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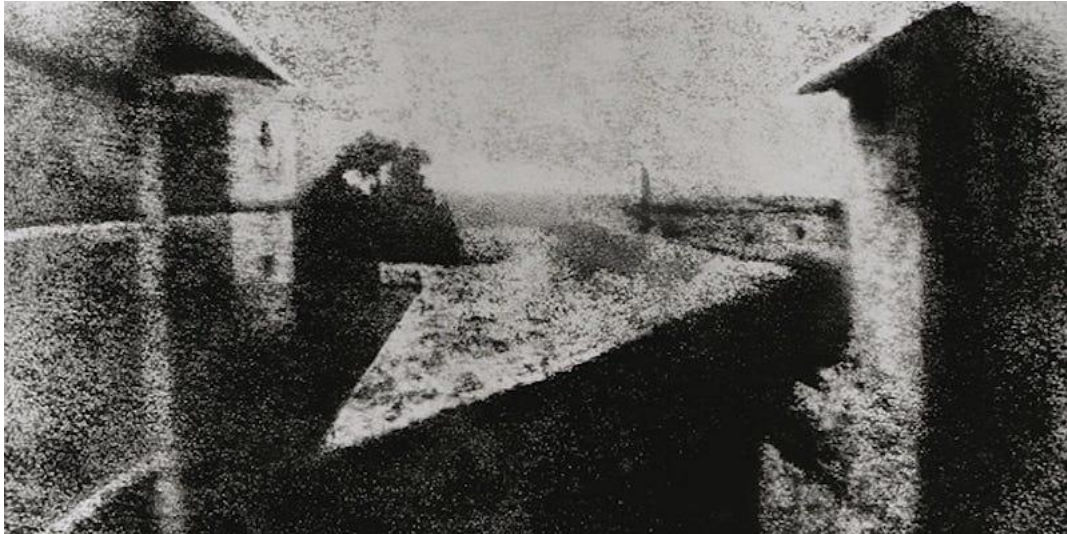


Fig 1.

Introduction

The first photograph ever taken or is considered to be the oldest surviving photograph, (fig 1.) was taken by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in or around 1826 or 1827. It was captured using a technique known as heliography, a Greek word, its literal meaning is 'sun writing' this image was taken from at an upstairs window at Niépce's home in Burgundy, France and was taken by exposing a bitumen-coated plate in a camera obscura, also known as a pinhole camera, with an exposure that lasted a few hours it shows a view of the courtyard and outbuildings.

It would seem the image is an accurate record of the view from his room and that old adage, 'the camera never lies' must be true, or is it?

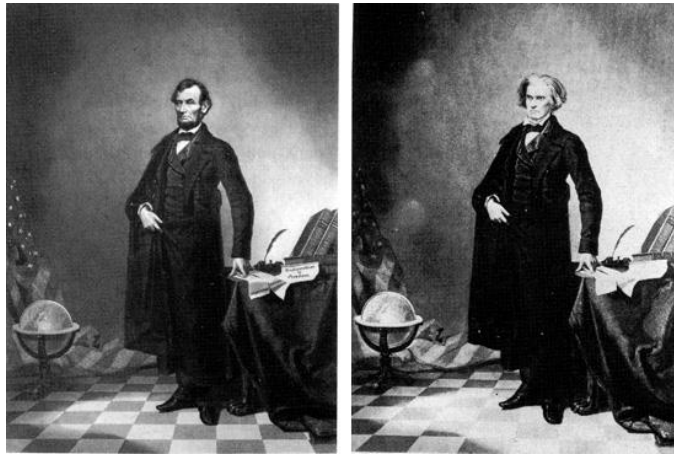


Fig 2.

History

Defined as: 'The study of past events, particularly in human affairs'
(oxford dictionary)

Altering images isn't a new phenomenon that started with photoshop, It's a skill that has been around almost as long as photography itself started.

In as early as the 1860's not that long after the invention of the photograph, In fig 2 This iconic portrait of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln is actually a composite of Lincoln's head on the body of southern politician John Calhoun. The reason given for the composite is said to be that no heroic looking image of Lincoln had been taken at that time.

Does that make it okay to manipulate images to portray a person as you think or prefer them to look rather than the reality of how they actually look, I intend to look deeper into this area during my dissertation.

In his book 'Fake Photo' (Farid H, 2019) Dr Hany Farid who is a digital forensic expert looks at ways of examining images to establish if they

are real or not. He explains throughout history images have been manipulated by leaders such as Hitler and Stalin to eradicate their enemies and in doing so they are attempting to rewrite history to suit their own narrative. As in the book "Ways of Seeing" (Berger J, 1972, p. 10) "Later still the specific vision of the image-maker was also recognized as part of the record. An image became a record of how X had seen Y." he states that although the art is not an actual reflection of the world as it was when the work was made, it is a representation of how the artist saw the world. I would argue this is misrepresentation whether it's the artist or photographer capturing an image, should it be acceptable for them to intentionally mislead the viewer and what are the consequences of this?



Fig 3.

Perhaps one of the most famous photographic fakes were the photographs of the Cottingley Fairies (Fig 3.) these images were taken in July and September 1917 by Elsie Wright who was 16 and her cousin Frances Griffiths who was 9 years old at the time, in the village of Cottingley, West Yorkshire. The images were taken by Elsie's mother to a meeting of the Theosophical Society, Theosophy is a philosophy combining mysticism and spiritualism, where they caught the eye of Edward Gardner, a leading member in the society, he believed they were proof that great metaphysical changes were happening. They were examined by Harold Snelling, a photographic expert who confirmed them to be 'authentic images' but only in the sense that they were real photographs of what was in front of the camera. I would agree with this even though they have been proven to be fakes and indeed Elsie finally confessed to this fact but not until the 1980's, It's the belief that the fairies that are real, not the image itself that makes it a fake. The two girls had drawn the fairies, cut them out and standing them up in the garden then using Elsie's father's Midg quarter-plate camera to capture the images. So I would suggest the images are real however it's the lie that went with them where even Sir Arthur Conan Doyle believed they were real fairies, that make these images a fake.

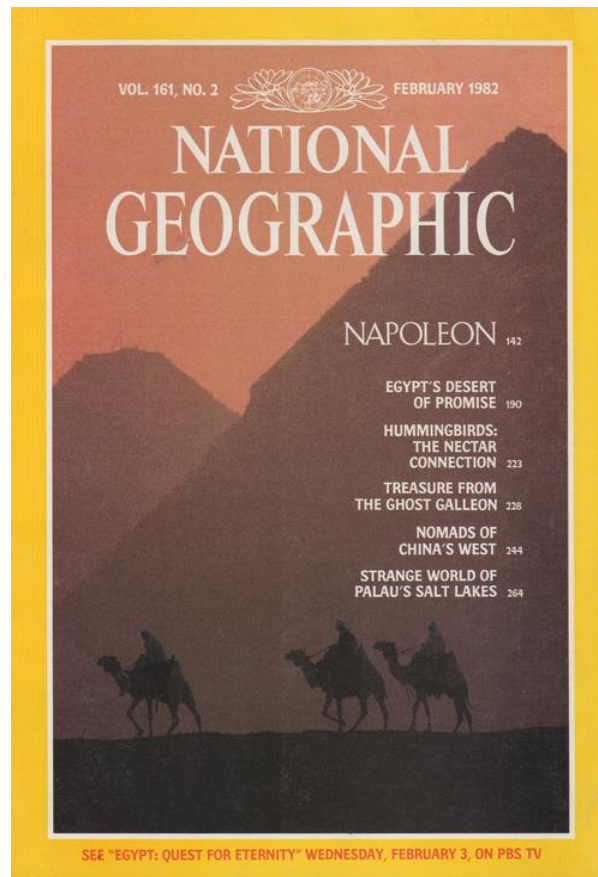


Fig 4

There has continued to be a number of high profile images that have been manipulated and presented as an accurate representation, for example the front cover of National Geographic in February 1982 where the pyramids were edited to fit the cover (Fig 4.)

I intend to explore this area in more detail for my dissertation and particularly how photoshopping images have become the 'norm' in today's society.

Ethics

Defined as: 'moral principles that control or influence a person's behaviour' (oxford dictionary)

As Roland Barthes said in his book Camera Lucida "Photography never lies: or rather, it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature tendentious, never as to its existence' (Barthes, Camera Lucida, p. 87)

within his book Barthes discusses what is a photograph, over time it has been transformed from its inception of light being captured on fragile pieces of silver to today's digital image that can be so easily manipulated from something as subtle as smoothing out the skin, removing spots or lines of a model or to create vast fantasy scenes that are very obviously fake, they can be printed onto almost anything and at any size.

There are many different reasons why images might be altered, as we have already looked at, image manipulation has been happening since the inception of photography. I believe it's really down to the intention of the photographer why are they altering it, what is their intention, is it to deceive, is it to improve the aesthetics of the image and so on.



Fig 5.

Many artists work in a constructed reality way such as Gregory Crewdson, his cinematic style images appear to be stills from a movie, here Fig 5. the image itself tells a story but it is open to the viewer to understand what that story is, if you apply Barthes theory of the Punctum and the Studium its perhaps the way the scene is beautifully lit that makes it an interesting image, (Studium) but looking closer we see the details, the little things that draw our interest (Punctum) petals strewn across on the floor, the desolate look on the face of model and we left to draw our own conclusions as to what is going on or what has happened, but the main thing is we know its constructed, we know its not real and no one is trying to present it as reality. Crewdson's images are multi layers of many images stitched together to create this final piece, its intended as a piece of art to be admired by the viewer.

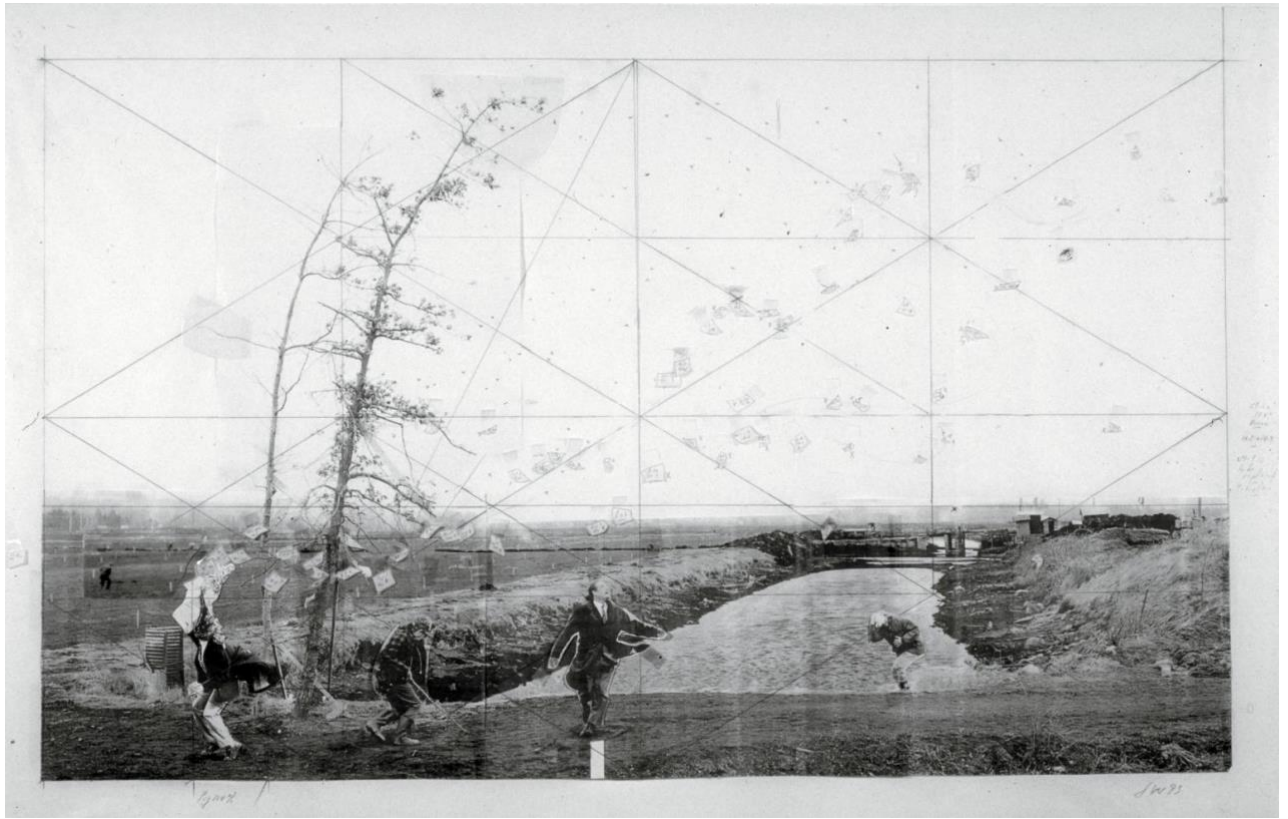


Fig 6.



Fig 7.

Another example of artists who work with constructed reality is Jeff Wall, in his image above Fig 6. And Fig 7. A Sudden Gust of Wind after Hokusai he has used photocopied photographs and paper to create the appearance of these men and women in the image reacting to the wind sweeping across the open landscape, above them papers are floating in the sky having escaped from the folder held by the lady. It is the placement of the papers that provide us with the knowledge of the wind direction it also causes us the viewers to follow the trail of paper across the image and see other details in the frame. The final image is a tableau and similar in style to a classic painting.

I would argue that these examples and many other similar ones where images have been manipulated, are acceptable and ethically ok as we the viewer are not being deceived and the images are not purporting to be anything other than pieces of art.



Fig 8.

In this image by Narciso Contreras, (fig 8.) a photojournalist working for the associated press, it was taken in Syria in 2013, Contreras took the decision to edit out the video camera in the bottom left of the original frame as he felt it was a distraction to the viewer. Was this ethical, has it changed the overall story that the image is telling us? I would suggest that it was unethical, the reality of that situation shows there were other people, other journalists capturing the same scene but from a different angle, whilst editing the camera out might have been for aesthetic reasons for the photographer he has created a fake reality, would it have been ok had he sent both images to the editors and given them the option to choose which one they could use, I would argue not as he

would be merely passing the decision on as ultimately if they chose to print the edited image they are still deceiving the viewer who should know the photographer was not alone, others would have had a different view of what was happening, none of us see the same incident in the same way, we all see things from different angles or distances. In *Understanding photojournalism* (Good J, Lowe P, 2019) Jennifer Good discusses the ethics of photo journalists and the need for trust, trust that the images supplied are real and reflect the reality of what was seen, but where do ethics come from? As the Oxford dictionary defines ethics as moral principles that control or influence a person's behaviour, but everyone has different morals and principals depending on your upbringing, cultural background, religious beliefs or lack thereof. As Borge discusses in her book *Documentary Photography Reconsidered* (Bogre M, 2019) the photograph is a witness, its evidence, it's a memory, if we change the image and edit out what we feel doesn't look right or is too distracting we are changing what we see and what was real.



Fig 9.

In a similar vein is it ok to alter historical images and let it be known that they have been edited? For example in Fig 9, an image of one of the victims of torture in Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge, Matt Loughrey has colourised the images and even edited smiles onto the victims, the reason he gave was to humanise them, is this a good enough reason I would argue no, it diminishes the gravity of the torture and deaths of thousands of Cambodians at that time. Just because we can doesn't mean we should and I intend to explore the ethics of photography in greater detail for my dissertation.

Technology

Defined as: 'The application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, especially in industry. 'advances in computer technology'

Technology plays a huge part in today's modern world of photography, your choice over which camera to use, the lens attached to it whether it be a prime or zoom, the focal length, the settings, aperture / shutter / ISO all of these things will impact the final image including what we decide to keep in the frame or exclude we are editing as we go.

Over the last 20 years the advances in the digital camera and software to enhance or manipulate images has made it possible for anyone with a smart phone to alter any image they want. Take for example apps such as Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook all of these apps have billions of users who publish images everyday, for example there are almost 1000 images posted to Instagram every second of every day but before you post an image you have options to edit the image on your phone or within the app itself, you can brighten skin tone, add fun features, swap faces, create cartoon faces etc...



Fig 10.

Whilst the vast majority of time it is very obvious the image isn't real or has been tampered with in some way there are plenty of examples where some people, in particular celebrities like Kyle Jenner, who have a huge influence within the world of social media and particularly towards young people who aspire to follow in their footsteps, when presented with images like this one Fig 10. They believe its how that person actually looks when in fact you can see by the warped body of the car that it has been altered, presumably to enhance her posterior. This in turn creates an unrealistic view of how she actually looks.

In the academic paper by Vivian and Burgess, where they explore how the everyday lives of individuals are fixed or altered in order to portray themselves how they would like to be represented rather than the reality of their lives (Vivienne S, Burgess J. 2013, The remediation of the personal photograph and the politics of self-representation in digital

storytelling) this is the same for those who we see as being successful such as the Kardashians and many other celebrities and the like but are they really or is it just how they wish to be seen.

Conclusion

Drawing on these areas, thoughts, ideas and philosophies for my dissertation I intend to explore in more detail the morality and ethics of photo manipulation, looking at the reasons why images are edited in the first place, the intention in the edit, is it to deceive and particularly how all this impacts on our everyday lives and our feeling of self-worth.

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