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We want our pictures to show us at our best. If a flash makes us look like a demon, we all probably apply the red-eyes-removal option. We also want the things we photograph to look their finest. If we use a cookbook, we expect the images to make our mouths water – even if we know the vegetables are undercooked to keep their colour, and fruit is sometimes sprayed with hairspray to make it shiny.

As we explored in the first chapter, even if a photograph is untouched, it will still never be a faithful copy of reality. As most of us who have ever tried to capture a stunning landscape know, no matter how brilliant the reality, the photograph will often end up looking flat and dull if we don't apply a filter. In short, we all know that photographs are manipulated. The question is: does it matter that an image has been altered in order to make it as powerful as possible? You could argue that applying a filter to make reality seem more appealing can be considered a kind of lie. So what about shooting an image in black and white – would that be lying, too?

It seems that the fact that photos deceive us on so many levels is something people have come to accept. When it is acceptable to manipulate a photograph and when it is not is a question that has occupied organisations such as World Press Photo, which has spent years trying to formulate a code of ethics – a code that seems to be far from definitive. In press photography, for example, World Press Photo stipulates that a photograph shot in colour and converted to greyscale is an acceptable form of alteration; however, removing a cigarette stub from the ground using Photoshop is impermissible.

It is true that manipulation of images goes back to the earliest days of photography. Roger Fenton (1819–69) worked in photography for just over a decade, but during this short time he undertook a range of important commercial commissions that have reverberated throughout the medium's history. Documenting the Crimean War of 1853–6, he is widely seen as the first official war photographer. It is from the series of work created during the war that his most famous work comes. *The Valley of the Shadow of Death* (left) has been under constant scrutiny since a second picture was discovered in 1981 with fewer cannonballs in the shot. It even spurred the film-maker Errol Morris to visit the site and investigate why this doctoring (or lie) was carried out. Today, it is believed that the second image was the original, and that Fenton added extra cannonballs to make the scene appear more dramatic.

The boundaries of accepted manipulation in multiple domains of photography remain unsettled and are precarious, or even disturbing. Generally, when it comes to photojournalists, we want their



Roger Fenton, *The Valley of the Shadow of Death* (1855)

work to be as untouched as possible, as only then can we trust them as reliable suppliers of 'real' images. Today, eyewitnesses using smartphones for photographs and live video, and the superfast distribution of images through the internet, in addition to or superseding traditional, professional press photographers, have contributed to a new understanding of documentary photography. Apart from the fact that, optically, mechanically or through software, an image is retouched before it is even shown on our screens, and despite existing protocols restricting the use of Photoshop by news photographers, it has never been easier to falsify images, as can be seen in the example of Eduardo Martins. This 'war photographer' downloaded pictures from other photo journalists' websites, made small changes to them, gave them a different location in the credit line and published 'his' work in media such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *Le Monde* and the *Daily Telegraph*, while also inventing his own heroic biography. He even borrowed photographs from another man's Instagram account to complete his fraudulent identity. What might feasibly have been a clever piece of conceptual art criticising the status of the hero journalist was in fact simply an outright hoax that illustrates the fallibility of the news media's verification procedures. The good news is that increased connectedness might make it easier for stolen or faked images to be distributed, but it also makes the falsehood easier to detect. It took years for Martins's deception to be discovered, but he was eventually found out.

Verification procedures are, however, facing a serious challenge known as 'deep fake news'. Deep-learning network software technology now allows people to create realistic simulations of politicians or celebrities and make them say anything, in real time: the next level in image manipulation. This could potentially cause a great deal of damage, if populations no longer know who to trust, and authentic messages that do not match their prejudices can be dismissed as fake news.

A further obfuscation of reality comes from celebrities themselves, through their self-presentation. One of the best-known examples is Kim Kardashian (right, bottom), whose lifestyle, like that of many other celebrities, especially as distributed through her popular social media channels, is highly tuned and managed. Careful use of lighting, apps and makeup, and the practice of taking hundreds of images out of which just one will be selected, all contribute to achieving the perfect selfie. The Australian actor and comedian Celeste Barber parodies Instagram accounts of the famous and aspirational by 'keeping it real'. She starkly illustrates the extreme poses and situations that people put themselves in, as well as the patently unrealistic versions of their lives they present in order to get more followers and likes. In her 'Celeste Challenge' series, she takes celebrity images from Instagram and, by re-enacting them, highlights the clichés, using the mechanics of vernacular culture to turn them from the aspirational into the absurd. However, they are not ill-natured: she ridicules herself at the same time, and the 'challenge' is really to established ideas of femininity and maternity that are largely regressive, conservative and dictated by ideals. She may use comedy to make her point, but like all images in popular culture, they can be read seriously.

Building a personality cult with the help of photography is something that goes back a long time in politics, too. Propaganda portraits of leaders and dictators, doctored to present their subjects in the most attractive light, have been made and distributed in many countries throughout the 20th century. In our time, the appearance of Italian ex-president Silvio Berlusconi may be seen as an example of life imitating art: rather than altering the photographs, the politician went under the knife to become the 'idealised' image he wanted to present. As can be seen from the photograph of this man (right, top), who has stood trial for many cases of corruption and bribery, however, the result is hardly an instance of propaganda – one could claim that quite the opposite is the case.



Silvio Berlusconi, Strasbourg, November 2017



Kim Kardashian, California, October 2015

**Yves Klein (1928–1962) with Harry Shunk (1924–2006) and Janos Kender (1937–2009)**
*Saut dans le vide (Leap into the Void)* **(1960)**

Long before 'to Photoshop' became a verb, image manipulation was used within every imaginable context, from advertising to politics and from news photography to art. This particular instance of manipulation started on a French Mediterranean beach, where Yves Klein and his friends decided to divide up the cosmos between them, much as the Greek gods had, with one friend choosing the land, another the sea, and Klein the sky or space. To demonstrate his new affinity with space, in October 1960 Klein undertook a piece of performance art involving a Superman-style leap from the roof of a house in Fontenay-aux-Roses, in the suburbs of Paris. Klein hired two photographers who operated as a duo photographing art performances, especially nouveau réalisme: János Kender and Harry Shunk.

Shunk-Kender created a 'documentary photograph' by combining two negatives: the first showing Klein leaping, face up to the sky, with all the confidence of an Olympic diver knowing he will score high points, while in the street below some of Klein's friends are holding a tarpaulin, waiting to catch him; and the second showing just the street. Part of Klein's performance was a fake four-page newspaper titled *Dimanche* (27 November 1960) distributed among Parisian kiosks, headlined: 'Leap into the Void: Man in Space! The Painter of Space Throws Himself into the Void!' In a rather earthly way, Klein threatened his collaborators with legal action should they ever disclose how the photograph was made.

A. ALICE AND THE FAIRIES.
Copyright. Photograph taken July 1917.

Elsie Wright (1901–1988)
and Frances Griffiths (1907–1986)
*Alice and the Fairies* (1917)

To understand the strange fascination with this photograph, one must really see photography as primarily a truth-telling mechanism. It is hard to believe now, but at various points during the 20th century many people were prepared to swear that these fairies were real – firstly, and most famously, the author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who used them to illustrate an article about fairies in the *Strand Magazine* for its Christmas issue in 1920. Conan Doyle was a committed Spiritualist, and the leap from a belief in an ability to commune with the dead to a belief in the existence of fairies is not so huge. Also contributing to the widespread acceptance of the authenticity of the photographs known as the *Cottingley Fairies* was the fact they were made by children – two young, middle-class girls – and children could not possibly lie in the face of adult authority. Or perhaps it was simply that people wanted to believe in these supernatural miniature beings.

The two children made a series of five photographs, of which this has become the most famous. To create the photographs, the children copied popular illustrations of the day, cut them out and stood them up using hatpins. Given the difficulty of making a photograph at this time, the fact that they were made, let alone circulated, was quite an achievement in itself.

Photography has always been used to 'prove' the existence of mythic and magical beasts. Who doesn't want to believe that a blurry photograph shows the Loss Ness Monster, or a shaky video of a Yeti waving as it heads into the woods? Update this to the esoteric 'aura' photographs in circulation today, and we can see that the desire to see beyond the frame is still intact in photography.

**Alison Jackson (born 1970)**
*Private* (2016)

The US landscape photographer Ansel Adams spent more time in his darkroom dodging and burning a print than he spent time taking the actual photograph. Manipulating images in Photoshop is just a way of extending this practice. When the onus is on truth-telling, media may use protocols which require photographers to indicate or limit the degree of digital manipulation in their images. But a lot of the time images are published with no such restrictions, and looking critically is not always easy.

An artist whose oeuvre is dedicated to showing how difficult it is to tell the difference between what is real and what is not in media imagery is the British photographer Alison Jackson. She has used celebrity lookalikes of the British Royal Family, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the Clintons and, more recently, Donald Trump, to create spoof images of controversial situations – including this one, in which a fake 'Donald Trump' is shown at a supposed Ku Klux Klan rally. Despite the threat of legal action being taken against her for images like this, Jackson feels the liberties she takes, in terms of truth and manipulation, are an essential part of her freedom as an artist.

Jackson decided to self-publish the book her Trump images appear in, when commercial publishers shied away from taking the risk. Finding the position she was in genuinely alarming, the main battle for Jackson was one against self-censorship. One could ask whether artists should self-censor their work when it could offend people, give rise to protests or endanger their career. While it is usually contentious when documentary photographers manipulate their images, we also demand a certain type of truthfulness from photographers working outside of this genre. The success of this work is dependent on the tension between its unreality and its potential believability, as well as the artist's authenticity of intention. By achieving this balance, Jackson makes a powerful comment on the nature of celebrity culture, media representation, and that phrase that was born simultaneously with Trump's presidential ambitions, 'fake news'.

**David King (1943–2016)**
*The Commissar Vanishes* **(1997)**

Josef Stalin's regime in the Soviet Union lasted from 1929 to 1953, during which time photography played a crucial role in the falsification of history and the elaboration of Stalin's cult as leader. Under him, photographs were doctored, manipulated and censored as he sought to consolidate his rule and 'vanish' those who dared to disagree with him – both in terms of their physical bodies and their presence in the historical record. The mass purges, show trials and executions that occurred during Stalin's dictatorship became even clearer after his death, and ultimately the photographs would serve as evidence of the thousands of people who opposed him politically while he was in power.

The pairing of the doctored photos with their originals was the painstaking work of the British writer and photographer David King, whose vast collection of Stalin-era photographs highlighted the airbrushing, cutting, defacing, cropping and other more or less crude methods adopted by the regime. A fraction of them were published in King's book *The Commissar Vanishes* in 1997. Looking through the many examples, it is fascinating to note how badly or clumsily done some of these obliterations were. One hopes that this was done as a deliberate act of resistance.

This pairing shows the 'disappearance' of Nikolai Yezhov, successively People's Commissar for State Security, Internal Affairs and Water Transport, who was obliterated from the original 1937 photograph after his execution on 4 April 1940. Yezhov was himself the architect of the Great Purge, so it is somewhat ironic that he should have met the same fate as those he was responsible for blotting out of history. This is just one of thousands of examples of similar scenarios involving other Commissars. These photographs have a renewed significance today as they remind us that photography can never be taken at face value – not now, and not at the birth of photography in 1846, when William Henry Fox Talbot's apprentice Calvert Richard Jones removed one of the figures from a calotype of Capuchin friars in Valetta, Malta, using nothing more than a blot of India ink.

**Eugene Thiebault (1825–unknown)**
*Henri Robin: Conjurer and Ghost* (c.1860)

The spirit photographs that were made in relatively large numbers in the 19th and early 20th century should not be regarded simply as jokes or amusing theatrical tableaux. Not only were many of these images taken seriously as proof of the existence of ghosts and the reality of the afterlife, but they also reveal attitudes toward death and grieving and the enduring fascination with the supernatural that has long infused science, art and religion. While, to contemporary eyes, the images seem hammy, ridiculous and obviously fake, they closely follow a powerful tradition in the visual arts – found especially in paintings and engravings – depicting spirits, angels and ghosts that were cultural projections of human emotions, especially the fear of death.

What must also be remembered is that people experienced death far more regularly in the 19th century. Many mothers died giving birth, and child mortality was high. Disease was rife and many sicknesses incurable. People died at home, so death was not abstract and sanitised as it is today in many Western cultures. The bereaved mourned openly, and the new art of photography played an important part in this, with, for example, images of the deceased placed in lockets and other items of jewellery. Spirit photography was only another manifestation of this preoccupation with death, remembrance and the afterlife.

Thus, while a picture like this may seem almost laughable today, a clear example of 'trick' photography, it is important not to underestimate its original seriousness, with deception ironically practised not so much to deceive but to offer consolation and evidence for the life eternal. It is important, too, not to lose our sense of wonder regarding photography. The alchemic blending of chemicals and the appearance 'out of nowhere' of a picture in a darkroom using analogue processes, and the ability of an image to digitally reproduce itself infinitely, may lie in the realms of science, but it certainly holds a touch of magic, too. Even today, the union of science and magic seems not to have quite disappeared, even if it manifests itself in different ways to this image of a magician 'conjuring' up a ghost.

**Christoph Bangert (born 1969)**
*War Porn* (2014)

News websites, TV channels and newspapers subtly yet dominantly set conclusive limitations on what we see. Keeping a shocking photograph away from the audience may generally not be considered a form of lying, but not being shown certain images is a form of censorship we usually don't think about.

Everybody knows that fake news can be dangerous when it is used to spread propaganda, more so as it deflects attention from real news. Hard enough as it is to separate real from fake news, it can be just as difficult for readers and viewers to form a personal opinion if they are not given full access to press photography, which may also influence the public opinion.

In his book *War Porn*, German photographer Christoph Bangert published the images which the international news media he worked for considered too disturbing. The book functions as a perturbing reminder that helps us to understand how press censorship in democratic states distorts our understanding of suffering in places of war. The photographer witnessed the most harrowing scenes and shot the most soul-racking images of conflicts that took place in seemingly faraway places like Iraq, Gaza and Afghanistan, images that would have been brought to your home if not censored by the news media.

Some of the pages in the book are not cut apart, initially hiding the images from immediate consumption. The viewer is expected to make a conscious decision as to whether they want to peek between the perforated pages, or rip them open to see the full horror. Bangert poses the fundamental question about how we can refuse to watch and acknowledge a photograph depicting gruesome incidents, knowing that other people are forced to actually live in those atrocities. This small yet grand book not only encourages people to think about how the media uses censorship, but, ultimately, how the reader actually applies censorship themselves by consciously avoiding images and looking away.