Visual Truth in the Post-photographic Era

DMA 105, Introduction to Computer Art
“Enhanced? Or fake? Today the very idea of photographic veracity is being radically challenged by the technology of digital image manipulation and synthesis: photographs can be altered at will in ways that are virtually undetectable, and photorealistic synthesized images are becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish from actual photographs.”

William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye*
Joseph Stalin and Vladimir Lenin, photomontage, which was officially presented as a photograph, 1930s.
Since this is an outdoor daylight picture, the primary light source must be the sun. Look at the strong light on Stalin’s clothes and face. He was shot in bright sunlight coming from the front and to his left. Yet most of the light on Lenin comes from the opposite side, and it is considerably less strong.
Stalin’s chair has no background beneath it and fades away.
No shadows fall on the balustrade, nor does it have edges that suggest thickness.

Each man is looking at the cameraman, but that person is differently positioned for each of them.

Do photographs always tell the truth?
STAGING A PHOTOGRAPH

Alexander Gardner, “Slain Rebel Sharpshooter”, July 1863
Staging a photograph: the same body appear in two different photographs.
STAGING A PHOTOGRAPH

Alexander Gardner, “Fallen Sharpshooter,” 1863
Enhanced, Faked, Doctored?
FALSEHOODS AND FICTIONS

Suspicious provenance: a photograph that surfaced in July 1991 as “evidence” of the continued imprisonment of three lost fliers in Vietnam (Reuters/Bettmann) and the source image from which it was apparently produced – a 1923 photograph of three Soviet farmers.

FALSEHOODS AND FICTIONS

Mudslinging by photo manipulation: composite picture of Millard Tydings (right) and Earl Browder (left), 1951. AP/Wide World Photos. Cut-and-paste rearrangements of the elements of a photograph can transform one action pattern into another, and in so doing dramatically alter the image’s meaning – our understanding of what the protagonists are doing.
How do false evidence, fabrications produced to deceive trade on the photograph’s privileged connection to reality?
Collage can destroy the photograph’s strict Aristotelian unities of place and time: Louis Armstrong (filmed in High Society) meets Elton John in a 1991 Diet Coke commercial. © 1992 Turner Entertainment Co. All rights reserved. © 1991 The Coca-Cola Company.

A counterfactual conditional “photograph”: If Groucho and Rambo had been at Yalta. Paul Higdon/NYT Pictures.
Astronaut Edwin F. Aldrin, Jr., on the moon, July 20, 1969. Courtesy NASA.

Seven astronauts on the moon. Manipulated image created by MarLo Bailey on the Quantel Graphic Paintbox at HBO Studio Productions, New York, New York, for *Time* magazine special Issue “150 Years of Photojournalism.” Original photography supplied by NASA.
How are photographs’ implicit truth claims subverted by digital imaging today?
Classical details are removed from pictures of grain elevators in Montreal (top) and Buenos Aires (bottom) in Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture*, 1923. The unmanipulated originals were published by Walter Gropius in the *Jahrbuch des Deutchen Werkbundes*, 1913.
ERASURE

Selective removal of the politically inconvenient: Leon Trotsky erased from a photograph of Lenin addressing a crowd on May 5, 1920 in Moscow, Russia.
Two undated photographs of Voroshilov, Molotov and Stalin, with Nikolai Yezhov, commissar of water transport, in the picture and deleted. He was shot in 1940.
ERASURE

Aziz + Cucher, “Chris,” 1994

WORK, http://www.vwork.com/?m=200612
ERASURE

Aziz + Cucher, “Maria,” 1994

New Media Art, http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/maria/
ERASURE

V.A. Serov, “Lenin provozglashaet Sovetskuyu Vlast’”

Yevgeniy Fiks, “Leniniana no. 5, after V.A. Serov, “Lenin provozglashaet Sovetskuyu Vlast’”
ERASURE

V.A. Serov, “Khodoki u Lenina”

Yevgeniy Fiks, “Leniniana no. 7, after V.A. Serov, “Khodoki u Lenina”
ERASURE

Aleksander Gerasimov, “V.I. Lenin on the Tribune”

Yevgeniy Fiks, “Leniniana no. 1, after Aleksander Gerasimov, “V.I. Lenin on the Tribune”
Additional Resources:

Theory book related to this PowerPoint:

Photoshop techniques book related to this PowerPoint:

Link to the website of artist Jeffery Becton, who utilized digital montage in his work:
http://www.jefferybecton.com/
EXERCISE: Please find on the Internet examples of images that use the method of addition and/or erasure to change a meaning of a photograph.
References:

