

From: Susan Sontag, "In the Cave of Plato," *On Photography*.

over a teletype machine, consists of just six words: "B. B. B. B. B. B." Woodstock, Vietnam, Sapporo, London, by "LEICA." Crushed hopes, youth, anti-colonial wars, and white woods are alike, are equalized by the camera. Flaming photography has set up a chronic voyeuristic relation to the world which levels the meaning of all events.

A photograph is not just the result of an encounter between an event and a photographer; picture-taking is an event in itself, and one with ever more peremptory rights—to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on. Our very sense of situation is now articulated by the camera's interventions. The omnipresence of cameras persuasively suggests that time consists of interesting events, events worth photographing. This, in turn, makes it easy to feel that any event, once underway, and whatever its moral character, should be allowed to complete itself—so that something else can be brought into the world, the photograph. After the event has ended, the picture will still exist, conferring on the event a kind of immortality (and importance) it would never otherwise have enjoyed. While real people are out there killing themselves or other real people, the photographer stays behind his or her camera, creating a tiny element of another world: the image-world that bids to outlast us all.

Photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention. Part of the horror of such memorable coups of contemporary photojournalism as the pictures of a Vietnamese bonze reaching for the gasoline can, of a Bengali guerrilla in the

act of bayoneting a trussed-up collaborator comes from the awareness of how plausible it has become, in situations where the photographer has the choice between a photograph and a life, to choose the photograph. The person who intervenes cannot record; the person who is recording cannot intervene. Dziga Vertov's great film, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), gives the ideal image of the photographer as someone in perpetual movement, someone moving through a panorama of disparate events with such agility and speed that any intervention is out of the question. Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) gives the complementary image: the photographer played by James Stewart has an intensified relation to one event, through his camera, precisely because he has a broken leg and is confined to a wheelchair; being temporarily immobilized prevents him from acting on what he sees, and makes it even more important to take pictures. Even if incompatible with intervention in a physical sense, using a camera is still a form of participation. Although the camera is an observation station, the act of photographing is more than passive observing. Like sexual voyeurism, it is a way of at least tacitly, often explicitly, encouraging whatever is going on to keep on happening. To take a picture is to have an interest in things as they are, in the status quo remaining unchanged (at least for as long as it takes to get a "good" picture), to be in complicity with whatever makes a subject interesting, worth photographing—including, when that is the interest, another person's pain or misfortune.

More than half Daguerre's ep early 1890s when it f feasible to reprodu tographs in large ne this point, the conti image had to be tra ing—which meant th for newspapers to ei regular or even just ture reporters on the tration, *The Illustrate* all draughtsmen who at considerably lowe glass negatives in bi representing battles, events at the peak m artist had been the more exciting than which usually arrive record fast action an ings of the Special Ar if not altogether ficti not give an edge to tl cause the latter lost tl ticity when transferre

Thus it is no wo history of photograp gle photographer wh news reporting, or v gans for any length o tive exceptions to th by major wars, whic a few enterprising r and Fenton to embai campaigns. Even the Brady's two-year ca War with dozens of temporary effort, no ing machinery. Mor Washington and Ne out a large volume o still seems to have b uct. And if his gran ended in bankruptcy

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23

EARLY PHOTOJOURNALISM

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