# EDITORIAL

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Accepting, as historians, the challenge of editing a monographic issue of a journal like *IMG journal* seemed, initially, to be a gamble. In our disciplinary area, we routinely apply methodologies and practices, perfected over the centuries, to analyse the authenticity of documents and testimonies, and to assess the degree of reliability and authoritativeness (Gazzini, 2020). But our procedures lack any apologetic intent for 'trueness', since every trace of the past is a representation to be interpreted with intelligence, even when the intention of the author or of the testimony is clearly fraudulent or manipulative, because it could, in any case, reinstate the deep sense of history (Bloch, 1969).

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The historian is, then, aware of the narrow ridge upon which he/she sets his/her narration, whose 'scientificity', according to the long constructivist debate, could be invalidated by his/her own subjectivity: even though today the theme is less discussed, it nevertheless orients our work (Ginzburg, 2006). These references to our specific relation with authenticity and with the false –in particular when it becomes an ideological tool for revisionism and negationism (Veray, 1999)– are sufficient to understand the misgivings we felt in launching a call on the theme and addressed to a wide audience, but oriented in particular towards the investigation of the cognitive and interpretative value of the image.

However, the teamwork with colleagues of other disciplines and the responses that arrived reassured us in our choice, in which intersectoriality had and has an intrinsic role. Nothing, in fact, is more interdisciplinary than a research dedicated to defining what is false in history, as well as in art, in political discourse or, moreover, in economic activity. Everything, especially in digital society, can be copied, imitated, artifacted, simulated... Precisely on account of this inevitability, it was and is necessary to qualify the 'false', aside from perhaps bringing it before justice or rejecting it with distain, in order to prove that a reality exists whose authenticity, the truth, can be transformed into consent and can consolidate the relations between individuals. Even more so in a society, like ours, which surely fosters knowledge, but intermediated by means of communication that are increasingly more rapid, widespread and liable to interpolation.

In 2018 a video appeared on the internet in which president Barack Obama uttered phrases that were highly un-

likely: it was the outcome of the application of 'deepfake', a new frontier of digital communication based on GAN neural networks, already known in the 1990s and used in the cinema (Bregler et al., 1997) and today so widespread that many smartphone applications allow users to see themselves as the protagonists, for example, of scenes of famous movies. It is well known that falsification in visual communication in politics is neither a recent invention, nor even an exclusively digital practice. Nonetheless, the episode cited above is the demonstration –and at the same time a warning– of the capacity of Artificial Intelligence technology to create *ex novo*, and in real time, a dynamic and realistic image starting from an audio track. An image equally false as it is realistic and powerful in its possibility to condition public opinion, thanks also to the rapid speed of transmission.

The fake may affect and has affected, over the centuries, the sphere of politics, since in the hands of authority it can become an easy tool, a powerful weapon able to deceive an entire society. The French *État-Major* of the 1890s, respectable and respected, was at the source of one of the most celebrated historical falsehoods, the one that sent captain Dreyfus to the *Île du Diable*, even though he was innocent of the crime of treason. The establishment of Stalinism was promoted by the 'creation' of numerous false official photos, in which the political figures that were no longer to appear among the founders of the regime, vanished (King, 1997).

On the other hand, the distinction between true and false has long been guaranteed by the authority of governments, such as when the forgers of the officially minted coins were

subjected to cruel penalties because they were undermining the authority of the prince himself (Béaur et al., 2007). Such an interpretation of the false was nevertheless complex, given that the rulers themselves ended up by altering the quantity of gold or silver in the coins, then legalising the counterfeit thanks to the power of their own authority.

The concept of the false runs through society and the arts, and not always for the sake of subverting their certainties; on the contrary, it sometimes happened that it innovated the aesthetic canons and the representation of modernity: for example, the period of eclectic revival in the second half of the 19th century produced celebrated works of architecture, such as the façade of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, created in a neo-gothic style in the wake of the Unification of Italy, or the still more mimetic remanagements of the historic centre of Bologna, carried out by Alfonso Rubbiani in *Di Bologna riabbellita* (1913). The false could also be displayed in private homes, without undermining social consent: in 19th century Paris, the manufacture of *bijoux en faux,* a flourishing economic activity, contributed to choosing the false that imitated the true as a symbol of social rise among the petty bourgeoisie, who at a low cost were thus able to enhance their own role (Gaillard, 2000). Furthermore, the theory of the false also comprehends the eternal debate sealed by the motto *dov'era, com'era* (where it was, how it was), coined to sustain Pietro Bon's reconstruction of the bell tower in Mark's Square in Venice, consolidated in the wake of the devastations of World War II and still current today in the critical discourse on post-seismic reconstructions or the preservation of cultural heritage following deliberate actions of destruction (Cormier & Thom, 2016; Ciccopiedi, 2018).

The call launched through *IMG journal* was an invitation to reflect, in theoretical terms or related to the results of specific research experiences, upon the broad conceptual space that lies between the true and the false. As already mentioned, as historians we were (and are) particularly interested in the gradation and the scale of values that separates the two terms: we endorse our interpretative hypotheses based on the findings supplied by documents and sources —of diverse kinds— and the sense we assign to our research depends on their reliability or the awareness of their mendacity. We therefore routinely deal with the cognitive value that can be attributed to a copy (irrespective of whether made by an amanuensis or a mimeograph) and to a false, and we are particularly sensitive to the intention of the author, declared or not, that may also have been the trigger for a social and/or judicial sanction.

With this in mind, we decided to focus our interest, within the visual dimension undertaken by the respondents to the call, less on what is false and/or falsified (and its theoretical classification) and more on the stress placed on the study and categorisation of the reproduction and replica (that today can easily reach an infinite number of examples), which digital technologies make simple and cheap. This is a disciplinary area of great interest, from an ontological and gnoseological perspective, because it allows us, on the one hand, to assess the contribution of both the 'identical reproduction', also dimensional, of different objects (from works of art to the typical artifacts of scientific research), and their re-materialisation, that is to say their digital and vectorial reproduction, to the lines of investigation and, on the other, to determine whether they open up new directions.

We should admit: our viewpoint is conditioned by the experience –pioneering– gained in the modelling of the virtual environments for the history of Bologna (we refer to the project Nu.M.E., Nuovo Museo Elettronico of the city of Bologna. In Bocchi, 1999). As historians of the city, the reconstruction of the model was confined to the information provided by the sources (which, for the medieval era, consist of descriptive, non-geometrical documents and other rare material vestiges still *in situ*), understood as the only reliable sources, without conceding anything to the hypotheses of reconstruction based on the concept of likelihood (Musiani, 2010). Also with regards the representations of the city, our emphasis was placed on the reliability of the iconographic rendering with respect to the object depicted (Ghizzoni, 2003). However, we are also aware –for example– of the intrinsic, positive and fruitful value of the copy, identical to the original also in the material aspect (with the aid of scanning and 3D printing on sheets of acetate and plaster) of the largest existing perspective view of Bologna, made in 1575 in the Palace of Gregory XIII in the Vatican, which is now on display at Palazzo Pepoli in Bologna for the appreciation of the public at large (Lowe, 2010).

Besides, at the root of the false lies the act of copying which, especially in the history of the visual arts, assumes conflicting and changing values that may have virtuous sides, if one considers that the masterpieces of Greek sculpture are known only thanks to the copies made in the Roman era (Barbanera, 2011), as well as more ambiguous aspects, if one takes into account the artistic debate that still revolves around the distinction between fake and authentic (Casarin, 2015; Charney, 2020). And precisely on the designifica-

tion of the authentic, it is possible to turn to the *précession du simulacre* theorised by Jean Baudrillard (1981): the simulacrum renounces any pretence of objectivity and substitutes its real counterpart, taking on a completely autonomous value. The copy nevertheless has an irreplaceable role in the didactics of the arts: Cennino Cennini in his book *Libro dell'Arte* –written in the early 15th century and one of the most important treatises of modern art criticism– praises the practice of reproducing the works of the masters, while acknowledging the necessity to concentrate on just one author in order to avoid any risk of cultural dispersion because, in this way, copying is never a mechanical action and becomes an archeological reading of the poietic action of the author, carried out by retracing the phases of ideation and realisation of the works.

Potentially everything can be copied, falsified or faked, perhaps in a conforming manner but still distinct from the factual reality. A qualification of the triad copy/false/fake is therefore necessary, whether to pursue it or reject it, but in any case, to seek out the existence of the real, of the authentic, the true, which can foster consent and consolidate the relations between individuals (Veray, 1999). Besides, judicial evidence is also undergoing a profound upheaval as a result of the proliferation of copies, false and fakes (Maras & Alexandrou, 2018).

The essays contained in this monographic issue are an attempt to build a 'sense' to the above-mentioned questions and reinstate the complexity of the theme of the false as a critical subject, rich in stratified meanings and, in some cases, also surprising. As in each issue of *IMG journal*, the reading path is extremely free (as the essays are in alpha-

betical order of the authors' names): without any intention to address the reader's curiosity and interest towards one direction rather than another, we limit ourselves here to presenting the selected texts according to a thread of coherence determined by the key words chosen by the authors.

From a 'fake' 10 Pound coin one can draw not only the provocative idea of the artist, but also read a political message. In diverse historical periods and for differing reasons, works of art have been the object of "attacks". In 1914 Mary Richardson, in the name of female suffrage, slashed Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* and justified her action with these words: "I tried to destroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the Government destroying Mrs Pankhurst, the most beautiful character in modern history". More recently, Goya's *Maja Desnuda* was 'used' by the Guerrilla Girls to denounce the scarce attention of the art world to female artists. Fakes, slashes, provocations... All these examples show how wide the spectrum of analysis can be when dealing with cultural spheres: the essays of Marinella Arena and Federico Rebecchini highlight this perspective.

But the theme of the copy in also linked inevitably with that of education and teaching, as emerges from the essay of Antonella Poce, Maria Rosaria Re, Mara Valente and Carlo De Medio, and in that of Monica Salvadori, Monica Baggio and Luca Zamparo. The reproduction of works of art, of design or of high craftsmanship –from sculptures to models of architectonic works or to antique ceramics (topics covered in the essays of Elena Merino Gomez, Fernando Moral Andrés and Chiara Casarin, but also of Michael Renner and Kambiz Shafei, as well as in that of

Aimee Murphy)– has always been a matter of study in artistic circles, in the academies and schools of art, ancient, modern and contemporary, but the contribution of modern techniques has certainly broadened the dimensions of the relation between original work, 'replicator' and final work, giving rise to a leap in conceptual scale perhaps never before so evident. Between 1848 and 1851, Charles Blanc, director of Fine Arts in the Second French Republic, put forward the idea of creating a *Musée Européen des copies*, a project then taken up by Adolphe Thiers in 1873, at a moment when France needed to 'reconstruct' itself after the defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. The Museum was to have become a 'universal' place able to preserve copies of the greatest works of art, also for the purpose of promoting the artistic formation of artists, as well as of the public at large. On the one hand this resumed the habit of the great painters who, in their studios, signed the works of their pupils, who thanks to this intercession could sell and earn some economic profit, and on the other it was an attempt to find a way to 'preserve' a European and universal legacy (Rodríguez Castresana, 2017).

The didactic scope, to launch the profession as well as to protect and enjoy the works of genius and creativity that had accompanied the French experience, can still be traced, on close inspection, in the project for copies of works of art kept in the plaster cast collection of the "Pietro Vannucci" Academy of Fine Arts in Perugia –starting from Ercole Farnese ("one of the most famous statues of antiquity"). But the proposal put forward in the essay of Paolo Belardi invites a cultural challenge that represents a paradigm shift: to overcome, in the age in which the

reproducibility of objects is at its height, the diffidence towards the intrinsic artistic value of the multimedia replica, which substantiates in the successive, and numerous, passages from copy to copy and from material to material (from bronze to marble, from plaster to bioplastic).

The cinema or photography then take up and broaden the theme by raising, as mentioned, the question of the difference between copy or 'homage' and, differently but not on this account less interesting, modification for public/political 'use'. If there is a sector in which the line between quotation, tribute and remake is particularly tenuous it is perhaps that of the cinema, as highlighted in the essay of Stefano Colistra: is repeating a scene from a great classic a tribute or plagiarism? As historians we could say that the image in this case makes the definition much more complex: hence the interest in a definition of the terms in an interdisciplinary field.

The theme of the reproduction of the image, as pointed out in the essay of Edoardo Maggi, is then of great interest. In the archives we find postcards with reproductions of the cities that were the destination of the 18th/19th century *Grand Tour* and we grasp their meaning as testimonies of a moment in history, without dwelling upon the fact that the image is, for an art historian, a reproduction.

The more broadly cultural significance of digital artifacts and of virtual reconstructions is investigated by Massimiliano Lo Turco, Elisabetta Caterina Giovannini and Andrea Tomalini. Starting from a historical perspective of the techniques and applications –passing through a proposal for a taxonomic classification of the types of reproduction in the age of the fourth industrial

revolution– the authors assess the educational and communicative impact of the virtual simulations of reality offered by the institutions of preservation and protection of cultural heritage, quite numerous in the period of lockdown imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. In this perspective, the copy (in particular digital) assumes an augmented cultural and 'glocal' value, which combines the transmission of specific histories and areas of knowledge with a very wide accessibility to the fruition, allowed by the (almost) obliterated physical distance between the observer and the place of preservation.

Further reflection on the gnoseological impact and dissemination of ideas determined by digital reproduction is offered by Paola Puma and Giovanni Anzani, who confront digital mapping as a scientific field in which the pair of opposites authentic-false loses its meaning, since the artifact, thanks to technology, is always more precise and reliable, and acquires its own autonomous dimension of state and place. With the aid of algorithms currently under development applied to certain study cases, the authors also propose a theoretical framework for the triad "copy, false and simulation" by means of the correspondence with the applicative phases of the mapping: acquisition, elaboration, modellisation of the data. The analysis then moves on, in conclusion, to the relation between the model that is 'simulated' with respect to the real, but the expression of new data, and the context it could be inserted in, which, especially for architectonic legacy historicised as "art for public use", will constitute the added value to strive towards for the "auralization" of the information artifact.

The call also attracted authors who extended their personal research on the concept of false, copy and imitation to the realisation of architectonic interventions: two investigations were accepted, geographically distant and also based on different forms of analysis, but both yielding theoretical results, as well as linking the Old Continent and the New World.

Fabio Colonnese, Maria Grazia D'Amelio and Lorenzo Grieco based their investigation on what happened in the Cistercian monastery of Santa Maria la Real in Sacramenia, in Segovia (Spain), which in 1925 was purchased, dismantled stone by stone and sent to Miami in Florida (USA) where it was rebuilt, ten years later, as in the original. 'Violently' decontextualised, albeit in the continuity of religious use and materials, has the monastery remained faithful to itself as an architectonic work? Assigning the new American phase of life of the artifact to the category of authentic or false is no simple task from the gnoseological and theoretical point of view: a case study calling to reconsider the borders of the original and its capacity to 'authenticate' artifacts realised with overtly imitative intentions.

The other case takes us to Macedonia and, again, to the USA: Giuseppe Resta and John Gatip tackle a theme widely investigated by the specialised critique –architecture as a political manifesto– but present it in a contemporary key, contextualised to the increasingly widespread affirmation of cultural phenomena aimed at casting doubt on factual truth. In particular, the authors consider the neoclassical style –adopted by the project Skopje 2014 to give a new aspect to public buildings, by

means of fake structures made of plasterboard and polystyrene, and invoked by president Trump in the planning of federal buildings– as a means to impose a "deceptive" nationalist narration.

The theme of the 'image' and the resignification of the object represented is taken up in the essay of Fabio Colonnese, who analyses the innovative renderings carried out by Alberto Campo Baeza and Raphaël Gabrion, in 2015, for the competition to plan a conservation and storage facility for the Louvre Museum in Liévin: although belonging to the tradition of photomontage and collage, the communication carried out on that occasion is paradigmatic, in the vast field of digital media, of evolution visual models for the communication of architectural planning. The author offers an analysis and an interpretation of the stratified meanings in the images, interconnected and intertextual, realised by the two architects, who are able to put under discussion the status of representation between false and true in the present age of copy-and-paste.

Finally, the path of theoretical reflection offered by Stefano Chiarenza and Barbara Messina, who systemise the main fundamentals for the distinction between real and representation, and between authentic object and copy, updating them in the light of the extraordinary opportunities for artistic and visual reproduction offered by new technologies; the article opens with a reflection on the image seen as the visual translation of concrete or mental realities, then focusing, in particular, on the dichotomy between imitative function and intrinsic artistic expression.

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