

## The Photographer as Aggressor

When photography became a moral act

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One of the most widely and attentively read photographic books in recent years was a collection of essays by Susan Sontag, On Photography. (1) This book was not fiction, but a series of musings by the iconoclastic Sontag on the meaning and effects of a plethora of photographs in our culture. Following its publication there was a remarkable outpouring of concern - comments, criticism, academic debate and readers' correspondence - on a scale probably unprecedented in the history of photography for a book of words as opposed to pictures.

Sontag made photographers uneasy and defensive, for many reasons. One of the prime causes of so much jittery concern, however, was Sontag's insistence that taking photographs was an aggressive/sexual act. She said: "There is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera"; "It (photography) is mainly a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power"; "To photograph people is to violate them"; "Like guns and cars, cameras are fantasy machines whose use is addictive"; "To photograph someone is sublimated murder", and so on. Words like "intrusion", "trespass", "exploit", "violate", "devalue", "tool of power" are liberally sprinkled throughout these photographic essays. (2)

It is interesting and curious that these remarks by Sontag should have been so provocative, because the most dominant characteristic of the photographer since the 1880s has been his/her aggression.

This might be difficult for photographers themselves to accept - especially when the reader can name several friends who are gentle contemplative types - but the fact remains that the single most consistent attribute of the 20 century photographer is his willingness, and even desire, to violate any and all social conventions of good behavior in order to take a picture. This image of the photographer/aggressor is inescapable in the fictional characters of photographers in short stories and novels. It is the most dominant theme in fiction which deals, however cursorily, with photography. It would be dishonest to overlook this fact, unpleasant though it might be. Therefore, any study which

attempts to deduce the public's attitude to photographers and photography, as reflected in contemporary literature, must come to grips with the photographer as aggressor.

The origins of this attitude are not difficult to find, although they have been ignored by all historians. It is worthwhile to examine the beginnings of the public's disenchantment with photographers because it is in these historical events that the photographer-aggressor was created.

### **The Photographer as Aggressor, in Fact**

Photography in general received a "good press" throughout the wet-plate era, from the early 1850s to the 1880s. The profession was considered an honorable one; it was useful, enjoyable, and educational. Its applications to both the arts and the sciences were growing, and its public image was held in high esteem. A growing number of well-bred ladies was entering the profession which was renowned for its lack of sexual discrimination, its rewarding of social skills, and its encouragement of the Victorian virtues of patience, tact, and enterprise. The photographic press never-failingly upheld the respectability of the profession and berated those individuals, or aspects of the trade, which were inconsistent with good manners and a sense of social responsibility.

This image of respectability was quickly lost, never to be recovered, with the advent of the dry-plate and hand camera around 1880. In all the essays and books on the history of photography in which the introduction of the hand camera is extolled, rarely, if ever, is mentioned the social approbation and general distaste directed towards the snapshot. They might point out that the hand camera was scorned by most serious photographers; they do not point out that it was almost universally criticized by every intelligent non-photographer as a major social nuisance. They might discuss the large numbers of amateurs who entered the medium for the first time; they do not reveal that these snapshotters were generally derided as camera "fiends." They occasionally mention the competition for already dwindling markets between the professional and the amateur; they do not pursue the idea that the late 19 century amateur brought photography into such disrepute that it has taken more than 100 years for the status of the medium to recover.

Until the early 1880s the history of photography had never experienced such a shock wave of change. No longer was photography the prerogative of the trained professional or reasonably well-educated and wealthy amateur. Now

photography was "child's play" which "a person of average intelligence could master. . . in three lessons." Thousands upon thousands of amateurs now became their own photographers - and wreaked havoc in the medium. By 1900 it was estimated that there were 4 million "camera fiends" who were "kodaking" everywhere and creating a major social nuisance of themselves in the process of filling their albums.

But *what* was it exactly to which people objected in snapshot photography that they had not opposed with earlier processes? The answer is straightforward: *for the first time people could be photographed surreptitiously*. Of course clandestine pictures had been made with wet-plates (notably in the case of photographing uncooperative prisoners), but these had been the exceptions, necessitating a great deal of prior planning. With the snapshot camera, anyone at any time could be the victim of an embarrassing or even incriminating picture. Sad to relate, the snapshot photographer knew and capitalized on the fact and it became the rage to capture the unposed person in awkward situations. The layman feared and hated the amateur with his ubiquitous camera. And the snapshotters ignored the restraints of common decency and good manners. The problem rapidly reached such proportions that for the first time the act of taking, or not taking, a picture was less an aesthetic consideration and more a moral or ethical one. All the endless debates about the photojournalist and his integrity (or lack of it) during the 20 century up to the present day have their roots in the uninhibited and unconstrained actions of the amateur of the 1880s. It is worth repeating for emphasis that, contrary to popular assumption, the snapshot photographer was loathed by the vast majority of right-thinking citizens during the final decades of the 19 century. Why this fact has been ignored or overlooked is difficult to understand because a plethora of articles, news items, diatribes, and irate correspondence is evident from even a cursory scanning of late Victorian publications.

The origins of the photographer/aggressor are well illustrated by this early incident reported from the seaside resort of Broadstairs in 1881. It has all the ingredients of the problem in one succinct paragraph. Several young ladies were enjoying themselves in the sea when a young man "with the inevitable camera" came along, a large wave struck the bathers and spun one of them around until, breathless but laughing, she was flung on the sand. The force of the wave had pushed the strap of her costume off her shoulder, and just as she noticed it and hurriedly replaced the strap, she heard the click of the camera and saw the man's grin. The girl jumped up from the water and, without saying a word, snatched the camera and flung it out to sea. (3)

This is the classic confrontation between a member of the public and the snapshot enthusiast which will be repeated hundreds of times in the succeeding years and is therefore worth analyzing. First, such a picture could never have been attempted just a few years earlier. The collodion process would have necessitated the setting up of a darkroom tent and the coating of a glass plate prior to the exposure. The presence of this bulky darkroom and the activities of the photographer under a dark cloth with the camera on a sturdy tripod would have been clearly evident to a prospective "sitter." In addition the exposure times would have been so long (commonly 10 seconds) that the active cooperation of the sitter in staying still for this time would have been essential. The subject would have had to be a willing and active cooperater in the production of the picture. But with dry plates and instantaneous exposures this photographer could make a picture without the agreement or participation of the subject. He was now an intruder. Perhaps the most important element in the story is that the girl heard the click of the camera and *saw the man grin*. He was satisfied that he had taken the shot at the expense of an unwilling subject, that he had triumphed at the cost of her embarrassment. If he had immediately seen her annoyance, quickly apologized, and offered her the offending plate, no doubt the story would have had a happier ending and been a salutary lesson to the photographer on future occasions. But no - the lady stiffened into a pose of righteous indignation, and the photographer alienated himself with his self-satisfied smirk. In this circumstance the legal rights are irrelevant. The photographer's act prompted hate and violence. When such instances are multiplied by the thousands, it is not difficult to understand why the amateur photographer was a social outcast.

The problem was as acute in America as in Europe. In 1884 The New York Times featured a story on "The Camera Epidemic," (4) which was one among many, in which it likened the snapshot craze with an outbreak of cholera which had become a "national scourge." Even people in perfect health, it said, are constantly harassed by those who have contracted the camera disease. No one can walk down the street or sit down in the woods with a young lady without a dozen or fifteen cameras trained on them by "camera lunatics" concealed somewhere close by. Another article in the same newspaper (5) took up the theme of the "lunatics" and asserted that "it has not occurred to a single medical man that the first noticeable increase in the percentage of lunatics in this country and in England took place about a year after the introduction of dry plate photography... We need search no further to find out why our lunatic asylums are crowded."

These and other facetious articles in prominent newspapers of the period serve as a reminder of the widespread distaste for the amateur photographer. The situation was not helped by the growing number of blackmail cases involving snapshots, (6) with curates and prominent society people as the prime targets. (7) In fact, actresses were always fair game for the snapshot photographer. The Amateur Photographer, the organ of the hand camera worker, wrote that "we must especially regret that Mdme. Sarah Bernhardt was not photographed the other day as she fell down the flight of stairs at a theater"! (8) Because of attitudes like this it is evident why the amateur photographer was held in disrepute and why the public began to retaliate.

A somewhat forthright answer to the amateur was published in 1885: "There is but one remedy for the amateur photographer. Put a brick through his camera whenever you suspect he has taken you unawares. And if there is any doubt, give the benefit of it to the brick, not to the camera. The rights of private property, personal liberty, and personal security - birthrights, all of them, of American citizens - are distinctly inconsistent with the unlicensed use of the instantaneous process." (9)

In England "several decent young men" were reported to have formed a Vigilance Association "for the purpose of thrashing the cads with cameras" who take pictures of ladies at the seaside. The writer wished them "stout cudgels and much success." (10)

By the late 1880s the snapshot enthusiast, after displaying an utter lack of integrity or even common good manners, was feared and hated. The problem was exacerbated by the introduction of the first Kodak camera in 1888 which provided a fully self-contained system - the amateur no longer needed to know anything about photography. As the Kodak advertisements proclaimed: "You push the button - we do the rest." The Kodak craze swelled the ranks of the amateur snaphooters and of the social pests by hundreds of thousands of irresponsible camera fiends. Violent reactions to the surreptitious use of the camera was not only condoned but applauded, as epitomized by this verse which parodies the Kodak slogan:

*Picturesque landscape,  
Babbling brook,  
Maid in a hammock  
Reading a book;  
Man with a Kodak  
In secret prepares*

*To picture the maid,  
As she sits unawares.  
Her two strapping brothers  
Were chancing to pass;  
Saw the man with the Kodak  
And also the lass.  
They rolled up their sleeves  
Threw off hat, coat, and vest--  
The man pressed the button  
And they did the rest!*

The situation was no laughing matter for the majority of pedestrians. Press reports encouraged the citizen to fight back. In an article titled "The Camera Fiend," The Chicago Tribune (11) wrote that "something must be done, and will be done, soon... A jury would not convict a man who violently destroyed the camera of an impudent photographer guilty of a constructive assault upon modest women." It recommended that the pedestrian should "fight for his rights" by attacking photographers while hoping that the legislature would pass a law to protect citizens against insult and arrogance from snapshot photographers.

The plea for a law against public photography had been heard on many occasions since the introduction of the hand camera. (Although anti-photography laws were never introduced in Britain and America, a law prohibiting photography without permission was introduced in Germany on 1 July 1907.)

Photographic magazines began to give advice on manners and picture-etiquette to their readers - but it was too little, too late, like attempting diplomatic negotiations between opposing trenches. The photographer was more likely to heed the advice of those writers who advocated "that a small revolver may on occasion be a not altogether undesirable addition to the [photographic] kit; or perhaps some enterprising inventor will 'combine' a shooting instrument with a shutter"! (12) Snapshot enthusiasts were encouraged to "take the precaution to carry a thick stick as part of their equipment, otherwise they may find their cameras reduced to a wreck in consequence of their inability to defend themselves." Another suggestion was the formation of a Photographic Defence Association in order to act as bodyguards to amateur photographers while they were shooting in public. This and similar suggestions might seem an overreaction today, but they were seriously considered in the late 19 century, particularly when prominent writers were merely reflecting public sentiment by asserting that because "the hand camera fiend... respects nothing except the exercise of muscular Christianity upon his carcass, there are cases when

damage to person and property would not only be pardonable but meritorious."  
(13)

Perhaps it is only fair to point out that a high percentage of camera fiends were women. When Prince George of Greece was traveling to America in 1891, he was "pursued by 150 ladies, all armed with cameras, who persisted in photographing him, despite his protests and his attempts to cover his face. This is really a social nuisance, which ought to be sternly repressed." (14) The writer continued, "but who can effectually guard against the pertinacity of a lady photographer?" Punch magazine published many cartoons lampooning the insensitivities of the amateur photographer and of the lady snapshot enthusiast. In one, four women photographers with their cameras are stationed at intervals down a twisting hill, waiting for a male bicyclist to make his descent. The caption runs: "Caution! This hill is dangerous!" (15) In another, an elderly gentleman is precariously hanging from a tree branch over a stream while three ladies with their snapshot cameras are taking their camera club monthly assignment: "A Study of Action. (16) The callousness of amateur photographers was renowned; they responded to a fellow human being's danger, embarrassment or difficulty merely by seeing the opportunity for a snapshot. Interestingly, the photographer depicted in this situation was just as often female as male.

The public indignation over the use of the inconspicuous and surreptitious use of the hand camera prompted a good many discussions, for the first time, on the morality or ethics of street photography. (17) Issues were raised at this period which have never, and perhaps never will be, resolved due to the infinite varieties of motives from which the pictures are made and of the complexities of personal integrity. As a topic of debate I would offer this 1910 assertion: "Our moral character dwindles as our instruments get smaller." (18)

This was a prophetic statement. With the introduction of smaller, easily concealed cameras with wide-aperture lenses, which permitted photographs to be made in low light level situations, modern indiscreet photojournalism was born. Newspapers and magazines, with an insatiable appetite for pictures, both reflected and reinforced the photographers attitude: "the picture - at any cost." As any impartial observer will admit, no aspect of a life was too private, no tragedy too harrowing, no sorrow too personal, no event too intimate, to be witnessed and recorded by the ubiquitous photographer.

Volumes could be written on the moral and ethical choices confronting the photographers of people and events. Suffice to say that, beginning in the 1880s

and continuing through the present, the photographer has been identified with aggression, and this fact is clearly revealed in the fictional characters in 20 century literature. The more responsible photojournalists are aware of this problem, and endlessly debate the issues with colleagues - and never reach any conclusion to their moral dilemma except that the personal integrity of the photographer is the deciding factor. A typical acknowledgment of the problem, and an implicit plea for understanding, was voiced by the photojournalist Leonard Freed:

*What sort of man is the photographer? The mounted police charge. The blood flows while I see it all as my private stage setting. We are dancing a public ballet. I look for the relationship of forms. This is my super-art appreciation course. All of this while a beaten woman screams. And I tell myself, I'm doing this for her, so none will forget this day. (19)*

Another prominent photojournalist, Larry Burrows, was on assignment in Vietnam when the helicopter in which he was traveling with a group of marines was raked by machine gun fire from the ground. Burrows experienced a "moment of doubt."

*It's not easy to photograph a man dying in the arms of his fellow countryman and later to record the breakdown of his friend. I fought with my conscience. Was I simply capitalising on other men's grief? But I concluded that what I was doing would penetrate the hearts of those at home who are simply too indifferent. And I felt I was freed to act on that condition. (20)*

Life magazine photographer George Silk spoke for most of his war photographer colleagues when he said: "I saw the soldiers fighting and dying... I was ashamed. So I drove myself to show the folks at home, as best I could, how the soldiers lived and died. I reasoned that I might do some good for humanity; that, perhaps, if people got a good rough look at how wars are fought, they might stop future wars - or something like that." (21)

There are many fine photographers who are well aware of the aggressive, exploitive nature of the photographic act yet temper this knowledge with their own sense of humanity, dignity and integrity. Many others are merely exploitive and it is these photographers who have created the public's image of the photographer as violence-vulture, an attitude reflected in the words of Malcolm Muggeridge: "I see the camera, far more than even nuclear weapons, as the great destructive force of our time." (22) In a later article, Muggeridge wrote:

*I consider that the invention of the camera was a sombre moment in our history. Well named camera obscura! They ever must believe a lie, Blake wrote, who see with, not through the eye. The camera is the greatest instrument for seeing with, as distinct from through, ever devised. And, oh God! what lies it has spread and made credible!" (23)*

Many other thinkers and writers have echoed the same distrust of the camera. Peter Simple has asserted that the photographer "tempts us, by draining all human feeling from what we see, to find first the world of others meaningless and then ourselves." (24)

In the minds of Muggeridge, Simple and scores of other antagonists to the camera, the photographer is not the caring, feeling, humanitarian but the paparazzo, the sensation seeker, the aggressive, uncaring, unfeeling, violator of privacy, an unwanted intruder of grief and suffering, who will break every convention of decent behavior in order to snatch a saleable picture. And it is this image of the photographer which is most clearly reflected in recent fiction.

### **The Photographer as Aggressor, in Fiction**

The most vivid picture of the photographer as aggressor is given in the novel The Photographer. This is an intriguing, well-written study of a photographer's obsession, the taking of a perfect, sensational picture of a violent act, at any cost, including murder. The photographer is willing to sacrifice anything - including honor, the woman he loves, the life of the political leader of his country, even his own freedom - for the sake of a single photograph.

The author, Pierre Boulle, was no stranger to violence and aggression. At the outbreak of World War II he was a rubber planter in Malaya and joined the French forces in Indochina. When France collapsed, he fled to Singapore and joined the Free French Mission. After the Japanese invasion he was sent via Rangoon and the Burma Road to Kunming, infiltrating as a guerilla into Indochina. He was captured in 1942 and escaped after two years and joined the special force in India. Since the war, Boulle has written many books including The Bridge over the River Kwai, Planet of the Apes and The Executioner.

His novel The Photographer (25) is the story of Martial Gaur who, as a youth in Paris in the early 1930s, had been an active member of an extreme right-wing political group. In his own words, he was a "professional rabble-rouser," "taking part in every seditious demonstration, dealing out blows with his fists and

occasionally with a lead pipe." On the death of his journalist father, young Martial (even his name has aggressive connotations) was forced to find a career, even though he was a half-educated, vicious radical. A friend of his father's, old Tournette, was a photographer who suggested that the young man use a camera. Without much enthusiasm Martial takes the proffered camera to the next political demonstration. As expected, a riot ensued. He began to wield the camera instead of the lead pipe. "He did not press the button until the very moment the weapon landed on the victim's face. This gave him a certain satisfaction, a sense of achievement." One of his political colleagues was surrounded by enemies but instead of responding to his cries for help, Martial stepped back and photographed the savage beating.

Martial was no longer a participant but a cold-blooded observer - he was a photographer:

*He took several exposures, without even hearing the curses the wretched (colleague) yelled at him. Then, as the battle again receded, he shifted his position so as to be closer to the scene of action, not as he used to do, with a show of defiance, but furtively, taking care not to get himself involved and to maintain his freedom of movement, looking all round him with a fresh eye, an eye that was indifferent to the issue at stake in this brawl, unconcerned about distinguishing friend from foe, fired only by the desire to discover some colourful element - an impartial eye, as old Tournette would say.*

For "impartial", read "unfeeling". Martial Gauer had been baptized by violence and was now a fully-fledged photographer. He was delighted by the outbreak of war and his excitement, "which had nothing to do with patriotism", was fueled by the possibilities of striking pictures in the violent events. This aggression, lack of feeling, and addiction to danger, make him a great war photographer, first during the German invasion of Paris, then Korea, Indochina and finally Algeria, where he lost one of his legs. Since then he had been reduced to photographing pinups in his studio.

He was now an embittered "artist", still dreaming of the one, last, sensational picture which would be the culmination of his life's work. The novel centers around Gauer's obsession with this picture, and how it was planned. Gauer is privy to an assassination attempt on the President of France. Instead of foiling the plot, he encourages the plotters and deviously manoeuvres the place and timing of the assassination in order to provide him with the perfect exclusive picture opportunity, the photograph which would "arouse feelings of frenzy in the

general public at the same time as admiration among connoisseurs and artists - the unmistakable hallmark of success."

The dust-jacket of the novel asks: "How far will a frustrated photographer go to get an exclusive shot...?" The implicit answer is that the photographer is capable of *anything* including murder, in order to achieve a picture.

If fictional characters are any guide, the public's image of the photographer is inextricably linked with violence. Most of the novels of the 20 century which depict photographers relate picture taking to an act of aggression. From the many available, the following examples will illustrate the fact.

Two books which deal with Presidential assassinations and photography in addition to the one already discussed, are The Parallax View and Game Bet.

The Parallax View, by Loren Singer, centers on Tucker, a newspaper photographer who becomes suspicious about the numbers of his colleagues who have died under mysterious circumstances since they witnessed the assassination of the President of the USA during a motorcade through a major city. He is even more suspicious when it dawns on him that all his dead colleagues were visible in a 2 1/2 minute news film of the event - and that the colleagues died in the order in which they flashed on the screen. Only four photographers and journalists are left (including Tucker) and clearly they have been targeted to be killed. By whom? Why? Tucker contacts the other three colleagues still alive. Cooperation is minimal. They are suspicious of each other, and their efforts at cooperation are marred by jealousy and mutual contempt. Not one of them is a desirable character. One dies after a homosexual orgy; another is killed while attempting to escape the country. That leaves Tucker, the photographer, and Graham, a journalist. In spite of their vocal overt distaste for each other they join forces briefly, follow a few leads, and are both forced to kill in messy, unprofessional ways. The character differences between the photographer and journalist are emphasized, and are instructive in this context.

The journalist is "a machine, an intellect, a researcher in behavior or in personality. Not knowing but deductive, impersonal, unemotional, accurate". It is through this journalist that the reader learns that the assassinations of news men have been instigated by an agency of the government. His attitudes to photographers are also clear: "it didn't take much brain to be a photographer"; photographers are "venal, self-destructive idiots."

The photographer is a far more disgusting character than the journalist -

alcoholic, violent, irrational, sick of society and social mores, and anxious to get even. He began as a pornographer before becoming a newspaper photographer, and does not see much difference between the two. He is just the paranoid, neurotic, aggressive type who is the perfect recruit for the agency which he first investigated. His target for assassination is his journalist colleague.

Game Bet by Stockton Woods, is about a photographer who is both aggressor and victim. He boasts of his skill as a rifle marksman and is maneuvered into a bet. To win the bet he must aim a rifle at the President of the USA as he rides in a motorcade, but photograph him instead, with a camera mounted on the rifle barrel. For some inexplicable reason he inserts live ammunition in the rifle. Cory, the marksman/photographer, organizes a convenient vantage point from which to "shoot" the President, takes his pictures, and seems to have won the bet. But then he sees a real assassin aiming a rifle at the President from a neighboring office window. Cory shoots him. Agents and officers hear the shot from Cory's window, assume he is attempting to assassinate the President, and fire back. Cory escapes but although he saved the President's life he is now hunted by every law agency in the country, and all witnesses to the bet end up dead.

It is interesting that even this plot has some historical precedents. Several rifle-cameras were designed in the 19 century. E.J. Marey devised a photographic gun which he aimed at flying birds like an ordinary rifle. Thomas Skaife constructed a pistol camera which he aimed at Queen Victoria - and was nearly arrested for attempting to assassinate her. Perhaps these, and various other photographers, were already subconsciously aware of photography as an aggressive act, and this awareness led to the design of cameras which mimicked guns, rifles and pistols.

One of the most intriguing novels which featured a pistol/camera was The Camera Fiend, published in 1911, and written by E. W. Hornung (who was brother-in-law to Arthur Conan Doyle). In The Camera Fiend, Hornung recounts the story of Dr. Baumgartner, a psychic photographer, whose ambition is "to intercept the actual flight of the soul" at the moment of death. Baumgartner fanatically believed that "a man's soul may be caught apart, may be cut off from his body by no other medium than a good sound lens in a light-tight camera." He sought permission to photograph at hospital death beds and at executions of prisoners, with no success. He then began to murder tramps sleeping outdoors; he shot them first and then immediately photographed his victims, but the souls

were too quick for him. He then invented an ingenious camera which contained a pistol. Pressing the bulb of the pneumatic shutter fired the gun; releasing the pressure fired the camera. The results were so disappointing that Baumgartner concluded that derelicts had no souls to photograph. Persistent to the end, Baumgartner shot himself with his own pistol/camera in a last desperate attempt to prove his theory.

Even many of the terms used in photography are linked to weapons, notably "snapshot", a word derived from hunting. As an aside, it is remarkable just how many photographic words have aggressive/ sexual connotations. Apart from "shooting" a picture, photographers "fire" the shutter, "aim" the camera, "expose" the film, "frame" the subject (with connotations of blackmail), "confront" a subject, "manipulate" the print, and so on. Even the "taking" of a picture has a connotation of aggression.

Murder and photography are linked in hundreds of novels including, to name a few, Arthur, Murder With Pictures, Blow Up, Fisheye, Out of Focus, Zoom!, Triple Exposure, The Sightseer, Blind Date, Skinflick, The Little Sister, The High Window, The Quick Red Fox, Eyes of Laura Mars, Reflex, as well as those already mentioned and many, many others. Without a doubt, photography as a violent act, or as an act which invites violence, is the dominant theme of practically all the fiction of the 20 century which deals, however tangentially, with the medium. It is worth noting an incident or two from these books in order to emphasize the point.

Several variations of the photographer/violence theme occur in Blind Date, by Jerry Kosinski, as might be expected from an author whose own life has been a mosaic of violent episodes and whose skills include photography. George Levanter, the hero of Blind Date, is a Russian determined at any cost to find freedom in the west. He knew that he would need a profession "with a universal language" and became a photographer. Within two years his work is widely published and exhibited and he receives offers to lecture abroad by several Western art societies. Thinking that his work would be a fine form of advertising for the export of domestic photographic products, the Russian authorities grant Levanter a short-term passport. (This episode closely parallels Kosinski's own efforts to escape from Poland, where he was a prize-winning photographer). Blind Date is episodic in the sense that it is a beautifully constructed patchwork quilt of separate events and characters. Several episodes involve photography, most in connection with violence, such as Levanter witnessing the death of a photographer who was photographing a dignitary when his flashbulb shattered -

a common occurrence in the earlier decades. Hearing the loud crack, the security guards drew their guns and fired at the photographer: "Blood poured from his neck and chest, seeping through his clothes, spattering his camera."

Levanter himself commits a particularly brutal murder with cold, calculated deliberation. He had no regrets and uses a photographic metaphor for his act: "But what had taken place there had already receded into a remote corner of his memory. It was nothing but an old Polaroid snapshot; no negative, photographer unknown, camera thrown away."

Susan Sontag's assertion that "to photograph someone is sublimated murder" no longer seems so outrageous.

An important aspect of the photographer-as-aggressor must be the photographer-as-sexual-aggressor. Many of the fictional characters in modern literature equate the act of photography with the act of sex. As Sontag says: "To photograph people is to violate them" and to photograph a member of the opposite sex (usually a woman, as most fictional photographers are male) is to rape them.

There is no doubt that to many laymen and amateurs the camera is a perfect introduction to a potential sexual encounter. The camera is a tool of seduction. This attitude is epitomized by a "Dear Abby" letter:

Dear Abbey: My husband uses a very clever gimmick to get acquainted with pretty young women whenever we are on a vacation. He always carries a couple of cameras to make himself look like a real expert photographer, and when he sees a pretty girl, he compliments her on her figure, or face, or hair, and asks her if she would mind posing for a few pictures. This never fails. Then he offers to buy her a drink or lunch or something so he can get better acquainted with her. (Of course he takes her name and address so he can send her the pictures later.)

Sometimes he doesn't even have any film in his camera. He's 45 years old and acts like a teenager. Would I be within my rights to introduce myself to some of these bathing beauties and spoil his fun?  
Shutterbug's Wife

*Dear Wife: Certainly. But be sure you catch him before he "clicks."*

Perhaps this particular example is sad or funny, but the attitude is common even

among photographers. One internationally respected photographer wrote: "I am incredibly suspicious of photographers who specialize in the nude. I feel sure the majority take these photographs because they want to see a girl without her clothes... The majority of people are, understandably, afraid to say to a girl: 'please come along to my room, and take your clothes off so I can look at your body.' So they use a camera as an excuse."

Of course, most photographers, according to the fiction, want to do more than look. In Blind Date, the hero uses a photographic variation of the "come up and see my etchings" routine in order to seduce (unsuccessfully) a beautiful Russian actress. But the sexual aggression of the photographer was never better expressed than in the movie "Blow Up", although this theme is not as explicit in the film script and even less in the short story which inspired the film idea, as will be discussed later. But the movie sequence in which the photographer shoots a writhing sensual model, while constantly driving them both to a visual climax, has become an archetype for the sexually aggressive act of photography. The session begins slowly, the model standing in front of a backdrop and going into standard fashion poses. Music is played - jazzy and sensual. She starts to undulate to the music. The photographer moves in closer. Her movements increase in tempo. They are both on their knees. A new record, and faster music. The photographer is jumping around her, getting more and more excited. "Come on", he says, "that's great. That's great! That's good. Good. Come on, more of that. More of that. Now, give it to me. Really give it to me. Come on, now!" The model lies down on the floor, writhing her body. The photographer stands astride her, bending his legs lower and lower. He's shooting faster. He's getting more and more excited. His movements are wild. "That's great. Good. That's good. That's good. Yes! Go on. That again. That again. That again. Go, go. Great. That's it. Lovely. Love, for me. Love, for me. Now. Now." His voice rises to a crescendo. "Yes. Yes. Yes". He stops - and the model slumps back in exhaustion.

It is the classic scene of photography as a sexual act. Its potency is attested to by the fact that if there were not many photographers behaving in this manner prior to the movie there were thousands imitating the photographer in subsequent years. This sensual frenzy in a studio has become a cliché, perhaps, but a cliché is only a truth too often repeated. The movie "Blow Up" represents a watershed in the 20th century attitudes to the photographer; it both reflected and led a social/cultural movement in the medium, as we will discuss in another context.

But one of the personality types which the movie helped to generate was the amoral, hard-living, hard drinking, fast-traveling, and oversexed photographer-adventurer. The fictional character who embodies these characteristics is Philip Quest, the hero of several books by Peter Townend, who, before becoming a successful writer, was a night club owner, actor, bullfight reviewer - and freelance photographer. His books include Out of Focus, Zoom!, Triple Exposure and Fisheye, all of which feature the Philip Quest character whose "hands and mind are uniquely suited to the intricacies of fine cameras and photography - and no less capable with beautiful women, or the kinds of danger that kill most men." He is "smart, tough, sexy... and loaded for action." Or: "Meet Philip Quest. He's a free-loving, freewheeling, and over-sexed photojournalist." "A new discovery in the sex and action game." Quest has a gun, of course, hidden "beneath a carton of 120 Ektachrome film", alongside his Leica, Nikon Fs and Hasselblad cameras in his aluminum photographic cases. The dialogue is slick and shallow. Quest is lazily floating in a pool dreaming of his last sexual exploit, when a visitor refers to the crotch of Quest's shorts: "Sweet dreams, eh? Is that what you photographers call an extension tube?" It is this combination of sex and violence, coupled with photography, that makes the Townend series of books so typical of their genre. They make good beach or pool-side reading when there is nothing better to do, but they exploit the themes rather than attempting to understand them.

Sex and violence are also the major ingredients of Eyes of Laura Mars, with one special difference - the photographer is a woman. (It should also be noted that this book was written by H.B. Gilmour, also a woman, after the movie was made. Normally a movie screenplay is based on a book but in this case the book was based on the screenplay) The story concerns Laura Mars, a 34 year old female fashion photographer whose work is considered "erotic, violent, chic, sensual, sadistic... That *female* photographer who makes fantasies real and reality fantasies." Her photographs are set up to imitate the bloody murders of elegantly dressed models. But then fantasy becomes reality. Her models and close associates are being murdered by a maniac who stabs his victims through their eyes with an ice-pick. While the murders are taking place, Laura "sees" through the eyes of the murderer; she is psychically linked to him by love and empathy. There is some discussion in the book on the photographer as aggressor, and of the question whether or not such violent pictures promote aggression or act as a catharsis for it. The book's appeal lies in its mixture of sex, violence, photography - and the current craze for psychic thrillers. In the book's short cover blurb, the words "cruelty", "violence" and "death" are repeated six times.

For the movie on which this book was based (starring Faye Dunaway as the

photographer), Laura's photographs were taken by Helmut Newton and Rebecca Blake, both top fashion photographers whose works reflect similarly violent, erotic setups as those described in the fiction. Also, director Irvin Kershner began his career as a photography teacher at the University of California at Los Angeles, and later became a photographer for the State Department.

While writing the above words I glanced at this week's movies in the TV Guide. They included: "Don't Answer the Phone. (1980) R: Violence, sexual situations. Because it might be a deranged photographer." Screening on another channel, at the same time, was "The Wrecking Crew" (1969), about a professional freelance photographer who doubles as a secret agent with a passion for "lethal lovelies". In tricky situations his camera shoots a blinding green gas.

An infinitely more intelligent and challenging novel than any of the books already mentioned is The Sightseer, by Geoffrey Wolff. The whole book is a sustained comic/tragic metaphor in which the author is a lens and life a big movie in the making. As one reviewer succinctly noted: "The ruthless lens moves about like a weapon, a penis: no wonder primitive people see 'taking' a picture as a kind of rape." (26) This is one of the most serious and profoundly introspective books which attempt to depict the character of a photographer. There is a lot of philosophizing about visual meaning and a good deal of traumatic self-examination of the photographer's motives, one aspect of which is the photographer as aggressor: "Armed with a lens to inject between myself and the world, I thought of myself as a formidable, deadly fellow. After all, I arranged the world to fit the dimensions of my viewfinder. At large among people, carrying my Leica or my movie camera, cool-eyed, deliberate, editing from the earth's face whatever was useless or gross, I could take the trophies I wanted. Find, fire, freeze. I was a predator." The photographer takes no responsibility for reality, only for the final image.

Another serious book which reflects the sexual aggression of a photographer is Blood Oranges, by John Hawkes. Hugh, the one-armed photographer, is tormented, tempestuous, unreasonable; he is also ill and jealous of his wife. He photographs what he calls "my collection, my catalogue of natural art photographs, my peasant nudes... My unmarried girls of barren countries..." On a walk with his friend and protagonist, Cyril, he spies a peasant girl hoeing a field. Emphasising the predator/prey metaphor, the friends agree: "Let's hunt her down". Even though they cannot speak the girl's language they eventually manage to maneuver her into a barn, where she is cajoled into removing all her clothes while Hugh shoots pictures, "the camera once more substituting its

cyclopean lens for his eyes and nose". The hunt was successful, the peasant girl was "shot", and her image was the trophy.

The heroine of Picture Palace, by Paul Theroux, is an elderly photographer who is often plagued by young photographers bringing their work for praise. She says: "the one with the most expensive equipment always seemed to concentrate on starving natives - I could tell the price of a camera by the rags in a picture... I looked at their work. It may not have been tragedy but it certainly was murder. They were like amateur assassins whose parents gave them a gun for Christmas: they brought me their victims".

The theme is incessant and insistent throughout the literature of the 20 century - the taking of a photograph is a violent act, often with sexual connotations. As one book blurb boasted, the story is about "a dazzlingly chic photographer whose mirror bright lens captures fantastic images of silken eroticism and passionate cruelty".

But it should be emphasized that some critics and social historians have insisted that there is a close relationship between all arts and violence, particularly in recent decades. The photographer-as-aggressor should also be seen in this wider cultural context. Arnold Hauser, in The Philosophy of Art History, insists that:

*The spiritual world of the artist may be incomparably more complex than that of the criminal, but as far as the relation between individual freedom and social causation goes, there seems to be no difference in principle between the creation of a work of art and the commission of a crime. (27)*

Volumes could be written around this assertion, but in this context it is sufficient to make a single point. We have discovered that in the attitudes of many writers and thinkers there is something *especially* aggressive about the act of photography, and we have examined the roots of this attitude in the "snapshot fiends" in the closing decades of the 19 century century. But photography is not an isolated area; it is interconnected with the other arts, and draws its influences from the same cultural *zeitgeist*, rippling out into society until it touches, and is touched by, every aspect of the age, and of its past and future.

For whatever reasons, the arts of recent decades have been suffused with violence and acts of aggression, as reflected in The Destruction in Art Symposium held in London in 1966. This event featured relatively harmless art

acts, such as Al Hansen blowing up a motor scooter, Werner Schreib burning photographs, and Tony West feeding classic books into a meat grinder. Such acts of destruction became increasingly more violent - and sexual - involving mutilation, death and the evisceration of animals. In 1969, Herman Nitsch "crucified" a young woman and "defiled" her with a disemboweled lamb. Other examples, among many, include the artist who shot his own dog and filmed its death throes, and the woman who arranged to be raped by a stranger in a Chicago gallery where the assault was videotaped as her art.

Perhaps the best known artist of violence is Chris Burden who "took on masochistic tendencies, and in a ritualistic succession of self-mutilating and self-threatening acts, he has emerged as a death-wish publicity monger with a suicidal bent." (28) Burden's art includes being shot by a rifle, crawling almost naked through broken glass, being kicked downstairs, inviting a museum audience to electrocute him, laying under a tarpaulin in a busy city street, and many other acts of physical danger.

Acts and the art of destruction, aggression and violence seems to be a requisite of modern culture, much like the blood sports in the colosseum of ancient Rome. It is a sign of the times, and photography is reflecting the mood of the age. As Joseph H. Berke has written: "Man is ready to begin his great work of art, his fundamental project, his supreme act of creation, his monument to the world. He will destroy himself." (29)

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20. Quoted in Creative Camera, May 1969.
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22. The Observer Review, 15 December 1968.
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25. In order to save space I have omitted publishing details for this and all subsequent books. All these titles are relatively easy to find, many of them in secondhand paperback book shops. On my web site I will post an annotated bibliography of novels with photographic themes which readers can use as the basis for their own additions.
26. Norman Sharpnel, The Guardian, 7 September 1974.
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