Have you ever wondered what our lives would look like if there weren’t any photographs, records, cassettes, video tapes, all those things that aim to materialize abstract concepts such as memories, feelings, longings, dreams? Well, I believe that our inner world would definitely disintegrate and we would find ourselves experiencing an identity crisis. Thus, it strikes me that photography is there in order to assist people in their existential journey, to support and guide them spiritually.

The action of taking photos gives individuals plenty of room to analyze and therefore to make known the realities of the human society. Hence, I regard photography as the perfect method of fighting for various causes, for changing lives, making a difference. As an illustration, there are photographers who travel all over the world, snap shooting the pain and suffering of human condition: children fighting in wars, people starving, walking on the edge of survival. Their works are then published throughout the world, giving an impulse to all the organizations of human rights to take action on these matters.

Kevin Carter is one of those people ‘chosen’ to present the reality through the lens of a camera. He was the first to photograph a public execution by ‘necklacing’1 in South Africa in the mid 1980s. He later spoke of the images: ‘I was appalled at

---

1 The practice of summary execution carried out by forcing a rubber tire, filled with gasoline, around a victim’s chest and arms, and setting it on fire
what they were doing. I was appalled at what I was doing. But then people started talking about those pictures... then I felt that maybe my actions hadn’t been at all bad².

In March 1993, Carter made a trip to Sudan. There, near the village of Ayod, he ran across a young Sudanese girl. She had stopped to rest while struggling to a feeding center. As he approached her, a vulture landed in view. ‘Careful not to disturb the bird, he positioned himself for the best possible image. He would later say he waited about 20 minutes, hoping the vulture would spread its wings. It did not, and after he took his photographs, he chased the bird away and watched as the little girl resumed her struggle.³

However, he came under heavy criticism for just photographing and not helping the child. After receiving the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography, Carter killed himself on the night of July 27, 1994. ‘It is ironic that Kevin Carter won the Pulitzer for a photograph which to me is a photograph of his own soul’⁴, says Scott Macleod, the author of the article entitled The Life and Death of Kevin Carter. ‘Kevin is that small child, he continues, huddled against the world and the vulture is the angel of death. I wish someone could have chased the evil from his life’.

Carter’s action brings out the eternal dilemma of photojournalism: you just record what’s going on or you get involved as well? So what should he had done? Help one person and not all the others? Because that decision is up to the individual. However, there are three key questions that one should keep in mind, whenever facing a similar situation:

- Should this moment be made public?
- Will being photographed send the subjects into further trauma?
- Am I acting with compassion and sensitivity?

In Carter’s case, the answer of the first question is ‘yes’. The world needed to know about Sudan’s famine. As for the second question, the girl was way too young, thus unaware of the fact that she was being photographed. And last but not the least,
Carter, as a human being, wasn’t showing compassion, not directly anyway. He took the picture to tell the story, inspire change, raise awareness of the situation in Sudan.

‘By embarking a career in photojournalism, Carter set himself apart from the lives of the people he photographed. He chose to be an observer rather than a participant. Carter opted for a moral detachment that most of us cannot achieve’5.

On the whole, it depends on everyone’s perception of life to decide whether it should be expected of a photographer to change the social flaws of what’s going on in front of him. In the meantime, think twice before pressing the release button of your camera. It may change your life for good. Be sure you are strong enough to handle it.

Catalina Marincaş
Faculty of Political Science
Communication and Public Relations, 2nd year

5 http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,981431,00.html