
THE FAKE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

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- L'objet de cet article d'opinion est le rôle que la photographie a pu avoir vis-à-vis de la réalité. Les partisans de la révolution numérique voient manifestement ce rôle de manière négative et ils l'estiment effacé par un système qui, au lieu d'être fondé sur l'idée de l'empreinte et de la traçabilité directe, comme la photographie analogique, est fondé sur le principe du transfert numérique.
- Het onderwerp van dit opinieartikel is de rol die de fotografie kan hebben ten aanzien van de realiteit. De partizanen van de digitale revolutie zien die rol herkenbaar op een negatieve manier en zij denken deze uit te vegen door een systeem dat in plaats van gebaseerd te zijn op het idee van de afdruk en de directe traceerbaarheid zoals de analoge fotografie gebaseerd is op het principe van de digitale overbrenging.

"What good is a great depth of field if there is no adequate depth of feeling?"
Eugene Smith

The etymology of the word "photography" comes from Greek; two words, *φως* (phos) and *γραφίς* (graphis), summarize the act behind photography: writing with light.

Is digital photography a new medium? Or nothing, or very little has in fact changed compared to the "previous" analogue photography? These are questions to which people who deal with media, and audiovisual media in particular, should be able to provide convincing answers as possible.

"The fake digital revolution", when considering photography, might at first seem a consideration exclusively against digital photography. In reality, it is not intended to consider "harmful" digital photography, but the way it is often interpreted in the relationship it has held with reality. The relations of photography with the real world create a very fertile ground for dialectic ability for, apart from the obvious show of reality, multiple forms of symbolic representations.

This is not the nth chapter of the debate between the "apocalyptic" and the "integrated" role of digital photography, those who reject and those who adapt to the new medium. Nor is it a nostalgic cry for film photography to come back. The pivot of the debate is the role, special and privileged, which photography has had with reality; role which photography has always vented having. The supporters of the digital revolution obviously see this role negatively and they consider it erased by a system which, instead of being founded on the idea of imprint and direct traceability, like it happens with analogue photography, is founded on the principle of numeric translation.

With digitalisation, photography should get finally closer to the spheres of art, to the sphere of inter-

pretation of the world and not just the sterile representation of it. In reality, the "digital revolution" does not change the cards on the table; the interests at stake are still the same. Photography continues to have and to amplify the roles that it has always had in the past, since its beginning, amongst which dominates what is defined as "exercise of memory".

However, in photography, the most problematic aspect seems to be that of the "referent", one of the most complex knots which sees the difficult and delicate intertwining of ethics, aesthetics and the intervention of the author. The specific technology used over the years by photography, based on an automatic mechanism, can lead to elaborate the idea that the photographic image, differently from language, cannot lie. According to the language/semiotic point of view, it is necessary that a sign be present in order to allow a manipulation of meaning connected with the sign. This is clearly a contradictory scenario, according to which photography, if it cannot structurally lie, it is therefore not a sign. If it is not a sign it cannot be a language. And if it is not language, it is not a cultural act.

Photojournalism represents, according to my point of view, an exemplary case, especially in relation to the debate on the interpretative dimension of documented events. Only if we attribute a certain "linguistic" character to photography, and therefore a certain ability to lie, it is possible to develop a certain ethics of information which recognizes the author as the source of interpretation of facts. Only in this case, is it possible to think of photojournalism as an author-based language, where images are in any case and always an interpretation of reality.

The hypothesis of a highly automated procedure connected to analogue photography, in opposition to digital photography, would lead to the digital technique to underline photography's potential of mystification. In reality, nothing has changed in the

philosophy of photography and we are not therefore in front of an epic change, or a shift from an era of photography to an era of post photography. With a simple example, whether the photo present on our identity card is an analogue photograph, or a digital photograph, the function it exercises (to confirm that the identity of the person represented coincides with our identity) does not change. This is common practice in our current society.

A more delicate, and certainly more interesting aspect, is the theme of photojournalism and information photography. In this case, the level of credibility which is asked from the image, its capacity to testify the truth, elevates itself to a higher moral ground, compared to other uses of photography.

From an ethical point of view, the discussion about digital photography is concentrated mainly in the problem of the "falsification" of reality. At the core of this discussion is the relationship between man and machine, and the relative control one exercises on the other. The conflict between analogue and digital does not just concern the evolution from one to the other technique. It is not a question of establishing if silver halides are better than pixels. The real problem is not whether to have more or less definition of images. By putting in crisis the strong knot of analogue photography, digital evolution opens up two major discussions: the first regards the power of testimony displayed so far by photography since its beginning; the second regards its relation to art.

The "false digital revolution" consists in the fact that whether analogue or digital, a photograph continues to be a photograph, its function remains the same, so it is even useless to put an adjective in front of it. As a matter of fact, until the introduction of the digital systems, when speaking of photography, it was never necessary to use the term analogue, even though since Daguerre and Talbot, photography has always been analogue.

From a technical standpoint, the mechanism does not change. The way a photograph is formed on a digital sensor, now by electronic and not chemical means, still involves light hitting an impressionable surface.

We can conclude that photography is photography as such, the representation mechanism, writing with light, with the evolution towards digital technologies, does not change in substance and the choice between analogue and digital is determined exclusively by the relationship which the author has with the machine he/she chooses to use.

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