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by **Valentina Tanni** - June 18, 2019

An exhibition that speaks to the relationship between our identity and its digital double, via invisible photographs, archives of images without censorship and stuffed cats.

Eva and Franco Mattes, "Personal Photographs, September 2009" (2019). Image courtesy of the artists and team (gallery, inc.)
Photo: Jeff McLane

A network of cables runs through the rooms of the bungalow and even pushes outside, suspended in a long system of metal channels. Inside, 142 files are continuously circulating: all the photographs taken by the artists during September 2009. The images are invisible, hidden from the human eye but always present, always in motion, unstoppable. The installation is entitled *Personal Photographs, September 2009* (2019), and is part of the exhibition *Data Doubles*, staged by **Eva and Franco Mattes** (Italy, 1976; live in New York) at Team Bungalow in Venice, California. The project, which includes two other works - a video and a sculpture - is the latest chapter in a long reflection, carried on by the artists since the mid-nineties, on the relationship between society and new technologies. In particular, the Mattes have continually focused their attention on the relationships between personal and collective identity, and its digital representation, as well as on the psychological and cultural changes triggered by the use of computers and networks.

THE DEATH OF PRIVACY

In 2017, acting on a commission by the Whitney Museum in New York, they created *Riccardo Uncut* (2018), conceptually continuing the line traced by now historic projects such as *Life Sharing* (2000-3), a radical performance action that anticipated the devaluation of the concept of privacy and staged a future of permanent sharing. After spreading an open call in which they offered $1,000 to anyone willing to sell their smartphone, with all the photographs and videos made over several years, without any complaint, they selected Riccardo. The collection of over 3,000 files, documenting the life of the owner between 2004 and 2017, was then edited into a 87-minute video, in chronological order: "We manually changed the duration of each image, trying to simulate the speed with which we would have passed the photos on the phone screen, dwelling a little more on the images that seemed more interesting to us," the artists explain in an interview with the British Journal of Photography. The result, now part of the Whitney collection and included in the show at Team, is a visual tale that expresses our relationship with the photographic medium with great effectiveness.

THE ERA OF SURVEILLANCE

The ability to share images in real time has profoundly changed attitudes towards documentation, especially after the advent of social networks. The very act of shooting an image contains in a nutshell that of its sharing, making us aware at all times of the presence of a *potential public* and thus irreparably polluting the possibility of a spontaneous and authentic story. On one side, therefore, *Riccardo Uncut* is a documentation without filters, which also contains the blurred shots, the wrong images, those intended to remain private and those realized only as a personal note; at the same time, however, the video shows us how, over the years, the awareness of being in the spotlight has shifted the idea of editing upstream of the process. The decision of what to photograph and how to photograph it is influenced by an awareness of being observed, pushing us towards the internalization of a new role: that of curators of our public image.

To symbolize the continuous surveillance regime that characterizes the contemporary age - understood as the control by states and corporations but also as a mutual, collective gaze - we come at last to the sculpture *Ceiling Cat* (2016), a disturbing and funny taxidermy feline that observes the spectator from an aperture in the ceiling. The materialization of a popular viral image, the cat embodies the contradictions of the networks of our time: "It is cute and scary at the same time, like the Internet."

- Valentina Tanni