

# Example of photography of london and societal aspects how is the city written ess...

[Design](#), [Photography](#)



## **Introduction**

Over the last 200 years, we as a society have gone through many changes. We've seen two wars on our own soil, 9 monarchs and 54 prime ministers. We've even seen the Chanute's hang glider of 1896, and we can now compare the first steps of the invention to what is now an aeroplane. Although there aren't many of us in London now who were present for the 1st World War or the 2nd, photographs of soldiers in their trenches are available for the worlds viewing. The subject of death in photography has also been treated with some detail and this has increased the accessibility of certain images on various mediums. These have become accessible from a museum or even with the use of a new invention, the internet. I will be looking at how the creation of the internet and modern day devices such as mobile phones, portable cameras and tablets have changed the way photography has been both used and viewed by the photographer and the audience as well as a treatise on the photography of death and war which has changed our view on the art.

## **Amateur photojournalism/ Twitter and Instagram**

Sontag speaks about some photographers being set up as scientists and others as moralists, with the scientist making inventories of the world and the moralist concentrating on the hard cases. I think this theory still exists today, although the point is not exactly alike but we do have the line between photographers and so called 'iphonographers'. In the last few years we have seen the rise of social networking sites such as Facebook, which you could use to share status updates with friends, and also upload pictures and

allow others to comment. From there we have had Twitter which is mainly about the text rather than pictures but users have now used Twitter as a link to their Instagram, a mobile phone app that lets you upload pictures to your followers whenever or wherever the user is. This app highlights Sontag's theory of photography-as-scientist as there are 'real' photographers who use this app to show off their latest work, where as there are also users or 'Iphonographers' who use Instagram to document almost every aspect of their lives. Katherine Markovich explains how she feels regarding Instagram and the users who chose to 'capture the simpler things in life'

" So now that you're a professional photographer, you need to capture the simpler things in life. All of them. It is your duty as an artist, after all. And there is nothing simpler than your pretentious foodie excursions. "

When using photography as a medium of documenting reality, you can easily lose the essence of what is true. This has brought about the democratization of photography however especially with the arbitrary use of Instagram as an example. Everyone can now take photographs and upload them in real time without much care for detail or quality.

## **Photography of death**

In her seminal article, , Photography After the Fact, Erina Duganne deals with the subject of death in photography especially in the light of the work of the award winning photographer Luc Delahaye who worked on several subjects but who is chiefly remembered for his stunning portrayals of death in the Afghanistan war against the Taliban. This can also be compared with the views of the city of London as taken by tourists who can practically

document every aspect of the city. The photography of bodies is an important historical tool which may be used subtly and with a certain sense of panache.

With the exhibition 'History', Delahaye attempted to free himself from the shackles of photojournalistic work describing himself as an 'artist'. However Duganne argues that the distinction between the two is not so easy and that Delahaye remains essentially a photojournalist although his work has matured quite intensely from its early beginnings. The 'Taliban' pictures are definitely a case in point since Delahaye's documentation of the last Taliban offensive and the subsequent deaths and violence which are depicted quite starkly in his range of photography on the subject are actually examples of superb photojournalism although one could also argue that these are art as well.

Delahaye argues that the images which he has taken in the exhibition, 'History' need to be seen in a different way and not just a portrayal of simple news events. However the manner in which these images tend to shock is also of paramount importance since it reveals a photographer who is attempting to convey a message with his photographs, albeit with certain violent effects that show a shocking visual aspect to all that is contained there. In fact when interviewed by Duganne, Delahaye insisted that he wanted his work to be portrayed as reticent and personal, reaffirming the view that the photographs are images which should be pondered over and not taken as a simple capturing of a particular event. Of course there are problems with such photographic essays since these will always be viewed in a certain sense as depicting particular news value since Delahaye has always

been associated with his work as a news photojournalist.

Interestingly, Delahaye's work in History has been compared to other photographers who have chosen dead bodies as their subject. One particular exhibition is by Sally Mann which was reproduced for The New York Times in 2000 entitled 'What Remains' where the images of bloated and decaying bodies elicited a strong reaction from art critics. The debate which is ongoing indicates that photojournalism can be accepted in a context of violence whilst when art is in the equation, the debate turns around on its axis and is totally different. Mann's photographs were intensely criticized by Sarah boxer also of the New York Times due to the fact that some of these were doctored to produce maximum effect. This cannot really be compared to Delahaye's work where the photojournalist produces images of striking reality although these can also be described as art. Duganne sets much store on the transformation of Delahaye's work from photojournalism to art and how this has been resisted by some critics and commentators. Although this is a very debatable argument, the article does seem to imply that most of the changes made by Delahaye in his style of work are intrinsically cosmetic but the end result is that one can only give an opinion on a photo when faced with a moral dilemma. Are the images portrayed trying to convey a message or are they art in the very sense of the work. Thus the great question once again sets itself. What is art? If one were to analyse Delahaye's work on a purely aesthetic and visual sense, this would merely be described as a photographic reproduction but when one observes it holistically, it does attempt to convey a message, in this case the message has to do with the pity and horror of war and how this reduces humans to

nothingness. In that sense, Duganne observes that Delahaye's work has reached its intended goal and conclusion. This also comparable to what Susan Sontag says in her essay especially with regards tying up photography with imagery and art as a whole.

Duganne delves much deeper into the credentials question, can an artist be described as a journalist or vice versa? Interesting she recounts an incident where Mann wanted to photograph some bodies at a mortuary but was denied access on the pretext of being an artist. When she returned and presented her credentials as a photojournalist she was allowed to enter and take photos to her heart's content. This shows that an artist has restricted parameters in which to operate if described as such whilst a news journalist can gain access to areas which are restricted to the common mortal. Of course this is the same with Delahaye, he was allowed access to the war zone in Afghanistan to take photographs without any sort of restrictions due to his press credentials. If this was not the case, he could never have taken the images as he took them and that is an obvious advantage for his work. Duganne then brings up the interesting point of dignity in death. She mentions an article by Susan Sontag where it is argued that the faces of European and American dead are usually obscured due to respect for their families but this is not necessarily the case when depicting the dead of other nationalities. This enables photojournalists to be perhaps more crude and inhumane when it comes to the dead of other nationalities as is the case with Delahaye's portrayals of the dead Taliban. This moral dilemma is something which seems to preoccupy Duganne and she sets much store on the issue when comparing Delahaye's work with Mann's grisly images of

anonymous dead. There is another moral dilemma here, are the dead really subjects for artistic expression? Duganne is non-committal on this but she cites Delahaye's work as a prime example where subtly and artistically creative photography can actually dignify the dead. For the anonymity and fairness of death is actually given some meaning and personality by the dead Taliban soldier who appears to meet his Maker with a certain amount of dignity in this remote and wild place. The comparison with the photography of the London 7/7 bombings could not be more instructive.

Duganne then compares Delahaye's work with another photojournalist, Alfredo Jaar who also finds problems with expressing himself in the photojournalistic field. Obviously this is another topic for debate and here we are once again brought face to face with the familiar themes where the photographer has to ask him/herself what is the real meaning behind the imagery and the photographs themselves? The debate then turns to preserving the memory of those photojournalists killed on assignment or in action and the restrictions placed on the photojournalist in carrying out work. Essentially Duganne argues that this is the main difference between a photojournalist and an artist. The former is restricted by the exigencies and requirements of the news media and what is requested by the editor whilst the latter can express him/herself to the heart's content without fear of editing. The issue of censorship also comes in here but essentially an artist is free to delve into various topics without any need of restraint. That perhaps is the intrinsic struggle which is faced by photojournalists when they express the wish to become artists.

## Conclusion

Sontag's theory about class isn't so applicable now as it used to be before due to the over exposure of the photographs being shared instantly, although it still can be relevant. Most photography based on London isn't about class, since Instagram has created the trend of 'empty' photos which are only faceless documents of particular settings and imagery. The documentation which permeates the city of London has changed over the years since photography has also changed accordingly. The photography of death is an important part of the city's heritage but workers have also documented this over the years. London is a vibrant city full of life and is indeed a photographer's paradise as Sontag exemplifies in her seminal essay, 'On Photography'.

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