

## **Everyone Is A Photographer**

By Jim Hubbard, December 2009

Decades before the advent of digital technology and cell phones equipped with cameras, working photographers were often insulted by the growing perception that everyone was a photographer. Proof was often provided by such statements as, “Anyone can take a picture—all they have to do is push a button.” For the serious photojournalist creating images of news events, or for the documentary photographer engaged in in-depth and long-term projects, taking pictures was a calling, not just a job and not, certainly, just pointing and shooting.

In the early 1960’s, when I was entering the world of news photography at the Detroit News, the photojournalists I worked with made it clear that they felt insulted by such comments. They felt that their stature was diminished as specialized creators of images for publication in major media. Such statements, perhaps advanced first during the early days of consumer film cameras, seem prophetic nearly forty years later.

This paper discusses two groups of novice image makers whose photographs are, increasingly, used by the media, studied by academe, and seen by millions of viewers around the world: citizen photojournalists and individuals involved in “participant photography” programs. Both create photos that they hope will reach a broad public, although the image creation methods and their goals may differ.

“Citizen journalism” is a term coined in the last several years to describe individuals who, whether using cell phone or consumer pro cameras, record events that they consider newsworthy, submitting their images to news outlets, blog sites, or other Internet or print venues, in the hopes of seeing their work published. Participant photography is a precursor to citizen photojournalism and differs from it in that images tend to be generated primarily, although not exclusively, by youth through special projects or ongoing programs to either depict social issues affecting the project participant’s life, such as poverty, health, or violence, or to paint a broader, more

## **Everyone Is A Photographer**

By Jim Hubbard | Page 2

human portrait of a community. Both represent images that have been created by everyday people with cameras in their hands.

### I. Citizen Journalism

The University of Southern California's (USC) Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership (CCL), with whom I am affiliated, explored citizen photojournalism, as distinct from citizen journalism, in 2008 with their feature Maximum Exposure on the Huffington Post's OffTheBus. Maximum Exposure invited the general public to document the United States' Democratic and Republican national presidential conventions. On their feature page, they described the project as "an undertaking that will show us in pictures what the Democratic and Republican National Conventions look like—up close and personal.... OffTheBus is looking for ground-level observers who are planning to attend... cameras in tow. We want you to snap shots of the convention as you experience it. What's happening around you? Who did you run into in the hotel lobby? At a restaurant? What was going on at a party you attended? Send us your photos or completed sideshows and we'll post them on HuffPost's OffTheBus Maximum Exposure page...So point, shoot, and submit!"

Although they may not use the term citizen photojournalist, nearly all of the major news outlets also solicit citizens' photos for publication, broadcast, or distribution on the Internet. "Just push the button on your camera and we may publish your photography," the media promises, making everyone a photographer, threatening professionals who have developed their craft and creativity over many years. To them, "snapping shots" for publication is as absurd as giving someone paint and canvas and calling them a great artist.

Asking the general public to submit images or video increases the potential pool of compelling stories: the professionally trained press cannot be everywhere and often cannot get the intimate images or the angle that a community member might get. While citizen journalism speaks to the idea that there is room in the world for many voices, it

## **Everyone Is A Photographer**

By Jim Hubbard | Page 3

does not address what happens when the experience of the photojournalist, his or her understanding of journalistic storytelling, and the quality of the image is diminished.

The trend toward using images from the general public may reflect a real desire for citizen engagement. Or, it may be an attempt to simply appear savvy and engaged as a way to increase viewership. Or, as many pro photographers feel, it may simply reflect a means for increasing revenues by downsizing photography staff, while having unlimited use of uncredited photographs, for free.

Plunging technology costs, easy access to cameras, and Internet distribution have diminished the barriers to entry and given even novice shutterbugs a chance to compete in the visual marketplace. Millions of people around the world produce personal images for Twitter, MySpace, and Facebook, while others are increasingly making images for serious social purposes, such as bringing attention to social inequality—often in their own communities.

The 24/7 demand for images for the Internet, television, and print publications make it inevitable that the media will use photos captured by nonprofessionals. The domain of the professional is now shared and this has not been a soft landing for photojournalists and documentary photographers. Although most working photographers never struck it rich in photography, stable jobs have been lost and the ability to make a living using a camera is in recession. Professional work may still command a premium, but that premium is slipping away as authorship and, perhaps, image quality has become less relevant. While photographic dilettantes engage in critical analysis about technique, the art value of photographs, or which work is or is not superior, the majority of viewers respond to images without regard to who the image maker was or the quality of the image.

Is the use of images by people who are not photojournalists by trade a completely new phenomenon, a creation of digital media and the Internet? Not exactly. While the number of images produced by citizens was scant more than 60 years ago, with a little

## Everyone Is A Photographer

By Jim Hubbard | Page 4

bit of luck and not much skill a number of amateur photographers managed to have their images used by news outlets and viewed by millions. In fact, two won the coveted Pulitzer Prize.



In 1954, Virginia Schau was the first woman to win the Pulitzer. She won for her photograph of a semi-truck dangling over a bridge in Redding, California with the driver hanging on the side of the bridge. Her camera? A Kodak “Brownie” box camera, an inexpensive consumer camera with optics that were likely inferior to those on today’s cell phones. In 1947, Arnold Hardy, another amateur photographer, won the Pulitzer for his photo of a girl leaping to her death (left) in a hotel fire that killed 119 people in Atlanta, Georgia.

Flash forward to January 2009. Tourist and cell phone user Janis Krums was riding on a ferryboat when a US Airways jet crashed in to the Hudson River in New York City. Krums pulled out his cell phone and took a picture that he then posted to his Twitter account. The next day his dramatic photo was on the front pages of newspapers around the world: it became the defining image of the crash and he is now a contender for the 2009 Pulitzer.

There were other ways in which non-professional photographers’ images were used or solicited by the media, well before the advent of the Internet. As early as the 1950s, news outlets would attempt to track down a working professional or a serious amateur photographer who happened to be near the scene of a dramatic news story, such as a plane crash, and who had photos. The news organization would print the image a day or two later or, if there was a wire service nearby—United Press International (UPI) or the Associated Press (AP)—they would transmit the photograph immediately via telephone.

## **Everyone Is A Photographer**

By Jim Hubbard | Page 5

During my 16 years as a staff photographer and bureau manager for UPI, I was expected to photograph the news whenever it was possible for me to reach the scene, even if hundreds of miles from my bureau. If I couldn't get to where the news was, I tried to find someone who was there, who had a camera, and who would provide the image to UPI. While, of course, far fewer people had cameras then, making the search for images fruitful or futile, it did not matter to me if the picture source was an experienced professional or an amateur who happened upon the scene. It also did not matter if the pictures were masterfully composed or were snapshots, so long as they conveyed some sense of what the story or event was about.

This was a time when there were perhaps millions of images created in the world, not billions like today. There were only print publications and three television networks. In fact, in the earliest days of television only 10% of the U.S. population of approximately 150 million had a TV in their home. This was a time, also, when photo-based print publications had millions of subscribers including magazines such as National Geographic and Life Magazine, both dedicated to quality photojournalism and image-based storytelling, supplementing what readers could see in their local newspapers.

During a time when most people did not travel, and could not connect to others across the world through the Internet, these publications offered high quality, intriguing photographs of far away places and current news stories. People were captivated by the images and informed. Even in working class families, such as my own, we waited with anticipation for our Life Magazine and studied the images religiously.

The Internet age is rapidly making both newspapers and magazines obsolete. The opportunity to view a few, high-quality images has been replaced by access to an inconceivable image volume. Few are likely to take the time to examine images, as they did in the years when print dominated and, I imagine, many simply fast forward through Internet sites in image overload. The looming question for both novice and pro image makers is this: What will grab people's attention sufficiently for them to spend time with an image or story? How will it be possible to focus viewers, who are traveling the

Internet at the speed of sound, on images or stories that might enlighten them about humanities triumphs and failures? What is the potential impact of a single image when, increasingly, stills are delivered as slideshows with audio? Most emphatically, it will not be the ample time that people took to absorb the photographs in Life or National Geographic.

This does not mean there is a shortage today of photographers producing images equal in content and quality as those of Life Magazine's golden years. There are hundreds if not thousands of notable and gifted photographers around the world; many of whom are traversing the print and digital worlds and trying to find a way to embrace this sea change. As only two examples, former Time Magazine photographer Dirck Halstead created The Digital Journalist, a cutting edge blog publication. He often writes articles about the current state of photojournalism and documentary photography, discussing its terminal state and imminent death. Magnum photographer David Alan Harvey, in his online Burn Magazine showcases emerging young photographers and the brilliant images that they create. He also offers exciting articles and dialog about photographic topics including participatory photography.

## II. Participant Photography

It is important to remember that image making and distribution remains out of reach for hundreds of millions of people around the world. These are people for whom issues of survival dominate. While the "digital divide" shrinks in communities across the United States, with individuals and families rapidly adopting always-on Broadband Internet, communities in many developing nations still do not have access to electricity, clean water, or other infrastructure that many of us take for granted. For such people, the ability to tell their own stories and craft their own images remains a powerful and, sometimes, transformative experience.

Access to such image making opportunities is generally offered through projects in participatory photography (PP) or photographic empowerment. Taught both by

## Everyone Is A Photographer

By Jim Hubbard | Page 7

individual photographers and through nonprofit organizations, PP projects emphasize the documentary method and use both still and video cameras. They most often work with people who have traditionally not had a voice—poor children and others affected by hunger, war, famine, or other adversities. As noted earlier, PP is a precursor to citizen photojournalism. It uses different methods, but shares the goal of getting images by nonprofessionals into the public realm.

Through participant photography projects—most of which are short-term and intensive, although some are ongoing—people who are often the subjects of professionals' pictures are provided with the photographic tools and knowledge to tell their own stories and those of their communities. PP is a form of self-representational photographic engagement that seeks to democratize the power dynamic in the producer/audience paradigm. The results are often images that speak loudly and candidly.

PP has been a growing phenomenon with an explosion of interest in the mid- to late-1990's when photographers working in schools, with NGOs, and on their own began to teach photography to illuminate new voices. The best participant photography offers an alternative view to traditional photographic reportage, capturing joy and sorrow, despair and hope, and serving to expand the subject-photographer's humanity and complexity in a way that photojournalism or documentary work may not.

In fact, the emergence of participant photography rekindled a long-standing controversy about whether the "outsider"—the photojournalist or documentary photographer—represents or distorts the lives of others. With some arguing that because a photojournalist drops in to a community only briefly to grab a photograph, usually of a tragic news event, he or she then leaves with a very limited view of the event or community. Even a documentary photographer, others argue, whose craft requires spending ample time in a community, sees that community through a distorted lens. In both cases, the resulting images often emphasize blank-faces, suffering, and despair contributing, even if inadvertently, to stereotyped or one-

## Everyone Is A Photographer

By Jim Hubbard | Page 8

dimensional images of the very communities that the photographer seeks to illuminate. While these may be real enough—and while the dramatic and emotional may sell best to media—it is in fact rare to encounter a human being who doesn't also express joy or intimacy.

One current example of the tendency of documentary photographers to create somewhat one-dimensional images of a subject can be found in a review of some of the work by Getty Images 2009 winners for editorial photography. The majority of photographs, while beautifully composed, depict depressed human beings collapsed under economic or health struggles absent any signs of joy in their lives.

I would argue that these visual stories—generated by the professional and by the participant—do not need to be mutually exclusive. There can be tremendous value in the perspective of the “outsider” and new insights offered through the perspective of the “insider”.

Most PP projects desire to get their images in to the public realm, hoping to educate or inform about a social issue, or to humanize a stigmatized community, or to otherwise raise awareness and effect social change. With a few exceptions, broad exposure through media outlets or exhibitions at major museums or galleries remains rare. Although there have been exhibits at major universities, the United Nations, traditional galleries, the Smithsonian and WPA in Washington, D.C., and the UCLA Fowler Museum in Los Angeles, among others, most PP work is exhibited at community centers, small neighborhood galleries, churches, and via the project's or photographer's website. This lack of significant exhibition is due, in part, to ongoing resistance on the part of curators who do not take PP work seriously. I have heard them explain that they are concerned that their institutions will not retain their status, or the respect of their patrons, unless they exhibit the highest caliber work by top selling names.

## **Everyone Is A Photographer**

By Jim Hubbard | Page 9

Perhaps the lack of significant interest in PP in the art world is less surprising, as it took some time for photography, as a whole, but especially documentary or journalistic photography, to gain access to the art world. In 1955, photographer Edward Steichen convinced the Museum of Modern Art in New York City to mount an exhibition of photographs, most of them photojournalism, called “The Family of Man”. It was a big hit with the viewing public and gave this form of photography a new place in the art world. A retrospective of work by acclaimed documentary photographer Dorothea Lange, taken during the depression era for the Farm Securities Administration (FSA) project, was first held in 1972 at New York’s Whitney Museum—decades after she completed her work. The most famous of the FSA photography was selected by art-world elites from the work of a number of great photographers; this was the work that was then promoted as art and exhibited. Perhaps something similar will happen with PP images.

Photo editors working in print journalism are also slow to embrace the use of photographs created by people other than well-known photographers, although both Shooting Back, Venice Arts (the project that I am currently affiliated with), and a number of other interesting projects have generated some large-outlet interest. This may relate more to job preservation and a concern with professional storytelling, than anything else.

There have also been times in which participant images were considered so unique, such a radically different approach to image creation, that they were preferred to pro images. An example of this were the photographs created by homeless children in the late 1980s through my seminal project, Shooting Back (SB), which were featured in print and television media around the world.



## Everyone Is A Photographer

By Jim Hubbard | Page 11

The work from Shooting Back also received significant visibility through exhibition. It was featured at the esteemed Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., at the Washington Project for the Arts, and at the Smithsonian Institute, as well as at many other venues nationally and around the world. In fact, the Smithsonian requested to travel the Shooting Back exhibit although, ultimately, I chose the Denver Children's Museum and its less-restrictive terms. Additionally, publication of a book by the same name along with significant media attention, promoted interest in the images and assured that they would become one of the most exposed photographic endeavors of the 1990's, including the work of professionals.

Participant photography is not an entirely new idea. According to Miles Orvell, writing in the Oxford University Press' History of Art publication American Photography (2003), "In 1964 visual anthropologist Sol Worth was inspired by Bronislaw Malinowski, founder in 1922 of the field of social anthropology known as functionalism. Worth followed Malinowski's injunction to 'grasp the native's point of view', making a distinction between a 'documentary' (made by an anthropologist) and a 'Bio-Documentary' (made by the subject). Advocating the latter method as a necessary dimension of understanding the worldview of the Native American. In 1966, Worth conducted the Navajo Filmmakers Project, in which motion picture cameras were put into the hands of the Navajo Indians for a look at Native American life through their eyes." Reflecting on my work and its relationship to Worth's, Orvell states, "Jim Hubbard crossed the boundary of keeping the camera in the photographer's hand."

Photographer and educator, Wendy Ewald, has also been cited with inspiring several PP efforts, although her methods arguably differ from PP practices. Ewald's approach is to blur the boundaries between subject and photographer. According to Adam Weinberg and Urs Stahel, curators of Ewald's 30-year retrospective Secret Games: Collaborative Works with Children, 1969-1999, "When Ewald's images are placed on equal footing with those of her students, we experience her voice as one among many. We are required to guess who is the photographer. This approach keeps the question

of authorship in the foreground. It destabilizes viewers' expectations. We cannot take for granted who is seeing and who is being seen. It is also not clear who is the teacher and who is the student." While an intriguing artistic concept, lacking clarity as to who produced the images, the professional or the participant, is not in the PP realm.

During the 1970s, Ewald taught photography in three Appalachian schools, among other locales and, during the same period, others were also teaching photography to low-income youth. As one example, in 1979 Perla de Leon and David Gonzalez taught a visual literacy workshop using Polaroid cameras at two South Bronx schools as part of a group effort called En Foco. They also worked with adults in the local community and created their own documentary work about their neighborhood.

### III. Shooting Back

In 1988, after 25 years traveling the world as a photojournalist, I founded Shooting Back in Washington, DC. The idea for Shooting Back incubated while I was studying theological doctrine, ministry, and the profound work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. At the time, I was also completing a one-year field internship at a social service and homeless agency, required for my Master of Divinity degree, which I received in 1991 from Wesley Theological Seminary (WTS).

Freire, cited by many in the PP field as an inspiration, is considered one of the twentieth century's most influential educators. He is an important voice in many seminaries, where his critical pedagogy for the lives of the oppressed is paramount. Freire's education for critical consciousness promotes individual change, community quality of life, and policy changes aimed at achieving social equity. Photography is a natural medium for the application of Freire's ideas, as it lends itself to helping a community reflect back upon itself to reveal the everyday social and political realities that influence their lives.

My seminary studies included exploring the meaning of biblical text (exegesis) and examining the lives of the oppressed. Reflecting on the enormous suffering I had

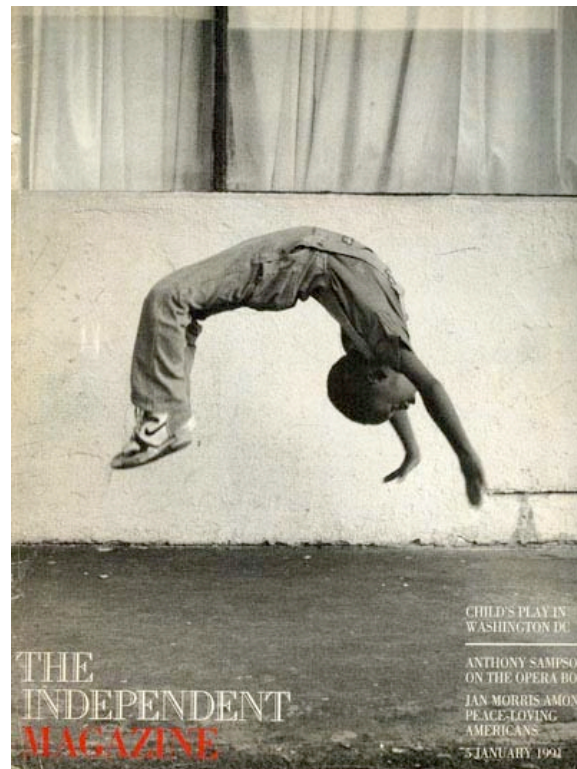
witnessed around the world as a working photojournalist convinced me to commit my life toward helping others whose lives were marginalized due to social and political forces. I decided that I wanted to enter the lives of others in a deeper way and that the world did not need any more of my pictures. Within a year, I was handing my camera to homeless kids for them to photograph their own world at a shelter, the Community of Hope in NW Washington. I then launched a program called The Children of Hope Media Center, later changed to Shooting Back. WTS, which has many of the early photographs from Shooting Back hanging on their walls, referred to this as “your ministry.”

The voluminous material I was attracted to addressed treatment of “the poor” or “least among us,” which admonished humans in Matthew 25 that “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers (sisters) of mine, you did for me.” The Social Gospel Movement that arose during the second half of the nineteenth century and is considered a liberal theology also influenced me. Walter Rauschenbusch was one of its most prolific writers.

At the time, Shooting Back was the first known attempt to raise a serious social issue—in this case, homelessness—through the eyes of the subject of the news photographer: homeless children. By giving homeless children cameras, they documented their own realities. Once their images were exhibited in prominent venues, the project became a media darling and the kids’ work was featured on the front pages of newspapers and magazines around the world. A Shooting Back image, “The Flip,” became an iconic image, and historian Julia Ballerini wrote an extensive, critical essay about the photograph, which was also featured in a number of international publications, including “A” out of Norway (next page, left) and “The Independent Magazine” out of the United Kingdom (next page, right).

## Everyone Is A Photographer

By Jim Hubbard | Page 14



The notoriety of Shooting Back resulted in my testifying at a congressional hearing and being honored by the U.S. House of Representatives for my work with the homeless. The Congressional Quarterly published an article about the honor. The Congressional Majority Whip recruited me to take him on tours of sites housing the homeless and later retained me as a consultant to work with him on social and health issues, dispatching me to several locations including his home turf in California. This was a rare case of participant images influencing policy or policy makers.

### IV. Other Significant Projects or Organizations

By the mid 1990's there were hundreds of PP projects around the world and, today, there are probably several thousand. Zana Briski and Ross Kaufman dramatically enlarged PP awareness globally in their 2004 Oscar winning documentary film Born Into Brothels that featured Briski's project with children of prostitutes in Calcutta, India. Zana also formed an ongoing PP project called Kids with Cameras, working in India and Haiti, although she currently pursues her passion for photographing insects,

## Everyone Is A Photographer

By Jim Hubbard | Page 15

particularly praying mantises. I find it interesting that Briski also reports being influenced by Freire's education for critical consciousness. While studying for her Master of Theology and Religious Studies degree, Zana may have been motivated, as was I, by the call of the world's dispossessed.

There are a number of other organizations that I think have been critical to the early development of participant photography. Here I highlight four: Fotokids (1991), Venice Arts (1993), PhotoVoice in the UK, and PhotoVoice in the US (both early 1990's).

*FotoKids* In 1991, former Reuters photographer and journalist Nancy McGirr gave cameras to eight children who lived, along with thousands of others like them, on Guatemala City's municipal dump. Her work evolved into the creation of FotoKids, originally called Out of the Dump. According to their web site, FotoKids is intended to help small groups of Central American young people from the poorest of barrios develop useful, employable skills as a means to self-exploration, expression, and discovery. Through intensive, long-term personal relationships with teachers and mentors, participating children learn to use photography, creative writing, and computers as tools to examine their lives, families, communities and environment bridging the global technology divide.



"Woman with Hand on Heart Trying to Find Hope in Homelessness"  
by Susan Eklund from *Got Caught Up Out There: Photography by Homeless Women* (2009)

*Venice Arts*, with which I've been affiliated since 1996 as its creative director, has as its mission "to ignite youths' imagination, mentor their creativity, and expand their sense of possibility through high quality, accessible media-based arts education programs. Venice Arts' programs also serves as a catalyst for people of all ages, living in low-income

## **Everyone Is A Photographer**

By Jim Hubbard | Page 16

or under-represented communities, to create and share personal and community stories through photography, film, and multi-media.”

As an organization with ongoing programs in the Los Angeles area and documentary projects implemented locally and globally, Venice Arts is committed both to documentary storytelling and creative development. Venice Arts’ Executive Director and Founder, Lynn Warshafsky, has been instrumental in creating Venice Arts’ innovative model of mentoring through media-based arts. Over the last five years, she and I have both worked closely with Dr. Neal Baer, a Venice Arts board member, pediatrician, and the show runner for the television show *Law & Order: SVU* to expand Venice Arts’ international participant-produced documentary work, which now includes filmmaking as well as photography. Venice Arts is now considered one of the preeminent youth media arts and participant photography organizations in the country.

In 2007, Venice Arts launched the Institute for Photographic Empowerment (IPE) with Dr. Baer and the former Dean of the Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California (USC), Geoffrey Cowan. Cowan now heads USC’s Center on Communication Leadership. IPE’s mission is to support the study and practice of participant-produced documentary projects in photography, film, and digital media. It is a resource for people from around the globe—photographers, filmmakers, academics, researchers, and project participants—to share ideas, learn from one another, and develop the field. The first such Institute of its kind in the world, IPE supports a virtual center on the web, conferences, academic learning, and research.

## Everyone Is A Photographer

By Jim Hubbard | Page 17



"My Memories" by Joaquim Varlito, Maputo, Mozambique (2007)  
from *The House Is Small But The Welcome Is Big*

Recent PP projects of Venice Arts that have had significant reach and impact include *Got Caught Up Out There*, featuring photographs by women who are homeless and mentally ill, and *The House Is Small But The Welcome Is Big*, featuring

photographs by HIV positive South African women and Mozambican

children who have been orphaned by AIDS. A companion film, *Home Is Where You Find It*, was directed during the project by 16-year-old Mozambican teen, Alcides Soares, under the mentorship of Dr. Baer and filmmaker Chris Zalla. Executive produced by another NGO, it is also featured with the print and online exhibitions of *House*. The film has been selected for numerous festivals and has won multiple awards. The print work has traveled to over 15 venues, worldwide, including the United Nations, major universities, conferences, galleries, and community sites, and have received significant public viewership through print and Internet media features

At Venice Arts, in addition to running projects, we collaborate and consult with other NGOs, government agencies, and foundations both in the U.S. and abroad including China, the Middle East, and Africa. I am consulting with a foundation in the Middle East where we will launch a Shooting Back project with a Venice Arts team in 2010 in several locations for youth affected by conflict.



"South LA Street" by Khaliq Farthing, (2009) from Venice Arts' *Living in South Central*

*PhotoVoice in the UK*, was founded by Tiffany Fairy and Anna Blackman and tends to be project-based, rather than providing ongoing programs in communities. It takes a traditional PP approach in that it emphasizes the methods of documentary photography and self-representation. PhotoVoice UK describes its work as “enabling those that have traditionally been the subject of such work to become its creator - to have control over how they are perceived by the rest of the world, while simultaneously learning a new skill which can enhance their lives.” PhotoVoice UK projects are implemented in England and around the world and have exhibition and community awareness components. Finally, PhotoVoice UK has worked to build the field of participant photography through the development of such things as a training manual, regular support for photographers working on projects in their local area, and a practitioner website.

*PhotoVoice (US)* Caroline Wang out of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor founded PhotoVoice in the US. Although research-based, PhotoVoice US shares an interest in the issue of authorship and community self-representation with others in the PP field. PhotoVoice US describes its goals as “to enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns; to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through large and small group discussions of photographs; and, to reach policy makers.”

Primarily, public health researchers working in impoverished communities use PhotoVoice US practices as a qualitative, visual research method. In PhotoVoice US projects, images provide visual data and an entry into conversations about how participants (or research subjects) understand the circumstances of their lives. Unlike most other PP programs, PhotoVoice US projects do not have as a goal to provide photographic training or to develop aesthetically strong images for exhibition and storytelling (although images from PhotoVoice projects are sometimes exhibited). In fact, most of the projects of which I am aware are staffed by physicians or other public

health researchers rather than photographers, and use inexpensive throw-away or point-and-shoot digital cameras.

*Film and Video* There are also some film and video projects around the world that engage participants in creating stories about their lives or communities. Some align with the traditions of participant-produced photography more than others. Many have been developed in the related field of Youth Media, which works to give youth tools to make videos about issues of social concern. These tend to target low-income or otherwise marginalized youth and also share an interest in personal or community storytelling. Still others use video in a way that speaks more to citizen photojournalism, rather than documentary filmmaking. One outstanding example is Witness, which was “launched in response to the overwhelming demand for training in the use of video for human rights and social justice advocacy.” Witness’ approach is to provide short-term training programs to organizations active in advocacy efforts around the world in the use of video documentation. Their goal is to enable citizens to become effective advocates for social justice by recording human rights abuses, which are then used in advocacy efforts.

These are but a few examples of the array of groups around the world engaged in PP or related fields. There are participant-produced projects and organizations on nearly every continent. They all have more in common than not. While some have been able to sustain ongoing programs that nurture participants for years (FotoKids, Venice Arts), others are short-term projects that, minimally, engage communities creatively and, at best, contribute another voice through exhibition, books, or web presence. Each seeks to bring new voices to media-based storytelling in order that those normally marginalized can have control over their image and help shape the perceptions that others may have of them. Or, as noted Brazilian documentary photographer Sebastiao Salgado describes the field, “...working to bring new voices to photojournalism...(and to) hear the world through their eyes.”

## Everyone Is A Photographer

By Jim Hubbard | Page 20

By the mid to late 1990s' there was growing interest in PP from academics around the world. Researchers began to study PP efforts in an attempt to quantify and qualify its impacts. Critical essays exploring the field were published in academic journals and college textbooks covering the fields of sociology, global health, visual anthropology and visual communication began discussing PP.

A few examples include: University of Queensland's, Australia, Roland Bleiker's article titled Representing HIV/Aids in Africa: Pluralist Photography and Local Empowerment in the International Studies Quarterly (2007) 5,139-163 co authored by Amy Kay, UN Development Program, Cairo. In the Journal of Research in Special Education Needs Volume 7, an article by University of Manchester's Sue Ralph and Ian Kaplan titled International Images of Inclusion. One other is titled Using Photos to Elicit Children's Perspective appearing in International Journal of Qualitative Methods (2006) from University of Alberta by Epstein, I., Stevens, B., McKeever, P., and Baruchel, S.

Julia Ballerini, historian of art and photography, wrote a lengthy critical essay in Radical History Review #69 Fall 1997 titled Photography as a Charitable Weapon: Poor Kids and Self Representation. Ms. Ballerini had previously written about the iconic "The Flip" photograph in an essay published in the Yale Journal of Criticism, 8:2, Fall 1995 titled "Flip: The Homeless Child as Auteur."

Grant H. Kester Associate Professor, in Art History, at University of California, San Diego puts forward a very thorough framework for art which seeks to be socially engaged in his essay Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework For Littoral Art published in Scottish arts and culture publication Variant Magazine, Issue 9.

In the past five years or so, people working within the field also started to more critically examine their own efforts and that of others. Amongst practitioners, topics such as (youth agency, adult involvement in editing, project goals (i.e., creativity or social advocacy or both), image ethics, ownership, use of images (recolonization) etc., -- there are more, have been hotly debated.

I find some of the criticisms by Ballerini and Kester—particularly those related to the value of providing “art” over food or shelter or employment—short-sighted and, in fact, somewhat arrogant. Why bring art (photo) programs to the poorest of the poor? How does this help them? Why not build homes or find employment for them? Because children living in economically diminished circumstances deserve to have their creative spirit nurtured as much as the most privileged child. I would argue also, that they derive benefit from having their stories told and their voices heard.

Giving people tools for visual communication are effective for these purposes. People skilled at organizing PP projects can help actualize this for participants and, in fact, their images and stories can be used by those engaged in more traditional advocacy efforts related to housing, health, education, poverty, and more. Genuine storytelling, coupled with strategic advocacy, can be a powerful way to reach those who have the power and resources to initiate and direct change. Fundamentally, why would we deprive the poor of the tools and knowledge used by the privileged to elicit attention, action and reform?

At Harvard University an initiative called Cultural Agents was developed that includes a PP component called Visible Rights. They are particularly interested in bringing academics and practitioners together to critically examine best practices in the field and to offer opportunities for practitioners around the world to network. To this end, they have sponsored two conferences with leading practitioner and academics, one in Brazil (2006) and one at Harvard in 2007.

The University of Southern California’s (USC) Center for Communication Leadership (CCL), in addition to collaborating with Venice Arts on the Institute for Photographic Empowerment, has begun to offer classes for undergraduates in the field, including a class that I teach called Visual Communication and Social Change. They are also working with USC to develop the first-ever Minor in the field. According to Cal’s Director and University Professor Geoffrey Cowan, “A social phenomenon is emerging in countless communities and countries that we think deserves to be celebrated,

replicated, studied and identified.” Rebecca Shapiro, Junior Fellow at CCL adds, “We are developing a Minor that will allow students to study social problems and explore participant photographic methods to addressing and rectifying such issues.”

It is the right time to develop, study, and sustain PP as an important field with an interesting history that spans the last forty years. Setting PP in the context of the ever-evolving world of digital, user-generated media and the Internet, makes both the practice and study of the field more interesting and complex. Sustaining the field and building its future will require defining the difference between PP—in its goals and potential impacts—and the millions of user-images posted to the Internet. Harnessing the growing cultural interest in storytelling and genuine engagement will also be critical to sustainability.

Significant challenges exist. To date, no practitioner—or participant—that I know of has been significantly remunerated for his or her efforts, despite perceptions to the contrary. (As example, it has been alleged that Zana Briski “got rich” from her work with children of prostitutes in Calcutta and subsequently winning an Oscar for *Born Into Brothels*. I find this doubtful.) That being said, moderate support in the United States for participant projects has come from the philanthropic community and, to a lesser extent, from governmental agencies; corporate support has been almost non-existent. Those programs that are most successful in their fundraising tend also to serve some other social need, such as offering ongoing after-school support to kids, or increasing technology education and access for low-income families.

This may be shifting, somewhat, as both the foundation and government sectors have a growing interest in storytelling, digital media, and participant-generated content. Perhaps this growing interest will result in a bright future for participant photography projects.

## Everyone Is A Photographer

By Jim Hubbard | Page 23

In this essay, I have attempted to offer a survey of participant photography including its history, influences, and key proponents. I have discussed journalism's historic willingness to use any available image when required to visually capture a story. The current environment where images sourced to highly trained professionals with high-priced equipment appear to be on the decline, while images by citizen's, such as Janis Krums, who witnessed a plane crash on New York's Hudson River and shot it on his cell phone, are on the rise. I have also tried to tease-out the differences between citizen photojournalism, user-generated media, and participant photography, emphasizing that substantive, creative engagement and a commitment to storytelling is the hallmark of the latter.

In the end, documentary photographs—regardless of the source—capture a moment in time. They try to represent, educate, and illuminate. They allow us a glimpse of world events or try to describe social realities that may or may not reflect our own lives. They suggest something about the human experience but, ultimately are only symbols into which the viewer projects. Perhaps the most profound statement about the meaning of a photograph came from a ten-year old participant in Shooting Back in 1991. Asked during an interview about the photos that he had taken of poverty and homelessness, he looked the interviewer directly in the eye and said, "It's only a picture, not the real thing."

END.