

The Camera Never Lied?

185 Years of Photo Manipulation

Presented by

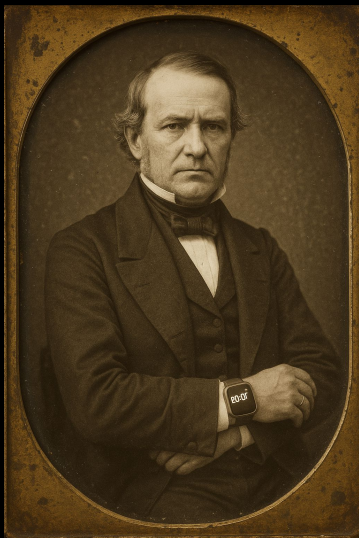
Luc Freiburg



200A | Fall 2025

Which one is the real image?

1



2



3





Content



"The camera never lies has always been photography's supreme fiction"

- Brian Winston, *The camera never lies: The partiality of photographic evidence*

1 1840–1900: The First Fakes



2 1860–1920: Spirit Photography



3 1920–1980: Propaganda



4 1910–1940: Artistic Manipulation



5 1982–2000: Digital Revolution



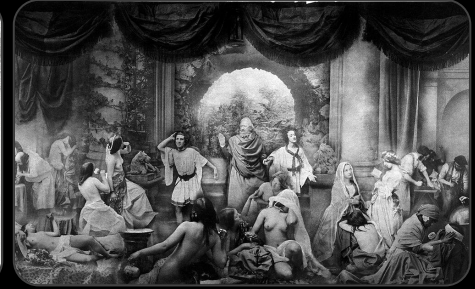
6 2014–Now: Deepfake Era



1840–1900: The First Fakes

Hippolyte Bayard (1840): *Self-Portrait as Drowned Man*

"The corpse which you see here is that of M. Bayard, inventor of the process that has just been shown to you. As far as I know this indefatigable experimenter has been occupied for about three years with his discovery."



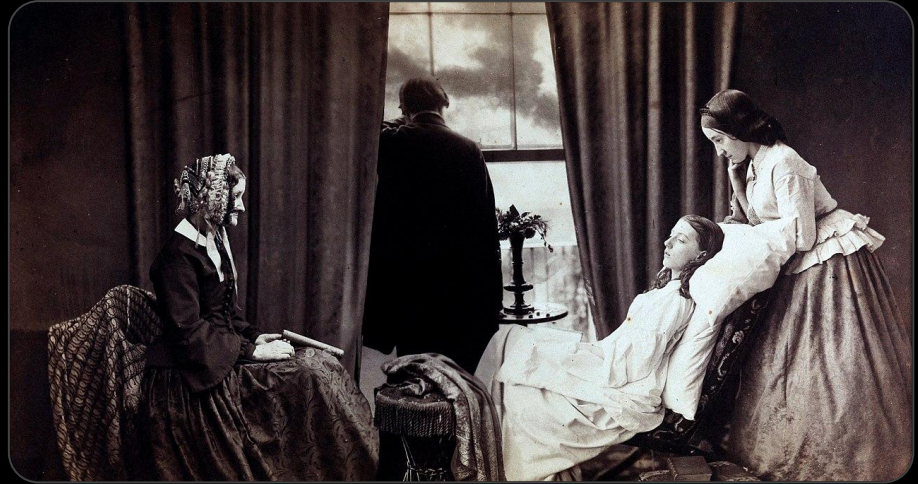
Combination Printing:

Oscar Rejlander's *"The Two Ways of Life"* (1857)

combined over 30 separate negatives into a single allegorical tableau.

Henry Peach Robinson's *"Fading Away"* (1858)

created from 5 negatives sparked accusations of "dishonesty"—yet Prince Albert ordered copies of every major composite Robinson produced



1860-1920: Spirit Photography

William Mumler

Boston engraver who "accidentally" produced the first spirit photograph. Charged \$10 per sitting.

Most Famous: Mary Todd Lincoln with ghostly Abraham Lincoln behind her.

P.T. Barnum v. Mumler.

A "ghost" was identified as a man still alive. Yet Mumler was acquitted, prosecutors couldn't prove exactly how he faked images.

Cottingley Fairies (1918):

Series of five photographs taken by Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths, loved by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Techniques Used:

Double exposure, multiple negatives overlaid, pre-exposed plates, drawing on negatives during development. Cardboard Cutouts



1920-1980: Propaganda

Stalin's regime employed an "army of retouchers" (1929-1953)

systematically altered photographs using airbrushing, negative retouching with scalpels and pencils, and composite imaging.

Nikolai Yezhov:

Head of NKVD, oversaw hundreds of thousands of executions. Removed after his own execution (Feb 1940).

Leon Trotsky:

Systematically erased from every official reproduction after exile (1929) and assassination (1940).

Library Reference: *Mirror With A Memory*

Carnegie Museum of Art (2020) traces photography's use for surveillance from 19th shows the continuity between Stalin-era control and today's biometric surveillance.



1910-1940: Artistic Manipulation

John Heartfield (born Helmut Herzfeld)

created over 240 political photomontages for AIZ. #5 on the Gestapo's Most Wanted List. Escaped SS troops by jumping from his balcony and hiding in a trash bin.

Man Ray's "Rayographs"

camera-less photographs created by placing objects directly on photosensitive paper.

László Moholy-Nagy

Bauhaus master who coined the phrase "Photography is Manipulation of Light" pioneered photoplastics and homogeneous photomontage.

Library Reference: *Sensing the Future: Moholy-Nagy, Media and the Arts*

Oliver Botar (Lars Müller, 2014) explores how Moholy-Nagy's experimental work anticipated digital culture, humanizing technology as "extensions of our sensory organs."



1982-2000: Digital Revolution

National Geographic Scandal (1982):

Technicians used a \$1 million Scitex system to move the Pyramids of Giza closer together to fit a vertical cover.

Photoshop 1.0 launched February 19, 1990 at \$895 vs. Scitex's \$300/hour.

First Photoshop image: "Jennifer in Paradise" became Photoshop's first color test image

NPPA Digital Manipulation Code of Ethics (1990):

"It is wrong to alter the content of a photograph in any way that deceives the public."

Reuters Scandal (August 2006)

Freelancer Adnan Hajj used Photoshop's clone stamp to add additional smoke to Beirut airstrike images.

Library Reference: *Digital Witness: Revolutions in Design, Photography, and Film*

Examines how "aesthetic and ethical debates have played out in mass media, politics, advertising and even the judicial system."



2014-Now: Deepfake Era

Ian Goodfellow's GANs (June 2014)

Goodfellow conceived Generative Adversarial Networks after a late night at a Montreal bar.

Generator + Discriminator

"Balenciaga Pope" (2023)

Pablo Xavier, 31-year-old Chicago construction worker, used Midjourney V5 to create Pope Francis in a designer puffer jacket.

Origin of "Deepfake"

Term emerged autumn 2017 from a Reddit user posting AI-generated celebrity face-swaps. Was eventually taken down.

Hani Farid, Detection Pioneer:

Lighting/Shadow analysis
Perspective analysis
Compression artifact analysis
Copy-move detection

Problem: these techniques are also used to make generation better.

Library Reference: *Beyond the Uncanny Valley: Being Human in the Age of AI*

de Young Museum (2020) features Trevor Paglen's work on facial recognition, including deepfake renderings of Taylor Swift discussing "creativity and authenticity."



Legal Actions

46

US states with deepfake laws (2025)

28

States regulating political deepfakes

27

States addressing sexual content

EU AI Act (Aug 2024)

Requires deepfake content to be marked as AI-generated; mandates machine-readable markers.

Take It Down Act (May 2025)

First major federal deepfake law. Criminalizes creating deepfakes without consent; requires platforms to remove non-consensual content.

California: AB 602 and AB 730

AB 602 (criminalizing non-consensual deepfake pornography) and AB 730 (prohibiting deceptive political deepfakes within 60 days of an election).

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