Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

We're All Robert Capa Now

Adam Leipzig · Friday, March 18th, 2011

Or are we?

In case you don't remember Robert Capa, he was the first great war photographer of the twentieth century, who made a name for himself by getting in the middle of the action. He was born Endre Friedmann, but changed his name to Capa in homage to Frank Capra, because he liked Frank Capra's movies. Capa first made his mark covering the Spanish Civil War, and from then on there was not a danger zone he neglected. He died in Vietnam in 1954 when he stepped on a landmine.

I am reminded of Robert Capa as I look at the stunning videos being posted from Japan, especially those taken during the tsunami.

What don't you see in these videos? The person shooting them, somehow balancing on a rooftop while the water sweeps away the rest of the house. And still the videographer keeps shooting.

We feel the power of the tsunami because of the hundreds of brave or reckless civilian Robert Capas of Japan. Without these videos, would we really understand what took place? Because today, if there is no video, the event did not happen.

But recklessness does not stop at the water's edge. In the past few days I've started to see a whole sub-genre of mash-up tsunami videos, set to distressingly pop music. or edited in the visual language of a movie trailer.

I guess if you can't do a mash-up, the event didn't happen either.

The Capa image above, of a fallen soldier in the Spanish Civil War, has attracted controversy because some historians contend it was staged. I'm not an expert, and Cape's a hero of mine, so I'll believe he actually caught the instant the bullet struck. But one thing's certain – Capa never trivialized his subjects. That can't be said of the tsunami mash-up editors flooding YouTube now.

This entry was posted on Friday, March 18th, 2011 at 11:05 am and is filed under Film, Discourse, Technology, Visual Art
You can follow any responses to this entry through the Comments (RSS) feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.