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Truth in Photography

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and
Press the Shutter

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Truth in Photography: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Press the Shutter

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Abstract: Since the nineteenth century, photography has often been heralded as the only medium capable of capturing an "objective truth," chronicling both everyday life and crucial turning points in human history, ongoing to this day. The rise of digital technologies and accessible photo-manipulation has thrown this reality into question. Yet those familiar with photographic history are acutely aware that photography's relationship with truth has always been precarious at best. Despite this knowledge, and in the face of countless scams, scandals, and social media, many people are still inclined to accept the billions of images uploaded to the web each year at face value; they rarely question the photographs' motives, creators, or impact. This article explores a multifaceted and pluralistic overview of photography that illuminates the ways in which we approach the notion of photographic truth in contemporary society.

Keywords: Truth, Analogue vs. Digital, Photographic History, Objective Medium, Oscar Rejlander, Photo Manipulation

> The photograph has an added realism of its own; it has an inherent attraction not found in other forms of illustration. For this reason the average person believes implicitly that the photograph cannot falsify…
>
> (Lewis Hine 1909, as cited by Goldstein 2007, 62)

Introduction

Looking through a stack of flyers one evening after correcting my student's latest photo assignments, I noticed a small scratch-and-win card from a national chain of automotive-hardware stores. Pictured in the foreground was a Springer Spaniel devouring what appeared to be a *chocolate* birthday from atop a kitchen table. In the background, and through the pristine sliding glass patio door, sat the birthday girl opening presents along with her parents and brother; all colourful, all smiles, seated around a table. The words WIN along with dollar signs were large and prominent to the right of the image.

Figure 1: "Birthday Surprise," Flyer Ad
Source: Canadian Tire Corporation, Canada (n.d.)

What sorts of truth does this everyday advertisement contain? There are the obvious observations one might make of an ad of this kind: the image personifies a portrait of an ideal family, that happy families are those that consume the products offered at this particular store. Although this is a painfully common and contrived model it is also a construct into which many

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people are willing and poised to buy. Upon further examination of the card (for no apparent reason), I noticed a line on the back that read: "All ingredients used to make the birthday cake in the image were dog friendly, human grade food products." It was then that I began to chuckle. I imagined some past instance where the advertising company produced a similar ad and must have been inundated with angry letters from dog lovers across the country who were wondering if it had been fed actual chocolate.

Even when we are confronted with something so artificial, so constructed, we still consider certain realities in the making of the photo. In this instance, however, they tend to lean toward the literal harm which may have befallen a participant rather than critically reflecting on the figurative ideologies promoted within the frame. This level of interpretation would fall under Rose's (2012) criteria of *social modality* at the *site of audiencing*. You may be questioning why include this image at all? Well contrived or not it is a photograph, and commercial photography is perhaps the most widely consumed and disseminated type of photo after the personal. By sharing it and the anecdote, I hope to provide some context that elaborates on how we, as a society, approach photography, its efficacy, and the ways we interpret and construct meaning and "truths" from the almost unimaginable volume of imagery now produced each day worldwide.

Now travel back more than 100 years and review the latter part of the quote from Lewis Hine, split from the preface. Hine was well known for his documentation of child labourers and his camera-based social advocacy for them. He states, "[O]f course, you and I know that this unbounded faith in the integrity of the photograph is often rudely shaken, for, while photographs may not lie, liars may photograph" (as cited by Goldstein 2007, 62). These words resonate with no loss of poignancy or relevance today, in lieu of the rapid and simple manipulations that can be carried out on any photograph, using the latest technologies, without the need for a darkroom or even a powerful computer. His words also represent the complex duality in which photographs both inform and obfuscate, revealing that long before programs like Photoshop, truth and objectivity were every bit as precarious in photographs as they are today; individuals just had to work harder to achieve it.

Photography's Early Years

After much experimentation during the early nineteenth century—investigating with light-sensitive materials, attempting to attain a permanent representation of light falling on objects—success was achieved in 1826 and quickly built upon. Shortly thereafter daguerreotypes became the first mechanically reproducible process. As we view Daguerre's 1838 "Boulevard du Temple," what appears as a straightforward photo from that period, without attempts at manipulation, is actually depicting something far from the reality of that day. A busy Paris street lies empty during the morning rush all but for a lone shoeshine and his customer, becoming the very first people to be captured in a photograph.
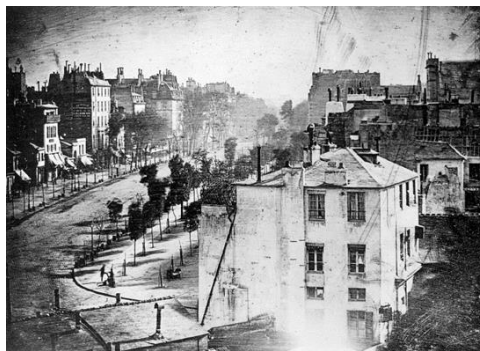

Figure 2: "Boulevard du Temple"
Source: Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (1838) (Wikimedia)

Due to the long exposure necessary at the time to render an image, only subjects and objects that remained still, while the shutter was open, would be captured by the cumbersome daguerreotype process. Still some photo-bloggers have gone one further and speculated that Daguerre knew the long exposure would not allow anyone to be caught by the camera. Therefore he deliberately had these people participate in the scene, pointing to the location of the figures being at an intersection fitting of the rule-of-thirds. One final observation is that there may even be a third person in the frame, a child peering from the top floor window (Scott 2014). Illustrating that long after an image's publication, dialogue can continue as to the contents and context of the image itself along with its creator's intentions.

At that time however most people were simply marvelling at this new mechanically neutral process that seemingly recorded light without the assistance of man and his inherent prejudices. Its truth was mathematical, and the "photograph was not only thought to be visually truthful; it was believed to be scientifically correct" (Schwartz 2000, 23). This fascination with technology coupled with the undeniable image products of daily life led to the valorizing of the camera as the mechanism of fact. Despite theorists of the late nineteenth century voicing opposition to this (Schwartz 2000) it remains to this day an arena of much debate. As Mitchell (1984, 524) observes, "No amount of counterdemonstration from artists that there are other ways of picturing what 'we really see' has been able to shake the conviction that these pictures have a kind of identity with natural human vision and objective external space. And the invention of a machine (the camera) built to produce this sort of image has, ironically, only reinforced the conviction that this is the natural mode of representation."

As photographic technologies continued to improve and printing from negatives was possible, multiple processes competed for attention. In Rejlander's 1857 "Two Ways of Life," an albumen print, what appears to be a carefully crafted, intact tableaux vivant is actually more than thirty-two separate photographs painstakingly exposed together to form a large composite print.

Figure 3: "Two Ways of Life"
Source: Oscar Gustav Rejlander (1857) (Wikimedia)

They form an allegory of two paths of life, vice versus virtue, which took Rejlander and his wife over six weeks to stage. This is an early photographic attempt at disseminating morality via the juxtaposition of chaste values opposite Dionysian libatiousness. The result is a powerfully presented, realistically rendered scene probably aimed at instilling that the god-fearing, hard-working public remain as such and not contemplate wandering too deeply into the realm of self-satisfaction or questioning the structures and authority of the moral majority. Still despite this apparent promotion of the conventional ideals of the time the image proved to be not only controversial in terms of its content but also its process. The nude bodies of men and women in Rejlander's photo were revealed in such meticulous detail, beyond pictorial painting, that the image was rejected for exhibition by the Society of Scotland on the grounds that it had crossed a line of public decency, yet was displayed by them a year later, albeit with the entire left portion

censored by an opaque curtain. This is in spite of the fact that a print had been bought by Queen Victoria. Practitioners of photography were also unhappy with the staged nature and composite technique used which they may have felt was inappropriate for this new mechanically "objective" medium ("The Two Ways of Life" n.d.). It should also be noted that a second version of the piece was later printed with the "master" (shown center) glancing toward the righteous side. This is thought to be Rejlander's attempt at appeasing his critics (Leggat 1995).

Photography after Mass Production

"The daguerreotype and the photograph on paper extended the authority of visual truth from the realm of actual experience to the verisimilitude of photographic realism. This changed the relationship of observer to material reality, and established ways of seeing that persisted and formed the basis of an increasingly visual culture. With the advent of photography, visual processes came to predominate epistemology" (Schwartz 2000, 11).

Flash forward more than a century after photography's invention where a surrealist truth was being exposed, shown in an outtake of "Dali Atomicus" (1948) by Philippe Halsman. The infamously whimsical character of Salvador Dali is distilled into reality, with a campy glimpse into the artist's studio and creative process exploring movement. Although Halsman was successful in capturing an actual moment in time, it took considerable effort, with twenty-eight attempts and an unknown number of exasperated cats, to acquire the end result.
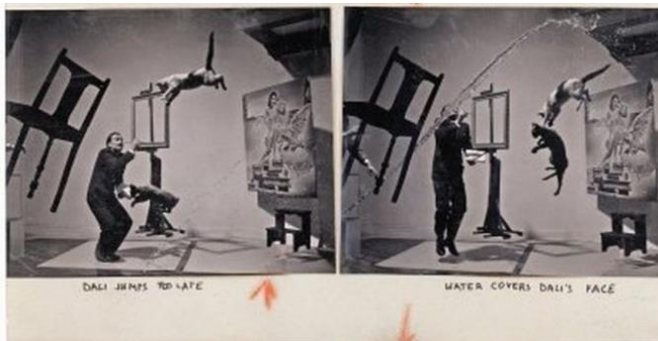
Figure 4: "Dali Atomicus," Outtakes
Source: Philippe Halsman (1948) (http://www.shootingfilm.net)

The result of the collaboration between the two artists likely solidifying, at least in the public's eye, the mystifying Dali persona, who decades later was also photographed walking his anteater in downtown Paris. The final un-retouched print showcased Halsman's dedication and precision, making him one of the most celebrated photographers of his time. The image also highlights how and what a photograph can portray without any post-processing, leaving us to question even the most stalwart so-called "straight" print.

The challenges of approaching and unravelling conventional straight prints are no more apparent than in Foreman's 1977 "Soiling of Old Glory," in which we see a half-truth skewered by our viewing perspective. Although the young man, Rakes, was swinging the flag at Landsmark (the man seemingly being held), he was not about to impale him as portrayed in this decisive moment. Yet this photo saw charges laid against Rakes (later dropped) and awarded Foreman with the Pulitzer Prize. As Louis Masur comments in an interview on the legacy of the image: "Photographs trick our eye because our brains want to think that they are seeing the whole and absolute truth. This photo is only one moment in time and it both captures that moment and also deceives, because what is going on in it is not immediately clear" (Kingsley 2008, 1).

Figure 5: "Soiling of Old Glory"
Source: Stanley Foreman (1977) (The Boston Herald American)

Yet does a photograph's success or proper communication of the context contained within the frame hinge on an accurate depiction of the "facts"? In a recent artist's talk at McGill University Jamel Shabazz, a renowned documentary photographer of the streets of New York, shared that the "Soiling of Old Glory" impacted him greatly as a young man. He pointed to the photograph as the inspiration for becoming a photographer, commenting on the supremacy and persuasion of a single image. Following the talk during a Q&A session, I pointed out that Foreman's contact sheet showed a different story than what was published. I asked Shabazz if knowing the whole truth behind the image changed its meaning or the effect it had on him. Shabazz replied that it did not. He argued that that frame had encapsulated the sentiments and emotions of that day and the hate that shocked the nation; he noted that even the idea that something so sacred could be used for such a malicious act was enough. Shabazz shared with me: "[T]hat one frame to me, I know there might have been other things that happened before and after, but that one frame just resonated with me to show the power of photography." He further supported this by suggesting that, "even if he didn't have the flag, even if he just had his middle finger out, there was something, there was a certain hatred there that was very evident" (Shabazz 2014, personal communication). Consequently regardless of evidence to the contrary of the photograph's popular interpretation, the initial reaction to the image and its effect remains intact.

With the contact sheet in mind let us reconsider what many agree to be one of the finest achievements in photographic history, Henri Cartier-Bresson's 1932 "Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare."

Figure 6: "Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare"
Source: Henri Cartier-Bresson (1932) (Magnum Photos)

The image embodies what many ascribe as photography's greatest facility in capturing what was coined as the *decisive moment*—the convergence of technology, human observation, and impeccable timing. Goldstein in a chapter on visual research methods titled "All Photographs Lie" looks back at the famous photo as more of a *decided moment* rather than a decisive one. With the absence of a contact sheet, he asks us to consider the frames before and after which were not captured, citing the intent of the photographer as every bit as important a consideration as choosing a particular frame or cropping an image (Goldstein 2007).

The work of Diane Arbus further expounds on truth and the contact sheet with her 1962 "Boy with Toy Grenade," one of many images she shot in Central Park one day. The image juxtaposes an innocent yet awkward and seemingly distressed boy with an instrument of war possibly used at that very moment overseas in the then ongoing conflict in Vietnam. However the real truth, if we chose to consider it as such, is that this was a fairly normal little boy playing and letting off steam in the park, as evidenced by the remaining frames in her contact sheet. Many years later however when interviewed for the documentary "Genius of Photography" the subject, Colin Wood, reflects that she had captured the turmoil of his parents' divorce which emanated from his boyish self (British Broadcasting Corporation 2007). Fortunately for Wood it was a positive experience, the same cannot be said for the subjects of "Migrant Mother" (1936) by Dorothea Lang. The mother, Florence Thompson, became the poster woman for the Great Depression. The image became an American icon and Lang a celebrated photographer, while Thompson and her children lived the truth of the image along with the stigma of poverty for the rest of their lives (Phelan 2014). Again time, reflection, and re-examination provide us with multiple versions of the truth of an image.

Far from a dilemma of choice between images shot, Carlos Franqui's erasure is an example of not only the destruction of the contact sheet but also an attempt of the eradication of a person

from history. Franqui, a poet, had been one of Fidel Castro's closet revolutionary confidants but was later exiled from Cuba after he turned critical of the new regime. Afterward Castro had his appearance in all official party photos removed, to which Franqui is reported to have responded "I discover my photographic death. Do I exist? I am a little black, I am a little white, I am a little shit, On Fidel's vest" (Conner and Farid 2011, 2).

Figure 7: "Untitled" (Castro Franqui and Fidel Castro)
Source: Unknown (1968) (http://pth.izitru.com/1968_00_00.html)

To elaborate further on just how persuasive and pervasive the Cuban regime has been in cleansing this image and Carlos Franqui from Cuban history, I share an anecdote from a recent trip to Havana. While visiting Revolution Square in 2016 and viewing the iconic ten-story homages to Che Guevara, José Martí, and Camilo Cienfuegos, this latter person's visage was one with which I was not familiar. Carlos Franqui's name immediately came to mind. When I uttered his name aloud, I instantly realized that it would not be him, but it caught my guide's attention. My guide, who had a PhD in art history, did not recognize the name. Even after I recapped the passage above regarding the photograph, he still seemed lost but made a banal attempt at pretending he did. The erasure of Franqui, at least in his mind, was absolute. This is reminiscent of Zola who is quoted as having said "You cannot claim to have seen something until you have photographed it" (Sontag 1977, 47); in this case you cannot claim that someone exits without a photograph of them. One could take this notion even further to question whether or not in a technologically driven, image-based society one can even be considered to exist without a proper photograph of their person.

As I examine more imagery within the public sphere, Goldstein (2007, 64) poses two questions to consider (if in fact we chose to accept that all photographs lie): "'How do they lie' followed by 'is this important to me, the viewer?'" These questions will serve us well as we consider the relationship between the media and the public and the discourse that transpires between them.

Photography in the Media, Military, Medicine, and Politics

Also holding that the notion of truth in photo is contestable, Lister (2009) recognized that the advent of digital replacements swapping pixels for paper has caused many to revisit the precarious idea of truth with renewed concern. In particular Lister describes the somewhat Orwellian fears of scholars such as Ritchen, who see the tremendous increases in digital manipulations now possible as creating an ethical dilemma for those in photojournalism. This is in stark contrast to what was perceived as the checks and balances imposed by the limited alterations possible in traditional processes (Lister 2009). Still, due to the aforementioned power of the photographic image to instill realism, we have come to trust institutionalized imagery produced by journalists, governments, and health care professionals often without question. However as the following examples reveal, some of the most common, taken for granted imagery, propound the most precarious truths.

In recent years corporations have become more and more concerned with their image and presence on social media; as such some have sought to portray themselves as so-called sounding boards for their consumers and the issues important to them. Dove's "Evolution" video in 2006

was the first of many attempts to show its consumers, predominantly women, that Dove is on the right side of history and that it too sees the unrealistic demands and hypocrisies placed on women. In order to showcase their new found enlightenment, they created an exposé of sorts that shows the sheer immensity of production that goes into creating a cover girl suitable for advertising. The video takes advantage of what Rose (2012) terms the *site of audiencing* and highlights not only the labours of makeup and hair but also reveals the physical alterations of the body, via Photoshop, to conform to an industry or societal standard that does not actually exist. Dove's message, "no wonder our idea of beauty is skewed," although revealing, becomes unravelled after closer scrutiny. This is due to the realization that Unilever, the parent company of Dove, also creates commercials for AXE Deodorant, which many women might describe as "schoolyard misogyny." This key piece of information exposes the true motive behind Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty." That is, simply, to push more bars of soap. This further illustrates the importance of critically analyzing not only the *site of the image itself* but also the motives of its makers or the *site of production* along with considerations of its *technological modalities* (Rose 2012).

Of course these sorts of ploys and manipulation are not limited solely to advertisements; they are the constant companion of celebrities as well. The covers of several popular women's magazine demonstrate that the consistency of truth is often viscous and malleable, as we witness Reese Witherspoon acquire a new chin in each appearance for three different magazine covers (Wilson 2009).

Figure 8: "Smile and Say 'No Photoshop'"
Source: Wilson 2009

Another example is that of Kate Winslet on the February 2003 cover of *GQ*, which decided Winslet's legs needed some thinning down, making them appear approximately two-thirds their original size. Winslet not only noticed the transformation but publicly called *GQ*'s retouching. She excessively stated that she was quite proud of her legs as they were, particularly since she had worked so hard to achieve them (BBC News 2003). However fast forward a decade when *Vogue*'s November 2013 cover erased fifteen years from Winslet's face and a similar reaction could not be found.

Figure 9: "Kate vs. Kate"
Source: Author's Own Composition

Still most people would say that searching for truth in these types of publications is a fool's errand at best. However, their influence and readership is a global phenomenon. It no doubt transfixes millions of young minds to shadow their prejudiced notions of beauty. However, this is not really anything new as Berger also noticed the disconnect between the pages of these magazines and daily life. He noted, "The contrast between publicity's interpretation of the world and the world's actual condition is a very stark one, and this sometimes becomes evident in the colour magazines which deal with news stories" (Berger 1977, 151).

However most would not expect to find these genera of manipulation within the respected news media of *Time* magazine and *The LA Times*. In 1994 OJ Simpson was arrested for the murder of his ex-wife and her lover. The subsequent mug shot was then published simultaneously by both *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines. Critics were quick to point out one glaring alteration of Simpson, who appears in the shadows, being a much darker one on the cover of *Time*, a seemingly deliberate attempt at demonization to make him appear more sinister.

Figure 10: "Side-by-Side Comparison of *Newsweek* and *Time* Magazine Covers"
Sources: Newsweek and Time

Time's editor, J. R. Gaines, was forced to respond to the growing public outrage. He posted a missive on an AOL message board stating that the image was handed over to a graphic designer who was given artistic licence to create a more iconographic cover photo worthy of the prestigious top spot (Carmody 1994). Gaines even went so far as to state that people equating

blacker with more sinister were the ones who were racist (Carmody 1994). Still one wonders if America would have noticed at all had *Newsweek* not chosen to simply print the raw image provided by the LA county police. Sometime later and across the ocean the same darkening tactics were employed by the British Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The EHRC hired a mobile billboard displaying an unknown black man's face peering out from the shadows, accompanied by a caption that read "Scared?" in huge red letters with smaller white letters below it reading "You should be. He's a dentist" (EHRC 2009). The mobile billboard campaign was called "Who Do You See?" with the agency playing upon the same notions of racial bias, among other stereotypes.

Figure 11: "Scared?"
Source: EHRC 2009

Dramatic changes in the interpretation of an image can also occur with just a few small modifications in the positioning of the people, as in the case of the *LA Times* photographer, Brian Walski. Walski took two separate frames both with figures in dramatic positions but ones that were not directly interacting with each other, then combined them into a composite image where they seemingly did, drastically altering how viewers would perceive the context. As Van Riper notes, this was not a mistake of pressing the wrong button or submitting the wrong image in haste: "He had to consciously manipulate his two digital pictures in Photoshop—an action requiring both skill and intent. He had to create the separate, faked, image, and—again with intent—transmit it to his editors, saying nothing about the alteration" (Van Riper 2003, 1).

Figure 12: "Basra, Iraqi," Original Images Top, Composite Image Bottom
Source: Brian Walski, LA Times, 2003

In an attempt to make an ethical parallel between writing and photography Van Riper states that "news photos are the equivalent of direct quotations and therefore are sacrosanct" (Van Riper 2003, 3). This harkens us back to an old debate among photographers on the ethics of cropping and the "Gedanken Experiment." In this study, cameras of all formats were set up at equal focal points and distances to capture an event from all common perspectives, then the best composition was chosen, questioning if the final selective action is in fact still a form of cropping (Goldstein 2007). Van Riper further claims that a photograph may be altered in terms of its lighting (which puts him in company with *Time*) or composition, but not in terms of the elements contained within the frame. Again he states that this type of alteration is like changing key words in a quote (Van Riper 2003). However as most academics and writers know they are able to preference the quotes that best support their arguments and although they dare not change key words, one may break up a quote into parts or omit portions one deems irrelevant, as Van Riper does just a few paragraphs later when quoting Pete Souza (Van Riper 2003).

So should one have to include all the contextual sentences preceding and following such a quote? Few would make such a claim. Much like the quote the single photographic frame is what we choose from a series of contextual segments to illuminate a narrative. This is what lies at the heart of the Walski incident. Still Van Riper continues to attest to his familiarity with photography. He relates an anecdote from a photographer at the *Washington Times* who told him that the computers outside their darkroom had a stark warning posted on them which read, "If you can't do it in the darkroom, don't do it here" (Van Riper 2003, p3). A sign that may well have delighted someone like Rejlander, knowing full well the capabilities of darkroom manipulation. Still these are standards entrenched and applied within news agencies and their direct subordinates. However, as Souza points out, "A staffer may be obligated in [adhering] to a certain ethics policy but what about a freelancer?" (Van Riper 2003, 4).

In Walski's case his intent was clear, to move those two figures was to manufacture a much more dynamic and dramatized version of events, something that Goldstein would claim constitutes a deliberate deception of the audience. Goldstein highlights an ad-hoc formula for questioning this type of image, citing past examples of civil war corpses being rearranged and the famous Iwo Jima flag raising. He states that it ultimately comes down to the "photographer's intent, the viewer's interpretation of that intent, and the viewer's reaction to any discrepancies between the two" (Goldstein 2007, 76). This statement is further supported by Bardis (2004, 215) who states, "For it seems that our confidence or fragile trust in photographs is contingent not on how they are actually made, but on the basis of what reasons they are made for." In Walski's case it seems he erred in his judgment of the complicity of his audience, or at least the online photographic community's ability to spot a fraud, in his case neither the discrepancy nor his reasoning could be rectified.

Relying on a freelancer's judgement evokes a similar incident that occurred just a few years later in the same region, illustrating that perhaps concerns with truth in journalism are fleeting and easily forgotten, particularly in these areas of volatility. During the bombing of Lebanon in 2006, Reuters published photos from Aman Hajj in which he attempted to manipulate smoke to make it appear denser as it billowed from buildings downtown; again the intent is painfully clear. Although looking at his doctored image one wonders how he even came to be at the service of Reuters given his retched use of Photoshop's iconic *clone tool* which left its trademark amateurish swirls throughout the *enhanced* clouds of smoke. Even more puzzling is how this image passed editorial muster and was only revealed to be a fake upon notification by bloggers (Day 2006). Reuters, endeavouring to quell this folly, blamed their editorial oversight on a plethora of images from that conflict. A note posted by Schlesinger on the Editors Blog of reuters.com read, "Experienced photo editors and other senior editorial staff went through thousands of images published during the Lebanon conflict" (Holmes 2007, para. 5). Today with the advent of social media and smart phones adding exponentially to the repository and

circulation of world imagery, one wonders how these editors can possibly cope with the volume when in calmer times a blatant fraud slipped right through their fingers.

Perhaps an even more egregious example, at least to those in the photographic community, is the manipulation case of legendary publisher *National Geographic*. *National Geographic* is widely considered one of the foremost purveyors of images of society, culture, and the natural world, instep with photography since the very beginning. Many have looked to *National Geographic*'s pages for a truthful account of the world for generations. However, instead of delivering that account Lutz and Collins (1993) discovered that the magazine has been more of a gentrified lens of the Western gaze, showcasing and confirming those ideals of the world abroad already held by its viewers. As noted by Rose in her analysis of Lutz and Collins' methodology, *National Geographic* was/is driven by the geo-political interests of its readership and did not give proportional representation to the world portrayed within its covers (Rose 2012). Still supplanting this perspective is an even more disturbing incident on their February 1982 cover of the Egyptian Pyramids of Giza. *National Geographic* was caught in a scandal and revealed it doctored the cover, squeezing the pyramids together in an unnatural perspective impossibly seen with lens or eye (Elgar 2004). And not only were these massive monoliths skewed but the seemingly natural procession of camels and riders traipsing along in front of them was also exposed to be set up, the people having been paid to divert their trek.

Figure 13: "Pyramids"
Source: National Geographic *(1982)*

As Elgar (2004) found out when conducting a study on the ethics of photo manipulation, the degree to which manipulation is accepted varies widely depending on the type of media and country. He stated, "These differences could be traced to different media cultures, educational training of photographers and their managers, and to historical ideas of truth in photography" (Elgar 2004, 22). The study questioned photographers in Australia, Europe, and the United States, basically asking "How much is too much?" and it, along with the examples above, leaves us with little veracity to bestow upon any imaging institutions from the lowly to the revered or cultured, but can the same be said of science?

As we delve more deeply, these issues are not just on the ground but overhead as Gladwell describes in his article "The Picture Problem." Fighter pilots armed with the most sophisticated imaging devices, well beyond even high-end professional cameras' capabilities, can deliver four mile swathes of reliable imagery from the ground to a cockpit 20,000 feet above. Nevertheless the results must be interpreted by a single human being and within a few moments' notice (Gladwell 2004). Gladwell (2004) states that this discrepancy was the conclusion of the scud hunt during the first Iraq conflict. For even amid the bastions of the military, the scientific community and its ostensible objectivity, there exist identical issues of deciphering truth.

Similar visual challenges are also faced in the health sciences and are none more apparent than in the practice of mammography. A process riddled with an intricate series of judgments made, accepted, repealed, and made again, usually by a single person. As Gladwell (2004) recounts the dizzying array of criteria that radiologist David Dershaw describes, reading a

mammogram seems about as straightforward as spotting lactose in a glass of milk with the naked eye. Gladwell proceeds to detail an account of how three radiologists were asked to decipher 150 mammograms (27 cancerous/123 healthy), with the outcome being that one person caught 87 percent of the cancerous imagery, while another only 37 percent, and the third contradictorily labelling 78 percent as suspicious (Gladwell 2004). To further contextualize this we only need look at recent reports out of Quebec where a radiologist missed 109 breast cancer diagnoses, meaning many women did not get the proper treatment and thousands of mammograms had to be redone, leaving many healthy women and cancer survivors with considerable anxiety (Levesque 2012).

Quite recently, even when a photograph is portraying ostensibly objective events, such as the size of a crowd, its authenticity is called into question simply by denial. In January 2017 press secretary for current President Trump, Sean Spicer, vehemently disputed numerous media reports that commented on the obvious size discrepancy between Trump's (Figure 14, left) and former President Obama's (Figure 14, right) inauguration crowds.

Figure 14: "Crowd Controversy: The Making of an Inauguration Day Photo"
Source: REUTERS: Lucas Jackson (L), Stelios Varias/File Photo

Spicer claimed that not only was Trump's crowd larger, but it was also the largest inauguration crowd in history, "period." This statement later led Kelly-Ann Conway (Trump's advisor) to defend Spicer, claiming he was simply presenting "alternative facts," leaving the media and general public mind boggled and conjuring up Margitte's "Treachery of Images" (a pipe that was not a pipe). Far from a subjective misinterpretation of the images or claims of photo-manipulation, these statements were direct attacks on the notion of truth itself, reminiscent of dictatorial mantras, and Orwellian doublespeak. Leaving us to question, are we now entering a post-truth era?

Creativity and Manipulation

Transitioning into the fine arts we find manipulation flourishing along with appropriation and intentional deception. These are all techniques employed by artists to reach a desired effect, elicit emotion, and provoke interrogation or thoughtful reflection.

In works of Martha Rosler we can see pre-/post-Photoshop manipulation of photos using montage. Rosler uses these obviously artificial images to draw attention to issues of the everyday lived experiences of women manifested in domestic sites such as the kitchen, TV set, and living room. Photos from her "Cargo Culture" and "House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home" (analog and digital) series display a commoditization of women in the '60s and '70s, as well as being critical of the wars then and now. In addition to her social critiques, her unabashed use of

montage seems to suggest that photographs are incapable of telling the truth. She states that viewers "accept what they see and don't think about its precise relation to fact; it's their working hypothesis, and the boundaries of its fictionality remain vague until questioned" (Rosler and Weinstock 1981, 79).

The degree to which the average individual questions imagery is relatively unknown and highly subjective leaving us vulnerable to falsely accept that which is designed to deceive. "Contrary to what is suggested by the humanist claims made for photography, the camera's ability to transform reality into something beautiful derives from its relative weakness as a means of conveying truth" (Sontag 1977, 59). While much of this beauty results from our daily lives and the natural world, there are those who seek to render it from their imaginations.

Gregory Crewdson is another photographer who makes no claims on truth through his real life tableaus. They display eerie parallel worlds, spectacularly and surreally rendered scenes and landscapes that appear as realistic as they are alien. In these bizarre, breathtakingly and seamlessly manufactured moments, Crewdson says he creates an atmosphere of fear, anxiety, and isolation in "Anytown" USA (Harris n.d.). Through the combination of a long-term relationship of twenty years with a small town in Massachusetts and the use of a sound stage, he carefully crafts these moments of utter astonishment that leave us trying to piece together a narrative.

Crewdson, not unlike Cartier-Bresson, remarks on how he appreciates that photography only allows just one moment to tell a narrative. However as Crewdson reveals the pre-/post-production behind these scenes, we see the labours of an entire team of designers, lighting technicians, location scouts, camera operators, cinematographers not to mention the aid of the local police, fire department, and local citizens who play the roles of actors in these scenes. Even landscapers trim the hedges and clear unwanted debris from the shots; singular images are now discovered to be more film stills than photographs. As for Crewdson's role in all this? He claims the ideas come to him while he swims and that he intentionally blurs reality with fiction, charging physical scenes with psychological perturbation (Harris n.d.). The fact that he never presses the shutter has probably raised the dander of more than one photo-blogger online. Again this leaves us to question the truth, as tenuous as it may be, conveyed in these photographs and the methodology of their creator, who might be likened more to that of a producer than a photographer. Yet it is hard to deny the impact he achieves with his images.

Moving further from the truth there are those who create photographs that merge multiple realities into a single plausible fantasy "where you will need a brief moment to think to figure out the trick" (Johansson 2011, 0:57). Johansson, hailing from Rejlander's homeland of Sweden, may also be the great compositors closest contemporary, evidenced as he takes us through his process of bringing his ideas into quasi-reality by combining photos of everyday scenes and objects he shoots to create some fantastic illusions. Once again our notions of pictorial representation and perspective are tested, which begs us to consider Mitchell's (1984) statement on our vision being as much a product of our experiences and cultural milieus as it is a physiological process.

Figure 15: "Iron Man"
Source: Erik Johansson (2008) (http://www.erikjohanssonphoto.com)

Even further astray from Rosler's social commentary and Crewdson's ostensibly calamitous scenes Sasha Goldberger asks the hard questions: "What if Superman was born in the sixteenth century? And what if the Hulk was a Duke? How might Van Eyck have portrayed Snow White?" (Goldberger 2006). In his latest series of portraits Goldberger enlivens his childhood by reimagining his favourite heroes and heroines from comics, science fiction, and fairy tales and dressing them in full seventeenth-century style garb. Executed over a period of two years and involving 110 people (Goldberger, personal communication), the series displays both a priceless sense of humour and sombre dignification deserving of homage to Van Eyck. The portraits are exquisitely composed and detailed, through painstaking pre- and post-production, Goldberger demonstrating the possibilities that lie within thoughtful, explorative, and witty manipulation.

Figure 16: Screenshot of "Super Flemish"
Source: Sacha Goldberger (2014) (sachagoldberger.com)

Along the same playful lines but decades earlier is a superb and comical nude by Jean Paul Goude titled "Champagne Incident" (1976). At first glance it seems like a fairly straight forward image until you consider the physics. The explosive foam from the champagne, arching over the model, was actually painted on well before digital imaging came along. Goude was considered an innovator in retouching, pre-Photoshop, with many today trying to re-create his compositions and the perilous poses struck by his former model and lover Grace Jones (Pasori 2014). Recently he remade "Champagne Incident" with Kim Kardashian as the model causing a stir over the enhancement of her infamous derriere and prompting numerous parodies with side-by-side comparisons.

Using deceit as his vehicle and critical awareness as his motive, artist or rather activist (as he prefers to be called) Joan Fontcuberta truly relishes pulling the wool over our eyes (Jeffries 2014). Fontcuberta takes manipulation and truth to an extreme, where there is no bending or embellishing, no gray area, just fabrication, of history, anthropology, zoology, and theology with the hopes that it can provoke the viewer into a state of critical consciousness, to question even the staunchest authorities (Jeffries 2014). He invents new animals like monkeys with wings, or fakes discoveries of merman at an historical site, and implants himself in brazen Hitchcockian cameos throughout this works. Fontcuberta's view on his work in relation to the veracity of photography and other media is that it is a "pedagogy of doubt, protecting us from the disease of manipulation. We want to believe. Believing is more comfortable because unbelieving implies effort, confrontation. We passively receive a lot of information from TV, the media and the internet because we are reluctant to expend the energy needed to be skeptical" (Jefferies 2014, para. 9).

Putting aside how much manipulation has been done to a particular photograph, there are simpler ways in which artists and photographers can skew the interpretation of their images. In terms of my own photography practice even those photos that I strive to represent as closely as possible to what was seen can be manipulated with misleading captions, titles, text, or orientation. Abstraction can take on a multitude of meanings, which is why the works are always "Untitled," allowing viewers to bring their own truths and narratives to the images. However, it

is easily demonstrated how even a simple one-word title coupled with a shift in orientation can alter one's perspective by viewing the example below.
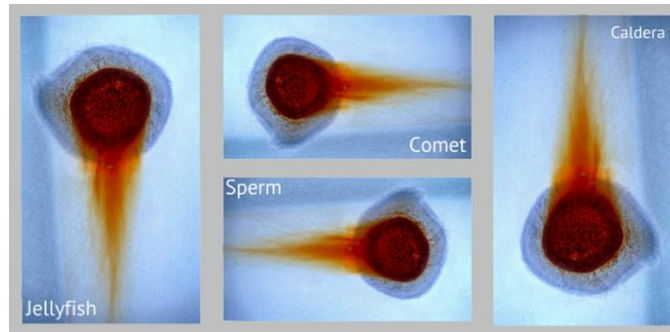

Figure 17: Titling the "Untitled"
Source: Author's Own Composition (www.untitledartist.com)

Sontag touches on this notion of captioning referencing a letter from Godard and Gormin to Jane Fonda during the Vietnam War that claims, "This photograph, like any photograph is physically mute. It talks through the mouth of the text written beneath it" (Sontag 1977, 58). Sontag concedes that captions habitually overrun our physical perceptions but, she claims, cannot irrevocably change or protect an image's meaning. However, Bardis asserts that the "opportunity to experience even the most faithful of photographs has been whilst it is embedded in layers of accentuating graphics and explanatory or even misleading text" (Bardis 2004, 215). Sontag maintains that even accurate captions are merely one person's insight, likening the ability to caption to that of trying on gloves, easy to slip in and out of (Sontag 1977). This is further supported by Jackson (2009) who notes the ongoing tensions between images and words that influence our perception and interpretation of them. Of course the fine arts often take a more pluralistic approach to meaning but it does remind us of the media and *Time* magazine's "American Tragedy" cover. The text juxtaposed against the sinister darkening already passing judgement and perhaps encouraging others to do the same.

From the sociopolitical and brooding cinematic landscapes to the imaginary, whimsical, and hilarious, the artistic side of photography shows a complex multifaceted side of truth and proposes that certain truths can only be unveiled through careful and creative manipulation.

Implications

From its onset the photograph has been noted as providing a valuable and increasingly more egalitarian format for not only entertainment but also education. Photographs are used for archives, anthropology, geography, and cultural knowledge as well as an ability to assess those previously fleeting moments, qualities, and emotions that lacked an observable physicality (Schwartz 2000).

Apart from adopting digitization the photograph is still the result of a mechanism, microchips supplanted gears, darkrooms swapped for computers, and prints with LED screens. However, the latest manifestations of this mechanical process do seem to provide more opportunities, from start to finish, for control of the resulting image. Still the greatest transformation for photography lies not in the shift in technologies and the ability to manipulate but in the general public's ability to access image capturing devices and manipulation practices, simultaneously, practices that were once reserved for professionals and editors in backrooms. Powerful pocket-sized cell phone cameras have now surpassed the old standard SLR, and the ease of free apps render customary editing techniques somewhat infantile in comparison.

Knochel (2013) takes advantage of these transformations and new technologies through the use of image tagging and online photo databases such as Flickr. He states, "It is not enough to deconstruct the latest action movie or develop an analysis of a contemporary artist's work if these activities are devoid of engaging the performances of everyday imaging and playing in the photostreams of participatory culture" (Knochel 2013, 10). He saw an opportunity for not only the practice of looking but the refining of critical thinking through exploration of themes and topics that parallel visual culture and students' lived experiences, an observation about Flickr also noted by Jackson (2009).

As Newbury claims, photography provides a "means of knowing the world; it makes the world present to the viewer in ways that are as fascinating as they are problematic" (Newbury 2009, 117). He also impresses on us that photographic education cannot be merely about the consumption of images and that it must also include their production. Jackson also acknowledges that engagement in photographic production is directly linked to how a student interprets it: "The subsequent knowledge base that the student brings to the classroom, therefore, is inextricably linked with what the student is currently doing with the photograph beyond it" (Newbury 2009, 169).

This is precisely what Herne capitalized on with his primary school students. Through the use of scanners and photo-editing software, Herne, along with artist Laurie Long, helped his primary students not only learn the use of new technologies but claims the process allowed them to construct identity and understand the identities of others through shared personal experience and popular culture (Herne 2005). Through Herne's postcard construction project students digitized their own photos, scanned, edited, and added captions as an extra layer of meaning (Herne 2005). He concluded that the use of technology, photography, and manipulation fosters both visual and media literacy as well as aiding the construction of meaning through student's own lived experience.

Along a similar vein Chung (2005) and her cigarette ad deconstruction project provides us with another example of how we can critically examine advertisements and unearth the overt and hidden meanings within. Through her projects with students she suggests activist art as a method for contextualizing and examining imagery from popular culture. She states that it, "like commercial advertising, recognizes the power of mass media in contemporary society and the ways in which images and language from television, films, the Internet, newspapers, and magazines serve as key conduits through which modern citizens learn about the world" (Chung 2005, 21). Chung's students first analyzed cigarette ads without initially being told what the images were. Then after deeper interrogation the students redesigned the ads using Photoshop to underscore their mimetic discoveries. By doing so the students were able to sharpen their critical eye and better understand the understated demands, truths, and messages commonly conveyed in those types of ads.

Another example, although not specific to the classroom, is the use of photography for community and social acclimation, exploration, and action. Known as "photovoice" or "photo-elicitation," this action research method asks its participants to document or represent daily life, or specific aspects of it, through photographs to explore issues of gender, health, identity, immigration, etc. Today, it has become a common practice in many community-based programs (Sutton-Brown 2014). Sutton-Brown describes photovoice as a "means to generate new insights into our socially constructed realities and cultures. It oscillates between private and public worlds in its attempt to publicize and politicize personal struggle via photography, narratives, critical dialogue, and social action" (Sutton-Brown 2014, 170). A cursory online search reveals that this technique has and is being employed in large urban centers across multiple countries in a diversity of community, academic, and educational settings.

A rather famous international example is that of "Born into Brothels" (2004), a photovoice project initiated by Zana Briski who ventured into a Calcutta red-light district providing cameras and lessons to the children of prostitutes. In the short term the project revealed the lived

experiences of kids immersed in the brothel business showcasing innocent, unique, and intelligent perspectives that few would have given any credence to, shattering our preconceived truths of their reality. In the long term it has proved to have been an empowering and transformative experience for the children, as more than eight years later the oldest find themselves in college and more legitimate careers and younger ones still pursuing education (Kids with Cameras 2010). This is in stark contrast to the inevitable expectations of taking up the trades of the brothel. Photovoice prompts an examination of personal truth, promotes a critical eye and critical reflection, and can serve as a catalyst for social change.

Although there exist numerous other examples of how photography provides a vessel for the exploration of truth, the examples discussed here evidence the potential for photography's success. However this is only if photography and visual culture are granted inclusion in cross-disciplinary education, both formal and informal, where text is currently the primary means of exploring the world and conveying its own truth.

Conclusion

Regardless of its quality, format, and intent or whether or not one has the interest, time, or fortitude for its study matters little, since our daily lives are inexorably mired within its rectangular frame. How does that frame shape and inform our lives, identity, and notions of truth? To what, or whose, standard of truth should we hold contemporary photography? How often are we led and misled by its contents, moved falsely by its character, or asked to judge without context?

Is the camera as Sontag (1977) suggested a machine with the ability to uncover hidden truths? Is it also doomed to fail at such endeavours due to our inability to separate or somehow balance aesthetics and personal bias? Sontag acknowledges this duality of the photo as a clash between fine arts' aesthetics versus idealized truth-telling popularized by journalism. She regarded photography as a predatory force of sorts, a violator of the private sphere, showing us as we have never been able to see ourselves. She claimed that there is a "shady commerce between art and truth" and that despite the photographer's preoccupation with "mirroring reality" he or she is still driven by "tacit imperatives of taste and conscience" (Sontag 1977, 7). How does an adult, let alone a young child, complicit in and coerced by photography's power and ability to reflect life as we know it, make sense of this cacophony of complex and oppositional perspectives on truth?

Yet despite these paradoxes one often assumes fidelity when approaching an analog image and duplicity when viewing a digital one, falsely associating the "former with the 'straight' image and the latter with the 'synthetic' or manipulated image" (Bardis 2004, 215). In fact, as evidenced in numerous examples presented here, both represent two parallel forms of image-making, their practices intertwined and contemporary digital almost indistinguishable from Rejlander's analog masterpiece. Our perceived distinction between digital and traditional photography dissolves in their means to an end (Manovich 2002) but what end is this, belief? Barthes (1981, 77) remarked, "I had identified truth and reality in a unique emotion, in which I henceforth placed the nature-the genius-of Photography, since no painted portrait, supposing that it seemed 'true' to me, could compel me to believe its referent had really existed." So powerful and persuasive in its ability to instill our belief in these referents, photography continues to reinforce and inform much of our visual consumption and literacy, or lack thereof. As Benjamin so insightfully wrote eighty years ago, asking for an "authentic print" makes as little sense now as it did then, as printing mechanisms allow for enhancements beyond that which we are capable of viewing with the naked eye (Benjamin 1936, IV).

To compound things even further Grundberg (2008) argues that even a very literate consumer of photography can only speculate as to the facts a particular image appears to express. He states that if even today with our knowledge of technology and its capabilities we still

obscure images and truth yet continue to demand that photographs deliver impartial accounts of our world, knowing full well that their interpretations are subject to the individual and their culture, then we must forgive Photoshop and "at least acknowledge that the fault is not in whatever optical prosthetics we devise but in our own, always human mind's eye" (Grundberg 2008, 133).

Ultimately we are inundated with less confidence, more incredulity, and more questions than answers when contemplating truth and the veracity of the photographic image in contemporary society. If you have arrived at this rather interesting and thought-provoking juncture, then good. Perhaps the only truthful way of knowing is, as some have suggested, by doing, so stop worrying and press the shutter.

Acknowledgement

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