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The "Make-Believe" War: Necessary Fictionalization in Alexander Gardner's
Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War

Alexander Gardner's Civil War photographs, especially those collected in his *Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War*, have achieved a tremendous amount of popularity in the one-hundred-fifty years following the war, but that fame has not come without its share of controversies. Though his images have been recognized for their stirring visual accounts of the war, the revelation in the 1960s that Gardner had falsified some of his photographs by posing corpses and inventing fictional stories to accompany his photographs raised significant ethical questions about the images Gardner created. Concerns over the way Gardner composed his photographs are informed primarily by contemporary expectations of the ethical standards of photojournalists, whose craft is comparable to the type of visual reporting Gardner did of battlefields such as Antietam and Gettysburg. Most who take issue with the way Gardner set up his photographs, however, fail to consider the significant limitations of the technology of photography in Gardner's day, which at the time was still in its infancy. In order to add significance to his photographs and help his audience see the war as he wanted them to see it, Gardner had to employ several creative manipulations to his photographs, the way he would manipulate studio portraits to tell a bigger story when he worked as a daguerreotypist. In using the text presented alongside the photographs in the *Sketch Book* in the same way he used props in the studio, as well as the strategic posing of his subjects, Gardner created images that fit the description of what

Heinz and Bridget Henisch call "make-believe." Recognizing how elements of "make-believe" are present in the photographs in Gardner's *Sketch Book* will help viewers to understand the necessity of fictionalization in Civil War photography.

Audiences often approach Alexander Gardner's *Sketch Book* as a historical text, or as an early form of photojournalism. Because both historical and journalistic texts deal with the recording and preserving of the truth of past and current events, those who view the images in Gardner's *Sketch Book* do so through the lens of contemporary expectations of integrity and ethics. In his book, *Photojournalism: An Ethical Approach*, which is structured to act as a guidebook for photojournalists who are just breaking in to the field, Paul Lester explains that "the impact of the visual image on a viewer comes directly from the belief that the 'camera never lies'" (90). Whether recording events from the perspective of a photojournalist trying to capture events as they are happening or the perspective of a historian attempting to preserve events for future memory, the contemporary cameraperson is influenced by this notion of photography as the primary medium for capturing truth. As Lester explains, "the camera faithfully and unemotionally records a moment in time. But a machine is only as truthful as the hands that guide it" (90). Lester reinforces the need for journalists to present their subjects as accurately as possible, in keeping with these expectations of integrity.

Lester explains that credibility is one of the most important assets of a photojournalist, and the specter of picture manipulation is an ever-present threat to that credibility. "The threat to credibility is irreversible," he says, "if the public starts to mistrust the integrity of the news photograph" (91). He then proceeds to offer examples of famous photographs, including a few of Gardner's Civil War photographs, that met with controversy because the journalists who took the photos were suspected of "misrepresenting the truth" in one way or another (93).[1] Lester is concerned with making sure up-and-coming photojournalists recognize the need to practice ethical conduct in their profession, going so far as to include in his book the official code of ethics for the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA). Of the list of eight points that make up this code of ethics, two in particular stand out as discouraging photojournalists from the practice of picture manipulation: Number 3, which states that "it is the individual responsibility of every photojournalist at all times to strive for pictures that report truthfully, honestly, and objectively;" and Number 4, which states, in part, that "untrue statements of any nature are not worthy of a professional photojournalist and we severely condemn any such practice" (163).[2] According to Lester and the NPPA, manipulating photographs is an incredibly unethical act that undermines

the efforts of photojournalists to portray unbiased, unedited versions of the truth. At the very least, photo manipulation can do significant damage to the career and reputation of a photojournalist. As Lester states, "when a photographer is shown to fake a picture, all of his work is put into question. Again, the issue is credibility" (95).

Given the emphasis on integrity and ethics among professional photojournalists, as well as the public expectations of truth in photography, it is not surprising that evidence of photo manipulation in Alexander Gardner's *Sketch Book* would bring about the questions and controversies that have arisen in the wake of the revealing analysis of Gardner's work. The debates that surround Gardner's battlefield photographs, however, ignore the fact that the photographs taken at Gettysburg and elsewhere were severely restricted by the limits of the technology of photography that made taking a photograph a lengthy and cumbersome progress. Telling a story through visual images required photographers to add certain fictional elements to their pictures that would make up for the inability of their equipment to capture scenes exactly as they wanted. As we will see later, Gardner added fictional elements to many of the photographs in his *Sketch Book*, particularly the ones featuring living human subjects. In doing so, Gardner drew on his background as a portrait artist, a position which also made significant use of fictional elements. The manipulations Gardner made to other photographs in the *Sketch Book* are often forgotten in conversations surrounding Gardner's more infamous images, but recognizing the fictitious aspects of other photographs will help to change the way we approach the controversies related to Gardner's work.

Gardner's notoriety stems from evidence suggesting that he fabricated some of the photographs he took at Gettysburg, as well as the text that would later accompany those images when he crafted the *Sketch Book*. Recognition of Gardner manipulating or falsifying some of the images he took on the battlefield of Gettysburg dates as far back as the early 1960s, when Frederic Ray, at the time the art director for *Civil War Times* magazine, first noted that Gardner had used the same body of a fallen soldier in different locations on the battlefield, describing the images in ways that suggest that he wanted his audience to believe that the two photographs represented two different bodies. The photographs under scrutiny are titled "A Sharpshooter's Last Sleep, Gettysburg, July, 1863" (Figure 1) and "Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg, July, 1863" (Figure 2).[3] Paul Lester summarizes Frederic Ray's analysis of these images, saying "Ray wrote that Gardner 'was guilty of at least a misdemeanor as a photographic historian' and concluded that his ethical transgressions were 'nothing serious'" (95).

It was William Frassanito's historical work, *Gettysburg: A Journey in Time*, published in 1975, that brought greater attention to the manipulations Gardner had made in his photographs and expanded on public understanding of what Gardner had done. While recounting the ways in which Gardner, Mathew Brady, Timothy O'Sullivan and other photographers had documented the aftermath of the battle of Gettysburg, Frassanito noted that the circumstances surrounding Gardner's composition of the two photos mentioned above constituted "one of the most unusual incidents in the story of photography at Gettysburg: the actual relocation of a dead body some forty yards for the purpose of composing a more effective scene" (187). Frassanito explains in his text that Gardner was primarily concerned with recording the horrors of war by focusing primarily on images of the dead bodies left on the field, waiting to be buried in the days after the battle.[5] Gardner, interested in the reaction of his potential audience and eager to get whatever photos he took on the market, knew that photos of the dead would generate a strong emotional response, so he focused primarily on capturing images of fallen soldiers that would resonate the most with his audience.

This desire to represent the horrors of war, at least at Gettysburg, seems to have influenced Gardner to take certain liberties with the way he composed his photographs.[6] Frassanito explains that, after taking photographs of a single body on the field (the body seen in Plate 40), Gardner and his assistants moved on to another location. At this new scene, says Frassanito, they

> Were struck by the photographic potential of the scene they found. . . but one vital ingredient necessary for a perfect view was missing. There were no bodies.
>
> In what must have been a flash of creative excitement, the cameramen chose to improvise. Returning to the position they had just photographed, Gardner's men placed the slain youth's body onto a blanket. . . and in all likelihood carried him themselves some forty yards up the slope. (191)

Figure 2

Gardner's actions in this instance obviously demonstrate exactly the sort of ethical gaffes Paul Lester warns budding photojournalists against in his guidebook. Frassanito goes on to detail the further steps Gardner took to set up this scene to fit

the idea he had in his mind of how it should look, including setting up certain props to add to the story behind the image. These props include an anachronistic rifle, which according to Frassanito, was "definitely not the type used by sharpshooters" (192), and a knapsack, the purpose of which, Frassanito claims, "was to support a story apparently formulated as Gardner pondered the scene's potential" (192). Frassanito also notes that even the caption accompanying this image contains fictionalized elements, as the story of the soldier lying down to die after being mortally wounded is undone by evidence of Gardner's manipulation of the image. He also labels Gardner's claim that he found the skeleton of this soldier upon returning to Gettysburg four months later "an obvious case of fiction" (192).

The ways in which Gardner manipulated the photographs he took at Gettysburg are especially significant to Frassanito, who argues in his book for an increased recognition of the photographs taken by Gardner, Brady, and other photographers as primary historical sources. He states in the first chapter of his book that, traditionally, Civil War photographs "have either been presented as works of art. . . or they have been placed in the secondary role of illustrations, serving the written word with varying degrees of relevance" (15). Frassanito argues that a photo taken during the war is "a historical document crying to be heard. It has a fantastic story to tell if we can only learn to provide the proper support necessary for the comprehension of its visual tale" (15). If Frassanito is pushing for a greater understanding and use of these photographs as historical texts, then he also must push for a recognition of photographers such as Gardner as historians who are subject to the same code of ethics to which today's historians and photojournalists are bound. Civil War photographers, if Frassanito succeeds in his appeal, become tasked with recording historical events as they happened, putting aside their own agendas and their own interpretations of these events and letting their cameras record whatever is there to record.

Frassanito himself may unwittingly undermine his own effort by placing a significant amount of emphasis on Gardner's artistic decisions concerning his Gettysburg photographs. As stated earlier, and repeated in Frassanito's text, "Gardner's prime interest at Gettysburg was in photographing the dead" (222). Gardner seems to have had an idea of what images he wanted to capture even before he reached the battlefield , and therefore would not have been content to let his camera record only what was there. Gardner believed he had an opportunity to represent the war in a particular way, a belief no doubt influenced by his experience photographing the dead at Antietam, and this belief helped to shape the photographs he took at Gettysburg.

Gardner's agenda for these images is reflected in Frassanito's description, quoted above, of the manipulation of the two sharpshooter photographs. Frassanito notes that Gardner and his assistants, upon seeing the small stone wall lodged between two large boulders that would eventually become the scene for his photo, "Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter," recognize "the photographic potential of the scene they found" (191). Gardner sees in this location a chance to create an image that will fit with his understanding of the events of the battle of Gettysburg, and an idea forms in his mind about how he can use this setting to have the desired influence on his audience. As Frassanito points out, however, the scene is missing "the vital ingredient necessary for a perfect view": the body of a fallen soldier (191). This is the instance where Gardner and his men move the body from another location to this present location, a move Frassanito calls "a flash of creative excitement" (191). Frassanito labels this move a creative act, referring to it as an example of improvisation, the way a portrait-maker might add a prop or rearrange his subjects. Frassanito recognizes that Gardner's artistic impulses are at work in this instance, and that the decisions he makes are in keeping with his vision of the story he wants to tell through his photographs.

While Frassanito's description of this incident implies that Gardner's exercising of his creative impulses is a deviation from his standard photographing techniques, in truth the limited nature of photography constantly required Gardner to employ creative manipulations in order to tell the story he wanted to tell. With the technology of photography still in its relative infancy, capturing an image was a lengthy process, even when the subject was sitting in a studio, surrounded by props.[7] Photographers attempting to capture images on the battlefield found themselves severely restricted by the cumbersome procedure required to create a photograph, not to mention the bulky equipment they had to drag with them across the battlefield. Gardner, like every other battlefield photographer of the day, employed what is known as the "wet plate process" to capture his images. Frassanito's account of Gardner's work includes a brief description of the process:

> This process first required that the photographer, on location and within the confines of a portable darkroom, pour a syrupy solution, known as collodion, over a meticulously cleaned glass plate. After draining off the excess liquid, the coating, which had to be perfectly uniform, was allowed to become tacky, but not dry, whereupon the plate was bathed in a chemical solution rendering the emulsion light sensitive. This collodion-covered plate then became what is known today as the "film." At this point,

the plate was carefully placed in a light-proof holder and rushed from the darkroom to the nearby camera. Immediately following exposure the plate was returned to the portable darkroom for its development. At no time during the process. . . could the solution become dry, for dampness was vital to the light sensitivity of the chemicals. With Gardner and his experienced employees working together as a team, this entire process would have taken approximately ten minutes per plate. (29)

For battlefield photographers such as Gardner, taking a photograph in the early days of photography was a tedious process, and several different factors contributed to the quality of the picture.

Perhaps most significant in terms of the photographic techniques Gardner used in his *Sketch Book* is Frassanito's claim that "any motion in a scene was a distinct handicap, for even the slightest movement, such as the ruffle of a tree in the wind, produced a noticeable blur on the finished plate" (30). While Gardner took numerous photographs of the dead on the battlefield at Gettysburg, as well as at Antietam, Gardner also took photographs of living subjects, and it is these photographs of living soldiers, replicating their lives in the army, that demonstrate the limits of photography and the creative measures Gardner had to take to ensure that the images in his *Sketch Book* told the story he wished them to tell.

The inability of Civil War-era cameras to adequately handle motion is evident in several photographs in the *Sketch Book*, perhaps most notably in Plate 39, entitled "Gateway of Cemetery, Gettysburg, July, 1863" (Figure 3). This photograph shows the gateway that marks the entrance to Evergreen Cemetery, a landmark photographed by many of the photographers who took pictures of the battlefield, including Gardner and Mathew Brady (Frassanito 108). The gateway, of course, is the main focal point of this image, along with the earthworks dug up in front of the gateway. Also present in this image, however, are several people, who each seem to be engaged in performing their own tasks unrelated to Gardner's photograph. As least two of the figures appear to be transparent, as if they are fading from view. Heinz and Bridget Henisch refer to this phenomenon as a "photographic ghost" (64), but while they describe it as a clever trick used by daguerreotypists to create the illusion that there are spirits floating in the background of a portrait, there is no evidence that this effect was done intentionally in Gardner's photograph. The blurry figure standing, or moving, underneath the gateway itself appears to be a very unfortunate accident. The figure can be seen in several places at once, making it difficult to tell if this is one person moving across the archway or several people

walking through the gate. If it is just one person, then the camera has caught him moving from beside the archway to a place inside the gate, inadvertently charting his progress by capturing the spectral trail he creates as he moves. If this is actually a group of people, then it is difficult to distinguish one person from another, or count how many people are there, since none of them appear to be fully corporeal. On the right side of the image, there stands another semi-transparent figure just behind the mound of dirt and pile of wood that make up part of the earthworks in front of the gateway. This figure, though apparently standing still, unlike the figure under the archway, still appears as more of a spirit than as solid matter, evidence of some sort of movement that caused the man to appear out of focus. Parts of the ground behind this figure can be seen through his body, including what may be a large stone or a piece of wooden fence. The blurry, out of focus figures in this photograph illustrate the inability of cameras at this time to handle movement. Photographers had to ensure that their subjects remained as still as possible in order to produce a clear, focused image. If even part of the image was blurred, it could be difficult for audiences to recognize what they were seeing, and could ruin the effect of the photograph by reminding viewers that they were not seeing war firsthand, but through a medium that was subject to the limitations of its technology.[8]

Figure 3

Knowing the limits of photography and knowing what would happen if his camera caught a subject in the middle of movement, Gardner knew that he would have to improvise in order to make sure he could effectively use his photographs to tell the story he envisioned. In response to this need for improvisation, Gardner drew on his experience as a daguerreotypist, or portrait-maker. Numerous accounts of Gardner's first years as a photographer in America note the time he spent as a portrait photographer, both as manager of Mathew Brady's studio in Washington, D.C., and then in his own studio, where he was primarily known for carte-de-visite photography (Mathews 19-20). At the time Gardner entered the photography business, writes historian William F. Thompson, portraits had already become the most popular form of photograph. "Photographers made portraits quickly and inexpensively," Thompson explains, "and they provided their customers with as many duplicate copies as they wanted. They also provided the public with portraits of their leaders in greater numbers and with sharper detail than had ever before been possible" (18). Given the popularity of daguerreotypes at this time, it is no stretch to say that Gardner spent a lot of time making portraits for his clients. Those who would analyze the photographs in Gardner's *Sketch Book* or the methods by which he captured images of the war cannot overlook the aspects of portrait-photography that would carry over into Gardner's battlefield images, especially the limits of the technology, which were as present in the studio as they were on the battlefield.

In their history of the early years of photography, Heinz and Bridget Henisch describe the creative measures daguerreotypists took in the wake of limited technologies, referring to these visual artists as "master[s] of make-believe" (24). The Henisches note that, for the photographer in a studio, "the need for make-believe was felt from the first. . . because the medium was slow and needed a great deal of light, the first studio photographs were made in the open air, but the aim was to create the appearance of an indoor scene. . . a simple sheet might be hung behind a client to hide distracting background material. . . but more elaborate measures were soon taken to create the illusion that the pictures were made in a drawing-room or study" (24-25). To create such scenes, daguerreotypists made liberal use of props, furniture, and false backgrounds, so that, as the Henisches point out, with the proper resources "even the humblest photographer could hope to spin his own web of illusion" (25). Both the photographers and the subjects they were photographing understood that the making of a daguerreotype was an opportunity for the photographer to exercise his creativity and turn a simple image into an entire scene. The subject only needed to hold his or her pose and allow the photographer to take all the time he needed to work his magic.

Soldiers having their photos taken on the battlefield or in camp, whether sitting for a portrait to send home to loved ones or posing for a shot that fit the photographer's vision, expected the process of taking a photograph to require them to hold the same position for an extended amount of time while the task of creating the scene fell to the photographer. As the Henisches explain, war photographers "were forced by circumstance to choose as subject-matter the routine attitudes, activities, and amusements of everyday life. Extremes of heroism and suffering lay outside their range" (390). For these photographers, and for those who would view these photographs looking for a better understanding of the war, "the best to be hoped for was an occasional glimpse, a partial impression," of the experience on the battlefield" (Henisch 372).

Due to these limitations, many of the images in Gardner's *Sketch Book* that are not concerned with the bodies of the dead feature views of landscape, buildings, or other prominent monuments on the battlefield, and the photographs in the *Sketch Book* that do feature living subjects are heavily posed. As William F. Thompson explains, the soldiers expected to have to hold a pose when their pictures were taken:

> They carefully posed themselves while the photographer adjusted his camera and checked the lighting. Ordinarily the enlisted men leaned on their long muskets, and the officers comfortably seated themselves with their legs crossed and their sword hip turned toward the camera. The Zouaves ballooned the fullness of their trousers, and the Michigan lumberjack troops posed full face to call attention to the bright plaid of their tunics. (31)

Presumably, no matter what sort of photograph was being taken, whether a portrait or a shot on the battlefield, soldiers approached the scene with the same understanding that they would be required to position themselves in a certain way, usually as dictated by the photographer, and remain in that position until the photographer had set up the shot in the desired manner and captured the image with his camera.

Most, if not all, of the images in Gardner's *Sketch Book* that feature living subjects offer examples of the type of posing that, while expected in studio portraits, was also necessary in battlefield shots. Many show soldiers or officers in various stages of relaxation, sitting in chairs outside their tents or reclining on the ground in an informal manner. Others, such as Plate 22, "Signal Tower, Elk Mountain,

Overlooking Battle-field of Antietam, September 1862" (Figure 4), feature soldiers in more strategic positions. In this photograph, a handful of soldiers are positioned on or around a wooden signal tower, each striking a unique pose. The shot is clearly staged, as the soldiers in the photograph seem just a little too obviously nonchalant. None of the soldiers are looking directly into the camera: the two seated on the tower are looking just past the camera, the man holding the signal flag and the man leaning on the tower have both angled their vision away from the camera, and the man closest to the camera has turned his whole body in an entirely different direction. While none of them is looking at the camera, a pose that would be expected in a typical portrait, the rigid posture and apparent determination to look off in one specific direction makes it clear that these men have been intentionally positioned in this manner.

What is perhaps most important to note about this photograph, and others like it in the *Sketch Book*, is that, despite the expectations of the public that war photography "would provide posterity with records of indisputable 'accuracy'" (Hüppauf 130), this photograph does not offer an example of any aspect of the life of a soldier during the Civil War. If anything, these men have had to put their routine and responsibilities as soldiers on pause while the photographer posed them and took the picture. None of the soldiers in the photograph are performing any of the tasks they would be expected to perform while stationed at this signal tower. Even the man with the flag, standing atop the tower, is obviously holding the flag as a prop rather than a tool of communication. He has the flag wrapped around the flagpole, one hand holding the flag in place, the other on his hip, demonstrating that he has no intention of signaling anybody. The other soldiers in the photograph seem to have no responsibilities at all, nor do they have any equipment handy to make them look busy. This image by itself does not represent a scene of war, but conforms to the conventions of studio portraits. The Henisches explain that "the most easy-to-find record of military life was the straightforward portrait" (373) and photos such as the photo of the signal tower in Gardner's *Sketch Book* come across as little more than elaborate daguerreotypes.

Incidents of the War.

SIGNAL TOWER ON ELK MOUNTAIN, OVERLOOKING BATTLEFIELD OF ANTIETAM

Figure 4

There are several other photographs in Gardner's *Sketch Book* that attempt to capture scenes of life in the army but cannot help revealing the necessity of posing, including the well-known Plate 94, "A Burial Party, Cold Harbor, VA, April 1865" (Figure 5). This photograph features five members of a burial party combing the battlefield at Cold Harbor, Virginia, retrieving the dead and preparing them for burial. One member of the party is sitting on the ground next to a stretcher covered with the skeletal remains of soldiers who fell during the battle. The title of the photograph states that it was taken in April of 1865, meaning that the remains piled on this stretcher had been decomposing for nearly a year, and were nothing more than skeletons by the time the burial party and the camera found them.[9] Behind the stretcher and the man seated on the ground, the other four members of the burial party stand hunched over, three of them holding shovels angled downward, apparently ready to begin digging graves in which to bury the bodies. The man standing second from the right in the background is bending down, picking up what may be another skull (though it could also be a canteen) with his bare hand. Though at least three members of the party are wearing standard infantry caps on their heads, the five men are all African-American, which would lead the audience to believe that these are not soldiers, but members of a detail whose main responsibility is to follow the army and remove bodies from the battlefield once the fighting is finished.[10]

Figure 5

Despite positioning his subjects in ways that create the appearance that they are engaged in some form of work, it is evident that Gardner posed this image just as he posed the image of the signal tower. In this image, one of the members of the burial party is looking directly into the camera, taking a break from performing his designated tasks to pose for the photographer. While it may be common, even today, for subjects of a photograph to stop what they are doing in order to smile for the camera, seeing the man in Gardner's photograph staring into the camera without posing as if he is doing something reinforces the understanding that soldiers who were photographed had to stop whatever they were doing in order to allow the photographer to set up the image. In the case of this man, at least, Gardner's photograph does not show him doing his job, but shows him pausing his routine for the sake of the camera.

The other men in the image, at first glance, appear to be engaged in some sort of action, hinting that this is a more candid photograph than some of the others in Gardner's collection. The way they are standing and the way they are holding their shovels, however, suggest otherwise. The man standing to the far left is most obviously holding a position suggested to him by the photographer: he is standing almost completely straight, unlike his companions, who are bent over their shovels in what audiences would more easily identify as a digging pose. The man on the left is also holding his shovel in a way that suggests he is not actually using it to dig up the ground, at least not at this moment. He is holding the shovel with both hands at the very top of the handle, whereas the other men in the photo holding shovels have one hand on the top of the handle and the other in the middle of the handle, closer to the blade. Presumably, these men have better positioned themselves to actually use their shovels to dig up the earth, while the man on the left will not be able to break up much of the ground with the amount of force he is putting on the top of the shovel. The shovel itself does not seem positioned to dig up the ground, as the man holding it seems only to be toeing the earth with it, and not actually planting the blade in the ground. It is easy to see that he, as well as his companions, are responding to a suggestion from the photographer that they adopt and hold a working pose, rather than the resting pose found in other photographs in the *Sketch Book*.

Even the grisly remains of fallen soldiers piled on the stretcher in the foreground look as if they had been manipulated for the sake of the photograph. Despite the most likely haphazard way in which the burial parties gathered the bodies and parts of the dead and piled them onto stretchers in order to carry them to the graves they had prepared, the remains on this stretcher are arranged so the skulls are in a row

on top of the pile. One of the skulls is even positioned so it is staring directly into the camera, in much the same way the man seated next to the stretcher is looking at the camera. This ghastly juxtaposition between the pose of the living man and the positioning of the skull creates a stark image in the minds of audiences who view this image and see a side of war they have never before seen, and this would appear to be a design choice of the photographer to achieve the strongest reaction from his audience. Having skulls on the top of the pile on the stretcher also makes it easier for audiences to identify what they are seeing as human remains: without the skulls, the pile is mostly a nondescript mass of tattered rags that do not bear much resemblance to human remains. There are other bones visible on the pile, but it is just as likely that they are strategically placed on top of the pile in order to catch the attention of audiences who saw these photographs.

Analysis of the strategic positions of the bones on the stretcher and the members of the burial party surrounding the pile reinforces the fact that these images do not represent the realities of battle or the aftermath of battle. Despite images that would catch viewers' attention and would even be unsettling, these images do not depict the process of gathering the dead for burial. The men in this photograph have stopped what they are doing in order to pose for this image. They have also allowed the photographer to set up the stretcher, shovel and human remains and clothing (and may have assisted him) in order to match the vision the photographer has for the image. As in many of Gardner's photographs, the positioning of subjects reflects his background as a daguerreotypist. Gardner approached the photographs he took on the battlefield in much the same way that he approached the portraits he made in the studio. He understood that a picture of a person sitting in a chair was just a picture of a person without a number of creative flourishes made by the photographer. In the studio, Gardner could bring static images to life by using props and creative posing to create a "make-believe" version of reality. When he took his camera to the battlefield, Gardner chose to employ this concept of "make-believe" in order to portray the reality of the war in his photographs.

The most significant prop Gardner uses in his *Sketch Book* to create his version of the war is not an aspect of the photographs themselves, but the text that accompanies each photograph. Often, the photographs in the *Sketch Book* are analyzed apart from the text that Gardner included alongside them,[11] but the text that is paired with the images is necessary, not only to interpret the photographs, but to understand Gardner's process and his mindset as he surveyed the battlefield and decided how he could create the images that would have the strongest impact on his audience. Gardner uses text in his *Sketch Book* to create a more complete

image in the minds of his audience, in the same way he used props to create a more complete, contextualized image in his daguerreotypes.

Despite the fact that the *Sketch Book* is primarily remembered for its photographs, a few scholars and historians have noted the interrelated nature of the photographs and the text that accompanies them. In their book, *On Alexander Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War*, Anthony Lee and Elizabeth Young make clear their intent to "take seriously the hybrid nature of the book and to suggest how reviewing, in turn, images and words can provide special insight into the book's complex meanings" (2). Lee and Young's book is actually composed of two essays on the *Sketch Book*, one written by each author, and in Young's essay, she states that the text in Gardner's collection is "indispensable to how this volume reconstructs the image of war as well as the warring nation" (57). Alan Trachtenberg also argues in favor of the "mutuality of picture and text in rendering a narrative; the story. . . of an entire war" (13).

These scholars recognize the importance of analyzing the text in the *Sketch Book* in addition to the images, but they do not recognize the ways in which the relationship between the text and the photographs are influenced by Gardner's understanding of how to use props to create a scene in a studio portrait.[12] Heinz and Bridget Henisch, whose use of the term "make-believe" to describe the creative touches added to studio portraits informs my reading of Gardner's photographs, describe just a few of the props photographers would use to manipulate a photograph:

> Indoor studios were cunningly devised to represent the great outdoors... little boys on rustic bridges angle solemnly for paper fish... and ladies swathed in fur calmly endure a blizzard of artificial snowflakes... Rain or shine, accessories were routinely provided to lend status to clients; a bowler hat was often used to fulfill just this kind of function. And when the motor car came upon the scene at the turn of the century, it too was drawn into service... as an easily recognizable studio prop in front of an easily recognizable backdrop. (25)

Whether using props or other artistic manipulations, portrait photographers could create a scene entirely different from the actual look of the studio in which they did their work. These photographers could use their resources to construct an image that was not really there: an image of make-believe. Gardner the daguerreotypist

retained this ability and this imaginative eye when he became Gardner the war photographer.

To return to the two photographs analyzed above, both of which provide examples of Gardner's use of text as props to create his "make-believe" version of the war, analysis of the text shows that what audiences read often goes beyond what is present in the actual photograph. Concerning Plate 22, "Signal Tower, Elk Mountain," the text explains the significance of the tower itself by giving a fair amount of background information about how the armies used and operated signal towers. Gardner describes much about the signal towers that readers do not see in the actual image, such as his explanation that "at intervals along our line of battle, and on the most prominent points in the vicinity, were stationed the Federal Signal Officers, detecting by their skill, vigilance, and powerful glasses, every movement of the enemy, reporting them instantly by a few waves of their flags to the Union Commander." In this statement, Gardner shows his audience the entire reason for the existence of this tower and others like it, not to mention the reason there are soldiers occupying the location.

None of what he says in the text, however, is present in the photograph. The only visible aspects of the photograph are this one tower and the handful of soldiers posed on top of it. None of these soldiers is currently engaged in scouting enemy movements, and the soldier holding the flag is not actually using it to signal the Union Commander or any other nearby general. It is clear that this photo was not taken in the middle of battle, as Gardner and other photographers could not drag their equipment into the middle of a combat scenario, but this reinforces Gardner's need to use text as a "prop" to offset the limits of technology. Audiences would only recognize the significance of what they saw in the photograph based on some understanding of the purpose and uses of a signal tower and the responsibilities of soldiers who manned them. Gardner uses the text to add this context to his images and bring the photographs to life in the minds of his audience.

The text that accompanies this image adds even more detail by describing a specific scenario that took place at this signal tower. As Gardner explains, "the Elk Mountain Signal Station was operated by Lieutenants Pierce and Jerome, and the view was taken whilst the former officer was receiving a dispatch from General McClellan, probably requesting further information in regard to some reported movement of his wary foe, or sending an an important order to a Corps Commander." Gardner adds an extra layer of detail into this text by identifying the two commanding lieutenants of this signal tower by name. The usefulness of this detail is limited, however, because the text does not identify which, if any,

of the soldiers in the photo is Lieutenant Pierce, and which, if any, is Lieutenant Jerome. Whether they are present in the picture or not, Gardner has not captured them in the middle of the events he describes. The men in the image are not in the process of receiving a report or sending signals to a general or to another signal tower. While it may be true that these men were engaged in these activities when the camera appeared, as Gardner implies, the composition of this photograph required them to abandon their tasks for a few moments in order to pose for the photograph. Despite the immobile nature of the subjects in the image, audiences can still imagine a scene in their minds, and picture these men performing the tasks Gardner describes. Gardner's text, like a prop in a studio portrait, aids in the suspension of disbelief, allowing his audience to view this photograph as a depiction of reality, even though they can see with their own eyes that nobody in the image is doing anything that would be described as accurate to the reality of manning a signal tower.

In the same way that the text accompanying Plate 22 brings the image to life and adds context and significance for audiences, the text in Plate 94, "A Burial Party, Cold Harbor, VA., April, 1865," also adds to the image to the image the audience is looking at, compensating for the inability of the camera to capture events as they are happening. Again, Gardner explains the significance of the men in the photograph, saying that "this sad scene represents the soldiers in the act of collecting the remains of their comrades, killed at the battle of Gaines' Mill and Cold Harbor." As in the text of the signal tower photograph, the text accompanying this photograph represents something other than what is in the image. As alluded to earlier, the fact that these men all appear to be African-American means that the audience cannot say with certainty that these are soldiers burying the men they fought beside in battle. Gardner does not say that these men *are* soldiers burying their comrades, only that they *represent* such soldiers. It is likely that these are members of a burial detail whose task is to follow the army and collect the remains of the dead to be properly buried. As in other photographs in the *Sketch Book*, the men in the picture have been asked to stop what they were doing for the sake of the camera. Gardner then adds the text to explain the location of this scene and share some of the incidents that happened at this location in order to make the photograph more significant, and add to what the audience can see.

Gardner again includes some minor details in the text that are significant to the place and the time in the photograph when he relates the story of an unexpected discovery made by one of the members of a burial party. Gardner explains, "among the buried at Bull Run field, a singular discovery was made, which might have

led to the identification of the remains of a soldier. An orderly turning over a skull upon the ground, heard something within it rattle, and searching for the supposed bullet, found a glass eye." In this passage, Gardner is not talking about the battlefield at Cold Harbor: the incident he refers to here took place at Bull Run, meaning that it most likely happened more than three years before this photograph was taken. This section of the text makes no reference to the photograph, and yet the text influences the way audiences view and understand the image. Referring in the text to the finding of a skull with a glass eye rattling around inside it draws attention to the skulls lined up side-by-side in the image, and causes viewers to wonder what gruesome discoveries the burial parties at Cold Harbor made as they were collecting these remains. This adds significance to the man in the background of the image who is bending down to pick up something off the ground. After reading the text, audiences would be filled with a sense of dread, or curiosity at the least, about what this man is picking up and what grim token of the battle he might find. The account in the text also brings to the minds of viewers the issues of identifying bodies after a battle. The skulls, body parts, and tattered uniforms piled on the stretcher in the photograph show nothing that would aid in identifying the remains, or distinguishing one set of remains from another. As if the grisly sight of these remains were not enough to grab the viewers' emotions, the text draws the issue of permanent anonymity to the center of attention, adding another sobering aspect to Gardner's construction of the war.

These examples from Gardner's *Sketch Book* demonstrate the ways in which Gardner used text as props to create a "make-believe" version of the war within his photographs. The technology of photography at the time made it impossible to capture the war adequately in visual form, so Gardner had to rely on the same type of creative manipulations in his war photographs that he used in the studio portraits he made. Though only a few examples are explored here, it is easy to see that Gardner took this same approach to the majority of the photographs in his *Sketch Book*, especially those featuring living subjects. The text that accompanies each photograph does not describe what is in the photograph, instead adding significance and context to the photographs, creating a scene in the minds of viewers that goes beyond what is present in the image. Like a daguerreotypist in a studio who creates more complete, life-like images by creative use of props, Gardner brings his images to life through creative use of text.

In analyzing the photographs of the *Sketch Book*, especially such controversial photographs as "Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter" and others, it is important to remember Gardner's background as a portrait-maker, both in Mathew Brady's

studio and in his own. The decisions Gardner made when choosing to pose bodies and create fictional accounts for certain images were not deliberate attempts to twist or falsify historical record, but creative choices made to offset the limits of technology at the time. As seen above, Gardner had to make these creative manipulations in most, if not all of the photographs he took at Gettysburg and elsewhere. Those debating the ethical issues surrounding the photographs Gardner took at Gettysburg will be better informed by understanding how Gardner's experience as a daguerreotypist and his recognition of the need for creative manipulations in images influenced his perspective on the photographic opportunities he saw on the battlefield.

Notes

1. Lester's examples of picture manipulations also include Robert Capa's "Death of a Loyalist Soldier, 1936," taken during the Spanish Civil War, and Joe Rosenthal's photos of the flag-raising at Iwo Jima during World War II.

2. Lester's book was published in 1991. The current NPPA code of ethics, taken from the NPPA website, bluntly states that photographs can "cause great harm if they are callously intrusive or are manipulated." Later, it extols photojournalists to "not intentionally contribute to, alter, or seek to alter or influence events" ("NPPA").

3. The observant reader of Gardner's *Sketch Book* will note that each plate actually has two titles: one title that seems to refer to the image itself (as seen on this page) and one title that seems to refer to the text (Plate 40's text is simply titled, "A Sharpshooter's Last Sleep"). All photographs discussed in this paper are identified by the title that corresponds to the image, not the text.

4. All photographs in this paper are taken from the "Prints & Photographs Online Catalog" of the Library of Congress website: http://www.loc.gov/pictures/

5. Frassanito notes that, of the nearly sixty photographs Gardner and his assistants produced at Gettysburg, "almost 75 percent contain as their main subject matter bloated corpses, open graves, dead horses, and related details of wholesale carnage.

6. Gardner's *Sketch Book*, of course, concerns itself with more than just dead bodies. Gardner also included images of landscape, buildings, and camp life. His concern with photographing the dead is primarily represented by the photographs taken at Antietam and Gettysburg, though the images in the *Sketch Book* represent numerous locations and points in time.

7. Photo-historians Heinz and Bridget Henisch point to 1839 as the year photography was invented, crediting Louis Daguerre of France and William Fox Talbot of England as "the two principle inventors of the art" (1). Going with this date of origin, photography would have been under twenty-five years old when Gardner went to Gettysburg.

8. Another noteworthy example of movement causing a blurry image can be seen in Plate 5 of the *Sketch Book*, "Fortifications on the Heights of Centreville, VA, March, 1862," in which a soldier appears to be playing with a two-headed dog.

9. Fighting in and around Cold Harbor occurred from May 31-June 12, 1864. On June 3, General Grant ordered an assault that ended in more than 7,500 Union casualties and 1,500 Confederate casualties (McPherson 733-41).

10. For a more in-depth discussion of the representation of race in Gardner's *Sketch Book*, see Lee and Young.

11. The fictionalized account that accompanies "Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter" is the obvious exception.

12. Young claims that, because of the way the *Sketch Book* was bound when it was first released, the text is meant to be read apart from the photographs, saying they "also function as self-contained works" (54). Trachtenberg, on the other hand, notes many disjunctions between text and image, saying that "in almost all instances the picture can be turned against the text" (16).

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