

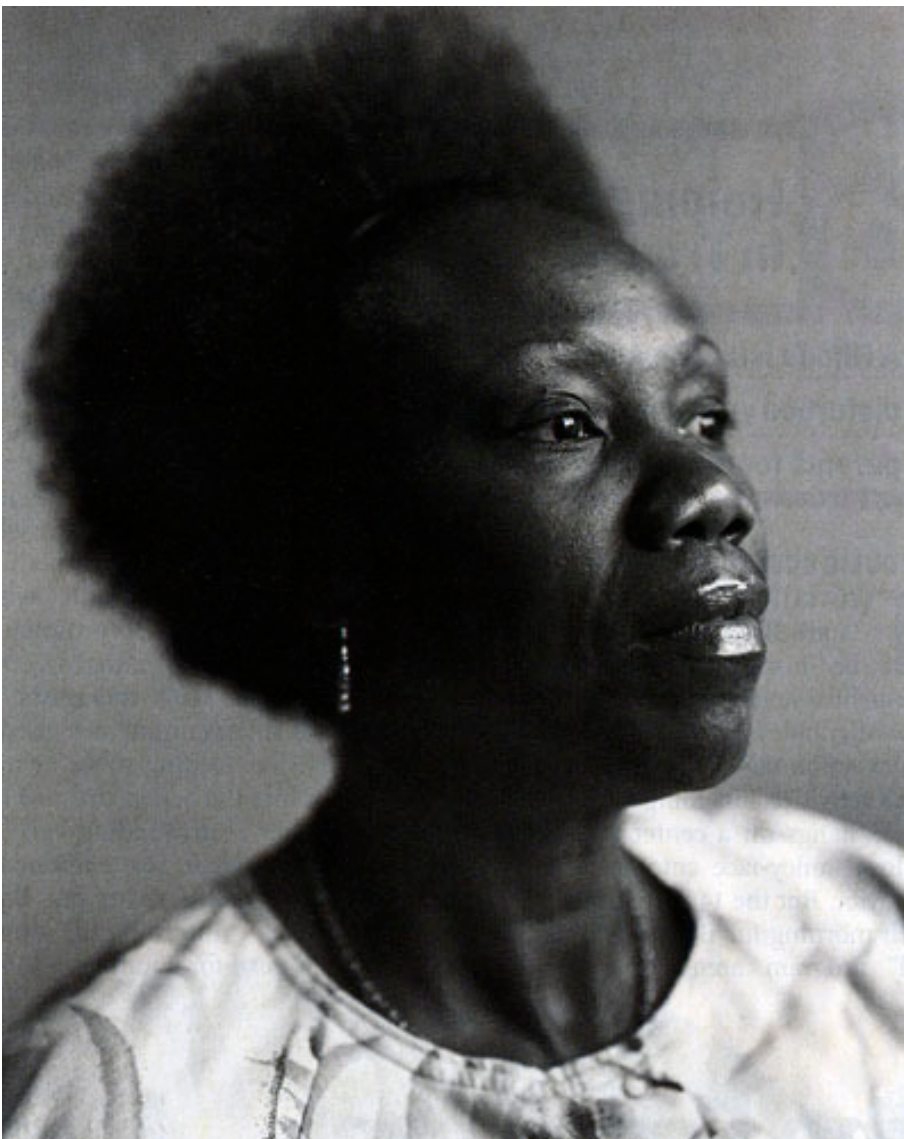
# Alec Soth's Archived Blog

October 15, 2006

## Andrea Modica & Newsweek

Filed under: [editorial photo, media](#) — alecsothblog @ 8:27 am

Has anyone else noticed that Andrea Modica has been doing a lot of editorial work for Newsweek? Modica is one of my all-time favorite photographers. Her book *Treadwell* is a masterpiece. While I'm always happy to come across her pictures in Newsweek, the surrounding news-magazine clutter often disappoints me. For example, the 10/16/06 issue of Newsweek has a story called [Fixing America's Hospitals](#). Within the piece is this fantastic image by Modica:



But Modica wasn't the only one assigned to the story. The much more prominent full-page intro has the following photo illustration:



This use of photography brings the medium down to the lowest common denominator. What is the point? If anything it pushes me away from reading the story. I understand that weekly news magazines are under huge deadlines and need to fill the pages. But do we need so much photo-filler? The photographs in another weekly, *The New Yorker*, are exceptionally powerful because of their restraint. What if Modica's image was the only one used in the story? Wouldn't it be so much better?

## 11 Comments

1. I fully agree, Alec. That image says nothing. When there are hackneyed photography images that are intended to illustrate an article, such as the one pictured above, I can't help but think that the text will be as bad as the image. I would only read the accompanying text that went with that image if I had polished off everything else in the doctor's waiting room, including the STD pamphlets.

*Comment by [Zoe Strauss](#) — October 15, 2006 @ [10:12 pm](#)*

2. And, yes, if Modica's image was the only one used it would be about a billion times better. That's a beautiful photo.

*Comment by [Zoe Strauss](#) — October 15, 2006 @ [10:15 pm](#)*

3. Funny I saw those 2 images on that very story and had precisely the same thought. I often fantasize about one of the major magazines being taken over by a fearless photo editor who makes exactly the kind of choices you are suggesting. We are living in an age when there is there is so much clutter around that restraint and strong image use by a major magazine would, I believe, be hugely successful.

*Comment by [blu](#) — October 16, 2006 @ [2:40 am](#)*

4. I really appreciate the photography education you provide here.

Of course the Modica is exceptional. It makes that other photo even more ludicrous than it is.

I wish I had an extra \$150,000 in my pocket to fund your SOTHeby buys...

*Comment by [Peggy and Bob](#) — October 16, 2006 @ [3:19 am](#)*

5. Might have to blame Duchamp here too!  
Actually it seems there really has been a paradigm shift and a few years ago, image #2 may really have been something that ends up in a gallery with a conceptual discussion on Berger, Barthes and simulacra.  
Hopefully the editors will catch up. There are far too many examples of editorial work that is the result of bad art direction.

*Comment by [Brian](#) — October 16, 2006 @ [11:51 am](#)*

6. Apples and Oranges? The New Yorker has excellent writing and thought provoking stories. Perhaps Newsweek pushes photography down to the lowest common denominator because they are aiming directly at that LCD who want easy explanations (i.e.: maybe they're right.. bandaids might not work! .. or maybe we just need an even bigger bandaid?!)?  
Of course this doesn't make me any less depressed about the state of our country. Luckily there is choice and we do have the New Yorker and its ilk to go to!

*Comment by [William K.](#) — October 16, 2006 @ [3:09 pm](#)*

7. I wouldn't be too quick to drop the blame with the photo editor or art department-often times in my experience they are having the same reaction we are, and are just as frustrated with these choices. Look at it the other way-they got Modica in the magazine, which is not an easy choice-she shoots BW, which is very hard to place these days, and she probably costs a lot, compared to some others.  
Most likely the pressure comes from the top down, this relentless pressure to sell magazines, and the worry that anything potentially out of the ordinary will drive readers away. If I could imagine the meeting with the managing editor when this story was shown, minus the bandaid picture, you can just hear them shifting between "wow thats beautiful" and "I think we might need to go

another way for the lead..”

If newsweek is anything like Fortune, for whom I have worked for years, it's a committee system, and everyone gets input on the visuals, so you get a lot of pressure from editors looking for formulaic pictures, pressure from ad sales, everyone, weighing in on art decisions, and the photo editors can only “go to bat” as it was described to me, so often. Sometimes they can insist, but there are only so many times they can do that, so they save them for when it really counts.

Mostly, they have to kowtow, and don't like it either.

Now I am not talking fashion magazines, where they keep the staff purposely young and dumb, but at newsweek, they know photography, so I think what you are seeing is pressure from somewhere else.

Just my .02 from having met and worked with many of these editors.

*Comment by [Robert Wright](#) — October 16, 2006 @ [7:30 pm](#)*

8. Very good point Robert. Most of the photo editors I've worked with have been thoughtful and visually literate. It isn't uncommon that they send me cryptic and conflicting messages that suggest other forces are at play. Wish I could be fly on the wall while those decisions are being made.

*Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — October 16, 2006 @ [8:48 pm](#)*

9. I have to agree, Modica's image could've carried the whole story by itself. The use of the second photo (which, looks like it was pulled straight from some random stock site) gives off a completely different mood... way to confuse your readers, Newsweek.

*Comment by [Ian](#) — January 19, 2007 @ [3:38 pm](#)*

10. [...] I've previous mentioned Andrea Modica twice (here and here), but failed to mention her terrific pictures of Minor League baseball players. Modica was interviewed about the work as part of the Smithsonian Photographers at Work series: How did your series of pictures of baseball players come about? [...]

*Pingback by [alec soth - blog » Blog Archive » Erotic baseball photography](#) — June 12, 2007 @ [10:29 pm](#)*

11. With the decreased fees and the usage slaughter I'm surprised to see a photographer of her level in any publication.

[here](#)

*Comment by [Mat](#) — April 6, 2008 @ [12:40 pm](#)*