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Photojournalism Ethics and VR  
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## INTRODUCTION

- My background in photography
  - BS Photography, 1979 Northern Arizona University
  - worked in Flagstaff, Mesa, Charlotte
  - Photographer
  - Photo Systems Editor
  - Picture Editor
- How I started taking panos
  - 3rd grade, scissors and tape snapshots
  - butting stills together before I understood lens distortion
  - Horizon film camera (Bananarama camera)
  - Coolpix 995 and FC-8E
  - wanted more pixels, switched to Sigma 8 and D100
  - now D200 and 10.5

## PHOTOJOURNALISM ETHICS

- This is what I'm here to talk about.
  - It's an interesting exercise to explain it to you.
  - These questions came up as I started to shoot panoramas.
  - I want to give you an overview of our ethical standards so you have an understanding of what we have to consider.
  - This stuff is in our DNA as news photographers.
  - I don't have the answers. What I can do is introduce you to the principles that we use when making ethical decisions.
- John Long, an NPPA leader in ethics, said this:
  - Our credibility is key, and it's been damaged. That's very difficult to fix.
  - The incidents of ethical problems have staying power - 25 years ago, Geographic moved the pyramids and we're still talking about it..

## SHORT HISTORY OF PHOTOJOURNALISM

- In the "golden age" (1939s-1950s), papers like the Milwaukee Journal, New York Daily News, and magazines like Life built their reputations largely on their use of photography. Educators such as Cliff Edom at the University of Missouri started training returning GIs in the craft of photography for newspapers. He is credited with coining the term photojournalism. He and others started bringing a different ethic to the craft of newspaper photojournalism. With the advent of smaller lighter cameras, it was possible to make photos as things happened, to document the world before us.
- The fundamental principle of this documentary approach was that the photographer affected the scene as little as possible, and that the process of developing and printing the photo accurately represented the subject matter.
- The NPPA (National Press Photographers Association) was formed in 1946, primarily to elevate the news photographer from being the "unwelcome but necessary stepchildren of the Fourth Estate". As the organization grew, it sponsored contests, the results of which encouraged the documentary approach, which spread rapidly through the industry.
- The organization soon wrote a statement of principles and ethics for photographers. It was a credibility jolt for photojournalists and picture editors, raising their stature as partners in the reporting process. It also linked visual reporting to standards of accuracy and truthful storytelling, taking it beyond mere aesthetics.

## BASIC ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

- What are the basic ethical principles of photojournalism?
  - Honoring the concept of the moment
    - The shutter is tripped and the moment is captured in the context of news. Alter the moment, alter the content. We seek to capture real moments in time. If we ask someone to do something again, or to change their behavior, that alters the content of the image.
  - Taking great care when making changes to the image
    - There are degrees of electronic change (Don Doll) This is primarily a result of the digital age.
      - Technical changes – what we do:

- These make the photo more readable. The grammar of photography: dodge & burn, color balance, contrast.
- Content changes - accidental or essential. What we don't do:
  - Accidental, eliminate a meaningless detail. (power lines)
  - Essential, removing something that changes the meaning of the photo (eliminating the groom).
  - "This is the Pandora's Box of the computer age - it's possible to make seamless changes to images, no film record to refer to as well." (John Long)
- Being manipulated by the subjects
  - We can also lie by being willing partners to photo ops and setups.
  - We strive to photograph real people doing real things. If a photographers shows up to an assignment, and the subject asks "what do you want me to do", then we've failed. The best recourse in this situation is a portrait.
  - As an editor, I strive to stay away from choosing wire photos where it appears things have been staged. This is difficult. Michele McNally, the Times' assistant managing editor for photography, characterized the controversy as more a reflection of the general questioning of photojournalism than as specific criticism aimed at the Times.
    - "Ever since the most recent Reuters discovery (of altered photos of the Israeli-Hezbollah fighting) many people have taken it upon themselves to question the veracity of all images" she said in an e-mail to Poynter Online. "One should note, during this particular war, each side is continually trying to prove an 'agenda' in all media outlets. They call into question everything, every usage, balance. You cannot persuade either side that you have (no agenda) because to them, there is no other truth but their own."
- Using the illustration credit line
  - We have dealt with some of these situations by applying the tag "photo illustration" to the images where we have made changes via digital editing, or have manipulated the situation. These tags almost always appear on feature, business or occasionally sports pages. Rarely do they appear on news pages.

- I don't think this tag is enough to explain changes made. We need to be up front and transparent about how we've affected the image, both in the taking and the producing. This puts the image on the same plane and pays them the same respect as for the written word.

## ETHICS DISCUSSION SUMMARY

- "The cumulative effect is the gradual erosion of the credibility of entire profession and I am not sure we can win this war. We are being bombarded from all sides, from movies, television, advertisements, the Internet, with images that are not real, that are created in computers and documentary photojournalism is the victim." John Long
- "We may be in a death-struggle but the end is worth fighting for. Real photos can change the hearts and minds of the people. Real photographs can change how we view war and how we view or society. Vietnam is a prime example. Two photos sum up that war: the Nick Ut photo of the girl burned by napalm running naked down the street and the Eddie Adams photo of the man being executed on the streets of Saigon. These photos changed how we perceived that war. They are powerful and they get their power from the fact that they are real moments captured for all time on film." John Long
- "No one has the right to change these photos or the content of any documentary photo. It is our obligation to history to make sure this does not happen. " John Long

This is why maintaining ethical standards is so important to me as a photojournalist. These are the questions that news outlets will struggle with as we go forth in using panoramas.

## PHOTOJOURNALISM ETHICAL LAPSES - RECENT EXAMPLES

SHOW: pdf from May 2007 News Photographer -

[http://www.charlotteobserver.com/images/pano/folio/NPPA\\_NewsPhotographer\\_52007.pdf](http://www.charlotteobserver.com/images/pano/folio/NPPA_NewsPhotographer_52007.pdf)

## HOW DO THE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES RELATE TO PANORAMA?

- How do ethical considerations affect the newspaper photographer who is considering adding the multi-shot panoramic photo to his or her repertoire? All of the things that got the aforementioned photographers in trouble are techniques that panoramic photographers have to use.
  - We use multiple images taken over a span of time and combine them.
  - We use masking and blending techniques to compensate for objects that move in the overlap between frames.
  - We use color correction and exposure techniques (HDR blending) that require multiple exposures.
- The biggest ethical problem that we wrestle is the multiple images taken over time aspect. Some organizations have opted to use only the single-shot approach, using either a mirror optic, or in the case of Chris Ramirez and the New York Times, a multiple-camera approach where each camera is actuated at the exact same instant.
- SHOW: <http://www.ramirezpix.com/main.php> (panorama tab)
  - I talked to Chris last week about his work for the Times. He told me about the first pano he shot for them, of the testimony of Condoleezza Rice before the Senate confirmation committee. The pano was a multishot cylindrical covering less than 360 degrees. He said, "I made the first frame of her with her hand up, then made my way across the lineup of photographers and the committee. By the time I was done - about 15 seconds, she had finished swearing in, and some of the photographers had their cameras down. In the swearing in, if the person is standing, the photographers are shooting, so to see photographers not shooting, that wasn't quite right. I had a hard time with it. I couldn't get my head around it, and that was what set me to the multicam setup."
- SHOW  
<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/images/pano/folio/weddingFS.html> - Leon and Diane's wedding
  - Exposures at different times. The subjects moved.
  - This is an extreme example of what can happen when things move within the scene.
- SHOW  
<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/images/pano/folio/barbershop.html> - Xavier's Barbershop
  - My camera bag and lenses in the frame. Dumb move, but I can't clone 'em out.

- SHOW [http://conference.ivrpa.org/gallery/vr/the\\_stroke\\_of\\_noon](http://conference.ivrpa.org/gallery/vr/the_stroke_of_noon) - Bell Tower pano
  - HDR ghosting
  - longer tonal scale than can be seen easily with the eye.
  - side note: I forgot my recorder, so I can't do any audio. At the time, the boy was making quite a bit of noise that would have added to the pano. Recording at a later time doesn't capture that context.
- SHOW [http://conference.ivrpa.org/gallery/vr/krishna\\_followers\\_and\\_tourists\\_o](http://conference.ivrpa.org/gallery/vr/krishna_followers_and_tourists_o) - Hare Krishna
  - I was asked if I was worried that their motions would yield an image where an arm would be cut off. Sure, that's the chance I was taking. It wouldn't have been ethical for me to ask one of to freeze. I have to deal with the luck of the moment, which is what we do in photojournalism.
  - Forgot the recorder again... used my cell phone and voice mail. Poor solution.

## WHAT WE'VE DONE ON CHARLOTTE.COM

- I took my pano cameras with me in April when I covered the Democratic presidential candidates debate in South Carolina. I wanted to see if I could shoot handheld panos on the fly in tough conditions, and I wanted to start an internal conversation at the Observer about using panoramas in news rather than feature situations. Up to this time, I had been shooting in non-news feature situations where the hard questions about stitching and multiple exposures weren't likely to be asked. I felt like it was time to get past this.
  - SHOW <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/images/pano/SCdemocrats/hillary3FS.html> – Hillary Clinton town meeting
  - The journalistic moment is in the initial view. The rest of the pano provides context, and additional storytelling entry points for the viewer. There's a considerable amount of motion of the elements in the pano, fortunately controllable in the stitch.
- My boss, Bert Fox, a former picture editor at National Geographic and the Philadelphia Inquirer, worked with me on thinking through how we would explain the panoramic image to our viewers. We wanted to be up front and open about the fact that these are not single images, but a combination images over time. We also wanted to give the viewer a look at the process without getting into technical detail.
  - SHOW <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/images/pano/how/01.html>

- Our statement of principle - that we were applying the same ethics we do to our news images - is up front. The fact that the photos were made over a period of time was next. We likened the panoramic to panning a video camera in a circle rather than shooting a single photo in a single instant.
  - We want to be transparent about our tools and techniques, without confusing the reader.
  - We aren't working in a vacuum - an editor is looking at the photographers' work as it progresses. This is another standard we try to apply to our still work - an editor looks at a photographer's work throughout the process - no one is working in a vacuum.
  - If we have to do, as Chris Ramirez puts it, "too much crazy shit" to a panorama to make it work, if I have to clone people, or create the rear end of an elephant (I've done it in the past), we will no longer publish the pano.
- Tom Kennedy, managing editor for visuals at Washington Post/Newsweek.com has had photographers out shooting panoramas for quite some time. I talked with him recently, and he is convinced of the power and possibility for storytelling that panoramic images offer. "The key is transparency," he said. "We have to be honest with our viewers about how we're making these images, and about what they are and are not. They're not an instant in time, but they can be a journalistically accurate representation of a scene."
    - In your package is a [note](#) Tom sent me last week in response to a request for his thoughts on panoramas and photojournalism. Please take time when you're reviewing your conference materials to read what he has to say - he puts it much more clearly than I could.

## WRAPUP

- "Journalism is supposed to show the world as it is, not as we would like it to be. That is perfectly understood by anyone who gets into the business. To do otherwise is to lie not only to your boss, but to your market - the public you serve. Generally, if you lie to your boss as well as your customer base, you are not going to have your job for very long."
- Jack Lessenbery, Toledo Blade ombudsman

## QUESTIONS

## HANDOUTS

5/2007 NewsPhotographer article: Truth Will Out -

[http://www.charlotteobserver.com/images/pano/folio/NPPA\\_NewsPhotographer\\_52007.pdf](http://www.charlotteobserver.com/images/pano/folio/NPPA_NewsPhotographer_52007.pdf)

NPPA Statement of Ethics

[http://nppa.org/professional\\_development/business\\_practices/ethics.html](http://nppa.org/professional_development/business_practices/ethics.html)

NPPA Statement of Digital Ethics

[http://nppa.org/professional\\_development/business\\_practices/digitaethics.html](http://nppa.org/professional_development/business_practices/digitaethics.html)

NPPA Ethics in the Age of Digital Photography - training seminar outline

[http://nppa.org/professional\\_development/self-training\\_resources/eadp\\_report/](http://nppa.org/professional_development/self-training_resources/eadp_report/)

NPPA.org article – recent panel discussion on Ethics

[http://www.nppa.org/news\\_and\\_events/news/2007/06/ethics01.html](http://www.nppa.org/news_and_events/news/2007/06/ethics01.html)

Poynter Age of Scrutiny (includes New York Times Statement of Ethics)

[http://poynter.org/content/content\\_view.asp?id=110342&sid=29](http://poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=110342&sid=29)

Society of News Design Code of Ethics

[http://www.snd.org/about/organization\\_ethics.html](http://www.snd.org/about/organization_ethics.html)

Tom Kennedy thoughts on Panorama and ethics

<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/images/pano/folio/kennedy.html>