

Image manipulation

Image manipulation is the art of modifying and changing an image for different purposes using various methods. After alteration, the intention is typically that it is hard to tell that the image is edited and not real.

Nowadays we do not believe that photos can show only reality, but at the very beginning, when photography was a very new thing, people believed that a photo cannot lie and is the absolute truth.

Soon after 1826, when the very first photograph was taken, image manipulation began its history. Artists tried to make monochrome photographs more realistic by overpainting them.

The Swiss painter and printmaker Johann Baptist Isenring used a mixture of tree sap (Gum Arabic) and pigments to colour daguerreotypes (howold.co, n.d.) and the hand-colouring process was popular until the mid-20th century when coloured film was invented.



Figure 1 Photograph by Johann Baptist Isenring (1796-1860)

In the 1860s amateur photographer William H. Mumler was creating photographic negatives using a poorly cleaned recyclable glass plate and it resulted a double exposure. On the photograph could be seen a semi- transparent face, and this was possibly the beginning of spirit photography era. (Anon., 2016)

Gustave Le Gray believed that photography should be considered as art and his images were highly influential. (Adams, 2017) He had an extraordinary imagination for creating photographs. At a time when photographic emulsions were not equally sensitive to all colours of the spectrum, it was impossible to achieve a good exposure of both landscape and sky in a single picture. Emulsions were very sensitive to blue light, a little bit to green and even less sensitive to the red colour and the landscape had to be exposed for a long time, after which the sky would be solid white and overexposed. Le Gray solved this problem by printing two negatives on a single sheet of paper: one exposed for the sea, the other for the sky, and sometimes he took images at separate times and different places. (Barsness, 2020)



Figure 2 The Great Wave 1857 By Gustave Le Gray

Image manipulation has a long history in politics and propaganda as well. It was used to show leaders physical prowess, and good health, or simply to delete

unwanted persons, and those falling out of favour. This technique was used in many countries. (Delana, n.d.)



Figure 3 Nikolai Yezhov, was pictured right of Stalin but later, after Yezhov was executed he was removed from this photograph.

Staging photographs was the other method to make historical events look more dramatic, or to present a particular view of events. (militaryhistorynow, 2015)



Figure 4 This photograph was staged and later edited to carry out an order from on high to shoot a image symbolizing Soviet victory

In 1987 the first version of Adobe Photoshop was released, and the history of photographic manipulation was changed forever. Nowadays digital cameras and software are easily accessible for editing images and nobody looks at photography with complete trust anymore. There are many ways to manipulate images digitally, including editing light, colour, texture, proportions, adding or removing parts or combining multiple images.

Like every tool for image manipulation, Photoshop itself is not a good or bad influence on society. It completely depends on who uses it, and how it is used. Photoshop is very useful for product advertisements. It can make a product much more attractive and desirable than it is in real life. On the other hand, Photoshopped images have influenced society in a bad way; regularly seeing unrealistic photographs of celebrities with perfect bodies and skin can impact upon the mental health of people and make them think they must live up to these unrealistic standards. Teenagers are particularly susceptible to this, which is particularly worrying.

Even though newer image manipulation techniques such as Photoshop are available, older methods are still used for artistic purposes. The combination of photography and painting is used in some artist's work.



Figure 5 *Mr. Fox* by Valeria TrasaRichman-Abdou, 2017)

While in the past double exposure effects were very complicated and time-consuming to make, today with digital photography techniques and editing software, they are relatively simple to achieve.



Figure 6 Photograph by Brandon Kidwell (Barnes, 2016)

In advertising and much of social media nearly, every image is touched by editing software and sometimes it can cause ethical problems. In 2009 the Ralph Lauren Company manipulated an image of the famous model Countess Filippa Hamilton way too much. In a print advertisement, they edited her image in such a way that many felt she was unhealthily skinny looking.



Figure 7 On the right the unedited image of Hamilton and on the left, the edited image. (Czerminski, 2013)

If we go further into the social media age, we see that apps such as Face Tune have lowered the bar even further for anyone wishing to edit and present a better version of themselves for Internet consumption. Could the ability to edit oneself to fit a narrowly confined, societally defined beauty standard really be a slippery slope? (ROSS, 2018)

Conclusion

Image editing and manipulation has come a long way - from double exposures and painting on photographs, via removing undesirable people from history to the one-

click beautified selfie. And at each step it seems as though some trust in the image we see presented to us is diminished further. People can present an image of themselves that does not match up to the reality, but where does that end? Only time and technology will give a full answer to that question, but one thing is for sure – whatever the image we are presented with, we need to question it.

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