MANIPULATION, RETOUCHING AND STAGING
THE DEBATE ON VERACITY OF DOCUMENTARY IMAGES IN DIGITAL ERA. SOME CASES COMPARED

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The article addresses the issue of the alteration of images in the digital age, and therefore the question of the authenticity and truthfulness of documentary photographs, through the analysis of some cases that involved affirmed reporters (awarded on the occasion of international contests by major photojournalistic institutions) and their professional integrity; vicissitudes that had important aftermaths and stimulated (especially on websites and blogs) technical, deontological and theoretical debates concerning the legitimacy of manipulative operations and their ethical implications.

IS THE BEAUTY RIGHT?

To what degree, in what contexts and according to which rules is the modification of a photojournalistic image considered admissible, when is it allowed and accepted in order to present a testimony that is not only true but also visually pleasing or narratively more appealing? And what are the actions to be condemned, which make a documentary photograph (from which a considerable level of reliability and objectivity is therefore expected) false, or in any case distorted, both on a perceptual and an informative point of view? These are just some of the issues pointed out by the debate –which is indeed variously articulated and always current– on the legitimacy of the practice of altering images, especially those of a testimonial nature. The spectrum of possible strategies is in fact very broad, and most of the time the precepts and guidelines included in the codes of conduct adopted by press and information agencies turn out to be vague, partial or inadequate. The stratagems range from more properly aesthetic expedients, corrective interventions that can affect the formal aspect of the image (tonal changes, digital retouching or tactical concealments made in post-production) to grave misrepresentation of reality or malicious miscommunication of narrative contents (by staging characters, re-enacting situations, formulating incomplete captions).

The examples I would like to focus on are five, all well known by specialists and experts but generally discussed, except for some important publications, via web or in the news press. The first is the now famous shot by Paul Hansen entitled *Gaza Burial*, awarded as best picture in 2013 on the occasion of the *World Press Photo Contest* and soon at the center of a heated controversy about its alleged falsification; the second revolves around an image of Narciso Contreras, fired by the prestigious *Associated Press* for having erased an unwanted element from the scene; the third is represented by Brian Walski, author of a misleading and

deceptive photomontage; the fourth concerns a highly ambiguous image by Spencer Platt of 2007, considered one of the most significant picture of that year; the latter has as its protagonist Giovanni Troilo, accused of having insincere intentions behind his award-winning reportage.

Fig. 1 Paul Hansen, *Gaza Burial*, November 20, 2012. Retrieved November 25, 2016 from <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/2013/world-press-photo-year/paul-hansen>
©Dagens Nyheter/Paul Hansen

AT THE BORDERS OF LEGIT

It has been discussed a lot a picture by the Swedish photojournalist Paul Hansen (Figure 1), an image awarded in 2013 as Photo of the Year by the *World Press Photo Foundation*, one of the most important in the field of visual journalism. The specific case[1], extremely emblematic by virtue of the problematic questions it was able to raise, and the resulting debate it triggered have in fact assumed considerable proportions, spreading both via Internet, through websites and especially blogs, and on printed paper. The echo of this story, destined to become a precedent, has affected not only photojournalism as a

professional practice, questioning its principles and rules, but has also addressed more general issues by starting discussions about, in the first place, the legitimacy and limits of the photographic image processing and its manipulation procedures. The official motivation given to ratify the win describes the photograph as "a powerful and direct image"; specifically Santiago Lyon, president of the jury, explained the choice as follows: "It reaches your mind, your heart and even your stomach – all key points for an effective photojournalism" (Lyon, 2013).

The image is indeed dramatic and visually effective, thanks to the emotional strength it conveys and the depth of social and political issues it involves. *Gaza Burial* is a close-up shot that testifies the repercussions on the civilian population of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a history of unpunished abuses and continuous violations of fundamental rights. Local people is reduced to exhaustion and especially young and children, innocent victims –casualties– of explosions and air strikes, are paying the worst consequences. Suhaib Hijazi, just two years old, and his brother Muhammad, nearly four, were killed by a bomb that destroyed their home during an Israeli raid in November 2012. Their bodies were carried to the mosque where the funeral would be celebrated by a procession of friends and family members, whose reactions range from desperate resignation to angry indignation. The human column seems to be crammed into an alley, coming towards and looming over the viewer. The space of the narrow passage is made even more claustrophobic by a distorted perspective that generates an 'immersion' effect, while the vanishing lines of the perimeter walls converge in a point placed in the distance and raised above the horizon giving the impression that the two buildings on the sides are progressively closing, crushing whoever is between them.

In the days immediately following the awarding ceremony in April 2013, Hansen found himself at the center of a dispute over the integrity, the correctness and the reliability of his photograph –even though criticism had been raised since nominations in February. According to the detractors,

who threw allegations of falsification from their blogs and from social media, the photojournalist of the Dagens Nyheter would have composed the image by combining several photographs with the purpose of obtaining an almost perfect exposure (Capovilla, 2013). Although the jury never questioned the veracity and authenticity of the shot, the Foundation felt compelled, in order to appease every accusation –like the one made by the computer scientist Neal Krawetz (2012), who had declared that the image was "composite", i.e. formed by a stratification of frames (Bogliolo, 2013)–, to undertake a forensic technical analysis aimed at clarifying the presence of modifications and possibly justifying the reasons. The photographer came out of the investigation clean, fully exonerated, and his reputation remained substantially intact. The experts appointed to conduct the digital inquest –Eduard de Kam (Nederland Instituut voor Digitale Fotografie), Hany Farid and Kevin Connor (Fourandsix)– explained that by comparing the original raw file with the final image in JPEG format, it can be noted that, although in the post-production phase some parts have been adjusted by darkening or lightening them, each pixel is in its place and therefore, from an electronic point of view, the two images are perfectly superimposable, basically the same. The photographer would therefore have limited himself to open the original file several times, in subsequent *Photoshop* sessions, each time emphasizing an element of the scene by means of tactical tonal increases or decreases (Capovilla, 2013). Despite the continuous and bitter opposition, of which a clarifying example is the article *Why Do Photo Contest Winners Look Like Movie Posters?* by Allen Murabayashi (2013), who immediately after the communication of the winning images has harshly criticized the excessive aestheticism of most of the photographs awarded (Winslow, 2013), the operation was judged legitimate and consistent with the parameters within which such modifications are allowed. Principles that, however, in most cases are anything but restrictive, and whose lability is often a reason for clashes and diatribes both on a technical and theoretical level.

CONCEALMENTS, OVERLAPS, OMISSIONS AND DISTORTIONS

Given that, the decision, considered by some to be too severe, to fire Narciso Contreras, an appreciated Mexican photoreporter, has been therefore rather surprising. He was one of the protagonists of the difficult operation that led to the most complete coverage of the Syrian conflict in 2013 (a reportage that obtained the *Pulitzer Prize* for the Breaking News category). Not only the discharging from the agency for which he had worked for five years, the *American Associated Press* (AP), one of the most influential worldwide, but also the removal of all his photographs from the archive, albeit among the more than 500 images no other traces of alteration were found. The reason: having retouched a picture taken on 29 September 2013 (which is not part of the Pulitzer-winning reportage) (Figure 2) making a camera abandoned on the ground disappear from the frame with a shot of stampclone (Colford, 2014; Associated Press, 2014). Opinions were divided: those who accused him of having falsified the realness of the fact, and who, on the other hand, took his side criticizing the inflexibility of the provision, which the photojournalist nevertheless accepted admitting his faults and declaring to have full responsibility for the mistake he made. For Santiago Lyon (the same who only a few months earlier had been the jury president of WPP 2013), at that time vice president of the AP, the choice was made in defense of the agency's reputation and its strict ethical principles, since "deliberately removing elements from our photographs is completely unacceptable" (Colford, 2014).

Other cases had already shaken the world of documentary photography. One of these dates back to the spring of 2003 and gave rise to a long series of on-line discussions (Smargiassi, 2014) even though the general opinion was consistent in condemning the author of the shot. In fact, the story did not leave room for many interpretations: it was a manifestly incorrect intervention, which radically changed the factual truth of the event distorting it by means of a

temporal overlap. Brian Walski, a correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times* appointed in 2001 as photographer of the year by the *California Press Photographers Association*, was embedded to the troops stationing in Iraq, near the city of Basra. British soldiers urge the civilian population to remain nearby, in order to stay safe in case of an impending attack. In the first shot the soldier's gesture is suitably authoritarian, perfect in its imperious movement, but it seems to be facing nowhere; in the second, instead, it is the position of the Iraqi father to be right, by expressing a submissiveness that could justify the attitude of the gunned man (Figure 3). The photographer then decided to combine them into a sin-

Fig. 2 Narciso Contreras, *A Syrian opposition fighter takes cover during an exchange of fire with government forces in Telata village*, September 29, 2013. Retrieved February 17, 2021 from <https://www.ap.org/ap-in-the-news/2014/ap-severs-ties-with-photographer-who-altered-work>
©AP Photo/Narciso Contreras

Fig. 3 Brian Walski, March
30, 2003. Retrieved February
17, 2021 from <http://www.
alteredimagesbdc.org/walski>
©Los Angeles Times/Brian Walski

gle image to make the event more significant (Walker, 2003; Aspan, 2006). The result: the quite immediate photojournalist's dismissal with a satellite phone call.

The episode was, as often happens, a pretext to reiterate the need to condemn attitudes and conduct not only inappropriate from a deontological point of view, but also wrong on a more purely ontological level, which calls into question the sense of truth (or in any case of truthfulness) of which the testimonial and documentary image should be the bearer, given its natural vocation for objectivity or at least honesty. On the pages of the *Washington Post* Frank van Riper underlined the willfulness of Walski's intentions and emphasized his desire to create a picture that was false (Van Riper, 2003) in its own informative content, as well as distorted from a narrative and even kinetic point of view.

An extreme example of ambiguity is the controversial photograph by New Yorker Spencer Platt, overall winner of the 2007 edition of the WPP (Figure 4). Who are the girls driving through a devastated neighborhood in a convertible? Passing tourists, locals? The original caption does not help to know much more: it is learned that they are wealthy Lebanese, the place is a suburb of Beirut hit by Israeli bombings[2]. Generally this information would be enough, but given the peculiarity of the image (the close cut, the different expressions of the women, all difficult to interpret, the rubble in the background) the questions that arise looking at it are more than legitimate, first of all if they were models posed by the photographer. In this regard Michele Smargiassi, author of an instructive book on the concepts of true and false in the history of photography, wrote:

> The structure of the informative channel through which this photograph reaches us, in fact, does not leave many alternatives to take-or-leave: we are not able to ascertain, for example, whether the girls were aware that they were being photographed, or the photographer suggested them a pose … So we should ask ourselves if the relationship between the image and the moment if the relationship between the image and the moment it t claims to tell could be a little more

Fig. 4 Spencer Platt, *Young Lebanese drive down a street in Haret Shreik, a southern suburb of Beirut, to check on their homes after bombardments by Israel*, August 15, 2006. Retrieved September 10, 2016 from <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/2007/world-press-photo-year/spencer-platt> ©Getty Images/Spencer Platt

complicated than what it shows us at a first sight. In cases like this, but we would like to say in all cases, in all photographs, the true/false alternative is too simplistic. [my translation from Italian] (Smargiassi, 2015, pp. 21-22)

Something doesn't feel right and in fact, as reported by Fred Ritchin (2009, pp. 169-70), the contextualization of the scene was questioned by its own protagonists, who said, interviewed by the BBC, that they were not rich as stated by the caption, then modified (in the meantime it has been discovered that the photographer had not spoken to any of them), but middle-class workers and that they were actually residents of the neighborhood who had returned to the place to check the damage suffered to the dwellings. In short, thanks to the intervention of the portrayed people (fundamental were the statements made by Lana El-Khalil, owner of the car, and Bissan Maroun, author of the video taken with the mobile phone), exceptionally released from the anonymous condition of "subjects", the interpretation of

the image has been rectified (Guerri & Parisi, 2013, pp. 398, 399). Even the car in which they were seated, which in the photograph appears to be a large-displacement vehicle, was actually a Mini Cooper. The fact is that no measures were taken against the photographer, who limited himself to substituting an adjective in the caption to define the women as "young" instead of "wealthy".

Similar but quite different in scope is the strategy adopted by Giovanni Troilo, a young Italian photographer and now also an affirmed documentary maker, to whom the award received in 2015 by the WPP was revoked (Porcellini, 2015). The series, entitled *La Ville Noir - The Dark Heart of the Europe* (Figure 5)[3], was conceived to present –'reveal'– to the international public the alleged dark sides of the Belle Europe, its hidden violence sublimated by bourgeois respectability. The reportage should have provided an unpublished portrait of the Belgian town of Charleroi, a former mining center elected as a symbol of the decay of the living standards of the wealthy classes, one of the

social pillars of the Old Continent, in a Belgium which is one
of its political and diplomatic hubs. But the one represented
by Troilo in nocturnal and eerie atmospheres is not Charleroi
but another city, always Belgian, Molenbeek. Furthermore,
some situations would even have been reconstructed with
the complicity of the photographer's friends and relatives,
as well as other performers (Weeks, 2015). Showing "voy-
eurism through voyeurism" (Troilo, 2015), this was, at least
according to his intentions, the mission of the reporter[4]. The
problem lies in the fact that he decided to do it in defiance
of every ethical and professional rule, falsifying reality in an
unforgivable way[5].

The one proposed by Troilo is a montage of images that
has been judged unreliable at its foundations, untrue and
therefore completely incongruous to the basic principles of
photojournalism. It was not a way of pushing the ambiguity
of the representation to its maximum degree, or of making
an image more attractive by means of interventions that al-
ter its appearance; it was a deliberate distortion of discursive
modalities, a deliberate and premeditated falsification of the
authenticity of the fact and its context. We are well beyond
the boundaries of, albeit questionable, staged photography,
which should be limited to arranging and orchestrating the
elements of reality in order to enhance the value, both aes-
thetic and conceptual, of the image. Even beyond the slip-
pery terrain of the so-called photo opportunities[6].

MARGINS OF INTERPRETATION

What are the reasons for this unequal treatment? What
makes the situations examined so far different beside their own
specificities, mainly due to personal, individual choices and to
the inevitable singularity of the contexts in which they are made?
The answer, or rather the answers, could be find in the first place
in the regulations drafted by news and information agencies,
which are official statements regarding their operational

and ethical policy formulated in the attempt to preserve and confer systematization (in other words: to give full legitimacy and dignity) to a profession that is perpetually in the balance –that is also the history and the very nature of photography itself– between recording needs (informative purposes) and personal views (expressive outcomes), with a wide and varied spectrum of attitudes and practices.

So says the code of ethics of the *National Press Photographers Association* (NPPA), a reference point for US photojournalists since 1947 but adopted almost all over the world:

1. Be accurate and comprehensive in the representation of subjects.
2. Resist being manipulated by staged photo opportunities.
3. Be complete and provide context when photographing or recording subjects. Avoid stereotyping individuals and groups. Recognize and work to avoid presenting one's own biases in the work.
4. Treat all subjects with respect and dignity. Give special consideration to vulnerable subjects and compassion to victims of crime or tragedy. Intrude on private moments of grief only when the public has an overriding and justifiable need to see.
5. While photographing subjects do not intentionally contribute to, alter, or seek to alter or influence events.
6. Editing should maintain the integrity of the photographic images' content and context. Do not manipulate images or add or alter sound in any way that can mislead viewers or misrepresent subjects.
7. Do not pay sources or subjects or reward them materially for information or participation.
8. Do not accept gifts, favors, or compensation from those who might seek to influence coverage.
9. Do not intentionally sabotage the efforts of other journalists.
10. Do not engage in harassing behavior of colleagues, subordinates or subjects and maintain the highest standards of behavior in all professional interactions (National Press Photographers Association, nd).

Studied in detail, the list offers the opportunity to analyze in clear terms a wide range of situations in which the photographer may find him/herself operating, as well as

the way in which he/she should behave. Although the single points of this decalogue logically presuppose a rather broad freedom of action –and it could not be otherwise, given that excessively rigid restrictions would risk undermining the very essence of testimonial activity– they contain a large number of key-concepts useful for understanding the fundamental methodological issues that guide the work of the photo-journalist. While points 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7 concern the ideal attitude toward the subjects (along with the ways to guarantee maximum truthfulness and objectivity), the last three aim to define the nature of professional and interpersonal relationships that photographers must establish in order to create a propitious environment, as well as to build support and collaboration networks. Point 2 introduces the idea of construction, i.e. the possibility that a scene could be 'recomposed' with the intention of making it more captivating or spectacular; even worse would be the will to preliminarily and artificially modify the conditions in which the subject is photographed with the risk of triggering partial and inaccurate interpretations that could distort the message by violating its basic communication codes. Then it is more explicitly spoken of manipulation and alteration in point 6, which also refers to the post-production phase, now considered a crucial step and for many even preponderant compared to the moment of shooting.

Another complete and detailed statement is undoubtedly the one conceived by the Associated Press. It offers a sort of ethical and functional handbook for anyone facing a career as a photojournalist and a set of guidelines which, summed up in succession like precepts, make up a rather precise description capable of encompassing a large number of operational scenarios: from the use of sources to corrective techniques, from the ideal features the image should have to the treatment of any obscene or vulgar content, from the issue of privacy to that concerning conflict of interest. In a climate of growing distrust in the credibility of the photographic medium, the AP strongly affirms –it has been the first to do so– a simple and strict directive: "the content of a photograph

must NEVER be changed or manipulated in any way" (Associated Press, not dated; Smargiassi, 2015, p. 45).

In recent years, even the main international newspapers such as the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*, have adopted their own codes of ethics, which reiterate the need to preserve authenticity at every stage of the work. But defining such syntheses is not easy, not to mention that "each code contains the lock pick for its own picking" [my translation from Italian] (Smargiassi, 2015, p. 47). Paul Sanders, picture editor of the *Times*, manages to describe his anti-manipulation policy only in macroscopic terms: "do not allow digital manipulations beyond what is reasonably possible to improve the image: small alterations in color, contrast and, of course, trimming" [my translation from Italian] (Smargiassi, 2015, p. 47; Baker, 2006). The appeal is therefore addressed to the photographer's common sense and that "naturally" would seem to indicate the ease and, indeed, the naturalness with which one can cling to it. So, in this perspective in which small alterations and cosmetic interventions are allowed, the manipulatory procedure adopted by Hansen is legitimate, that of Contreras is not.

Different expedients to implement the rhetorical effectiveness of photography. While Hansen renounced the raw nature of live photography to strategically increase the pathos of the scene –which is indeed already strong– through retouches that remain enclosed in the decorative sphere of the aesthetic, Contreras and Troilo modified the real datum and its documentary potential: the first indirectly and a posteriori (by deleting a diegetic element in a post-production operation), the second, committing a much more serious violation, directly and a priori (by forcefully enhancing the evocative power of the settings). The relationship of trust, if not of dependence, which links, referentially and phenomenologically, the photographer's gaze and his/her testimonial will to the actual event that is conveyed, is questioned. The pact, the tacit compromise between chronicler and fact, between the author and the tools he has at his/her disposal, is irretrievably broken in the name of a different, maybe higher purpose, even if it is bogus. Perhaps one can feel justified

in doing this in the age of falsification, the age of simulacra (Baudrillard, 1981) where a general and profound crisis of deictic systems prevails[7]. Smargiassi wrote again, in his essay on the lying character of photography:

> Even circumscribing the scope of photography as a document, Rudolf Arnheim identifies at least three different aspects of the problem. The authenticity of a photograph "requires that the scene is not altered" before the lens. The correctness, that the image "corresponds to what the camera has taken"; finally, the truth "guarantees for the facts that the image shows". The three requirements are neither synonymous nor necessarily copresent. [my translation from Italian] (2015, pp. 57, 58)

But one thing is sure: photography itself never lies (Smargiassi, 2015, p. 58)[8]. The liar can always and only be the photographer, and ultimately only the use made of certain images or, at most, the meaning attributed to them can be incorrect. Contexts of signification are fundamental in this process. After all, Troilo's photographs would certainly not have been false without captions that contradicted their descriptive assumptions. Even if it was born in recent times, in the face of pressing definitional and juridical needs, the policy of ethical codes already seems to be wobbling. The common imperative seems to be to compromise each time, delving into the specificities of individual cases.

An interview commissioned in 2014 by the *World Press Photo Academy* and then published on channels such as Lens, the *New York Times* photography blog, collected the opinions of 45 experts from 15 countries, including many WPP jurors, on the issue of manipulation. David Campbell, authoritative scholar of communication and visual analysis in charge of conducting the survey (entitled *The Integrity of the Image*), argued that the practice of manipulating a digital image does not end in the use of computer technologies such as *Photoshop* but that, on the contrary, every phase of the realization, from the moment of the shot to the editing and distribution steps, contains the possibility of making changes (Campbell, 2014, 2015a, 2015b).

The debate on what are or should be the limits to which one can push him/herself –Michele McNally of the *New York Times*, jury president of the 2015 edition of the WPP, has repeatedly argued the need to establish rules that are clear from the beginning and without exceptions– offers new perspectives on the role that photography, in particular that which aims to tell the world and document its society, is called upon to play today. Some points seem to be certain and indisputable –even if, albeit being necessary conditions, they are far from being sufficient. As Campbell explained, so-called minor adjustments (burning, toning, converting to black and white) are generally accepted; while, as could be seen from the measures taken against offenders, the post-production removals and concealments have to be condemned (even if, for example, those that permit the removal of defects caused by anomalies or perturbations of the optical sensor, such as dust deposits, are allowed). Manipulation and retouching, it has been stressed, are not the same thing[9].

TOWARDS AN AESTHETICS OF ETHICS

Admitting the expressiveness, both intrinsic and induced, of documentary, testimonial and informative photography has become compelling. Certainly there is no shortage of controversial voices, coming mainly from the defenders of an anachronistic photographic purism, people who share an idea of photography still linked, presumably, to its mimetic properties without taking into account the developments –which in fact they often deny– of a constantly evolving medium. Among them was that of the French photographer Thierry Dehesdin, who repeatedly lashed out at the WWP, which he considered, diminutively, a mere "beauty contest" (Libertà di Stampa Diritto all'Informazione, 2013)[10]. The criticism was moved precisely on the occasion of the ceremony that awarded Paul Hansen in 2013, whose photograph was defined by Dehesdin by citing Alain Mignam, winner of the same prize in 1981, *à côté de*

la plaque, or, in photojournalistic jargon, "stoned" (Libertà di Stampa Diritto all'Informazione, 2013).

An answer to Dehesdin's attacks was given by André Gunthert (Libertà di Stampa Diritto all'Informazione, 2013)[11], professor of Visual History at the prestigious *EHESS - École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*, who affirmed how ridiculous it really is, considering the transformations introduced by the digital revolution, to stigmatize the practice of retouching; indeed, Gunthert still believes that it is a more honest and intelligent choice to admit once and for all the expressive potential of documentary images, without fear that it may somehow harm or distort the sense of photojournalism. The author also asserted, in defense of photogenic expressiveness[12], that resorting to the problems raised by the manipulative use of retouching is an ideological argument[13], that is to say:

> An instrument of aesthetic disqualification in the context of a claimed photographic virginity. Refusing to admit that information photography can be constructed, the critics of Hansen's photo systematically refer the expressive values of the photographic image to painting or cinema. Retouching is used as a pseudo-technical criterion that allows to justify and impose an implicit aesthetic. [So a] naturalization of aesthetics, disguised behind the matter of retouching, hides an impoverishment of the critical debate. [my translation from Italian] (Libertà di Stampa Diritto all'Informazione, 2013)

From the point of view of communicative effectiveness, retouching can be considered an expedient to achieve an ideal rhetoric. In this perspective, then, the distinction made by Roland Barthes between "aesthetic effects" and "significant effects" (1985, p. 14) would be inaccurate, or at least out of date. In fact, the former would mediate, through technical and connotative solutions, the latter, in a very tight intertwining —causing sometimes a problematic overlap— supported by the metaphorical functioning of the photographic image. Contrary to what Barthes affirmed, journalist Alberto Papuzzi wrote that "it is not possible to distinguish the technical aspects" from

"the aesthetic ones" [my translation from Italian] (1999, p. 145), which therefore, the latter, as intrinsically rhetorical, would include not only manipulation and retouching (as the cases of Hansen and Contreras clearly demonstrate) but also visual artificialities and narrative strategies (as shown by the cases of Platt, Walski and Troilo). However, Papuzzi argued, all this involves a considerable problem:

> If the event, the reality (or the truth ...) coincide with the representation, in what way, then, is the news still a chronicle of the event and not the experience of the event itself? And what remains of the event? [...] We can conclude that photographic news is charged with a more extensive and deeper subjectivity than what the theory of information generally provides. The camera, apparently the most objective medium, determines the maximum subjectivity of the news. [my translation from Italian] (1999, pp. 145-147)

NOTES

1 Analyzed, among others, by Michele Smargiassi on the occasion of a symposium, held at Sapienza University of Rome, on the relationship between ethics and photography. The papers presented at the conference were then collected in Perna, Schiaffini, 2015.
2 The original caption in fact read: "Affluent Lebanese drive down the street to look at a destroyed neighborhood".
3 First prize *Stories for the Contemporary Issues* category of the WPP. The project also received the *People Photographer* of the Year prize assigned on the occasion of the *Sony World Photography Awards* in 2015.
4 The photographer said, called to justify his actions before the World Press commission, that this was his goal, "to transform the camera into an active tool" in order to make it a sort of shame detector. As stated by the reporter in a long post published on his *Facebook* profile on March 6, part of the series was made on the night he decided to follow his cousin, fully consenting to be photographed and intending to have an occasional sexual intercorse.
5 The jury of the WPP 2015 chose to follow a hard line that led to the exclusion from the competition, therefore to mandatory disqualification, 20% of the photographs submitted because they were digitally manipulated in ways not permitted by the regulations.
6 This term refers to a highly misleading form of falsification for which situations are planned and prepared for conditioning the outcome of the photographic action (Papuzzi, 1999, p. 152). For an overview of journalistic falsehoods see also Fracassi, 1996.

7 The theoretical literature on the concept of indicality or indexicality is vast, in particular that with a philosophical and semiological approach. Among the fundamental texts, in addition to the aforementioned anthology edited by Guerri and Parisi see Krauss, 1990 and Bate, 2016.

8 Smargiassi, however, expresses a cautious reserve on the matter, while affirming several times the relative inability of photography to be really false: "Photography, this is evident, is unable to lie while denying the truth. But it can do it, and it does it very often, by stating the false: it is enough for photography to attribute a certain state of existence to visible forms [...] that have no comparison in the physical world, or are at least very different from how photography shows them to us".

9 Smargiassi proposed the following definition of retouching, putting it at the same level of the notion of maquillage: "an intervention, usually imperceptible, carried out on the 'raw' image produced by the camera, in order to erase its technical or superficial defects, and to improve its general effect" (Smargiassi, 2015, p. 144).

10 The article originally appeared on *Culture Visuelle*, an online magazine active between 2009 and 2016 (culturevisuelle.hypotheses.org). The alarm raised by Dehesdin warned about the iconicity, both innate and posthumous, which usually distinguishes the winning pictures of photojournalistic competitions, which, once chosen, stop documenting a particular event to become symbolic and stereotyped images.

11 The essay was originally conceived always for *Culture Visuelle* to be then republished on Gunthert's new personal site, *L'Image Sociale* (imagesociale.fr).

12 The theory of photogenicity, as Barthes recalls in *The Obvious and the Obtuse*, was developed in the field of movie studies by Edgar Morin in his essay *The cinema or the imaginary man*. Resuming it, Barthes declines it on photography in terms of informative structure: "in photography the connoted message within the image itself, 'embellished' (that is, generally, sublimated) by lighting, impression and printing techniques ... each of them corresponding to a meaning of connotation that is sufficiently constant to fit into a cultural lexicon of technical 'effects'"(Barthes, 1982, p. 13).

13 Louis Arago already considered photographic retouching a practice charged with ideology purposes, given its ability to idealize representation in order to act itself as a weapon against bourgeois realism

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