

**Is it a photographer's responsibility to consciously
acknowledge and take ownership for how their images are received by an audience?**

Documentary photography as a platform for genuine visual narrative

- exploring the relationship between images,

discovery and the process within

photojournalism

Module code : ADAA6000

Module name: Independent Project

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Word count: 5500

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Summary of Topic

This dissertation outlines the ethics involved in selecting a moment captured in photography and subsequently how the method of portrayal affects the interpretation and understanding of the image. Furthermore, it will investigate the responsibility of the photographer in taking the image and their ownership in how the image is received, taking into consideration whether the image should have been taken.

Introduction

This dissertation outlines the ethics involved in selecting a moment captured in photography and subsequently how this image is displayed; does this documentation give sufficient context? If it was shown in an alternative setting would the way the story is portrayed, alter how it is viewed?

This research enquiry into photography discusses the captured moments and the narratives they unfold. Barthes' claim that a photograph is a visual representation and not real, always altering from its captured instance, introduces the fundamental debate: are images an absolute reflection of reality or a curated narrative shaped by the photographer's intention? This essay delves into the multifaceted world of photography, examining the ethical responsibilities entwined with the art of visual storytelling.

Chapter 1 will investigate what the photograph is and how this influences our perception of reality. It will develop an understanding of photography as a construct and fabrication of a moment in time and thus why it should not be trusted as a true reflection of reality. This discussion will draw on philosophical concepts, such as Plato's allegory of 'The Cave,' to emphasise how photography can manipulate representations, either revealing or concealing aspects of reality. Consideration of sensitive and controversial imagery will be used to engage with the idea that emotional responses are often intentionally encouraged by the

photographer. Chapter 2 examines the position of censorship, media representation, and the impact on viewership, which will be demonstrated through the context of conflict photography and photojournalism. This chapter aims to emphasise the ethical considerations that are present in the process of documenting conflict, further exploring the role photographers play in the responsibility of publishing sensitive imagery. Chapter 3 considers the challenges faced and the intricate relationship between consent and creativity in documentary photography. It underscores the moral obligation that is often overlooked in capturing images – the idea of consent. This will be examined through visual examples, such as Dorothea Lange's infamous, '*Migrant Mother*', to help analyse the complexities of consent and the potential for exploiting the vulnerable.

Research will include the writings of Plato's Allegory of the Cave and Susan Sontag's, *Regarding the Pain of Others* and *On Photography*, in addition to, Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*. These perspectives on photography, explore the notion that photography is not a true representation of reality. Research will be drawn from various philosophical and theoretical concepts in the fields of photojournalism, examining ethics and cultural analysis, utilising texts such as John Berger's, *Another Way of Telling*. Media and representation will be critically examined, focusing on social theory and exploring alternative

approaches to visual narratives, through David Hesmondhalgh's and Jadon Toynbee's, *The Media and Social Theory*.

This dissertation will ultimately consider the role of the photographer and their responsibility in taking the image. Is it appropriate to hold the photographer responsible for an image captured, and subsequently, entailing accountability for the image's impact and the way it is perceived and interpreted? This thesis will come to a conclusion regarding the impact of the photographer, their role in taking the image upon the viewer and their understanding of it.

Chapter One – The Importance and Impact of Context

An image can be defined in many ways, most commonly as a representation of the external form of an object of art or a “picture in your mind” (OED.com, 2023). It is a visual representation; “whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see” (Barthes, 1999, p.6). Barthes introduces to us the concept that a photograph is not ‘real’ in the sense that, once a brief moment is captured it is instantaneously dissimilar from itself, and thus almost as though, that moment could have never existed.

Photography can be viewed as a construct, where every photograph we encounter is an exact reflection of our true reality, but alternatively, it is a fabrication of real life and the everyday (Helmerdig, 2023). It is possible, that the imagery seen is a curated narrative woven by the individual photographer’s choices and intentions. The idea of photography as a construct encourages us to question our presumptions about visual truth and the burden this can carry. This is especially prevalent in the era of digital images and post-truth narratives, which describe the documentation of and concern regarding, disagreements over public truth claims; the public is more impressionable to arguments that present in line with their own bias, emotions and beliefs, rather than facts (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Consequently, it further encourages us to consider the levels of interpretation and symbolism that are ingrained in every image that is taken.



Fig. 1: *Plato's Cave*, (1999).

To illustrate this point Plato's, *The Republic: Book VII* can be considered, whereby he describes the story of 'The Cave' (Adam, 2010). This conversation between Socrates and Glaucon demonstrates how the process of photography can be one metaphor; the journey is more figurative than physical. 'The Cave' (figure 1) depicts individuals living, chained, in a cave only watching shadows on the wall reflecting from the light above. In this allegory, they mistake these moving shadows for reality (Adam, 2010). As Plato's allegory compares with photography, photographers can disguise and manipulate representations to either disclose or conceal aspects of reality. The images are not true depictions, but alternatively, decisions made by the photographer (Sontag, 1979, p.4). Alike the cave dwellers, the audience of a photograph may mistake it for the entire

truth. Ultimately, the owner of an image can use their images to tell a story or elicit emotions, sometimes distorting reality and how the chosen moment is framed.

Every photograph is the product of the photographer's perspective. The very act of choosing a moment to capture in itself is a form of composing your narrative, constructing a version of reality. In Sontag's book *On Photography* she talks about how photography is but a representation of reality. "Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it" (Sontag, 1979, p.5). This reiterates the idea that what is seen is not the absolute truth. The doubt is necessary as photography is inherently subjective; two photographers could capture the same scene with contradicting outcomes. This nature of perception and interpretation is also reliant on multiple factors: context, social and cultural perspective, ethics, representation and truth. The compositions exhibited by photographers can be deliberately manipulated to convey bias of narrative or to provoke an emotional response from the viewer (Barrett, 2000, pp.50-51). However, in doing so, the photographer could potentially exclude other elements that may have highlighted the full context and story.

The imagery shown, specifically documentary photography, becomes challenging to interpret when the authenticity and integrity of photography are

in question. The reliability of journalism and art is uncertain when defining photography as a representation of a *moment in time* (Barthes, 1999, pp. 88-89). Sontag discusses the ethical implications specifically when representing conflict, contending that photographers hold a level of responsibility in the portrayal of truth and context behind such images. “To suffer is one thing; another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate” (Sontag, 1979, p.21). Responsibility must be acknowledged, whilst still withholding creative integrity; the intention behind the images captured is questionable.

Happy accidents or chance in photography refer to the unplanned moments that often occur in the process, which could also be described as the *decisive moment* (Cartier-Bresson, 2014). This often helps to enrich an image, as it has unexpected and unprovoked outcomes. However, this can create issues when we are discussing the intentionality and responsibility of a chosen image. Robin Kelsey explores the nuances of the ethical implications of capturing moments. “Chance has threatened to fill the disconcerting gap in the medium between intention and result” (Kelsey, 2015, p. 9), encapsulating the unpredictability as well as the deliberate intentions that impact the final result. Additionally, “Time and again, efforts to ensure occupational or consumer safety have had to reframe the accidental as the inevitable” (Kelsey, 2015, p.9). This highlights the

anticipation of potential issues arising from the social narrative that is perceived in each image displayed; there will always be someone who does not agree with the intention or is foreshortening their perspective.



Fig. 2: Barnardo's Campaign (1999) "Heroin Baby"

This idea can be demonstrated by the controversy that surrounded Barnardo's campaign of 1999 *Giving Children Back Their Future* and of 2003 entitled, *Child Poverty* (Quainton, 2013). These advertisements used visually difficult imagery to illustrate the abuse and neglect that some children experience,

highlighting how the consequences of this, present themselves in adulthood.

Heroin Baby (figure 2) depicts a baby in a destitute living environment, appearing to inject himself with a syringe. The caption carries the story of this image, *John Donaldson, Age 23* (figure 2), insinuating that John is now a heroin addict due to the circumstances of his negligent upbringing. The series of images produced for this campaign intended to create an emotive response, gain traction, and therefore raise awareness. It has had a provocative effect and holds shock value, utilising the idea that distressing imagery, can be supported by the theory that empathy leads to moral action (Hoffman, 1991). The use of realistic and disturbing imagery is intended to create a guilt complex with the viewer, hence increasing the chances of donating. However, this imagery has the potential to create misleading interpretations about the complexities of children who have grown up around addiction and poverty, emphasising the importance of context. Similar to Plato's cave, *Heroin Baby*, displays how our perception can be detached from the truth. Is this imagery too sensitive to be published? Or does the intention override the possible negative responses from the audience? Whether imagery should be censored due to its content is questionable or whether this in turn forces a standardised narrative, ultimately restricting individual thought and creativity.

Chapter Two – Censorship, The Role of Media and Impact on Viewership

In the face of the post-truth news in the media, and the challenges concerning conflict photography in journalism, censorship and representation of these reports on sensitive global issues must be addressed. Firstly, it is important to consider the ethical framework, context and intention, exploring the line between advocacy and sensationalism.

The documentation of conflict through photojournalism and thus its representation in the news can be defined as a spectacle or a form of visual entertainment (Gross et al., 2003, pp.95-96.). Viewers may refer to modern representations of war, as being consumed by detached spectators. This idea is that the public consumes suffering as entertainment.

Modern society is aware of global conflicts, exacerbated by online media coverage (Batchen et al, 2012). It urges the viewers to enquire into the reasoning for sharing graphic and disturbing imagery. Unfiltered media brings the reality of war and suffering into everyday life. The relentless barrage of distressing content on news and social media, ultimately leads to desensitisation and a disconnection from the gravity of the conflict (Stallabrass, 2020).

Sontag criticises labelling reality as a spectacle, overlooking diverse experiences and reactions beyond the privileged parts of the globe, and suggests “perversely, unseriously, that there is no real suffering in the world” (Sontag, 2013, p.85). This viewpoint implies that people have a lack of genuine understanding and engagement with the suffering that is experienced around the world. Sontag portrays this argument as dismissing the responses and realities outside of the affluent, educated population, “living in the rich part of the world, where news has been converted into entertainment” (Sontag, 2013, p.85). This highlights the risk of generalising people’s ability to respond to suffering by not representing the broader population, ultimately disregarding the diverse array of reactions shaped by various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Berger proposes that “publicity is the culture of the consumer society. It propagates through images...society's belief in itself” (Berger, 2008, p.139) and, yet, at the same time, it ingrains that belief with a halo of authority, suggesting that societal constructs and cultural conditioning influence our perception of art and images. Disparities exist, especially concerning accessibility to sources of information; the consumption and possible commodification of photographs of suffering transcends socio-economic boundaries (Hesmondhalgh & Toynbee, 2008). This could arguably be due to the ubiquity of graphic images that are produced by the widespread availability of online media.

According to *The Media and Social Theory*, the consumption of media is more related to quantity or the ‘perceived quality of that consumed’ (Hesmondhalgh & Toynbee, 2008). The overall consumption is not concerned by the consequences, for those who possibly may be affected by it. From the context of the power of photojournalism, Hemondhalgh and Toynbee discuss how those publishing these images overlook the recognition of the individuals involved. In essence, the subjects of the photographs as well as the audiences consuming them, are reduced to mere instruments of the process (Hesmondhalgh & Toynbee, 2008). The rise in digital connectivity means that information and images are accessible to a much wider audience; people can respond and witness conflicts around the globe, practically, in real-time. Studies suggest that constant exposure to violent and distressing content and narratives can cause a lasting psychological impact, regardless of their location or status (Krahé et al, 2011, pp.630-645). In many cases, these studies have proposed that desensitisation, characterised by diminished emotional responsiveness through repeated exposure to media violence, may correlate with reduced anxious arousal and increased pleasant arousal in response to violent content; it causes sensationalism of conflict (Krahé et al, 2011, pp.630-645). As mentioned, there is potential for this subject of imagery to cause subsequent negative effects on a person’s aggressive thoughts and behaviour.

As documentary photography evolves into the digital age, the challenge lies between distinguishing impactful narrative, advocacy and sensationalism. A nuanced, responsible representation of conflict that respects its subject matter and audiences' experiences is crucial. Fundamentally, the morals and values of the photographers need to be addressed. How do they choose to represent their photographed conflicts in the media; what exactly is the intention of their forthright approach to photographic documentation?



Fig 3: Nilüfer Demir (2015) "Aylan Kurdi"

The photograph of Aylan Kurdi, captured by Nilüfer Demir during 2015's refugee crisis is a notable example (see figure 3). This image portrays a Turkish paramilitary police officer finding the body of the 3-year-old, which

washed ashore near the Turkish resort of Bodrum in September 2015 (Smith, 2015). Demir's image is not a sophisticated one; not in the framing nor its expression of creativity. However, that is not its purpose. Perhaps more important than the quality of an image, is the achievement of capturing the event (Hicks, 1973, p.26). Alternatively, the message is quite clear and concise; a child 'has died and he's being picked up like a washed-up piece of wood on the beach. There's nothing more violent' (Laurent, 2015). The image portrays an essential truth.

Furthermore, figure 3 provokes strong emotional reactions globally, after circulating the news and online. Demir's image caused controversy due to the distressing nature of the imagery, mainly raising concerns about the ethics of sharing an image that sensationalises and possibly exploits a tragic situation. The shock value of the image almost became separate from the content, sacrificing depth for appearance. Through this media portrayal, it becomes a testimony of 'distant suffering and an inadequate carrier of the meaning of suffering' (Chouliaraki, 2006, p.50). Further ethical considerations were raised in the act of publishing the image itself, especially when considering the significance of selective representation. There is a delicate middle ground where the dignity of the deceased must be respected in addition to highlighting the shocking realities and results of ongoing conflict.

Demir's image (figure 3) prompts debates on intentional subject selection for evoking emotional impact, highlighting the need for regulations in publishing sensitive imagery. Possibly, to promote a personal bias or chosen narrative; in turn not providing all context. Rather, an image like this can easily be taken out of context and therefore misinterpreted. It underscores the ongoing debates surrounding the presentation of sensitive and distressing images in documentary photography. Is there a need for a form of regulation when publishing sensitive imagery, or rather, stricter censorship?

A photographer's responsibility extends to presenting reality responsibly, within its appropriate context (Neidich, 2003). In *Memory of Fire*, the power of images, aesthetic and ideological effects of war photography are discussed. "...it felt wrong to arrange photographs of corpses and the wounded in a way that made cogent sense... to judge how they could be best placed to produce a coherent formal ensemble" (Stallabrass, 2013, p.23). When a photojournalist chooses to publish images of atrocity, which often make people feel unsettled, it is to provide those who have experienced the most misfortune, with a platform. The intention is to give a voice back to those whose atrocities have been captured by the lens.

To regulate and mediate imagery is to ‘occupy a middle point’ between two different positions, ideally creating an intersection of dialogue (Debrix & Weber, 2003, p.21). Mediation of imagery through censorship can enhance viewership experiences, but it risks skewing the representation of reality (Ritchin, 2009). A depiction that is far from the truth. The mediation of imagery means there is a standard being enforced. There would need to be an authority to regulate and enforce the mediation, which results in a loss of authenticity and honesty.

..the act of giving testimony against atrocity tends to go beyond the mere authentication of horror and to imply the act of bearing witness, by which we assume responsibility for the events of our times, ‘not merely to narrate but to commit oneself.... to take responsibility for history or for the truth of an occurrence’ (Zelizer, 2000, p.10).

The act of collectively remembering an event means the experience of the victim is recognised in history as significant (Stallabrass, 2017).

Photojournalism coverage of modern warfare bears witness to monstrosity, as a form of testimony (Hartman, 1994, p.24), playing a monumental role in shaping public opinion. Photography of conflict is ultimately hoping to collate the expectations and fears of millions and give a moment that connects us all with some profoundly significant event in history, by using ‘symbolic overtones and larger frames of reference that endow it with national or worldwide significance’(Goldberg, 1993, p.135). It is arguably standing as an attempt for justice. In essence, the documentation is bearing witness, it implies that there is

no best way of depicting or thinking about atrocities, but that the very fact of collectively paying heed is crucial.

The circulation of images like Aylan Kurdi, can cause trauma and provoke lasting negative impact on one's sensibilities, emphasizing the importance of obtaining consent as well as retaining the dignity of individuals depicted in photographs captured. Issues that arise when we begin to approach these concerns, highlight further complications; Aylan Kurdi was deceased when photographed, meaning permission is unobtainable. The correct approach may be one from the attitude of, *for the greater good*, whereby prioritising the message it has the potential to spread, over the privacy of those involved. The intertwined relationship between journalism and humanitarianism requires navigating objective facts and subjective experiences, emotional responses, and nuanced narratives that individuals weave in the face of adversity (Bunce et al., 2019). Understanding the entire impact of crises requires not just an extensive assessment of objective facts, but also recognising the variety of ways in which people navigate their own understanding amongst challenging circumstances. Furthermore, it is important to consider the role media and public authorities play (Batchen et al, 2012) alongside the notions of claiming responsibility and whether this hinders freedom of expression and creativity.

Chapter Three – Consent and Creativity

Photography and photojournalism are a means of communication, capturing moments in time whilst portraying experiences and emotions. The ethical duty, often overlooked, revolves around consent. Behind every shot lies a dynamic interplay of power, trust, and representation, posing crucial considerations regarding the photographer's vision and the subject's autonomy.

In exploring the realm of censorship in photography, it's imperative to navigate the nuances it encompasses. There is a distinction between explicit and implicit consent. Explicit often refers to the wider commercial production of photography where it is more likely for a contract to be signed or another form of direct consent. Implicit consent however is an occurrence more commonly found in photojournalism; it raises questions of ethical dilemmas and often hinges on contextual cues that imply an individual's willingness to be photographed (Klaviyo Help Center, 2023). Implicit consent is common in public settings. For example, an event is spontaneous and the circumstances frequently do not lend themselves the time nor the practicality in being able to secure explicit consent. However to allow for complete creative freedom it is arguable that photographers take advantage of the inability to obtain consent from their subjects.

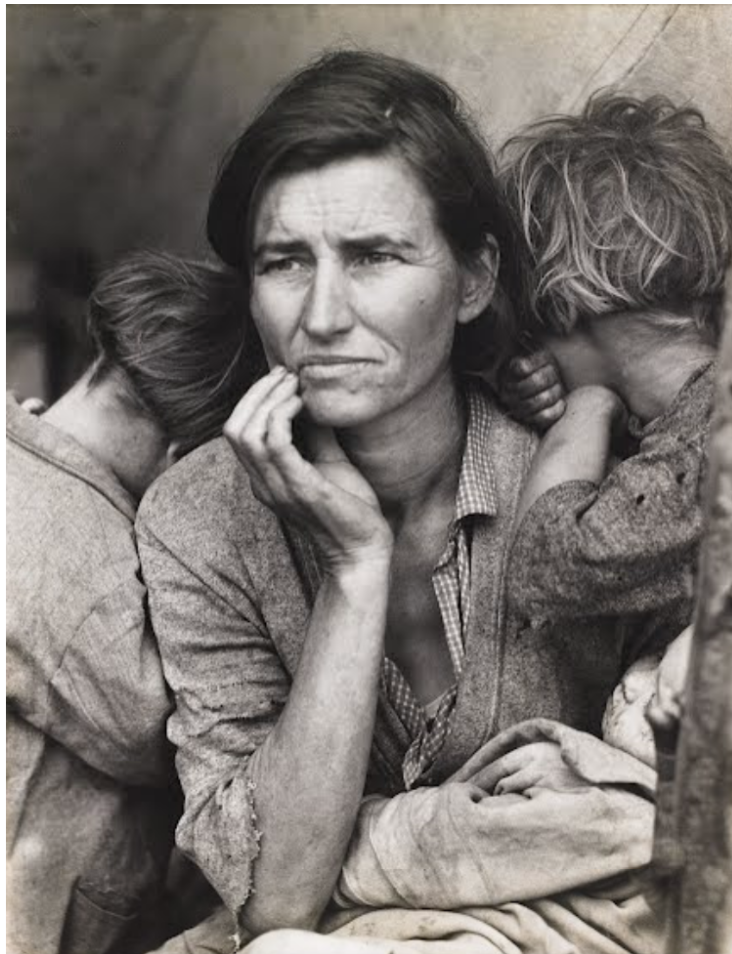


Fig. 4: Dorothea Lange (1936) "Migrant Mother"

Figure 4 can be used to delve into the scope of consent and creative licensing in photojournalism. *Migrant Mother* (see figure 4) by Dorothea Lange captures the plight of poverty during the Great Depression in America and remains an iconic representation of this period. It illustrates a mother holding her children; the mother is making an expressive gesture, a mixture of concern and determination, whilst the two children are facing away. Lange's photograph quickly became a symbol of family, deprivation and the hardship experienced (Goldberg, 1993, p.136.). In *The Power of Photography: How Photography Changed Our Lives*, Vicki Goldberg discusses the palpable bond that exists

between a mother and her child; “something sacred in the bond ... so basic to all human experience, so charged with the potential for tenderness and compassion” (Goldberg, 1993, p.136). This emphasises how powerful the message was when the image was published, that such relationships have potential to transcend any hardship of the Great Depression. Lange has captured a moment that embodied the essence of motherhood; the protective and nurturing instinct, as well as, how the children find security in their mother's embrace during a time of struggle and adversity. Due to the depth of the connection portrayed in the imagery, audiences can resonate and empathise with the basic maternal connection depicted, something that most people have experienced during their lifetime.

Despite, the positive connotations held towards Lange's documentation of the Great Depression, there has been a stigma surrounding the image, raising concerns regarding consent and portrayal (Goldberg, 1993 pp.222-223).

Florence Thompson was the migrant mother, Lange's originally unidentified subject. Thompson was portrayed through the lens of human suffering and grief, and eventually, in the year 1978 she spoke out against the photograph; “I'm tired of symbolizing human poverty when my living conditions have improved” (Robin, 1999). Furthermore, she displayed her regrets towards allowing Lange to take the image, exclaiming how she could not and did not receive any dividends from the attraction and fame that the image received (Davis, 2020),

regardless of the role Thompson played in its success. Did Lange take advantage of Thompson's vulnerable circumstances therefore for personal gain? Consent can only be provided when the person is in a fit state to give it as this can be questioned in both the images of Aylan Kurdi (figure 3) and Thompson with children (figure 4).

Adam Coleman (1987, cited in Hadley, 2022, pp.529–530) suggests that photojournalists too often hide behind legal conventions that exist, stating that they take advantage of the fact that a person's right to privacy is lost once they have stepped out into a public space. Photographers may often employ self-justifications for not obtaining the subject's consent when the public shows interest or raises concerns. Lange, in an article she wrote for *Popular Photography* (1960) entitled *The Assignment I'll Never Forget*, recalled the experience, describing the interaction between her and Thompson as having “a sort of equality about it”, but how can this interaction be one of equal nature, when one is a well-dressed, well-educated woman with a camera and the other a poverty-stricken migrant (Heron and Williams, 1996, p.152). In 1978, Thompson stated that Lange had never asked her name, specified her intention was not to sell the images, and never sent Thompson a copy, to which she previously had agreed (The Los Angeles Times, 1978). Arguably, Lange betrayed any initial trust and respect for the subject's autonomy, especially

when Thompson had the right to revoke consent post-capture. Sontag suggests that this display of exploitation is unavoidable by the nature of photography,

...to photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed (Sontag, 1979, p.10).

Sontag contends that photography can violate subjects, turning them into symbolic possessions. The act of being photographed therefore can be considered an intrusion, violating their own self-perception. Similarly, the lens of the camera could be seen as the barrel of a gun, just like when a camera is shot, it is comparable to a life being taken. Therefore, it is arguably a subliminal form of murder (Sontag, 1979, p.10), suggesting that by capturing significant or distressing moments in time, the act of photography becomes far more than ordinary documentation.

In reference to figure 3, Aylan Kurdi's image was captured without the ability to obtain any explicit or implicit consent; both were absent. The father, who had also lost his wife and two sons during this attempt to flee was unaware of the images being published (Moss, 2015). He only later stated, "We want the world's attention on us, so that they can prevent the same from happening to others" (Al Jazeera, 2015). However, this statement was akin to consent only after the fact. Similarly, *Migrant Mother* (figure 4) was captured in a moment of vulnerability, raising the questions as to whether Thompson was ever in a

position or had the authority to provide consent. *Aylan Kurdi* and *Migrant Mother* spotlight the blurred line between historical significance and respecting the subject's control over representation. Feasibly, practitioners could unintentionally exploit subjects as a means of cultural construction; capturing a moment is a form of understanding the world through their perspective (Berger & Mohr, 1995, p.93). The photographed image belongs to a specific moment, and yet the material relation between the image and its representation becomes prevalent without much consideration – a trace of reality.

Photojournalism has the potential to create narratives that benefit a cause and spread a positive message like wildfire. “They seem to summarize such complex phenomena as the powers of the human spirit or of universal destruction” (Goldberg, 1993, p.135). Through a singular moment captured in time, a photographer can encapsulate intangible aspects of human existence. They have the potential to embody the magnitude of significant events in visual representation, appealing to and resonating on a universal scale. Whilst upholding the ability to evoke a range of powerful reactions, photography has the capacity, to become a symbol of seminal moments. It catches the significance and ephemerality that is ever present in the human experience.

“All photographs are memento mori”; the act of capturing an image is the engagement and act of participating or involving yourself in the captured

narrative and mortality (Sontag, 1997, p.11). By nature, photography is paradoxical; a singular moment is preserved, frozen in time, emphasising the transient nature of time, and how existence is temporary. These semantic images no longer represent an individual or complex abstraction. Instead, they comprehend the ways of simply being human (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007). Despite the controversy regarding consent, this could be the supporting factor that allows the documentation of these scenarios to be acceptable, enabling creative freedom for those recording the moments.



Fig. 5: *The Valley of the Shadow of Death* (1855)

In juxtaposition, *The Valley of the Shadow of Death* (see figure 5) which was taken in 1855 by Roger Fenton (Fenton, n.d.), mirrors dilemmas concerning creative licensing; are these circumstances intentionally created or chosen, to drive a particular narrative or agenda? Figure 5, was taken during the Crimean War, depicting a barren ravine, littered with cannonballs which were fired from the Russian defences. This is an image documenting a landscape that has recently been witness to conflict (Merian, 2006). However, it was later revealed that Fenton rearranged the cannonballs for visual impact, intentionally creating an appearance that the result of war on the landscape was larger than it was. The image, despite appearances, was not candid. Fenton, further was trying to play to the national sentiments that surrounded the poem, *The Charge of The Light Brigade*, by Alfred Tennyson, which speaks of the ‘Valley of Death’ (Alfred, 2017). This raised concerns regarding, the authenticity and ethical boundaries regarding capturing an image of, and the manipulation of the desolate lowland that was a part of active war, challenging the balance between creative expression and the responsibility of representing truth. However, the notable successes of Fenton’s imagery are acknowledged by his ability to represent the horror of conflict, without presenting an image that displays bloodshed and grief. It speaks volumes through simplicity, as one can envision subsequently what would have occurred without directly confronting it.

Understanding the implications of being photographed is paramount in the discussion around consent. It is important to create balance within a practice; allowing for creative expression whilst still acknowledging the ethical responsibilities that are ever present when documenting.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 *The Importance and Impact of Context*, delves into the complexities of photography as a construct, emphasising how every photograph is a reflection of the photographer's choices and intentions rather than an absolute representation of reality. It draws parallels with Plato's allegory of 'The Cave,' highlighting the potential for photographers to manipulate representations, either disclosing or concealing aspects of reality. The discussion underscores the subjective nature of photography, influenced by factors like context, social and cultural perspectives, ethics, representation, and truth. Robin Kelsey's exploration of the ethics considered in capturing moments, especially controversial visual imagery and the potential issues that could arise regarding social issues, can be viewed in Bernardo's campaign (see figure 2). This case study prompts reflection on whether such imagery, may lead to misleading interpretations and the importance of considering context in photographic narratives. Overall, the chapter builds an argument around the nuanced responsibilities of photographers in acknowledging and taking ownership of how their images are received by an audience, particularly in the realm of documentary photography. The interplay between intention, responsibility, and the potential impact on perception and interpretation is central to this exploration.

Within chapter 2 *Censorship, the Role of Media and Impact on Viewership*, the focus lies on the challenges and ethical considerations related to censorship, media portrayal and its consequences on the audience. Through the role of photojournalism, it explores the intentionality behind documentation and addresses the line and balance between advocacy and sensationalism; referencing Susan Sontag and Julian Stallabrass to examine public consumption and the psychological impacts of constant exposure to distressing content. It highlights the responsibility of photographers to present sensitive content responsibly, illustrating the importance of appropriate context and dignity of the subject, such as the controversial and distressing image of Aylan Kurdi. The complexities of regulating and mediating imagery and the implications it imposes on maintaining authenticity is important in terms of nuanced and responsible representation, as well as, the responsibility of photographers in shaping public perceptions.

Chapter 3 *Consent and Creativity*, explores the power dynamics, trust and representation involved in documentary photography, particularly the challenges involved in obtaining and gaining consent and the impact this can have on the creative process. The chapter uses case studies representing experiences of humanitarian crises and warfare, highlighting concerns that surround consent and portrayal. Adam Coleman's perspective is touched upon

to help demonstrate the questionable nature of practices that lack consent. It also elaborates on Sontag's consideration that photography can be an act of violation. Overall, various examples and perspectives contribute to the argument that a photographer could claim responsibility in regard to consent, ethical considerations, and the impact of image reception in documentary photography.

To conclude, the world of photography is one filled with intricate nuances, including truths that intertwine with subjective perceptions, as well as, the constant interplay with capturing a moment and representing its narrative responsibly. Documentary photography can shape narratives to fit a photographer's intentions. However, it is not the responsibility of the photographer alone to acknowledge how an image is received by an audience; there are far more interventions that can influence a person's response and interaction with imagery. It is not the full responsibility of the photographer. Nonetheless, it is a continuous journey to tell the truth, where a photographer's responsibilities converge with the ethical responsibilities, autonomy of their subjects and transparency.

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