

The Museum of Modern Art

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FROM THE PICTURE PRESS - WALL LABEL

It would doubtless be an exaggeration to say that each day's newspapers reproduce in essence the same pictures. Nevertheless, except for the rapid obsolescence of costume, automobile design, political leaders, and other similarly transient and superficial aspects of our lives, it would probably be possible to reprint the pictures of five years ago in tomorrow's paper, with few readers being the wiser. Each day, the specific events of the past twenty-four hours are selected, processed, and captioned to respond to issues which are not ephemeral but permanent: catastrophe and progress, pleasure and pain, victory and defeat, villainy and altruism.

This observation suggests that news photography might more profitably be studied as a kind of poetry than as a kind of history - that is to say, that we might look at it not merely for what it tells us that is unique and new, but for the ways that it describes to us over and over again, with subtle but constant variation, those few simple and enduring human issues that the medium of news photography has learned to cope with.

By the mid-1920's, the technologies of photography, photomechanical reproduction, and phototelegraphy had advanced to the point where photographs had become a central component of the modern newspaper. The pictures that have resulted from this new potential are radically unlike those that had documented previous eras: They are (or seem) unimpeachably frank; they have redefined prior standards of privacy, and the privilege of anonymity; they deal not with the intellectual significance of facts, but with their emotional content; they have directed journalism toward a subjective and intensely human focus. As images, the photographs are shockingly direct, and at the same time mysterious, elliptical, and fragmentary, reproducing the texture and flavor of experience without explaining its meaning. They wear the aspect of fact, prove nothing, and ask the best of questions.

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PICTURE PRESS

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The book, From the Picture Press, based on the exhibition, is available in the Museum book stores for \$3.95.

Solen Gyankauri