

ADVOCATUS DIABOLUS Part One

A PHOTO IS FOR LIFE NOT JUST FOR XMAS.

I suppose that these articles (there will be more) are what is known as a Blog, I prefer to think of them as Articles myself. So why Advocatus Diabolus? Well let's imagine that there's a little bit of my tongue in my cheek.....just a little bit. A very small bit.

I'll begin with Adobe's Photoshop, currently in its 11th incarnation and its baby brother Elements. There are other software packages available but Photoshop remains the industry leader, even spawning its own verb in 'Photoshopped' or 'Shopped' to mean that an image has been altered in some way. Most photographers who see themselves more than 'snappers' will have a copy on their computer and I would venture that a sizeable minority, maybe majority, of those copies will be illegal due to the cost of the full program. Not all hobbies will make you a criminal, even though often what is done with it is.



Looking Fabulous

Let me explain. Once upon a time, if you wanted the 'Ten Years Younger' effect, then you were photographed in subdued light, maybe with a soft focus lens or a soft filter of some kind. We've all seen those 'shot through a fog, slightly vignettted' portraits of a bouffant topped relative sat in front of a blue clouded canvas backdrop. Now we have Photoshop and suddenly with a modicum of know-how you can smooth, remove, blur, re-sculpture and generally 'air-brush' granny to within an inch of her 30th birthday. Now we are faced with a family album of 'FHM'd' super models who at times bare little resemblance to the person they represent.



Squeeze me gently

Imagine the confusion of our grandchildren when they look back on photos of Great Grandma to discover that at the age 83, she looked 42. Imagine the thrill of having inherited such age defying genes or the doe-eyed beauty that was Auntie Florence when she was 16 and let them worry if your eyes really do shrink as you get older. Whilst on the subject of eyes – when we say ‘the whites of their eyes’ we don’t mean that they have to be a featureless block of empty space bleached white by the Cillit Bang Brush.

I once photographed a wedding where the bride wanted her eyes fixing, her nose tweaking, her double chin minimising and her breasts made bigger. I often wonder if her husband wished for the airbrushed version as he slipped into bed at night or the original whom he had married. As it happened the marriage lasted six months – maybe he should have been airbrushed too.



Yep, we're fooled.

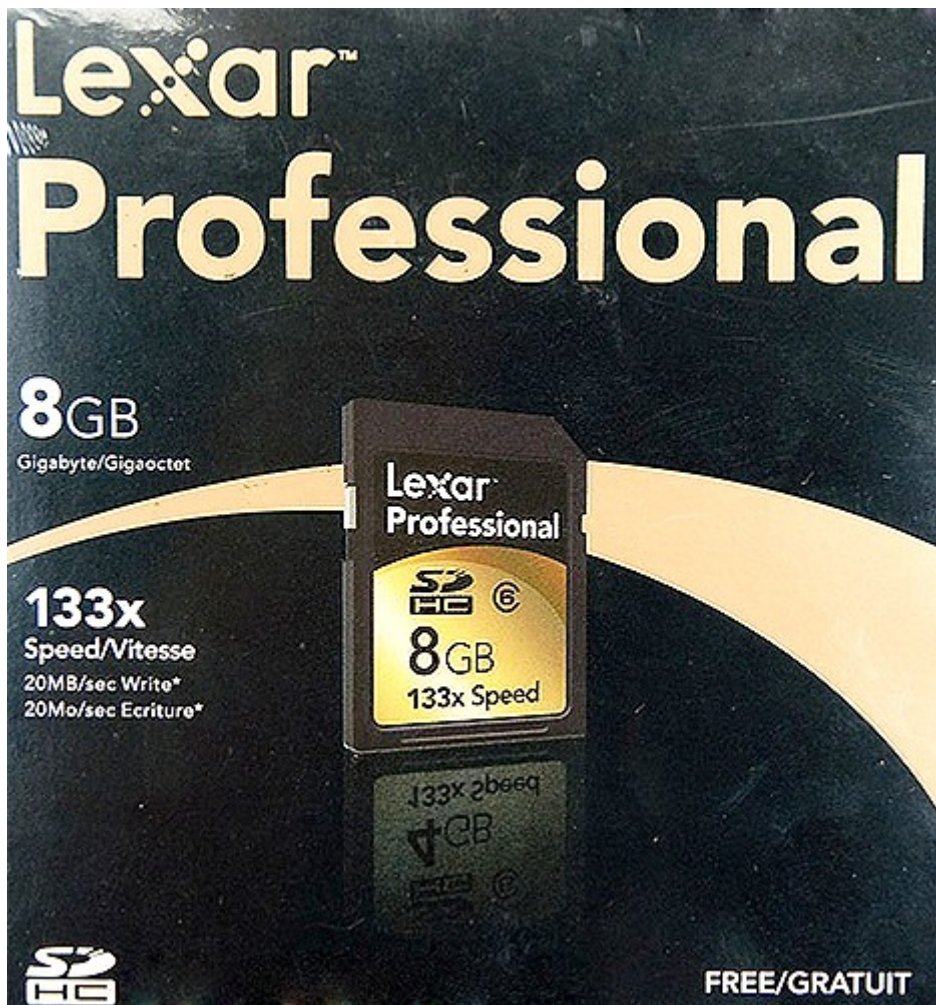
Now don't get me wrong, I love Photoshop, I use it daily, I would be lost without it but there are times when you have to ask if particular photos have benefited from its use. I know that this is where you wish that I'd link to some examples – and I was tempted – but maybe that wouldn't be fair without the owners consent and would that be forthcoming when linked to this article? So you'll just have to seek them out yourselves.

[Photoshopdisasters](#) Is as good a place to start as any.

Here are a couple of disasters I don't mind pointing out although they don't really illustrate my article – they are a humorous interlude.



Top Tip: Instead of using a tripod, why not super glue the camera to your thumb.



On reflection maybe not as big as you thought.

These are of course chiefly commercial images carried out by those who should be more capable or at least be overseen by those with more attention to detail. Some of these disasters can obviously be put down to the MAC Monkey being overworked and in these days of 'composite rules', then we're bound to see more of them, although if you're selling to photographers and graphic designers it's probably best not to give them something to gloat about.

This whole idea of being airbrushed has now entered the human common psyche, if it's good enough for the cover girls and super models, then its good enough for everyone. After all, if Gisele Bündchen needs tweaking why shouldn't me and you. It's become acceptable and in the case of some studios, a business model, whereby you know you will most definitely be 'airbrushed' before you even set foot through the door.

So can we blame the poor photographer who when faced with demands of manipulation has to keep one eye on the mortgage at all times. It can't be easy to think that it will be your Photoshop work that is being praised rather than your skill with a camera and lighting but in times like these, or any times for that matter, needs must. Adapt or die?

It's about now that the cry of 'but it all went on before digital and photoshop' can be heard echoing along the virtual corridor and so it did but not as vociferously as it does now. Bob at Number 14

wasn't tweaking the missus to the point that she looks like Kelly Brook's better looking sister and not all 16yr old girls looked like they stepped out of the pages of a Manga comic. The pages of the family album were a history of our families; they showed us as we were – warts 'n' all.

Yes, I know that artists with a brush were often more than complimentary with their subjects – there have been times when their very life may have depended on it – but we don't use brushes, we use cameras. Some of the very best of today's portraiture, for me, comes from the work of press photographers and photo-journalists, who work quickly, often in less than ideal light and locations and yet manage in that short time to capture something of the person in front of them. No gimmicks, no 'brushing', just the essence of their subject, frozen in a split second of their life.

This craze, if it can be described as such, is not only confined to the world of portraits and commercial images. When I was writing my two books on Victorian crime, old photographs proved a valuable resource to me. These were not the works of professional photographers but archived collections from what had been hobby photographers, snapshots of everyday life given to the Municipal Archives and Libraries. They had not been doctored or altered and so they showed people and places as they had been. I was able to use them to pinpoint premises and see how streets and locations had looked prior to modern development.

If our own collections end up being utilised in the same way a hundred years from now, will those viewing them be able to trust that what they see is a true depiction of that location in that particular year.

This problem came to me a few years back whilst photographing down at Kimmeridge Bay in Dorset. It's a location used by many UK photographers and the Cleavell Tower on the headland is an architectural feature that has added a focal point to countless photographs. In 2007 it was dismantled and moved away from the crumbling cliff to a safer position and when I was down there it was half built and covered in scaffolding. When I processed the photo I chose to do my own re-building job on the tower and removed the scaffolding and completed the build a year ahead of completion. Later it struck me that anybody viewing the image, and seeing the date, could be confused as to why it showed the tower as a completed structure in 2007 when it had not according to records, been completed until the summer of 2009.

Alright, so the moving of Cleavell Tower was a well documented event and covered extensively in the local press but so often these days Landscape Photographers clone objects from images in an attempt to create what they perceive to be a more pleasing photo.

Think of it this way. When we look back at old photographs and see old cars and horses and carts we do not see blots on the landscape. Photographers of the 19th and early 20th Century, were not trying to re-create an earlier period, they were photographing what was in front of them. These days pylons, telephone wires, cars, even people are cloned out. Contrails in the sky are obliterated, even planes themselves are removed - but we live in the 21st Century. These objects are part of the world we live in. We should not be trying to re-create a time gone by; we should be photographing the here and now. If you don't like the pylons and why should you, then photograph something else. If the quaint little Somerset village has cars on the street, then that's how it is. In a hundred years time, those cars will elicit feelings of nostalgia in the same way that a 60's Morris Minor does today – probably. Here we are with the greatest advancement in photography since the invention of film and we're using it to try and create the 19th Century.

Back on the subject of weddings, I've been asked to remove guests from group shots – “We only asked 'em 'cos my Mum told us we had to. Don't want 'em in the photos as well,” and so with a

few deft sweeps of the clone brush it's as if they were never there – but of course they were. Despite them being replaced by a nearby yew hedge, they were still there, eliminating them from a photo doesn't alter the fact any more than healing those weathered brows or eliminating that Ford Focus makes it the truth. Yes, the camera has always lied but now it tells the truth less and less.

It is worth noting that French MP, Valerie Boyer is campaigning for a bill to be put through Parliament asking that a statement be shown next to altered images, reading along the lines of "Photograph retouched to modify the physical appearance of a person."

A statement released with her intended bill said -

“These photos can lead people to believe in a reality that does not actually exist, and have a detrimental effect on adolescents. Many young people, particularly girls, do not know the difference between the virtual and reality, and can develop complexes from a very young age.”

Her concerns are very different to my own and if proved to be true, more worrying. So who knows, maybe I'm exaggerating but maybe I'm just writing this 10 years too soon.

As I write this article several agencies are reporting the taking down of an advert featuring Twiggy. It claims that her beautiful 60yr old skin can be attributed more to Photoshop than Olay skin cream.



© Olay © London Media Magic cream?

I have been basing some of my talks around the country on this subject now for a couple of years, in fact it formed the basis of four days of 'lectures' at the Focus on Imaging Show at the NEC and I must admit, there is always a steady stream of people waiting to agree with me afterwards.