



THE CAMERA DOESN'T LIE (AND PIGS CAN FLY)

In February this year fifteen directors of photography from newspapers and magazines from all over the USA gathered to discuss the crisis during an intensive seminar at the highly respected Poynter Institute for Media Studies in Florida.

The seminar looked at how the new techniques of digital photography and manipulation presented new ethical choices for the professional journalist.

And they were dismayed at the amount of manipulation that has been appearing more and more in the magazine and tabloid world in the US.

The justification for the manipulation, mostly on the covers of these publications, has been that they are using DM as "illustrations".

DM here should be identified as the new style of altering an image in terms of its colour saturation, contrast and of special interest here - removing offending telephone poles out of the picture, etc.

Picture several photojournalists jockeying for a decent pic of Winnie Mandela again! And one or two of the pixmen don't crack the code and get appalling pictures. Their pix editors use Photoshop to increase the colour of one of the new images and brighten the contrast.

Deadline hour speeds nearer and nearer - but Winnie's face is partly obscured by the brim of her vast hat.

No problem! The picture desk imports another image, places it under the hat and deletes the first image.

Hey presto, Winnie in two places at once! It is, of course, a complete misrepresentation of the truth.

The rules are bent a "little" but DM is supposedly justified by deadlines and the pressure of competition.

Humour me a little more in this scenario. After the use of the Winnie image, not too many readers complained. And slowly the use of manipulation programmes grows in that newsroom - not just the standard burning, dodging and cropping as in the wet darkroom, but much, much more.

How much further will the newsroom go under enormous pressure?

Take the well-known photograph of the AWB men lying near their car, one dead, one injured, one surrendering. "Let's move them closer together - the page can only take a three-column today, but we can run a deeper pic," the picture editor says. Using Photoshop, you move the figures around and rebuild the background. You can even add people, change their expressions!

It is shortsighted to say that only the tabloid or yellow press will use digital manipulation. Great magazines like Time and National Geographic, and several major, highly respected newspapers in the USA are using DM regularly.

A new "seamless reality" has evolved with the latest digital technol-

ogy. Fictitious, yes, but almost impossible to tell that it is a fake.

The groups were appalled at one of the first major DMs of its kind to appear in the National Geographic, who had used the technology to "move" the Egyptian pyramids closer together for their now-infamous cover.

There was further dismay at the colour manipulation in the OJ Simpson covers on Time and Newsweek, where OJ had been "made" blacker.

We were appalled at the Newsday cover featuring a seamlessly assembled photograph of Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan supposedly skating together.

American photojournalists are in danger of becoming "toothless". They are still taking great pictures, giving further meaning to life but are their images believable anymore? Which images are real or are all partially altered?

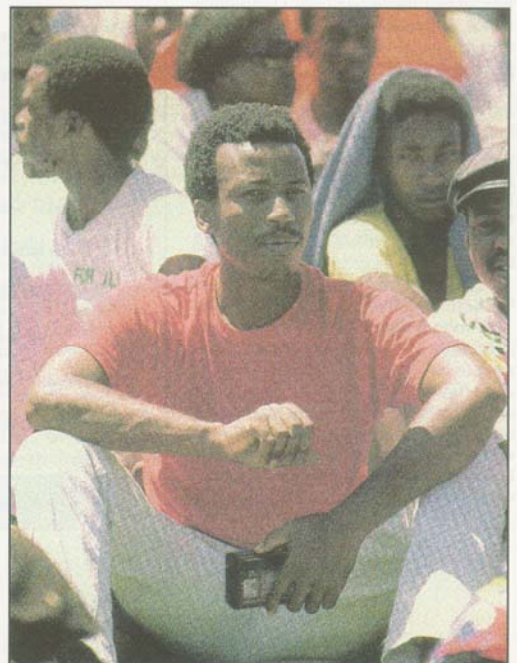
With more and more illustrative pix appearing daily, no image can be taken for granted. No image is immediately recognised as the truth. Photographs now can be freely dismantled and seamlessly reassembled via DM.

Computer packages and programme developments are partly "responsible" for this slicing away at the credibility of the already hard-pressed photographer.

The newsrooms of the United States are being haunted by the "new kid on the block," the crisis of digital manipulation that is changing the face of visual journalism in the United States.

By Montgomery Cooper

Swords into plough shears
Witness the subtle manipulation in this double image, where the submachine gun is turned into a tape recorder, the t-shirt slogan vanishes and the bent trigger finger is made user friendly.





Left:
Pact Ballet dancer Nigel Hannah as the "Ugly Sister" in the PACT version of Cinderella by Rodrigues.
Right:
Nigel "unmasked".

Original photograph by Montgomery Cooper.
Impressionist Image by Arti Paschedag

The Department of Journalism and Media Studies is currently working with several groups in Europe to resurrect an ethics databank. The bank, one of very few databanks of this nature anywhere in the world, will be operated and administered by the Department, in collaboration with Finnish experts. The bank will include an archive facility, a discussion group and advisory function. All submissions in the form of published articles, conference material, news updates etc are welcome. Those interested should contact Montgomery Cooper at the Department or on e-mail: Cooper@thoth.ru.ac.za

Many American photojournalists regularly use DM and I saw the ease with which some of them use this new tool. South African visual journalists and editorial hotshots are poised on the very precipice of the turmoil and ethical dilemmas caused by Photoshop and manipulation software packages.

Of course, manipulation in photography is not a new concept — black and white manipulation has been very visible for 100 years. W Eugene Smith was just one of the really great photographers who was brilliant at his superimposed images and manipulations.

And the techniques in the wet dark-room — cropping, burning, dodging — have been taken for granted for too long.

But with Quark and Photoshop how long will it be before the real content of the photograph is interfered with, either on the newsfloor or down in the computer centre?

So before it is too late, let us learn from our colleagues in the New World and set down a more focused ethical "skeleton" around the new rights given to Joe public and the media.

We need an updated code for the visual media, a new Ethical Code, built up, for example, from the Code of Ethics of the NPPAA (National Press Photographers of America Association) — tried and tested through their embryonic period with DM.

The proposed code should include the wealth of experience and knowledge from journalism practitioners and ethics experts worldwide.

We need an ethical code which will guide the photojournalist and journalists in moral decision-making on a daily basis.

A participant at Poynter, Geoff Forester, mentioned William Glaberson from the New York Times who, in an article on digital manipulation, asked: "If a news picture isn't true, then what about the words around them?"

Exactly. This powerful technology could affect the credibility of journalism.

Montgomery Cooper, Photojournalism lecturer in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, was awarded a Poynter Fellowship in Florida earlier this year.

"The only reason we're at the rock-face is to reach the top."



If we kept our noses to the grindstone, the grindstone is all we'd ever see.

Fortunately, Gencor attracts the kind of people who never take the short-sighted approach.

Our aim is real growth. For the people who work for us. For the world-class companies they have created. For the communities in which we operate.

Our long-term vision is to become one of the world's top resource companies, creating global opportunities for all those who want to climb with us.

