

# The camera and the Red Cross: “Lamentable pictures” and conflict photography bring into focus an international movement, 1855–1865

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## Abstract

*Henry Dunant’s appeal for a neutral and impartial organization to provide care to wounded combatants aligned with growing criticism of mid-nineteenth-century European and North American conflicts. This article discusses the important convergence of Dunant’s “lamentable pictures”, laid out in his Memory of*

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*Solferino, with spectators' passionate responses to them and to battlefield photographs that circulated between 1855 and 1865. Through these images and reactions, there emerged a shared, expanded vision of humanity worth caring for, which brought into focus an international humanitarian movement.*

**Keywords:** Red Cross history, combat photography, humanitarian visual culture, Henry Dunant, Solferino.



## Introduction

The mid-nineteenth century was a time that saw an emergence of new media, leading historian and philosopher Richard Rorty to claim it as having contributed to an “unprecedented acceleration in the rate of moral progress”.<sup>1</sup> New media, including the telegraph, the illustrated newspaper and the camera, circulated—at unprecedented speed and in unsurpassed detail—news and pictures of bloody conflicts in Europe and North America. While not everyone was reacting the same way to this information, the novel perspective offered by the camera began to alter people’s perceptions. Together with a rising tide of democratic nationalism came a growing distaste for warfare and a recognition of the common soldier not as the “scum of the earth”—as they had been derided by some contemporary military leaders—but as a fellow citizen worthy of protection and care.<sup>2</sup>

Henry Dunant’s appeal for an organization supported by an international convention to provide care to wounded combatants, regardless of rank or nationality, aligned with that of spectators who were responding in particular ways to novel conflict photographs, making it possible for Dunant’s ideas to become a reality. As an example of the way in which history can provide perspective on the present, this paper includes a brief narrative of Dunant, as an unsuspecting tourist of the horrors of battle, and his translation of the suffering he witnessed into “lamentable pictures” meant to invoke passionate responses in his readers.<sup>3</sup> His book is regarded from within the context of the nineteenth-century equivalent of the “viral” spread of news and pictures of three major conflicts of the time: the Crimean Campaign, the Battle of Solferino and the American Civil War. These conflicts, and the unprecedented spread and detail of stories about them, are said to have contributed to an acceleration in humanitarian sentiment.

1 Richard Rorty, “Human Rights, Rationality and Sentimentality”, in *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 121.

2 The Duke of Wellington made the following statement on 2 July 1813: “It is quite impossible for me or any other man to command a British Army under the existing system. We have in the service the scum of the earth as common soldiers.” This reflected a common sentiment, particularly among the gentry. See Jonathan Marwil, “Photography at War”, *History Today*, Vol. 50, No. 6, 2000, p. 35.

3 Following Darnton, I support close readings of the past to gain insights into the present. See Robert Darnton, *George Washington’s False Teeth: An Unconventional Guide to the Eighteenth Century*, Norton, New York, 2003.

Paying particular attention to eyewitness accounts of mid-nineteenth-century battles and to recent visual scholarship on spectators' responses to images of atrocity and suffering, what follows is an invitation to gain a new perspective on Dunant's words through the lens of early combat photography and the humanitarian narrative. As humanitarian actors and agencies today actively work to assess the impact of their communication strategies on global audiences, this historical review provides insights on the role of photography in expanding a shared vision of who constitutes humanity, and who is worth caring for. As some of the examples in this article show, there are no guarantees when it comes to use of, and engagement with, photographs. Of interest here, however, are people's passionate responses to pictures, for it is this relationship that plays a vital role in developing humanitarian sentiment. In the case of Dunant's "lamentable pictures", passionate responses helped bring into focus an international humanitarian movement.

## Translating suffering

Henry Dunant wrote these words near the end of his 1862 book, *A Memory of Solferino*:

But why have I told of all these scenes of pain and distress, and perhaps arouse painful emotions in my readers? Why have I lingered with seeming complacency over lamentable pictures, tracing their details with what may appear desperate fidelity?<sup>4</sup>

The passage is a bridge to Dunant's call for a relief organization that would provide care to soldiers wounded in war. The quotation suggests that the text is filled with "lamentable pictures", yet, remarkably, the only figure illustrating the book's first edition was a line-drawn map.<sup>5</sup> Pictures in the physical sense of the word (photographs, prints or drawings) may not have appeared, but the book's pages are indeed filled with images in the notional sense (mental pictures, imagination).<sup>6</sup>

4 Henry Dunant, *A Memory of Solferino*, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Geneva, 1862.

5 Dunant would create three editions of his book within the first year: one for close acquaintances, followed by one for heads of State and political officials, and a third popular edition. Martin Grumpert, *Dunant: The Story of the Red Cross*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1938, p. 84.

6 Dunant was exposed to photography through Jean-Gabriel Eynard (1775–1863), a family friend, wealthy banker and early photography enthusiast. While photography was growing in popular use, reproduction technology at the time meant that photographs had to be translated into (woodblock) prints or hand-printed for each volume, which was prohibitively expensive. Dunant primarily considered himself a man of letters, making it natural that he would have gravitated to the written word to express himself. He did recognize the rhetorical force of visual pictures, using woodblock prints in his first pamphlets promoting his ideas for an aid organization. He would later coordinate the composite group portrait of the participants of the First Geneva Convention. See Roger Durand, *Henry Dunant, 1828–1910*, Slatkine, Geneva, 2011, p. 42; Roger Durand, personal communication, July 2015; Natalie Klein-Kelly, "Dot to Dot: Exploring Humanitarian Activities in the Early Nineteenth Century", *Human Rights and Humanitarianism Blog*, 13 October 2017, available at: <https://hhr.hypotheses.org/1766#more-1766> (all internet references were accessed in January 2021).

Beginning already in the eighteenth century, “spectatorial sympathy” in poetry, theatre and the novel was a popular device marshalled to open eyes and soften hearts.<sup>7</sup> Dunant’s choice was a style of writing with which he had become intimately familiar through an influential member of his social network.

In 1853, Dunant had the good fortune of meeting Harriet Beecher Stowe, the American author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), during her stay in Geneva. She was on tour “pleading the cause of humanity in old Europe” and happened to stay at the home of a relative of General Dufour.<sup>8</sup> Stowe, and her literary peers Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo and Emile Zola, were writing a form of humanitarian narrative meant “to arouse people to a crusade against wrong through books or appeals”.<sup>9</sup> Before photography’s invention, graphic language and illustrations (e.g., prints) were increasingly incorporated into various popular and authoritative texts—from the novel, to government inquiries, to medical autopsies—with the express purpose of shaping perceptions and generating sympathies. For social historian Thomas Laqueur, these texts constituted a rubric of sorts that he termed “humanitarian narratives”. Their frequency and persistence were a sign, according to Laqueur, that “some people [had] begun thinking and feeling in new ways” and had thus begun to regard a wider swath of the population around them as part of a humanity worth caring for.<sup>10</sup> Generally the arc of these chronicles would include a victim, almost always described as innocent, who would struggle with a villain (e.g., disease, disaster, or an individual or group causing suffering) and be saved by a hero, in most cases either a technology or a person of socio-economic privilege. The “sensationalistic” details of suffering experienced or inflicted on the affected person’s body operated on two fronts: to represent the truth of the claims, and to “demand attention and sympathy” on the part of the readers.<sup>11</sup> Such compositions were expected to form a common bond between the reader and the victim, with the personalization of the victim’s misery anticipated to nurture the “moral imagination”, thus contributing to the generation of a more humanitarian outlook towards subjects who until that time had “been beneath notice”.<sup>12</sup> As such, humanitarian narratives are central to the sort of “sentimental education” that Rorty has associated with the sharing of sad stories. Indeed, the purpose of such manipulations of feeling, particularly those aimed at “increasing [the] ability to see similarities between ourselves and people very unlike us”, is “to expand the

7 Karen Halttunen, “Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture”, *American Historical Review*, Vol.100, No. 2, 1995, p. 307.

8 See R. Durand, *Henry Dunant*, above note 6, p. 67. Dufour was in many ways Dunant’s mentor: he would later help arrange the battlefield meeting between Dunant and Napoleon that would lead Dunant to stumble across—quite by accident—the Battle of Solferino, and he eventually became one of the five founding members of the Red Cross.

9 M. Grumpert, above note 5, p. 15. Grumpert continues: “During their lifetime, they were honoured and admired, and even now are accorded full rites by the motion picture industry. It was felt that even the shadow of pain and suffering was a last damnable blot on modern civilization.”

10 Thomas W. Laqueur, “Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative”, in Lynn A. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History*, MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, 1989, p. 200.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 184.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 176, 191.

reference of the terms ‘our kind of people’ and ‘people like us’.”<sup>13</sup> Rorty sees this practice as a critical aspect of developing a more equitable and just world. Recent scholarship on humanitarian visual culture identifies a similar narrative association within humanitarian photography.<sup>14</sup>

In her text, Stowe relied heavily on graphic depictions of the bodies of slaves and the violence done to them, in order to represent their full humanity.<sup>15</sup> Her writing and advocacy skills substantially influenced the young Dunant.<sup>16</sup> Mobilizing imagery equivalent to that of Stowe’s, he wrote: “I moistened his dry lips and hardened tongue, took a handful of lint and dipped it in the bucket they were carrying behind me, and squeezed the water from this improvised sponge into the deformed opening that had been his mouth.”<sup>17</sup> Describing another soldier who had been peppered with grapeshot, he wrote: “The rest of his swollen body was all black and green, and he could find no comfortable position to sit or lie in. I moistened great masses of lint in cold water and tried to place this under him, but it was not long before gangrene carried him off.”<sup>18</sup>

It was not until three years after the Battle of Solferino that Dunant would write and publish this account of his experience providing care to wounded combatants. The passing of time did little to diminish the details he would recall, or his emotions surrounding the events. Dunant’s publication was an account of the *ad hoc* care he provided to soldiers wounded in the battle. Not medically trained, Dunant could do little more than provide comfort and company to those who might survive and to those who would surely die: essentially, rudimentary palliative care. For the bulk of the book, Dunant focuses on combatants overcome with pain and suffering, the eye-witnessing of which spurred him to action – and, he expected, would surely do the same for his readers. Dunant sets up his accounts of the battle as those of “a mere tourist with no part whatever in this great conflict[,] ... witness [to] the moving scenes that I have resolved to describe”.<sup>19</sup> He explicitly invites his readers to engage the narrative visually as he

13 R. Rorty, above note 1, pp. 129, 122–123.

14 Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno (eds), *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015.

15 Subsequent literary critics have differentially interpreted and debated Stowe’s use of violence in her novel. For example, in her analysis “The Ecstasies of Sentimental Wounding in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*”, Marianne Noble puts her ideas into dialogue with those of Laqueur and Halttunen, who each find different motivations and impacts of Stowe’s mobilization of violence in the book. Noble reveals the ways in which the humanitarian narrative is a “double edged sword”, precariously balancing liberation and repression, awareness-raising and objectifying. What this criticism points to is a long-standing, perpetual paradox of potentially doing harm while trying to do good by objectifying victims and their pain. See Marianne Noble, “The Ecstasies of Sentimental Wounding in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*”, *Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1997.

16 Abraham Lincoln is said to have believed that Stowe’s book played a part in bringing about the American Civil War, a conflict that was still nearly a decade away when she and Dunant met. M. Grumpert, above note 5, p. 15. According to Hamand, “Abraham Lincoln is alleged to have said upon meeting Harriet Beecher Stowe, ‘so this is the little lady who made this big war.’” Wendy F. Hamand, “‘No Voice from England’: Mrs. Stowe, Mr. Lincoln, and the British in the Civil War”, *New England Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 1, 1988, p. 3.

17 H. Dunant, above note 4, p. 62.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

lived it: to become affected witnesses alongside him. Dunant's writing, his selection of words and his choice of scenes to describe are meant to grip readers and encourage "the onlooker" and fellow "tourists" to visualize in their mind's eye repulsive panoramas of battle and the concomitant grievous suffering and death.<sup>20</sup>

Importantly, Dunant deviated from Stowe in one crucial way. Unlike Stowe's famous work, Dunant wrote himself in as the hero (or what would be characterized today as the hero), albeit not already in possession of heroic qualities. Dunant's story is about his transformation from disaffected tourist to advocate for the care of wounded soldiers. His text has many of the characteristics of a classic *Bildungsroman* or coming-of-age story. Joseph Slaughter has positioned the *Bildungsroman* as an ideal form of writing in the service of humanitarianism and human rights.<sup>21</sup> Conventional humanitarian narratives that centralized suffering and graphic descriptions of pain as the source of moral development, Slaughter argues, offered less guarantee that readers would respond in the ways that writers intended. Indeed, long-standing anxieties accompanied the creation and critique of these stories over their potential to be interpreted by audiences as entertainment or worse.<sup>22</sup> To centrally feature the main character's development took the focus off bodily suffering and instead concentrated on encouraging reader emulation through a "sense of responsibility to [the] moral integrity of one's own class of humanity".<sup>23</sup> The benefit of this was that readers were not left to their own devices to determine "proper sentiment" and what actions should be taken in response to that emotion.<sup>24</sup> Such a focus on the development of the protagonist is an important part of the sort of story which Rorty identifies as crucial in sentimental education that can help to bring about a more inclusive and diverse human family.

Repeatedly in *Solferino*, Dunant steers spectators past horrific scenes – but he also guides them along a direct and actionable path. In the vein of the classic *Bildungsroman*, Dunant provides examples of proper sentiment and encourages its development in his readers:

The moral sense of the importance of human life; the humane desire to lighten a little the torments of all the furious and relentless activity which a man summons up at such moments: all these combine to create a kind of energy which gives one a positive craving to relieve as many as one can.<sup>25</sup>

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 65.

21 Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.*, Fordham University Press, Brooklyn, NY, 2007.

22 Kevin Rozario, "'Delicious Horrors': Mass Culture, the Red Cross, and the Appeal of Modern American Humanitarianism", *American Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 3, 2003, available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/46647>.

23 Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 2006, p. 103; see also Jane Lydon, *Photography, Humanitarianism, Empire*, Bloomsbury, London, 2016.

24 K. Halttunen, above note 7, p. 307.

25 H. Dunant, above note 4, p. 73.

Dunant focuses on drawing attention to suffering as something equally felt by soldiers, officers, allies and enemies.<sup>26</sup> He mobilizes his text to show this consciousness for the benefit of his readers:

[The] women of Castaglione, seeing that I made no distinction between nationalities, followed my example, showing the same kindness to all these men whose origins were so different, and all of whom were foreigners to them. “*Tutti fratelli*” [“All are brothers”], they repeated feelingly.<sup>27</sup>

Dunant’s witnessing and his first-hand experiences in the aftermath of fighting transformed his perceptions when it came to battlefield care. His book, with its graphic text, became a proxy to his readers, a substitute for actually standing on the sidelines of the battle with him. In the final section of the book, Dunant presents a sketch of an unprecedented plan: “Would it not be possible, in time of peace and quiet, to form relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wounded in wartime by zealous, devoted and thoroughly qualified volunteers?”<sup>28</sup> All of this occurs in a little over 100 pages.

In writing as graphically as he did, Dunant was tapping into the power of images—even if only ones appearing in the mind’s eye of the reader—to affect people, to touch them emotionally so that they might act. “People” in this context refers, of course, to those within his social circle, people with the means to effect political or material change, to whom he was directing his message. Dunant’s appeal was aimed at “comfortably situated citizens possessing an international spirit of good works”,<sup>29</sup> adding credence to Rorty’s argument that sentimental stories are best addressed to the people “on top”, those with political and material means, as they are the most likely to be able to effect change. This is the same class of people who are in positions of sufficient security “to relax long enough to listen” to appeals such as those of Dunant.<sup>30</sup>

26 Florence Nightingale famously stated following her experience at Crimea: “Suffering lifts its victim above normal values. While suffering endures there is neither good nor bad, valuable nor invaluable, enemy nor friend. The victim has passed to a region beyond human classification or moral judgments and his suffering is a sufficient claim.” See British Red Cross, “Florence Nightingale and the Red Cross”, 20 August 2017, available at: [www.redcross.org.uk/stories/health-and-social-care/health/how-florence-nightingale-influenced-the-red-cross#](http://www.redcross.org.uk/stories/health-and-social-care/health/how-florence-nightingale-influenced-the-red-cross#). Ironically, Nightingale was against Dunant’s plan, arguing that it would lead to governments relaxing their responsibilities towards their fighting forces. Nightingale’s caution has since been termed the “Nightingale risk” in conflict studies circles. See Katherine Davies, *Continuity, Change and Contest: Meanings of “Humanitarian” from the “Religion of Humanity” to the Kosovo War*, Humanitarian Policy Group Working Paper, Overseas Development Institute, 2012, p. 5; R. Durand, *Henry Dunant*, above note 6; Eleanor O’Gorman, *Conflict and Development*, Zed Books, New York and London, 2011.

27 H. Dunant, above note 4, p. 72.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

29 David P. Forsythe, *The Humanitarians: The International Committee of the Red Cross*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 17.

30 R. Rorty, above note 1, pp. 128, 130. See also D. P. Forsythe, above note 29, p. 17: those who had “the money and leisure time to make that spirit count for something, proved receptive to Dunant’s ideas. Dunant would ultimately draw upon what might be termed Genevan exceptionalism: the collective self-image, no doubt partially the product of Calvinism, that the citizens of Geneva constituted a special people with a positive role to play.”

To achieve his aims, Dunant reconfigured and fictionalized some of his experiences for added affect. He also provided his readers with a clear path of action towards which they could direct their energies.<sup>31</sup> Much of the credit for the success of *A Memory of Solferino* has to go directly to Dunant. He was adept at working his social network and rallying influential people to a cause.<sup>32</sup> Building on these abilities, Dunant circulated *Solferino* across Europe and discussed its contents and ideas with influential leaders in his social circle.<sup>33</sup> He did so in person with members of the European nobility, political leaders, ministers of defence and military physicians. He also toured his book through the salons of Paris.

High praise followed from various arenas of the political and cultural elite. The Brothers Goncourt, popular social commentators of the time, noted in their *Journal* of 8 June 1863: “One finished this book by damning war.”<sup>34</sup> Among other philosophers and philanthropists, Victor Hugo wrote in a letter to Dunant: “I have read your book with the greatest interest. You are arming humanity and are serving freedom ... I endorse your noble efforts with enthusiasm, and I send you my heartiest good wishes.”<sup>35</sup> Also in 1863, “England’s most popular author”, Charles Dickens, published “The Man in White” in his weekly journal, *All the Year Round*; this account “was devoutly read by the English-speaking world, [presenting] a detailed analysis of the book of the ‘travelling amateur’ and his difficult and courageous attempt to alleviate the misery of war”.<sup>36</sup>

Dunant’s book and the emotions it aroused might have been destined to fade from the memories of the influential people he met with had it not been, again, for the intrepid and sympathetic General Dufour. It was Dufour who connected Dunant with Gustave Moynier, then president of the Geneva Society for Public Welfare,<sup>37</sup> together with Louis Appia and Théodore Maunoir, these would be the five founders of what eventually became the Red Cross.

*A Memory of Solferino* has been credited as having sparked the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC),<sup>38</sup> but Dunant’s call for a relief society to be viewed by his readers as a “damnation of war” and an “armament” in

31 D. P. Forsythe, above note 29. See also N. Klein-Kelly, above note 6.

32 While at Brescia, where Dunant spent most of his time providing what care he could to wounded combatants from the Battle of Solferino, Dunant made appeals to philanthropists in Geneva to donate funds and supplies. Dunant’s contacts also included the Dutch Royal Family, establishing a line of royal patronage with the Red Cross that continues to this day. R. Durand, *Henry Dunant*, above note 6; Caroline Moorehead, *Dunant’s Dream: War, Switzerland, and the History of the Red Cross*, HarperCollins, London, 1998.

33 R. Durand, *Henry Dunant*, above note 6. Dunant developed his networking proficiency while internationalizing the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) in the decade before the battle of Solferino. He was employed by the YMCA while the First War of Italian Independence (1848–49) and the Russo-Turkish War (1853–56) raged. The Crimean War was a campaign in the Russo-Turkish War; the Battle of Solferino would be fought during the Second War of Italian Independence in 1859.

34 Cited in M. Grumpert, above note 5, p. 84.

35 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 85.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85. Dickens’ title is a reference to the moniker given to Dunant by the soldiers he tended to; he had arrived at the aftermath of the battle in the tropical colonial suit he wore for his meeting with Napoleon II.

37 H. Dunant, above note 4, p. 35.



the service of freedom was made all the more possible because everyday people were already starting to think differently about warfare and its impact on infantrymen. The opinions and designs that Dunant proposed in his book could only take hold in a climate already receptive to them. An example of the growing distaste for war at the time can be seen in the work of Francisco Goya; some four decades earlier, the Spanish court painter, known for his idyllic scenes of everyday life among the gentry, became a *de facto* documentarian and commentator of the cruelties that accompanied Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Spain, leading to the Peninsular War of 1808–14.

While his peers created works that glorified war or depicted the miseries of warfare as unavoidable, Goya broke from painterly traditions to present horrific scenes of brutality, famine and repression with a dramatically accusatory tone.<sup>39</sup> He combined each unflinching image of brutality and despair with titles that explicitly expressed strong sentiments against the conflict. With titles such as *They Do Not Want To, Bury Them and Keep Quiet* and *There Is No One to Help Them*, Goya guided spectators to a new interpretation of war as abhorrent and repulsive.

Despite Goya's reputation, the prints were never put into wide circulation in his lifetime.<sup>40</sup> By 1863, when Henry Dunant was circulating *Solferino* throughout Paris and among the European elite, changes in public opinion resulted in Goya's work taking on new significance. Sentiments that earlier had appeared unconventional and controversial had become widespread and accepted, as the "fatal consequences" of numerous battles taking part in quick succession were being made visible through the new medium of photography.<sup>41</sup> Goya's prints were newly published for mass circulation in 1863 under the collective title *The Disasters of War*. Goya has since been credited with having introduced the sentiment of revulsion for warfare in the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, ICRC senior medical officer Paul Bouvier has presented a convincing interpretation of Goya's prints as depicting the essence of humanitarian action.<sup>43</sup> Undoubtedly, Goya's work contributed to changing social relations in the face of conflict.

38 This credit comes not only from the ICRC, but also from critical humanitarian scholars such as David Rieff. See J. Slaughter, above note 21, p. 327.

39 In this regard, Goya is believed to have been influenced by Jacques Callot's *Les Grands Misères de la Guerre*, 1633.

40 It is speculated that the prints were too critical of the French, then the European powerhouse. See Jonathan Jones, "Look What We Did", *The Guardian*, 20 June 2002, available at: [www.theguardian.com/culture/2003/mar/31/artsfeatures.turnerprize2003](http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2003/mar/31/artsfeatures.turnerprize2003).

41 Originally published under the title *Fatal Consequences of Spain's Bloody War with Bonaparte, and Other Emphatic Caprices*, Goya's prints contain many images of violence toward civilians, mainly women. It would be almost a century from the time he made his pictures before humanitarian laws to protect women, children and other non-combatants would come into effect.

42 Sharon Sliwinski, *Human Rights in Camera*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 2011; Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Picador, New York, 2004.

43 Paul Bouvier, "In Folio: 'Yo Lo Vi'. Goya Witnessing the Disasters of War: An Appeal to the Sentiment of Humanity", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 93, No. 884, 2011.

Deep philosophical roots underpin the long-standing belief in the persuasive link between sight and moral sensibilities. Long before Dunant's time, a succession of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers had prioritized scenes of suffering as central to exciting the imagination, enabling spectators to "enter into" the body of the sufferer and develop a proper sense of what was required to end the other's distress.<sup>44</sup> More recently, visual theorist Sharon Sliwinski has reflected specifically upon the role of the camera in advancing humanitarian sentiment and the codification of human rights. Sliwinski outlines how spectators' "passionate responses" to visual images, such as outrage, disgust, sorrow or frustration, "can be read as a sign that demonstrates the 'moral character' of humanity".<sup>45</sup> It is these sensorial reactions, these aesthetic responses to images of suffering and calamity, that precede—indeed, spark—actions to better humanity. The role of images in this moral progression is to show examples of situations that call for human intervention, and also to show the viewer *how* to intervene. Dunant provided aesthetic scenes by way of his "lamentable pictures" revealing suffering that called for a response, and he extended those scenes to allow spectators a chance to see how such intervention could be done to the betterment of many. While Dunant's ideas generated support for concrete actions to ameliorate the conditions for common soldiers, this expansion of humanitarian sentiment was made all the more possible because contemporary conflict photography (and related commentary) heralded these passionate responses. It is this contextual moment that is the focus of the following section.

## New media and the acceleration of moral sentiment

The Battle of Solferino has been described as the most modern conflict of the nineteenth century. The advent of steam technology, the telegraph and photography made it possible for communications to travel greater distances at unprecedented speeds and in unsurpassed detail.<sup>46</sup> With public opinion weighing in almost hourly, this swift movement of information—albeit within particular privileged circles with access to less commonplace technologies—was the nineteenth-century equivalent of news "going viral".<sup>47</sup> Alongside Solferino, two other major conflicts in the decade 1855–65 received much popular, political and media attention: the Crimean Campaign and the American Civil War.

44 For instance, David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, and Adam Smith: see K. Haltunen, above note 7, p. 307. See also K. Rozario, above note 22.

45 S. Sliwinski, above note 42, pp. 5, 23.

46 M. Grumpert, above note 5, p. 39.

47 Simon J. Potter, "Webs, Networks, and Systems: Globalization and the Mass Media in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Empire", *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 2007, available at: [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/515446?seq=1](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/515446?seq=1). See also Jeremy Stein, "Reflections on Time, Time-Space Compression and Technology in the Nineteenth Century", in Jon May and Nigel Thrift (eds), *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*, Routledge, London, 2001.

By the time that Dunant was writing *A Memory of Solferino*, photography had been in popular use for nearly two decades. The state of the art had moved away from one-off daguerreotypes and now consisted of a collodion process using glass-plate negatives to which a wet emulsion was applied just prior to exposure.<sup>48</sup> When exposed outside a studio, these plates had to be developed in travelling darkrooms. Photographs were circulated as individual prints, displayed in exhibitions and projected in lantern lectures. They were also readily translated into woodblock prints for mass circulation in newspapers and books.

Photographers, journalists and media moguls were quick to take advantage of the ability to bring the camera onto the battlefield: to impress their existing audiences, to entice new ones, or for the sheer challenge of taking pictures amidst a battle.<sup>49</sup> In 1842, the *Illustrated London News* launched with bold, centrally featured prints – often made from photographs – depicting calamities and conflict, with the express conviction that “disaster could push newspaper sales”.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, governments and political leaders mobilized the new media technologies to try to sway public opinion in favour of their actions, including conflicts that put the lives of many of their citizens at risk. Regardless of the intent on the part of States, editors, writers or photographers, there was no guarantee that spectators would interpret what they heard, read or saw in the same way. Indeed, the advent of the camera enabled people’s perceptions to change in unexpected ways;<sup>51</sup> this was no less true regarding conflict photography, beginning with one of the first conflicts where the camera was present, the Crimean War.

The war that would make Florence Nightingale famous was also a war that was tremendously unpopular in the UK after British involvement unexpectedly dragged on through an uncommonly harsh winter. The British suffered great losses in the Crimean War due to what was seen as mismanagement that resulted in troops being severely undersupplied. It is said that more soldiers were lost to

48 A dry collodion process was also possible, but most photographers of the time used the wet process because, as one photographer noted, the dry process was “too slow to be employed where the exposure must only occupy a short time”. See J. L., “Photography at the Seat of War”, *Photographic News*, Vol. 2 No. 42, 24 June 1859, p. 183.

49 Jason E. Hill and Vanessa Schwartz (eds), *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of the News*, Bloomsbury Academic, London and New York, 2015. Also, J. L. wrote this account of his endeavour to take photographs of the hostilities mounting in Italy: “When I left England my intention was to make a tour with the camera in Switzerland, but the exciting prospect of being able to get plates of battlefields, sieges, and other incidental scenes, induced me to change my course, and, instead of remaining among the glaciers and ice-peaks, to make a journey to the sunny plains of Italy.” J. L., above note 48, p. 183.

50 With crimes, disasters and calamities as its regular fare, Herbert Ingram’s *Illustrated London News* focused on more serious issues than another British magazine, *Punch*, that launched around the same time. Concerned about readership, sales, social conventions and Victorian sensibilities, the *Illustrated London News* carefully meted out its news with a strong dose of excitement and entertainment. See Paul Hockings, “Disasters Drawn: *The Illustrated London News* in the Mid-19th Century”, *Visual Anthropology*, Vol. 28, No.1, 2015, p. 22.

51 Walter Benjamin was one of the first to critically theorize photography as a social phenomenon, persuasively describing the power of the medium to shift perceptions. See Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2008.

exposure and disease than to enemy fire. During the unforgiving winter of 1854, William Russell of *The Times* of London shared narrative dispatches that painted “grim pictures” of the events.<sup>52</sup> Such reports differed greatly from government propaganda or from traditional historiographies that glorified warfare. Eventually, public criticism would become intense enough to lead to the resignation of the Aberdeen government in February 1855. It was in the spring and early summer of that year that Roger Fenton went to photograph the campaign. A matter of contention to this day, it is said that his supporters hoped to turn the tide of public sentiment with photographs that could command loyalty and build patriotism – essentially, propaganda.<sup>53</sup>

Among the earliest to photograph conflict, Fenton was a professional photographer commissioned by the English print-seller Thomas Agnew to photograph the Crimean War.<sup>54</sup> With his history of being a photographer to the Royal Family, Fenton also travelled under Royal Patronage and with the backing of the British government. Though not the only photographer taking pictures of the campaign, Fenton is credited as being the most prolific and is certainly the most recognized today.<sup>55</sup> The commission also entailed taking photographs to be used as source material by the renowned painter Thomas Jones Barker, which may explain Fenton’s creative decisions.<sup>56</sup> Over the course of three months in the spring and early summer of 1855, Fenton succeeded in taking some 350 exposures, which were shared to broad public audiences through portfolio publications and travelling exhibitions.<sup>57</sup>

Fenton’s photographs were always products of careful composition. With exposure times measured in seconds or minutes (as opposed to today’s fractions of a second), heavy box-type large-format cameras, and the need to develop the plates immediately after being exposed, the technology at the time prevented him from taking candid exposures or action shots, and limitations on the subject matter may have also been imposed by his commission. The result is that his pictures have since been described as dull.<sup>58</sup> Compared to today’s conflict photography made in the thick of battle, it is understandable that Fenton’s images can come across as stale and outdated. Such an anachronistic perspective

52 T. J. Brady, “Roger Fenton and the Crimean War”, *History Today*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1968, p. 80.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 76. For a recent counter-argument to that which Brady references, see Sophie Gordon, *Shadows of War: Roger Fenton’s Photographs of the Crimea, 1855*, Royal Collection Trust, London, 2017.

54 The publisher intended to turn a profit through the sale of postcards and portfolios, which were popular forms of circulating photographic prints at the time. See T. J. Brady, above note 52; Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1982; J. Marwil, above note 2.

55 T. J. Brady mentioned several others who were commissioned to take photographs of the Crimean War: Richard Nicklin in 1854, and “two young officers – Ensigns Brandon and Dawson” in the spring of 1855. None of their photographs appear to have survived to the present. T. J. Brady, above note 52, p. 76.

56 S. Gordon, above note 53, p. 40.

57 Fenton travelled with his assistant by ship to Sevastopol, where they converted a four-horse-drawn wine cart into a mobile darkroom. Reproductions of Fenton’s photographs were circulated later in 1855 among the British Royal Family and Napoleon III’s court. An exhibition containing 312 prints was put on public display to thousands in both London and Paris. See T. J. Brady, above note 52, pp. 76, 83; S. Gordon, above note 53, p. 40.

58 J. Marwil, above note 2, p. 32.

led art critic Beaumont Newhall to conclude that Fenton had to “resolve [himself] to the still life in the aftermath of battle”.<sup>59</sup> Newhall possibly made this statement with photographs like Fenton’s most well-known photograph of the Crimean War in mind (see [Figure 1](#)).

*The Valley of the Shadow of Death* (1855) is a photograph of a dry and barren landscape transected by a roadway.<sup>60</sup> There are in fact two exposures made from the same tripod position. In one the road lays empty; in the other, cannonballs are strewn across it. Apparently, Fenton had cannonballs from the ditches repositioned to give the picture a different effect. While it was the exposure with the projectiles that was most widely circulated, the contemporary impact of these particular photographs has been overshadowed by subsequent, and still ongoing, debate about the integrity of the image.<sup>61</sup> Fenton did not, however, only photograph in the aftermath of battle. The majority of his war photographs were of soldiers and officers posed singularly or in groups in the British military camps.

Using the camera to its best advantage, Fenton meticulously posed his subjects in ways that accentuated their discipline, their camaraderie, their strength and their vitality. To be fair to Newhall, although technically superior to many of his peers, Fenton’s conflict images were relatively staid compared to those of some of his contemporaries. Photographers practicing in conflict settings, then as now, had ample graphic subject matter on which to train their lenses. War photographs depicting the physical effects of conflict on human bodies were being taken, with the earliest known coming from the 1847 Mexican–American War depicting a battlefield amputation (see [Figure 2](#)). Fenton’s sedate picture content was more likely a political-economic choice than due to failings of technology or its operator. Photographs of injury and death would not have suited his patron’s goal.

Fenton’s photographs of strapping soldiers and officers in full battle dress (see [Figure 3](#)) may have bolstered patriotic sentiments in the hearts of some of his viewers. Despite the anticipation of renewed support for the military engagement, the photographs also offered opportunities for perceiving the conflict in different ways. Following the 1855 London exhibition of the Crimea photographs, a journalist with *The Times* wrote that the pictures presented the “private soldiers [with] as good a likeness as the general”.<sup>62</sup> To make such a remark may have simply been a statement of observable fact, but in the highly structured, hierarchical British society, to say that people of different social ranks were treated as equals – even if only in photographs – was quite an act of levelling.

59 B. Newhall, above note 54, p. 85.

60 The title was taken from the moniker that soldiers had given to another valley in Sevastopol. The nickname referenced both Psalm 23 and Tennyson’s popular 1854 poem “Charge of the Light Brigade”, based on the Battle of Balaclava that took place before Fenton arrived.

61 Michael Zhang, “Famous ‘Valley of the Shadow of Death’ Photo Was Almost Certainly Staged”, *PetaPixel*, 1 October 2012, available at: <https://petapixel.com/2012/10/01/famous-valley-of-the-shadow-of-death-photo-was-most-likely-staged/>.

62 Quoted in B. Newhall, above note 54, p. 85.



Figure 1. *The Valley of the Shadow of Death*, by Roger Fenton, 1855. Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-35546.

According to the philosopher Judith Butler,

there are ways of framing that will bring the human into view in its frailty and precariousness, that will allow us to stand for the value and dignity of human life, to react with outrage when lives are degraded or eviscerated without regard for their value as lives. And there are frames that foreclose responsiveness.<sup>63</sup>

The framing Butler refers to is only partly to do with the way in which the photographer situates the subject within the camera's optical parameters. It also refers to situating the image within a set of political and ideological boundaries, in order to limit the surfeit of meaning that can accompany photographs.<sup>64</sup> It is unclear from the historical record what sort of "framing" Fenton intended with his images. As for his patrons, they may well have been framing his photographs in an effort to bolster public support for the Crimean campaign. However, once on public exhibition to thousands of everyday, common people, the photographs could not be guaranteed to remain bound to the ideals of the ruling class. Ordinary citizens whose sons were among the "private soldiers" referenced in

63 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, Verso, London and New York, 2009, p. 77.

64 *Ibid.* See also Stephen D. Reese, "Framing Public Life: A Bridging Model for Media Research", and James Tankard, "The Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing", in Stephen D. Reese, Oscar H. Gandy and August E. Grant (eds), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, 2003.



Figure 2. *Amputation, Mexican–American War, Cerro Gordo, 1847*, photographer unknown, 1847. National Photographic Archive, National Institute of Anthropology and History, Mexico City, Inventory No. 839971.

*The Times* may themselves have read something different than national pride in Fenton’s images—particularly when placed in association with the “grim pictures” reported on the previous year, or alongside those reported in letters sent home from soldiers.<sup>65</sup> Spectators may not all have been conscious of the democratizing potential of Fenton’s pictures, but the camera was making this more of a possibility. Once raised in profile, it was no great leap for photography to contribute to making the common soldier’s life “grievable”.<sup>66</sup> This can also be seen in the work and discourse of other eyewitnesses and photographers to European conflicts happening a few short years later. Several professional and amateur photographers have been identified as having taken pictures at the battles that were part of the Franco-Austrian War, of which Solferino was the final, decisive one.<sup>67</sup> Compared to Fenton’s, the numbers of photographs that have survived are much fewer, and none have attained the status of his Crimean

65 Cambridge University Library, “The Crimean War Letters of Captain Blackett”, *Cambridge University Library Special Collections*, 2012, available at: <https://specialcollections-blog.lib.cam.ac.uk/?p=2308>.

66 J. Butler, above note 63.

67 William Johnson, “Combat Photography during the Franco-Austrian War of 1859”, 21 August 2017, available at: <https://vintagephotosjohnson.com/2012/02/18/combat-photography-during-the-franco-austrian-war-of-1859/>; see also J. Marwil, above note 2. The First Italian War of Independence (1848–49) was followed a decade later by the Second Italian War of Independence, also known as the



Figure 3. *Private Soldiers and Officers of the 3rd Regiment (The Buffs) Piling Arms*, by Roger Fenton, 1855. Library of Congress, LC-USZC4-9289.

pictures. Despite being the bloodiest battle of the nineteenth century, Solferino has not had the same lasting impact on popular memory as the Crimean War that preceded it or the American Civil War that would shortly follow. The dearth of Solferino photographs compared to the wealth of those produced in the other two battles is a likely contributing factor to Solferino's conflict being all but forgotten outside of Italy or humanitarian action circles. The contemporary comments about their creation, however, are telling: they reflect the impact of photography on changing perceptions of lives worth caring for.

A couple of sets of stereograph pictures exist from the Franco-Austrian War that in many respects share equivalences with Fenton's images.<sup>68</sup> Stereographs were a popular form of photography, particularly among landscape photographers; these dual-exposure pictures, when seen through a specially designed viewer, appeared three-dimensional.<sup>69</sup> The largest remaining collection

Franco-Austrian War (1859). The Battle of Solferino was the final battle in these wars. See C. Moorehead, above note 32.

68 W. Johnson, above note 67.

69 Stereographs fell out of favour at the end of the nineteenth century as the technology was not easily adaptable for commercial consumer cameras. As aid organizations today turn to techniques such as 360-degree photography and virtual reality, it would seem that 3-D technology is ripe for a comeback. The affective force of these technologies remains to be seen, but will likely emulate the pattern of historical technological innovations, including the stereograph.



from the Franco-Austrian War comes from the Gaudin Brothers, who were professional French photographers commissioned to take photographs of French soldiers and their allies in bivouac (see [Figure 4](#)). Like Fenton's, these too are clearly staged and carefully composed. Taking photographs of regular troops may have been a novel "means of memorializing military accomplishments", but it likewise presented a commercial opportunity.<sup>70</sup> Such pictures, which had few equivalents in earlier conventions of celebratory battle art, also communicated the scale and quality of lives put at risk.

Fewer in number are photographs attributed to Jules Couppier.<sup>71</sup> His images are of the battlefields and were made in the days following several of the conflicts that were part of the Franco-Austrian War, which lasted from 26 April to 11 July 1859. Unlike Fenton's pictures, these are panoramas taken at a distance. Fenton's *Valley* picture may have made the battlefield appear more palpable with its proximal composition, but Couppier and Fenton's battlefield scenes are equally devoid of human figures. Couppier, however, did take a certain type of photograph that Fenton did not, or could not: amidst the Couppier collection are a few photographs that contain images of the wounded and the dead. A stereograph of "a convoy of the wounded and survivors" has survived from Solferino.<sup>72</sup> It is taken at high angle, perhaps from a church bell tower, and shows carriages filled with injured soldiers, stretching as far back as the eye can see, being moved to makeshift medical facilities in the town of Brescia (see [Figure 5](#)). Dunant referred to similar scenes, describing a "long procession of Commissary carts" with "all ranks mixed up ...[,] bleeding, exhausted, torn, and covered with dust".<sup>73</sup>

From the Battle of Magenta, which took place two weeks before Solferino, there exists a striking picture of a pile of corpses awaiting burial at the local cemetery (see [Figure 6](#) and detail in [Figure 7](#)). The fact that this image was made into a stereograph enhances its affective potential – to see a photograph of a mass of bodies was itself shocking and new, but to see it in three-dimensional quality would have been harrowing. This is precisely what Oliver Wendell Holmes suggested in his account of encountering a stereograph (possibly this same image) of a "heap of dead lying unburied" at the cemetery at Melegnano in his friend's collection of pictures.<sup>74</sup> The American poet, physician, essayist, and co-founder of *The Atlantic Monthly* wrote:

70 W. Johnson, above note 67.

71 The photographs attributed to Jules Couppier and reproduced here have been researched by Janice Schimmelman, who has also researched Claude-Marie Ferrier, another contemporary photographer considered the possible creator of these stereographs. Based on a variety of factors including handwriting comparison, Schimmelman concludes that these images are by Couppier. The Couppier and Gaudin Brothers images are reproduced with permission from the personal holdings of photographic historian William G. Johnson. See John B. Cameron and Janice G. Schimmelman, *The Glass Stereoviews of Ferrier and Soulier, 1852–1908*, Collodion Press, Rochester, MI, 2016; Janice G. Schimmelman, *Jules Couppier: Glass Stereoviews, 1853–1860*, Collodion Press, Rochester, MI, 2018.

72 W. Johnson, above note 67.

73 H. Dunant, above note 4, pp. 53–54.

74 Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Sun-Painting and Sun-Sculpture: With a Stereoscopic Trip Across the Atlantic", *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 8, No. 45, 1861, p. 27; see also J. Marwil, above note 2.

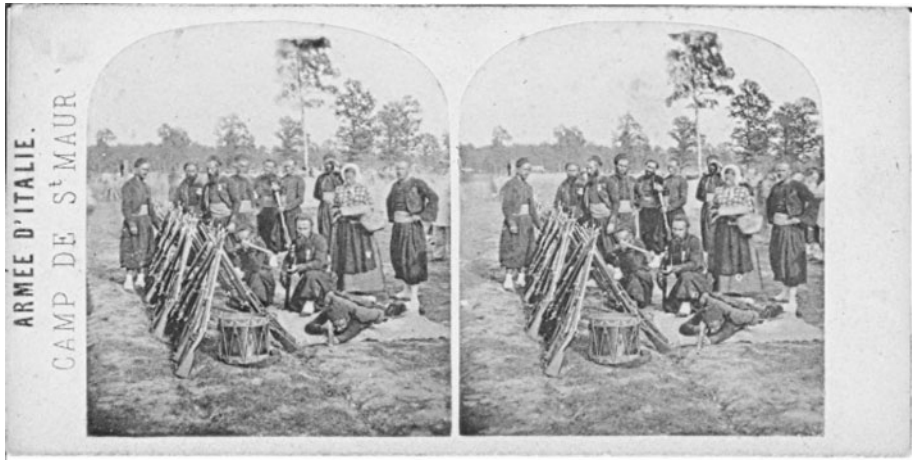


Figure 4. *French Army in Bivouac, 1859*, by the Gaudin Brothers, 1859. Stereograph. Courtesy of [vintagephotosjohnson.com](http://vintagephotosjohnson.com).

Look away, young maiden and tender child, for this is what war leaves after it. Flung together, like sacks of grain, some terribly mutilated, some without mark of injury, all or almost all with a still, calm look on their faces. The two youths, before referred to, lie in the foreground, so simple-looking, so like boys who had been overworked and were lying down to sleep, that one can hardly see the picture for the tears these two fair striplings bring into the eyes.<sup>75</sup>

Holmes, whose own son would later go missing for a time during the Civil War, lamented the indignity done to the bodies of “simple” “boys” and the death of these “two fair striplings”.<sup>76</sup> The lives of common troops—even those an ocean away—were generating passionate sentiments in powerful people. As an example of the discourse around international news that circulated among the influential literati, Holmes’ reaction is also an exemplar of an aesthetic encounter that generated passionate responses in the author, who subsequently provided his audience with cues for developing humanitarian sentiment. Though not an eyewitness like Dunant, Holmes demonstrates the impact of photographs on his own moral progress. The way in which photography plays with time and space created a presence for Holmes akin to—though not equivalent to—the eyewitness experience, such that he came to consider the common soldiers as sons to be grieved.

The growing popular use of photography brought with it “the emergence of a new relation toward the visual”.<sup>77</sup> It did so by seemingly collapsing distances in time and space, making it appear as though viewers were witnessing scenes

75 O. W. Holmes, above note 74, p. 27.

76 *Ibid.*

77 Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, Verso, London, 2012, p. 65.



Figure 5. *Vue de l'Avenue de Brescia avec convoi de blessés et de Vivres* [View of the Road to Brescia, with Convoy of the Wounded and Survivors], attributed to Jules Couppier, 1859. Stereograph of the aftermath of the Battle of Solferino, c. 24–26 June 1859. Courtesy of vintagephotosjohnson.com.



Figure 6. 702. *Vue du Cimetière de Melegnano – le lendemain du Combat* [View of the Cemetery at Melegnano – the Aftermath of Combat], attributed to Claude-Marie Ferrier, 1859. Stereograph. Courtesy of vintagephotosjohnson.com.

first-hand. It also brought new subject matter into the homes and hands of spectators. Pictures from places and cultures all over the world were being circulated and displayed, opening people's eyes and minds to different possibilities and ways of life. Furthermore, the freezing action of the camera enabled viewing aspects of the physical world that were otherwise impossible to see with the unaided human eye. Photographs encouraged the lingering of ones'



Figure 7. Detail of 702. *Vue du Cimetiere de Melegnano – le lendemain du Combat*, attributed to Claude-Marie Ferrier, 1859. Courtesy of vintagephotosjohnson.com.

gaze on a scene, such as the young, dead soldiers in Melegnano, making a moment that had long since passed continue to exist and take on multivariate meaning. With the introduction of the camera into innumerable social arenas—including its presence on battlefields—the opportunities and limits of the medium contributed in unanticipated ways to a restructuring of sentiments.<sup>78</sup>

According to the cultural theorist Raymond Williams, “structures of feeling” refer, in essence, to the “ways of thinking and feeling” of a particular cultural context at a specific point in time.<sup>79</sup> As a form of communication that “outlives its bearers”, it is in art that ideas and sentiments—the “actual living sense, the deep community”—of the past are contained and made accessible, which is of benefit to those working with history.<sup>80</sup> Art is also where deviations and disruptions in norms of sentiment initially appear. It is through artistic practice or engagement with artistic works that a

78 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Encore Edition, Broadview Press, Peterborough, 1961.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 65. Art historian Peter Burke refers, similarly, to the distortions or artistic license of artistic creations themselves, which are of prime interest to historians; contained within them are the beliefs, ideologies and perceptions of an era. Burke goes on to explain that images can be understood as historical agents, in the way they influence perceptions of historical events. See Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 2001, pp. 30, 145.

new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many continuities, that can be traced, and reproducing many aspects of the organization, which can be separately described, yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling.<sup>81</sup>

It is in this sense that photography opens the possibility for new feelings to emerge and for sentiments to be restructured within a broader community. As such, it is in this way that photographs and the narratives associated with them can contribute to sentimental education towards a more caring and equitable world.

The photograph that Holmes referred to could not be circulated en masse at the time (half-tone presses still being a couple of decades away). The graphic language employed by Holmes to describe the picture reflected Dunant's and was an effort to replicate the eyewitness presence that photography seemed to offer. Likewise, such language was used by photography enthusiasts who followed the efforts of their colleagues through articles in popular newspapers and technical journals.<sup>82</sup> Though created with different purposes in mind, these writings yet add to the examples of photography's affective impact. In the months leading up to the Battle of Solferino, the *Photographic News* included the statement: "The example given by Mr. Fenton in the Crimea will not, therefore, want imitators in Italy."<sup>83</sup> Imitators, however, they got.

The reports from another photographer present at a battle that preceded Solferino provide additional context of a sentimental sort to Couppier's images. Known only as J. L., this photographer described himself as a British tourist who diverted his plans to take landscape photographs in the mountains of Switzerland and Italy when he heard of the impending battle at Palestro, which took place on 30–31 May 1859. By chance rather than design, he became a *de facto* correspondent for the *Photographic News*, a journal that predominantly featured articles on the technical aspects of the medium.

Over the course of three lengthy accounts, J. L. tells of the technical challenges of taking photographs during the conflict, including the intrusion of a "stupid Piedmontese soldier" who ruined two of his five exposures.<sup>84</sup> In fact, none of his exposures appear to have survived, but J. L. did provide a helpful description:

I will send you proofs of these [surviving exposures] as soon as I have an opportunity of printing some. They will not be quite like what I hoped to send you. You will see many dead bodies scattered about among the trees, and many lying side by side ready to be thrown into the hole in which they

81 R. Williams, above note 80, p. 65.

82 The half-tone press, which would facilitate the reproduction of photographs onto paper, was still several decades away; Fenton's photographs were circulated through exhibitions and lantern lectures, and translated into woodblock prints for use in newspapers, a process which further editorialized and sanitized his pictures.

83 "Miscellaneous: Photographic Incidents", *Photographic News*, Vol. 2, No. 37, 20 May 1859, p. 129.

84 J. L., "Photography at the Seat of War", *Photographic News*, Vol. 2, No. 44, 8 July 1859, p. 208.

will be interred as soon as it has been dug, but no bodies of men in actual conflict; I felt it would be absolutely impossible to get near enough to pitch my camera, though I was myself able to see the fight distinctly from beginning to end.<sup>85</sup>

Couppier's stereographs depict almost the same scene that J. L. described, with the two corroborating each other's pictures. J. L. continued to employ a photographic language to describe more of what he saw and what he could not photograph. Aside from mechanical matters, J. L. also revealed—reminiscent of Dunant's account in *Solferino*—the way in which witnessing the battle affected his own views on warfare. Watching the battle from atop a tree in the company of the priest who informed him of the fighting, J. L.'s account includes his transition from being someone who admired war to now being stunned by it:

There is something wonderfully impressive in the sound of the marching of a body of armed men .... I afterwards saw bodies of men moving towards each other to engage in actual combat without any similar feeling .... [T]o describe what took place over the whole scene of the fighting is out of my power.<sup>86</sup>

Perhaps J. L. is bowdlerizing, or perhaps he was really taken aback. He describes a transition in his own thought, from seeing battles as conceivably heroic and exciting to warfare being a human tragedy. A little later, he goes on to graphically describe his experience in the moments immediately following the end of the fighting:

Their [the wounded's] groans could have directed us to where they were lying, even if we I [*sic*] [had] not been able to see them. You can form no concept of the sickening sensation I felt when I found myself in the midst of pools of blood, which splashed about at every step spreading a sickening smell in the atmosphere. The bodies of the slain were lying pell-mell among the wounded, very few of whom were able to withdraw themselves from the horrible contact. We moved each in succession, and laid them gently on their backs—the dead, dying, and wounded side by side.<sup>87</sup>

Demonstrating a sort of kinship with Dunant's later text, J. L. was writing for the benefit of "you at home [who] have not a thorough conception of the horrors of warfare, or of the injustice and cruelty it involves".<sup>88</sup> Consistent with Dunant and to a great extent the combat photography of the era, J. L.'s accounts focus on the impact of warfare on the common soldier. J. L.'s description of dead and injured soldiers "lying pell-mell" is an image quite in contrast to conventional war art that, when showing wounded combatants, would more likely have focused on officers and generals surrounded by their supporters. Nineteenth-century combat

85 *Ibid.*

86 *Ibid.*

87 *Ibid.*

88 J. L., above note 48, p. 183.

photography brought to the fore the ways in which fighting brutalized the bodies of the average troops.

In many ways, J. L. and Dunant are similar. They are both self-described “tourists” of war, though J. L. was actually a tourist whose travels were diverted by the exciting pull of (and perhaps the challenge of photographing) battle. They both became eyewitnesses to the aftermath of battle and the impact of warfare on human bodies, with J. L. having witnessed actual fighting. Despite J. L. having been a photographer, both took to graphic writing to describe the similar scenes they saw. J. L. and Dunant are also dissimilar from each other, however. There is no indication in the historical record to suggest that J. L.’s life purpose emerged from this event, as it did for Dunant. While J. L. appears to have had his vision altered, he makes no call to intervene, as did Dunant, on the suffering he witnessed. He does not appear to have been inspired like Dunant to get immersed in caring for the wounded, nor to redirect his purpose to that of ameliorating battlefield suffering. J. L. is also very different to Fenton – though an early photographer of combat, his images (including his descriptions of them) have had far less reach than Fenton’s. Yet, J. L.’s account provides an example of the role of aesthetic encounters in inducing passionate responses in himself. We get a strong sense that he is moved to feel and think differently about warfare, seeing it as less heroic than initially expected. As for his audience, he hardly provides guidance on emotional development or nurturance of a sentimental community, as Dunant and even Holmes provide in their accounts. J. L.’s responses, however, offer by their very existence an opportunity to view soldiers as lamentable, which has the potential of supporting the growth of a more caring community of humans.

Correspondences such as J. L.’s, about the battles that were part of the Franco-Austrian War, were not restricted to niche technical journals or to Europe.<sup>89</sup> With the telegraph and steam transport, news of the war travelled across to North America as well. Coincidentally, the first battle that the recently established *New York Times* newspaper covered was the same that inspired Henry Dunant.<sup>90</sup> The Crimean War was geographically too far away and did not have as much relevance to Americans as did the wars of Italian liberation. So in the spring of 1859, accompanied by two colleagues, the *New York Times*’s editor and co-founder, Henry Jarvis Raymond, went to Italy, driven by “that inexplicable perversity of human nature which pushes on towards scenes of carnage”.<sup>91</sup> Like Dunant in *A Memory of Solferino*, Raymond wrote in a manner meant “to dissolve authorial distance and thereby enable readers to see in their minds what was not before their eyes”.<sup>92</sup> Unlike Dunant, who arrived later, Raymond was

89 The *Journal de Genève* (1826–1991) did not reproduce prints to illustrate its newspaper; it did, however, reproduce photographic language. It was common practice to transcribe, with the use of the telegraph, accounts from other foreign newspapers. Dunant would have been reading the graphic accounts reproduced in this journal and would have been getting additional information about distant events from people within his transnational social network.

90 The *New York Times* was founded in 1851.

91 Jonathan Marwil, “The New York Times Goes to War”, *History Today*, Vol. 55, No. 6, 2005, p. 47.

there at midday on 24 June, during the height of the battle. While J. L. had a clear vantage point from his perch in a tree, Raymond was unable to see much through the smoke from his position on a distant hillside. Nevertheless, from the periphery, he saw scenes of carnage echoing those that Dunant and J. L. would later write about.

Raymond did his best to describe these scenes for his readers, who would have been unfamiliar with such mass devastation. Similar to Dunant's "lamentable pictures", he wrote of musket and sabre wounds, jaws cut away and gaping holes in men's bodies, and tried to generate in his readers a sense of the scale of the assault by inviting them to imagine carts full of bloody soldiers in front of New York City Hall.<sup>93</sup> Again similar to Dunant, Raymond's writing, with its focus on suffering, takes on an appearance of nurturing humanitarian sentiment. However, unlike Dunant, but in the vein of news reporting, little guidance is provided on how to mobilize that sentiment. The graphic language that Raymond used might not have been enough for readers with no reference pictures in their personal or collective imaginations to draw from in order to visualize the grotesque scenes emerging from this battle.<sup>94</sup> In a few short years, however, there would be a massive collection of war photographs made during the American Civil War that would be have lasting impact.

The photographs that Mathew Brady and his company made during the American Civil War did include the type of photographs that Fenton was taking and circulating;<sup>95</sup> they also included more harrowing images like those from Solferino. However, Brady and his colleagues' pictures differed from those of the other two battles in a critical way. Brady and his team had secured access to the battlefields and taken photographs before the bodies of the dead soldiers were removed (see [Figure 8](#)). The common practice of staging living combatants in their camps or rearranging items in a "still life" scene was extended to the repositioning of corpses for added effect. Today's preoccupation with the fidelity and integrity of images was not a concern in 1863 – truthfulness was more important than accuracy, and the truth in these photographs was that the men and boys depicted in them were damaged and dead as a result of the war.

Fenton and his peers' cameras may not have been used with the intent of changing public perception, particularly in terms of transforming warfare into an anti-heroic event. Likewise, they may not have been popularly interpreted that way, but inherent in the photographs are changing attitudes towards the value of

92 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

94 In forming mental images, Dunant's European readers would also have been referencing the many illustrated newspapers and a visual arts tradition that made use of photography (including several popular panorama paintings of the Battle of Sevastopol, such as Jean-Charles Langlois' two *Bataille de Sébastopol* paintings of 1855 and 1856), or even their own first-hand memories of recent battles in Europe. See John Hannavy, "Crimea in the Round", *History Today*, Vol. 54, No. 9, 2004.

95 Mathew Brady was a commercial photographer in New York at the time that the Civil War began. He hired upwards of twenty photographers, or camera operators, to make visual records of various aspects of the war's battles. Among the most well known of these were Alexander Gardner and Timothy H. O'Sullivan.





Figure 8. *Incidents of the War: A Harvest of Death*, by Timothy H. O'Sullivan, 1863. Library of Congress, LC-B8184-7964-A.

human lives and the question of whose lives matter.<sup>96</sup> The ways in which the photographers operated at Crimea, around Solferino and in the American Civil War amount to a pattern. Included in each collection were pictures of soldiers and officers, always carefully posed. Not all were for propaganda, as is how Fenton's pictures have predominantly been viewed; some were mementos commissioned by individual soldiers.<sup>97</sup> Each collection of photographs from these three battles also included images of the sites where the battles took place. Although none of the photographers included images of the fighting itself, for obvious technical reasons, all had created what amounted to before-and-after pictures. All had created narratives in which the vital, the strong, the living combatants were cut down, killed and ultimately extinguished from the scenes of battle. Comparing all three sets, Fenton's barren battlefield landscapes may have presented a more allegorical narrative. Couppier's Solferino pictures were certainly more harrowing, but anonymous. And those from the Civil War made the story all the more graphic, with human figures that were recognizable and identifiable, as this quote from an 1863 exhibition review that appeared in the *New York Times* reveals:

<sup>96</sup> P. Burke, above note 82.

<sup>97</sup> The *Photographic News* reported: "[W]e know that most of the subaltern officers figure largely in the collections of portraits which have been made. It is the fashion to have one's portrait taken in camp." See "Miscellaneous", above note 85, p. 129.

[W]e could scarce choose to be in the gallery when one of the women bending over them should recognize a husband, a son or a brother in the still, lifeless lines of bodies that lie ready for the gaping trenches.<sup>98</sup>

With each conflict, the intimacy between the spectator and the dead increased, yet the soldiers continued to remain nameless masses. The indiscriminate suffering of soldiers and the gruesomeness of war were made palpable with the aid of the camera. Photography's democratic treatment of soldiers and generals also invited consideration of more uniform and egalitarian medical treatment across all ranks.

A result of being at the forefront of "convey[ing] the human face of war", nineteenth-century combat photography made it possible that soldiers were increasingly being "regarded as fellow citizens—sons, brothers, fathers".<sup>99</sup> Riding a rising wave that seemed to accompany the creation and circulation—through exhibitions, textual descriptions or prints—of combat photographs, passionate and empathetic responses made way for an organized political response. People were feeling differently towards warfare. Such emotions benefited from the concrete actions that Dunant appealed for; he was able to give that emotion an action. It was within a landscape in which soldiers were included in the broadening terms of humans worthy of attention that Dunant's visions in *A Memory of Solferino* could come into focus and spark an international movement.<sup>100</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite the scale and number of conflicts being a sign of apparent moral decay, the mid-nineteenth-century moment discussed in this article is considered one of humanitarian progress. Dunant's skill in uniting people to a cause can be credited for his success, but the spark emanating from his book may not have ignited had it not been for the combustible material, so to speak, that circulated at unprecedented speed and in unsurpassed detail with the help of the camera. A

98 Quoted in Susan Moeller, "Photography, Civil War", available at: [www.encyclopedia.com/defense/energy-government-and-defense-magazines/photography-civil-war](http://www.encyclopedia.com/defense/energy-government-and-defense-magazines/photography-civil-war). Cara Finnegan provides invaluable insight into the rising importance of photography in the everyday lives of a growing audience of visual spectators in this mid-nineteenth-century moment, which she characterizes as "a period when photography became a dominant medium of cultural life". She also points out the difficulty of locating reactions and commentary from this audience, as these were not recorded or valued as historically relevant at the time. See Cara A. Finnegan, *Making Photography Matter: A Viewer's History from the Civil War to the Great Depression*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, IL, 2017.

99 J. Marwil, above note 2, p. 35.

100 From its earliest years, the Red Cross movement mobilized photography, but it was not an adopter of atrocity photographs and did not participate in what would later be characterized as a trade in the visuals of suffering in the way other aid groups or industries might. It has been argued that institutions like the Red Cross did not have to display such images as supporters could "imagine" them when referenced circuitously. Indeed, images of suffering, be they photographs or prints of another sort, were prominent in the surrounding contemporary context, including evangelical pamphlets and lantern lectures, the commercial "yellow press", and pulp fiction. As noted by Rozario, "phantom spectacles of suffering [can be] conjured up imaginatively even as they are renounced rhetorically". K. Rozario, above note 22, p. 443.

*Memory of Solferino* appeared at a time in which new forms of international travel and communication were accelerating changes in sentiment and in social and political culture. Prime among the new technologies was the photographic camera. The popularity of photography from the late 1830s onward brought with it new capacities for viewing—in essence, heralding a new visual culture. The technology of the camera extended the gaze temporally and geographically, thus enabling a reconfiguration of existing ways of seeing and feeling. The result was an ability to draw attention to previously overlooked and vulnerable bodies—in Dunant’s case, that of the common soldier. Operating within his social and political milieu, Dunant found support from influential individuals who were receptive to the ideas at the root of his appeal. His may have been a modest call by some standards—an appeal to care for wounded soldiers, rather than to bring an end to warfare altogether—but the result was the bringing into focus of a new form of humanitarianism—third-party, neutral and impartial—that is the basis of modern humanitarian action today. For humanitarian actors and agencies working with visual narratives in the modern world, this historical example offers a valuable perspective on the role of photography and spectators’ engagement with it in expanding a shared vision of lives worth caring for.