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Britain today they voted on blah blah blah.'" And there are "newsreel" stories, described by Alter as "voice-overs back-to-back, about four or five items. We used to do them as individual voice-overs, but now they're kind of bunched together and we run them one after the other. Cairo, Baghdad and Baton Rouge—fifteen seconds each, and flood update."[75]

But television does have compensation in its pictures. "We're very conscious here, in all of what we're doing, that we must exploit the tools available to us to the maximum possible extent to preserve our position up against the guys who make beautiful color moving pictures," said Robert Kaiser, former managing editor of *The Washington Post*. "Words are challenged, and if we don't have the best possible words we can get and the most vivid writing we can get, then we're failing."[76]

The pressure is on at newspapers, too, for shorter stories, because space is shrinking and because the big complaint they hear from readers is "I don't have time." Average-length stories have dropped from a high of 1,000–1,200 words to 700–900 words, although many foreign editors argue that the news shrinkage has caused "an improvement" in coverage. Stories are "tighter, more to the point," "more thoughtful, more comprehensive, better written" and "better at telling readers about the significance of the news." The increasing difficulty of getting stories in has caused editors, such as Simon Li to make "smarter selections about what stories to run." And the late Jim Yuenger noted that the foreign stories "really are better written—if they weren't, I wouldn't be able to get as many of them into the paper as I do."[77]

Long stories are agreed to less automatically. At *The New York Times*, for example, a reporter can't write a story that exceeds two columns—about 1,800 words—without getting masthead approval for it. In cases where approval is given, the story is called a "Special Report." Art is required and the copy has to be divided up into packages, each with its own subhead.

(Ironically the one paper, *USA Today*, charged with initiating the slippery slope of shorter articles and more pictures has been, Peter Herford said, "the only paper I know which increased its story length over the past 15 years." And Bill Small suggested that *USA Today* has in fact "changed most of America's major newspapers mostly for the better—in graphics, sports detail, weather, financial reporting and feature writing. And today's version has far more content, including foreign news, than its critics think. It is not America's best read paper for nothing; in most markets [and in some ways, in all markets], it provides much that the local newspaper does not."[78])

The wire services, too, (or the "news agencies" as they prefer to be called now that the technology has changed) have felt the pressure to conform to the

graphic and visually laden television and *USA Today*–type journalism. At AP, said editor Tom Kent, "we have been forced to think more like a newspaper than we ever did before." Fifteen or 20 years ago, when teletype machines oozed out 50 words a minute, a 500-word story on the wires was a very long story. Then high-speed transmission came along, and an average story became 800 to 1,000 words. But increasingly stories are sent out keyed to the layout demands of the member papers. Instead of sending out stand-alone text, a package will be created of story and a sidebar and pull-out quotes. "The AP and UPI," said Small, "are often as guilty as their clients in providing the factors [that] lead to compassion fatigue. They, too, emphasize coverage of what their clients want and they too are criticized in many underdeveloped countries (and even in many fully developed ones) for the 'Americanization' of their coverage."[79]

Rarely first off the mark in international affairs, the newsmagazines are especially dependent on peripheral images and graphics for their appeal to consumers. As Walt Mossberg, at the photographless *Wall Street Journal*, said: "I think some of the most powerful news stills are in the newsweeklies. Somalia was a good example of that."[80] John Walcott told of the extraordinary hoops which *U.S. News* would go through to put graphics into a story. A cover article that ran in February 1994 on military foreign policy, for example, featured a detailed illustration of life aboard an aircraft carrier. "It literally had a two-page gatefold graphic that took you a half an hour to get through," he said.

> The ultimate size of it was driven very largely by the fact that no one had ever done a cutaway graphic of an aircraft carrier. I was astounded to find this out. Well, it turned out that the raw material was all classified. So we had to go through this big song and dance to get the drawing from the shipbuilder, which we finally did. Then we actually sent the graphic artist out on the carrier. He went out for three days and walked all over the carrier with his Polaroid camera and his sketchbook to peruse the thing. That resulted in that cover package amounting to three to four pages.[81]

But despite such outstanding efforts, in many ways, the newsmagazines are losing their relevance. "*Newsweek* is something of a lemming," said its former acting–foreign editor Carroll Bogert. "The newsmagazines are a particular breed of animal which watch what the other media do in order to do stories that reflect the public interest—even more, I think, than other media that tend to follow the general public mood. That's the whole point of reading *Newsweek*. You open it up to find the things that were defined by other media to be current. So if

other news media—the networks, *The Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*—if they're covering a story to death, than we can't not cover it to death.

"I think the growth of TV news—not specifically CNN, but also the networks' expanded news coverage—has changed the whole configuration," she continued. "CNN meant that *The New York Times* could not just give you the facts, because that's what CNN did. If you look at *The New York Times*, they do now what we used to do. They have a running story and they have a sidebar. If *The Times* is doing that, then we can't do it and we, in turn, have to turn in another direction. And the question is, what do we do? And I think the answer, at *Newsweek*, is more voice. You're not just getting the facts, you're getting someone's view of the facts."[82]

Many critics have charged that the media has been policy-driven, that the great international story in past years was the Cold War contest—to the exclusion of all else. "Now," as *The Post*'s Robert Kaiser has said, "just as diplomacy is completely discombobulated, so is journalism." Now the North Star of coverage is often the competition—from both the high and low ends of the spectrum. "One of the great dangers in journalism—and we all succumb to it from time to time—is writing for each other," said Walcott. "We're sitting around writing stories saying, 'Wait till they read this at *The New York Times*!' We're insecure about how we're getting along, because it takes a certain amount of courage to go off on your own." And Jim Yuenger at the *Chicago Tribune* admitted, "There's no avoiding the fact that we have gone to color and graphics more, partly as a result of *USA Today*. I don't have a problem with what we've done, but how much of this stuff are we going to do? Where are we going to stop so that we don't look like a cereal box?"[83]

As always, newspapers, newsmagazines and television don't want to get beat by the competition—either in the stories they cover or in the packaging they come in. As a result, much of the media looks alike. The same news, the same pictures. What's the inevitable result much of the time?

Compassion fatigue.

Compassion fatigue is not the inevitable consequence of similar events or lingering events. It is a consequence of rote journalism and looking-over-your-shoulder reporting. It is a consequence of sensationalism, formulaic coverage and perfunctory reference to American cultural icons. So the challenge is for each member of the media in each of the three genres to cover untold stories and to cover the obligatory stories in a distinctive manner. "You must say about Bosnia or Somalia or Chechnya, 'There's all this human tragedy going on, and it should be reported, and this is why,'" said former *L.A. Times* foreign editor and former *New York Times* foreign correspondent Alvin Shuster. "You just have to come at it in a different way. I've always felt that you have to tell people things they *should* read,

even if they don't seem to be all that interested in it. You can't just take a poll every day and say, 'What do you want to read today?' If they're tired of Chechnya, that doesn't mean we can't go on with Chechnya. We have to, but we have to do it in some way that's going to attract the reader."[84]

IMAGES AND COMPASSION FATIGUE

"For just an hour or so," wrote novelist Martin Amis after hearing CNN's breaking story of the death of Princess Diana, "it felt like November 1963." He said he turned to his two sons and told them, "You will always remember where you were and who you were with when you heard this news." Although for Amis "a sense of proportion" soon returned—the "true comparison" being, "of course," "not with Kennedy but with Kennedy's wife"—for others the comparison lingered. The shock of Diana's death was likened everywhere to the Kennedy assassination. Hyperbole was rampant. *New Yorker* writer Kurt Andersen repeated one editor's comment to him that "This is the most important event since John F. Kennedy was assassinated."[85]

It wasn't, of course. Indeed, there was very little that was apt about the analogy . . . with one key exception. Both John Kennedy and Diana Spencer had during their lives become world-renowned cultural icons. And their metaphoric stature became even more clear upon their deaths. If President Kennedy became, in hindsight, King Arthur who had reigned for one glorious moment in Camelot, Princess Diana became Helen of Troy whose beauty launched a thousand ships. For all her worthy causes—AIDS, hospices, land mines—Diana was most famous for her face. "What made millions love her, what made her unforgettable," wrote *Life* magazine in its Collector's Edition, "was not her words, nor really any specific achievement. It was her visual eloquence—her style, her empathic gestures, the drama that played out on her beautiful face." Her face launched a thousand magazine covers—43 of them in *People* magazine alone. "In the 16 years since her marriage," wrote *Newsweek* columnist Jonathan Alter, "she became not only the most famous woman in the world, but the only personality who consistently sold big in the global marketplace."[86]

The media clearly understood her ability to boost sales and ratings—and gauged their coverage of her death and funeral accordingly. "We pretended," wrote *New York Times* columnist Max Frankel, "that a sad accident was a universal catastrophe, that the deportment of Britain's monarchy bears on the fate of humanity and that civilization's great challenge now is to rewrite the laws of privacy, to make the world safe for celebrity."[87] *USA Today*'s total circulation for the week after Diana's death was several hundred thousand above normal. *The Washington Post*

sold more than 20,000 additional copies of its Sunday editions the day Diana died and the day after her funeral. *Time* magazine sold 850,000 copies on the newsstands of its first issue about Diana's death and 1.2 million newsstand copies of its commemorative issue. To put that in perspective, a respectable newsstand sale of an average issue is 180,000. Those two issues were the largest sellers in the history of *Time* magazine—a history that dates back to 1923. And television seemed to report on nothing else. According to *The Tyndall Weekly*, which tracks the three networks' stories, the Monday night after her death the networks devoted 95 percent of their broadcasts to the story. By the week's end, her death had received more nightly coverage than any event since the 1991 coup against Gorbachev.

Diana's success at selling papers and magazines and boosting ratings was just one more goad to the industry to celebrity-ize the news. And the fact that her death received more network news coverage in a week than the landing of U.S. troops in Somalia—or even the O.J. Simpson trial, the Mississippi River floods or Hurricane Andrew—was a clear sign that the trend was continuing. At her death, Diana most clearly represented the late-20th-century phenomenon of the melding of news and entertainment, the vanishing boundaries between newsworthy events and celebrity spectacle. "Only the most determined literalist," wrote Alter, "could fail to see a connection between her death and her epoch, a time—our time—when celebrity obsession seems as out of control as a hurtling Mercedes on a late summer night in Paris." Corporate pressures, the bottom-line imperatives of the mega-media conglomerates have pressured their news components to produce entertainment-oriented reports. But this, acknowleged former U.S. *News & World Report* editor James Fallows, is a "Faustian bargain. . . . In the short run it raises your audience," he said, but "in the long run it threatens to destroy your business, because if the only way you make journalism interesting is by making it entertainment, in the long run people will just go to entertainment, pure and simple, and skip the journalistic overlay."[88]

Media moguls have long known that suffering, rather than good news, sells. "People being killed is definitely a good, objective criteria for whether a story is important," said former *Boston Globe* foreign correspondent Tom Palmer. "And innocent people being killed is better." The selective coverage of foreign events is coverage of the deaths of the famous, of famines and plagues and genocide. Watching and reading about suffering, especially suffering that exists somewhere else, somewhere interestingly exotic or perhaps deliciously close, has become a form of entertainment. Images of trauma have become intrinsic to the marketing of the media. Papers are laid out, newsmagazine covers are chosen, television news is packaged to make the most of emotional images of crisis. "The

kinds of dramatic pictures of starving kids," said CBS News foreign editor Allen Alter, "which started on the BBC and kind of filtered over to the States, the Rumanian orphans and things like that, those are the kinds of images where people [in the media] say, 'Oh, my God,' and use them over and over."[89]

As various academic studies have observed, photographs which accompany stories on international affairs—especially from Africa, Asia and the Middle East—commonly feature mayhem and pathos.[90] "As for international news," said Malcolm Browne, the journalist who took the iconic Vietnam War image of the burning monk, "I think we do care more now about the really poignant image from wherever it happens to be. As a page-one leader, not necessarily attached to the story, but with a reefer saying, 'Here's your BB [Bloated Belly—shorthand for "starving child"]. Details within.'" Americans expect the worst, and the photographs in the media—whether ad campaigns or humanitarian appeals—reinforce their audience's predispositions.[91]

The media rarely act on the basis of the "pleasure principle;" they are more likely to run striking but essentially negative news images than feel-good pictures. Yet various studies conducted on direct-mail fund raising in the donor community have suggested that most people have a distinct preference for positive photographs. Identical appeals were married to either upbeat (clean child smiling) or depressing (dirty child sad) images. The direct mail with the positive photographs garnered slightly more donations and greater sums of money per household than those with the negative images.[92] Threatening and painful images cause people to turn away, and since the media prioritize bad-news images, this tendency may partially account for Americans' compassion fatigue.

What does it mean when we become blasé about the pictures we see? Images of suffering and disaster—from pictures of the grieving Princes William and Harry to photos of the flattened Mercedes in the Paris tunnel—are appropriated to appeal emotionally to readers and viewers. As *The New York Times* columnist Max Frankel says, "Conflict is our favorite kind of news."[93] Crises are turned into a social experience that we can grasp; pain is commercialized, wedged between the advertisements for hemorrhoid remedies and headache medicines. In that cultural context, suffering becomes infotainment—just another commodity, another moment of pain to get its minute or column in the news. Our experience and our understanding of a crisis is weakened, diluted and distorted. If the news shows prompt us to equate chronic famine with chronic fatigue syndrome we are somewhat relieved. It helps absolve us of responsibility for what we see and can do little about. So with relief, we forget and go on with our everyday lives—until some other crisis image seizes our attention for a second.

Simple pictures, emotional pictures, pictures that can be distilled into a plain and unmistakable message can drill into the minds and hearts of their audiences. John Fox, an Eastern European specialist at the State Department, told of the photographs that came out of Bosnia after a busload of refugee children was shelled. "The images just kept mounting," he said. "The images came, they never stopped, and that's what got to people . . . you had to steel yourself just to get through the day."[94]

The public screams, "Stop those images!"—meaning: "Do something!" but also, sometimes, meaning: "I don't want to know any more." Didactic images can overload the senses. A single child at risk commands our attention and prompts our action. But one child, and then another, and another, and another and on and on and on is too much. A crowd of people in danger is faceless. Numbers alone can numb. All those starving brown babies over the years blur together. "Maybe we've seen too many anguished faces in too many faraway places pleading for help through our television set," wrote *St. Petersburg Times* columnist Jack Payton in response to the deluge of crises in the spring of 1991. "Maybe the Kurds, the Bangladeshis, the Ethiopians and the Mozambicans have finally pushed us into the MEGO, or My Eyes Glaze Over, syndrome. Maybe Joseph Stalin was right after all when he said, 'One death is a tragedy, 1 million deaths is a statistic.'"[95]

The New York Times tested that principle in one of its stories that same spring, interviewing 50 Americans across the nation. Many said they were "moved by the suffering, but overloaded, confused, even numbed by so much sorrow from so many places at once. . . . Kay Hamner, an Atlanta executive, and Roux Harding, a Seattle window cleaner, find the images on the evening news strangely unaffecting. 'You can see real true-to-life pictures, but your mind reacts to it almost as if it's just a movie,' Ms. Hamner said. Mr. Harding remarked, 'It's too surreal when you're watching television.'"[96]

New York University communication scholar Neil Postman was not surprised by the comments of those interviewed in *The Times*. "The sheer abundance of images of suffering will tend to make people turn away. People respond when a little girl falls down a well. But if 70,000 people in Bangladesh are killed, of course people will say, 'Isn't that terrible' but I think the capacity for feeling is if not deadened, at least drugged." "People seem to be paralyzed or just giving up," observed Tom Getman, director of government relations for the Christian relief organization World Vision, in 1991. "They seem to be saying to themselves, 'With so much going on, there's little one person can do.'"[97] The public can imagine the rescue effort needed to rescue one trapped little girl, one starving child threatened by a vulture, but the mind boggles at the logistics necessary to save millions.

Some people don't want to be reminded of their helplessness. "I get upset watching the babies dying," said Caroline Trinidad, a housewife and mother of four interviewed in *The Times* article. "Who the hell wants to see that? I switch the channel." Others feel drained by all the tragedy and by the seemingly repetitive crises. "Americans just get tired of seeing starving people on television," said Al Panico of the Red Cross. "They end up just turning the television off."[98]

Sometimes the fatigue is due to simple overexposure. The same thing that happens to movie stars and rock stars can happen to crises. They can get overexposed. (Oddly, Princess Diana seemed to be the one exception to that rule.) And when they are overexposed, they quickly become yesterday's news. Ignored and forgotten. Fashion moves on. The Bosnians, the Kurds, the Ethiopians, the Sudanese, the Somalis just disappear from view. Although it is demonstrable that many global events have a grave political, social or even ethical significance for the United States, it is conventional wisdom that Americans know little and care less about international affairs. Photographer Luc Delahaye took a memorable picture of an infant rescued from the Tuzla fighting in Bosnia, its face covered with blood. The photograph made the cover of *Newsweek* . . . and it was one of *Newsweek*'s poorest-selling issues of all time. As Smith Hempstone, the former U.S. ambassador to Kenya, put it: "I think that we may have reached the son of 'horror fatigue' situation in which, when you've seen one starving baby, you've seen them all."[99]

Crisis coverage demands pictures. Arresting images may not prevent compassion fatigue—they may in fact promote it by causing viewers to turn away from the trauma—but no pictures for a crisis is even worse. If a story doesn't have a visual hook, an audience will often ignore it. Better to have their interest for a time, than not to have their interest at all. "If a reporter has a special story," said the *Tribune*'s Jim Yuenger, "he or she is urged to take photos—although there's no requirements that they do that—but to take photos, or hire a photographer to take them, so that we can take that special story that we pay all this money to maintain them overseas for, and make it as attractive to the newspaper as we possibly can."[100]

Especially when covering international affairs, journalists must excite the imagination of their readers. "A story is more likely to get on the front page if it's a feature that has a good picture," said Bernard Gwertzman, former foreign editor at *The New York Times*. "And we won't run a series without a lot of pictures. We have to have them. That's the trend all newspapers are moving to. . . . The way it works here is we just do our stories and hope we have decent pictures to go with them. And often if we get good stories and no pictures, we hold up the story until we get some pictures." The Associated Press, which is the main source of

international news for most of the nation's print and much of the broadcast media, will also hold stories, for a cycle or a day or longer until pictures are available. "If it's urgent, of course, we can't do that, but otherwise we'll hold it as long as it takes," said Tom Kent, the international editor. "I've been at papers at decision time and I've seen AP stories get thrown in the wastebasket because there was no picture or graphic to go with them."[101]

For the newsmagazines the pressure is even greater to include photographs and graphics. At a time when television, 24-hour radio and niche magazines are all bombarding the public with easily digestible news, the general newsweeklies have all decided that to attract and hold readers' interest, they need to regularly redesign their layouts, use graphics and run compelling pictures. "There are a lot of news stories that do not lend themselves to good pictures," noted *Newsweek*'s Carroll Bogert. "Like the Japan story, there you have Asian guys in suits. Couldn't be more boring. Sometimes there's a story you have to cover but there's no good visual. A lack of good pictures can kill it."[102]

With a distant event there is a need to make an audience "feel" the situation. Northern whites had long acknowledged the legal apartheid of the American South, but they didn't "feel" its effects until photography and television in the late 1950s and 1960s brought the emotional blow of racism to the front pages and airwaves. Images help to legitimate the use of the word "crisis" for an event. A "crisis" occurs when the abstractions of injustice or racism or prejudice or pain, violence or destruction become concrete on a scale large enough to attract attention. It is the role of imagery to make the incorporeal, corporeal. That is how images tap so easily into our emotions, which respond more readily to flesh-and-blood people than to ephemeral concepts, however transcendent. News needs to be related to an individual's experience in order for that individual to take it in. Images effect that more easily, partly because common ground can more readily be discovered in a photograph than in paragraphs of text: That is a picture of a child; I, too, have a child.

Yet there is an instinctive distrust of allowing emotions to influence and govern our reactions. We may say pejoratively of someone that "his heart rules his head." On one side of the balance we place the intellect, facts, truth, analytical reasoning and scientific investigation. On the other side we place the emotions, pain, pleasure, gut reactions and "women's" intuition. This division blinds us from seeing that an emotional response to imagery is also an intellectual one.

Confronted with two images of a mother breastfeeding a child—one the image of the tired and dusty Migrant Mother nursing her infant during the Great Depression; the other of a Somali infant, flies glued to the child's eyelids, trying to nurse from the mother's shriveled breast—we react with greater emotion to the

photograph of the African child. Both photographs are aesthetically compelling. But even though we may have more in common with the American mother and child, we know with a fair degree of certainty that the American infant will survive with a measure of health even if it has limited prospects. The African infant, it seems, cannot possibly survive; and even if it does survive, the ravages of famine will have seriously compromised not just the health but the developing brain of the child. The fictions of imagination are overwhelmed by the tangibleness of the picture. What reverberates in our memory is our empathetic response to the visual stimulus. We apply our intellect and reason to the evidence we see—and then we respond, emotionally, to what critical theorist Walter Benjamin called the "aura": an image's elusive, charismatic and sometimes haunting presence. Photographs move us from the particular to the general, and from the general to the particular. "Just what kind of person are you?" asks an ad for Save the Children. "What kind of person can ignore the heartbreak in a child's face? How can anyone with a heart for children . . . for life . . . for decency . . . not reach out to help ease the pain of children so young, so defenseless, so needy?"[103]

A photograph provokes a tension in us—not only about the precise moment that the image depicts, but also about all the moments that led up to that instant and about all the moments that will follow. We see a news image of a starving child and a hovering vulture. Well we, too, have a child, and it is horrible to contemplate our child dying and becoming carrion for a vulture. Where are that child's parents? Siblings? Was the little girl left by her mother to die? Or did the mother die, and now the child is left alone? Did the child manage to crawl to help? Why didn't anyone see the child and help her? Did the child survive? The photograph stimulates a controlled emotive response—*emotive* because it acts on us sub rosa, under the level of our conscience intellectualizing; *controlled* because we retain the power of turning the page.[104]

Our commonalty with the image, the fact that we can understand in part how terrible it is to have a child in distress, is tempered by the fact that we who only look at the image are not literally there. We—and our children—are exempt. And we are blameless for not taking action, for not helping that starving child. We didn't know, we weren't there. But—and this is the key hitch—now that we know the horror, we will share in the guilt if we just turn the page. We will become complicit. Our responsibility becomes not only that child—whose story is a foregone conclusion—but other children threatened. If we turn the page—according to the logic of the advertising campaign—we become part of the problem. Photographer Kevin Carter, who took the 1993 photo of the Sudanese toddler threatened by the vulture, did not help that particular child, but his image, which was seen all over the world, became part of the global

humanitarian effort to prevent apathy. A little over a year later Carter won a Pulitzer Prize for his effort. Two months after he accepted the award in New York he committed suicide. He had earlier told a friend "I'm really, really sorry I didn't pick the child up."[105] Being close enough to photograph the starving child meant being close enough to help. The responsibility to bear witness does not automatically outweigh the responsibility to be involved.

The moral dilemma, as typically construed, opposes direct aid to one victim against the more remote, yet wider effect of a published photograph. Jim Dwyer, Pulitzer Prize–winning columnist for the late *New York Newsday*, says the only ethical justification for a reporter's intrusion into a victim's life is that he will help.[106]

But what is our justification for looking? And what is our justification for turning away?

In more ways than the metaphorical, compassion fatigue has become an insidious plague in society. Just as the overuse of antibiotics has made people immune to their benefits, the constant bombardment of disasters, with all their attendant formulaic, sensationalist, Americanized coverage, has made the public deaf to the importuning of news stories and relief agencies. We turn the page, as the Save the Children advertisement cautions us against, and leave the troubles of others behind.

If all the media treated international crises as priority news items, there would be no benefit in "switching the channel." The story would be everywhere. But such unanimity rarely occurs. Despite the undoubted significance of "hard" news—whether about international events, domestic politics, business and economics or the environment—the media pander to the public's interest in gossip and celebrity stories. And marketplace concerns effectively mandate that there will be no lasting redefinition of news—omitting the fluff and emphasizing those events and circumstances that have an important effect on the lives of Americans.

Compassion fatigue is easier to catch and harder to overcome if there is something flashy that clamors for our attention. Odd juxtapositions of other stories, or even ads and commercials, usurp some of the power of news imagery. One's mind can linger gratefully on frothy stories of celebrities or glitzy car and beer ads—in effect, pushing away pictures of suffering. True, advertisements in print periodicals and commercials on television pay the way for reporters, correspondents, photographers and camera operators to cover the news. But the ads and commercials also create a context for the news that makes it easier for an audience to remain unaffected by a story's words and images. (This is a concept

that is understood by the media—witness the lack of ads during the network première of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*.)

The ad in the December 6, 1992 *New York Times Magazine* for an extraordinarily expensive Steuben crystal vase observed, "Sometimes the strangest juxtapositions just happen." A few spreads later an advertisement for Hellmann's Real Mayonnaise admonished its readers to "Bring Out Your Holiday Best." On the following page, the cover story began. A two-page, black-bordered black-and-white photograph by James Nachtwey pictured a starving Somali woman being brought to a feeding center in a wheelbarrow. Bring out your holiday best, indeed.[107]

A few months earlier, *Time* magazine, in its September 21, 1992, issue, ran a story entitled "A Day in the Death of Somalia." Several pages into the story a large color image by Christopher Morris dominated the right-hand page. A dead child was being washed for burial. The child's ribs looked like a chicken carcass after all the meat has been plucked off the bones, and the skin covering the child's stomach bore no resemblance at all to skin or a stomach—it had the appearance of a collapsed puddle of milk skin from a cup of cocoa.

On the opposite page, Lucy—of *Charlie Brown* fame—screamed from the black hole of an open mouth. But she wasn't screaming in pain over the death in extremity of the child whom she faced. She was screaming, so the balloon caption said, "Now hear this! MetLife has Mutual Funds."

On the following two-page spread, the article ended with two photographs on the left-hand page: one of eight bodies wrapped in rags lying before several open graves and the other of the head of a dead young man being held by other hands, prior to his being shrouded for burial. The features of the young man are sunken, his neck sticklike. How could he have lasted as long as he did?

On the facing right-hand page was an advertisement for Habitrol's nicotine patch. A color photo in tones similar to those of the images from Somalia—terracottas and teal green—pictured an attractive black woman baring her arm to show her skin patch. The headline stated "Portrait of a Quitter" and read, in some fashion, as a commentary on the dead of the previous page.[108]

A reader wrote in to *Time* to comment on the Somalia story and its surrounding advertisements. "I wonder at the process by which these pictures came to be juxtaposed," said Paul J. Bauermeister, of St. Clair, Missouri. "The effect is jarring, and it is one of the most telling judgments I have seen on the ease with which the self-absorbed First World is able to ignore the suffering in the Third World. This lesson in compassion makes me tremble."[109]

Form can matter as much—or more than—function. Layouts, adjacent stories, lead-in pieces make a difference to how we understand the news. It is disturbing

to realize, for example, that our sympathetic capacity to suffer emotionally and intellectually is partly regulated by the talents of the photographer and the aesthetic merit of an individual image. An arresting image transfigures its subject, so that we find the representation of starvation visually stunning, so that we look upon the African child and find its pain and desperation literally unforgettable. Images, wrote novelist E. L. Doctorow in *The Book of Daniel*, "are essentially instruments of torture exploding through the individual's calloused capacity to feel powerful undifferentiated emotions full of longing and dissatisfaction and monumentality."[110] Yet a badly focused and poorly cropped image of a child in identical circumstances will make little or no impression.[111] It is not the subject alone that makes the statement, it is the subject married to a technically proficient, stylishly appropriate packaging that reverberates in our memories.

A simple redactiveness in the images of a crisis can be the most powerful way of calling attention to an issue. The best pictures, said the great 19th-century British historian Thomas Macaulay, "exhibit such parts of the truth as most nearly produce the effect of the whole." But the selection of those parts is a task rife with problems. Commonly, crisis images do not describe epiphanies, but formula. Crisis images feed into formula coverage. Dave Marash, a correspondent for ABC News *Nightline*, has noted how much television relies on "familiar pictures and familiar texts." He observed, for instance, the TV code for "hurricane": "Palm trees bending to the gale, surf splashing over the humbled shore, missing roofs, homeless people showing up in local gyms. You see it once or twice most years."[112] (On occasion not only is the same code used by various media, but the exact same images are repeated—a consequence of the fact that most of the media subscribes to or has access to the same photo agencies, wire services and/or satellite news services.)

Especially when a crisis is a "foreign" event, there is a tendency to fall back on hackneyed images, often revealing more about what the crisis is thought to be than what the crisis actually is. Formulaic images "label" a crisis so that it is identifiable. "Wars," said photojournalist Eugene Richards, "have to look the same way from picture to picture. . . ." And "when they do," noted Susan Meiselas, "it can be hard to tell them apart—especially when the people and places look the same, too, as in the conflicts in Nicaragua and El Salvador or Rwanda and Burundi."[113] "War" is signaled by photographs of men with guns, not, for example, by images of a barren landscape—even if that landscape is seeded with mines, and is, in effect, as much a war zone as that street filled with guerrilla fighters.

Other varieties of crises have their own "look," too. For instance, photography can give a disease the imprimatur of an epidemic by cueing an audience to formulaic elements, say, doctors in "space suits," signaling that the disease is highly contagious or, say, the microscopic appearance of a virus, signaling that the disease is aberrant. Images, by design, cannot help but simplify the world. What matters is the quality of their simplicity.

Images of crisis and their accompanying metaphors rely on a repertoire of stereotypes: the heroic doctor, the brutal tyrant, the sympathetic aid worker, the barbaric mercenaries, the innocent orphans, the conniving politicians, and so on. The images induce the public to fit these models into the current crisis. Each stereotype employed implies or presupposes a story line which in turn implies or presupposes an appropriate political response. If the images that document a crisis are of starving orphans, the remedy is humanitarian assistance. If the images are of the brutal tyrant, the remedy is military force.

There is a built-in inertia that perpetuates familiar images. Without them "reality" becomes more complex, less immediately understandable, more "real"—and perhaps more interesting. But because, other than choosing to watch or not to watch or to read or not to read, the media's audience has little direct control over the news they receive, the audience can't easily vote for a more individual style of coverage. The public's most direct response to coverage that it doesn't like is to lapse into ennui. In an oft-cited passage in Jonathan Kozol's book on poverty in urban America, *Amazing Grace*, a mother with AIDS is told about compassion fatigue among the well-to-do. She says to Kozol, "I don't understand what they have done to get so tired."[114] They haven't *done* anything. But as they sit passively in front of their TV sets, they've been barraged with redundant images.

Since we are not typically conscious that news images are being repeated, they have an insidious and usually imperceptible effect.[115] Yet this compassion fatigue is a problematic response to read. It may be perfectly evident that readers are not interested in a news event—for example, they may not buy the magazine with Bosnia on the cover—but it is less clear whether the low sales of that issue are due to the public's lack of interest in Bosnia or just to the style of coverage. So the media's reaction is often both to pull Bosnia from the cover of all future issues and to change their news style to include more "reader-friendly," human-interest content.

In theory, photographs can have a beneficial influence on the public's interest in international affairs; positive, upbeat photographs can encourage readers and viewers to read and watch the news. The public is more likely to tune in or read on if a story is more than gray copy or talking heads. And the public is more likely to have a higher recall of facts and themes when there is visual accompaniment to a news item.[116] But unfortunately, this accompaniment is not always objectively

functional. "Sometimes," said *L.A. Times* director of photography Larry Armstrong, photographs are "used more as ornamentation. Sometimes they're used more in terms of 'We've got to fill our hole, break up some space.'" Photographs do not always illuminate the key facets of a story, nor do they always speak pertinently about them. "Rightly or wrongly," said Mark Seibel, former assistant managing editor at the *Miami Herald*, "I think the photo's an afterthought."[117]

Television, especially, cultivates a kind of negligence about imagery. Images on the news are too often driven not by what needs to be or should be told, but by whatever images are available on the station's "B" roll. Yet 1960s media guru Marshall McLuhan popularized the notion that it does not matter what the television reporters say because the pictures in the background tell their own story.

Images on a screen are easily subsumed into the flow of time, bypassing the mind. Watching TV, one's eyes become a passive instrument; rarely does one have to make any active, visual judgments or effort. Still images, by contrast, are still. One can look and look and look. The electronic images on television blur and melt away, while the still photograph stubbornly resists dissipation. Confronted by a photograph, one searches the image. A photograph is the sum of moments that have come before. The recognition that the image is a record of what has happened up to that instant, inspires questions about what might come to pass. Photographs freeze time, then dole it out infinitely, as long as one chooses to look and wonder. They are the "residue" of continuous experience.

Photography, more than the movies or television, as Roland Barthes has said, is the collective memory of the world.[118] Photographs make an indelible impression; we remember events by reference to the pictures of them. To list just a few iconic images from the last decade: the lone protester standing in front of the tank in Tiananmen Square; the black vulture looming over the Sudanese child collapsed on the way to a feeding station; the dead American serviceman being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu; the bloodied toddler in the Oklahoman firefighter's arms. The Roman statesman Marcus Tullius Cicero wrote that "The most complete pictures are formed in our minds of the things that have been conveyed to them and imprinted on them by the senses, but that the keenest of all our senses is the sense of sight, and that consequently perceptions received by the ears or by reflection can be most easily retained if they are also conveyed to our minds by the mediation of the eyes."[119]

Film and video take their viewers inexorably along a foregone path, while memory and photography are individually haphazard. The flashes of time can be shuffled how one will. Memory, like an anthology of still photographs, consists of slices of discontinuous time. Both the remembered and the photograph exist as a moment in time and as a moment out of time. Both champion the

individual standpoint over the collective position. Film and videotape are relatively careless mediums—not in their construction, but in their audiences' responses. "That's one of the effects of TV," said Jim Yuenger, "that it's shortened the national attention span."[120] Confronted by a film narrative you sit waiting for what is going to happen. When it all ends you realize that your anticipation overwhelmed your delectation of the passing moments.

Perhaps still images in newspapers and magazines function better to fix events in the memory than videotaped images on television—although they may not inspire immediate action as readily. The stage management of the Persian Gulf War, which resulted in live press conferences, sanitized video shots of "surgical" air strikes and in few photographers and cameramen gaining access to the ground fighting, demonstrated that Americans could fight a war and a short time later remember only the chalk talks by the generals.[121] "My son, who's 27, was telling me that the Persian Gulf War didn't happen," said Yuenger in 1994. "I said, 'What?' He said, 'There wasn't any Persian Gulf War. Consider it from the point of view of someone my age. We don't know anyone who went, no Americans got killed, we didn't see any Iraqis get killed. It's just CNN footage of these bombs and then there's victory parades and Bush and Stormin' Norman standing tall.' It's not a part of the history of our time for a whole generation of people."[122]

The emotional pull of still photography remains peculiarly strong when we reflect on the current state of technology, when we can sit in our living rooms and watch a war raging live on the other side of the globe. Most of the visual spectacle of televised war is scarcely more memorable than a game in a video arcade; the still image leaves a deep footprint in our imagination. Perhaps it's easier to contract compassion fatigue when the pictures are on TV than when the images are in print, because one has a personal, intimate relationship with printed still photos. One has to touch the page to turn the page.

Videotape—and still photography—have other limitations as well. Trends and economic and political causes or repercussions, for example, are hard to film. As CBS anchor Dan Rather puts it, "You can't take a picture of an idea." Typically what photographs and videotape can do and do do is quite literally put a "face" on the text. When a television correspondent speaks, for example, about a Center for Disease Control doctor "dressing like an astronaut: all seams sealed, two pairs of gloves, and a personal respirator," images show the *2001* look. When a magazine article talks about Ebola as a "thread-like filovirus," pictures give an electron microscopic perspective on the long and looping appearance of the virus.[123]

But while a photograph may offer evidence that a man is dying, it does not tell of the significance of his illness.[124] Images rarely inform; more typically, they

inspire. Most images are little more than illustrations. Much of the way we "read" images is directed by the appended headlines, captions or stories. In general, published photographs have some text appended to them; images used for the purpose of telling the news are dominated by language. A photograph is strong evidence that something existed like what is in the picture—but what that "something" means is less clear. Mark Twain told of looking at a famous painting:

> A good legible label is usually worth, for information, a ton of significant attitude and expression in a historical picture. In Rome, people with fine sympathetic natures stand up and weep in front of the celebrated "Beatrice Cenci the Day Before Her Execution." It shows what a label can do. If they did not know the picture, they would inspect it unmoved, and say, "Young Girl with Hay Fever; Young Girl with Her Head in a Bag."[125]

As the spin doctors know, how we see a picture depends on its tag. In 1992, for example, the media's choice of images from Bosnia fed into the metaphorical debate as to whether the situation was more like the Holocaust or more like Vietnam. When we were shown photographs of the "death camps" we were implicitly being asked whether we were going to stand back and watch these new "Jews" die. When we were shown pictures of the fighting we were implicitly being asked whether we were willing to become embroiled in another quagmire. The images and metaphors concealed grave truths, but not solely about the crisis they claimed to represent. Often crisis images are about more fundamental matters: primal fears and human psychology, American history and the dominant belief system of American society. The media's selection of photographs from Bosnia revealed more about the United States than about the war being fought in the former Yugoslavia.

Because images cannot explain themselves, as writer Susan Sontag has noted, they are "inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy."[126] But there remains an expectation of meaning. To decode that meaning from an image, viewers must know what they are looking at, whether it is authentic, when and for what purpose it was made and what were the circumstances, conventions and constraints on its creation.[127] Images are bewitching sirens, luring us with promises of knowledge, but leaving us with little more than the memory of a compelling face. The images are not meaningless; in many ways, they do warn us of the rocks below, but they also tempt us to ignore those rocks in favor of their mesmerizing song. Americans were so captivated by the compelling images of the starving in Somalia, for example, the dangerous shoals

of warring tribal factions were disregarded. Words may give meaning, but in our visual era, images are essential to effective communication—especially in the telling of the news. Images have authority over the imagination.

When a crisis occurs in a place about which Americans know little, images are often married to known metaphors—images are published emphasizing a certain one-note theme. Many of the images and metaphors that have become clustered around present-day crises have been associated in one form or another with similar crises for generations. Associations already in the collective imagination creep into the perceptions of new events. The assassination of a foreign head of state is referred back to America's fallen hero, JFK; the state-sponsored decimation of entire populations is cloaked by the mantle of "Holocaust"; the ravages of mysterious diseases are heralded with the cry of "plague."

The interaction between the fundamental constants and the dynamic events suggests the appropriate specific images and metaphors. For instance, war prompts thoughts about courage and promises and loyalty to allies. It is not happenstance that it was the image of General MacArthur striding back through the Philippine waves—not one of him fleeing the islands—that became an icon of World War II. And it is not happenstance that it was the image of the helicopter evacuating Americans from the Saigon rooftops—not one of Marines landing at Da Nang—that became an icon of the Vietnam War. Imagery can embrace opposites.

The appeal of both images and metaphors is that they convey a wealth of information in a relatively small package. It is frequently the case that visual images or metaphorical expressions can more succinctly describe a face or a place or a moment in time than can paragraphs of narrative. Narrative is time- and space-consuming. And when space in print and time on air are expensive and in finite quantities, the reporting on any crisis, no matter how compelling or immediate, has to be constricted to fit the medium. That condensing is often achieved through the selective use of formulaic images and sensationalized or Americanized metaphors.

The problem is, however, that the selected bit of information found in any image or metaphor cannot possibly accurately represent the situation that it purports to depict. Images and metaphors may provoke an emotional response from an audience, and in that respect may focus the attention of the public on an event that otherwise might have been neglected, but that event is almost certainly more complicated. The impact of the Depression was felt by groups other than that of the Migrant Mother, the war in the Pacific was both less and more than the glory of the Flag Raising on Iwo Jima, the end to Camelot did not come with John-John's salute to his father's caisson.

When images and metaphors are used in conjunction, they have the potential to synergistically obfuscate rather than illuminate the known situation. If all that a reader knows of the dismemberment of Yugoslavia is the metaphor of "Holocaust" prompted by the photograph of the emaciated faces of the Bosnian Muslim prisoners peering through the barbed wire of the Bosnian Serb POW camp, then a disservice has been done to the complexity of the Balkan conflict. The existence of the Serbian camps is incontestably important and newsworthy, but the de facto parallels of Serbs to Nazis raised by the use of the metaphor of "Holocaust" are neither especially accurate nor useful. The Bosnian negotiations had "a kind of resonance to the Munich conference," said Gwertzman from the *Times*, "but there's really no Nazi force out there, you can't really compare the Serbs to the Nazis, it's not fair. But people do it, and we take note of it, and I think what you're implying is true."[128]

There is another problem stemming from the labeling of crises by images and metaphors. Once an audience is familiar with a label, it becomes easy to dismiss the event itself by rejecting the label. And that rejection can become a form of compassion fatigue. Since few people have (or take) the opportunity to learn about the news in detail, a label may be one of the most specific things a person knows about an event. Since labels, to be effective, must be part of a culture's common language, a person will have a history of responses to that label. A person will often dismiss a politician for being "liberal," for example, if that person associates "tax and spend" behavior with liberalism. Similarly, an event labeled "famine," for instance, may call up associations of starving children and selfless aid workers. If an audience is not interested in, or is bored by, that scenario, the famine will be ignored—a casualty of compassion fatigue, caused by a reflexive and limiting use of labels. With labeling comes the ability to categorize, to say, "Oh, this is a famine," like Biafra or Ethiopia. But with categorizing comes the tendency to dismiss, to say, "I know about this. I've seen this before." As the coverage of a famine continues, so too does the vulnerability of that crisis to compassion fatigue.

Most news generates images that remain anchored in a specific time and place. Even dramatic events typically give rise to images that only linger in the public's memory for the duration of that crisis. But on occasion an epiphany occurs in an ongoing news story, a decisive moment is identified, and the essence of that story is crystallized into a compelling news icon. Many times that icon is a visual, photographic one, for example: the training of fire hoses on civil rights demonstrators in Birmingham; the keening of a bystander over the body of a student shot at Kent State; the exploding of the space shuttle *Challenger*. Other times

memorable images are evoked through narrative word-pictures, such as Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain," John F. Kennedy's "Camelot," George Bush's "Read My Lips." But whether or not the news icon is created through a photographic or a verbal image, it is sustained by the meanings that journalists, sources and the public project onto it.[129]

The repeated use of an iconic image comes to dominate the originating event; the entire story, crisis or conflict is distilled into that one or a very few other signifying images. The force of an icon comes from its documentary authenticity, from the acuteness of its aesthetic or verbal vision, from the perception of the importance of the original event, from the ubiquity of its reference and from the sense of shared experience it engenders. Form and content are intrinsic to a photographic image. "A photograph becomes more illustrative when it is content-driven," observed Susan Meiselas, "and more aestheticizing when form is paramount. What makes an iconic moment is when these two come together with precision."[130] A brief look or phrase can recall such an icon to the mind's eye, and once embedded in memory it has the power to shift the framing of other news stories. Its use prompts both an intellectual and an emotional response to the initial crisis. But it also evokes—and at times even provokes—larger social, cultural and/or political themes. Its application in other settings may forge linkages between otherwise dissimilar events. It may add a historical marker or context to a narrative that would otherwise have none. It may also add a note of drama or comedy to an otherwise bland recital of facts or analysis.

The prevalence of news icons suggests that journalists desire to emphasize those moments that have metaphorical potential. In a world of quick sound bites and scant column inches, evocative shorthand is imperative. Icons are a form of stereotype, a less transparent means of categorizing a particular event than the more traditional conventions. Used indiscriminately, dumped gratuitously for the sake of novelty into all kinds of news stories, icons can quickly lose their effectiveness and initiate compassion fatigue. But used more sparingly, incorporated into stories not as a tic but as an insight, they can illuminate unrecognized public policy issues or tensions. They can act as "focusing events," serving to push certain problems into the news and onto the public agenda. They can be both indicators of the existence of tensions or fears and as catalysts for responses to those concerns.[131]

Images have always played a role in the defining of a crisis, but in the coverage of international affairs they are often the chief manner by which Americans "see" and "remember" a crisis. Given the importance of images in contemporary politics and in historical memory it is critical to discover what ideas are

represented by those images. What is the resonance of a certain image for those who see it? A public image may range from a simple stereotype to a complex mental picture. It may incorporate visceral emotions, inarticulate feelings, unconsidered beliefs, as well as carefully thought-out ideas. Images of the gassing of the Kurds in 1988, for example, will take their meaning for each person from his or her beliefs about and prior knowledge of such topics as chemical warfare, historical military actions against civilians, foreign tyrants and the Middle East.[132] "Experiments show that we must have a rough idea of what to look for," wrote historian Spencer Weart in his study of the images of nuclear power, "some previously learned mental picture, or we even have trouble recognizing an object in a drawing. In short, as a result of experience every simple image, from direct perception to elaborate mental representation, becomes connected with various other things in a web of associations."[133]

Imagery is the common denominator of a culture, a means of communicating the dominant culture's values and set of ideas, rich in symbols and mythology. To be effective, imagery must draw upon a "language" of recurrent themes and values widely shared and easily understood by its audience.[134] Context matters. The photograph of the lone Chinese who stopped a column of tanks in Tiananmen Square became a symbol of freedom and individual rights to Americans. In China, that same image was used to demonstrate that the troops had exercised humanitarian restraint in not mowing the man down. For both countries, the imagery supplied, in a fragmented form, much of what their ideologies did: It supplied "a world image convincing enough to support the collective and individual sense of identity."[135] Imagery reflects its culture's ideology, its self-image and its relationship to the world.

The issue is, as *Time* magazine put it, "Who controls the culture?" "The Third Reich," *Time* said, "proved beyond all reasonable doubt what the constant pumping of hate-filled images and inflammatory statements can do to a culture."[136] To control the culture, one must control the pictures. Even images taken to serve merely as historical documents can change their meaning depending on the context in which they are seen. The cumulative effect of the identity photos taken of those who were tortured and killed by the Khymer Rouge during the era of the Killing Fields was little more than that of a telephone book for Pol Pot's regime. Today, those images form a testimony to genocide, just as do the recital of tattoo numbers or the mound of eyeglasses from Auschwitz.

The right image can condemn a murderer or elect a president. After the military triumph of Desert Storm in 1991, President Bush became politically mired in the debacle of the abandoned Kurdish refugees. A Doonesbury cartoon identified the administration's problem: "So what happened?" asks Bush. "What

happened to my perfect little victory?" "We lost control of the pictures, sir," his aides reply. "During the war, we killed 100,000 Iraqis, but we controlled the media, so no one saw the bodies. With the Kurds, it's a different situation. Every baby burial makes the evening news. . . . I'm afraid we are just going to have to weigh it out. At least until we can get the pictures back on our side."[137]

Few of us are visually literate. We are familiar with the notion that words are malleable; we know about the manipulative powers of rhetoric. But few of us are as aware of the potential that images offer for manipulation. And rarely are the machinations exposed—whether they are as blatant as government photo-ops, as sneaky as editorial slights-of-hand or as instinctive as journalistic biases.

Convention has it that photography is that lantern of Diogenes, sending rays out into the world's dark corners. Conventional wisdom is wrong. Photography can illuminate the shadows, but it can also cast its own. Images can lie outright: They can be published with misleading captions, they can be morphed on computers. But they can also be more subtly influenced. The censoring of images—or the denial of access to image making, as occurred during the Persian Gulf War, can skew the public's perception of an event. "What you see in the media are the pictures that didn't get away," observed longtime photographer Carl Mydans. "And there's no way of knowing how many important, how many wonderful images there are that we saw, that we wept for, but that we didn't make. Just think how much more there is to history, how much more experience there is that photojournalists didn't quite get."[138]

Once the pictures are "in the can," the editing of images to emphasize one aspect of a situation can equally skew perception. The taking and the publishing of images is inherently undemocratic. Even if one discounts the limitations of technology and access, there is still an astonishing range of images from which the single one is selected. We, the audience, are seduced into believing in the freedom of the press, because rarely, at least in the United States, is the viewing of certain images prohibited. But the viewing is just the last act in the series of image production and dissemination. There is an ideological construct (or constructs) behind every image. There are moral, cultural, social and political assumptions in the taking and the publishing and the viewing of images.

Images serve a myriad of functions within a culture: They can be taken to offer aesthetic repose, to fulfill a breaking-news function, to keep an historical event in memory, to confront authorities with evidence, to serve as mute testimony. Like contemporary affairs, the historical past can be co-opted by seductive imagery (as Oliver Stone's *JFK* film demonstrated). Images taken or appropriated to represent the past determine how we view history. They are not passive illustrations; they are ideological constructions designed to justify national

ideals resonant today. The endless arguments about what should be included in school textbooks reminds us that history is shaped by the selective presentation of images, people and events.

Who we believe we are and how we perceive the world to be have a powerful effect on world events. Photographs cannot initiate a moral or political stance, but they can reinforce one. In Bosnia, said Johanna Neuman, "the pictures may have moved the leadership to threaten or cajole or implement sanctions or even, finally, to strike from the air. The pictures produced a policy of humanitarian assistance. . . . But never did the pictures prompt the West to enter the war on the ground. . . . The bottom line never changed."[139] Neither the taking nor the viewing of images impels great action. An understanding of imagery and metaphors—and the initiating ideology—provides no constant guide to the behavior of a culture. It does, however, help to delineate the structure within which policymakers deal with specific issues and within which the attentive public understands and responds to those issues.[140]

Despite the fact that CNN, the three television networks and some of the world's best photojournalists—James Nachtwey, David and Peter Turnley, Luc Delahaye, Jon Jones, Christopher Morris, Anthony Suau, Gilles Peress, Corinne Dufka, Tom Stoddart, Roger Hutchings and even portraitist Annie Liebovitz—have all camped out in Bosnia, despite the fact that there were more photographers and cameramen killed there in three years of fighting than in ten years of war in Vietnam, there was little political will to intervene. Would more images of the caliber of the raped Moslem women or the emaciated POWs staring bleakly out from behind Serb barbed wire have made a difference in the U.S. commitment there? Or would more iconic photos just have left us with more guilt? As the American response to Bosnia proved, images' power to provoke action has not only dimmed, but it never operated at all unless the appropriate response was immediately apparent and relatively simple. It makes sense that when the public—via the American government—is effectively prohibited from action—if a crisis is too complex or entrenched for amelioration—compassion fatigue results.

Compassion fatigue is a result of inaction and itself causes inaction. "Our experience is that over the last couple of years our appeals for Bosnia have seen declining returns," said John McGrath of Oxfam in 1995. "I think people feel it's a situation with no end. They feel that if the politicians can't sort it out or don't have the will to sort it out then what can the public do?"[141]

If the news-reading and news-watching public does linger over images of suffering, if the imagery is arresting enough, and if the crisis hits us at Christmastime when our sympathies are most awakened, maybe we'll send a few dollars to some aid agency. But we can't stop everything to care about a child thousands of miles away, even if he is dying. Compassion fatigue leads to a take-it-or-leave-it attitude: "Hey, if I miss the news about Bosnia today, I'll catch it tomorrow." So much for the suffering in the Balkans and the fate of millions who live only two hours away from our last holiday at EuroDisney.

Our moral fatigue and exhausted empathy is, in some degree, a survival mechanism. "When we see fairly horrendous pictures that upset us emotionally," noted psychology expert Dr. Geoff Scobie, "we have some sort of mechanism which prevents us getting quite so emotionally upset the next time we see something." There is always an audience for images of quality, but there is a fatigue for continual—even live, on-air—suffering. "The ability to stun an audience by delivering real-time pictures of events as they happen is ebbing," said Johanna Neuman. "Call it compassion fatigue or media over-saturation, but television pictures of a starving child or a mass exodus of refugees no longer tug as strongly."[142]

Compassion fatigue's passivity—the "fatigue" part—is not neutral. Save the Children ads promise that if we respond, if we throw off our compassion fatigue, action will result, a child will be saved and we will become caring human beings. If we respond to that Save the Children ad, we check off a box that reads "Yes, I'm the kind of person who cares."[143] Compassion fatigue militates both against caring (as Save the Children crassly plays on) and against action.

It even militates against memory. Milan Kundera wrote, "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."[144] If we don't care, if we take no action, we will forget—if indeed we ever knew—what caused a particular crisis. Images are our most efficient—although certainly not infallible—mnemonic device; images call up events and eras and feelings in the blink of an eye. But if we tune out those images, we forget. It's true, it's sad that the media's coverage of crises is so formulaic, that iconic moments become symbols, then stereotyped references that become at best a rote memory. But better a stereotyped memory than no memory. Better to recall Somalia in terms of starving babies, than not to remember the country at all.

But perhaps if the coverage of crises was not so formulaic or sensationalized or Americanized we wouldn't lapse so readily into a compassion fatigue stupor. The tension among what "is," what we are "shown," what "action" we take and what we ultimately "remember" is at the heart of our understanding of global events.