographs – the underbelly of the news industry – be pondered

alongside the bulk of what has stood as such legitimate fields of photojournalism as war reporting. In fact, while there is a continuous history of news and war reporting from illustration to photography, such dogged invasions of privacy and the construction of a certain kind of celebrity is specifically photographic. With this in mind, tabloid photography may be one of the singular contributions of photojournalism.

- 7 Although the relative novelty of the web as a means of distribution and the advent of digital photography has enlivened scholarship about photojournalism, it has also produced an archaeological impulse. The essays collected here should make clear that this transformation has also facilitated a fruitful return to the equally troubled pre-digital archive of the photographic press – challenged by the collecting habits of research libraries. These libraries often did not care to buy such publications as tabloids and were oriented toward the disposal of the hard copy of press publications in favor of their substitution by poor microfilms. The lack of consistent archiving practices of both photographers and publications, not to mention the continued commercial value of press images, serve to further decontextualize them from the moment of their production while making them inaccessible to scholars, except as discrete objects for sale. Despite these less than perfect research conditions, our return to the history of photojournalism in its heyday, suggests that it never really presented ‘things as they are,’ and that its advocates and practitioners actually knew this *and* tried to convey this information to their audience. It seems we are finally learning to see and hear photojournalism, as it really was.

NOTES

1. Gisèle Freund, *Photography and Society* (Boston: Godine, 1980 [1936]): 103.
2. ‘Caught in the Act: Re-Thinking the History of Photojournalism,’ international conference co-organized by Christian Delage and Vanessa Schwartz and funded and hosted by the Borchard Foundation at the Château de la Bretesche in Missillac, June 21-24, 2009. Catherine Clark, Ryan Linkof, and Curtis Fletcher provided research support for the colloquium.
3. *La trame des images. Histoire de l’illustration photographique, Études photographiques*, no. 20 (June 2007).
4. Mary Panzer and Christian Caujolle, *Things as They Are. Photojournalism in Context Since 1855* (London: Chris Boot, 2005).