

Senior Project Coversheet

Seeing Is Not Always Believing: Photo Manipulation in Photo Journalism

Honors Project

In fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Esther G. Maynor Honors College

University of North Carolina at Pembroke

By

Ed Ricker

Mass Communication in Broadcasting

December 9, 2010

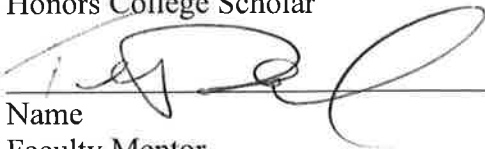


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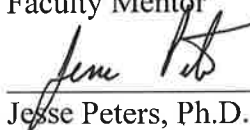


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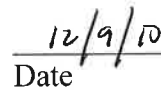


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Jesse Peters, Ph.D.

Dean, Esther G. Maynor Honors College



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ABSTRACT

SEEING IS NOT ALWAYS BELIEVING: PHOTO MANIPULATION IN PHOTOJOURNALISM

By Ed Ricker
Mass Communication in Broadcasting
University of North Carolina at Pembroke
Graduating December 11, 2010

The reader's credibility and trust in the field of photojournalism are paramount. When an image modified by Photoshop or other means is run in newspapers or on news websites, public deception results and credibility suffers. As these instances of modification are exposed and retracted, the audience's trust of journalistic sources wanes. This article explores examples of modification, methods of altering images, and the ethical implications surrounding the issue. Photojournalists exposed for violating ethical standards held by their employers are also researched. Concerns of the future and how/why to keep a watchful eye for visual deception are covered.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. Take for example a picture of a baby soon after birth or a victim of starvation on the other side of the world. They inflict emotion upon the viewer. They make us think and reason and imagine and reflect. Images of all types and origins have their own place in our minds where they stay forever. Some are more important and may stand out more than others, but none can be “unseen.” In today’s society, with our bombardment of images from the internet, television, magazines, newspapers, etc., we have quite a few permanently engrained images in our minds that help us (or hinder us) to understand and interpret the world that is not immediately around us.

The field of photojournalism is very competitive. Every photographer wants to take the million dollar picture. Some will even go as far as to manipulate the picture or snap it a certain way to be more interesting or tell a more compelling story. But is this ethical for news photojournalism? What damage does this cause to the audience’s perception of certain events and stories? Which methods are acceptable? Those of us who present the world to the people via photographs that are expected to be an accurate representation of reality must exercise cautionary practice and ethical standards of photojournalism. This article will be mainly restricted to news photojournalism because of its claim to accuracy and truthfulness.

Visual Accuracy

According to S. Salvo’s book, *True Lies*, every photograph in history is a distortion of reality. The photographer’s choice of lens, lighting, angle of shooting, and exact time of taking the picture culminate to form a certain reality. One second after the picture was taken, things may have changed. A cloud may have gone in front of the sun. Excluding one angle may ignore a certain aspect of a scene (Salvo). While these are minor differences, their effects on the subject may be important depending on context.

Still, this should not cause us to stray from the notion that there is a visual accuracy that should be obtained with every photograph entrusted as a true representation of something. Visual accuracy of this type, in the reasonable ways we can control, is the unaltered representation of a scene, object, person, etc. from a camera's lens to the printed image (Ricchiardi). It is not modified in the process, and it is the best representation from a selection of other companion images. Colors, composition, and details should not be altered or removed in any way (Salvo).

Why are we so worried about visual accuracy? Wouldn't that give a boring and uncreative approach to photography? We must remember that we are most concerned with what the audience, or viewer, believed the photograph to be. If they are led to believe it is a real image with no alteration, then that is what they should be getting. As this essay continues many examples of how an altered photograph believed by the viewer to be real produces adverse consequences to the photographer, news editors and the magazine, newspaper, etc.

There is a trust bond of sorts that exists between the photographer and the audience, in the case of news photography (Lester). If the photographer is having his/her images published to a reputable magazine or newspaper that is understood by the subscriber/reader to be an authentic source for images considered to be genuine, the trust resides with the reader, who assumes there's no chance he/she is being fooled into thinking something other than what exactly occurred in real life (Lester).

Imagine this. *The Washington Post*, a reputable newspaper that reports on national and world news, runs an image that shows current president Barack Obama shaking hands with Osama Bin Laden. Of course this didn't happen, but if it had most readers would take it much more seriously than if the image had been printed on a tabloid that only entertains those waiting in a check-out line at a grocery store. Still, this is a rather over-the-top example considering the

current relationship the two men have. A majority of the readers would simply think April 1st came early this year for the Washington Post. The level of trust, however, would be greater for a newspaper that has worked hard to retain the trust of its readers via credibility. The trust would waiver in such a bond when the newspaper editors find out the image had been altered and runs a retraction.

While it would most affect the photographer who submitted the picture (most likely he would be fired and never find another job at a reputable newspaper ever again), it would also affect the newspaper. Now all the images are in question. The director of photography would probably run a check through all the pictures being submitted by all photographers and conduct an internal investigation on the matter. And now the word is out that such a photograph of the President slipped through the watchful eye of the editor. Now all newspapers are on alert, and all readers are now questioning every future image of the President with the thought of the *Washington Post* in mind. While a newspaper on alert is a good thing (they begin checking images more carefully, and images that wouldn't have been caught before are now discarded), the public's perception of the news has been changed to one of doubt. All news sources suffer.

Santiago Lyon, the director of photography for the *Associated Press*, oversees more than 1,000 photojournalists. At an AP Photoshop training workshop in 2006, he adamantly argued that "credibility is the most important thing we have at the AP and journalism in general (Ricchiardi)."

Photojournalism vs. Photo Illustration

What is the primary aim for a photojournalist (a visual reporter of the news)? The answer is quite simple: truth. If truth is not, to the best of his or her knowledge, completely associated with an image, it is an image no longer fit for publishing. If the image has been altered, it is no

longer considered photojournalism but photo illustration (Salvo). Of course, illustration has its place in more creative and less sensitive areas than in news. However, to focus on news photography, it has no place.

As Salvo argues, this alteration we speak of is relative. Most people would think of alteration as something done after the fact, whether using conventional methods in darkrooms or newer digital methods like Photoshop. Even though that is the most concerning, a camera is not an imaging device produces the end result of the picture. It is the person behind the camera that makes most of the decisions about what the camera is seeing. The ethical decisions arise before the shutter button has been pressed (Salvo). For the remainder of this essay, we will not be focusing on this type of alteration and simply research the post-production modifications.

But to what extent can a photojournalist modify his images? As stated earlier, every photograph misrepresents the subject to some extent. And how unethical could it be to clear up someone's skin or whiten some teeth in post-production with Photoshop when much less hoopla would surround a makeup artist doing essentially the same thing. In journalism's younger days, the darkroom allowed for color changing, cropping, cutting out, and airbrushing of photos (Ricchiardi). How far is overboard?

Patrick Schneider, a photojournalist for the *Charlotte Observer*, was quoted as saying, "I used the tools that for decades have been used in the darkroom, and now, in Photoshop, I do them with more precision. My goal is to bring more impact to my images, to stop the readers and draw their attention (Ricchiardi)." The reasons why Schneider was fired from the Charlotte Observer for continuing to practice his ideology lie further into this essay. The former director of Photography Services for the Associated Press, Hal Buell, said about the issue, "I don't think

your ethics can be any better or any worse using electronic methods than they are using the classical methods. Ethics is in the mind. It is not in the tools you use (Salvo)."

Some sources like *Time*, *Newsweek* and *USA Today* have run images that the editors knew were altered and then printed a line of credits for the picture somewhere in the magazine that explained the alteration (Ricchiardi). *Time* ran a photo of Ronald Reagan with a tear drop running down his face in the article, "How the Right Went Wrong (Smolkin)." *Newsweek* ran a photo shortly after Martha Stewart was released from prison in 2005. It was a composite image of her head and a model's body. Credit and acknowledgement of the alteration was printed inside the magazine (Ricchiardi).

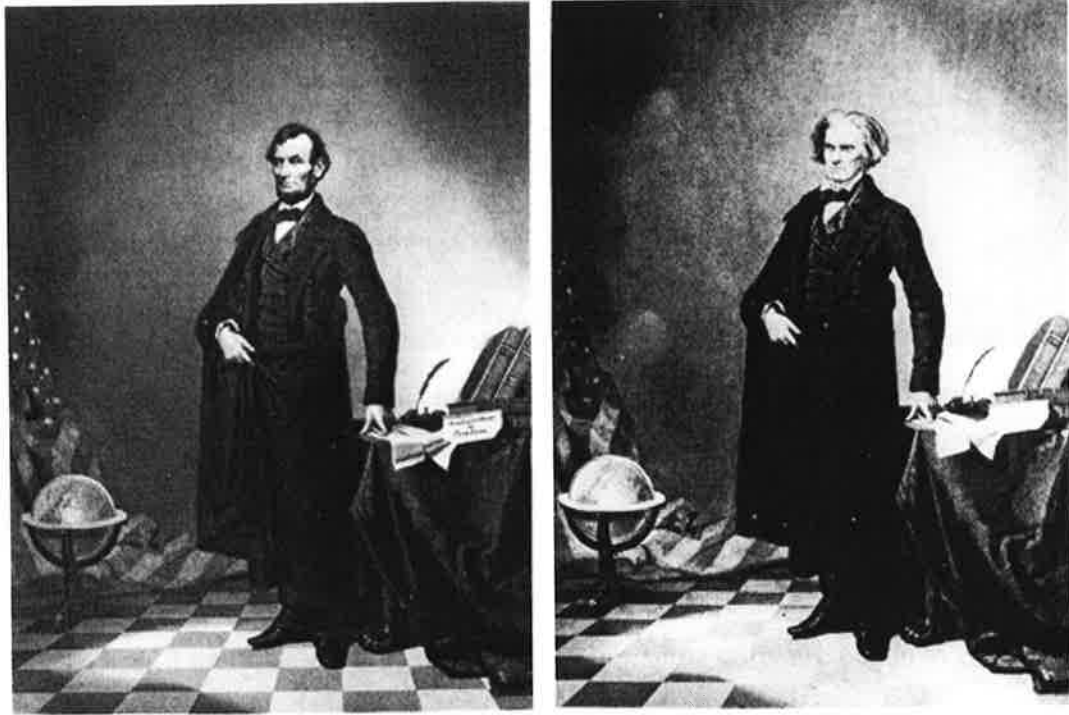
Some senior photojournalists and photo critics believe a photojournalist should not assume that simply stating somewhere in the publication that a given image is somehow altered will be okay. National Press Photographer's Association's John Long said this about such attribution, "No amount of captioning can ever cover for a visual lie or distortion. If it looks real in a news context, then it better be real (Ricchiardi)." According to Long, picture journalism should hold the same ethical weight as word journalism, where what is said is what is meant.

Exposed Alteration of Photographs

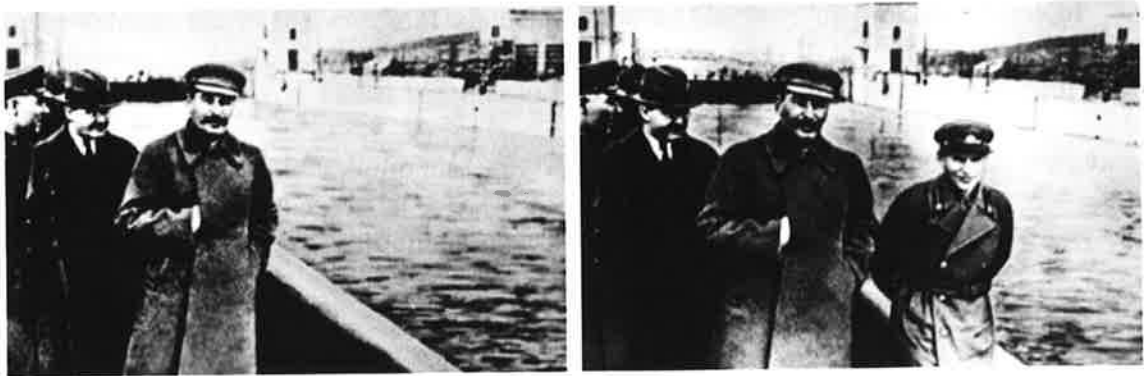
When many of us hear about altering photographs, we usually think of digital means for doing so. While it is true that modifying an image is now easier and more common than ever for even the average computer user, the art has been around for over 150 years. Let's take a look at some examples of historic picture alteration.

Around the year 1858, Henry Peach Robinson made an art practice out of combining negatives from multiple photographs and producing works that featured elements and objects from various scenes. His work was first criticized for the content of the finished product (such as

the grief of a family). Once the public learned that the images weren't even real in their entirety, they negatively received the artwork because of the deception (Hancock).



In the early 1860s, a photography company used Abraham Lincoln's head in place of John C. Calhoun's in a portrait. The quality of the alteration for its time is surprisingly good (Photo: Farid).



People who shared the camera lens with Stalin and later lost favor with him were usually removed from the pictures (Photo: Farid).



Fidel Castro had Carlos Franqui removed from this picture snapped in 1968 after Franqui cut ties with Castro's regime (Photo Farid).

These pictures were usually airbrushed or otherwise physically altered without the help of computers. It wasn't until the early 1980s that digital imaging software began to emerge. Though still in its infant stage, the software's footprints could be seen in fashion and celebrity gossip magazines before long (Hancock).

With the rising competition between tabloids and magazines at newsstands and shopping check-out lanes for impulse-buying customers, titles that once were free of altered imagery began to slip through the ethical cracks (Hancock). *National Geographic* took the liberty of moving two pyramids of Egypt closer together to fit into their 1982 cover page (Ricchiardi). A later Director of Photography for *National Geographic*, Tom Kennedy, said about the image, "We no longer use that technology to manipulate elements in a photo simply to achieve a more compelling graphic effect. We regarded that afterwards as a mistake, and we wouldn't repeat that mistake today (Hancock)."

TV Guide displayed a picture of Oprah Winfrey on the cover of one of its 1989 issues. She was shown smiling in a revealing purple dress. However, Winfrey never had a picture taken

in this pose or with this dress. Her head had replaced the head of actress Ann-Margret in an image taken 10 years prior and was seamlessly integrated onto her torso without the consent or knowledge of either woman. It was only exposed by Ann-Margret's clothes designer who recognized the dress on Winfrey's "body (Farid)."

Later, in 1994, *Time* magazine used O.J. Simpson's freshly-snapped mug shot on its cover. The only problem was the way *Time* darkened his skin and gave him a five o'clock shadow to his face (Hancock, Ricchiardi). Not only was this overly suggestive of Simpson's possible guilt and apparent menacing personality according to *Time*, it painfully stood out as an alteration next to *Newsweek's* much brighter and clearer cover picture of the exact same mug shot (Farid).



(Photo: Farid)

More recent manipulations include George W. Bush's presidential campaign, such as this picture where several soldiers were "cloned" to remove Bush and the podium and create a more interesting composition. With a closer look, you can see a number of soldiers (circled) that have been repeated to fill in the space where Bush was standing.

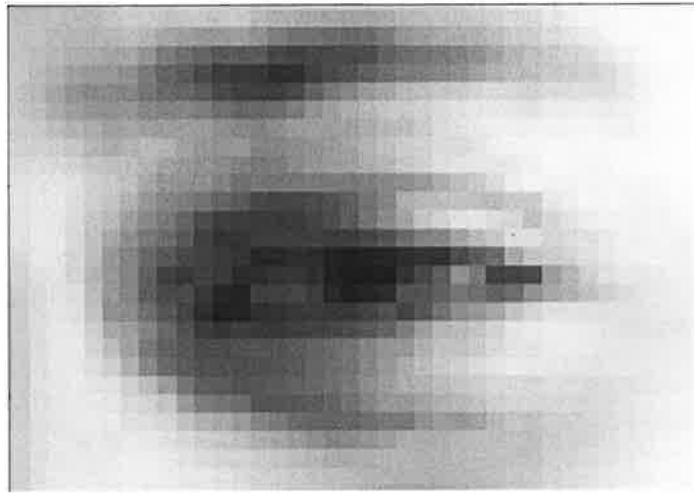
In a July, 2003 issue of *Redbook* magazine, the editors used a composite picture of Julia Roberts (Farid). Her head was taken from an image at the 2002 People's Choice Awards and her torso was taken from an image at the Notting Hill movie premier (Farid). Speaking about the cover, the magazine later wrote, "In an effort to make a cover that would pop on the newsstand, we combined two different shots of Julia Roberts. We acknowledge that we may have gone too far and hope that Ms. Roberts will accept our apology (Farid)."

In 1990, the U.S. Office of Research Integrity estimated that 2.5% of its cases were derived from allegedly altered scientific images. That percentage skyrocketed to 26% by 2001. In 2005, the scientific journal *Nature* ran a report on how alteration in scientific journals affects its quality. *Journal of Cell Biology* editor Mike Rossner said that roughly 20% of the journal article entries contain a significantly altered image or figure that has to be sent back for reversion (Farid).

Methods

How do these magazines, newspapers, etc. change these images? Back 50 years ago, direct manipulation was applied to photographs and negatives. Techniques such as airbrushing were common. Cutting and pasting literally meant cutting and pasting.

Fast forward to the turn of the millennium, and we observe Photoshop in all its glory as it changes how we make changes. Terms such as cutting and pasting are now methods derived from digital instructions applied to an image made of 0's and 1's. Airbrushing now uses digital "paint." Changing an image to suit your needs has never been easier.



Colored dots called "Pixels" that make up a digital image (Photo by Ed Ricker).

Images are made up of small colored dots called pixels. If one greatly magnifies a digital image, he will discover all of his favorite pictures are made up of these colored squares. In a program like Photoshop (or any of the other programs that use digital "paint" such as Image Forge and Gimp), you can change the color of these dots. In the grand scheme of the whole image, the dots end up contributing to whatever is being shown. With Photoshop's many tools and a shallow learning curve, almost anyone with a mouse can, with practice, create believable alterations to images.

One of Photoshop's tools is called a Clone Stamp. This enables an artist to choose a spot in an image that he wants to duplicate. He then picks another part of the image where he'd like to place the duplication. Once this is done, he can "paint" the subject onto another place with incredible precision. "Cloning" is a favorite for people modifying photos because one can clone grass, trees, people, buildings or simply a texture of a surface to eliminate any object or create more.



A Photoshop artist using the Clone Stamp tool can remove unwanted elements from an image.

(Photos Above and Below by Ed Ricker)





Almost anything can be cloned out of a photograph. (Photos Above and Below by Ed Ricker)



When Is It Okay?

Photographer Scott Kelby enjoys using Photoshop to bring new dynamics to his images. He states, "I have no qualms whatsoever with removing any distracting element in my photo. So, if there's a distracting telephone wire, or a sign, or a piece of trash on my beach photo, it's gone. No questions asked. Although I don't want to add anything to a photo, I have no problem whatsoever with duplicating something in my photo (Salvo)."

As stated earlier, photojournalism is different from photo illustration. Sources such as magazines have much more leeway in what they can do to an image since they aren't meant to present factual news. In S. Salvo's book, *True Lies*, he provides an outline of various methods of minor alteration that are considered to be acceptable for use in most images (within reason) intended for news usage. He also states conditions that are never acceptable in news images, as well as questions photojournalists must ask themselves in order to stay within the ethical boundaries they should be striving for. Salvo takes these guidelines from *The Webster University Journal Policy for the Ethical Use of Photographs*.

These conditions are allowed (Salvo):

- Brightness/contrast control
- Burning and dodging to control tonal range
- Color correction
- Cropping a frame to fit the layout
- Retouching of dust and scratches

These conditions are never allowed (Salvo):

- Adding, moving or removing objects within the frame

- Color change other than to restore what the subject looked like
- Cropping a frame in order to alter its meaning
- Flopping a photograph (left/right reversal)
- Printing a photograph in other than "true" orientation

These questions must be asked when considering manipulating a photo (Salvo):

- Where did this photo come from?
- Has it already been manipulated? How?
- Does the copyright allow me to alter it?
- Why am I changing this photo?
- How will the audience interpret the altered photo?
- How would they have interpreted it without alteration?
- What is the context of the photo? Is this photo supposed to be news (journalism) or illustration (art)?

The National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) is an organization that promotes photojournalism's ethical standards. Its website holds a Code of Ethics section which lists various ideals that photojournalists should abide by. Its Preamble states the various good things photographs can do, such as expose a truth, inspire, and that "Photographs can also cause great harm if they...are manipulated (NPPA)." The number one standard quoted from this list says, "Be accurate and comprehensive in the representation of subjects (NPPA)." Further down the list at number 6 says, "Editing should maintain the integrity of the photographic images' content and context. Do not manipulate images...in any way that can mislead viewers or misrepresent subjects (NPPA)"

Director of Photography for *Newsweek* Simon Barnett states "We do nothing beyond what has traditionally been done in the photographic darkroom (Ricchiardi)," While this seems to be an innocent approach, even the best darkroom forgery could be exposed by examining the negative. Edgar Huang, associate media professor at the Indiana University-Purdue University of Indianapolis, says, "Even when a highly skilled darkroom technician creates an altered photograph that can fool a well-trained expert, examining the negative (if possible) will immediately betray the manipulation. This technical limitation on manipulation...has guaranteed, to a large extent, the authenticity of documentary photographs published in print media in the pre-digital-imaging era (Wheeler)."

In P. Lester's book, "Public Expectations of Reality Through Photogenic Truth," Lester lays out certain tests for determining credibility of images. They can be used by photojournalists and photo editors to ensure factual photographs. The tests are quoted from his book as follows.

- The Viewfinder Test – What you see in the viewfinder is what you see in real life (Lester).
- Nonfiction Photography Process Test – The print is the scene you saw through your viewfinder (Lester).
- The Technical Credibility Test – Cropping and crude area extracting is okay (Lester).
- The Test of Obvious Implausibility – "Over the top 'goofs' can be acceptable (Lester)."

As news consumers, we expect what we see to be an accurate representation of reality and fact. News consumers rate photojournalists based on the Qualified Expectation of Reality (QER) (Lester). As photojournalists violate the tests above, credibility suffers. We should all

critically analyze what we see and be aware that there is always deception to be seen somewhere in the news.

What Do Employers Do?

With all this talk about what photojournalists shouldn't do, why should they care besides the fact that it may be unethical? Doesn't the unethical photojournalist come out ahead of the pack? Certainly making a better image via Photoshop could produce a wonderful cover-photo for a newspaper. However, there is a police force that keeps these photographers in check. And what is this force? It is simply the newspaper itself. And it has the power to end not just jobs, but careers.

Brian Walski found this out the hard way. He was a photographer for the *Los Angeles Times* and won numerous awards for his wonderful images. In 2003, he was in Iraq taking pictures of the relatively new war. These pictures were of citizens, soldiers, and the conditions both dealt with during the troubled time. On March 30th of that year, Walski had submitted 13 images to the *LA Times* director of photograph, Colin Crawford. One of them, an image showing a US soldier motioning to a crowd of citizens to stay out of the way of gun fire, was run on Page 1 of the *Times*, as well as on both the *Hartford Courant* and *Chicago Tribune* (Patterson, Ricchiardi).

This image in question was later caught by an employee of the *Courant* as potentially modified. After a magnification by 600% and an investigation into the image, Walski was exposed for altering the background and "cloning" a group of civilians. Crawford fired Walski for breaching the *Times* standards for manipulating images (Patterson, Ricchiardi).

Walski is a tragic example of a one-time alteration that cost him his job. However, in this industry, news travels fast. He lost not only his job but his reputation as well. Another

photographer who talked to Walski after the incident says that after such a widely known incident at the greatest newspaper in the world, no other newspapers will take Walski. He'd lost his car and his cameras (Patterson). A whole Wikipedia article was dedicated to his blunder. He now owns a private photography company in Colorado that provides services to weddings, business events, and portraits (Walski).

On April 1st, 2007, a photograph by Allan Detrich was run on the *Toledo Blade* that depicted a memorial at a high school basketball team's first game since five of their athletes were killed in a bus wreck. Allan Detrich had been a photographer for the *Blade* since 1989. His images won him many awards, and his photographs were frequently featured on the front page. Today, however, Detrich's particular angle of shooting was also used by other photographers in other newspapers (Ricchiardi, Hancock).

When other newspapers printed their images of the same scene, employees at the *Blade* noticed a slight difference in Detrich's image (Hancock). A pair of legs protruding from under the memorial was missing from his image. After an investigation, Detrich's manipulation was exposed. Detrich confessed to the alteration but held that the image was a copy he intended to have for his personal use and had gotten mixed up with the original (Ricchiardi).

While this "slip-up" may have saved the job of a regular photographer, the investigation looked through all 947 of Detrich's images submitted to the newspaper for publication and found clear evidence of alteration in 79 of them. Detrich was quoted as saying that he felt he was the most "reviled journalist in the country" after he began receiving ugly emails and letters from other photojournalists upset over his unethical practices (Ricchiardi).

Patrick Schneider, mentioned earlier in this essay, worked for the *Charlotte Observer*. After winning many awards for the photos he had taken, some of his images were exposed in

2003 as being manipulated extensively. The North Carolina Press Photographers Association removed awards from these images. He was suspended. Later in 2006, he was finally fired from the *Charlotte Observer* after he changed the color of the sky in a picture depicting a firefighter on a ladder (Ricchiardi).

What's The Big Deal?

With all this firing of photojournalists, why should the news sources care? Don't they want a great photo for their story? It's highly doubtful that a photographer would alter his images to make them look worse. In every instance, the alteration was to make them better. Why should news sources mind whether they are abiding by ethical standards as long as they're making money?

As mentioned earlier, news media requires a trust bond with its viewers/readers to stay afloat. A freelance photojournalist, Alex Lloyd, says, "Always follow tight ethics. Without them, there is no trust between the reader and the journalist (Hancock)." The *Toledo Blade's* executive editor, Ron Royhab, was surprised at the response of some readers who didn't agree with the action taken on Detrich. When asked why Detrich had such a drastic penalty applied to him for subtle image editing, Royhab responds, "The answer is simple: It is dishonest (Ricchiardi)." Bob DeMay, chair of the Ohio Photographers Association, said this about the mixed response to the *Blade* firing Detrich, "I find it very scary that some people didn't find fault at all... There used to be an old saying, 'Pictures don't lie.' Well, they do now. Once that seed of doubt is put in somebody's mind, it's frightening (Ricchiardi)."

Atlantic Monthly ran an article in its 1998 issue entitled *Photography in the Age of Falsification*. In the article, a wildlife photographer was quoted as saying, "I often had to pass over photographs because in a picture of masses of animals, invariable one would be wandering

in the wrong direction, thereby disrupting the pattern I was trying to achieve. Today the ability to digitally alter this disruption is at hand (Wheeler).” However, a response to this by another photographer said, “Wandering in the wrong direction according to whom? Whose patterns is the nature photographer supposed to celebrate – nature’s or his own? In the human herd that animal wandering in the wrong direction would be the Buddha, or Luther, or Einstein (Wheeler).”

In addition to simply making a better image, there can also be political agendas incorporated into the alteration. A portrait of a younger John Kerry was digitally inserted into a picture of Jane Fonda at a 1971 anti-war rally. While no newspapers were known to use the image, the believability of the image caused a stir until it was exposed as a hoax (Hancock). A picture of Condoleezza Rice was modified to give her an evil-looking piercing stare. The photographer held that he simply tried to sharpen the image and accidentally made her eyes brighter and wider. However, he violated the editorial principles abided by the World Net Daily website, where the image was posted, and it was taken down (Ricchiardi).

Concerns about the Future and What We Can Do

Alex Lloyd Gross, a freelance photographer based in Pennsylvania, said this about the future of photojournalism, “With papers leaning towards citizen journalism, I am very concerned. It’s nothing for the citizen with a cell phone to take out a tree, manipulate the background or something even more sinister. (Hancock)”

News media is becoming more sensationalism rather than documentary. But with all the digital ethic traps to fall in, it is all the more up to simply the editors of the media and what they want to do with the information they receive. Digital photo editing is not an evil thing; it is just misused on many occasions.

With this increased abuse of Photoshop in news situations also comes an increased watchful eye. Digital forensic programs are being used to determine the truth about an image. They have the ability to detect blurred portions of images or jagged edged pixelated parts that are telltale signs of a doctored image. However, with each new step in digital forensics comes a more easily concealable way to get around it. Professor Hany Farid of Dartmouth University says, "I guarantee you there will be people out there developing anti-forgery detection software or software that makes better forgeries (Ricchiardi)."

Even though it seems the destruction of credibility and the essence of journalism is inevitable, some opinions are different. "If you are caught faking a picture today, you are fired. Fifty years ago, it was just part of the business. Now most people have gone to journalism school and learned ethics. Newsrooms are taking these things more seriously. Standards are higher than ever," says David Perlmutter, author of many photojournalism articles (Ricchiardi). Protecting job security and reputation in the photojournalism field also discourages the gamble of modifying images and keeps most photographers in check (Hancock).

There is no prison for a journalist. There are no ethical shackles that will keep him from modifying his images. There is only a foundation that has no room on its base for a lack of truth. Those of us who present the world to the people via photographs that are expected to be an accurate representation of reality have a duty to the public to exercise the ethical and cautionary practices associated with the journalistic professions.

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