

Dissolving Reality: Exploring the Erosion of Photographic Authenticity in the Age of AI

Eduard-Claudiu GROSS

Babeş-Bolyai University

Corresponding author email: eduard.gross@ubbcluj.ro

Dissolving Reality: Exploring the Erosion of Photographic Authenticity in the Age of AI

Abstract: This study explores the intricate dynamics of visual communication in the context of AI-generated visuals. The question of picture interpretation, starting with the subjective interpretation of images, contextual constraints, and cultural influences of individuals that may affect the perception of an image, is at the heart of this work. The study examines a range of viewpoints on the perception of pictures from writers including Roland Barthes, John Berger, Susan Sontag, and Jean Baudrillard in order to investigate these concerns. The paper also explores the significance of AI-generated graphics, as well as Jean Baudrillard's simulacra notion. It draws attention to how simulacra, or representations without a true relationship to reality, are embodied by AI-generated visuals. In the context of AI-generated imagery, Baudrillard's phases of the image are analyzed, indicating the separation from reality and the formation of pure simulacra. The importance of critically engaging with images becomes evident, as viewers' personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and the intricate complexities of visual media intertwine to shape meaning. The insights derived from this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the multi-faceted nature of visual communication in contemporary society, emphasizing the need for a nuanced and critical approach to the interpretation of visual content.

Keywords: Visual Communication; Subjectivity; Contextual Influences; AI-generated Imagery; Simulacra; Image Interpretation

Citation suggestion: Gross, Eduard-Claudiu. "Dissolving Reality: Exploring the Erosion of Photographic Authenticity in the Age of AI" *Transilvania*, no. 01 (2024): 36-43.
<https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2024.01.05>.



Introduction:

The counterfeit nature of everything is, at least in appearance, the contemporary standard. Programs such as DALL-E 2 or Midjourney are now emulating photographs that manage to pass the viewer's critical radar as true images. In a context where many see photography as a standard of truthfulness and proof of truth, it is more necessary than ever to question what an image represents. If AI-generated images can fool scholars, photographers, jury members in renowned photography competitions, what chance does the average user have of discerning what is real and what is fake? The aim of this paper is to re-evaluate the value of images and bring the discussion into the contemporary, starting from some recent examples where Artificial Intelligence has caused controversy. Photographer Boris Eldgasen has publicly admitted that the photograph with which he won the creativity section of a renowned photography competition was in fact generated by artificial intelligence. He turned down a substantial cash prize in the hope that this stunt would open the way for further discussion of AI-generated art.¹

In the contemporary era, the notion of "post-truth" has become the term most often used to describe the state of affairs. A brief description of the term post-truth according to Oxford Dictionaries refers

1. Jamie Grierson, "Photographer Admits Prize-Winning Image Was AI-Generated," *The Guardian*, April 17, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/apr/17/photographer-admits-prize-winning-image-was-ai-generated>.



to “circumstances in which people respond more to feelings and beliefs than to facts”². While the term surfaced in 2016, in the context of the US elections, being declared the word of the year for that year³, and experiencing a significant increase in search engines, the term is not strictly related solely to politics. Lee McIntyre argues that the term “post-truth” carries with it a normative dimension, indicating a concern that the value of truth itself is under attack.⁴ Another quintessential idea about the mechanism behind this phenomenon is the following: “post-truth amounts to a form of ideological supremacy, whereby its practitioners are trying to compel someone to believe in something whether there is good evidence for it or not.”⁵ Therefore, in this era, the promotion of truth becomes an afterthought, whereas each individual becomes focused on his own cause. This postulates that post-truth can be utilized to exercise control or influence over others, potentially distorting public discourse and decision-making processes.

However, we should not treat post-truth as a novelty. In 1992, Boorstin describes a paradigm shift in what truth means, evolving into credibility, suggesting that people are becoming less and less concerned with whether something is factually correct, the important thing is that it is “convenient that it should be believed”⁶. He argues that in society, almost anything can be presented as true by mere appearances. Applying this sequence to the issues raised in this article, we can say that more than ever, narratives can be supported with evidence that has the power to be credible. With the power of AI to generate alternate worlds, any story can be illustrated. The purpose of this study is not to undermine the importance of photography in journalistic content, but only to draw attention to the fact that images need to be viewed in a more critical light, especially since photographs are often considered intangible evidence of an event or situation and visual content is abundantly present and rapidly distributed. As Kakutani mentions, the incredible volume of data allows the user to choose only the data that supports their point of view, while also encouraging researchers to find only studies that support their theories.⁷ If this is an erosion of the value of truth, we can imagine what it means to generate the full facts that support a particular point of view.

Redefining the definitions of authenticity: the threat of artificial intelligence against truth and reality

The image is also approached in terms of its propagandistic value. Addressing the issue of photographic manipulation, Tandoc et al. argue that the term fake news has transcended the barrier of textual content, and now includes the dimension of images and videos to create false narratives.⁸ As they argue, this phenomenon has become prevalent due to the advancement of digital photography and powerful manipulation software, as well as the fact that more people are knowledgeable in these techniques. Manipulated images can range from simple adjustments, such as enhancing or removing elements, to significant alterations, such as inserting or deleting individuals from photos. While legacy media adheres to ethical standards regarding image manipulation, social media platforms do not have such strict regulations, leading to the dissemination of manipulated images that mislead readers. As I conclude, another worrying factor is that images are taken out of context, as images can contribute to the spreading of false beliefs and the reintroduction of preconceived notions.⁹

A further key aspect of images is mentioned by Claire Wardle, who points out that most of the content circulating on social media is made up of images, frequently memes, which are detached from a text article, making it almost impossible in some cases to trace the original source. These types of content are prioritized by the algorithm in favor of text.¹⁰ Based on the two aforementioned

2. “Post-Truth,” post-truth adjective - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com, accessed May 31, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/post-truth>.

3. “Oxford Word of the Year 2016,” Oxford Languages, accessed May 31, 2023, <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/>.

4. Lee C. McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), pp. 6.

5. McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, pp. 13.

6. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), pp. 212.

7. Michiko Kakutani, *The Death of Truth: Notes on Falsehood in the Age of Trump* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018).

8. Edson C. Tandoc, Zheng Wei Lim, and Richard Ling, “Defining ‘Fake News,’” *Digital Journalism* 6, no. 2 (2017): 137–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143>, pp. 144–145.

9. Tandoc et al., “Defining ‘Fake News,’” *Digital Journalism* 6, no. 2 (2017), 137–53, 144–145.

10. Claire Wardle, “Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making” (2017). pp. 39.

perspectives, we can argue that today, due to generative photography tools, the definitions are no longer entirely up to date. After concrete examples of some cases of generated images that have managed to cause confusion among users, we will propose a definition that also takes into account fully generated images.

Kalley Huang points out in an article published in *The New York Times* that the photos generated of Pope Francis raise new concerns about counterfeit visual content. Kalley Huang delves into the rising concerns surrounding the ability of artificial intelligence (AI) to produce authentic-looking counterfeit images, with Pope Francis serving as a notable example.¹¹ The article highlights the remarkable level of realism achieved by AI algorithms, enabling the creation of deceptive images that closely resemble genuine photographs. The piece draws attention to a specific occurrence involving the generation of a counterfeit image of Pope Francis, generated by an AI model trained on an extensive dataset of papal photographs. This falsified image depicted the Pope engaging in an action he had never actually performed.¹² This incident serves as a reminder of the potential risks associated with the improper use of AI technology, particularly when it comes to the production of counterfeit visual content.

In an article on *Vox*, Oshan Jarow argues that the photo of Pope Francis in a puffer coat or other AI-generated images that have gone viral marks an event that leads to the collapse of a clear boundary between the imaginative and the real. As Oshan Jarow mentions, generative image technology allows us to see realistic exposures of scenes that do not exist, thus opening up a future of visual realities. Artificial Intelligence will increase the number of plausible scenarios and the future we perceive as plausible.¹³

In conclusion, the phenomenon of AI-generated images has revolutionized the visual propaganda landscape. The current understanding of imagery and propaganda does not include this perspective in which alternative realities can be constructed from a simple text prompt. The implications of AI-generated images in visual propaganda are alarming. The rise of counterfeit visual content, as demonstrated by the creation of deceptive images resembling genuine photographs, poses significant risks. The incident involving an AI-generated counterfeit image of Pope Francis serves as a striking example, underscoring the need for caution and ethical use of AI technology to prevent the production and spread of counterfeit visuals. These developments challenge the clear boundary between the imaginative and the real, as generative image technology enables the portrayal of realistic scenes that do not exist, reshaping perceptions of what is plausible in our visual realities. Therefore, we propose the following definition for AI-generated images in the context of visual propaganda: AI-generated images refer to visuals created via the application of artificial intelligence algorithms and generative models. These images are produced by training AI models on extensive datasets, allowing them to generate highly realistic and convincing visuals that mimic real images.

Subjectivity and Contextual Constraints in Visual Communication

Another weak point that hangs in the balance of truth value when discussing images is precisely the interpretation of images, which is a difficult task for the individual. Visual communication plays an important role in modern society, as it influences the perception of individuals and influences their understanding and attitudes. Roland Barthes elaborates in *Camera lucida* on the concept of *punctum*, as he puts it: "I may know better a photograph I remember than a photograph I am looking at"¹⁴. In Barthes' theory, *punctum* means a detail or element within the photograph that intensely captures the viewer's attention. These aspects are rather subjective and personal and affect the viewer emotionally or in Barthes' words, "A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)"¹⁵. Thus, the *punctum* is not readily noticeable when looking at a photograph, in spite of its clarity. The *punctum* might only reveal itself after viewing the photograph, when it is no longer physically available to the viewer, when the viewer reflects on the image from memory and a deeper understanding of the image is possible.

11. Kalley Huang, "Why Pope Francis Is the Star of a.i.-Generated Photos," *The New York Times*, April 8, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/08/technology/ai-photos-pope-francis.html>.

12. Kalley Huang. "Why Pope Francis Is the Star of a.i.-Generated Photos." *NYT*, Apr 8, 2023.

13. Oshan Jarow, "How Fake AI Images Can Expand Your Mind," *Vox*, March 30, 2023, <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/23661673/pope-puffer-coat-generative-ai-midjourney-imagination>.

14. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 1st American ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), pp. 53.

15. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp. 27.



However, it is also worth mentioning the part that speaks in favor of the interpretation of images, namely the concept of *studium* developed by Roland Barthes. He talks about *studium* to explain that feelings towards a photograph are not purely subjective or personal, but are rather influenced by a collective and cultural understanding. According to Barthes, *studium* does not immediately refer to study in the academic sense, but to something that arouses interest and enthusiasm; by *studium* we mean cultural interaction. Summing up, the concept of *studium* describes a cultural influence in the interaction with photography and represents general interest without requiring exceptional insight.¹⁶

John Berger emphasizes upon the idea that seeing precedes words, which means that it significantly shapes the way we understand the world. According to Berger, before a child learns to speak, they are already interacting with their environment by looking at and recognizing different objects. Therefore, seeing is a precursor to language development. Berger further argues that seeing establishes a connection with the surrounding world, the relationship between what we see and what we know is always evolving and never definitively concluded.¹⁷

Let us bring into discussion this quote of Susan Sontag: "Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy."¹⁸ This part suggests that photographs as objects by themselves do not have the ability to provide explicit explanations or to expose a specific meaning on their own. In contrast to written language that directly communicates ideas and concepts, photographs rely on visual cues, thus leaving room for interpretation. Sontag proposes that, despite the fact that they do not possess a particular quality to explain facts, photographs are a source of inspiration that leaves room for an endless series of interpretations. When we look at a photograph and engage in a process of analysis and interpretation, the conclusions and theories deduced by one person may be contrary to the conclusions of another. In interpreting photographs, we employ our own knowledge, experiences, and biases to elucidate the meaning of an image. Sontag further goes to say: "Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it."¹⁹ When we accept a photograph as a representation of reality, we may tend to believe that we have gained knowledge about the world through that image. We trust that the camera has captured a truthful depiction of a particular moment or scene. However, Sontag suggests that this belief can be misleading because photographs are subjective representations influenced by various factors such as the photographer's intention, framing, timing, and editing.

On another note, Mitchell discusses the contrasting opinions about the nature of photography, pointing out that there are various debates about interpretation. As Mitchell describes, the duality inherent in photography revolves around its ability to embody both automatic realism and naturalism, along with its inclination to aesthetically elevate and idealize subjects through pictorial representation. Photography garners acclaim for its incapacity to engage in abstraction, while simultaneously facing criticism for its propensity to generate abstract interpretations of human reality. Moreover, photography is often hailed as an independent visual medium, yet simultaneously scrutinized for its entanglement with language.²⁰

Thus, photography often seen as a medium capable of capturing reality while preserving the natural details of the subjects photographed is seen in contradistinction as a medium that tends to aestheticize and idealize subjects through a more visually pleasing form, photography thus becoming a vehicle for immortalizing the world but one that stylizes it at the same time. Photography is sometimes lauded for its ability to capture clear features and specific situations, which makes it less susceptible to abstraction, however sometimes photography can make abstractions by detaching itself from immediate reality and producing images that are more metaphysical or symbolic in character. Summing up the idea of Mitchell, images are influenced by cultural and contextual aspects that shape their interpretation, rather than being merely visual.

Relevant to the purpose of this critical examination, James Elkins brings into discussion the concept of visual literacy in relation to interpretation. According to Elkins, there is a prevalent trend in visual culture

16. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp. 26.

17. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing: Based on the BBC Television Series* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972), 7-9.

18. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: RosettaBooks, 2005), pp. 17.

19. Sontag, *On Photography*, 17.

20. Mitchell W J T., *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago, Ill: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 274.

where visual literacy is predominantly associated with interpretation, while neglecting discussions that involve creating lists or establishing canons of influential works or artists. Elkins contends that lists and interpretation are inherently interconnected. He argues that visual literacy cannot be solely focused on methodologies, ideologies, and interpretive strategies, as it necessitates familiarity with a specific set of images, even if these images may change over time. In certain instances, visual literacy may entail a shared catalog of images, such as in introductory art history courses. However, even in such cases, methodologies and ideological purposes emerge organically from the images themselves. In graduate seminars, the author suggests that visual literacy shifts its emphasis from knowledge to interpretation, centering on how visual objects are employed in diverse contexts. Nevertheless, even in these instances, a shared vocabulary of images forms the basis for comprehension, potentially excluding students who lack familiarity with this vocabulary. The author further expresses their intent to address practical considerations that are often overshadowed by more abstract and general discussions.²¹ Elkins raises questions regarding the specific images and image-making practices that an ideal undergraduate student should encounter, which images a visually literate undergraduate should comprehend, and what interpretations and understanding would constitute visual literacy at varying levels.

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen propose the following statement on interpretation: "Reality is in the eye of the beholder; or rather, what is regarded as real depends on how reality is defined by a particular social group."²² This idea suggests that perception and interpretation of reality are subjective, influenced by cultural and social factors in which the individual exists. The position is one against the notion of objective reality existing independently of human perception. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, various social groups have distinct understandings of what is real since each group has its own set of values, beliefs, and interests that impact their experience of reality. Kress and van Leeuwen contend that reality is a construct that evolves from social interactions and shared understandings rather than an inherent, fixed substance. According to this viewpoint, reality is a product of human interpretation and negotiation rather than an ultimate truth. It is shaped by the intricate interplay of social, cultural, and historical elements that contribute to the formation of meaning and comprehension. As a result, what is considered real might vary greatly depending on the setting and the group of people involved.

In conclusion, visual communication has subtleties of subjectivity and context, each individual is prone to a different interpretation of an image or situation. The works cited in this section attempt to elucidate these complex mechanisms behind the deciphering of reality and draw attention to the fact that images are shaped by the wider cultural context in which we exist. It is the result of a symbiotic relationship between the viewer's own experiences, cultural influences, and the intrinsic intricacies of the medium itself. As viewers, we apply our own knowledge, prejudices, and understanding to picture interpretation, building meaning in a contextually sensitive way.

Simulacra, simulation, and the Artificial Intelligence generated imagery

The notion of the simulacrum was introduced by French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, who defined it as a copy or representation that has no original. According to Baudrillard, when it comes to simulacra and simulation, the matters are "no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication"²³ but a "question of substituting the signs of the real for the real"²⁴ meaning that instead of reality being copied or imitated, the focus is on replacing the signs that represent reality itself, causing a change in the representation of reality. He believed that reality had given place to hyperreality in today's society, a situation in which simulations and duplicates are more real than the original. Baudrillard believed that the abundance of pictures, signs, and symbols has distorted our perception of reality. The barrier between the real and the virtual blurs in this hyperreal environment, resulting in a loss of authenticity and relevance.

Based on Baudrillard's view, we can argue that AI-generated images are the embodiment of the notion of simulacrum. Such images, although based on a set of millions of images, cannot be considered as simple reproductions of existing objects captured by the camera/human, but rather as the work of algorithms, producing upon themselves. Thus, the images generated are the result of a machine, with

21. James Elkins, *Visual Studies a Skeptical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 139.

22. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 158.

23. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp. 2.

24. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, pp. 2.



no correspondent in real life, representing rather the machine's interpretation of already available data. Now it is time to discuss the successive phases of the image according to Jean Baudrillard's definition with an application of AI-generated images to the framework to see how simulacra emerges in AI generated imagery. According to Baudrillard's view, an image goes through four successive phases, as follows: "a) it is the reflection of a profound reality; b) it masks and denatures a profound reality; c) it masks the absence of a profound reality; d) it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum."²⁵

In the first phase, which is the reflection of deep reality, the image is regarded as a mirror. This means that it faithfully depicts something with a correspondent in real life. In the context of images generated with artificial intelligence, it can be seen as an attempt to reproduce real-life objects (e.g., the dataset learns what a dog looks like based on a plethora of dog photos, and then reproduces a faithful copy of what it has learned).

In the second phase, the image is no longer a simple reflection of reality, but a mask and distortion of it. The image becomes a medium through which reality is transformed, introducing a subjective interpretation that alters the original reality. In the context of AI-generated images, this happens when algorithms modify or enhance the input data to create a more pleasing or idealized image, deviating from the original reality (here we can talk about filters).

In masking the absence of deep reality, the image is not related to reality at all. The image functions as a substitute for reality, which becomes practically non-existent. The image is in this case a simulation with no correspondence to reality. This is the current stage of AI generated images, they are generated by algorithms, they seem to depict certain situations, but they have no physical basis.

The last phase is that of pure simulacrum, culminating in total detachment from reality. The image becomes self-referential without any connection to reality. This can be seen in the context of AI-generated imagery when images are made completely through the generative powers of the algorithms, without any external input or reference, resulting in images that are purely simulated and disconnected from any original reality.

Another relevant perspective in the context of simulacra is presented by Guy Debord, who writes about the spectacle of the image and the fact that reality is mediated by various forms of media. As he states in the beginning of the book "the tendency toward the specialization of images-of-the-world finds its highest expression in the world of the autonomous image, where deceit deceives itself."²⁶ This passage reflects on the detachment of images from life, presenting a critical perspective on how the proliferation of detached and specialized images can distort our understanding of reality and lead to a separation from authentic lived experiences. These images exist as separate entities and have a life of their own, detached from the reality they originally depicted. In this autonomous image world, there is a significant emphasis on specialization, meaning the images become highly focused and specialized in representing specific aspects of the world. However, the passage also highlights an interesting aspect of this specialization. It states that in the world of the autonomous image, deceit deceives itself. This implies that the specialized images, while detached and autonomous, are also deceptive. They not only deceive the viewers or observers, but also deceive themselves. This could suggest that the highly specialized images, by virtue of their detachment from reality, perpetuate illusions or falsehoods, losing touch with the authenticity and truth of the world they represent.

Ultimately, Meredith Broussard argues: "I heard people repeat the same promises about the bright technological future, but I saw the digital world replicate the inequalities of the 'real' world."²⁷ While the text does not strictly refer to the image, we can consider how this applies to the current case. Firstly, this part refers to the skepticism towards the promises brought by technology and how they actually manifest themselves in society. Instead of being a bridge to reduce real-life inequalities such as discrimination, wealth disparities or social divisions, AI will in certain ways bring these inequalities to the online environment. We can think of the following ways in which the images generated can further increase inequality in the real world:

- Amplifying narratives containing bias: since there is no objective way to use datasets, algorithms can be trained to produce discriminatory content, with generated images being used to reinforce

25. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, pp. 6.

26. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995), pp. 12.

27. Meredith Broussard, *Artificial Unintelligence: How Computers Misunderstand the World* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019), pp. 6.

biases and stereotypes.

- Production of counterfeit/misleading visual evidence: Generated images may be created to convince the audience of dangerous narratives. In a context where visual evidence has a great impact on the credibility of a news story, one can imagine what it would mean if conspiracy theories were backed up by convincing visual evidence.

- Deepfakes: Deepfake technology is becoming increasingly accessible for the creation of audiovisual content. Although it has many applications unrelated to disinformation, such as in the film industry, it can be used as a political weapon. Such techniques erode trust in public figures, institutions or media outlets.

Conclusion

The philosophical insights discussed in this study succeed in unraveling the intricate dynamics of visual communication in the age of simulacra and artificial intelligence-generated imagery. The discussion is extended to the subjective aspects of imagery, emphasizing that images are not static elements with fixed interpretations, but rather are subject to subjective constructs based on individual experience and cultural influences. Exploring the concept of simulacra within the counterfactual nature of images reveals a detachment of the image from the reality that challenges traditional notions of the image with regard to authenticity and truth. The implications of AI-generated images have many ramifications, and extend to perpetuating bias, distorting reality and creating misleading visual content that can serve as evidence to support malicious narratives.

These phenomena undermine the notion of credibility and truth in visual communication. In conclusion, the paper insists on the importance of critical thinking when it comes to images, viewers should be aware that they have a lot of shortcomings when it comes to interpreting images. Recent developments in other generative technology and software such as Midjourney and DALL-E 2 represent a paradigm shift. There is currently a race in the development of software for digital photo editing, with the emphasis falling on the speed with which image alteration can be done. An ethical approach to these developments is needed to minimize as much as possible the negative effects of the proliferation of AI-generated content, so that individuals are equipped with the necessary skills to combat misinformation coming in such a form.

This study has limitations that should be mentioned. First, this research focuses entirely on philosophical and theoretical perspectives that may have limited applicability; future studies should address empirical research that complements the theoretical foundation. Secondly, the perspective of Western philosophy is explored, which may not be well suited to encompass cultural nuances in various spheres of visual communication. The idea for this article came from a few years of experience with AI-generated images, which despite their popularity, are nothing new. We can mention in this case Harold Cohen's lifelong project AARON, who created this program in 1973 and perfected it until the end of his life.²⁸ Harold, unlike most artists who use the new methods that allow anyone to generate images credits the work of the program very carefully, all the work generated is credited to AARON. In the current landscape, many debates revolve around authenticity, data training and copyright issues. I generated the photo above as part of a vernacular photography project I've been working on for over a year, I was curious if AI could be used for expansion of a small photo collection. The results are some promising ones that closely emulate reality, but as I progressed with the results, I realized that this is not what I want. The goal of this paper will be achieved if it succeeds in convincing one person to be more mindful when interacting with visual content online and to sharpen one's senses when it comes to believing the information, especially if it happens to be congruent with the beliefs they hold.

Bibliography

"Oxford Word of the Year 2016." Oxford Languages. Accessed May 31, 2023. <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/>.

"Post-Truth." post-truth adjective - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com. Accessed May 31, 2023. <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/post-truth>.

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. 1st American ed. Hill and Wang.

28. Jo Lawson Tancred, "The Prophecies of Aaron," Outland, November 4, 2022, <https://outland.art/harold-cohen-aaron/>.



- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- Berger, John. *Ways of seeing: Based on the BBC television series*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972.
- Boorstin, Daniel J. *The image: A guide to pseudo-events in America*. New York: Atheneum, 1992.
- Broussard, Meredith. *Artificial unintelligence: How computers misunderstand the world*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019.
- Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books, 1995.
- Elkins, James. *Visual studies a skeptical introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Grierson, Jamie. "Photographer Admits Prize-Winning Image Was AI-Generated." *The Guardian*, April 17, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/apr/17/photographer-admits-prize-winning-image-was-ai-generated>.
- Huang, Kalley. "Why Pope Francis Is the Star of a.i.-Generated Photos." *The New York Times*, April 8, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/08/technology/ai-photos-pope-francis.html>.
- Jarow, Oshan. "How Fake AI Images Can Expand Your Mind." *Vox*, March 30, 2023. <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/23661673/pope-puffer-coat-generative-ai-midjourney-imagination>.
- Kakutani, Michiko. *The death of truth: Notes on falsehood in the age of trump*. New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018.
- Kress, Gunther, and Theo van Leeuwen. *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. London: Routledge, 2010.
- McIntyre, Lee C. *Post-truth*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: RosettaBooks, 2005.
- T., Mitchell W J. *What do pictures want?: The lives and loves of images*. Chicago, Ill: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Tancred, Jo Lawson. "The Prophecies of Aaron." *Outland*, November 4, 2022. <https://outland.art/harold-cohen-aaron/>.
- Tandoc, Edson C., Zheng Wei Lim, and Richard Ling. "Defining 'Fake News.'" *Digital Journalism* 6, no. 2 (2017): 137–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143>.
- Wardle, Claire. "Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making." 2017.



Figure 1 Image generated via Midjourney v5.1 by the author.