Images and Ethics

Fake -vs- Inaccurate -vs- Altered

When discussing images and ethics, many questions tend to naturally arise:

• What constitutes an altered image? Are images that have been sharpened or had their levels naturally adjusted in the category of “altered” images? What about an image that has undergone red-eye removal?

• What makes something an inaccurate or a fake image? Are they the same things? Is there such a thing as a fake painting?
Legal -vs- Ethical -vs- Moral

What is the difference between something that is illegal and something that is unethical and somethings that is immoral?

Questions of legality and of ethics and of morality can each arise when taking a photograph, editing it, or publishing it.

Does it come down to questions along the lines of “Can you take the photo?” versus “Should you take the photo?” versus “Would you take the photo?”

Do fairies exist?

Consider the so-called “Cottingley Fairies” photographs circa 1917.

There were five such photographs taken by Elsie Wright (age 16) and Frances Griffiths (age 9).

The negatives were deemed unaltered by experts.

The photographers admitted decades later that the fairies were cutout drawings on cardboard…
Authenticity
In many contexts the question might be phrased as one of the image’s authenticity.
  – Photojournalism
  – Astrophotography
  – Wildlife/nature photography

Does wildlife need to be wild?
In the case of this prize-winning “wildlife” photograph, investigative minds looked for and found:
  – what is likely the wolf that was rented for the shoot
  – what is likely the park with these stones

*Is this photograph a fake?*
Tim the elephant’s ear looked wrong!


Instagram Photos

“If travel influencers were HONEST” by YouTube user Currently Hannah.

Warning: video has somewhat adult language and intentionally sexualized content for the point of satire: https://youtu.be/wnI8TA8XCt4
Two Telescopes, One Nebula

Each used “RGB” filters of different colors (wavelengths) and they got different results as a result… If the human eye’s cones were different, what we would see as color would be different. Would it make it fake?

Unflattering Photos…

If you take a photo of someone looking bored and alter it to make them look interested, is that unacceptable?

- What if you simply have actual photographs with both looks and choose to use one over the other?
- What’s the harm in each?

What about make-up, lighting, etc. done with the subjects of photos in real life versus done in editing?

- Who gets hurt in this case?
- [https://about-face.org/](https://about-face.org/)
“Live” Filters

While “live” filters such as ones the give you a dog’s nose or whiskers probably seem harmless (unless you are Pakistani politician Shaukat Ali Yousafzai and stream a press conference with the cat filter on https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48663289) what about more complex live filters, like if the Snapchat gender swap filter (https://youtu.be/mPKD_9XUOj8) were used on a livestream to deceptively change gender or age appearance of the person?

Satire -vs- News -vs- Commentary?

Photo illustration from the DC area “Snowzilla” in 2016:

Patrick Schneider (I)

After firing him, the Charlotte Observer released the following statement: “Photographer Patrick Schneider’s photo depicted a Charlotte firefighter on a ladder, silhouetted by the light of the early morning sun. In the original photo, the sky in the photo was brownish-gray. Enhanced with photo-editing software, the sky became a deep red and the sun took on a more distinct halo. The Observer’s photo policy states: No colors will be altered from the original scene photographed.”

Schneider’s claim was that he was just fixing a poorly exposed photograph.

He had previously been suspended for altering photos (three won press awards and were later revealed to have been altered).

Patrick Schneider (II)

What do you think in this case?

http://v1.zonezero.com/editorial/octubre03/images02.html
Patrick Schneider (III)

What do you think in this case?

Allan Detrich (I)

http://www.toledoblade.com/assets/pdf/TO16827415.PDF
Allan Detrich (II)

News -vs- Magazine?

https://nppa.org/news/1704
Magazine -vs- Magazine?

Documenting History: Migrant Mother
“Please note: a classified document seen in this photograph has been obscured.”
Documenting History: Situation Room

https://www.flickr.com/photos/obamawhitehouse/5680724572

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/10/jewish-paper-apologises-hillary-clinton

Arthur Rothstein: Have prop, will travel?

The photographer says he only moved the skull a few feet.
The image (especially the shadow) certainly is more dramatic this way.
The image became a part of a political scandal because it was taken for the Farm Security Administration and Democrats were being accused of making the conditions look worse than they were in order to help pass some controversial legislation.
Is deliberate “framing” potentially wrong?

http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil/TheRestOfTheStory/ContrivedDemoTwo.html

Positioning for a moment?

https://www.diyphotography.net/this-photo-wasnt-staged-wedding-photojournalism-or-photojournalism/
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Trigger Warning

The next few examples depict war, poverty, and death. The images are not what I would call graphic, but they depict tragic scenes and there is some dried blood in one.
Staged, posed, or natural for the photographers?

What about documenting tragedy…
This image won Paul Hansen the 2011 “International News Image” award at the Swedish Picture of the Year Awards.

Paul Hansen was not alone at this moment in Haiti.
Who moved her and the framed pictures?


What happened to the child next?
What about to the photographer?

http://100photos.time.com/photos/kevin-carter-starving-child-vulture
Some real examples of rules…

“No colors will be altered from the original scene photographed. This includes excessive changes in density and saturation levels.”

- Charlotte Observer Photo Correction/Editing Guidelines

“Resist being manipulated by staged photo opportunities.”

- NPAA Code of Ethics

“Do not distress wildlife or their habitat.”

- NANPA Principles of Ethical Field Practices

Staged Moments?

Photo by Evan Golub standing next to Vucci (different bill, same signing session).

AP Photo by Evan Vucci

Photo taken of an “unannounced” stroll to church.

Photo taken after photographer asked if they could take a photo of Bo coming back from a walk.
In-camera -vs- On-computer?

This division might become difficult to make as cameras have more and more powerful hardware and software in them.

Imagine if technology improved to the point that a lower resolution sensor could be put in a device and the device would “up-scale” internally to make pictures look like they were taken with a higher resolution camera.

deep-image.ai/application

What rules would you propose?
Some additional resources used:

https://photographingspace.com/ap-color/
http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/story?id=2244298
http://www.fourandsix.com/photo-tampering-history/?currentPage=6
http://aretsbild2011.se/?p=493
http://www.nppa.org/professional_development/business_practices/ethics.html