

Proceedings

From The Photograph to the Meta-Image My Practice-Led Search For a New Digital Epistemology †

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Abstract: My contribution explores how design impacts visual communication. Building on my professional background as a photographic journalist, I contextualise my practice to assess the ontological shift from the photograph to the Meta-Image. I conclude by recommending for visual journalism a framework of theoretical research and digital multi-strand engagement, which is visually embedding, multimedia and multi-layered. Its digital format and media platform is what I call the Meta-Image.

Keywords: visual communication; visual epistemology; visual journalism; practice-led research; digital ontology; visual ontology; photography; photojournalism; pictorial turn; visual cultures

1. Introduction

An improvised answer from officer Schabowski led an ordinary 1989 East Berlin press conference to accidentally tear the Berlin Wall down. Two years later, the Gulf War confirmed how, among many socio-political changes, a communicative shift was happening. From enjoying a central relevance, media became the imperative requisite for politics. Now media indeed thoroughly infuse each and every aspect of our daily lives in manners as diverse and unexpected as temporarily limited visual messaging like Snapchat.

For the last 25 years, social events and political changes have been witnessed, disseminated and discussed in increasingly more participatory ways through the boom of digital media and online platforms. For instance, Howard Dean set a milestone precedent with his ground-breaking online fundraising strategies in 2004. Since then, digital media have been playing a capital role in all consequential US Presidential Elections, and, arguably so, for the 2016 BREXIT referendum. Online and mobile assets have also been rather unanimously credited as major contributors to the so-called ‘Arab Spring’. Lately, rumours over Russian intelligence agencies engaging social media campaigns and digital hacking to sway political consultations, are under very close scrutiny.

What these examples share is the privileged role visual imageries and issues of ‘authenticity’ have acquired. Throughout all these scenarios, visual media appear to be continuously at the centre of current socio-political disputes, particularly so when debates arise in regard to what is real.

In response, this contribution will explore how design impacts visual communication. More precisely, the notion of design, in this paper, is used as an opportunity to engage the shifting qualities of still photograph-based journalism (hereafter: visual journalism). I intend to argue my case from my own professional background in visual journalism, to theoretically assess my developing argument on the ontological shift from the photograph to the Meta-Image. I will conclude by recommending for visual journalism a framework of theoretical research and digital multi-strand engagement, which is visual-embedding, multimedia and multi-layered.

2. Discussion

Design is here advocated as the pivot for today's multimedia digital communication. With the Meta-Image, as I will argue, design is appreciated as a revised digital tool to pragmatically augment both communication and the understanding of visual journalism.

Indeed, design appears to be a notion of multiple meanings and applications. For the present context, design is assessed as both composition and aesthetics. The former indicates lines, shapes and volumes framed for the image. Bearing in mind the extent to which compositional framing equally expands outside the borders of the photograph, I will approach aesthetics as the visualization strategies for the *composed* photographic data.

Each and every act of production, from writing an article to completing a project, shares the same three moments; in chronological order, pre-production, production and post-production.

The compositional quality of design typically impacts photographs at the pre-production and production phase. In some instances, designing practices could be appreciated as being part of both composition and aesthetics. This is very much the case of cropping, which, as a way of re-composing, clearly falls under post-production activities. Though, to me, this should be more properly encompassed within the umbrella of the visualising strategies of aesthetics. Aesthetics stretches across all three stages, as it can be implemented from the pre-production to its finalised post-production. In conclusion, regardless of any specific frameworks, design unquestionably affects each and every stage in digital production, from pre- to post-production, from montage to media distribution policies. It follows that photographs cannot but be appreciated as designed.

As a consequence, photographs place themselves at the highly controversial nexus between the recorded real and its communicated representation/s. Furthermore, by engaging with ethical concerns on the relation between real and represented, designed photographs also work as a most effective framework to reveal adopted policies in visual communication.

In the context of visual journalism, photographs seldom communicate as independent media. They are always contextualised either by supporting text, in the form of caption, or together with other still photographs, in the form of the visual essay.

In light of the relation between the single photograph with its caption, and considering the over-reaching quality of montage, design is quite often overlooked as solely being part of the post-production decision-making. Both design and post-production clearly work as valuable opportunities to trace and explore the steady passage from analogue to digital visual journalism. However, I have come to focus on the notion of design rather than post-production, as the latter fails to evince the extent to which visual communication is thoroughly mediated [1] from the very act of looking.

In the last 15 years, new media and digital platforms have caused the constant reshuffling of epistemologies and ontologies within media studies. In such a context, the key role of montage for all visual media has not substantially changed [2], if not arguably expanded [3,4]. However, in spite of these considerations, an epistemological reboot of montage, here appreciated as the ordering of single photographs to achieve specific communicative results [5], will not be addressed due to space constraints.

All parties with a vested interest, be they photographers, agencies or media outlets of distribution, continue to explore how to constructively advance best practices on the digitally altered relation between the real and its representation/s. In a context where defining univocal guidelines becomes more difficult every day (for instance: [6]), offered solutions had to pragmatically deal with the challenges arising from the quickly evolving world of digital communication. In spite of these efforts, the issue of what a digital photograph is remains debated and unsolved. For instance, is the RAW file recorded in the camera memory already a photograph in the same way that un-developed films were regarded as latent photographs [7]?

Formulas have searched for a clear definition of the digital photograph both ontologically and epistemologically, while distinctly approaching synchronic and diachronic analytical axis.

However, visual journalists might adopt variable visual tactics as part of their production decision-making. For instance, a voluntarily under-exposed and over-flatted RAW file might be

pursued towards a more effective and aesthetically pleasant finalised digital photograph. In this case, an apparent error, the under-exposed and over-flatted digital file, might be nothing but a required first stage to more aptly, if not truthfully, communicate both the real, and the represented. In such a view, strategically designing the photograph from its very inception might apparently produce very artificial and un-real RAW files, which, nevertheless, would embed more digital information. Thus, enhancing a RAW file to construct designed photographs should be evaluated as one part of the wider and multifaceted visual communication comprehensive framework.

Exploring how to shoot B&W photographs is another valuable example of the distinct quality of digital visual communication. Shooting RAW files in colour seems to be the best way to obtain 'beautiful' post-produced B&W digital files. In fact, independently from the camera used, digital colour files record three times the amount of pixels of a B&W digital file, as the camera relies on three channels of information rather than a single one.

Therefore, the best way to produce a B&W digital photograph is by shooting in colour and then converting it to the grey scale during the post-production phase. In such a context, what are the issues at stake with regards to the veridicality of the recording of the real, and the comprehensive designing of the digital representation? For decades professional visual journalists have preferred the language of B&W photography to that of colour, despite the fact that the majority of humans experience the world in colour. B&W is indeed an un-real, artificial and post-produced reality. So, what to do?

The issue practitioners and theoreticians are thus required to confront is: to what extent should the digital designing of photographs be allowed? As such, should post-production and the designing of visual journalism be tactical or strategic? To clarify, B&W visual journalism was probably strategic and not tactical. Visual journalists would seem to prefer the artificiality of an un-real visual language, with its additional communicative punch, to the realism of colour; the celebrated motto "less is more". In other words, B&W visual journalism would apparently choose communication effectiveness against 'truth'. Further, contrary to colour photography requiring a professional lab, B&W analogue photographers could develop their film rolls anywhere. In this framework, B&W visual journalism should be considered merely tactical when such a choice were decided upon aesthetic evaluations.

Design will therefore be here contextualised in relation to two capital and juxtaposed dynamics. On one side, it will be addressed as strategic for the communication of substantiated information. On the other, design will be explored as capable of communicating a body of information larger than the one the source foresaw, visualised, or, even, promoted. The former ideally reconnects to the American tradition of photojournalism, as the latter renews the parallel French tradition of photoreportage [8].

As addressed above, camera settings design the recording of the real well before it being not only shot, but possibly even seen. Even though this is by no means a completely new dynamics (choosing a colour or B&W film had the very same effect in analogue photography), today's designed visual communication appears to have attained a more thorough impact due to its overwhelming presence on mobile phones. Hence, design may reveal the extent to which digital media has epistemologically disrupted the semiotic practice of photography.

To ontologically reconsider whether and under which conditions designed communication falsifies the 'real' truth is thus cardinal. Clearly, this would develop in parallel with an overall revised understanding of visual education, specifically in relation to ethical issues. It is my firm belief that such topics should not only concern researchers, experts, academics and professional practitioners. Instead, they represent the unavoidable duty of each and every mobile phone's user, which—incidentally—equates to almost two third of the world population [9].

Therefore, whether to *take* or *make* a photograph is not a small issue of semantics, but the way visual media and today's multimedia and digital storytelling communicate. In response, my contribution aims to empirically engage with design and post-production not in relation to any "truthful representation" [10], but as a digitally reconsidered tool for visual journalism and multimedia storytelling.

With more than 15 years of worldwide professional experience as a visual journalist, I am fully aware of the contentious quality of a proposal centred on ethics. Its implementation runs across very fluid and shifting lines. Further, the act of looking is not only personal and thoroughly cultural, but also too often deeply affected by concurrent phenomenological constraints in visuality [11].

I establish the rationale for my ontological paradigm shift from the photograph to the Meta-Image, and the advancement of the consequent wider framework of *The Image As Storytelling*, upon the above-discussed assessment of design.

3. Materials and Methods

Before proceeding any further, allow me to quickly mention my relation to visual journalism. In 1992 I began shooting B&W 35 mm films with automatic cameras to later rely solely on two Leicas, one of which was manufactured without a light meter. Shooting without any camera support taught me the grammar of visual communication as well as that of photographic production. Consequently, I devoted myself to understanding the quality and temperature of light, and learned to decode it without mechanical data. After all, the etymology of photography is writing with the light. I then refined my expertise by working in a variety of roles across different media industries, and in very different locations from Morocco to China. Setting most of my professional activities in the Middle East led me to address issues of Orientalism [12] alongside my ethical research on best practices in visual representing.

As a result, my years in visual journalism have consistently fed and inspired my theoretical research on the language of visual communication and vice versa. Evolving from this approach, I am advancing a practice-led [13] theoretical-informed perspective for both the research and production of visual journalism. I call this, the Meta-Image.

My Meta-Image paradigm aims to enhance the overlooked and new qualities of contemporary digital visual journalism. It does so by adding interactive layers of supplementary information to the still photograph. Through its interactive and actable features and capabilities, the Meta-Image expands and empowers (i.e., augments) the nesting single photograph's communicative quality to better manage, but not necessarily limit, the contentious space between visual communication and its semiotic practices. This multiplication of semiotic qualities, leads me to prefer the notion of image to that of the photograph [8]. Thus, by supporting a wide and very context-driven variety of media texts [14], the Meta-Image has the capability of incorporating issues ranging from specific debates on design, to the ethics of its aesthetics, as much as to explaining finalised storytelling techniques.

To further illustrate this point, Figure 1 below presents an example of my developing working model. The upper part of the format, what I call the interactive Meta-Image, presents the actable layers. The audience chooses in fact when, how and in what order to activate these, as digital viewers engage with the photograph and its communicative universal sets. Needless to say, distinct media platforms (mobile VS. tablet VS. laptop VS. desktop...) favors diverse phenomenologically inspired media engagements.

The lower part of the nested layers, the so-called 'passive Meta-Image', traces and shows how design, i.e., composition and aesthetics, thoroughly shapes the semiotics of the photograph (Figures 2 and 3), clarifying, if not explicitly stating, the extent to which the real has been visually augmented.

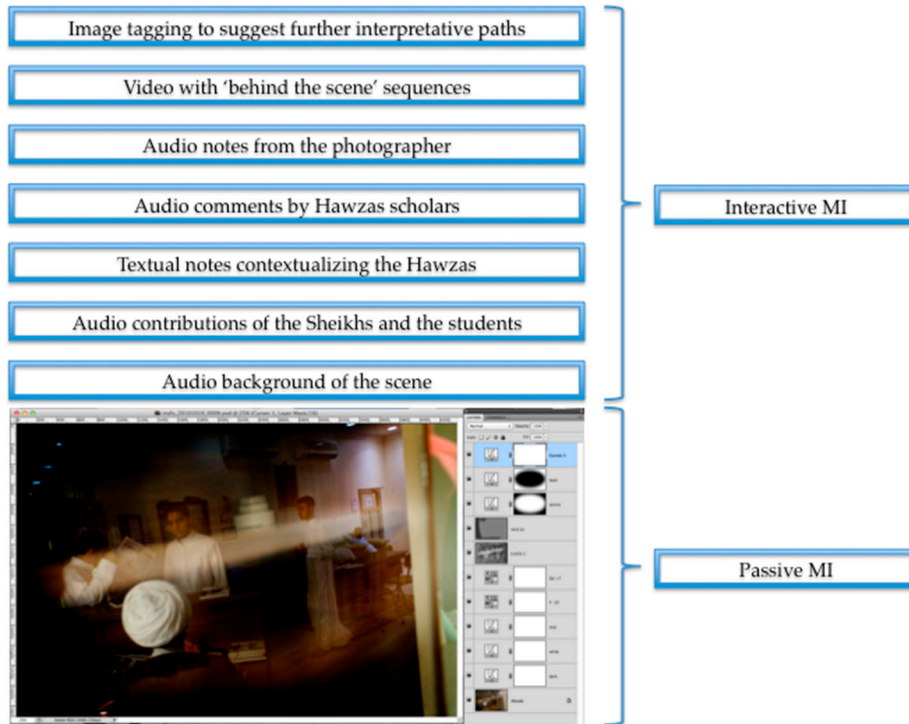


Figure 1. A work-in-progress framework example for the Meta-Image. All materials © Massimiliano Fusari/Massimedia.

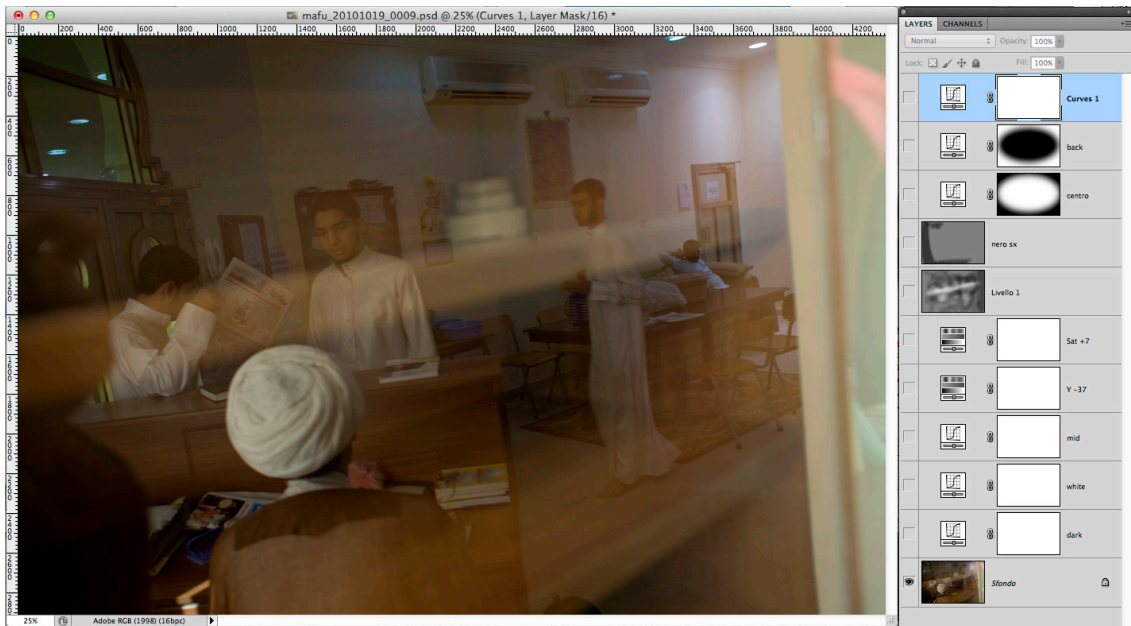


Figure 2. Un-designed photograph. All materials © Massimiliano Fusari/Massimedia.

Visual journalism before (above in Figure 2) and after (below in Figure 3) digital designing of RAW data.

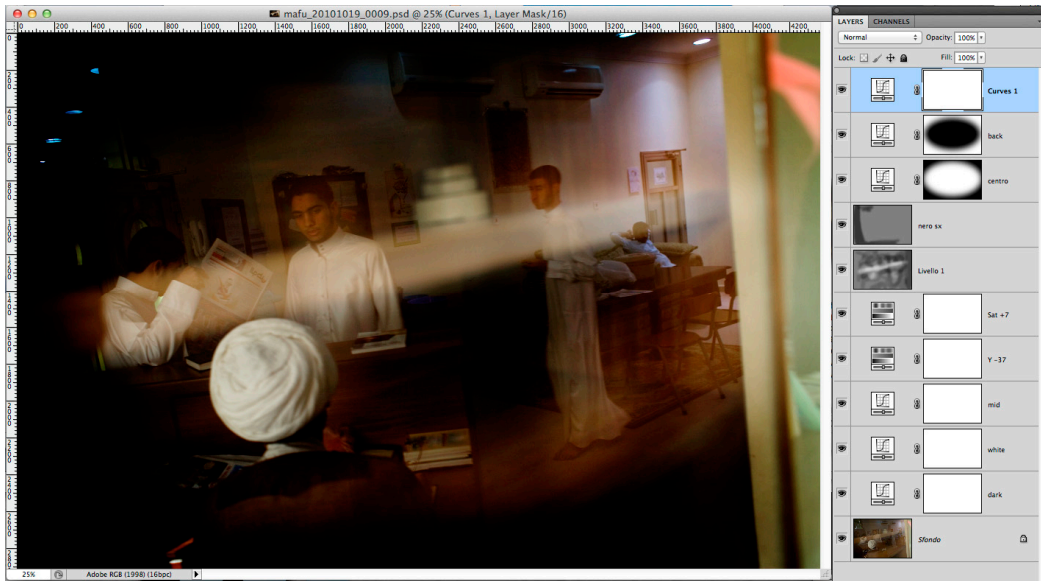


Figure 3. Designed photograph. All materials © Massimiliano Fusari/Massimedia.

As the visual journalist is endlessly framing the signification of the real, they re-design context with a slight movement of the head. By recognising a different communicative rhythm, they “find and focus on (that) particular subject within the mass of reality” [15] (p. 32). With a simple detail, they are capable of creating a thoroughly subjective interpretation. Raising the not unreasonable question, how does one manage the thoroughly personal quality of visual journalism?

A conceivable approach is to differentiate between the photograph production, which is “just that: *the production of an image*” ([16], emphasis in the original) and the following signification process. For instance, Campbell argues that the real “is not copied by the camera, it takes on meaning through the whole apparatus of photographic practices that culminate in—but are not limited to—someone releasing the shutter. Photography is much more than what the photograph ‘is’. The meaning that results in part from the image is not limited to either details within the frame or the intentions/self-understanding of the photographer” [16].

As I will address in my case study below, the variety and richness of a photograph’s interpretations is truly never-ending. In fact, “photographs are polysemic and polyvalent—as part of their condition, they are inescapably open to multiple readings, and can often sustain different if not contradictory readings. The proliferation of clashing interpretations demonstrates the naturalist faith is untenable. If a photograph were just what it ‘is’ there would be nothing to discuss and the pictures’ public role would be minimal at best” [16].

Photographs are part of, and substantiate, diverse, converging and oppositional interpretations, which should be appreciated as mere fragments of that atomised and incomplete real that the visual journalist signifies *hic et nunc*.

Intended meanings for the designed photograph as a sign and a symbol [17] or a simulacrum [18] remain temporary and phenomenologically [19] limited. As audiences enter the field of signification, they might in fact even generate *ex-novo* their own autonomous meanings, as I address below with my case study.

In such a context, not only different audiences engage, or fail to engage, the same sign in multiple ways and, upon these, finalise multiple significations. At different times, the same audience might actually create alternative interpretations out of their distinct sensorial and cognitive engagements. Arguably, visual journalism is not only a relation between real and represented, but should factor in audiences’ projections too.

To best deal with this continuous proliferation of endless gazes, semiotic deviations and unconscious significations, before publishing I always test my work with as many audiences as possible. By exploring my intended communication against my audiences’ wide-ranging

interpretations and diverse projections, I am able to clarify possible overlooked aspects as much as enhancing the communicative richness of the story itself.

4. My Practice-Informed Case Study

In order to pragmatically ground my theoretical argument, I will specifically pinpoint a one-to-one conversation I had with Marco, an Italian professional journalist working for a major Italian news corporation. We discussed the visual journalistic work I did as part of a British Academy research project on the Shi'a seminaries of Syria (called *hawzas*) in 2010.

Our conversation introduces the extent to which in visual journalism and, by extension, in visual communication, intended meanings might be thoroughly dismissed by audiences' significations in the form of personal projections [17].



Figure 4. Designed photograph. All materials © Massimiliano Fusari/Massimedia.

The photograph presented as Figure 4 above has been viewed and interpreted in a fairly consistent manner by a number of interviewed audiences, who acknowledged my intended signification, an ordinary class moment in a Damascus' *hawza*. Instead Marco, who is a fluent speaker of Mandarin with many years of work in Asia, interpreted this scene as a press conference.

He further detailed, for me, how the photograph reminded him of a press conference exactly because of its design, with the viewpoint behind the participants who all have a common point of focus. The main character on the left of the frame is writing notes, an activity that Marco interpreted as being done by a journalist, rather than a student.

Having photographed press conferences for some time as a visual journalist, I acknowledge the presence of that template alongside many other coexisting designs. Apparently, such a template design would work as a most effective tool to communicate both an educational space and a press conference. As such, to what extent should captions and/or design of the photograph narrow intended communication?



Figure 5. © Bill Sauro/New York Herald Tribune, Wikimedia Commons archive.

For instance, Figure 5 above offers just one from the many examples echoing Marco's projection (Google search on August 2017). It narrates the Dallas District Attorney Henry Wade conducting a press conference following the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963.

Hence, when approaching what to do with Marco's feedback, I was surprised by the extent to which my background as a visual journalist might have influenced my design, and, consequently, by the extent to which my own mental template of the topic press conference might have, even unconsciously, led me to apply a specific design. In other words, is it possible that some sort of Jungian archetype [17] might have found its way to unconsciously make me design the representation in that specific way? As such, how to deal with Marco's feedback when none of the previously interviewed audiences placed a similar significance on the photograph? Is it possible to treat the designed photograph as an object independent from its wider semiotic framework? Hence, how to clearly identify roles, identities and relationships, e.g., the author, the image, the audiences and their variable and shifting relations?

In order to confront such an intricate web of possibilities, including intended versus aberrant [20] meanings across signs, symbols and simulacra, I have capitalised on my double role as both photographer and viewer, producer and analyst. This has allowed me, at least for this case study, to explicitly pinpoint my designing process.

The inception of Figure 4 was dependent of a set of very specific physical variables. My long negotiated agreement with the *hawza* allowed me to be their guest and work in their facility as a visual journalist as long as I did not disrupt, or in any way disturb classes. As such, my very limited freedom of movement would end with the class beginning.

My intended communication for Figure 4 was to present an ordinary activity in a class, with students writing notes. The photographs surrounding Figure 4 in my finalised visual essay [21] were chosen to support and reinforce this storyline through a selected montage. Arguably, in the passage from reading the real to designing my visual communication, something got hijacked, but that seemingly happened for Marco alone.

In another context, or in a different mood, Marco too could have interpreted Figure 4 differently. He may not have projected on it his own experience as journalist attending press conferences. This would not negate, though, the extent to which my visual archetypes could have stimulated or inspired his interpretation, regardless of any constraint I had while working at the *hawza*.

The case study of Marco's feedback has thus allowed me to briefly mention how photographs might be understood as a Rorschach blot test tracking personal projections. Within this perspective, designed photographs could be seen acting as prisms, as they reflect audiences' feelings as well as the representation, in conjunction and/or in opposition to the visual journalist's intended content.

Though, in my view, pursuing any attempt to quantitatively account for preferred against aberrant interpretations, as much as any qualitative exploration of psychoanalytic interjections or projections, should eventually be rubricated as subsidiary. Arguably, the elements factoring in the relation between identities and semiotics are not increasingly multiplying but, crucially, random and overall methodologically anarchic [22].

As a result, my focus is not anymore on the audiences' understanding. An explosion of new and endlessly shifting factors re-arranges notions of identities as much as semiotic practices for online and digital communication. The 24/7 continuous consumption of mobile data further dilates and transforms audiences in human rhizomes [23]. The resulting personal dynamics alter both social and 'commodification' [24] processes. Arguably, global digital economics too continuously disrupt today's communication and media signification. How does one plot a *truly* universal visual communication when unique mobile users have reached the five billion mark [9]?

I remain fully aware of the extent to which evinced concerns could be equally applied to analogue photographs. However, as briefly pointed out above, what unquestionably separates digital from film photography is its pervasiveness and capillary diffusion. It is exactly this far-reaching invasive presence that justifies, in my perspective, a clear ontological rupture between and across the two media practices. As a consequence of this, I am re-ordering my own research priorities and production frameworks, to approach the object 'digital photograph' distinctly.

As I address in my developing research on *Aesthetics As Storytelling* [8], I don't prioritize anymore for my intended visual communication to be fully received across digital audiences. In fact, this has become, to me, substantially unachievable, if not, overall misleading. Instead, my focus is on using the potential of digital media to refine audiences' digital literacy for visual communication. Hence, my aim is not anymore to forensically witness for audiences, but to stimulate their curiosity for the topics presented in my visual journalistic essay. As such, I wish to provide them with the tools to reflect on my intended communication autonomously. The tool and the framework I use to pursue my research is the paradigm of the Meta-Image.

5. Results—The Meta-Image

If I managed to argue my rationale convincingly, the Meta-Image should now appear as an effective and sensible paradigm to support visual-led digital media production, while contemporarily fostering visual literacy.

However, the Meta-Image is not the only solution for the issue. It is my solution. In fact, its flexible operative framework is purposely geared for experimentation, continuous adjustments and context-driven culturally sensitive rendering. The Meta-Image offers thus a way into the historic semiotic shift produced by the ever expanding and consolidating realm of mobile communication.

Concurrently, whether design is approached tactically or strategically, the finalised communicative frameworks are thoroughly altered. If design is implemented tactically, it merely embellishes the designed image: this to me applies regardless of any quantitative assessment of post-production, as it should encompass all interactions, from the simple application of a filter, e.g., Instagram, to comprehensive colour balance. More importantly, this visual enhancement might be autonomously applied even without any knowledge, or understanding, from the photographer. This happens, for instance, when the algorithm of the camera automatically sharpens the recorded digital file. However, if design is applied strategically, the number of steps preceding the finalised photograph is notionally irrelevant, as the concern is not on the real anymore, but, specifically, on the value of the representation in and of itself.

It follows that concerns over any truthfulness would cease to matter, as the photograph would act very much like a Baudrillian simulacrum [18], with its relationship to the RAW file as purely

ancillary, if not thoroughly coincidental. The aim would thus be not to convene the real as real, but the photographically perceived real as an ethical-informed representation to be questioned.

As debated, its digital and interactive features allows the Meta-Image to thoroughly reconceptualise the semiotic field of visual production, communication and consumption. In fact, by incorporating interventions from different parties, the *Meta-Image* turns the photograph into a space to question, explore and contextualise. Rather than forensically assessing the real, the Meta-Image does indeed reconnect to the philosophical notion of reportage rather than that of journalism, or, in the dichotomy above, to the French tradition instead of the American school.

More importantly, the Meta-Image establishes the notion of ‘designed photograph’ right at the core of its epistemology and, therefore, as the ontological quality of today’s visual-led and multimedia digital storytelling. Storytelling is here understood as the communication of information strategically. Hence, storytelling is, to me, communicating something as exactly that something. Paraphrasing David Fincher, there are only two ways to shoot a scene, one of which is wrong.

The presumed paradigm shift occurring from verbal-driven to visual-centred communication urges digital storytelling to be practiced and, at the very same time, theorised and endlessly questioned. This is the reason why the Meta-Image aspires to make digital audiences learn-by-doing, thus educating them as they creatively produce and engage their storytelling. By enhancing visual literacy, the Meta-Image advances professional and public awareness on the changed space, role and dynamics of today’s digital visual communication.

6. Conclusions

I have argued above the rationale supporting my paradigm of the Meta-Image. The Meta-Image has been assessed as an educational tool for the continuously evolving world of visual-led digital communication. I therefore place my contribution right at the nexus that is the little debated space of intervention between digital photography manuals and philosophical studies on the photograph.

It is my understanding that literature on digital photography has overall neglected the hands-on concerns and recommendations of the practitioner, who is allowed to contribute in their quality as technical instructor only. However, the sensibility of the reflective practitioner [25] should be acknowledged as capable of thoroughly re-directing debates on how to produce, signify and understand visual communication, and specifically so, visual journalism.

Having lived through the dramatic changes to the profession of the visual journalist in the last 15 years, I rate the exponential multiplication of recording devices and their ubiquitous presence as the most relevant factor leading to the end of the profession. As we witness on a daily base, no visual journalist can successfully cover daily events when the hyped ‘citizen journalist’ is already there with their mobile.

However, the complete randomness of the visualised events to be covered implies that citizen journalists are not necessarily trained to deal with the complexities of today’s multifaceted societies and cultures. The possible unpreparedness and lack of professional competencies, particularly on the ethics of the visual, might in fact lead visual recorders to produce flawed narratives. Furthermore, the citizen journalists’ readiness to freely submit visual contributions to become a “hero just for one day” makes them un-accountable and endlessly replaceable [26].

I do not mean that professional visual journalists necessarily had proper training and visual education. However, being professionally employed implies some sort of auditing of your skills, competencies and expertise. Those wishing to make a living out of this profession are in result looking for new practices and distribution channels. In such a context, the recognised horizontality of publication formats and digital platforms offers professionals new opportunities which are challenging, scary and exciting.

It appears that authorship and entrepreneurship should now be the defining assets of this new approach to the profession. Visual education offers the further capability to recognize the work of the trained from the untrained. As argued above, the epistemological reboot of the visual with its digital qualities is no longer avoidable, as production of visual communication is not the domain of few experts anymore, but a fully popularised practice.

Social debates, democratic processes and political dynamics increasingly rely on visual communication. However, visual communication is still generally perceived as immediate and unfiltered, while it becomes more and more complex, nuanced and multi-layered on a daily basis. Furthermore, digital media continuously reshuffle the elements to be factored in when moving from the mere recording to any finalised communication of an event: the former roughly requires a CCTV camera, the latter an agentic decision-making [27] in interpreting and signifying recorded information.

These are the reasons why I recommend, through the paradigm of the Meta-Image, the advancement of a visual journalistic research and practice which is multi-layered and multimedia, as much as visual-embedding. The multi-layered and multimedia features of the Meta-image have been explained in detail. Possibly, the most innovative quality of the Meta-Image lies in its capability to use photographs as embedding communicative vectors, with the whole of communication arranged upon visual imagery.

In 2008 Peter Greenaway reminded his viewers that “just because you have eyes does not mean to say that you can see” [28]. I agree that, in spite of its richness and complexities, visual communication still remains profoundly overlooked and trivialised, and the role of photographs, and of visual journalism specifically, ancillary.

To counter the above, the Meta-Image relies on its interactive features to advance the field of visual studies, and inform the public sphere with its augmented digital communication. As the so-called ‘pictorial turn’ [29] seems to have twisted and turned our way of thinking, it might be high-time for communication to finally become visually-led.

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