

# Commentary

*Paul Martin Lester, Editor*

Several years ago while researching the history of photojournalism, I read an anonymous and mean-spirited description of a photographer as “a reporter with his brains knocked out.” Probably within the same era, Albert Henning in his 1932 textbook, *Ethics and Practices in Journalism* explained why a photojournalist should never be confused with the superior mind of a reporter: “Newspaper photographers can scarcely be considered journalists . . . They do not come into contact with the problems that daily face the man or woman who goes forth to gather facts . . . It is difficult to see wherein the education required of a news or editorial writer would be necessary preparation for the class of work photographers are required to do” (pp. 61–62).

It is that stereotype of someone involved with the field of visual communications that we have all, no doubt, struggled to overcome as academics even to this modern day. Most of us come from professional backgrounds. Whether in the fields of graphic design, photography, film, video, web design, and so on, our decision to join the ranks of academia was not without personal sacrifices as we struggled to learn how to convert our creative, qualitative minds into organisms that produced acceptable studies and writings for university professors.

Perhaps you felt, as I did, the sting of bias against someone with merely a photography background during college seminars. And later

as a faculty member working towards tenure and promotion, I realized that the personnel document for my department, originally crafted by former “reporters with their brains intact,” had to be changed to reflect the contributions made by those from visual fields. Gradually, the requirements for promotion were changed and have been improved, reinforced, and validated by younger faculty members who understand the power when words and images, and those who produce them, work together.

Stereotypical thinking always comes from narrow-mindedness. And narrow-mindedness is always thwarted by exposure to great thinkers. Recent conversations with two of our own deep thinkers, Michael Carlebach and Claude Cookman, inspired me to consider the books I have collected over the years.

I never fully understand students who stand in long lines immediately after a final exam is taken to sell their textbooks back to a bookstore. The books I have kept, these friends that have guided and inspired me, are still a part of my intellectual growth. My only regret is that, for the most part, word-oriented and biased professors never learned to appreciate the level of intellect expressed in words and images by these cataloguers of popular culture. Fortunately, these deep thinkers influenced me through their works in books that I purchased as a student and that still remain on my bookshelves (in no particular order):

*Gramp* by Mark and Dan Jury, Russell Lee; *Paul Martin* by Roy Flukinger; Larry Schaaf, and Standish Meacham; *Wynn Bullock*, *Hearts of Darkness* by Don McCullin; *Diane Arbus*, *André Kertész*, *Son of Bitch* by Elliott Erwitt; *Photojournalist* by Lewis Gould and Richard Greffe; *Visual Impact in Print* by Gerald Hurley and Angus McDougall; *Pictures on a Page* by Harold Evans; *Photojournalism* by Cliff Edom; *Photojournalism* by Ken Kobre; *Henri Cartier Bresson*, *The Americans* by Robert Frank; *Clarence John Laughlin The Personal Eye*, *Minor White*, *Jacob A. Riis*, *Down Home* by Bob Adelman; *Minamata* by W. Eugene Smith; *High School U.S.A.* by Jim Richardson; *Bruce Davidson Photographs*, *Ward 81* by Mary Ellen Mark; *Wisconsin Death Trip* by Michael Lesy; and *Suburbia* by Bill Owens.

## In This Issue

I have been accused of being overly optimistic as if that is a negative trait! However, I might be criticized for stating the obvious: Visual communications has deep thinkers as evident, once again, by the entries in this issue. Collaborative teams have published important professional and perceptual articles in this issue.

The problems with moving from analog to digital archives are explored by Lucinda Davenport, Quint Randle, and Howard

Bossen. Sometimes analog does not trump digital.

An experiment on how our minds process what we see is adroitly explained by Andrew L. Mendelson and Zizi Papacharissi. There may be more of a fine line between reality and fiction than we would care to believe. The third research paper in this issue is concerned with body language and television's familiar news faces reported by Andrea Miller, Renita Coleman, and Donald Granberg. Communicated media bias may be more than a simple perception of political leaning.

And in keeping with the theme of this commentary, please note the extensive bibliographies offered in all three research papers. You may want to keep this issue for the resources each paper offers alone.

Jean Trumbo in her column, "By Design," gives us her usual thoughtful insights on the meaning of visual culture for academics and professionals, inspired by the tragic shootings at Virginia Tech last year.

Daniel D. Morrison and Claude Cookman show us new ways to think of photojournalism and typography with an elegance of style and an economy of verbage by their thoughtful reviews.

Dennis Dunleavy once again provides a useful and timely

collection of writings, made more so by his sharply written annotations.

Finally, there are of course the photographic portfolios that make this academic journal unique. Over the years, my procedure for reading the *Visual Communication Quarterly* has always been to first study the photographs within each portfolio, taking my time with their textures, richness of content, and explanatory captions and then I settle down with the research papers over a quiet and unhurried lunch. Please do not forget: color versions of most of the pictures presented here are a few clicks away on the journal's website, [vcquarterly.org](http://vcquarterly.org).

As mentioned earlier, the work of Bill Owens was an inspiration to many of us. It is indeed a pleasure to introduce you to his recent work that is just as edgy and funny as almost 40 years ago. I am also pleased to report that he is a member of our Editorial Board.

Back in the 1970s, Jerry Lodriguss and I were photographers together with the *Times-Picayune* newspaper in New Orleans. I will never forget what he said to me once while we were on a bridge overlooking a Mardi Gras parade, "I can't believe we get paid for doing this." We both moved on to other situations, but I have kept up with his work as an award-winning sports photographer with

the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and his technically astounding images of deep outer space. Jerry is a national authority on astrophotography and has written books on the subject which are available from his website.

Finally, no matter how you feel about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, looking at the far-away eyes of a handful of soldiers portrayed on the cover and inside these pages is a moving, sad experience. Suzanne Opton has performed a useful service not only for those of us who should be confronted through her work, but also for the soldiers she respects through her sensitive portraits.

This issue, in your hands, represents the end of my first year as editor of this journal. My thanks to the members of the Editorial Board, members of the Visual Communication Division of AEJMC, all those who volunteered to review submissions, all those who submitted work, Beth Schad, production manager at Taylor & Francis, and xtine, art director and fellow faculty member at Fullerton. I can't believe I get paid for doing this.

## Resource

Henning, A. (1932). *Ethics and practices in journalism*. New York: Ray Long & Richard Smith.

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