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Commentary

Paul Martin Lester

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Commentary

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\$433,000

According to the magical, mysterious, mindsuck known as Google, that same dollar figure was recovered by the U.S. Department of Labor in back wages for Walt Disney World employees; was the energy cost saved by the Milford, Connecticut public school system; the price of a four bedroom, four full-bathroom home in Branson, Missouri; the record for donations for the 9Cares Colorado Shares food bank; the average salary for a major league baseball player; the award given by a judge for a woman's broken ankle; the amount that a federal employee allegedly stole from the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania; and the cost *per minute* for the motion picture *Lincoln*.¹

According to the Internet Movie Database, the 150-minute movie released in 2012, directed by Steven Spielberg with the London-born actor Daniel Day-Lewis in the title role, cost \$65 million to produce—about \$433,000 a minute.

The curious cultural conundrum we currently coexist with is this: As attention spans shrink to the equivalent of 140 characters, movies are made at ever-expanding lengths. Besides *Lincoln*, even longer films released in 2012 included *Django Unchained* (165), *The Dark Knight Rises* (165), *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (169), and *Cloud Atlas* (172).

But even though the British director Alfred Hitchcock, himself the subject of two biopics in 2012 for a total of 189 minutes, once famously commented, “The length of a film should be directly related to the endurance of the human bladder” and I am happy to report that I made it through *Cloud Atlas* without having to excuse myself, *Journalism & Communication Monographs* has been ahead of the trend in long-form, attention-expanding offerings.

The piece in your hands is, of course, no exception.

From the Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Gregory A. Borchard, Lawrence J. Mullen, and Stephen Bates teamed to produce “From Realism to Reality: The Advent of War Photography” for this issue. As a photojournalism undergraduate major, a photographer for a newspaper, and a photography instructor, any article that lists the keywords “Photojournalism, media history, Civil War, and illustrated press” gets my immediate focus. With about 18,500 words and 14 illustrations, for them, a picture is worth 1,321 words. Images are gaining.

PRINTERS' INK Mar. 10, 1927

PRINTERS' INK Mar. 10, 1927

畫意能達萬言
CHINESE PROVERB
One picture is worth
ten thousand words

ROYAL
BAKING
POWDER
ABSOLUTELY PURE

ROYAL
BAKING POWDER

Avoid Substitutes

NO ALUM

"Make a Cake for Bobby"

—that's what this car card said *every day* to many millions of women. It reminded all mothers *every day* of a sure way to give a treat to their own children. And hundreds of thousands got an extra thrill with their next cake making because of the happy expression of the boy on the car card.

The moral of this story is that the same influence could not be created even with the same picture in any other advertising medium.

In the magazines, the reminder would not be often enough to change the average housewife's baking habit. In the newspapers, with no color, there would be no appetite appeal. On a twenty-four sheet poster, seen for only a few seconds at a time, the great appeal of the expression on the boy's face would be lost.

H. Barnard
National Advertising Manager.

STREET RAILWAYS ADVERTISING CO.

Figure 1. A 1927 *Printers' Ink* advertisement was the source for the cliché, "A picture's worth a thousand words."

Courtesy of *Printers' Ink*.

I've written elsewhere about the origination of the ill-conceived 1,000-words cliché, but redundancy for the right reason is no vice:

Fred Barnard, an advertising executive in the 1920s for the Street Railways Advertising Company, was trying to convince advertisers in *Printers' Ink* that pictures get a busy streetcar rider's attention and should be included with text messages so he added a picture of a boy with a big smile in his advertisement. To give his argument some credibility, a bit of phony ancient philosophy was added: CHINESE PROVERB: One picture is worth ten thousand words.

For Barnard, the phrase meant that a picture of a boy's smile enjoying his mother's treat is equal to 10,000 words explaining the benefits of baking powder. Over time, of course, it took 9,000 fewer words to describe a photograph.

However, whomever Barnard hired to create the Chinese translation got the proverb a bit wrong. Instead of stating that a picture is *worth* ten thousand words, the literal translation is,

“A picture’s *meaning* can express ten thousand words.” Worth implies a crass, commercial connection, while the meaning of something is subjective and personal. To say that an image is worth any number of words is a false equivalence, but meaning puts words and pictures on a respectful, equal footing.

I trust that you too will respect the partnership as you delight in reading, as I did, the words and pictures that tell the story of the history of a medium that has allowed me to sit on my couch writing these words next to my sleeping Weimaraner puppy across from my wife who is pregnant with our twin boys and who sits at the dining room table as she works on Chapter 14 of her book for Routledge until we stop to watch another episode of “Breaking Bad.”

When I was selected as editor of *Monographs*, I vowed to make the publication more visual. Welcome to my world.

Paul Martin Lester
Editor-in-Chief

Note

1. The sources used in the making of this commentary can be found at <http://jcmmonographs.org/433000.html>.