



Ethics of Images in Humanitarian Action

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1. The Importance of Images

Images allow

- Fast recognition of many information
- Holistic comprehension of complexity
- Complementary use of senses (eyes)
- Communication means for people independent of age and education
- touching hearts, compelling for compassion
- Immediate worldwide information via ITC.

2. The Problems of Images

The problems and limitations of images are:

- They normally are not self-explanatory, they need to be interpreted by words
- Image fragments / image selection can be manipulative (as information in general)
- Flood of images makes un-sensitive and overstrains many people

Conclusion: images per se ethically neither negative nor positive.

3. The Role of Emotions for Behaviour

Emotions are

- complementary to rational analysis and argumentation
- fundamental for concernment/compassion
- necessary for changing behaviour
- With long-term, sustainable effect only in combination with interpreting values (in German: das Erleben wird zur Erfahrung)
le vécu/le vu devient une expérience.

4. Ethical Criteria I

Images are ethically positive, if they

- help to recognize and digest reality in order to act/react adequately
- respect and enforce human dignity/rights
- allow fair remuneration of people in images
- increase compassion and solidarity
- sharpen conscience, increase responsibility
- strengthen community/peace/non-violence
- entertain in order to increase joy of life.

4. Ethical Criteria II

Images are ethically negative, if they

- hinder to recognize and digest reality and lead to inadequate action/reaction
- violate human dignity/rights of those in picture or those who see the picture
- exploit human existence for commercial purposes without fair remuneration
- treat human beings unequally (e.g. poor people with less respect than rich people)
- increase apathy, induration and violation
- entertain on the cost of living beings.

5. Codes for Images in Humanitarian Action

Images in humanitarian action have to

- serve the goal of the humanitarian (l'être humain au centre, promoting human welfare and reducing human suffering)
- respect the ethical criteria

Ethical Codes of Conduct are

- an instrument to make this obligation transparent
- serve as a self-committment of individuals and of institutions

5.2 Codes of Ethics for Images

Manifold Codes of Ethics for Photographs exist, e.g.

- **Center for Journalism Ethics, University of Wisconsin/USA**
<http://www.caj.ca/principles/principles-statement-2002.htm>
- **National Press Photographers Association (Canada?)**
http://www.nppa.org/professional_development/business_practices/ethics.html
- **Asian Journalism Codes of Ethics:**
<http://www.medialaw.com.sg/ethics/jcode.htm>
- **Ethics of Digital Foto manipulation**
- http://graphicssoft.about.com/od/digitalphotoethics/The_Ethics_of_Digital_Photo_Manipulation.htm
- **Animal/nature photographers ethics:**
- <http://www.reflectiveimages.com/CodeofEthics.htm>

6. Photographers Responsibility

Professional photographers should

- respect professional ethics (codes of conduct): fair production, distribution, trading and recycling / archiving / deleting of the product
- Strive for the right of freedom of information which includes the obligation for fair journalism

Hobby photographers: become very important especially in emergency situation (mobile phone images). Sensitization of lay photographers for their responsibility.

7. Journalists Responsibility

Professional journalists should

- respect same criteria for images as for texts in journalists' codes of conducts
- be sensitive/sensitized for intercultural aspects of images
- pay fair remuneration

8. Media Owners/politicians Responsibility

Media owners have to respect the codes in their publishing strategy and commercial policy. Commercial interests do not justify violation of these standards.

Politicians on all levels and specialised institutions (e.g. Unesco) have to guarantee/strive for freedom of expression, protection of journalists and photographers and internet legislation.

9. Media Users Responsibility

Media users as consumers of images

- have the same ethical rights and obligations in using images as in consuming other products
- need media education for a responsible use of it, also in terms of effects on their personal development and those of others

10. Humanitarian Actors Responsibility

Humanitarian actors should

- respect the codes of ethics of photographers in their media contacts
- mediate between victims of humanitarian catastrophies and media in order to respect the dignity of people and making media needs understandable
- help to give humanitarian action the right place, i.e. encourage media to report on forgotten human catastrophies and report about the hope, strength and even esthetics of people in disastrous situations.