

# War photos need art for impact

by Suenje Paasch-Colberg

War photographers need to take an artistic angle to get through to people, believes Max Oettli, a Swiss-German photographer and university lecturer.

People are emotionally blunted by looking at images of violence over and over again, he says.

"There is a kind of immunisation which sets in to a point at which I think we are becoming indifferent."

To overcome this indifference and have an impact on people, photographers can use various artistic strategies of representing and questioning violence, the Geneva Polytechnic lecturer told a seminar at the University of Auckland last week.

According to Oettli, the Belgian photographer Bruno Stevens is successful in using a "journalistic strategy".

In his pictures, Stevens tries

to marshal as many facts as possible – such as names, places and dates – to answer the factual questions of the viewer.

"His large format photography [...] gives an enormous amount of details, and one is compelled to look at it."

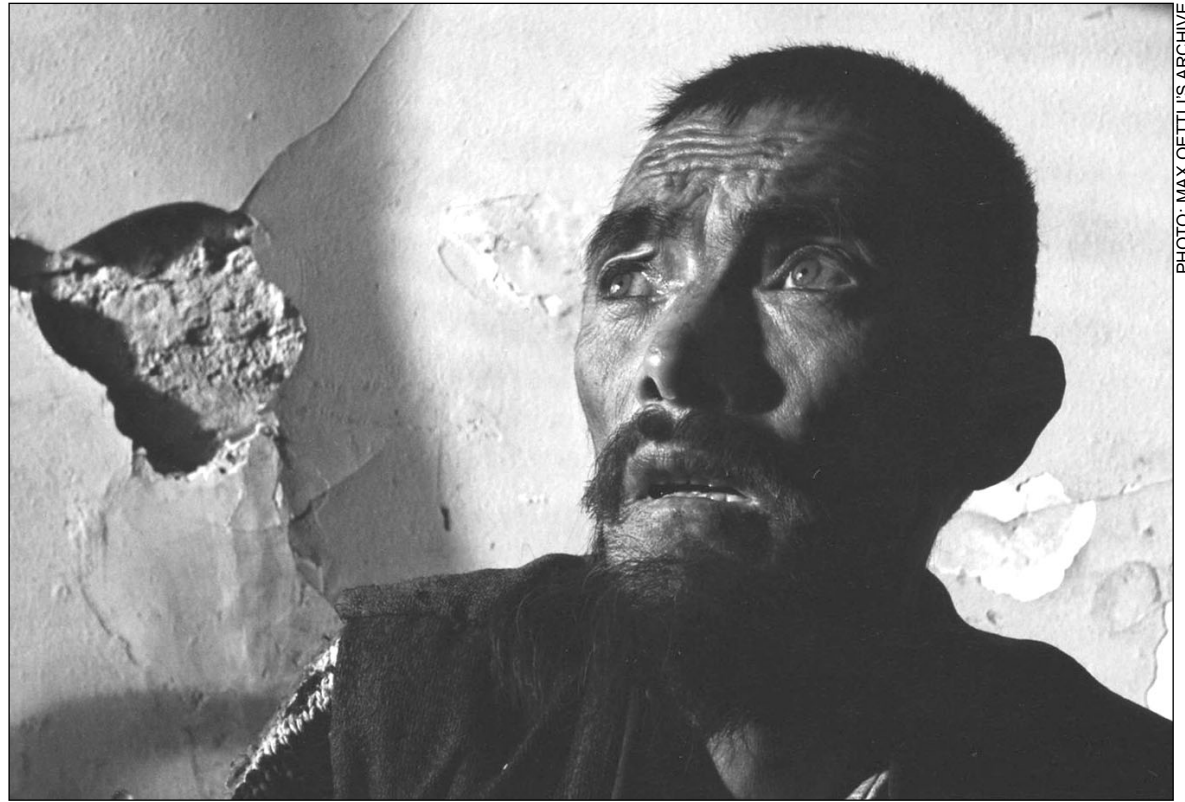
One reason why war photographers have to change register is the fact that magazines changed, says Oettli who lived in New Zealand for nearly two decades.

"The stuff is so drowned between pages of advertising and other content that it is difficult to get a kind of independent reading of it. So the mainstream of images of this kind goes over to television."

However, he thinks photographs can get through to people even in the time of television and computer games.

"They have an impact in a more contemplative way.

"If we see photographs in a fine arts context we are more



MORE HUMAN: War victim in Kabul photographed by John Stanmeyer (2001).

PHOTO: MAX OETTLI'S ARCHIVE

likely to look at them, to absorb them, to interact with them.

"And I think for most of us there is a kind of icon quality to pictures which we don't get by watching the screen."

Oettli says there have been a number of changes since war photography began.

While the Civil War photographs in the 1860s and 70s were disturbing, few pictures of corpses during WW I and II were

published.

The pictures published between the wars were mainly taken in colonial situations.

"There were some horrible results of the colonial wars and suddenly people started realising that yellow or black people had souls as well."

After 1945 the immunisation of people started, says Oettli.

"I think we'd had enough." Occasionally a photograph

hits the public consciousness harder than others – like the famous Vietnam napalm children or the Abu Ghraib torture.

Oettli never worked as a war photographer himself but says his interest in it comes from an interest in peace.

He thinks war photography can make a difference.

"Every now and then, I think it has allowed us to become perhaps a little more human."

# Electioneering: does kissing babies cut it?

by Miles Erwin

Electioneering is back and the politicians are hitting the hustings around the country. While Winston Peters declares the end of tolerance at Grey Power meetings, Mark Blumsky campaigns on the pub crawl. And on the National campaign trail Don Brash puckers up his lips to a baby and squeezes his elongated body through the bars of a stock car.

But are these demeaning performances really necessary? And, more importantly, will any sane person actually think "He's got my vote" in response?

Would New Zealand politicians be wiser emailing propaganda to voters instead of railing from a soap box? South Korean presidential candidate Roh Moo Hyun reached 800,000 people through email and texts the night before the election and scraped in with a 2 per cent majority proving spam mail beats stump speeches.

Political commentator Nigel Roberts says technology has changed the nature of campaigning. It's more important now to get your face on TV – even if that shot is Nick Smith washing a dog bowl.

Roberts says the change happened during the fourth Labour

Government.

"Between 1984 and 1987 New Zealand dumped the old way of campaigning – the 1987 election campaign was much more about sound bites and doing the right thing at a factory or on a farm and making the six o'clock news."

Labour Party president Mike Williams says television is the most important part of campaigning.

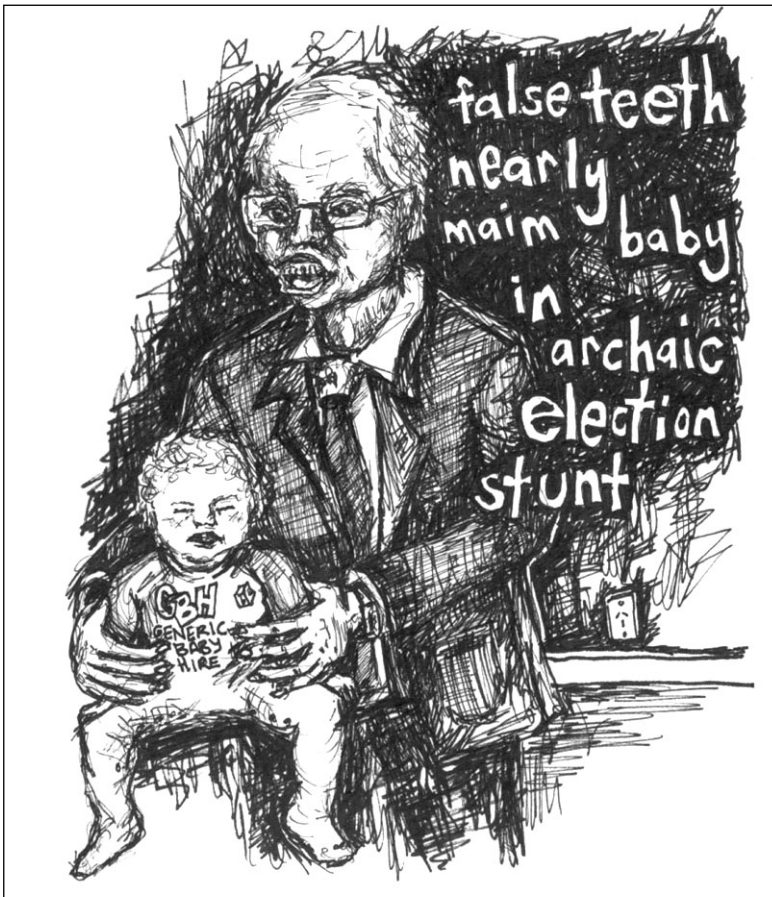
"Your campaign is aimed to catch the six o'clock news on both channels which means you try to have your leaders near the big cities at midday when [the TV stations] can capture them."

Last year Don Brash toured town halls around the provinces spreading his Orewa speech message. But starved of the oxygen of television publicity, National's polls plummeted. The strategy to hit the hustings and get Brash's face out in the community failed miserably.

In contrast, Jeanette Fitzsimons and Helen Clark took one walk in front of the cameras and the Green Party jumped in the polls.

National Party president Judy Kirk says the party has now established a candidates' college that teaches candidates campaign strategies, speech training and how to handle public meetings.

ILLUSTRATION: SARAH RESTALL



Kirk says the party's best use of technology has been the www.taxcuts.co.nz website which has given it an edge over Labour. National candidates are taking the policy to the public by using laptops to show people how much they will save if they vote National.

Most political parties are using technology with Destiny Church copying Australian Prime Minister John Howard by leaving recorded messages on phones last year.

"What political parties have realised is that the means of communication has changed. The way that people communicate have changed and political parties have adapted to it."

The Labour Party is trialling phone messages in the

Northland seat but Williams is wary of them, saying "they get up people's noses".

Williams says the Labour campaign has barely changed since the last election.

"The formula doesn't alter that much. If you do a street corner meeting you'll see people pour out of their houses to listen to you."

Political commentator Chris Trotter says while technology has an impact, American research shows that old-style politicking is making a resurgence.

"People on the ground really matter. A face-to-face encounter with a political figure leaves a much deeper impression than the ephemeral effect of a television ad."

# Trademe my vote

by Jan Birkeland

Two young voters in Auckland are breaking the law by offering their vote in next weekends' election for sale on an online auction site.

The votes include two party votes, one Auckland Central Local Body Electoral Vote and one King Country Local Body Electoral Vote.

It is a criminal offence to receive money, or pay someone else for their vote.

Brad Barron says his vote is for sale because he doesn't believe in the political system.

"I have no time for two-faced politicians and I am quite happy to sell my vote to the highest bidder."

Mr Barron promises to vote for whatever party the winner of the auction asks him to.

"When this election means so little to me, I find it only fair that I can make a little money out of it, as well as helping someone obviously more devoted to the political life than myself."

The auction was removed by TradeMe the day after it appeared on the website. Business director at TradeMe, Mike O'Donnell, says there have been several people trying to sell their votes online.

"We try to remove these links within a matter of hours, but with 3000 auctions per hour, it's not always easy to keep up."

"We will close the auction and warn the user. We will also inform the Electoral Commission, to let them know what is happening."