

Pictures in the Press: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

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My purpose here is to consider photography's relationship to journalism, and to question whether that relationship is undergoing a fundamental change, as many claim, as we head into what has been called the era of post-photography. I approach the topic from three perspectives, corresponding roughly to the past, the present, and concluding with what may be a trajectory for the future. For a view of the past, I draw on the results of a study of twentieth century Swedish journalistic discourse, concentrating on the front pages of the daily press.¹ For the present, I turn to the discussion of digitized photography and the questions it has raised within journalism about the limits and nature of photographic truth. This discussion reverberates with the reflexive stance in much of the current debate about journalism's relationship to the events it reports and the society it reflects in its current practice. This suggests a new position for press photography, derived from the photograph's capacity to frame journalistic practice and, by extension, the journalistic institution in reflexive terms.

The image is central to journalism. The journalistic "text" is in the first place a visual construction, a more or less well-integrated package of words and pictures, which is seen by its public, even as it is read. Further, visualization serves as a defining principle of journalistic practice. John Hartley argues that the founding *medium* of journalism is vision, the primary means of making sense and order from the inherent disorder of that which is newsworthy. As he points out,

The most important metaphors of journalistic method, used by journalists themselves to make sense of what they do, are metaphors of sight: eyewitness news, watchdogs, in the spotlight, insight, discovery, revelation – metaphors of bringing to light or looking. (1992: 140)

The *real*, the ostensible subject of journalism, is in discursive practice secondary to its visualization. The report is authenticated with reference to what was *seen* – the accounts of reality that journalists have experienced. The report that the public sees, then is constructed to give an accurate rendering (supported by various forms of visual documentation and evidence) of what the journalist saw.

Describing journalism as a social and discursive construction is certainly not new, particularly for media scholars concerned with discourse and textuality. The perspective is also a familiar one to many journalists, who nevertheless tend to be offended by the concept of news as a product, shaped and constructed by professional routines and institutional guidelines (Schudson 1991). The centrality of vision in that process is, perhaps, less familiar. My reasons for raising the issue of visualization in the context of journalistic discourse are twofold. First, is the need to acknowledge the paradigm shift that is taking place within the human sciences, where the picture and its correlates in visual culture are replacing language and written culture as the dominant focus of inquiry (Jay 1988; Jenks 1995). My sense is that the study of journalism has yet to take account of this "pictorial turn" (Mitchell 1995)², and that a serious theorizing of visual culture can be fruitful for explaining and revealing links among many of the challenges to the journalism institution, including the rise of diverse publics, new and hybrid press genres, and global trends of information exchange.

Second, to understand journalism as based in visual concepts and practice may make pictures less strange to the majority of journalism scholars and practitioners who continue to see the image either as a threat to the journalistic enterprise or as peripheral to it. The tension between visual and verbal representations is a long-standing rift within journalism, commonly expressed as the difference between "Words and Pictures", and cultivating a persistent ambivalence toward images.³ Distinctions between *word* and *image* are found in many arenas, not only in journalism, and serve as the most common way of dividing up and organizing the field of representation. Mitchell describes the distinction, further, as a basic cultural trope, with connotations beyond the formal and structural differences between words and pictures. Comparing cultures of reading and cultures of spectatorship for example, one finds different forms of sociability and subjectivity. The implications for individuals and institutions within these cultures include hierarchies and values which structure the relationships between verbal and visual forms, and attach to the individuals who work with them (Mitchell 1994: 3). Within journalism the hierarchy between "words and pictures" is firmly established, with a lower status attached to pictures and the people respon-

sible for them, and which is further reflected in the scholarship of the field. An important reason, then, for turning to visualization as a central organizing principle of journalism, is that it casts the interactions of verbal and visual representations in a new light, as constitutive of journalistic discourse. Either one without the other would not be journalism as we know it.

Photography in 20th Century Journalism

Journalism's rise during the modern period – in Sweden corresponding to the twentieth century – has been a process of institutionalization, establishing its position as a self-evident power and voice in social life (Ekecrantz and Olsson 1994). What have been the roles of pictures in this process? Visual representation has not been a central aspect of Ekecrantz and Olsson's research, yet their data included pictures in the contexts of daily journalism. More important, their study assumes a dynamic, complementary relationship between the visual and verbal aspects of journalistic discourse. The theoretical framework and research design open the possibility of examining the particular roles pictures have played in the construction of journalism, both longitudinally and in a series of synchronic analyses.⁴

Even a simple quantitative overview reveals that by 1915 the photograph held a self-evident position in the Swedish daily press.⁵ Further, the photograph outnumbered other forms of graphic illustration, including maps, tables and drawings, by at least ten to one. The number of articles accompanied by photographs appears to have increased steadily until 1955 when nearly one fifth of the articles (18.6%) included a photographic illustration. From the 1950s onward, that relationship appears fairly constant: every fourth or fifth article is linked to a photograph. Other forms of graphic illustration also increase, but their numbers remain too limited to draw any clear conclusion. This longitudinal outline, admittedly rough and preliminary, can be refined and expanded to reveal how photography has been used in the construction of the journalistic event (Becker 1995). To offer one example of the kind of question this longitudinal study generates: An initial impression from the data is that in the early years photographs appear primarily in the context of foreign news and cultural events, such as theatre premiers. This appears to be the pattern even when the dominant form of picture was the head and shoulders portrait, a form which in principle could be related to any type of event. If this impression holds true, it raises the question of why domestic news was not visualized in comparable ways or to the same extent.⁶ What are the institutionally regulated texts and contexts which define the different forms of communication for different kinds of events?

Journalism is a form of institutionally regulated communication which has the event as its most important product. We can identify journalistic strategies and the discursive field which structure the event, examine the roles, actors and social categories which are created through its presentation, and see the forms of social communication that journalism represents (Ekecrantz et al. 1994a). When we look more closely at the pictures and how they are related to the text at different points in time, we can see how they change, setting the scene of the

journalistic event in distinctly different ways. Thus we can identify the picture's, and in turn the photograph's, positions in the discourse of journalism.

To establish the relationship of the picture to this discourse one must go beyond a description of the picture's content and its immediate context as determinants of meaning. The picture's "performance" (to borrow a concept from structural linguistics) as an image on a newspaper page is an expression of an underlying structure. At this deeper structural level, text and image exist as forms which can be selected and combined according to rules for the production of the journalistic product, the event. The event, in turn, is the central ingredient in the journalistic discourse. To paraphrase Searle, the study of the meanings of pictures and the study of the meanings of journalistic events are not two separate projects, but the same study from two different perspectives.⁷ Journalistic discourse, as the study of institutionally produced "texts" (in the broader linguistic sense of the meaning of "text"), can in its turn be related to the social and historical situation (external to the "text").⁸ This opens the way for a broader contextual framework which includes intertextual analysis and the interplay between journalism and other discourses (cf. Thompson 1990; Ekecrantz et al. 1994a, 1994b).⁹

This framework was applied to a study of journalistic discourse in three historical situations: 1925, 1955 and 1987 (Ekecrantz et al. 1994a, 1994b). The aim was not to analyze journalistic trends across time, but to examine the synchronic relationships within the daily press as compared with a sample of historical texts. Comparison across the three periods served to clarify the characteristics of each and differences between them. The analysis was based on a systematic sample of front page articles from four newspapers (*Arbetarbladet*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Vestmanlands Läns Tidning*) during one week, selected from the basic types of events which were found to characterize each period, the specific events which dominated the period, plus all the front page photographs appearing during the sample week.¹⁰ Of particular interest is the characteristic event-type for each period, the *dominerande händelsetyp*, for it is here one can see the journalistic discourse at work, structuring a diversity and range of social and political events into a common journalistic form. Through its repetition, the dominant event-type links events together into a social framework with ideological power.

1925: Portraits and the Speech Event

Consistent with the preliminary results of the longitudinal study, fewer photographs were published on the front pages in 1925 than in the other two periods. Of these, nearly half were portraits of individuals, and with one exception (an actress), all were men. Photographs of two or more persons comprise another fifth of 1925's front page photographs. Few of the photographs include a social context or environment. Even when the subject is a group pictured out of doors, the relationship among them is left undefined; group identity is not the subject.

The dominance of individual portraits of men cannot be explained by the technical limitations of photography of the pe-

riod. Small format cameras were coming into use, if still uncommon among newspaper photographers, and photographic reproduction had been routinized in the daily press, as seen in the sheer numbers of photographs. The broader repertoire of photographic possibilities can be seen in the landscape and group pictures common in other genres. Within the discourse of journalism, however, the dominant event-type for this period is the *speech event*. Someone, typically a representative of an institution, makes a statement, presents a demand, holds a speech, points out a problem, issues a denial, a correction or a criticism of something. The speech event is presented largely unedited, often as a long excerpt with no comment other than the editorial introduction of the time and place of the event.

The portraits that dominate within this discourse correspond to the authoritative position afforded the *talking heads* of contemporary television news – a head and shoulders image of the man making the statement. This picture form does not originate in journalism, but from the privately commissioned painted portrait. Even when channeled through the photography studio, the subject of the portrait retains more control over the result than in any other picture form. The portrait is seen to correspond to the subject's own statement about who he (or she) is. This control survives onto the newspaper page where the portrait, as a seemingly *non-edited* image, becomes the ideal counterpart to the subject's verbal statement. Together they construct the speech event, simultaneously visual and verbal, as the dominant event-type of the period.

In spite of the institutional positions of the majority of these speakers, the composite is a discourse made up of many voices, giving it a *polyphonic* structure. Yet this polyphony depends at least as significantly on the dominance of individual faces, visually isolated from the institutions they speak for, as it does on a diversity of voices. The sheer number of individual speakers represented within this discourse does not mean, however, that all voices are heard (or all faces seen). The actors are predominantly members of the political, administrative and economic elite. And to judge from the modes of address the speakers use, their audience is also assumed to be members of the male elite. *The public* has not yet been established as a social category.

The journalistic discourse of 1925, dominated by the visual/verbal representation of the speech event, is not pluralistic in character. *Society* is made up of monologues by men in positions of economic and political influence. The variety of voices and faces which comprise this picture of society is an expression of journalism's pre-institutional character. The press had not yet found its own voice for presenting the public agenda and debate.

1955: Group Pictures and the Symbolic Event

Thirty years later, the journalistic monologue has been replaced by dialogue and a social order based on talk in various forms – conversation, conferences, meetings. In 1955, half of the front page pictures show two or more persons, talking to each other, listening to each other, showing things to each other. The number of individual portraits has decreased from the dominant picture form to slightly more than a quarter of the

sample. Another notable difference is the environmental portrait, of an individual pictured in a setting, has increased from 1925.

The dominant event-type is constructed as a polarity, a subtle dialectic in which the event's significance depends on an opposition that may be only implied in the text. Isolation versus integration, construction versus destruction, harmony versus discord, the present versus the past are common themes. Concrete events are allied with one pole or the other, which shifts their context from the original setting, as a kind of inverted metaphor. Ekecrantz and Olsson refer to these as *symbolic events*. The result is a tension in the discourse between, on the one hand, all the things which are being built up – from the concrete bridges, roads and atomic power plants to more abstract arenas of technology and research – and on the other, the negative consequences of not keeping up, or of deviating, a sense that one can all too easily fall by the wayside or between the cracks.

Pictures serve to resolve the tension of the symbolic event by representing consensus and a social public. In pictures people, often famous or members of the elite, are shown meeting, shaking hands, embracing, looking each other in the eye. The dominance of the group photograph is significant as a representation of the public. People take part in events as a group, listening to a conference lecture, watching a performance, looking at objects in a museum. Group portraits are also common, portraying ceremonial occasions such as bridge dedications. Group portraits may also portray people who cooperate on or have completed a common task, a construction project or a school examination, for example. Participation and group consensus are repeated themes, in contrast to the institutional representatives of the 1920s. The journalistic discourse of 1955 is concerned with social communication, and its significance is confirmed in the photographs.

The strong emphasis on the present (including an overabundance of phrases built around the word *now* [nu]) creates a distance from the past, the time prior to this era of development and improvement. The present is a time to look forward, to build for the future. Many pictures portray young people as bearers of the future, in school, as military recruits, as new graduates. Objects being demonstrated are often in the news as something new, which will bring change for the future, always for the better.

Journalism's relationship to other institutions is no longer simply presenting them. Journalism itself has become institutionalized as an active *participant* in the social order. At the institutional level, newspapers are actively organizing and even initiating discussion of current social and political questions. Reporters are beginning to include descriptions of the mood, the situation and the actors in their stories, facilitating the reader's visualization of events. Photographers also have an active role, seen in the decline in studio portraits. In 1955 photographers are present at many of the fronts page events. The large number of arranged photographs underscores journalism's participatory relationship in these events. Groups arrange themselves to give the photographer access. Individuals demonstrate and show objects, or hold a pose for the camera. The posed photograph is also significant as a representation of

consensus. When people arrange themselves for the camera they acknowledge the photographer's authority and agree to cooperate in the construction of the event. The photograph's position in the journalistic discourse of 1955 is thus a key to journalism's position in Swedish society.

1987: The Individual and the System

Journalism presents a much darker picture of society in November 1987. Financial crises brought on by a falling stock market index and a speculation scandal, diminished salary increases for public employees, a range of environmental problems, and a farmers' blockade of a huge shipment of chemically-treated rye from West Germany are the dominant news stories. These events are often described in terms of people and places which have been struck by misfortune (*drabbade*) in various forms, from financial ruin to threats of environmental catastrophe. The journalistic discourse takes a systemic perspective on these events, identifying the common underlying cause in a system which has stopped functioning as it should. The event-type that dominates journalism of the period is thus the *system event*.

Journalistic discourse is no longer presenting an idyllic picture of society as a common project building toward a bright future. The social setting, the group, people meeting and talking have lost their prominence. Front page photographs of two or more people together has declined to forty per cent of the sample. The number of portraits is at approximately the same level as in 1955. The most marked increase is in the proportion of photographs portraying single individuals in an environment, from fifteen percent in 1955 to twenty-five percent three decades later. The typical front page picture in 1987 portrays a lone individual in a desolate environment or dwarfed by a collection of objects.

As one explanation for the shift away from portraying communication, Ekecrantz et al point to media's more central position in the social and political communication of the 1980s. Instead of reporting on the exchange of questions and answers between politicians and others, as was the case in the 1950s, the journalistic discourse is itself giving the answers. Many of the problems which journalism raises are defined as "information" problems – too much, too little, or conflicting information. Much of the journalistic discourse thus focuses on experts, including other journalists, who have been called upon to discuss, describe, clarify a problem. This framework presents the journalist as the one holding together the diverse threads, the answer or solution to the problem which has been defined as such only within journalism. It is more difficult to identify "who is saying what to whom" in this discourse. The result is a *journalistic monologue*. The monologic character of the discourse is underscored by the journalist's failure (or inability) to consider the media themselves as actors, as active participants in the communicative formations of the period.

The relationship between text and picture is significant for this construction. The text analysis reveals a dominance of present tense, and of direct speech where individuals are "saying" (*säger*) things in the I – (*jag*) – form. These short statements (in contrast to the long citations of the 1920s) are not tempo-

rally contextualized. The present stands as a space abstracted from the past and the future, in the tone of a live broadcast. The visual correlate is photograph of the isolated individual, singled out and portrayed against the backdrop of symbols of the system. The person is shown reacting to something which has already taken place – a decision, an action, an accident, a disaster. The environment, whether the desolate beach of a polluted sea or a pile of weapons which the police have seized, become the materialization of society. The few examples of happy or triumphant individuals (the sample includes photographs of Astrid Lindgren on her 80th birthday and Stefan Edberg after his Stockholm Open victory) follow a similar pattern.

What is taking place in the forty per cent of the photographs from 1987 which portray two or more people? In some cases, an individual is singled out, and the other people are more or less a backdrop, part of the environment. More often, a group is portrayed *reacting* to a decision or event which has occurred prior to the occasion of the photograph. (In this sense they are more literally reacting to *being photographed*.) Interaction within the group is not the reason for the photograph, any more than social interaction can be the focus of the environmental portraits of individuals. Instead, the subject(s) of the photograph are isolated in a constructed moment in time. Their relationship is not characterized by their communication with each other, but by a common bond brought on by the systemic action or event which has *struck* them. The journalistic event is not organized around social interaction, but around individuals' relations to objects or environments, as symbols of the more encompassing system.

The Digital Image in Contemporary Journalistic Discourse

Today photography is deeply implicated in ongoing debates about journalism's roles in reporting and shaping world events. Photographs often set off heated discussions over how victims of war, violence and disaster are shown, and how members of minority groups and subcultures are identified. Media are accused of using photographs to exploit or sensationalize events. A central question, surfacing with increasingly frequency in debates over the photograph's position in journalism, is: How can we know the picture is true?

The question, and the doubt and unease that lie behind it, are in part responses to broad-reaching technological change in the field of press photography. The introduction of digital imagery and the electronic transfer of images has had a profound effect on the ways photographs are handled and thought about. These technological developments have raised the prospect of images which are no longer anchored to their photographic, film-based original. Changes in the image, which in principle can now occur at any point in the chain of events from the taking of the picture to its publication, cannot be detected visually. And if the photographic "original" is an electronic image, there is no longer a negative to refer back to. The new image technology is described in the press and popular journals as a rupture with the past, carrying us rapidly into a "post-photographic" future where images will no longer be

believed as evidence of actual events. This, not surprisingly, has been a dominant issue in journalistic discourse of the past decade, resulting in a kind of technologically-driven debate over press credibility and image ethics.

A second, and older issue is seldom raised in these contexts, despite its relevance to the debate. I refer here to the critical inquiry into the status and nature of photographic representation, a subject of major importance in cultural and communications studies for the past two decades. Starting from the question of how photographs represent their subjects, the inquiry includes the relationship between visual representation and identity, the photograph's ontological status as fact or proof, and analysis and contextualisation of the photograph as an instrument of power. The credibility of the photograph cannot be separated from its ideological uses. In other words, "What are the politics of photographic truth?" (Bolton 1992).

Despite their very different points of departure, both the critical theory of photographic representation and the technology-driven questions of photography's future share a concern with the deconstruction of the photograph as a representation of reality. Both foresee paradigmatic shifts in contemporary visual culture and are engaged in efforts to chart the meanings and trajectories of photography. Yet questions of what and how photographs represent are virtually absent from the discourse of journalism. Why? How can this be explained? Instead of answering the question directly, I wish first to examine more closely the debate over the future of photography in relation to its traditional roles within journalism. Then, I will consider how changing the terms of that debate to engage critical theory of representation can provide new insights into the visual culture of contemporary journalism.

In the mid-1980s, examples began to crop up of journalistic photographs that had been altered, "manipulated" using new digital technology. Examples of abuse, where digital retouching had significantly altered the photographic message, were raised and debated (Ritchin 1990b; Alling-Ode and Tubin 1993). Controversy over these cases centered on the control of the image – whether it should be in the hands of the photographers, the editors (who, as "word people", it was argued, often lacked the skills and experience to judge the photograph's authenticity), or handed over to printers and technicians (Becker 1991). More than a question of quality control, the debate quickly focused on the question of the photograph's journalistic credibility: when and under what conditions can the editorial photograph be relied upon as an accurate representation of what occurred in front of the camera at the moment the photographer released the shutter? Often cast in ethical terms, preserving the integrity of the news photograph was linked to the professional status of the photographer, the credibility of the press, and journalism's accountability to its public (Becker 1991; Ritchin 1990a). The credibility of the press photograph was reasserted as central to the authority of the journalistic event, accompanied by urgent warnings about the dangers in uncontrolled applications of the new technology.

With the adoption of electronic transfer and editing of images, newspapers and picture agencies have reorganized their staff with new lines of authority in the work of selecting and editing photographs. Rules and guidelines have been drawn

up, to determine what changes are permitted in electronically-edited photographs, who may make the changes, and how and under what conditions readers should be warned that a photograph was a "montage".¹¹ Generally these guidelines are modelled after earlier practice, drawing electronic parallels to the picture editing permitted by press photographers and printers working in the darkroom. The labels for electronic techniques are frequently coined from older, established practices. "Reverse cropping", for example, refers to cloning or copying picture elements (the electronic "pixels") in order to extend the frame of an image. Similarly, the computer symbol for the "tool" (as it is called) used to selectively lighten or darken parts of the electronic image on the computer screen, is a picture of the tool printers use in the lab to achieve the same result. When describing these changes, authors often go to great lengths to contextualize the computer image both historically and institutionally, pointing out examples of "manipulation" which predate the computer era or which have occurred recently without the aid of the computer (cf. Alling-Ode and Tubin 1993). The structures for handling the new technology have included a language and ideology for how to think about it.

At one level this discourse focuses on the practice and traditional handwork of journalistic photography, attempting to incorporate the new technology into the ideals and practices of the field. Simultaneously, the discourse reasserts the traditions of visual representation which reside in the culture of photography. It becomes necessary, in the words of one journalist "to safeguard the photograph's ability to transcribe reality and its general sense of veracity" (Ritchin 1990a:36). The terms of the discourse are clear: the photograph is under attack and the forces of journalism are being mustered to defend it. There is a strong tone of righteousness in the language, advocating an ethos of realism with photography as its handmaiden. Whether it is possible to prevent the full onslaught of the "post-photographic" era is still an open question. The terms of the struggle, of knowledge of the world based in realism versus a radical postmodernistic relativism, resonate deeply with modern cultural experience. The doomsday prognosis describes a future where the public has lost all belief in the photograph as a meaningful link to a material world. That, indeed, would mean the death of the culture of photography as we know it.

What then is on the opposite side of this struggle? Opposed to the traditionalism and pessimism of the journalistic discourse is a utopian vision of the future. In this scenario, the convergence of photographic, video and computer technologies is forming a new context, where the still image is only one small element in the encompassing domain of hypermedia.¹² Here we find a *celebration* of the rupture and discontinuity the new technologies have introduced into visual culture.

Virtual technologies, with their capacity to originate a 'realistic' image on the basis of mathematical applications that model reality, add to the sense of anticipation and expectation. (Robins 1995:29)

From this perspective, the future looks rich and various and open, a spontaneous consequence of technological development, and the old chemical and optical techniques appear "re-

stricted and impoverished” by comparison (Robins 1995:30). This utopian future promises to liberate photography from the narrow confines of naive realism which bound its past. The death of photography as we know it has only positive consequences, for it forces us into a “more vigilant interpretive stance” in our encounters with images (Mitchell 1992:225).

I have perhaps drawn the lines between these two camps somewhat harder than they deserve. There are those like journalist Fred Ritchin, whose warnings about the future of photography do not preclude his enthusiasm for some photographers’ efforts to use new technologies to explode the unitary voice of the documentary image (Ritchin 1990b). Many photographers are experimenting with various forms of montage for section fronts and feature pages. And few would argue with futurist Mitchell’s reminder of the need for a critical stance in assessing the truth value of any image (Mitchell 1992). Yet more is at stake than the old and misleading controversy over photography as an inherently “objective” or “subjective” medium.

Polarized Visions of the Future – and Their Consequences

Old arguments over the medium of photography are now being recast. What seems to be happening in this conflict between two visions of the future is that two broad and occasionally contradictory ways of describing photography seem to have parted. Martin Lister describes the opposition as a continuation of an old debate between those who privilege the photograph as a trustworthy analogue of reality and those who stress its constructed, ideological character. The realist position, which I identify here as dominant within journalism “stays attached (in a less subtle but newly zealous form) to photography. . . [and] what could be called the constructivist position has been transferred to the digital” image (Lister 1995:9-10). A closer examination of the progressivism of this new constructivist position reveals its essentially rationalist character (Robins 1995). Opposing photography’s link to “ordinary” vision as inadequate, the advocates of digital imagery pursue a new photographic truth according to a logic of progress as necessary and inevitable. Vision is dislocated from the observer (the empiricist position implied by the photographer), in favour of new techniques of observation, depersonalized and decontextualized in the fulfilment of rationalism. The opposition between traditional photography and digital technology is thus grounded in a powerful symbiosis between empiricism and rationalism:

Neither could function without the other. . . . If, in the history of photographic observation, there has always been the danger of a naive empiricism, there has also been an acute awareness that visual experience and evidence could only perform its task. . . if it were incorporated within systems of rational procedure and analysis. . . . The advent of post-photography has simply served to make this all the more clear. (Robins 1995:37)

Rationality is the ascendant and dominant principle, ensconced in the logic of a progressivist agenda. The problem is that the positions tend to define themselves in opposition to each

other and without regard for the cultural threads which tie them together. The result is a dehistoricized, atheoretical determinism cast in terms of photography *versus* digital imagery. Within journalism we see it in its most simple form: *for* or *against* the digital image.

The consequences are that critical thinking about the past and the future of press photography is blocked in some crucial ways, preventing serious inquiry into photography’s relationships to the discourse of journalism. *Change*, for example, is seen in flat, deterministic terms, as either the positive or negative consequences of technological innovation. Each side selects examples to illustrate the rupture with the past as absolute: in positive terms, the typical example illustrates the radical interconnectedness of the world through the rapid transfer of electronic images. The typical negative example is the altered photograph which illustrates that we can no longer believe what we see there (or, by implication, in any other photograph). Both examples are taken out of history, to illustrate the discontinuity of the present with anything which has gone before or which lies ahead. Change becomes the decontextualized celebration of an abstract potential or the equally decontextualized condemnation of technology’s encroachment on the presumed core of photography. The abstraction of change in this polarized discourse of photography thus blocks critical inquiry into both the history of photography in the press, as well as visions of its future.

The polarization discourse also precludes critical examination of what we mean when we discuss the photograph’s *realism*. The technological difference between the altered and the unaltered image has been abstracted and generalised to a principle used to explain the special significance of the photographic image. The photograph is different from any other form of representation, according to the terms of this debate, because of its indexicality, its analogous relationship to the object it represents. This assumption, that the relationship between the photograph and its referent is particular and unique, is then used to account for photography’s cultural significance as evidence, as proof, as showing what is *real*. Today, when that relationship no longer adheres, or is under threat, the consequences for a visual culture built upon that relationship are undoubtedly profound. The central question becomes: What are the political, social and cultural consequences of no longer being able to trust the realism of the photograph?

This, however, is the wrong question. It ignores a prior question, which is central to photography’s place in our visual culture: How do beliefs in the photographic image as fact and evidence get attached to the material image, the specific and concrete photograph? Both those who advocate protecting the photograph’s realism from technological encroachment, and those who advocate dropping realism as an irrelevant concept for the post-photographic future leave the concept itself unexamined. To take realism for granted as *the* characteristic which distinguishes photography from other modes of representation, supports a restricted and oversimplified view of how photographs come to have meaning. Examining the varied and contradictory social uses of photography suggests otherwise, that photography cannot be understood as a single enterprise held together by a unifying idea. Realism itself has had different

meanings; it has been constructed and contested in a variety of situations and at many different points in the history of photography. Digital imagery is certainly not its first challenge.

What then does the digital image mean for the future of photography in the press? An adequate answer requires that we move beyond a deterministic view of change and an unexamined concept of realism. Critical theory and research in photography reveal the fallacy of that vision on both counts, suggesting that different "photographies" carry different meanings according to the ways they have been grounded and institutionalized in different historical practices. Further, this body of work offers insights into our visual culture that are rooted in analyses of the relationships between the uses of photography and how we construct our knowledge of the world, issues of direct relevance for journalism. The consequences of even the most fundamental technological change can be traced through its adoption in institutional structures and cultural patterns. The power and authority of the photograph as a realistic representation (among its other possibilities), cannot be understood apart from this history, and the processes involved in contesting and negotiating alternative meanings for the image.

Recent studies have revealed, for example, how photography gained its authority as documentary in conjunction with the growth of institutions whose power was established under the guise of neutral and impartial authority (Tagg 1988; Stange 1989). Museums collected and displayed photography as art, not according to abstract or universal criteria of aesthetics and value. Instead, museums constructed a canon which legitimized the selection of certain photographers and established a "provenance" of photography in terms that carried the authority of the institutionalized world of fine art (Solomon-Goudreau 1991; Phillips 1992). Studies of picture archives have shown how the authority of visual records was used to estab-

lish industrial success and a cooperative work force (Nye 1985) and to create national identities and traditions (Becker 1992a). In these different "histories" we see photographs analyzed as cultural objects whose meanings are negotiated and defined through the cultural and political activities of institutional uses of the image. Technology, as it has changed the ways the photographs are taken, stored, reproduced, exhibited, and distributed, is not distinct or removed from these institutional practices. Its social and cultural consequences are neither singular nor monolithic. In order to understand the impact of digital technology in social and cultural terms, we must learn to regard the photographic image as first a cultural – not a technological – object.

We already have the beginnings of a history of digital imagery. We can see the ways it has been discussed and adopted within journalistic discourse, as I have reviewed here. We can see the ways institutional practices have accommodated the technology, and what guidelines and work routines have been instituted to assert journalistic control over when and how it is used. Discussion of picture sources and attribution today is probably broader and more critical than a few years ago, in response to examples which clearly violated journalistic codes. There is, however, a persistent tendency to discuss "the digital image" as a singular and isolated phenomenon, without identifying and exploring its relationships to photography within the discourse of journalism, and to broader spheres of cultural meaning and exchange.

To take one example, one of the most widely used images from the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in Beijing in June 1989 shows a lone young man standing in the path of a row of tanks. According to Steven Bode and Paul Wombell, this was among the 13 pictures that Associated Press photographers sent out of Beijing as an electronic image over telephone lines, bypassing the Chinese authorities who were try-



Tiananmen Square, Beijing, 4 June 1989. This scene has become an icon of the demonstrations and their tragic outcome, signifying in different ways depending on the context. This is the version distributed by Reuters, apparently copied from a television image. (Pressens Bild – Reuters)

ing to stop the reports from leaving the country (Bode and Wombell 1991:1-2).¹³ For these authors, this digitally-transferred photograph is as an example of how technology transcends political boundaries and serves democratic interests. Another version of the same scene became "World Press Photo of the Year", and "brought home the unequal struggle of Tiananmen Square to a worldwide audience" (World Press Photo 1990:6-7). A sequence of photographs of the same event won third prize as "spot news story" in the same contest.¹⁴ These four photographs show the line of advancing tanks, the young man standing erect in front of the first tank, and then sitting on the tank together with the soldiers, his white shirt standing out like a flag against the grey background of the soldiers' uniforms, the tanks and the surrounding pavement. Here we see "the full story of 19-year-old Wang Weilin, whose heroism came to symbolise the spirit of the 'Beijing spring' (World Press Photo 1990:15).

The Chinese Communist Party on the other hand, has used visual documents (including those by Western journalists) to support a romantic myth of the *soldiers* at Tiananmen Square as revolutionary martyrs in the ongoing struggle for a new China, whose actions saved the nation by restoring order. The official narratives paid careful attention to providing "proof" to back up their version of events. Chinese television has shown documentaries in which violence against the soldiers is highlighted and "the lone protester's famous confrontation with a tank is presented as 'proof' of the enormous restraint that the military showed under stress" (Wasserstrom 1994:297).

Clearly similar photographs of the same incident have been used to support opposing interpretations about what happened in Tiananmen Square.¹⁵ The "politics of photographic truth" signify differently according to the cultural and political contexts of the news photograph's presentation and use. This is no less the case for the "technological" context, where Bode and Wombell have selected a photographic icon to illustrate the positive political consequences of electronic image transfer. The photograph, including its technological framework, is first and always a cultural object whose meaning depends on the context of its use. Kevin Robins, in his critique of the technologically driven vision of the future of our visual culture, returns to the uses of photography as his starting point. He reminds us that "photographs have provided a way of relating to the world – not only cognitively, but also emotionally, aesthetically, morally, politically" (Robins 1995:33). Technological change has not eradicated these ways we use photographs within journalism, even as the forms and meanings of photography are undergoing change.

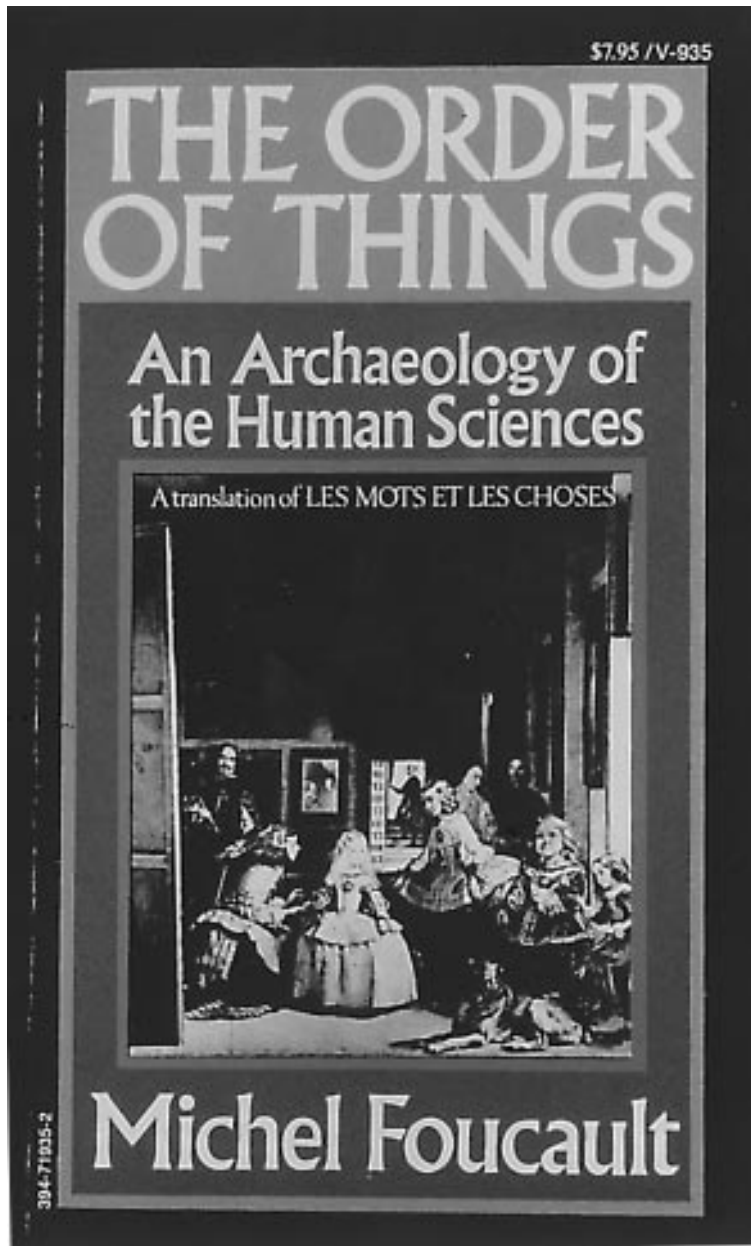
1995: Journalism about Journalism?

Returning to the content of the press in 1995, we find an increased concern with meta-events, journalistic events which consisted of reports on other reports, including other newspaper and television news stories. In a preliminary analysis of journalism during one week in November, we observed a process of reverberation in which topics and themes were cycled between journalists and their sources and then back into the press. There the events often reemerged in altered forms with

new angles, but also with various references back to the paths they had followed or projections into the future – how people could be expected to react to the event. Another common feature was the use of quotation marks in newspapers headlines. In some cases this signalled the statement itself as the news topic ("Radonlarm ignoreras", "Döende patienter lider i onödan"). In other examples a word or phrase is highlighted as ironic or a slang expression ("Raffel och fest i 'Bajens' premiär", "Bostadsfälla" hotar för pensionärer", "Unga och 'gamla' i skön harmoni"). In both cases the quotation marks are a signal, a journalistic disclaimer that draws attention to the report as report, as a *representation* of discourse.¹⁶ In different ways, these examples suggest a tendency toward a meta-discourse within the press, a journalism *about journalism*. Whereas it has long been common practice for journalists and researchers to debate the role of the press and its content, the debate has typically taken place within the media's professional and academic organizations, publications and journals. It has been far less common for journalism to be framed as a discourse within the pages of the press itself or to emerge as the content and subject of the journalistic event. Here we find photographs, as meta-pictures, important to the construction of journalism about journalism.

Meta-pictures are "second-order reflections on the practices of pictorial representation" (Mitchell 1995:9). The most common examples of such second-order reflections within journalism are found in captions, the lines of text published under the picture, where the text refers not only to the picture's ostensible content, but to a characteristic of the picture *as picture*. Examples are captions which include an explanation of the technique used in making or reproducing the picture, a disclaimer that the picture is not of the same people or event who are the subjects of the text, or a reference to the time the picture was taken in relation to the event it represents. In each of these cases, the relationship between the text and the photograph establishes a second order of interpretation, outside the picture, drawing attention to it *as a visual representation* which would not have been possible or would have looked different had it been created at another moment, or in another way. The reader is implicitly invited to reflect over what that difference might look like and mean.

More interesting, if less common within both journalism and pictorial representation in general, are the ways that certain pictures reflect on themselves and establish a *pictorial* meta-language. Mitchell identifies several distinct types of meta-pictures in which the subject itself is a first-order discourse on the practice of visual representation. Of these, the most complex and articulate example is Diego Velázquez' renowned *Las Meninas* from 1656, "an endlessly fascinating labyrinth of reflections on the relations of painting, painter, model, and beholder" (Mitchell 1994:58). This art historical masterpiece has come into focus again following Foucault's renowned essay (which has in turn generated an extensive literature) on how the painting's self-knowledge of representation destabilizes the identity of the spectator to become a portrayal of political and representational power (Foucault 1973). Mitchell is careful to note that the phenomenon is not confined to painting:



Las Meninas is the cover illustration of Michel Foucault's book *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

The metapicture is not a subgenre within the fine arts but a fundamental potentiality inherent in pictorial representation as such: it is the place where pictures reveal and "know" themselves, where they reflect on the intersections of visibility, language, and similitude, where they engage in speculation and theorizing on their own nature and history. (Mitchell 1994: 82)

Recently, several scholars have noted an increase in the number of press photographs which seem to perform in the same ways, as meta-pictures (Sivertsen 1995; Groenvall 1995). These photographs cannot be considered dominant or typical journalistic events; they are not common enough. Their occurrence nevertheless suggests a shift or movement in the perspective of journalistic discourse. Parallel to *Las Meninas*' self-reflexivity directed at its own *kind* of painting (Mitchell 1994:62), meta-photographs in the press are directed at the representational practices of journalism and its photography.

What does this pictorial meta-language of press photography look like? In what ways do press photographs portray journalistic events and at the same time offer reflections on themselves as representations of those events? And finally, how is this tendency related to a journalism about journalism?

The Self-reflexive Photograph in Journalism

The most common way that press photographs achieve self-reflexivity is by the apparently simple fact that press photographers are included in the frame. The picture portrays photographers at work. This may not be the primary subject, but even when a single photographer is glimpsed in the background of the picture, it signals that we are seeing a media event. The same is true when the frame includes other journalists, wiel-



Rwanda, 9 July 1994. The caption on this file photograph states, "Photographers make their work after their group discovered abandoned Hutu child on the road between Kigali and Gitarama". The staff at Pressens Bild have noted an increase in requests for the meta-picture of photographers at work. (Pressens Bild–AFP–Photographer: Bous-sel)¹⁷

ding microphones and carrying the shoulder bags which are the signs of the profession. Their presence in the picture prevents the illusion that journalists are outside the event, as objective observers. The event does not have its own inherent structure, separate from the report. The photograph reveals that the reporting, that is the gathering of words and pictures, is constructing the journalistic event.

The construction is most evident when the picture portrays a group of photographers around a single subject or smaller group. This type of photograph has become a more common feature of reportage in recent years, a self-reflection on the flock behavior of the press, and in particular photographers. It suggests an ambivalence toward the profession that goes beyond simply acknowledging the constructed nature of journalistic events. There is often irony and humour in the image of a crowd of journalists converging on a hapless victim, as in the well-known example of photographers clustered on their knees around President Clinton's cat. When the subject is less trivial, the photograph includes, in addition, a self critique of journalists' complicity in creating victims. By portraying themselves crowding in and pointing their cameras at a single subject, photographers implicitly acknowledge that their work can compound tragedy and hardship by visualizing its subjects as marginal, stricken, and *other*. These meta-pictures reveal the press reflecting over its transgressions (Sivertsen 1995), and the role it plays in this process of victimization.

The meta-picture also creates a special relationship to the viewer, in particular when the picture includes a photographer

whose camera is directed toward us. The photographer's viewfinder becomes the counterpart to the hidden canvas in Velázquez' painting, on which the painter is at work as he looks out



Lübeck, 18 January 1996. Following the fire which destroyed a refugee center, killing at least 10 people, a photographer turns his camera toward a woman who is simultaneously being photographed from behind by an AP photographer. The doubling of the two photographer's gazes introduces self-reflexivity into the journalistic event. The picture appeared on the front page of Svenska Dagbladet on January 19. (Reportagebild – AP)



After the press conference, 14 January 1996. Head of HSB Stockholm, Ulrik Fällman, faces the press to deny that he hired his friend Harald Ullman, prominent Social Democrat and head of the advertising agency 'Måndag', to investigate a television reporter who had in turn been investigating HSB Stockholm. With its focus on a journalism about journalism, this front page photograph is typical of the contemporary journalistic event. The photographer's choice of angle supports a reflection on the ambiguity of the power relationships between journalism and other social institutions. (Photographer: Staffan Löwstedt, Svenska Dagbladet)

at us (or into a mirror?). We can see that we may be the subject of his gaze, at the same time that what he sees and how he is portraying it/us is invisible to us. In the press photograph where we see a photographer pointing the camera in our direction, a similar doubling of gazes occurs. These "duelling" gazes place us in the picture in two ways. First, we are in the position of the photographer whom we cannot see, who took the picture that we are looking at. And second, we are in a picture that we *cannot* see, being taken by a photographer who is visible to us. We cannot know how we appear in that camera's viewfinder, any more than we could know if we had been there at the moment of the picture – we might have been only part of a blurred background. This questioning and doubling of the gaze pushes us into self-awareness as we look at the picture. We see ourselves as potential subjects of the photographer's gaze, at the same time that we become conscious of our own gaze, as viewers of the scene. It is in this sense that the meta-picture becomes doubly reflexive, both of the press photographer's role and of our role as viewer.¹⁸

Complex relationships of power are inherent in the meta-picture. However, it is not always the photographers or other journalists who hold the self-evident position of power in these pictures. Where is power located, for example, in a photograph of journalists huddled on their knees around a cat who is looking away from them (with apparent disdain)? Meta-pictures of press conferences or other meetings with politicians often present the balance of power between the parties as problematic. Comparing these with the *talking heads* of 1925, the typical way of representing a public statement by a member of an institution during journalism's pre-institutional phase, the difference is striking and significant. Today when picturing these meta-events, the representation of power rela-

tionships between journalism and other social institutions is the subject of the photograph. We see how the actors are dependent on each other to confirm their own authority at the same time that they struggle to establish an advantage over the other. The collusion between political institutions and the institution of journalism is visually evident and self-reflexive.

The meta-picture of journalists and in particular photographers' relationship to their subjects has become a metaphor for the institution of journalism. One sees these photographs used to illustrate debates in the press about the media's role, as feature material related to a major event, or together with an article giving background or analysis. In each case the reflexivity inherent in the meta-picture becomes part of the journalistic event, engaging in speculation and theorizing on the nature and history of photography, journalism and the relationships between them. Perhaps it is in the growing use of meta-pictures that we see the questions raised about what and how photographs represent – but in visual terms.

If vision is the central medium of journalism, to return to Hartley's argument, then challenges to the premises of visualization – how it is accomplished and what it means – may be pushing journalism and its discourse into a reflexive stance over its relationships to the events it portrays. It is here that meta-pictures, pictures of how pictures represent, are joined to the debate over the digital image within journalism. Both challenge the established uses and meanings of photographs in the press. Both introduce into the journalistic event a broader questioning and reflection over journalism and its relationship to society. Both illustrate the expanded position of press photography within the institution of journalism, where the photograph now serves as a focal point and metaphor for the issues journalism faces as it attempts to chart a course for the future.

Notes

1. The summary is based on results drawn from the research program *Journalism: Discursive Order and Social Practice* (*Journalistikens roller*, 1992-1997), led by Jan Ekecrantz and Tom Olsson in the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, Stockholm University. Analysis of photography's positions within that discursive order are most fully explicated in Ekecrantz et al. (1994a, 1994b). In July 1995, a related project was begun, to examine more explicitly the roles photography has played in the development of Swedish journalistic discourse (*Pictures and the Press/Journalistikens bilder*, 1995-1997, led by Karin Becker and funded by HSFR).
2. Mitchell adapts the term from Rorty's characterization of the history of philosophy as a series of "turns" in which "a new set of problems emerges and the old ones begin to fade away" (Rorty 1979, as cited in Mitchell 1994:11). Mitchell identifies the pictorial turn with intellectual and academic discourses which are concerned with nonlinguistic symbol systems and do not assume that language is paradigmatic for meaning (Mitchell 1994:11-12).
3. A full consideration of journalism's ambivalence toward the image lies beyond the scope of this article, other than to suggest that its roots can be traced to both the cultural history of iconology (Mitchell 1986; Andén-Papodopoulos 1994: 190-191) and the institutional history of twentieth century journalism (Becker 1992b).
4. The summary presented here of Ekecrantz and Olsson's work is intended as a foundation for further research, including a refinement of the categories used for analyzing picture form and content and picture-text relationships (Becker 1995). Readers familiar with Ekecrantz and Olsson's work hopefully will be interested to see how a focus on the visual aspects of that study suggests new insights into the material.
5. The figures here are based on sample of 2,416 articles from ten daily newspapers during one week in November for 1915, 1925, 1935, 1945, 1955, 1965, 1976, 1987, and 1992. For a discussion of the methods used in constructing and analyzing this sample, and its representativity of Swedish journalism, see Ekecrantz and Olsson 1993.
6. This observation was made by Eva-Lotta Frid, doctoral student at JMK and the project assistant who has worked most closely with the coding of the material. A full answer to the question raised here will depend on a fuller examination of the data.
7. Searle was referring to the distinction in study of language, between the study of expressions in speech situations and the study of the meaning of sentences, and argued that they are related and complementary as modes of investigation in the philosophy of language (1969).
8. The concept of the "text" has been broadened to refer to the symbolic order in any form of cultural expression. The term itself, however, remains an index of the priority given to verbal forms of representation. As an alternative, Mitchell proposes the dialectical figure of the "imagetext" to designate "composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text" (1995: 9, 89n). Although journalism, as I argue here, is certainly such a synthetic form, I have chosen to follow the more conventional term "text", with quotation marks to indicate its provisional status. Note, too, that the concept of *intertextuality* may equally well refer to the interplay and reflection occurring between and among imagetexts.
9. One example of this interplay occurred during the second half of the 19th century, when the authority of the photograph as visual fact was being established at the same time that the ideal of objective reporting was being formulated in New York newspapers. References to photography appeared in the press, as an ideal and model for journalistic practice, decades before the technology had been developed to print photographs in the daily press (Schiller 1981).
10. For an explanation of how the sample was constructed and the historical texts used, see Ekecrantz et al. 1994a, 1994b. The analysis included all the photographs (309) published on the four newspapers' front pages (78) during the sample weeks of 1925, 1955 and 1987. Note that I do not consider here the interdiscursive relationships between journalism and other institutions which are an important part of their study. The research project *Pictures and the Press/Journalistikens bilder* (Becker 1995) includes plans to analyze relationships between press photography and photography's roles in other discourses, such as school books and museum exhibitions.
11. Labelling any computer-altered photograph as a "montage" was a solution supported by the Norwegian press photographers' association.
12. It is important to note that the terms of the debate have stretched "the photograph" beyond the discrete chemical print to include the entire range of images, which, while originating with a camera, are produced and reproduced through a variety of technologies. It includes, too, the broadcast television and video image, which share the photograph's mechanical, lens-based and analogic features, although produced by electromagnetic means (Lister 1995: 3-4).
13. The World Press Photo of the Year was taken by Charlie Cole of *Newsweek* magazine in New York.
14. Stuart Franklin, of the Magnum photography agency in Paris, took this sequence.
15. The example deserves a broader analysis than the present space permits, since how the photographs mean in each of those contexts has its own political and cultural history, ranging from the press photography contests to the incidents in China during the spring months of 1989 in which both Chinese and Western journalism are implicated. As MacKinnon notes, "the intertwined histories of both the Chinese press and U.S. reporting on China are directly relevant to an understanding of the political forces that led up to the Tiananmen incident" (MacKinnon 1994: 206).
16. I am grateful to Jan Ekecrantz for these preliminary reflections on a sample of newspaper pages from week 46, 1995. The sample and a full analysis of it are to be included in the final phase of the research project *Journalistikens roller*.
17. I am grateful to Bengt Carlsson, picture editor at Pressens Bild, for drawing this example to my attention.
18. For a more complete analysis of the intersection of gazes in the context of press photography see Lutz and Collins study, *Reading National Geographic* (1993)

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