Photo Manipulation

Photo Manipulation is the act of changing a photograph or video to have a different appearance than it had in its original form. Sometimes, this is perfectly acceptable. Newspapers and magazines crop, enlarge, lighten, and darken photos as a regular professional practice. But if this kind of ‘altering’ of an image would change the public’s perception of “reality,” then we must question whether the manipulation is ethically acceptable.

Two scholars, Tom Wheeler and Tim Gleason, have developed a test for photo manipulation acceptability. Here it is:

The Wheeler-Gleason Test for Photo-Manipulation Acceptability

1. The viewfinder test.
   Is this what the photographer saw in the viewfinder?

2. The photo processing test.
   Are the changes routine, and not affecting overall content?
   (Cropping, color correction, sizing, etc.)

3. The technical credibility test.
   Is it obvious to anyone the photo has been altered, and that the change was made to enhance visual effect?
   (e.g., a flying s)

4. The clear implausibility test.
   Is the photographed image something that could not occur in reality?
   (e.g., a photo of the Eiffel Tower wearing a sombrero)

   A “news” photo image should be able to pass all four elements of the test.

   A “public relations” or “promotions” photo may not need to pass, however.

   Every situation is different.

Why is this all important for PR writers? Because you must think VISUALLY as well as linguistically as you create materials to promote ideas, people, and products.

If audience members feel “fooled” then you may have a PR problem on your hands!

Below are some examples of photo manipulation…

**Five presidents** at the Richard Nixon funeral in 1994 –
LEFT- The original view (position of the subjects when the photo was taken)
RIGHT- the “manipulated” result for Bob Woodward’s book

The former first ladies were digitally removed from the photo so that the photo would only show “Five Presidents.”
Making Light Of Katie Couric

CBS has not been shy about promoting its new “Evening News” anchorwoman, Katie Couric, a process that began in May when, though still working for NBC’s “Today” show, she made a surprise appearance at CBS’s annual presentation to advertisers, in which it promotes its fall lineup, this year at Carnegie Hall.

This month, however, CBS is showing off a new Katie Couric. As part of a cover story in its promotional magazine Watch, a picture of Ms. Couric taken at that event has been altered to give her a noticeably slimmer physique and fewer facial lines. (At right, before and after.)

Gil Schwartz, executive vice president for communications at the CBS Corporation and the editor in chief of the magazine, said in an interview Wednesday that he had seen the magazine and the photograph before publication but did not realize that the photo had been altered.

A story about the altered photo was first reported Tuesday by TVNewser.com.

“If I had been aware of it before publication, I would most certainly have reinstated the original picture,” Mr. Schwartz said. “Katie doesn’t need any improvement.”

In a statement, Ms. Couric said she preferred the first photograph “because there’s more of me to love.”

Last week, CBS and American Airlines announced that Watch, a quarterly publication with a distribution of 400,000, would be available on American flights in September, the month that Ms. Couric is scheduled to debut as anchor of the “CBS Evening News.” CBS also provides in-flight entertainment on American flights.

EDWARD WYATT
Martha Stewart Gets New Body In Newsweek

BY JONATHAN D. GLATER

Martha Stewart’s name may be enough to sell magazines, but Newsweek magazine apparently does not think her body is.

On its cover this week, Newsweek features what appears to be a photo of Ms. Stewart but is actually an image combining a photo of her face and one of a model’s body. The idea, an editor at the magazine said, was to portray Ms. Stewart as she may appear when she emerges from prison in a few days — slimmer and stronger than ever.

"The piece that we commissioned was intended to show Martha as she would be, not necessarily as she is," said Lynn Staley, assistant managing editor at Newsweek.

Ms. Staley, however, emphasized that a credit on Page 3 with the table of contents of the magazine made clear that the image on the cover was a composite.

"In this case, we identified this piece as a photo illustration," she said.

The article that accompanied the cover photo describes how shares in Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, have risen fourfold since she was sentenced last summer, and how Ms. Stewart has two television shows waiting for her when she emerges from a prison in West Virginia.

The modification of the photograph was first reported yesterday by USA Today.

"We haven’t had this particular cigar blow up in our face in the past," Ms. Staley said. "If there were people who were misled, that’s a problem."

Janice E. Castro, director of graduate journalism programs at Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, said the image did not look completely artificial and might be mistaken for an unmodified photo. That is cause for some concern, Ms. Castro said.

Martha Stewart’s face on a model’s body. No deception was intended, a Newsweek editor said.

"If the reader thinks it’s a news photo, an actual photograph, as opposed to a piece of art, then you should never change the truth of the photo," Ms. Castro said.

Ms. Staley agreed with that assessment, saying she wished that Newsweek had used an image so implausible that no reader could have concluded that it was a real photograph.

"I wish we had maybe been even less successful in conjuring up Martha," she said, "and maybe a little more over the top."

Ms. Castro said she did not think this kind of image manipulation amounted to a serious ethical lapse.

"They fumbled, they blurred, but this is not like misrepresenting the news," she said. "They just did a dumb thing."

Ms. Castro also distinguished between news publications and others, like fashion magazines, where manipulation of photos is more accepted practice (the actress Kate Winslet has periodically objected to airbrushing she has received at the hands of some magazines).

Ms. Castro recalled a weeklong online discussion at Time magazine, where she used to work, after it ran a photo of O. J. Simpson that had been darkened. "It was really a very exciting journalism experiment," she said.