

SMILE FOR THE BIRDIE

THEY SEEM TO STAND ALONE, TWO SLIGHTLY BLURRED FIGURES AMID AN EMPTY PARISIAN STREET. ONE IS SHINING THE OTHER'S SHOE ON A WIDE AVENUE, BOULEVARD DU TEMPLE. SMOKESTACKS DOMINATE THE SKYLINE. THE YEAR IS 1838, AND THE TWO FIGURES — NOBODY HAS EVER KNOWN WHO THEY WERE — ARE THE FIRST PEOPLE TO HAVE BEEN PHOTOGRAPHED. **CHRIS WRIGHT** REPORTS



PHOTO: LOUIS DAGUERRE

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LOUIS-JACQUES-MANDÉ DAGUERRE'S *BOULEVARD DU TEMPLE* IS A FAMOUS AND IMPORTANT PHOTOGRAPH, AS OLD AS YOU CAN FIND. "IT IS ONE OF THE EARLIEST EXAMPLES OF A TIME AND PLACE FROZEN FOR ETERNITY," WRITES GERRY BADGER IN HIS BOOK, *THE GENIUS OF PHOTOGRAPHY*. "IT TAKES YOU THERE. AND IT ALSO ESTABLISHES IMMEDIATELY ONE OF PHOTOGRAPHY'S GREAT THEMES — THE URBAN EXPERIENCE."

For all its grainy archaism, the photograph sets some themes that resonate to this day. One, it is not a typical depiction of a real event — the streets would have been filled with people, but the length of exposure the primitive technology of the time required meant that only people who were staying still — like having their shoes shined — were captured in the image. Secondly, neither of them had any idea they were being photographed, and probably never found out. Camera tricks? Voyeurism? The candid camera? These things have been with us, it turns out, ever since 1838.

In less than 200 years of history, the camera has undergone an extraordinary evolution in technology, access, usage and influence. Today, we are all photographers — try buying a mobile phone that doesn't have a camera built into it. This combination of vision and communication means we are all now journalists too, the first on the scene, capturing each moment and freezing it for history. "Photography began as a way of collecting the world," Badger says. "It still functions extremely effectively in that role." And it is the most democratic of all the arts, because we can all do it.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES (MAIN)



IN THE MID-1800s, IT WAS POSSIBLE TO TAKE PANORAMIC PHOTOS. THIS CURVED GLASS PLATE IS ONE OF THE FEW SURVIVING EXAMPLES OF THE NEGATIVES PRODUCED BY THIS INNOVATIVE PANORAMIC CAMERA. LEFT: A DAGUERRETYPE CAMERA, ONE OF THE EARLIEST ANCESTORS TO YOUR HANDY DIGICAM

FROM PLATES TO PAPER

So where did it all begin? While Daguerre, who lent his name to the daguerreotype, is often referred to as the pioneer of photography, in fact the first photograph is generally thought to be a composition by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1826. Called *View from the window at Le Gras*, it is scarcely legible as an image, but you can just about make out the view of rooftops. Any camera shake has to be forgiven, as the exposure took a good eight hours.

Niépce used a pewter plate coated with light-sensitive salts inside a small box with a lens attached to it. By the time Daguerre came along a few years later, he had introduced a new process. This time, the plate was copper but coated in polished silver, and was exposed to iodine

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in the dark. Doing so created a coating of silver iodide which was sensitive to light. The image would be developed by mercury vapour and then set with a warm solution of salt. Clearly, it wasn't short of toxic chemicals, but one only has to look at Niépce and Daguerre's images next to each other to see the extraordinary differences. Daguerre's images are sharp, detailed, accurate and unmistakably photographs, even to cynical modern eyes.

Daguerre wasn't the only pioneer out there. Another was Englishman William Henry Fox Talbot, who used a model called a calotype in which light-sensitized paper was exposed in a camera. The images weren't, to be blunt, as good as daguerreotypes; they weren't too sharp, and had a tendency to blur. But the calotype had one huge advantage: it created a negative, from which one could make as many positive prints as they wanted.

"The paper negative, blessed with the priceless capacity to generate endless reproductions, was to form the basis of all modern photography until the advent of the digital camera," says Badger.

Talbot began producing a book, *The Pencil of Nature*, featuring prints from negatives, in 1844. The venture didn't really work; however, it was a useful demonstration not only of photography's versatility but its class-busting realism.

"The instrument chronicles whatever it sees and, would certainly delineate a chimney-pot or chimney-sweeper with the same impartiality as it would the Apollo of Belvedere," Talbot wrote. In class-conscious 19th century Europe, this was a big deal. As photography became more accessible, it delivered more empowerment. Professional portrait studios started to appear in the United States and Europe, allowing the working classes, or at least the rising middle classes, to have pictures taken of themselves. In New York by 1940, Badger writes, you could be daguerreotyped for a dollar, and pretty much anyone could set themselves up as a camera operator.

Technology was swiftly refined. Gustave Le Gray had the idea of soaking a paper negative in beeswax before sensitising it, making it better at capturing detail. In 1851 came the glass negative or wet-plate process, pioneered by Frederick Scott Archer — while cumbersome, it produced great results. It also made photography



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even cheaper — and by the 1850s in France the *carte de visite* portrait, about 10 centimetres by six centimetres, was selling by the thousand. For a small sum, you could have a hundred copies of your portrait made and hand them out to your friends.

"The glass negative could deliver the world, accurately and in great detail," writes Badger. "People in Europe who had never seen Niagara Falls, and might not be willing to accept a painter's interpretation, however accurate, could view this natural wonder for real in a photograph." As such, photography began to shrink the world.

OLDER THAN YOU THINK

Within 20 years of its invention, photography was everywhere, and used by everyone: scientists, botanists, engineers, administrators — and in wars. We might

think of the war photographer as a modern invention, but wars as ancient as the American Civil War and the Crimean War were documented in pictures. Roger Fenton is often considered the first war photographer, and one of his most well-known Crimean images, *Valley of the Shadow of Death* (pictured right), dates from 1855.

Photography also swiftly became a form of artistic expression. Early artists, such as the Edinburgh duo David Hill (a painter by background) and Robert Adamson, were producing admired bodies of photographic art as early as the 1840s. Yet there was already a certain amount of derision given to photography as an art form — as there is now in some circles. The sentiment is neatly encapsulated in something Picasso once said: "Inside every photographer is a painter trying to get out." Throughout the camera's history, through surrealism and on to Andy Warhol's retouched Marilyn Monroe and soup-can images in the pop art movement, the debate has continued.

You might be surprised at how early some of the practices prevalent today actually began. Most of us have edited photos, some with the endless possibilities of Photoshop or Lightroom, others with more simplistic tools that might come pre-installed in a computer's operating system. But the idea of combining two negatives together — so as, for example, to combine one shot with a properly exposed sky and another with land — also dates from the 1850s.

One famed composition from 1857, by the Swedish artist Oscar Gustav Rejlander, is made up of a combination of more than 30 separate negatives. Another from the following year, *River Scene* by Camille Silvy, made strides by combining two negatives, retouching one of them to produce a horizontal white cloud to obscure the join between the two, then pouring more light



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (DRY PLATE CAMERA); CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: JOSEPH NICÉPHORE HENRY FOX TALBOT; ROGER FENTON/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS (MAIN)

ABOVE: VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH BY ROGER FENTON, WIDELY CONSIDERED THE FIRST WAR PHOTOGRAPHER, GRIMLY COVERED THE CRIMEAN WAR
ABOVE LEFT: AN EARLY SLIDING-BOX TYPE DRY COLLODION PLATE CAMERA, FEATURING THE TECHNOLOGY THAT REPLACED THE WET COLLODION PROCESS



HISTORY AT A GLANCE

View from the window at Le Gras by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce is thought to be the first photograph (pictured top right), though he is perhaps not as well known as Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre. Documenting the view from his upper-story workroom at his country house, it took at least an eight-hour exposure to produce the image, and it can only be viewed in controlled lighting. Another irreplaceable relic of photographic history is the oldest negative in existence, a picture of a latticed window in Lacock Abbey, shot by William Henry Fox Talbot (pictured above right).

around the edges while masking the middle so as to draw the eye into the middle of the picture. "The result," writes Badger, "is an image which is as tightly controlled as any contemporary photograph that has been manipulated in a computer."

GAME-CHANGER

Perhaps the most significant step in the development of the camera came in 1888, when a man called George Eastman launched something revolutionary through his company, Kodak — the roll of film.

Eastman had earlier pioneered a new method of taking photos called the dry-plate process, which crucially meant the photographer didn't have to carry a darkroom with him, such as when using the wet plate process. This changed the number of shots a good photographer could take in a day, from six to 10 using the wet-plate method, to a hundred or so on the dry. His No. 1 Kodak camera took this idea a step further. The camera was loaded with a roll of paper coated with a light-sensitive emulsion (a roll of film, as it came to be called). Photographers could take about a hundred pictures on a roll, then send the whole camera back to Kodak's headquarters in Rochester, New York. Kodak would develop the film, print the pictures, and return them to the user along with the camera, reloaded with film.

This was revolutionary. Photography no longer had to be a craft, a scientific achievement; anyone could do it quickly and cheaply. Kodak's motto was "you press the button, we do the rest", and it brought into being the snapshot — indeed, some people think this period of time was when the word was adapted as a photography-related term. In the early days, snapshots were

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circular, before later evolving to the familiar rectangular format of today.

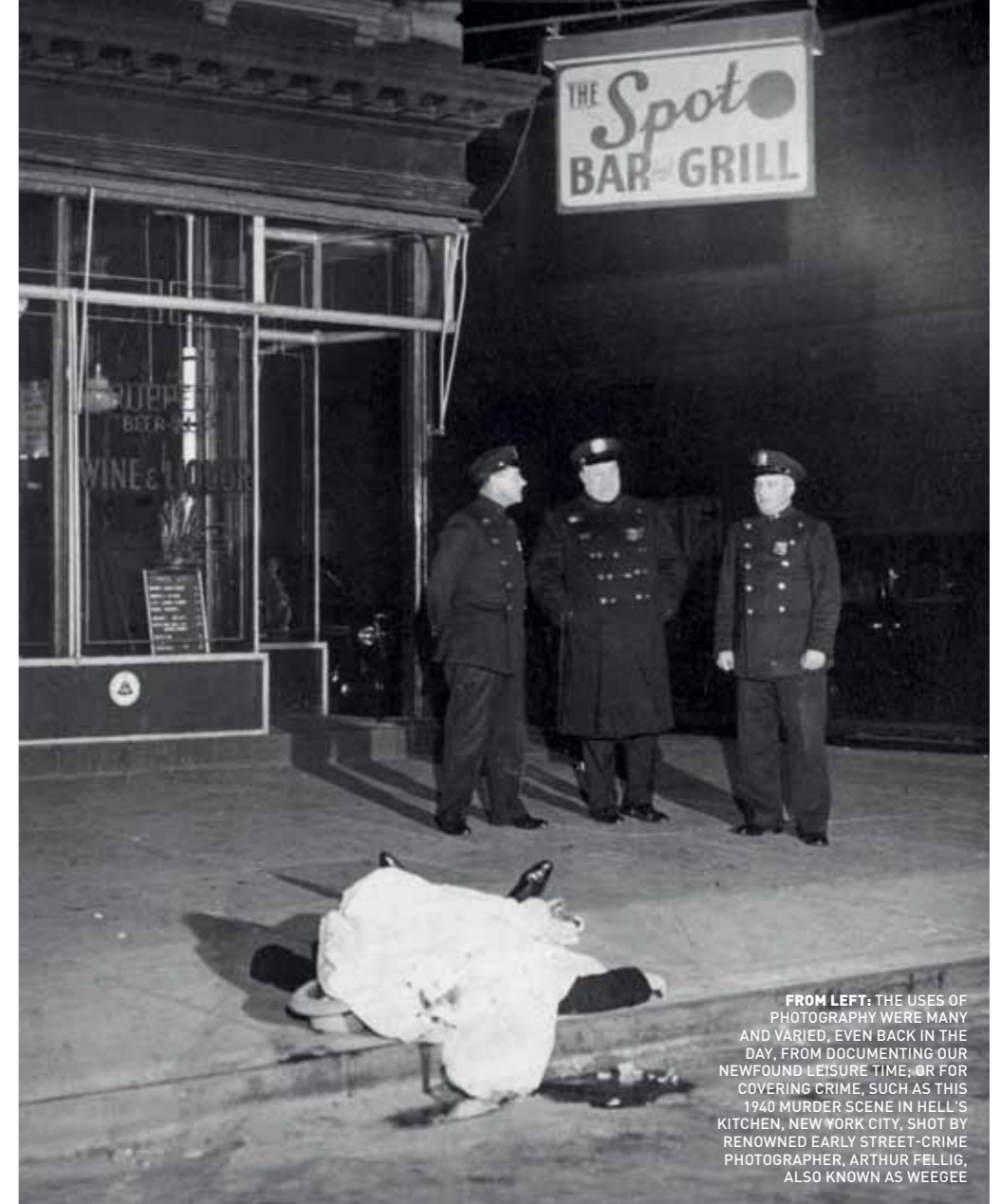
The camera began to fit in with other icons of the late 19th and early 20th century — the skyscraper, the motor car, the rise of cities. Photographers such as Alfred Stieglitz would prowl the metropolis looking for everyday subjects. Others, such as Paul Strand, pioneered the idea of the candid camera, taking unposed (and often unrequested) pictures of ordinary people.

Looking at Strand's brilliant but grim 1916 street portrait *Blind*, we see the emergence of a new photography question: ethics. The shot is of a sightless woman with a sign round her neck saying "blind". Clearly Strand had not asked her if he could take the picture; he used a false lens on the side of his camera so few of his subjects knew they were being photographed. Should they have been asked?

It is a question that continues to be as relevant today, if not more so, even as we're photographed hundreds or even thousands of times a day by remote public surveillance cameras, without ever realising it.



PHOTOS: CORBIS (PEOPLE ON HOLIDAY); WEEGEE/GETTY IMAGES (CRIME SCENE)



FROM LEFT: THE USES OF PHOTOGRAPHY WERE MANY AND VARIED, EVEN BACK IN THE DAY, FROM DOCUMENTING OUR NEWFOUND LEISURE TIME, OR FOR COVERING CRIME, SUCH AS THIS 1940 MURDER SCENE IN HELL'S KITCHEN, NEW YORK CITY, SHOT BY RENOWNED EARLY STREET-CRIME PHOTOGRAPHER, ARTHUR FELLIG, ALSO KNOWN AS WEEGEE

OLD OR NEW?

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY BROUGHT HUGE POSSIBILITY TO THE MEDIUM, BUT IT HASN'T CONVERTED EVERYONE. THERE ARE STILL SOME PURISTS WHO PREFER THE MEDIUM OF FILM. **DCM ASKED ONE DIGITAL DEVOTEE AND ONE FILM AFICIONADO TO EACH STATE THEIR CASE**

OLD Patrick Dransfield



ABOVE: BROOKLYN BRIDGE, SHOT ON FILM BY PATRICK DRANSFIELD

Patrick Dransfield is an amateur who has enjoyed several successful exhibitions in Hong Kong. He uses an old Leica that dates from 1965, an absolute dinosaur by contemporary standards and a time-consuming one at that. His lenses are older still, hand-crafted after World War II. He believes the restraints of older methods carry benefits.

"There is something to be said for the old way," he says. "With my camera, you have a choice about what film you use, and immediately that makes a difference to the end

result. You're forced to use a light meter, separate from the camera. It all means you have to take time — you are conscious that every time you finish a roll of film it is going to take 15 minutes to change it. So everything is that much more measured and thought through."

On a shoot, other photographers tend to eye his massive, bulging bag of lenses and paraphernalia strangely.

"But they've all got the same cameras and largely the same lenses

— so they are going to take something very similar," he points out. "I immediately have an advantage because my cameras are old, idiosyncratic."

Looking at Dransfield's black and white images, what comes through strongly is his exceptional use of light and darkness — something one does not tend to see to the same degree in digital work.

"My mentors are people like Rembrandt, the artists who came before photography, and

of course the use of light in a Rembrandt is very important," he explains.

He believes it is easier to take a good photo in black and white, than in colour. "Remember we dream in black and white, and convert it to colour in our memory," he notes. "There is a particular resonance to black and white."

It is tempting to think that film means having to get everything right in the camera, with no post-production, but in truth the darkroom

is something of a lost art in its own right. "The real masters, people like Ansel Adams, were masters in the darkroom too," says Dransfield. "They learned the craft from beginning to end."

In practice, he leaves the darkroom development to local professionals and rarely even crops his own photos, preferring to stick with what he has taken.

Although he is an amateur, his work has

been published in many magazines, and the old style does present a problem here because few, if any, magazines can handle negatives these days. Instead, the negative is scanned and then sent to the publication — so one way or another it gets digitised anyway. "Digital wins that battle," he says.





PRETTIFYING PHOTOS

Long before Photoshop, Sir Cecil Beaton was using all sorts of tricks to make his subjects look good. Tweaking in the darkroom to slim waists, refine jaws and smooth skin tone — among other things — he became known for his society portraits. It helped that he had a flair for styling and staging shoots to flatter his subjects. Some famous customers included Queen Elizabeth II, Marilyn Monroe, Pablo Picasso and Audrey Hepburn. Given today's press demands on celebrities like German actress Sibel Kekilli (*pictured*), it's just as well digital touch-ups are easier today.

As shutter speeds, film quality and development sophistication improved, so photography moved into new areas, most obviously sport. It became a medium of political movement too, particularly after World War I. The appearance of photo montages from about 1919, in which one could simply cut out photos and arrange them, alongside words and statements, to make a point, created new possibilities. The New Vision movement from the 1920s put the cameras in new places and odd angles,

NEWSPAPERS EMBRACED PHOTOGRAPHY, BOTH FOR NEWS AND CELEBRITY, WHILE POLICE FORCES BEGAN TO USE IT TO DOCUMENT CRIME SCENES



seeking to tell stories beyond the obvious. Photographically illustrated magazines sprung up in the United States and Europe in the 1920s and '30s, creating a new way to tell a story — the photo essay. Newspapers embraced photography, both for news and celebrity, while police forces began to use it to document crime scenes.

This idea of the photograph as evidence would become very important in World War II, especially for evidence of the Holocaust. Pictures from Belsen or Auschwitz remain as horrifyingly powerful today, and were vital in proving an atrocity once so unthinkable that many struggled to believe it. Some still deny it today, making the ever-growing Holocaust archive as necessary as ever.

The photography of atrocity and war raised difficult questions. One author wrote that George Rodger, the first photographer to get into the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, recalled in shock that he'd realised he was "arranging groups and bodies on the ground into artistic compositions in the viewfinder." Capturing powerful and truthful images to convey a horror to the world was his job, and to this day, many photographers must rationalise such choices in this way.

NEW LANDSCAPE

In the past century, the photograph has demonstrated its power to transform opinions. The Vietnam War featured Eddie Adams' famous image of the Saigon chief of police shooting a suspected Vietcong in the head, and Nick Ut's photo of nine-year old Kim Phuc running naked ahead of soldiers, her clothes burned off by napalm. Images like these helped mobilise public opinion and end America's involvement in the war.

Colour photography arrived, and companies like Canon and Nikon made cameras more accessible and affordable. We took film rolls to developers who turned the prints around in ever shorter times — from a week, to mere hours. Polaroids took the developer out of the process, allowing us to see an image within minutes, while disposable cameras, designed to throw away after use, opened new markets.



Then of course came digital photography, which now dominates entirely. As with any game-changing technology, some benefitted and others lost from the digital movement. Print developers saw revenues drop, while sales of editing software and photo printers increased. And with the rise of Photoshop, a new challenge: we are now far more sceptical.

"Most people realise what photographers and media professionals have always known — the camera can lie," writes Badger. "We now know that alternate heads can be grafted onto bodies, and while a photograph of a celebrity in a compromising position might not seriously fool anybody, we are rightly suspicious of news photographs that could have been more subtly altered."

Digital photography has also increased the number of citizen photographers, making us all witnesses — we record what we see. In the newspapers after the July 7 bombings on the London Underground, most photographs were of silhouetted people creeping along dark tunnels (*pictured above*) — shot by ordinary people on mobile phones. From starting out as a very fine craft, photography is now the most democratic of the arts. And there have never been more voters than there are today. ●

OLD OR NEW?

NEW Willy Foo



ABOVE: JAVANESE MAN, SHOT IN DIGITAL BY WILLY FOO

Willy Foo is a Singaporean photographer and entrepreneur who runs LiveStudios, a 16-strong team specialising in commercial photography, with a strong focus on using technology to enhance both the images and the speed with which they're seen. He pioneered a method of live photography in 2003, through which all photographers have WiFi transmitters on their cameras. Pictures taken at an event appear

on a screen within two or three seconds, then can be printed out on the spot as business card-sized images — very popular at weddings and children's birthday parties. "It adds immediate gratification to photos," Foo says. "Prior to this, most people probably never saw the photos. They were almost exclusively for the event host, who wouldn't view them until later. It creates a form of entertainment using technology."

Foo, a self-professed geek, has a background as an IT consultant, so his immersion in the digital world was seamless. "I skipped all film and waited for the first digital camera," he says. For years he specialised in photographing birds and insects, too shy to ask people if he could photograph them, before turning professional and launching his business. So why digital? "The first thing is cost. With film each snap would

cost money to develop. In digital you can make mistakes and learn very quickly," he explains. It is also easier for beginners to learn this way, he says, considering that if they use an analogue camera, they may have forgotten what their camera settings were by the time they see the image, and thus may not learn from their mistakes. For years, he says, the debate around digital was whether the resolution would ever

be high enough. Now, Foo says, 35 mm film has been surpassed by digital. "Medium format has not yet been surpassed, but we are getting close." From the professional perspective though, digital has in some ways increased the burden on the photographer, both because of the wealth of post-production possibilities and the need to send images quickly. "It used to be easy for photographers: take a roll of film, dump it on

the staff and leave it to them to do development and printing," Foo notes. "Now you have to do everything. Right after a shoot you see everybody getting out their laptops, deciding which images to use, editing them and then sending them." Despite using top-end equipment, Foo has been hired in the past by smartphone companies to take impressive shots on their phones. Everyone can be a photographer now, he says.

So what comes next? Foo points to two trends: Android-based cameras (already on the market but not yet widespread on DSLRs), allowing photographers to edit their photos in-camera; and greater connectivity. "Right now, a camera on its own is not very internet-enabled. Once it is, there are much bigger possibilities of sharing photos right away." Foo runs popular photography courses, and looks forward to a

time when he can even gain access to a student's camera remotely to change settings for them. He does however appreciate the classics too. "There will be a niche of photographers who still like the feel and grain of film." The popularity of Instagram embraces that nostalgia for an earlier, simpler "old-school" look. "The whole point of making a photo is to make it look different to how the eye sees it. So there will still be that appeal."

SHOOTING ON THE FRONT LINE

Finbarr O'Reilly has covered wars, revolutions and famines in some of the most hostile parts of the world — most thoroughly in the Congo but also Afghanistan, Rwanda, Chad, Sudan, Lebanon and Libya. He was the 2006 winner of the coveted World Press Photo award — for a shot taken for Reuters at an emergency feeding station in Niger, and has received numerous other industry honours. Normally based in Dakar, Senegal, today he is currently a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University, from where he spoke to *Discovery Channel Magazine*

What are the logistical challenges involved in combat photography?

In Africa, about 95 percent of my job is logistics, chiefly getting to places. The areas are remote and difficult to get around, the languages are different and you need to rent cars or hitch lifts on aid trucks going into the bush. You have to get local translators, as you're negotiating with hostile militias, or with government troops who don't want you in certain areas — these things take the bulk of your time. Even flying: Dakar, where I live, to Liberia, should be two hours as the crow flies, but it takes 21 hours because African airlines don't fly direct, and they are always delayed. Logistics is the biggest part of what we do as photographers in Africa.

How do you begin to capture a conflict on camera?

You have your local resources on the ground, local reps who know the area, who can guide us and use local knowledge to navigate these places. Or we may rely on the United Nations networks. Then there's experience. If it is a zone of conflict, you will have contacts with both the government side and the rebel side, so that you can negotiate your passage. It is not always easy to do — people don't want you in places where things are happening. You have to assess the risk as you travel. So these are all things you get used to doing. I wouldn't say it is routine, but you do become accustomed to working in these situations.

Technically, what sort of picture works best to illustrate a conflict?

It depends on what you are going for. If you want an immediate hard news picture that shows what happened that day, you need something dramatic and full of action that captures the moment and could only be taken that day, at that time. That is what the newspapers usually want. What I like to do is more contextual. When I was in Libya, I was not only travelling with rebels to the front each day, but would sometimes take an afternoon and take portraits of them at their base. There is no one way to tell a story: there is the hard news angle, the human angle, and you incorporate all of these to provide the complete picture. But individual images that work are those that have a connection and an impact, and drive people to find out more about the context.

For a good shot, how much is about technical mastery of the camera, and how much is the sense of what makes a good image? You obviously need to be technically competent and understand how your equipment works, and grasp the idea that the camera doesn't see things the way you and I see things. But

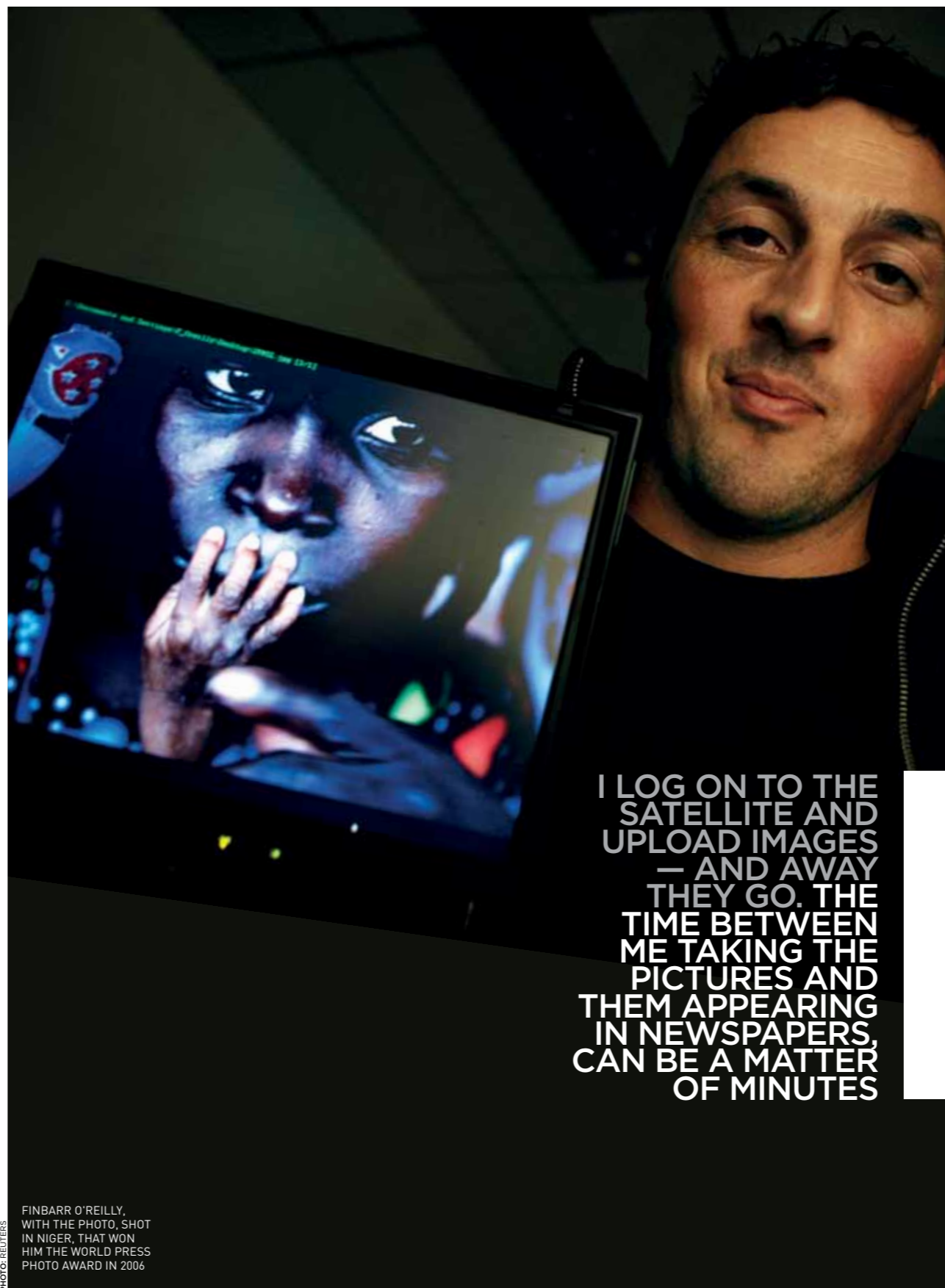
I am not a technical photographer. There are many, many people who are better at the technical side. For me, photography is more like a philosophy, or an approach to express your view of the world. You are offering your interpretation of events as they unfold. I have travelled with good friends, professional photographers, shooting the same events, yet when we compare them at the end of the day, our pictures look nothing alike. One might be shooting in black and white, gritty, to show how harrowing and brutal things are. I am shooting in colour and focusing on another side of the detail. What I am looking for in photography is a feeling. It is about what I feel when I am looking through the lens — and how I am trying to capture emotion.

The shift from film-based to digital photography, and the ability to send pictures electronically, must have made a huge difference to combat photography.

If there hadn't been digital photography I don't know if I would be a photographer [O'Reilly was a writer for Reuters in the Congo before switching to photography full-time in 2005]. Logistically, going around and covering the places I was covering, if I was carrying everything analogue photographers had to carry back in the day, I wouldn't have bothered as a writer. But because I was able to put a camera in my bag in 2001 when I was covering the Congo, I did.

Analogue photographers used to have to carry around curtains and boxes and chemicals. They would get back from spending the whole day out, then get down to developing film and processing it and fixing it. Then they would have to transmit it over terrible African landlines. If it drops off halfway through transmitting the picture, you might have spent three hours trying, and have to start again. I can't imagine what a nightmare that must have been. Now, I download in a couple of seconds to a laptop, do the editing and plug in my satphone, about the size of an iPad. I see if I can get a signal, so if there is building cover I have to get to an open space so there's a clear view of the sky; then I log on to the satellite and upload images. And away they go. The time between me taking the pictures and them appearing in newspapers, can be a matter of minutes. There is nowhere in the world you can't file from now. And I can go with just the clothes on my back, a shoulder bag and a mobile phone.

One of the photos you are best known for is the one that won the World Press Photo award, taken in Niger. Talk us through that. I was just three



I LOG ON TO THE SATELLITE AND UPLOAD IMAGES — AND AWAY THEY GO. THE TIME BETWEEN ME TAKING THE PICTURES AND THEM APPEARING IN NEWSPAPERS, CAN BE A MATTER OF MINUTES

FINBARR O'REILLY, WITH THE PHOTO, SHOT IN NIGER, THAT WON HIM THE WORLD PRESS PHOTO AWARD IN 2006

PHOTO: REUTERS

months into working as a photographer for Reuters — I wasn't permanent staff — and went to cover an extreme food situation in Niger. I fell very sick that day with food poisoning, and was feeling very feverish and weak. I looked down and ended up watching the interaction between a mother and child. The child's hand reached up to his mother's lips, and at the moment I snapped the picture.

It was a weird thing. I had just started and I didn't feel like I had earned this. But that's not how these things work. It has meant that I have felt I've had to work really hard to justify or earn that distinction, retroactively. Though I don't know that it is the picture I am best known for, some in Congo and Afghanistan are probably better known.

In Afghanistan, having been embedded in Kandahar and Helmand with the Canadian army and the US Marines, you were ambushed. Was that the worst situation you have been in?

Situations are different. It is one thing to be in an ambush. It's scary and so on. But in reality, if something had happened, I would have been medevacked in 30 minutes to some of the best medical care in the world. I am much more isolated and alone when I'm operating in Africa, without those resources at my disposal. If something goes wrong, you are in a very difficult situation. We saw that in Libya, when my friends Tim Hetherington and Chris Hondros were killed. Tim's injury, if it happened in Afghanistan, would probably not be fatal because you get the best medical treatment. The moment everything unfolded in that ambush was scary, but I have been trapped in situations in Africa where mobs have wanted to tear you limb from limb and you have to extricate yourself. There is no authority, nothing and nobody you can appeal to. Libya last year was terrible too: driving every year to the front with the rebels until they were ambushed by Gaddafi's guys. It was lethal.

In one instance, you walked into an advancing rebel group in Chad. In that situation, the camera was helpful — by showing you were a journalist, you were able to get out of the situation. What is the power of the camera?

It depends. In that situation, where the rebels first thought I was a spy, then I convinced them I was a journalist — that was okay. They thought it was good to have someone from the outside world to validate them. In other cases, such as Egypt, journalists, particularly female journalists, are being attacked because they are there. The camera can make you a target as much as it helps you. It is the same in Afghanistan; the Taliban has come to target journalists who travel with troops, in order to generate publicity.

How do you deal with the ethical side of your job, the necessary separation between recording an event impartially, and the terrible things you must witness?

Well there isn't really a separation to be made. Once you are out there, you are a journalist second and a person first. If someone in front of you needs help, you are always going to choose being a person first. There are occasions you could say I have been too close to be objective. Do I have a problem with that? No. I cover things I care about, and am invested on some level. The point is trying to make people care about these stories — and that's why I am doing them. ●