

Google Images, Flickr, Picasa, Tumblr, Instagram or Facebook, etc. the rapid development of image banks and social networking services has profoundly modified the features of photographic documents. Up until the recent strain caused by this tsunami of pixels, a photograph was still evaluated in terms of its materiality and its uniqueness. Thanks to their obvious indexical nature, they were deemed to be the most accurate way to testify the existence of a thing, of people, of events and any kind of phenomenon appearing in the real world. As specified by a long-lasting tradition, a photograph worked as an evidence that something specific had happened at a certain time, at a certain place. These traces of light became the ultimate tools used for strengthening the canons and the authority of the visual regime built throughout Modernity.

The various schemes put in place since the 19th century have exercised a major influence, both on methods of scientific demonstration, and on the establishment of common practices in the reading and understanding of photographs. Following Roland Barthes' teachings, the approach of the medium was always colliding with the same, at once candid and absolute, *modus operandi*: "in Photography I can never deny that the thing has been there". According to propositions of photographic realism, the ontological evidence of the "this-has-been" was so assertive that there were no apparent reasons to doubt the transparency of photographic reality. Photographs were treated as material facts and, despite their polysemy, as precise mirrors of 'of reality'.

It is in that spirit that archives have largely contributed to sustain the conviction that there is a "photographic truth", all the while allowing for the consolidation of the power structures and desires already in place. Books and exhibitions are still indentured to methods that follow directly from taxonomic inventory and original categorical structures. More conventional uses of photographs were also affected by the same effects of reality. Susan Sontag noticed the implications, close to dependency, caused by our craving for photography: "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge -- and, therefore, like power." This primal aspiration helps create the speculative records of our lives more than it contributes to organizing the proliferation of images.

Since the 1990's, digital photography and images produced with computer graphics software have provided a different varieties of mimetic productions, instantly absorbed by Western visual regime. This digitisation has not only called into question the nature and the occurrences of photographic realism, but it was first and foremost an effective precondition to precipitate photographic images into the flow of information. Conveyed as bits, they can spread like water within contemporary global networks, bringing an appropriate and quick response to the acceleration of lifestyles. As the saying goes, "the faster we go, the less we truly see" and collecting photographic documents happen to be a most convenient prosthesis to stand back and, sometimes, reflect.

Reduced to acronyms or generic numbering systems, released from copyright and stylistic imperatives, dematerialized and ubiquitous, digital photographs form a floating and ever changing constellation that is difficult to fasten. Even if it is almost impossible to figure out how Internet search engines work, we still follow an implicit belief that they are substitutes of physical libraries, where hidden members of staff make careful researches throughout the shelves or the columns of a coherent filing system. Like many recurring conceptions of digital realm, we seek primary inspiration in the physical world to fix the intangibility of information flux. Despite the fact that it does not disclose the discrete alchemy that leads to the selection of images, the comparison with the library keeps a strong heuristic value when it comes to discuss the ambivalent status of photographic documents. As soon as they are conveyed through Internet, images loose any of their initial determinations and become available to all kinds of uses and tags.

More than ever, an image makes sense depending on the context and the condition of its appearance. Online photographs are mostly denoted by their semantic vacancy and the actual patterns of dissemination and consummation of photographic images produce mainly "abstractions". This indetermination provides a rare context for experimenting original methods of (co-)creation of values and aesthetic codes.