

VIŠJA STROKOVNA ŠOLA ACADEMIA

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**SOCIETY'S PERCEPTION OF RETOUCHING
AND ITS GROWTH THROUGHOUT HISTORY**

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ABSTRACT

The practices of retouching and image manipulation have existed since the creation of the very first photograph in the 19th century. While the methodologies of retouching have seen drastic changes throughout history, from their roots in the analogue era to a software-based digital age, its usage, for all intents and purposes, has always remained consistent – to either increase the visual qualities of a still image, or to support a political or commercial endeavour. The ethics and morality of its application have always been in question by photographers, critics, and the general public. There are numerous arguments for and against the use of retouching. Some argue that retouching is merely a tool or a method, that allows the photographer to have an image reach its full potential – be it a landscape photograph, where some portions of the image can be purposefully lightened or darkened to increase the overall visual fidelity, or a memorabilia portrait, where the subject's appearance can be enhanced to show them in a slightly more attractive manner. Others would argue that it is simply the incompetence of the photographer that would warrant the use of retouching, or that (due to its unavoidable negative effects on the perception of beauty and body image) it should be all but removed from the creative process. Regardless of what an individual's stance on retouching may be, it has become an integral part of the photographic process, for better or for worse. In the analogue era, the methodologies used for retouching were incomparably more cumbersome than they are now, in the digital age. In the modern day, especially with the arrival of the internet and the rise of social media, retouching has become so accessible that practically anyone can manipulate an image, creating a fictitious version of reality. In the world of photography, especially in the fashion and beauty industries, retouching has become a crucial aspect of their commercial products. While retouching has been used to support a political agenda on occasion, its commercial usage in the health, beauty and fashion industries is what has ultimately had the biggest impact on modern day society. Perpetuated by the mass media, it has shaped the perception of what is considered a normal body in terms of a standard of beauty. This, in turn, has had a negative effect on the general public, especially the more impressionable younger generations. Thus, it has become that much more important that the population is made aware, through education, of the modern practices of retouching.

Keywords: retouching, image manipulation, beauty standard, body image, photography

POVZETEK

Razvoj in družben pogled fotografske retuše skozi zgodovino

Praksi retuširanja in manipuliranja s slikami obstajata od nastanka prve fotografije v 19. stoletju. Medtem ko so se metodologije retuširanja skozi zgodovino drastično spremenile, od njihovih korenin v analogni dobi do programske opreme digitalne dobe, je razlog za njegovo uporabo v svetu fotografije vedno ostal jasen - bodisi povečati kvaliteto fotografije ali jo spremeniti s političnim oziroma komercialnim namenom. O etiki in moralnosti uporabe omenjene tehnike so se od nekdaj spraševali tako fotografi kot njihovo občinstvo in širša javnost. Obstajajo številni argumenti za in proti uporabi retuše. Nekateri trdijo, da je slednja zgolj orodje ali metoda, ki fotografu omogoča, da njegova slika doseže svoj polni potencial - naj gre za fotografijo pokrajine, kjer se lahko nekateri deli fotografije namenoma posvetlijo ali potemniijo, da se poveča celostna vizualna podoba, ali spominski portret, kjer se lahko videz subjekta malenkost spremeni in se ga posledično prikaže kot nekoliko privlačnejšega. Drugi bi trdili, da bi bila uporaba retuše zgolj odraz nekompetentnosti fotografa ali pa bi morala biti popolnoma zavržena, zgolj zaradi njenih neizogibnih negativnih učinkov na percepcijo lepote in telesne podobe. Ne glede na to, kakšna je posameznikova naravnost do retuše, je le-ta postala sestavni del fotografskega procesa. V analogni dobi so bile metodologije za retušo neprimerljivo bolj okorne kot so danes, v digitalni dobi. V sodobnem času (zlasti s prihodom interneta in porastom družbenih medijev) je retuširanje postalo tako dostopno, da lahko tako rekoč vsakdo manipulira s svojo fotografijo in posledično ustvari lastno različico resničnosti. Retuširanje je postalo ključni del komercialnih izdelkov modne in lepotne industrije. Čeprav je bilo v zgodovini velikokrat uporabljeno za politično agendo, je njegova komercialna uporaba v zdravstveni, lepotni in modni industriji tisto, kar je imelo največji vpliv na družbo. Uporaba retuše s strani medijev je popolnoma spremenila dožemanje normalnosti v smislu standarda lepote, kar je negativno vplivalo na širšo javnost, zlasti na dojemljive mlajše generacije. Tako je postalo toliko bolj pomembno, da se prebivalstvo z izobrazbo pouči glede vpliva in uporabe retuše v svetu medijev.

Ključne besede: retuša, manipulacija slik, lepotni standard, telesna podoba, fotografij

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Area of research and issue definition

As a photographer, the issue that has gained my attention, and subsequently peaked my curiosity, is the retouching aspect of the world of photography. More specifically the way images have been altered in the past, through history and up until now – to either change their appearance (usually in an effort to improve their visual fidelity, or support an ulterior motive behind the photographer's intentions). Naturally, this is also tied to a more specific examination of the methodologies used to alter and retouch images throughout history, from the way film images were physically manipulated in the 20th century to achieve certain effects, to how the digital era has shaped the way photographers retouch their images by using different software. What is also an important issue, that I will be discussing herein is the social perception of retouching, its implications, how it has changed through time, as well as the implication that the retouching of images (especially in the beauty industry) has had on the perception of beauty and reality itself in the modern day. A deeper dive will also be conducted on how exactly the standards of beauty are shaped by the mass media, through the retouching and manipulation of images. While retouching has certainly become an integral part in the creation of a finalized product in photography, it has also drastically changed society's attitude toward the visual medium as a whole.

1.2 Intents, goals and claims

The intent of my research and examination into the world of retouching is fuelled by the fact that I myself operate in the still image industry, and show great admiration and respect toward photography as a whole - as well as by its inherent methodologies for creating a visually stimulating commercial or non-commercial product. Retouching has always been an integral part of the process of creating a competent image, and if done correctly and to an intelligent extent, it can greatly increase the visual potential of a photograph. On the other hand, it can also negatively affect society's perception of beauty and reality if misused and overdone. The true intent here is to examine the usage of the retouching process throughout history, and more importantly, to examine how the altering of images has shaped not only the commercial industry but also society's expectations and the perception of the fashion and beauty industries through time. The main goals are to achieve a better understanding of retouching as a medium and to provide adequate context of its usage from the analogue to the digital era, as well as to explain how it has affected society from its first application at the very beginning to the modern day.

The initial claims would be, that the retouching process is a pivotal and integral part of the creative outlet of photography, and will most likely continue to evolve well into the future. Another claim would be that the standards of beauty, perpetuated by the mass media have been directly affected by the use of retouching, and while the general public is aware of its presence, the effects have been more or less negative.

1.3 Presumptions and limitations

Since retouching in the world of photography is a methodology that has been relatively well documented in its use and application through time, finding the necessary contextual information will not prove difficult; there exist numerous books and articles that have examined the altering of images thoroughly through history. Photography as a medium is also relatively new and has only thrived in the realm of fashion and beauty (where retouching is most prominent) for less than a century. Fortunately, when the altering of images began, it was already more than possible for it to have been easily documented in its inception and subsequent evolution. A potential limitation that could occur, however, is a lack of information regarding how society itself has perceived the steadily growing application of retouching through history – as well as its effects on the perception of beauty and actual reality. Nowadays, with the growth of the media and internet, society has developed a completely different attitude toward retouching of images – both growing accustomed to it through its application in the commercial industry, and criticising it for its negative effects on society as a whole, specifically the younger generations. It could also be difficult to accurately gauge the extent to which retouching has made an impact on society before the 21st century due to the media not showing as much of an intent to more specifically examine its effects – due to them possibly not being as prominent, since the altering of images was not as widespread.

1.4 Research methodology

Research and the gathering of information and data will be conducted through the examination of various books and articles regarding the history and methodologies of the altering of images, as well as their implications on society and the perception of beauty and reality as a whole. Research will be conducted in ordinance with finding and verifying sources that are consistent with actual facts. The sources must also exhibit no bias in relation to the researched issues, for the information to be as legitimate as possible.

2 THE HISTORY AND INITIAL METHODS OF RETOUCHING

2.1 *The beginnings of retouching*

The first-ever surviving photograph was effectively made in 1826 by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, who developed the method of heliography, with which it was recorded, as well as being the first one to extract a photographic print from a photoengraved printing plate. (Uelsmann, 2019)

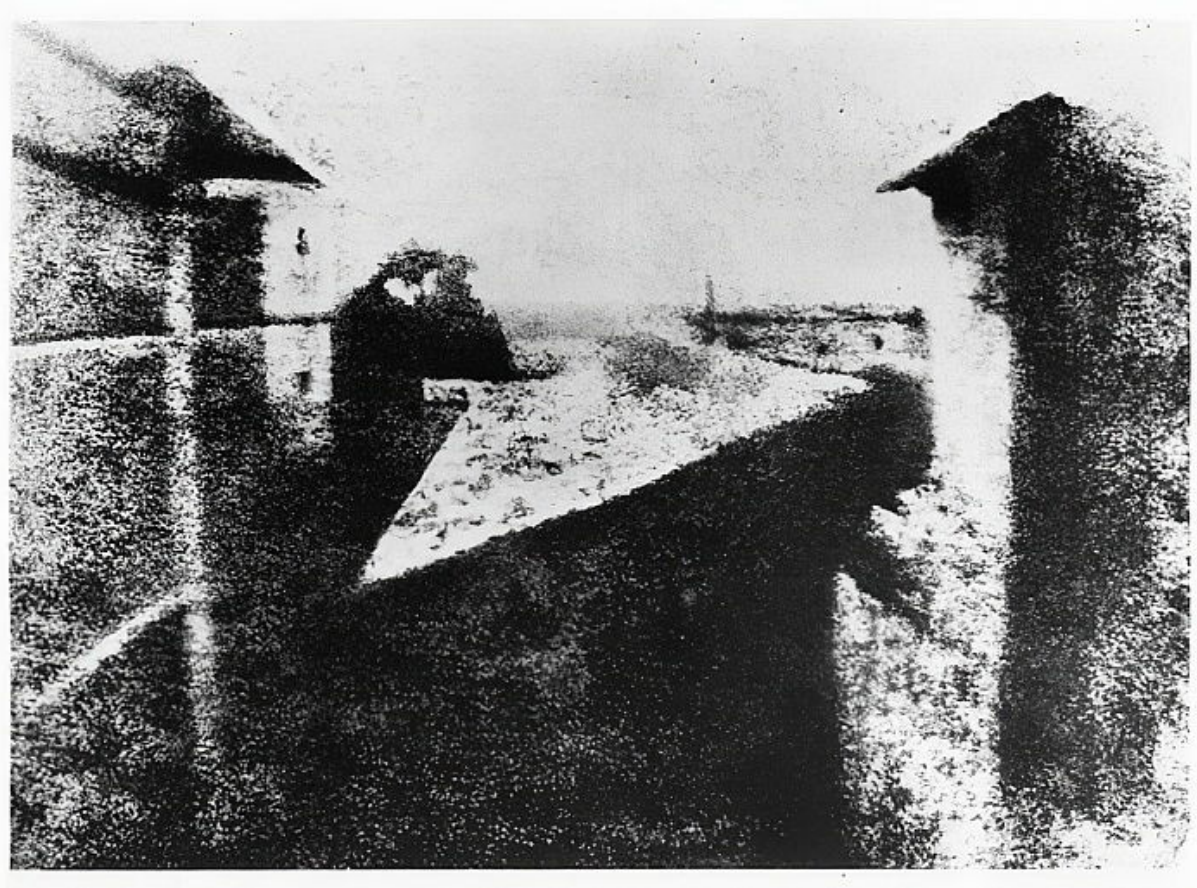


Image: 1 The world's first photograph by Niépce (1826)

Source: (<https://fixthephoto.com/blog/retouch-tips/history-of-photo-retouching.html>)

In 1841, William Henry Fox Talbot created and patented the calotype, which is attributed to being the first practical process in photography with which a negative can be created that is then able to subsequently generate multiple copies. This process would later become instrumental in the altering of an image. In 1846, the first documented act of photographic retouching was performed by Calvert Richard Jones (or one of his associates), a colleague of the aforementioned photographer, who took a photograph of five Capuchin friars on a rooftop in Malta. One of the friars was unfortunately positioned a few feet behind the rest, leading to an unwanted asymmetry in the overall composition. To remedy this, the fifth friar was blotted out on the paper negative using India ink. Later, in the positive print, the friar itself had all but

disappeared into the white sky. Another one of the earliest examples of altering an image can be traced back to the early 1860s when an image was altered by combining the body of John C. Calhoun and the head of Abraham Lincoln, both taken from two separate portraits of the subject – this would also later become the basis for the original American five-dollar bill.



Image: 2 Retouched photograph of Ulysses S. Grant

Source: (https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3294609/The-Photoshopped-picture-Bizarre-image-General-Ulysses-S-Grant-Civil-War-battle-mocked-hero-really-there.html?fbclid=IwAR2dK7WkqEVvPCTDiHDuezeRVD6j-dsFZFT2_JCgvz0TETd6bwR-9O0iELE)

Retouching also quickly made its way in to the world of photojournalism, where an example of an altered American Civil War photograph of General Ulysses S. Grant, posing on horseback in front of his battalion of troops, can be traced to the *Prints and Photographs Online Catalogue* from the *Library of Congress*. Due to the imperfect and unrefined methodologies used, various details of a photograph can stand out as being strange and ill-fitting to the rest of the image. Such is the case, for example, with the aforementioned, where a close observation reveals certain areas that appear rather odd. For instance, the head of the subject is angled differently in comparison to the torso of the subject, which also dons a uniform from a different time period. The actual horse itself in the photograph does not resemble his personal stallion. The reality of the matter is that three separate photographs were used to create the composite of the general. The world of photography is therefore no stranger to the aspect of changing an image's appearance to either enhance its visual fidelity or support an ulterior motive, as it has been around as long as the medium itself. (Sears, 2016)

2.2 The early methods of retouching

The first methods, naturally, greatly differed compared to the modern day, software-based, digital ones. Since the retouching of an image has existed from practically the beginning of photography itself, it has undergone numerous changes in its evolutionary cycle. With the very first methods used, which took place directly on the negative itself, the photographers would originally scrape their film with knives, or paint directly on top of it, as well as place multiple negatives together to create a single print in the end. A quick mention here would also be that, just like in the modern day, various photographers and cultural critics alike had debated the ethics of retouching, and the attitude of society toward it has also fluctuated. That being said, however, ever since the first methods of retouching were used, it had become an integral part of the creative process of photography. (Sears, 2016)



Image: 3 Retouching an image by combining multiple negatives

Source: (<https://fixthephoto.com/blog/retouch-tips/history-of-photo-retouching.html>)

3 RETOUCHING IN THE ANALOGUE AND DIGITAL ERA

3.1 *Methods of retouching throughout history*

To better understand the first methods of retouching, an outline of the most common methods for the creation and development of a print have to be made.

In the beginning, the most popular method of developing photographs was the wet-collodion method, initially invented by Frederick Scott Archer in 1851 and thought of by Gustave Le Gray approximately a year before that. This method was used all the way through the 1870s and had its fair share of advantages and disadvantages. The way the process functioned, was as follows: it was able to produce an inverted (negative) image on a certain material with a transparent foundation, which was usually glass – this, in turn, was quite a step up technically over the calotype method, thought of by H. F. Talbot and the daguerreotype, invented by Louis-Jacques-Mande Daguerre in 1839 (which was able to produce a special, unique image, that was impossible to replicate).



Image: 4 Glass plate negative

Source: (<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/83262/how-photo-retouching-worked-photoshop?fbclid=IwAR0EcPMcJZgXqpRaA8bV8JxVouU-cpcUoyviHqCSHujoUI50k4tNfgJYPA0>)

The wet-collodion method effectively made use of the best of both worlds, enabling the photographer to create numerous prints from a single negative with no repercussions, and produced images with increased sharpness and clarity – something that could not be achieved with typical paper negatives. The entire process was usually done on albumen paper, which was the first commercially exploitable method of producing a photographic print on a paper base

from a negative, and published in 1847 by Louis Desire Blanquart-Evrard. It was able to efficiently make use of a certain type of material, that is located in egg whites, and use it as an adhesive for combining the various chemicals used in photography, and subsequently turned into the preferred method of creating film positives from 1855, eventually till the end of the 20th century. Collodion itself is a transparent and sticky medium, which while wet is able to be submerged into a bath of silver nitrate, making it more than exemplary for application onto various surfaces – for instance metal or glass in the world of photography. After this chemical mixture is applied onto a stable metallic surface, which has been infused with silver nitrate, and subsequently placed in an area of light, and developed eventually after that, it results in a positive image. When applied to a stable glass surface, it produces a negative, which can then be easily reproduced on albumen or another kind of photographic paper. The entire process was also extremely fast (it requires only a short amount of time to have an image be placed in an area of daylight), as well as relatively inexpensive compared to other methods, and it eliminated having to use containers of fuming through toxins, necessary for the daguerreotype or a polishing of equipment in general. The wet-collodion, while having many advantages, did have one apparent flaw. The complete method, ranging from applying chemicals to the stable surface and to eventually developing it, needed to be accomplished before the drying process for the plate took part, usually within 10 minutes - warranting the use of a portable darkroom. The silver nitrate solution on the plate itself would also drip off, creating discoloration, as well as a gathering of the leftover substance, the residue, which has certain explosive properties in the appropriate area of the photographic apparatus and also the holders of the camera plates. The area of submersion itself was an issue as well, due to it becoming increasingly saturated with elements such as ethanol, dust and other various chemicals, with their own individual properties that caused changes to develop – losing its intent and use over time in having plates produce an image. The entire process is also sensitive only to blue light, causing certain colours to appear of a different spectrum in the final image. Regardless of its issues, it became enormously popular and was well used in various forms of photographic endeavours, and all artistic or commercial projects of photography. (Uelsmann, 2019) (Sears, 2016)

By the 1880s, the dry plate process, which was invented by Dr. Richard L. Maddox in 1871, came into effect, where a glass plate coated with gelatine and a silver bromide emulsion could be left to dry and then used later. Due to its convenience it quickly became the leading method for still imaging. It became so widely adopted, in fact, that by 1879 the first dry plate factory had been established, centralizing the required chemistry work to a specific location, allowing

photographers to effectively expand their business due to the sudden simplicity of the post-production process. As with the previous method, this one also used glass negatives that were well-suited to manual retouching, also known as »handwork« due to them being done by hand. During the entirety of the 19th century, large-scale glass negatives were considered the norm, and plastic negatives became popular in the early decades of the 20th century – which were also manually retouched with the same techniques.

The retouching of an image began with the same process regardless of the type of negative that was being altered. After the initial process of a negative being exposed and the capturing an image, the photographer would use an assortment of chemicals in the darkroom to develop an image and then change its state, so it was no longer sensitive to light. Photographers would then proceed to varnish their negatives, usually adding a protective coating before they began retouching. An alternative method was also used where some photographers would retouch directly on the unvarnished negative, and then later add varnish to permanently seal it. The retouching process took place on a specifically designed wooden retouching desk. The hinged easel had a central wooden frame propped up by side supports on each end, allowing the retoucher to alter the angle of the entire working surface. In the center, a frame held a piece of glass onto which the negative was then placed.



Image: 5 A retouching desk

Source: (<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/83262/how-photo-retouching-worked-photoshop?fbclid=IwAR0EcPMcJZgXqpRaA8bV8JxVouU-cpcUoyviHqCSHujoUI50k4tNfgJYPA0>)



Image: 6 Retoucher manipulating an image at a retouching desk

Source: (<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/83262/how-photo-retouching-worked-photoshop?fbclid=IwAR0EcPMcJZgXqpRaA8bV8JxVouU-cpcUoyviHqCSHujoUI50k4tNfgJYPA0>)

An adjustable mirror or piece of white cardboard was attached to the base, which reflected light up through the negative – illuminating it so the retouchers could effectively observe the changes they made to the negative. On the top was an overhanging piece of wood (sometimes featuring side curtains as well), which prevented any light from reaching the negative from above. The work area was usually set up in front of a north-facing window, as the light from the north was deemed least variable. Most of the retouching work took place on the film side of the negative, which was covered with the photographic emulsion. (Sears, 2016) (Uelsmann, 2019)

The retoucher would face numerous obstacles whilst retouching and would have to pay attention to a variety of factors in the negative itself. For instance, if certain parts of the print were too light, they would need to be addressed first, usually before varnishing. This is due to the fact that since the negative reverses the light and dark areas of an image, the highlights on the photograph would appear black on the negative and vice versa.



Image: 7 An unretouched (left) and a retouched (right) negative and print

Source: (<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/83262/how-photo-retouching-worked-photoshop?fbclid=IwAR0EcPMcJZgXqpRaA8bV8JxVouU-cpcUoyviHqCSHujoUI50k4tNfgJYPA0>)



Image: 8 Three stages of retouching the same image (freckle removal)

Source: (<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/83262/how-photo-retouching-worked-photoshop?fbclid=IwAR0EcPMcJZgXqpRaA8bV8JxVouU-cpcUoyviHqCSHujoUI50k4tNfgJYPA0>)

If, for instance, a large darker area needed reducing in volume, the retoucher would use a scrap of cotton or leather to carefully exfoliate the film with either cuttlefish powder or powdered chalk. If there were small sections of the negative that needed to be lightened up, the retoucher would use a sharp blade to literally and carefully shave away the dark film, subduing the

highlight in the final print. A wide variety of tools would be used to achieve various results. For more detail-oriented work, such as the retouching of a face, the retoucher would use a blade similar to a scalpel and, in a process called etching, carefully manipulate the image to achieve the desired result.

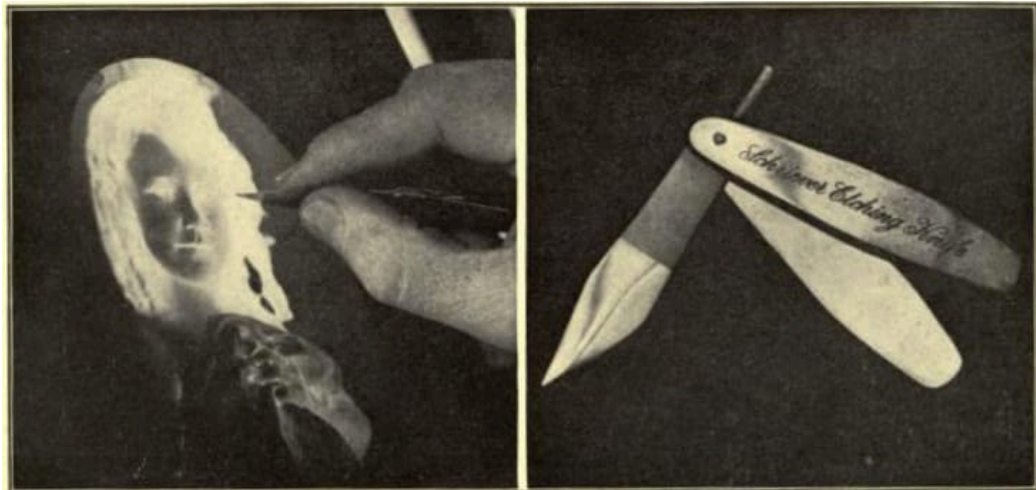


Image: 9 An etching knife for retouching negatives

Source: (<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/83262/how-photo-retouching-worked-photoshop?fbclid=IwAR0EcPMcJZgXqpRaA8bV8JxVouU-cpcUoyviHqCSHujoUI50k4tNfgJYPA0>)



Image: 10 Pencil strokes applied to remove freckles

Source: (<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/83262/how-photo-retouching-worked-photoshop?fbclid=IwAR0EcPMcJZgXqpRaA8bV8JxVouU-cpcUoyviHqCSHujoUI50k4tNfgJYPA0>)

Only experienced retouchers would perform extensive etching, and portrait photographers found it invaluable for creating the perfect image of a client. The technique of etching is arguably the most image-defining method of transforming a portrait. It was one of the most useful tools in the retouching department and saw numerous uses. It was used to remove wrinkles, stray hairs, change the features of the nose or cheek bones, darken the hair, add sharpness to the image, soften certain areas, or even in some cases completely change the silhouette to make it more appealing to the client.



Image: 11 An example of the effects of retouching

Source: (<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/83262/how-photo-retouching-worked-photoshop?fbclid=IwAR0EcPMcJZgXqpRaA8bV8JxVouU-cpcUoyviHqCSHujoUI50k4tNfgJYPA0>)

It is worth mentioning that this process is still kept more or less intact, only modernized in the digital age. The process of altering an image hinged on either lightening or darkening certain areas. After the retoucher had finished lightening the desired areas, he or she would darken others using either a hard graphite pencil or a brush dipped in ink or watercolour. The surface would have to be adequately prepared first before dark colour could be properly absorbed. It would first be roughened by the retoucher using finely powdered pumice stone or cuttlefish bone to gently abrade the surface of the negative. A certain liquid, considered a retouching medium, with a base of turpentine mixed with balsam or gum would also be applied, and would in the case that too much graphite or ink was added allow for it to be easily removed. The retoucher could simply dissolve the retouching medium using pure turpentine, wipe off the negative, and after applying more – try again. Retouchers would also effectively use different types of touches or strokes of the pencil (such as crosshatching and spirals to dots) to solve

different issues when retouching skin. Much like in the digital era we live in now, portraits were by far the primary subject of retouching, and while critics argued about the ethics and questioned the nature of using extensive retouching, there was some consensus for its usage in eliminating certain anomalies such as skin blotches and freckles. After removing any determined skin imperfections, the retoucher would then model the face and the body of the subject, distorting certain features to create a more symmetrical, visually pleasing appearance. Depending on the subject, the retouching process would either be subtle or as extensive as necessary, sometimes completely changing the appearance of the subject. Due to the beauty standards that prevailed at the time, various features were subjected to being altered, such as the nose, jawline, cheekbones, shoulders, waist, ears, and, naturally, the quality of the skin itself. (Sears, 2016)



Image: 12 The before and after of retouching

Source: (<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/83262/how-photo-retouching-worked-photoshop?fbclid=IwAR0EcPMcJZgXqpRaA8bV8JxVouU-cpcUoyviHqCSHujoUI50k4tNfgJYPA0>)

Even by the 1850s, the methods of retouching were already widespread in Europe and were later introduced in the United States in 1868 by James Fitzallan Ryder. The methods of retouching exponentially changed on the stepping stones to the digital age, when a digital form of altering the image was beginning to show signs of life. (Sears, 2016)

3.2 Modern methods of retouching

With the ever-growing evolution of television and broadcast technologies, the Quantel Paintbox became the gold standard for broadcast designers from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. At the time, it was nothing short of ground-breaking, featuring a workstation with a monitor, tablet and pen, keyboard and mouse – a whole spectrum of paraphernalia. The operating system featured a workflow that was considered intuitive for graphics designers and illustrators at the time, allowing them to paint and create graphics digitally – this in turn also introduced a new era of photographic retouching. Photos could be imported into the Paintbox via a camera mounted on a so-called copy stand. Using the aforementioned pen, the photo could be retouched, masked out, cut and posted onto a different background quickly and efficiently for the time.

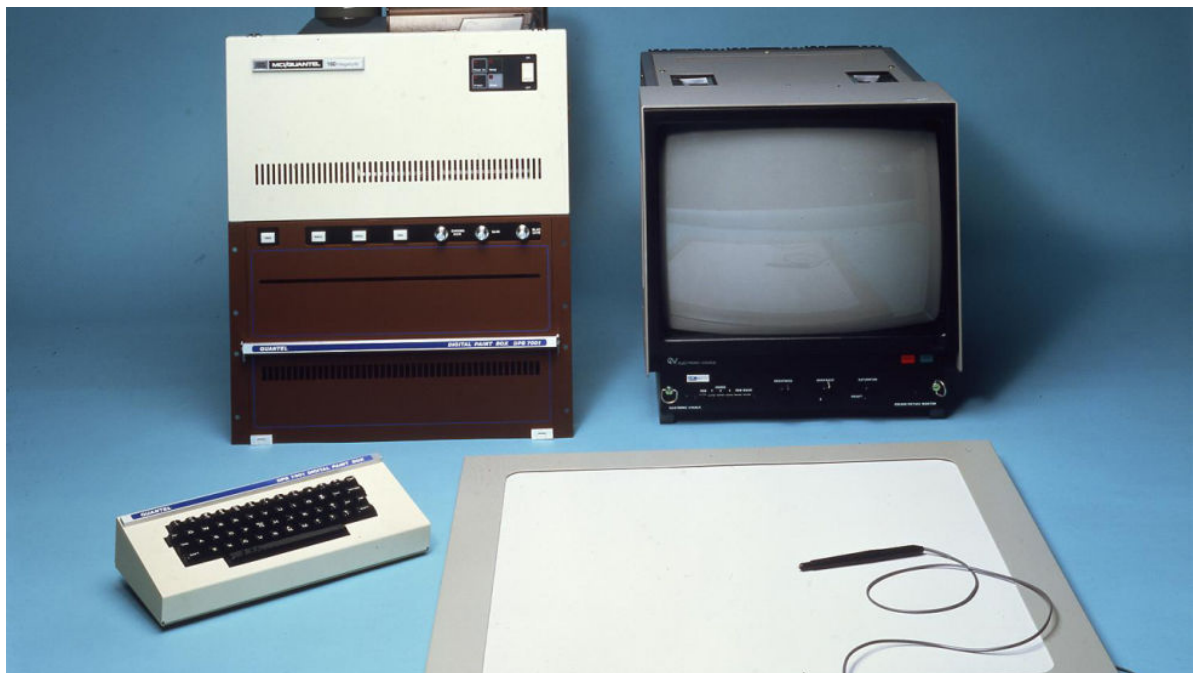


Image: 13 Quantel Paintbox, the precursor to modern day Adobe products

Source: (<https://arstechnica.com/gaming/2016/05/how-london-became-the-home-of-hollywood-vfx-2/?fbclid=IwAR3Pcg3Mj73wdqKHEAqQF-rWctK-DC4kyha3PUSVMf7ludkGbW5FgQIyuKo>)

The Paintbox was at the time incredibly expensive and required a full-fledged staff of engineers to maintain it. Due to it not being available in schools, potential graphics designers and retouchers had to learn the system on the spot at either a television station or a post-production house. Designers who were classically trained were resistant to the new technology due to a number of reasons, such as television resolution being inferior in quality compared to print. At the time, computers were not used primarily to create graphics design and were in turn seen as inadequate for the job. In time, this would change as more designers made the transition from

the print world into the world of broadcast design. In turn, television graphics became more sophisticated, with Paintbox at the forefront. In expert hands, it could be used to create competently made graphics for music videos, commercials and network branding with ease. The fast nature of the workflow also landed itself well for creating news graphics, where deadlines had top priority. Some time after Paintbox, Quantel created the Harry – a digital, non-linear, real-time composing system that worked in conjunction with Paintbox. Graphic images could be created on Paintbox and imported directly into Harry, which could render them immediately, though one at a time. Shortly after Harry, the company released Henry in the mid-1990s, which introduced multi-layer, real-time compositing, and quickly became the top effects-editing tool for post-production companies worldwide. Due to the high retail price and maintenance costs of the equipment, the budgets were also relatively high. Post-production and motion graphics houses thrived, competing with each other and releasing designs that ultimately revolutionized the motion graphics industry. (Kamanitz, 2015)

Adobe Photoshop, which is nowadays considered to be the industry standard software for digital retouching, was originally released in the late 1980s. The company was at the time already successful with various releases in the software world, especially Illustrator. Due to its slow workflow and simplicity Photoshop could not compete with the functionality and speed of the aforementioned Paintbox. The early Macs that adopted Photoshop technically did not feature the necessary RAM or processing speed needed to implement a paint feature in real time. The situation would change drastically in the late 1990s, as Macs became significantly faster and Photoshop gained added functionality, such as the ability to have multiple layers, undos, effects, features, and font tools that simply weren't available in Paintbox. Quantel's Henry also fell under the radar with the release of Adobe After Effects, which completely revolutionized the way animators and graphics designers operated, especially with the dawn of the internet, which allowed file sharing – further increasing the effectiveness of Adobe's products. In turn, the quality of the products that professionals produced in the field of retouching began to see an exponential rise that has been ongoing to this day. (Kamanitz, 2015)

It is worth mentioning that the first Photoshop CS was commercially released in 2003, with it seeing a gradual improvement in functionality and features with each new release in the subsequent years. Photoshop quickly became a retoucher's paradise, where any image, film or digital, could be completely altered in an unprecedented way. With methods such as dodging and burning (which somewhat mimic the analogue days of retouching), and a host of others such as frequency separation and liquify, it became the dominant platform of image

manipulation worldwide. With the newer releases implementing more complex AI-based technologies, many features have already been automated to an incredible extent. Due to it being relatively accessible and available to consumers at an affordable price, anyone can make use of it and expand their creative endeavours. Photoshop and retouching in the digital era have completely changed the face of mass media, commercial industry and society as we know it, for better and worse. (Kamanitz, 2015)

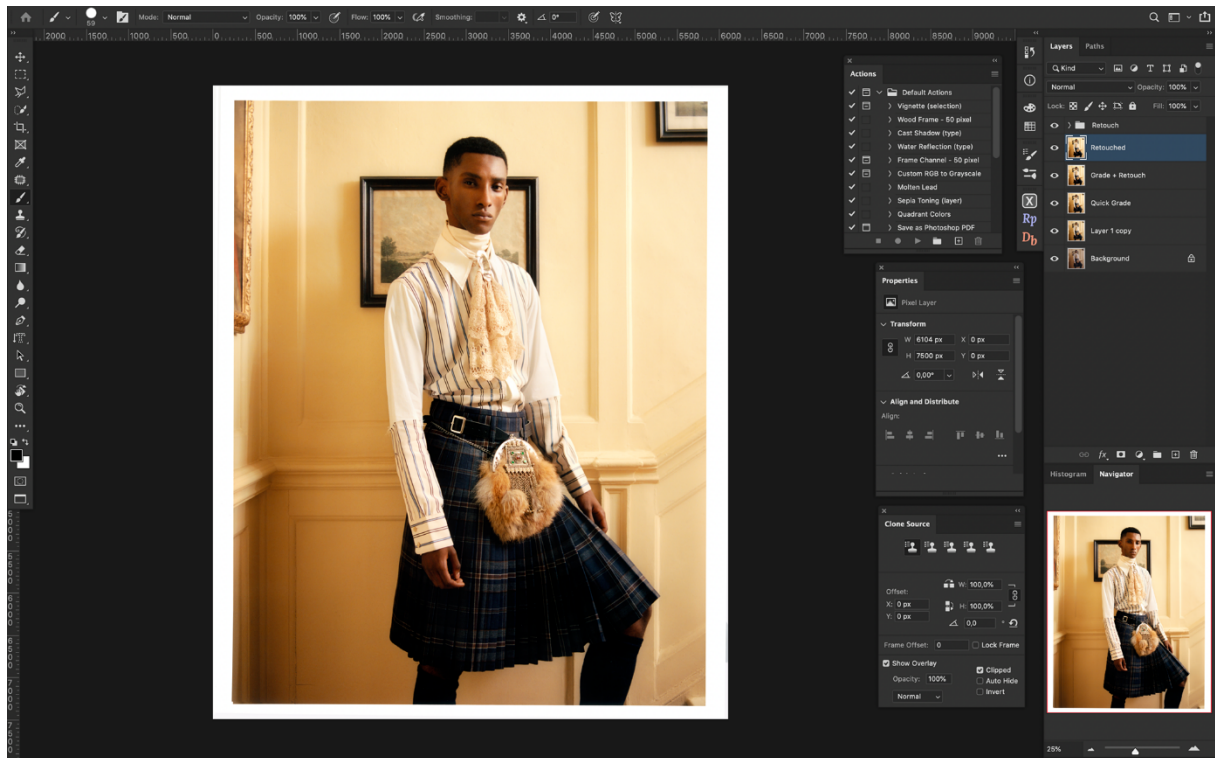


Image: 14 Adobe Photoshop in the modern day, the industry standard retouching software

Source: (Own source)

4 SOCIETY'S PERCEPTION OF RETOUCHING THEN/NOW

4.1 The public's perception of retouching in the past

As stated previously, retouching came to prominence almost right after the creation of the first photograph in the 19th century. It quickly became an integral part of the creative process (namely the post-production) that ultimately led to a finished photographic product. Ever since its inception have photographers, critics and the general public debated of its practices and ethics. As photography progressed, so did the methods, application and the extent of the retouching process. A notable critic, Virgil Williams, wrote in an 1891 issue of *Photographic Mosaics: An Annual Record of Photographic Progress*, dedicated to the art of photography: “I do not like heads as photographers retouch them. [...] I have never known an artistic retoucher; I mean to say I have never known a retoucher who did not eliminate character from the head when he retouched it.”, ending with “Defects in the complexion, like yellow blots, make the negative extremely spotted, and, of course, they should be eliminated.” It is safe to consider that some critics of the time were at least partially aware of the implications that extensive retouching could have on the perception of certain beauty standards, but also realized that, for instance, a portrait, especially one serving purposes of memorabilia, should be presented in the best possible light. By the mid-1850s retouching was well spread all over Europe, with the Germans pioneering its methods. After two decades, when it made its way to the United States with the help of a photographer from Philadelphia, James Fitzallan Ryder, it only grew increasingly more integral. An expert German retoucher, who discovered dye sensitization – a pivotal contribution to the progress of photography, Hermann Wilhelm Vogel, wrote in the March 1870 issue of *The Photographic Journal of America*, a publication dedicated to the art of photography: “The case with ladies from private life is quite different. They are often awkward in their movements or even resist the arrangements of the artist, they object to being handled, and show a skin, which, in spite of all the artifices of illumination, looks, in the negative, like a freshly ploughed field. Negative retouching has to come to the rescue.”, while praising retouching, if done correctly and only when it is rightfully warranted. There were also a fair share of critics who strongly disagreed with the practices of retouching, such as Henry Huny Snelling, a prominent photographer, inventor, editor and writer on various photographic topics. Throughout his career, he wrote and published numerous works such as *The History and Practice of the Art of Photography* and one of the earliest practical manuals on daguerreotype photography *A Guide to the Whole Art of Photography*. He expressed immense criticism against retouching in the March 1872 issue of *The Philadelphia Photographer*: “The man who cannot

produce a negative in the camera that will print a positive of equal merit to any 'artistically retouched' negative is unworthy to be denominated a photographer," Most photographers and critics accepted retouching, stating that attention should always be paid to the intent, purpose and extent, such as Henry Peach Robinson, who co-wrote *The Art and Practice of Silver Printing*, published in 1881: »The only question is where to stop.« As the decades passed, photographers, critics, editors and the media itself adopted the mentality that retouching is somewhat of a necessary evil, as was noted by Frederick C. Davis, an American pulp writer, in the 1920 publication of *Photo-Era Magazine*. (Sears, 2016)

Retouching has also played a part in various political and ethical issues. Joseph Stalin, for instance, has made use of photo manipulation for propaganda purposes and political gain - in 1920 he had Leon Trotsky removed from a photograph, showing his attendance at a speech held by Stalin's predecessor Vladimir Lenin. Another, well documented case of image manipulation, is when NKVD leader Nikolai Yezhov was removed (after his execution) from an official press photo where he was pictured with Stalin. The Soviet Union is notorious for its use of censorship and the retouching process played a massive part in it. This painted retouching in a negative light again, as its uses could potentially have enormous impact on the world, especially if kept secret. (Sears, 2016)

Journalism has also covered the manipulation of images to a great degree. For instance, in the 1982 issue of *National Geographic*, the magazine's cover features two Egyptian pyramids, which were made to appear having less physical distance between each other, than they had in reality, or the actual first photograph that was taken. This fiasco, in turn, damaged the magazine's reliance on providing glimpses of nature as it is naturally, and also created a debate on when it is appropriate or acceptable to retouch an image. The fashion industry can also be seen as a major contributor to how the public's mentality of retouching has changed. Ever since the dawn of the first fashion publications such as *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*, standards of beauty have been constantly shifting. The retouching process has had a direct impact on how the general public sees the commercial world, which is to say a somewhat skewed, distorted reality. Though, only after the arrival of the internet, well into the 21. century, has the public's criticism of retouching practices truly come to the forefront. Through history, retouching has been known as a tool that can be used for both positive and negative results. It is important to understand that there is still a human hand making the conscious decision of using retouching for a certain purpose. This brings us to the modern day, where the public's perception and opinion of retouching is more important than ever. (Barker, 2020)

4.2 The public's perception of retouching in the modern day

With the increased growth of mass media and the arrival of the internet, the public is subjected to retouched material more than ever. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, have turned the consumerism of altered imagery into a daily occurrence, which has in turn affected the public's perception of reality and, more specifically, beauty standards. Given all the various means of sharing one's stance on difficult subjects in the online world, new critics have begun to showcase their disdain and disapproval for the way the methodologies of retouching are used to create fiction, but with no effort being made to make that apparent. Since the human population is gradually increasing, it has become much more important to fully educate the arguably more impressionable younger generations so that they become aware of the nature of mass media and the commercial health and beauty industry. (Schiller, 2008)

5 RETOUCHING AND ITS USES IN THE MODERN DAY

5.1 The effects of retouching on the perception of beauty

Mass media plays one of the biggest roles in the perception of beauty ideals and how these ideals affect the public's behaviour and well-being. It plays a critical role in an individual's self-image by informing and reflecting what people consider to be either attractive or unattractive – some kind of beauty standard. The use of retouching to manipulate images has played an extensive contributing role in determining what kind of beauty standards are marketed and promoted by the media industry.



Image: 15 Extreme photo alteration (plus-sized model Tess Holliday)

Source: (<http://highendbeautyretouching.com/blog/fashion/celebrities-without-retouching.html>)

There are various aspects of appearance that can be altered and conveyed through the media to the public, which is to say everything from the skin, hair and facial features, to an entire body image or silhouette. In the past, in Western culture, the ideal body type for a model was that she be as thin as she can. This notion has been slightly challenged in recent years leading to numerous new trends as part of the body positive movement. The body image, which could be considered a multidimensional construct that refers to an individual's perception about the size and shape of one's body, is the most affected and prevalent notion in the idea of a beauty standard. An individual's body dissatisfaction is experienced when one perceives that their own body does not meet the standard, or the societal ideal in terms of size or shape, regardless of the

person's objective view. This leads to the conclusion that the perception of an individual's body image, in this case his or her dissatisfaction, and the portrayal of a standard of beauty from the media are interlinked. When an individual experiences a severe dissatisfaction to one's body he or she can start exhibiting unhealthy behaviours, such as eating disorders or extreme dieting. Similarly, an individual can also perceive other features negatively, which often leads to seeking out plastic surgery in order to make them appear more in tune with the current beauty standard – these have been shaped and changed throughout history, but are nowadays very much dictated by the mass media and the commercial beauty industry. There is a very high probability that every single image that the mass media introduces to the population has been altered in a certain way, mainly through the use of retouching. (Jennifer S. Mills, 2017)



Image: 16 The before and after of a magazine cover (Britney Spears)

Source: (<http://highendbeautyretouching.com/blog/fashion/celebrities-without-retouching.html>)

In the modern age, the public, and in turn individuals, encounter mass media on a daily basis through the internet, magazines, images, social media, films, music videos, television, etc... Beauty standards are often shaped through commercial advertisements that give off the impression that by purchasing a specific product or adhering to a certain diet, often accompanied by either a video or a retouched image, the individual will become more beautiful, which is to say more in line with the prevalent standard of beauty at the time. The past two decades have seen numerous empirical researches concerning the public's perception of an ideal

body image, promoted through the mass media. Most research focuses on women with the idea that being thin equals to being more beautiful. The correlational studies examine the link between the consumption of media and various pre-defined body image constructs, such as the actual perception of the body, the ideal body size or body dissatisfaction.



Image: 17 The untouched image (left) and the retouched beauty standard (right) (Kim Kardashian)

Source: (<http://highendbeautyretouching.com/blog/fashion/celebrities-without-retouching.html>)

These studies also usually follow a similar routine, exposing the subjects to various photographs (which have in almost all cases been retouched) of thin and attractive models under varying conditions and then measure the subject's subsequent body image. These studies serve to offer a better understanding of how the casual effect of the media affects the public's perception of the ideal body image. The first ever meta-analysis of the effects of exposure to thin body image ideals promoted by the media was conducted by Lisa M. Groesz in 2002, titled *The effects of experimental presentation of thin media images on body satisfaction: A meta-analytic review*. She examined 25 experimental studies that were conducted between 1983 and 1998 involving a total of 2292 participants. In the end, it was concluded that women's body image was significantly more negative after viewing thin media images, compared to viewing images of average or plus-sized models – the effect being moderate in size. Shelly Grabe also conducted a meta-analysis of both experimental and correlational studies, which examined the link between media exposure and body dissatisfaction, in a research paper titled *The Role of the Media in Body Image Concerns Among Women: A Meta-Analysis of Experimental and Correlational Studies*. 90 studies were reviewed and it was concluded that media exposure is indeed associated with decreased body satisfaction in women – the effect being moderate in size as well. There is a plethora of robust, empirical support for the notion that the idealized

body image, and subsequently the public's perception of the beauty standard, is dictated based on exposure to mass media, specifically televisions and magazines. There is also support that exposure to the thin ideal, which is still very much prevalent in modern day society, is directly associated with body satisfaction among women, especially young women.



Image: 18 The anorexic model chic (Karlie Kloss)

Source: (<http://highendbeautyretouching.com/blog/fashion/celebrities-without-retouching.html>)

The majority of research thus far has been conducted primarily on women, but there has also been some research conducted on male participants. The male physique and its features are also attributed to a standard of beauty portrayed by the mass media. A meta-analysis of experimental research concerning the effects of exposure to media featuring the male muscular ideal of a body image was conducted by Anna Blond in a research paper titled *Impacts of exposure to images of ideal bodies on male body dissatisfaction: A review*. In her review of 15 studies with a total of 1085 participants, it was concluded that exposure to images of idealized male bodies indeed caused the male participants to feel more dissatisfied with their own bodies – though the effect was small. It is therefore safe to conclude that the perception of beauty (after exposure to retouched images) of both men and women is affected negatively. It is worth noting that there

are certain individuals who do not respond to the mass media's portrayal of an ideal body image in the same way – the ideal body image being heavily based on the individual's self-perception of beauty. (Grabe, 2008)

The mass media, usually through the use of retouched images and videos, does not only reinforce beauty ideals by eliciting immediate changes in terms of how people perceive and judge their own appearance, but also influences the perceived norms. This means that the media directly affects how individuals perceived certain terms, for instance what could be considered average or normal.



Image: 19 The power of Photoshop (plus-sized model Candice Huffine)

Source: (<http://highendbeautyretouching.com/blog/fashion/celebrities-without-retouching.html>)

There are no pre-defined definitions for these terms, so the perception of them is susceptible to change or alteration. So far, no actual research has been conducted that would fully confirm this idea, but the indirect evidence does exist. Studies have shown that women, for instance, generally want their bodies to appear a certain way depending on what they consider to be the norm or ideal, and what they think other people find attractive. Allison Blair has conducted a study in the research paper titled *Do These Norms Make Me Look Fat? The Effect of Exposure to Others' Body Preferences on Personal Body Ideals*. In a series of experimental studies, she examined the influence of normative body ideals on body image. The participants were

university students who were told that their peers preferred the look of either relatively thinner or relatively heavier body types, and later reported the body size they most wanted to look like, from a range of hand-drawn silhouettes. Women allegedly selected a thinner personal ideal body size in the thin norm category than the heavier one. In a related study, conducted by Jennifer S. Mills in a research paper titled *The psychology of body image: Understanding body image instability and distortion*, the effects of purported body norms on ideal and current body size perception were examined. The findings were interpreted to mean that women would consistently pick their ideal body image as being thinner than the average so they would see themselves as special. The internet has become more and more commonly used for matters of social networking, such as social media – Facebook or Instagram. They often involve users posting images of themselves for others to see and comment. The mass media, and their usage of retouched material have changed how people internalize beauty ideals and how they attempt to portray themselves on social media platforms.



Image: 20 Retouching in social media I (Karina Irby)

Source: (https://au.news.yahoo.com/bikini-model-reveals-before-and-after-photos-on-instagram-38458845.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAALfz7n9suJ6QPrew0SEVU26njWHEHTMHFwtEM3Hc7eOclpEurX3nrHLKY9LXfaGo77ci99lWt9WqzxUn5JNyLWpQOrcY7C96CmxV07hX_G-yERxa1keYb9MdAZYiijItTcADLfUqdX6zR2dfU3KpUDZdU3tIboB_MTj4m5JGA_1)



Image: 21 Retouching in social media II (Karina Irby)

Source: (<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-5878879/Bikini-designer-28-reveals-NINE-ways-photoshopped-sultry-swimwear-snap.html>)

Many of these platforms also feature relatively easily accessible means to immediately alter your image, by applying light or heavy retouching before actually posting it online. As expected, this has further led to skewing the perception of what could be considered a normal body image and appearance. With the mainstream population of these platforms being mainly teenagers, it would come as no surprise that they have grown somewhat distant of reality and what it truly means to possess an average appearance, or to be normal. The pressure to appear as ideal as possible in online interactions with peers and other people has led to many young individuals developing psychological issues in terms of objectifying themselves. There is constant pressure of having to compare your visual appearance to others. This has, in turn, been additionally fuelled by the abundance of retouched images being featured in magazines, various commercials and social media. (Grabe, 2008)



Image: 22 A retouched commercial image

Source: (https://petapixel.com/2015/04/30/these-time-lapses-show-how-beauty-retouching-is-done-for-high-end-campaigns/?fbclid=IwAR0tdZD4U-D5kolFaLGou7RNJ4sBetb9iVkfK85_Ko7XXFAPauv9kiA8f-c9)

Another contributing factor is the celebrity culture that is often associated with portraying the ideal body image or beauty standard. Consumers often flip through popular magazines and articles and admire the presented models for their flawless features, such as skin and ideally proportioned bodies. Behind these images there is, however, a process of creating a fictitious image through retouching and altering. In 2017, France introduced a law where digitally altered images used in commercial context must clearly show a disclaimer, saying that they had been retouched. *Getty Images*, the largest stock photo provider in the world, has also announced a ban on retouched images. In 2016, Dove, a leading health product company, conducted a study where more than 10.000 women from 13 different countries were interviewed. It revealed that more than half of the women feel pressure from the media industry to reach a seemingly unrealistic beauty standard. The study also found that the confidence of women in relation to body image was on a constant decline. It is almost safe to say that every single image presented through the mass media has been altered in some way, even if they claim otherwise. Beauty standards are constantly being moulded in the modern day, and it is that much more important that we make impressionable young individuals aware of the fictitious nature of the commercial world. (Grabe, 2008)

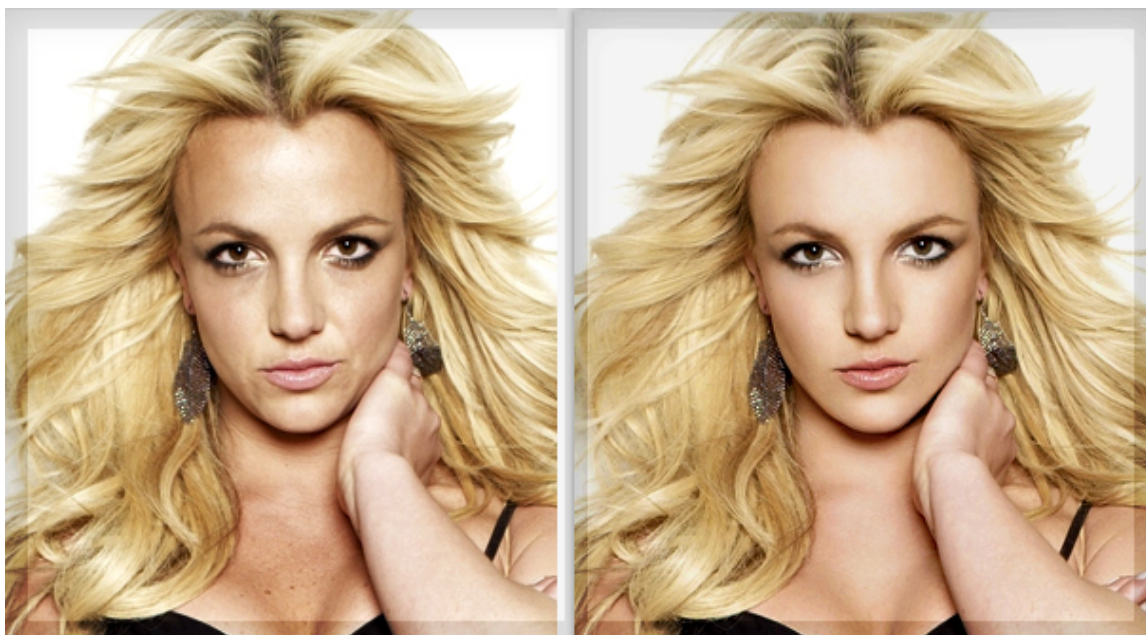


Image: 23 An example of a retouched celebrity image (Britney Spears)

Source: (<https://www.deviantart.com/jumpfive/art/Britney-Spears-Retouch-181130301?fbclid=IwAR3CwJXi5TAOjHF0UAEwShU1nuqhmMEDzY9AprTP6nveCDHm80ONMpbBU4>)

5.2 The usage of retouching in the modern day

Retouching has been steadily growing and evolving ever since the creation of the first photograph. Photographers have been searching for methods to alter or manipulate an image for various reasons – either to improve its visual qualities or for political or commercial reasons. The process has quickly come to be known as post-processing and has since become an integral part of the photographic creative endeavour. It is not directly correlated to editing an image, since editing is often associated with altering the image in terms of exposure, colours, aspect ratio, etc... The staple of retouching, that has evolved throughout history, is the so-called »dodge« and »burn« technique. The same technique is used nowadays in software like Adobe Photoshop to achieve anything from skin smoothing and removing blemishes to enhancing the eyes and smoothing out luminosity or colour gradients. In the modern day, the methods to alter an image, be it digital or film, have been completely digitized, and the overall techniques of post-processing an image have been improving on almost a yearly basis. Many purists still photograph on the film medium and show disapproval with the digital photographic approach, that has, naturally, been steadily growing. This is even more prevalent in the fashion industry, where many editorials are expected to be done on film – not so much by the client as by the photographer and his or her peers. The main argument for this is that film produces an image that is visually more appealing than that of a digital camera. Even if there was a possibility to

perfectly replicate the distinct visual flare of a film photograph through a digital medium, many photographers would still prefer the analogue method, due to the physical nature of having to develop and print a tangible product. In a slightly hypocritical fashion, the same cannot be said of digital retouching, where there is nearly a unanimous consensus on the usage of modern day digital software to alter or manipulate an image. This is most likely due to the accessibility and effectiveness of such software, as well as it also presenting room for error – the ability to revert changes and the presence of non-destructive forms of editing. In the world of photography, retouching is not a static principle. It is constantly evolving as the technology and methodology for it evolve, and every single photographer and retoucher approaches the post-production aspect from a different stance – this in turn makes the concept of retouching more of a general approach and not a hard or fast procedure. Each individual photographer will present a different vision through his application (and subsequently its extent) of retouching. It is inevitable that every single commercial image undergoes the process of retouching to enhance it. The public has more or less accepted this, as considering the history of retouching has more or less reached the point of no return – its application is engraved into the mass media and commercial world. (Jennifer S. Mills, 2017)



Image: 24 Retouching in the mass media and the commercial world

Source: (<https://lightonimage.blogspot.com/2015/05/retouching-perfume.html?fbclid=IwAR1CYpDvmSBKBYSt1v40oBnxKXbqCxiMpcfB1ERcgpWh5XZnWHrLtOOmLo>)

It is important to understand that the act of retouching is in the hands of the photographer, and its usage, be it tasteful or distasteful, is entirely dependent on the extent and method of its application. In photography there is rarely something that could be considered absolute truth, regardless if the image has been retouched or not. Since the act of taking a photograph usually involves some kind of in-camera processing, or colour science, the image will never appear such as it was in real life upon taking it. The same can also be said of the analogue world, where each film records images differently – adding its own visual interpretation to what is being captured. There is no film or digital camera that can perfectly record what is being photographed, compared to the human eye, even on a fundamental level. Another aspect that should be well considered when it comes to photography is that it freezes time. The human brain, in conjunction with the human eye, processes the world in motion. Photography is literally the act of freezing motion to a single still image – again a departure from the observable world. All of these are reasons why the retouching and editing of images have stayed firmly integrated into the photographic process, especially in the modern day.

The questions of the ethics and morality of using retouching is prevalent in the modern day. Most of the general public is aware of the extent to which images can be altered – thus it is important to base one's scepticism of an image's authenticity on the content and publication of where it is found. Usually, when retouching is mentioned, references are made to the fashion and beauty industry that have, as mentioned before, played an active role in shaping the beauty standards in the modern day. The main perpetuator of this is the mass media, which is primarily concerned with making a profit, by persuading the consumer to purchase a certain product. It is thus important to educate the public on how to properly shape their expectations when viewing magazines, advertisements and commercials. The same can also be said of the social media platforms, which have become the largest promotional platforms of the modern era. Not only do they feature brand accounts that promote their products, but even regular individuals and consumers post their personal images on them. These can be retouched and edited practically with the tap of the screen. It thus lies on the parents and the educational system to shape the rightful expectations of the public, especially the younger generations (Cage, 2017).

6 THE POTENTIAL FUTURE OF RETOUCHING

6.1 Retouching in the coming decades

Retouching has enabled photographers to creatively improve a digital or film photograph through post-processing. This also gave rise to a new class of experts in the world of photography, not so different from the retouchers of the analogue era. Retouching, as a practice, is considered to unlock the full potential of a photograph, which is one of the reasons why the role of retouchers is steadily growing in relevance and will continue to do so. The main determining factor, apart from the retoucher, is the technology associated with using a retouching software. Currently, programs like Adobe Photoshop CC, Adobe Lightroom, Capture One and others are the dominant form of image manipulation and editing. The industry has found itself in need of retouchers who have mastered these programs, more than ever before. Modelling, companies, fashion houses, the film industry and other firms have all showcased a widespread demand for various retouching services – thus increasing its value through high demand. In fact, retouching services have become so far-reaching that a lot of E-commerce and other online services are almost entirely dependent on them to create a visually pleasing product. The online retailing and commercial sector is also dependent on the retouching services. There are numerous opportunities available for retouchers, with freelancers also being able to thrive in the economy. In terms of the photography world, the fashion and beauty sectors are the most prevalent, with them being most concerned with the aesthetics and appearance of their models. Retouching services have become deeply entrenched in the working mechanism of other services and their relevance will only continue to grow. With this, so will the ethics of using them. The future remains both certain and uncertain. (Cage, 2017)

7 CONCLUSION

Ever since the creation of the first ever photograph in the 19th century, retouching and image manipulation have existed as tools and methods to either increase the potential visual quality of an image, or to better propagate an idea, and serve a political or commercial use. Retouching as a medium began to grow continually and exponentially with the development of film-developing techniques in the analogue era: from the wet - collodion process, which was invented in 1851, to the dry plate process, which was invented decades later and greatly improved on its predecessors. The methods of altering an image were at first cumbersome and required a specific process, helmed by expert hands – these too would evolve throughout the 20th century with the inevitable transition into the digital age. In the early days of photography, retouching had already begun to shape the public's opinion on various ethical and moral issues regarding its usage in photography and commercial use. Critics and photographers themselves were also raising questions of its validity and how acceptable it was to retouch images. Some argued that retouching is an effective tool and method that allows the photographer to fully express his or her creativity through his work – be it a landscape photograph, or a portrait of a loved one. Others, especially critics, claimed that its use brought a whole host of negative effects on how the general public perceived various ideals, and that its use should be all but eliminated from the photographic process. Most acknowledged that the retouching process was as integral to the creation of a photograph as was the press of a shutter button – a necessary evil that would, since the dawn of its creation, be firmly etched into the creative endeavour of photography.

The practices of image manipulation were not only used in political agendas, but also in society's actual perception of reality, more specifically how a standard of beauty was perceived. The health, fashion and beauty industry would regularly employ retouched images in magazines and commercials to persuade the general public to either purchase a specific product or adhere to a diet or lifestyle. This would be made even more obvious with the arrival of the internet and the mass media. As technology advanced, so too did the methods of retouching an image, which became more accessible to accomplish. Numerous brands of the modern age regularly use retouched material to better promote their products (usually in the health and beauty industry) to consumers and, in turn, increase their profit. This process continues to shape and mould beauty standards, the ideal body image, and what could be considered to be normal or average, which are in and of itself relative terms. The mass media perpetuates this by constantly promoting these brands and products, somewhat brainwashing the general public to adhere to

certain ideals. Various studies have been done that illustrate the negative effects that come from creating unrealistic beauty standards, especially for impressionable younger generations. The education system is not well equipped to properly educate the general public to what extent retouching is actually being employed in the commercial world. With the rise of the online social media platforms, like Instagram, any individual can alter or retouch a personal image and post it online for others to see. This has subsequently created a host of new problems, where the younger generations are not only consuming retouched material on a daily basis through the internet but have themselves become a vessel for its usage and subsequent negative effects. While the general public is aware to some extent of how frequently retouching is used in the mass media, if it is applied effectively, there is no dead giveaway that the content was retouched at all, which makes identifying and accepting that an image had indeed been manipulated that much more difficult. A bright side of the high demand for retouched images is a host of new employment options that retouching has created. The most important take-away is that the extent of how drastically an image is retouched is based on the mentality of the photographer, retoucher or client, so (in theory) it could be limited and used intelligently.

Retouching will forever be an integral part of the commercial world, so it should be used in a thoughtful and tasteful manner – and content that has gone through retouching should at the very least be accompanied by a disclaimer that what you are viewing is not reality, but instead a fictitious, idealized version of it.

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