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## Evans: Pictures on a Page: Photojournalism and Picture Editing

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## Evans: Pictures on a Page: Photojournalism and Picture Editing

is a major flaw in the design of most of the studies that necessarily undermines our confidence in the generality of the results. In most studies, all the subjects in one condition (e.g., the live condition) were run at once, in a group, and all the subjects in the other condition (e.g., the videotape condition) were run in another single group, at another time. This means that any other events besides the presentation of the trial—events such as the style of the person giving the instructions or overt or covert communications among the group members—would be confounded by the experimental stimulus and might be responsible for the judgments made by the subjects in that group. The authors treat the judgments of individual jurors as independent observations, but they are not. If we examine the tables closely, we can see that when the same videotape is used in two different experiments, the pattern of juror responses is often different, indicating that something else is affecting the jurors besides the tape they see. In order to compensate for these extraneous influences, it would be necessary to run several groups (or several individual sessions) in each experimental condition. If this were done, the findings that videotape generally made no difference might well be supported, or they might not: we simply have no way of knowing.

This problem is most salient in the basic study of videotaped versus live presentation, and in the study of inadmissible evidence. The memory study was replicated across two different sets of materials, general findings of the deception studies have been replicated in several different laboratories, and the findings on production techniques and witness credibility are so weak and inconsistent that the authors make no general claims.

Thus, it would be unwise to proceed with any major policy changes on the basis of the findings presented in *Videotape on Trial*. It would also be unwise to ignore the research and continue to wage the debate about videotape as it has been waged in the past—with no data at all. Opponents of videotape have taken extreme positions ranging from the prediction that juries exposed to videotaped testimony will fall asleep to dire speculations about the ability of skilled media consultants to engineer any result they are paid to bring about. This research strongly suggests that neither of these extreme points of view is realistic. Our best bet at the present is that the use of videotape increases efficiency without impairing the juror's performance. However, without more extensive research, we should not feel confident that our best bet is a very good one.

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**Harold Evans.** *Pictures on a Page: Photojournalism and Picture Editing.* Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth, 1979. 320 pp., ill./\$14.95.

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Harold Evans, editor of the London *Sunday Times*, has produced a very full book—full of pictures, insights, critiques, and the how-to-do-its of successful photojournalism. The pictures, drawn primarily from British and U.S. media, are a good collection of the classics, some near-classics, and—most instructive of all—the everyday failures of print journalism. Each picture is there to serve a point: there is continuous contrast between the good result and the bad one, with a full and almost always convincing explanation of what distinguishes the former from the latter. Particularly effective are cases in which we are presented with a highly successful photo alongside other prints that were wisely abandoned in favor of the now classic version. It is an exercise we learn from. Evans is in love with effective photography, and his practical, analytic affection lends itself well to a project like this.

The distinguishing intellectual stance seems to be that the photojournalist's effort to convey a reality provides an essential opportunity for art; indeed, an absence of artful purpose usually results in the failure to convey any important meaning at all. News photography without artful manipulation is, under most circumstances, incompetent work.

Such a view puts Evans at odds with any notion that reporting with a camera is essentially an objective activity. Evans doesn't make the case quite this way, but my translation of his more practical words of wisdom is that never, not even in an "ideal" condition, should it be the professional's goal to remove himself or herself from the image-making process. The professional's role is, rather, to capture a reality by deliberately manipulating *technique*. Hence, Evans argues that a creative cropping of a photo is as critical to the communication process as the aiming of the camera in the first place. Arranging "proper" lighting is as necessary to making a story come alive as is a journalist's choosing a question to put to a newsmaker. The considered juxtaposition of photos on a news page to sustain an overall news angle is no less an objective enterprise than telling a story by arranging sentences to form a coherent paragraph.

What counts is not the artifice of production, but the vitality and validity of the outcome; a speeding car shot at 1/1000th of a second will, thanks to modern camera technology, appear as a stationary vehicle—if nothing additionally "artificial" is done. But deliberate blurring of



Rosenthal's third shot of the flag on Suribachi: "I got them together to wave and cheer under the flag."



Staff Sergeant Lowery's picture of the raising of the first small flag.



Second flag, Rosenthal's second shot.



Front page, but small. How Rosenthal's first shot began its publication life as the most reproduced photograph of all time.



The full frame of Rosenthal's first shot.

the negative in the darkroom will render it a speeding car to the naked eye of the newspaper reader. The idea is to convey a reality perceived by the photographer, not to treat the technology priggishly as a means of pure transmission or the professional as a passive mechanic. Indeed, the challenge is to hold onto technique even under the most trying of conditions. Hence, we have Evans's *sang-froid* appreciation of the "refreshment" (p. 141) of a newsman with the opportunity and presence of mind to "exploit perspective" by bending "his knees so that the viewer can participate on the children's level of fear." The source of his refreshment is the now famous news photo of screaming Vietnamese children, badly burned, fleeing the conflagration just behind them.

There remains the great problem of just what reality is going to be portrayed in a photograph. Evans consistently fails to grapple with this issue. If creative intervention is mandatory, how do we judge *which* potential reality these valued techniques will serve? As we know, realities do not just present themselves to a photographer (or photo editor) as pure "things" that it is his problem to simulate. Joe McCarthy, in a classic example of photo-editing abuse, crops out a whole group of people to make it appear as though a putative Communist is standing alone (and hence intimately) with a discredited person. Lesser rogues have no doubt used similar techniques with conscious or not so conscious efforts to distort, given the purposes at hand. The glare of a strobe can make the political candidate look "too old"; the wide-angle lens from below can caricature an otherwise reasonable face. Evans, in pointing out how to avoid such errors as a technical matter, pays little attention to how we are to avoid them *as a social matter*.

More subtly still, Evans pays little attention to the possibility that, quite apart from bad individuals (with poor technique or poor morals), there are systematic patterns in the mobilization of the technical arts that serve the pictorial needs of some, but not the pictorial needs of others. U.S. presidents and British queens, for example, are almost always presented (i.e., lit, cropped, propped, and angled) as individuals of dignity; protesters are not. My point is that the necessity of artful practice opens the possibility that such practice is mobilized to serve certain cultural and political purposes and not others. Usually these actions are quite unwitting (in contrast to the McCarthy example); they partake of the culture, the moment of history, and the extant class basis of access to the means of communication. Evans thinks "our reality is the caprice of photographers and picture editors" (p. 163) but he seems unaware that this "caprice" is socially organized.

Within the pages of Evans's book many plates illustrate the point I am making. We are able, for example, to compare the classic AP photo of the flag-raising at Iwo Jima with some of the rejected versions printed from the same roll of battle film. Under some rules of the journalistic thumb, the rejected versions would have to be judged the superior photographs (the Marines' faces are visible, the island topography is clearly revealed, etc.). The actual choice was not determined by such schoolish criteria; the decision was guided by an artful judgment—and in this case, artful practice is animated by U.S. patriotism. The body posture of the marines and composition of the photo convey the triumphant resurgence of U.S. military power. The lack of any real "information" in the photo becomes an asset because nothing detracts from the desired symbolic effect. The reality in this photograph is not simply that of a battle won, of exhausted troops trying to install a flag with an awkward, makeshift mast, but rather that of the stars and stripes ascendant in a far-off land. This reality was as contrived, in a sense, as Joe McCarthy's crop job.

In the end, Evans sees art as merely a skill—a subtle one developed through experience and, perhaps, through reading a book like the volume under review (that's my point, not his). But he does not see the art of photojournalism as itself organized by the cultural and political milieu in which the manipulators of the technique live everyday. He has no sociological or historical perspective for understanding how professional seeing, like all seeing, gets organized. Hence, a fundamental naiveté surrounds Evans's various wisdoms.

But my sociological point reduces to a major quibble; only the high quality of Evans's work prompts these efforts to go beyond its impressive competence. The book itself contains many wonderful pieces that help a reader both document and advance beyond its major failing. For this reason alone it is worthy of all the praise I have tried to heap upon it.