

A SOUTH AFRICAN CASE STUDY IN DIGITAL MANIPULATION

REVIEW touched on the problems of digital manipulation in a recent article by Montgomery Cooper quoting well-known overseas examples of pictures digitally doctored for greater effect or to fit the editor's most favoured format.

But even before Cooper's article, Cape Town newspaper photographers already had first hand experience of what it meant to drastically alter a news picture in a case that has since become known as "the lowering of the dove".

During Nelson Mandela's first public appearance on the balcony of the Cape Town City Hall after he was elected president on May 9, 1994, he released a white dove in front of a crowd of thousands assembled on the grand parade.

The significant moment was missed by most press photographers present as all of them were distracted by angry members of the crowd wanting to break down the VIP enclosure for a better view of the newly elected president.

The only South African photographer, as far as my knowledge goes, to get the shot was *Die Burger's* Henk Blom.

Blom, working with a 400mm lens, got two frames. One showed the dove just leaving Mandela's hands with a smiling Tutu (and security guards) looking on, while the second shows the bird about two metres above his head.

Blom remembers: "At the time there was a huge commotion going on at the back with the crowd wanting to break down the enclosure where we were sitting."

Most photographers had vantage points from scaffolding erected for the press and were able to shoot pictures of the angry crowd from above. Blom, sitting in front of the scaffolding, could not get to the crowd without abandoning his equipment, an extremely lucky coincidence, as it was during this commotion that Mandela released the dove.

As the batteries of his FM2 motor drive were almost flat, he got only two frames.

Nevertheless, he was quite happy with the results and offered the chief sub-editor both frames and suggested a horizontal cropping of the first as the main picture.

The next day a drastically altered picture was used on the paper's front page over three columns and about 30cm deep.

The picture showed the second frame with Mandela's hands in the air and the dove lowered by about a metre to appear just above the president's outstretched arms.

Ironically the headline read "Die nuwe era begin" (The dawn of a new era)—ironic as the use of this digitally manipulated picture was also the dawn of the comput-

er age and all its associated problems for South African press photographers.

Blom believes now, almost two years later, that the altered picture negatively influenced the impact of his own shot.

"Digital manipulation takes the control out of photographer's hands. The shot I gave them was good and usable, but by manipulating the second frame, they destroyed the first shot's impact.

"If a newspaper wants dramatic pictures, its photographers must go out and take them. The point is that when I released that shutter, the dove was not there."

Ebbe Domisse, the editor of *Die Burger*, also acknowledged the decision to lower the dove was not a good one.

"I immediately put out a staff bulletin at the time, saying that we should be very cautious about this kind of thing. I also gave instructions that whenever we change pictures, we should tell our readers that we have done it in the caption."

He says: "With the Mandela picture the argument was that at some or other stage the dove had been near Mandela's face. If the photographer had pushed the shutter half a second earlier he would have got the shot. "But the most important thing is credibility. We should tell readers if we tamper with images."

It is true, as both Blom and Domisse agree, that the unfamiliarity of the new technology and the fact that very few realise exactly what a powerful tool it is, are mitigating factors when criticising the dove incident.

The question, however, is where newspapers go from here.

Pieter Malan is a reporter with The Argus. He lectures photography at the journalism department of the University of Stellenbosch.

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President Mandela eenparig verkies

Parlementêre verkiesings... Die nuwe era begin met die verkiesing van Nelson Mandela as president van Suid-Afrika. Die ANC het 'n oorweldigende oorwinning behaal, met Mandela as die enigste kandidaat wat meer as 60% van die stemme verkry het. Die ANC se leier, Madiba, het 'n sterk posisie in die parlementêre proses verkry. Die nuwe regering sal 'n nuwe era van demokratiese regering begin. Die ANC se oorwinning is 'n teken van die volk se begeerte na verandering. Mandela se verkiesing is 'n historiese oomblik in die geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika. Die nuwe era begin met die verkiesing van Mandela as president. Die ANC se oorwinning is 'n teken van die volk se begeerte na verandering. Mandela se verkiesing is 'n historiese oomblik in die geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika.

Nelson slaap oor by Kobus Meiring

Die nuwe era begin met die verkiesing van Nelson Mandela as president. Die ANC se oorwinning is 'n teken van die volk se begeerte na verandering. Mandela se verkiesing is 'n historiese oomblik in die geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika.

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The lowering of the

BY PIETER MALAN

dove

The fourth-wave revolution which has now engulfed just about every major daily newspaper in the country has brought with it one of the biggest ethical dilemmas that editors, and especially picture editors, have had to grapple with in recent years.