

Student Name: Katie Davies

Student Number: 2003597

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Research in Context Lecturers Name: Paul Duerinckx

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Question 5:

From Lens-Based Image Making research strand lectures, choose a theme or selection of artists that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess primary themes and key writers and relevant Practitioners.

Although not all photographs and images are being used for controversial or negative purposes, in this essay I will be discussing how photos are used for a particular purpose. I will be exploring how the purpose of specific photographs has transformed from being an artform, to how they are used in an everyday context, that often expresses ideologies or are used to illustrate and instigate drama. I will be focusing more on the way photography has been used in photojournalism and how photographs are represented in news stories. I will be discussing the work and views of the following artists, photojournalists and photographers, Ruben Salvadori, Nick Ut, Jonas Bendiksen, and Matt Loughry.

“If one wishes to deepen the significance, i.e. to reconstruct the abstracted dimensions, one has to allow one’s gaze to wander over the surface feeling the way as one goes. This wandering over the surface of the image is called ‘scanning’. In so doing, one’s gaze follows a complex path formed, on the one hand, by the structure of the image and, on the other, by the observer’s intentions.”

(Flusser, 1983, p.8)

What it appears that Vilem was discussing here can be seen in the way that photography transformed from a being considered a privilege, to being a part of everyday life. Photography has drifted away from being an art form to now being seen, and used more than ever, as a means of creating a façade and advertising false idealisms. It is often used to direct false narratives to cause people to see something from a particular perspective and it has given people more ways not up

front and honest, therefore hiding behind ideas of what they think others want to see instead of showing something as it is.

Ruben Salvadori



Figure 1



Figure 2

Ruben Salvadori is a photojournalist who spent three years working in Jerusalem. During his time there he realised that people wouldn't be interested in the documentary photos he was taking in the city, due to the focus being on capturing the conflict and riots that were breaking out there at the time. Salvadori changed his focus from taking photos of the city itself to taking photos of the conflict, and like many photojournalists he wanted to capture that award winning action shot. "I was creating a portfolio of what in my head conflict looked like, because I had seen other photos of work, I had seen what photos had won the big award of the year and I wanted to win those awards" "I was taking photos that represented what I thought the audience wanted conflict to look like because I

too have seen Hollywood movies, I basically learned what photos I had to take in order to be published.” (Salvadori, 2017)

He spent a long time working on capturing photographs in ways other people had done so previously, but he felt as though something wasn't right. When taking the images, he started to realise how different the photographs would look if you were to witness what was actually going on behind the camera. This was referring to of the other photographers crowding around to take that 'perfect' image of the action. In his work he illustrates how much photographers can take advantage of the situation as well as showing how a lot of the photographs that were taken for news articles and magazines were staged, due to it being more aesthetically pleasing or visually impressive. This is seen in Salvadori's photo series *Photojournalism Behind the scenes*, two examples are shown as Figure 1 and Figure 2. In this photo series he shows what the action image would look like when published (figure 1) and how the scene looked before fine tuning or editing (figure 2). He wanted to address the subject of whether seeing really is believing and get people to question what they see because it may not always be based on truth. Figure 1 shows someone holding a grenade of some kind along with smoke and fire in the background, which creates the appearance of a rebellious image that seems to be in the middle of the action. However, in figure 2 the person was holding a water bottle, and the fire had not been started yet which makes you question how many images in the news were as they appeared or were just staged to draw your attention and to make a profit.

“Images are mediations between the world and human beings. Human beings 'ex-ist', i.e. the world is not immediately accessible to them and therefore images are needed to make it comprehensible. However, as soon as this happens, images come between the world and human beings.” (Flusser, 1983, p.9)

What Vilem discusses here his book also emphasises that what is going on in figure 2 not only manipulates the photo, and the way people see what is going on in that place, but it also manipulates peoples' views and how Jerusalem is represented. When all your seeing is conflict and

not any of its other potential qualities it makes it come across as a hostile environment, in the TED talk Salvadori suggests and questions whether the riots and conflict would break out so often or even for as long if it wasn't for the photographers and journalists being there. Does their presence actually make the situation worse? Are a lot of the riots just a show to get attention from cameras?

"some photographers actually claim that they had no effect on their subjects, they would like ask me what do you mean we author the scenes, we don't tell people what to do or how to pose, but at the same time some of us would ask another important question and kind of controversial question, would the violence have happened weren't there?" Salvadori, TED talk, august 15th 2017



Figure 3



Figure 4

During a TED talk Salvadori spoke about his *Photojournalism Behind the Scenes Series*, but during his talk addressed the image *Napalm girl, 1972 by Nick Ut*. This photo has a lot of controversy surrounding it as it is, but then when he pointed out that Nick Ut's original image had a man reloading film into his camera as a girl is screaming in agony beside him instead of going to her aid completely changes the way you see this image and it illustrates more than the just horrors that went on during the Vietnam war. Nick Ut had submitted the image shown in figure 4 to be

published, but the news organisations cropped it down to look more like figure 3, so instead of showing the image as it was, they made it appear more cinematic, like you are there with her, instead of showing the reality of people just wanting to capture a photograph that would grab people's attention. However, this manipulates the way people see the image by changing the narrative to how the news articles wanted it to be represented and seen, instead of revealing the truth of how some photojournalist can really behave in those hostile situations and environments. This could potentially make the people taking the photos and the news agency's potentially look bad instead of who or what they are trying to shine a light on. This is what can happen when you sell your images for publishing in news articles, they gain artistic license allowing them the right to tell a story in the way they see fit even if that means not telling the full story.

Jonas Bendiksen



Figure 5



Figure 6

Jonas Bendiksen is a photojournalist who shocked the world with a book publication called *The Book of Veles, 2021*. My interpretation of the book itself and the photographs it contained, is that it was created as a kind of social experiment to illustrate the danger of how seeing shouldn't always be believing. The photos in the book were taken in Veles, North Macedonia, which became better known in 2016 during the US elections. The reason for this is because during the US elections there

was a large amount of fake news websites that advertised falsified news stories about the elections causing a large amount of chaos and confusion. "Throughout the Trump era, I was boiling with frustration over all the lies and misinformation in the media." Bendiksen, Magnum photos 2021.

After taking the photos in Veles he started to manipulate the images and created CGI figures in the areas the photos were taken to make it appear as though it was full of life despite this not being the case. Some of the fake figures were easier to distinguish than others depending on the scenes that they were shown in. Figure 5 is Untitled, Veles 2019, showing people hanging around and skateboarding, which comes across as casual and due to how small they are it is hard to tell that they are not supposed to be there. Figure 6 shows someone who appears to be using her laptop, again captured in a potential everyday circumstance, but this time you can see the person clearer and if you're looking for it you can tell that she isn't supposed to be there and looks like a screenshot from a video game. These are only two photos from the book, but figure 6 is an example of some of the more obvious CGI figures with figure 5 representing the images that were more discrete.

From when he started to upload and show off some images from the book to when the book was released nobody questioned him or his images, until Bendiksen created a fake Facebook profile using a CGI photo of a woman he created for his book. He created the profile and once he had enough followers and people believing the woman was real, he started to out himself and his fake images. It was a very elaborate scheme and was questioned by many people as to if it was too over the top, and whether he should have gone to such lengths to get a point across, or not. He fooled a lot of people with these photographs including his agency Magnum Photos and a photography festival Visa pour l'image in Perpignan, France when he submitted the images for the festival and was accepted (Magnum photos, 2021). It would appear from this that a lot of people felt as though it was a breach of trust due to him building up a reputation and support, to then trick people into thinking his work was genuine, but not in this circumstance.

Similarly, to Salvadori, Bendiksen wanted to show the other side of the coin, but instead of showing something as it is he wanted to show things as how they could become and how the world around us is changing and people are being able to get away with more when it comes to technology and photography, especially photojournalism. This is starting to create confusion over what is real and what is not. When asked about his work Bendiksen spoke about his frustrations during the US elections in 2016, and how there were hundreds of news websites created with fake news and false advertising, playing a big role in the drama and confusion during the election. Bendiksen said “The way we now produce, spread and consume information has change so much in the last 15 years, and this was a terrifying example of that. So, I started digging, and found all these other strange layers to the story.” Magnum photos, Jade Chao, Sep 17 2021. Ironically Veles is also the name of a Slavic god of the underworld and known for magic and trickery, which is a fitting description of what the place has become known for.

Matt Loughry



Figure 7

Matt Loughry is an Irish photographer that decided to manipulate and falsify mugshots of the Khmer Rouge Cambodian tortured and execution victims (figure 7). Instead of using the images to draw attention to the horrific genocide that took place between 1975-79, he thought it would be a good idea to add not only colour to these images, but a smile as well in an attempt to humanise the tragedy. To falsify the images of not only a tragic event, but individual victims is beyond disrespectful, not only disrespectful to the victim, but to the family of the victim, along with the millions of other victims as well.

“No words can ever fully describe the dreadful feelings hidden behind those faces who knew they would soon be marched to the mass graves. But here they were transformed into celebratory, smiley portraits for an artful show off. Inconsiderate and offensive!” (BBC News, 2021). This was only one of the many reviews of people on social media that were outraged and offended by the misconduct and fake representation of what those images really meant. In this case legal action had been taken to not only remove the photos from all platforms, but also to prevent Loughry from being able to use the images for any kind of profitable or advertising purposes. Despite this being how the situation played out this time, it doesn’t change the fact that there are still many cases and situations where people are creating fake photographs to illustrate someone else’s narrative of the story are occurring. In this case it was more obviously out of order in the way he used an image of an event to illustrate a false perspective, as he was manipulating images that referred to such a sensitive subject. They were not like the other photographs he had ‘restored’ previously, in those images the people having their photo taken were not smiling due to how long they had, had to wait to take their photo and it is interesting to see how they could look like if the photo was taken under different circumstances (My colourful past, 2021). However, in the case of the Khmer Rouge Cambodian mugshots, they weren’t smiling because they were being tortured, they had probably seen things that no child or person should have to see or experience, not only that but they probably knew that they weren’t going to make it out of that place alive. When you see work that has been created and put across in this way it makes you consider a very important question, would you still do it if the

tragedy had happened to someone you know? Would you still think your behaviour or narrative is as important then? Would you still make the work then, would you still want to see work shown and represented in this way? How would you feel if it was you?

When it comes to photojournalism and the specific situations that I have discussed, you can see that sometimes there is a disconnection between the person taking the photos, and the people in the photo. In some cases, the situations appear to lack empathy, due to there being such a disregard for people's feelings and worth through the manipulation. The ability to just take or pick up an image and manipulate them in such a way it takes from what the image or subject matter is about, makes me think what the point is in taking a photo at all if what your left with is so far away from what you're taking the photo of, that anyone could do it.

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