

### Photography Synthesis Prompt

According to poet Allen Ginsberg, “Whoever controls the media—the images—controls the culture.” Although photography has existed for less than 175 years, photographs are now certainly ubiquitous. N. Scott Momaday states that “Photography, at its best, is authentic art, an expression of the creative imagination informed by an original perception of the world. It is said that the camera, by virtue of its very presence, alters reality. Too often a photograph is simply the static record of an image – an object, a figure, a place – in bare definition. A photograph commonly records a façade, the surface of a moment, a nick in geological time. And as such it is necessarily a distortion, a kind of visible plane beyond which we cannot see. But in the hands of an extraordinary artist the camera can penetrate to a deeper level” (from Brassil et al., *Analysis, Argument, and Synthesis* 30).

Carefully read the following seven sources, including the introductory information for each source, and consider the film clip. Then synthesize information from at least four of the sources and incorporate it into a coherent, well-developed essay that develops a position based on the impact photographs have on our experience and perception of the world. Refer to the sources by their titles (Source A, Source B, etc.) or by the descriptions in the parentheses.

Make sure that your argument is central; use the sources to illustrate and support your reasoning. Avoid merely summarizing the sources. Indicate clearly which sources you are drawing from, whether through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. You may cite the sources as Source A, Source B, etc., or by using the descriptions in parentheses.

- Source A (Plato)
- Source B (Sontag)
- Source C (Ephron)
- Source D (Goldman)
- Source E (Cox and Forkum)
- Source F (Woodward)
- Source G (Murray)
- Source H (*The True Meaning of Pictures*) film clip

## Source D

### **Putting things in perspective**

by [Lisa Goldman](#) on Thu 20 Jul 2006 10:07 AM IDT

The image below caused a huge storm of outrage in the Arab blogosphere. Huge. You wouldn't believe how huge. The widely-read Gulf-based Palestinian blogger who was the first to post it received so much traffic that he had to move the photo to another server. Many others, including several I know personally, posted it and expressed their disgust. Israeli children taught to hate! Lebanese children are dying and they're happy! They're no better than... (fill in the blank, I don't want to go there). Below is the story behind the photo - from the source.



*Israeli schoolgirls write messages on missiles*

I phoned Sebastian Scheiner, the Israeli photojournalist who took the photo for Associated Press (AP), explained that the image had given a really terrible impression and asked for the context. He sketched it out quickly and fluidly, but asked me not to quote him. So I spoke with Shelly Paz, a Yedioth Ahronoth reporter who was also at the scene and agreed immediately to go on record. She was quite shocked to learn how badly the photo had been misinterpreted and misrepresented; and she told me the same story Sebastian did, but with more details and nuance.

The little girls shown drawing with felt markers on the tank missiles are residents of Kiryat Shmona, which is right on the border with Lebanon. And when I say "on the border," I'm not kidding; there's little more space between their town and Southern Lebanon than there is between the back gardens of neighbouring houses in a wealthy American suburb.

No, how close is it really?

Well, there's a famous story in Israel, from the time when the Israeli army occupied Southern Lebanon: a group of soldiers stationed inside southern Lebanon used their mobile phones to order pizza from Kiryat Shmona and have it delivered to the fence that separates the two countries.

Anyway.

Kiryat Shmona has been under constant bombardment from South Lebanon since the first day of the conflict. It was a ghost town, explained Shelly. There was not a single person on the streets and all the businesses were closed. The residents who had friends, family or money for alternate housing out of missile range had left, leaving behind the few who had neither the funds nor connections that would allow them to escape the missiles crashing and booming on their town day and night. The noise was terrifying, people were dying outside, the kids were scared out of their minds and they had been told over and over that some man named Nasrallah was responsible for their having to cower underground for days on end.

On the day that photo was taken, the girls had emerged from the underground bomb shelters for the first time in five days. A new army unit had just arrived in the town and was preparing to shell the area across the border. The unit attracted the attention of twelve photojournalists - Israeli and foreign. The girls and their families gathered around to check out the big attraction in the small town - foreigners. They were relieved and probably a little giddy at being outside in the fresh air for the first time in days. They were probably happy to talk to people. And they enjoyed the attention of the photographers.

Apparently one or some of the parents wrote messages in Hebrew and English on the tank shells to Nasrallah. "To Nasrallah with love," they wrote to the man whose name was for them a devilish image on television - the man who mockingly told Israelis, via speeches that were broadcast on Al Manar and Israeli television, that Hezbollah was preparing to launch even more missiles at them. That he was happy they were suffering.

The photographers gathered around. Twelve of them. Do you know how many that is? It's a lot. And they were all simultaneously leaning in with their long camera lenses, clicking the shutter over and over. The parents handed the markers to the kids and they drew little Israeli flags on the shells. Photographers look for striking images, and what is more striking than pretty, innocent little girls contrasted with the ugliness of war? The camera shutters clicked away, and I guess those kids must have felt like stars, especially since the diversion came after they'd been alternately bored and terrified as they waited out the shelling in their bomb shelters.

Shelly emphasized several times that none of the parents or children had expressed any hatred toward the Lebanese people. No-one expressed any satisfaction at knowing that Lebanese were dying - just as Israelis are dying. Their messages were directed at Nasrallah. None of those people was detached or wise enough to think: "Hang on, tank shell equals death of human beings." They were thinking, tank shell equals stopping the missiles that land on my house. Tank shells will stop that man with the turban from threatening to kill us.

And besides, none of those children had seen images of dead people - either Israeli or Lebanese. Israeli television doesn't broadcast them, nor do the newspapers print them. Even when there were suicide bombings in Israel several times a week for months, none of the Israeli media published gory photos of dead or wounded people. It's a red line in Israel. Do not show dead, bleeding, torn up bodies because the families of the dead will suffer and children will have nightmares. And because it is just in bad taste to use suffering for propaganda purposes.

Those kids had seen news footage of destroyed buildings and infrastructure, but not of the human toll. They had heard over and over that the air force was destroying the buildings that belonged to Hezbollah, the organization responsible for shelling their town and threatening their lives. How many small children would be able to make the connection between tank shells and dead people on their own? How many human beings are able to detach from their own suffering and emotional stress and think about that of the other side? Not many, I suspect.

So, perhaps the parents were not wise when they encouraged their children to doodle on the tank shells. They were letting off a little steam after being cooped up - afraid, angry and isolated - for days. Sometimes people do silly things when they are under emotional stress. Especially when they fail to understand how their childish, empty gesture might be interpreted.

I've been thinking for the last two days about this photo and the storm of reaction it set off. I worry about the climate of hate that would lead people to look at it and automatically assume the absolute worst - and then use the photo to dehumanize and victimize. I wonder why so many people seem to take satisfaction in believing that little Israeli girls with felt markers in their hands - not weapons, but felt markers - are evil, or spawned by an evil society. I wonder how those people would feel if Israelis were to look at a photo of a Palestinian child wearing a mock suicide belt in a Hamas demonstration and conclude that all Palestinians - nay, all Arabs - are evil.

And I wonder why it is so difficult to think a little, to get it into our heads that television news and photojournalism manipulate our thoughts and emotions.

Links to anti-Israel websites with that photo placed prominently next to the image of a dead Lebanese child have been sent to me several times. Someone has been rushing around the Israeli blogosphere, leaving the link to one particularly abhorrent site in the comments boxes. And it makes me really sad that the emotional climate has deteriorated to this point.

The moderates of the Middle East are locked in a battle with the extremists. And look what they did to the moderates. Without blinking, without thinking, we fell victim to the classic "divide and conquer" technique. We work hard for months and years to build connections, develop our societies, educate ourselves, promote democracy and free speech... And they destroy it all, in less than a week. And we let them.

<http://ontheface.blogware.com/blog/archives/2006/7/20/2142505.html>

## Source E

### First Casualty



## Source F

### **Cheap Technology, Shoddy Morals**

By RICHARD B. WOODWARD

November 20, 2007; Page D7

"Peeping Tom," the chilly 1959 movie by Michael Powell, concerns a young psychopath who uses a 16mm movie camera to film his victims while he is killing them. The close-ups of terror that cross the faces of the women as he impales them on a spike attached to his tripod are for him a source of curiosity and pleasure.

Widely reviled on its release -- and credited with destroying the commercial career of Powell, a venerable English director ("The Red Shoes") -- the work was rediscovered by Martin Scorsese and other cinéastes in the 1970s. They argued against its earlier detractors, noting that in its exploration of the dynamics between movie images and violence, criminality and voyeurism, the film was shockingly ahead of its time.

A casual reading of the news illustrates just how prescient "Peeping Tom" has turned out to be. There was the recent arrest in Nevada of Chester Stiles, who allegedly filmed himself raping a three-year-old girl. This sensational item overlapped with the capture in Thailand of Christopher Paul Neil, a Canadian schoolteacher accused of posting on the Internet images of himself having sex with a series of children. Neither would in all likelihood have been jailed so quickly had they not photographed themselves performing these atrocities. Both Pekka-Eric Auvinen, who shot eight people in a Finnish high school on Nov. 7, and Cho Seung Hui, murderer of 32 at Virginia Tech this April, made confessional videos for broadcast or posting online -- so called massacre manifestos -- designed to outlive their suicides.

A partial list of others happy or compelled to document their own crimes in recent years would include the young arsonist in California who took pictures of himself against the background of the infernos he set. Or the Canadian joy-riders who cruised around Vancouver at night, shooting frightened pedestrians with paint-ball guns while recording themselves whooping it up during these escapades. Or Sean Gillespie, a neo-Nazi who videotaped himself in 2004 firebombing an Oklahoma City synagogue as part of his racist promotional package. Or the three teenagers arrested last year in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., for clubbing with baseball bats three homeless men, one of them to death, events the boys commemorated by making a video.

The guards at Abu Ghraib also participated in this trend. Their abuse and torture of Iraqis might have remained whispered rumors within the prison walls had they not taken pictures for their own amusement. The members of al Qaeda who beheaded Western journalists and aid workers are a subset as well. They staged these murders for the cameras in hopes the group's ruthlessness would be broadcast to viewers everywhere. Like the lead character in "Peeping Tom," they took pleasure in filming and watching playbacks of their own cruelty.

Many other shadowy sides of human behavior -- formerly hidden from public view because they were regarded as either aberrant or just plain shameful -- are now freely recorded and exposed for everyone to witness, often with considerable attention by the participants to *mise en scène*.

Movies of sex between adults, acts once considered so private that few dared to film them, have proliferated wildly for sharing over the Internet. In the November issue of Portfolio magazine, Claire Hoffmann reports that amateur sex tapes distributed on YouPorn and other free sites are cutting deeply into the income of the professional sex industry. Some of these swingers

may be striving to emulate Paris Hilton, whose lucrative career as a novel form of dubious celebrity derives from a 2001 bedroom tape shot by her boyfriend. But most of these couples will have to be satisfied just with the nonmonetary rewards of knowing that a camera has preserved their moments of extreme intimacy for an international audience of voyeurs.

The growth of these many new varieties of confessional video, self-programmed with either violent or sexual content, has coincided with the expanding reach of surveillance technology. Never have so many of us been so willing to have our lives overseen by cameras. Being photographed in public places -- sometimes with one's tacit consent but usually without -- is now so routine that hardly a day goes by when urban or suburban dwellers don't have a chance to catch sight of themselves on a video monitor.

While a minority still protest or at least openly worry about these Orwellian intrusions, most of us have internalized modes of surveillance so deeply by now that they are a source of either comfort or entertainment. "Big Brother" is a larky reality show and an international franchise. After two rounds of jihadist bombings in Britain, in which the suspects were later identified by surveillance cameras, citizens there seem to have meekly accepted the country's 4.2 million closed-circuit TV cameras. Only a few seem to mind that the routes of up to 35 million cars a day can be tracked around London as part of a national surveillance system.

The photographic image has the power to magnify the everyday by the simplest means. To star in your own movie requires only that you press a button on the picture machine. The dirt-cheap costs of producing digital images and linking them to global networks that promise a vast audience -- or that cater to a particular "community" -- have no doubt contributed to these mutations in mores. The hundreds of niche audiences developed by cable television and the millions created by the Internet are responsible for a wilderness of images.

The rapist who trains a camera on his actions, the high-school friends who exchange sexually graphic cellphone images of themselves -- even the egregiously off-key "American Idol" contestant -- have this in common: They have decided that any risk they run of self-incrimination or public scorn is worth the thrill of seeing their own image looking back at them.

The one encouraging note may be the number of pedophiles, jihadists, hate groups and numbskull criminals willing to trap themselves in their own world-wide web by providing boastful evidence of their lawbreaking online.

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