NOTES
FROM THE CUTTING EDGE

In a pioneering study, commissioned by World Press Photo, David Campbell examined the current practices in multimedia against the background of the disruption in the traditional media economy, and the revolution in how people consume news today. On the World Press Photo site http://www.worldpressphoto. org/multimedia-research you can download the full report and hear from Campbell and the makers of multimedia in a series of five video conversations with some of the leading players in the field.

By David Campbell

What is MULTIMEDIA?

Searching for a single definition in answer to this question is neither possible nor desirable. At its most basic, "multimedia" signifies some combination of images, sound, graphics, and text to produce a story. In different realms of practice people speak of cross media, transmedia or mixed media. In photojournalism, multimedia has often been first understood as photography, plus something else, principally the combination of still imagery with other content. Nowadays we see it in multiple forms ranging from online photo galleries where pictures are combined with text captions, to audio slideshows, linear video (both short- and long-form), animated infographics, non-linear interactives, and full-scale web documentaries and broadcast films.

The digital revolution has been a defining development in the emergence of multimedia that blurs the boundary between still and moving images. But that boundary has long been blurred. Even a brief consideration of the history of image making shows considerable overlap between still and moving images. Close-ups and freeze frames are moments in which cinema employs the still image, and photo-stories and sequences testify to the influence of cinema on photography. Famous photographers like Man Ray, Paul Strand and Gordon Parks were all involved in film making and films like Chris Marker's *La Jetee* (1962) and Agnes Varda's *Salut Les Cubains* (1963) were based on still photographs. Ken Burn's creative use of archival pictures in *The Civil War* (1990) was so powerful it gave rise to an effect now immortalised in video editing software. Modern television is not averse to deploying stills in either opening credits (as in David Simon's *Treme*) or in news broadcasts, when a slower pace is needed to underline the significance of the event (the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the invasion of Iraq being two such cases), or when video is unavailable.

The roots of multimedia go deeper still. In the media history of photographic images, prior to mass reproduction of images in print becoming possible, pictures were displayed to the public with the help of technological devices such as the magic lantern (as well as the gloriously named phenakistiscope, zoetrope, praxinoscope, mutoscope, etc.) that created the perception of moving images in theatrical settings.

Moving forward again, we can recall other photographic projects in which images were entwined with other forms of content. Nan Goldins' famous *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* was originally shown in the early 1980s as a constantly evolving slideshow with music. Pedro Meyer's *I Photograph to Remember* (1991), Rick Smolan's *From Alice to Ocean* (1992) and *Passage to Vietnam* (1994), and Tim Hetherington's *House of Pain* (1996) were all on CD-ROMs and it was speculated that CD-ROMs might replace books as the chosen platform for photographic

presentation. Gilles Peress' *Bosnia: Uncertain Paths to Peace* (1996) was an interactive photo essay, while Ed Kashi's *Iraqi Kurdistan* flipbook style production (2006) closed the circle by deploying a 19th century technique on a 21st century platform.

Photojournalism has always been influenced by technological changes, and the arrival of DSLR cameras with video capability – the Nikon D90 in August 2008 followed shortly thereafter by the Canon 5D Mark II – have again highlighted the relationship between still and moving images, providing practitioners with dual image capability in a single camera body.

What is the significance of this history? It confirms that any attempt to strictly define multimedia would exclude more than it includes. And it demonstrates that what we need is not a restrictive definition of one genre, but an expanded understanding of the photographic, especially the long-standing and complex relationship between still and moving images, possibly what Tim Hetherington meant when he spoke of a "post-photographic" world. This is not a world in which one visual form has died, but a world in which multiple visual forms are alive and stronger than ever.

This is why this study speaks of "visual storytelling". It opens up the field to different communities who share

a common purpose in image-oriented reportage. It is the zone in which photojournalism, videojournalism, documentary, cinema and interactive storytelling have the potential to intersect. This does not create a new visual genre, but it constitutes a space in which photojournalists can bring their aesthetic abilities and commitment to reporting, and learn from those operating outside of photography.

This is not the convergence of everything into one, or a place where a single new form replaces all others; none of this leads to the conclusion that all forms of print are passé. Instead, we have arrived at a place where image making is important to storytelling, and storytelling encompasses many forms across many platforms.