

**Marc Lenot**

**Für eine Philosophy of Caixa Preta**

**Critical textual analysis of the different versions of Vilém Flusser's  
book**

***Towards a Philosophy of Photography*  
and a short history of its editions**

*This essay was born out of my dissatisfaction while reading the French translation "Pour une Philosophie de la Photographie" which I will discuss later. This frustration led me to go back to the original text, then to the other original texts, and to their conditions of writing and publication. And, one thing leading to another ...<sup>1</sup>*

Vilém Flusser has frequently written the same texts in several languages, not only translating himself his initial text, but rewriting it, modifying it, enriching it through its various self-translations<sup>2</sup>. Thus, in the Flusser Archive, one can find many of his original writings, in slightly different self-translated<sup>3</sup> versions, in German, Portuguese, English and French, some published and some in the form of typescripts. This is the case of his best-known, most widely distributed and most translated book, *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie*, of which he wrote and published four original versions, two in German, one in English and one in Portuguese<sup>4</sup>.

There are relatively few critical textual analyses of Flusser's writings<sup>5</sup>. The existence of these four original versions of the book allows one to develop an attempt at a Flusserian textual critique, which I will present here<sup>6</sup>. I have essentially limited myself here to the published texts, merely mentioning

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Emmanuel Alloa, Yves Citton, Rainer Guldin, Anita Jóri, Jacinto Lageira Rodrigo Maltez Novaes, Andreas Müller-Pohle, Gabriel Philipson, Pierre Rusch and Steffi Winkler for their suggestions, advice, provision of information, and assistance in translation.

<sup>2</sup> On the subject of self-translation, the main reference is the work of Rainer Guldin on multilingualism (<https://rainer-guldin.ch/multilingual-literature/>) and on translation (<https://rainer-guldin.ch/translation/>).

<sup>3</sup> I propose to call "version" or "self-translated version" texts written by Flusser himself and "third-party translation" texts translated by third parties (with a special mention for texts translated by Edith Flusser during her husband's lifetime). If this convention were to be adopted by researchers on Flusser, this would avoid, sometimes, embarrassing confusions. The terms "edition" and "text" apply to both versions and translations.

<sup>4</sup> On the very title of the book (Photography or Black Box), see the conclusion of this essay. The references of all the editions, original versions as well as translations, are in Appendix 1.

<sup>5</sup> A similar analysis of the two versions of his book « In the Universe of Technical Images » is in preparation as part of its forthcoming French translation. Further analysis could usefully be made for other books by Flusser and in view of their translations into other languages.

<sup>6</sup> This work was the subject of a video presentation entitled "Für Eine Philosophy Of the Caixa Preta. A Text In Three Languages" at the online seminar "Vilém Flusser and His 'Languages'" organized by the Vilém Flusser Archive on June 29, 2020, and I thank the participants for their many very stimulating comments.

briefly the discrepancies between typescripts and published texts; this issue could be explored later, in order to better understand Flusser's writing process, his thinking development and his constant struggle for more clarity in his writings.

Moreover, the existence of numerous translations permits also to analyze the program of dissemination of this book and the apparatus that underlies it, following the approach proposed by Flusser in his critical analysis of the distribution of photography.

## I. The original German editions in 1983 and 1989

The first publication was, in 1983, that of the text in German, under the title *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie*, (Figure 1) with the European Photography publishing house in Göttingen<sup>7</sup>: Andreas Müller-Pohle, photographer and publisher, had met Flusser in February 1981<sup>8</sup>, at a symposium organized by photographer Erika Kiffel at the Schloß Mickeln near Dusseldorf (where Flusser gave a presentation entitled "How to Decipher Photographs?"<sup>9</sup>). Interested by his theories, he had suggested that Flusser write a book based upon some of his previous essays about photography. Flusser would say so in his preface to the Portuguese version in 1985: "This essay is a summary of some lectures and courses that I have given mainly in France and Germany. At the request of European Photography, Göttingen, they were reunited in this little book published in German in 1983". A list, as exhaustive as possible, of these essays and conferences anterior to the publishing of the book is in Appendix 2; a future project could be to republish these texts, which are often difficult to find, and to compare them with the book.

It should be noted that at the time, Flusser was more interested in video than in photography, finding video with "more dialogical potentialities as an apparatus operating model"<sup>10</sup>. It was his meeting with Müller-Pohle, photographer and publisher of books on photography and of the *European Photography* magazine, that led him to abandon video for photography, which he once jokingly

<sup>7</sup> Flusser Vilém, *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie*, Göttingen, European Photography, 1983. To lighten the text, all the bibliographical references of the original versions and of the translations are in Appendix 1.

<sup>8</sup> See Andreas Müller-Pohle, "Der Tod des anderen. Über Vilém Flusser", *Kunstforum*, No.117, 1992, p.85-86

<sup>9</sup> See reference in Appendix 2.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Flusser to Felix Phillip Ingold of July 30, 1983 (file C97, page 40); I thank Daniel Irrgang to have drawn my attention to this letter. References to the Flusser Archive will be given here in this abbreviated form; the detailed references to the Archive files are in Appendix 3.

described as "a discipline that has been out of date for a long time (but with which great things can still be accomplished)<sup>11</sup>" during a conversation with photographer Gottfried Jäger.

Flusser seems to have cultivated a certain ambivalence with respect to the idea of being published in the German language. Although he had tried as early as 1957 to publish in German (proposing at the time, without success, his text *Das zwanzigste Jahrhundert* to various German and Swiss publishers<sup>12</sup>), he was for a long time reluctant to publish in what was both his mother tongue and that of those who had annihilated his family and his community ("my mother and my murderer<sup>13</sup>"), and he argued a lot with his friend Alex Bloch about his relationship with "die Mördersprache<sup>14</sup>".

But the insistence and talent of Müller-Pohle, combined with Flusser's difficulties in being published in French and his distancing himself from Brazil after the relative failure of his participation in the São Paulo Biennale in 1981<sup>15</sup>, convinced him to accept his proposal. In 1988, during a video<sup>16</sup> recorded with Müller-Pohle and his colleague Volker Rapsch in the presence of Edith Flusser, he explained why he published in German, giving three reasons: German is the language closest to his thinking, his meeting with Müller-Pohle convinced him that he had found in him an excellent editor and publisher, and he had a hard time publishing in French, the language of the country where he was living (on this last point, see below).

It is also important to note that the importance of Müller-Pohle was not limited to his essential role for the publication of Flusser; his own theoretical reflections and his artistic research had also a definite influence on the development of Flusser's thought. In 1985, the German version of *Ins Universum der Technischen Bilder* has the following sentence highlighted at the beginning of the book: "Without Andreas Müller-Pohle, whose photographic and theoretical work had a strong influence on me, this book would not have been written, or would have been very different<sup>17</sup>".

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<sup>11</sup> Gottfried Jäger, "Freiheit Im Apparatkontext: Vilém Flusser", *Kunstforum*, n°117, 1992, 83; I thank Martha Schwendener to have drawn my attention to this quote.

<sup>12</sup> Gustavo Bernardo & Rainer Guldin, *O Homem sem Chão. A Biografia de Vilém Flusser*, São Paulo, Annablume, 2017, p. 109.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Milton Vargas of January 18, 1983, file C5, P. 28.

<sup>14</sup> Bernardo & Guldin, *O Homem sem Chão, op.cit.*, pages 76 & 106.

<sup>15</sup> See my article "The Failure of the Encounters of Robion (1981/82): A turning point for Vilém Flusser" to be published in the next issue of *Flusser Studies*.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Andreas Müller-Pohle, Volker Rapsch and Edith Flusser in the context of his conference "Die Krise Der Linearität" (The Linearity Crisis) in the Kunstmuseum Bern on March 20, 1988. Unreleased recording of Wilhelm Mundt, *Vilém Flusser. Engagement und Vision*, 1988, Göttingen, Imatrix Publications. Archiv Flusser reference: VHS\_MP\_002 (1:05 a.m.'54"). This passage is between 2'56' and 7'04". Partially online: < <https://www.youtube.com/embed/ruclsgNsHVs> >. I thank Steffi Winkler for the transcript of this interview.

<sup>17</sup> *Ins Universum der Technischen Bilder*, Göttingen, European Photography, 1985, p. 4.

a. The 1983 German version

After their meeting in February 1981, Flusser and Müller-Pohle initiated an intense correspondence (which occupies four files at the Flusser Archive, C70 to C73) and, when they met in Arles on the occasion of the International Encounters of Photography from 11 to 17 July 1982, they made the decision to publish a book outlining Flusser's thinking on photography. Flusser mentioned it on July 19 in a handwritten note and on July 24 in a letter to Müller-Pohle, and then, on September 9, he promised to send a typescript of 50 pages within two months. He submitted his manuscript on 11 December, and Müller-Pohle sent him his suggestions and corrections on 16 January 1983<sup>18</sup>. The book was published in May 1983.

There are two typescripts of the book in the Archive (file B3): the version named V2 (pages 3 to 46) is quite similar to the published text. The version named V2b (pages 48 to 97) is further away, it does not include the glossary, nor a real preface or a presentation text, and the main text seems, at first glance, less well written. Some corrections, which a further research could analyze in detail, were still being made to the V2 typescript before publication. For example, the words "Charakter", "Scanning" and "Wert" (Value), which appeared in the glossary of the typescript, were taken out of the printed text, as well as the phrase "photography is a hierophany: the sacred is visible in it" (which will reappear in the Portuguese text).

b. The 1989 German version

The book was an immediate success, and was well distributed and sold<sup>19</sup>, there were many reviews in the press, and the book was reprinted in 1985, then again in 1988. In addition, as noted below, Müller-Pohle proactively contacted several foreign publishers in order to conclude translation agreements.

On November 13, 1984, Müller-Pohle wrote to Flusser: "Your book is the contribution to contemporary photographic theory ... and sooner or later it will be translated into all languages."<sup>20</sup> At a meeting in Göttingen from 16 to 18 August 1987 between Flusser, his wife, Müller-Pohle and Rapsch<sup>21</sup>, it was noted that the third reprint would be released in early 1988 and that a postface could possibly be written (which was not done).

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<sup>18</sup> Letters from file C70, pages 98, 96, 102, 122 and 128, respectively.

<sup>19</sup> The only document in the Archive showing sales figures relates to the first 9 months of 1985: it does indicate only 83 copies sold, but it contains miscalculations and does not appear conclusive (file C72, p. 68).

<sup>20</sup> File C72, p. 4 ; article highlighted in the original.

<sup>21</sup> File C73, p. 69.

On March 19, 1989, Andreas Müller-Pohle wrote to Flusser that the third reprint would soon be exhausted, and that he planned to "recompose the text entirely and to rethink the volume's typography. On this occasion it would be possible to review the content or add to it. Please think about it. Photophilosophy is - at least for sales here - your most successful German book to date, not to mention foreign editions."<sup>22</sup> Flusser noted by hand in the margin of this letter "Neues Kapitel", new chapter.

The new edition in 1989 benefited indeed from a new, more airy typography, some orthographic errors were corrected and eight bio-bibliographic lines on Flusser were added. But, from a textual point of view, the difference with the 1983 version is minimal: there was no afterword or new chapter, and the text is almost identical to that of the 1983 version, except for one modification<sup>23</sup>. A small part (48 words) of the last paragraph of Chapter 3 ("Der Fotoapparat") of the 1983 version on page 24 was replaced by two new paragraphs with 275 words on pages 29-30 of the 1989 version. In these two paragraphs, the notion that the apparatus was invented to simulate a thought process was developed, the primacy of digital thought over linear thinking was explained, the Cartesian concepts of thinking thing and real thing were introduced there (they were already in Chapter 8), and the assertion of the apparatus as a black box was reinforced. Flusser also mentioned briefly Nicholas of Cusa<sup>24</sup> there.

The text of the 1989 version is the one that will be constantly reprinted until the current 12<sup>th</sup> reprint; the 1997 version is sometimes presented as a new edition, but the text is identical, with simply a revision of the typography and layout.

## II. The self-translated original English 1984 version

### a. The self-translated 1984 version

Müller-Pohle also encouraged Flusser to publish an English version, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, whose text, self-translated by Flusser, was revised by the Swiss-American photographer and writer Derek Bennett and was published by European Photography in May 1984.

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<sup>22</sup> Filer C73, p. 102.

<sup>23</sup> I didn't find trace in the Flusser Archive of letters or typescripts related to this change.

<sup>24</sup> Flusser had in his library Karl Jaspers' book on Nicholas de Cusa (see < <https://arena-attachments.s3.amazonaws.com/185811/81ba2234aae3864e896fc055a5d8dcfa.pdf?1389358868> >), but I have found only one other mention of this thinker, quite briefly, in his essay "Digitaler Schein" in Florian Rötzer (dir.), *Digitaler Schein, Ästhetik der elektronischen Medien*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1991, p. 26.

There are also two typescripts of the English text in the Flusser Archive (file B4): the version called V2 (p.2-47) is quite close to the published text. The version called V2b (p.48-86) is further away, and it seems to be, more or less, a translation by Flusser of the V2b version in German, since it also lacks a glossary and a real preface. This may indicate that Flusser had begun translating this first version of the English text at the same time than he wrote the first version of the German text, as early as the autumn of 1982, and that the second English version was then written after the second German version.

On January 27, 1983, Müller-Pohle wrote to Flusser that he was planning to go to New York City in May and would try to find a publisher there, and, on March 19, he mentioned that he would send the English text to several people, including the critic A.D. Coleman, whom he considered as influential and well connected<sup>25</sup>. However, having had no success, he decided to publish the English text himself. Flusser sent his English typescript on June 23; Müller-Pohle thanked him on June 29 ("it's extremely nice of you to translate the text") and told him that he had sent the typescript to Derek Bennett ("an excellent stylist") to review it<sup>26</sup>. On October 15 Flusser thanked Bennett for revising his text; he then sent a new version that Müller-Pohle transmitted to Bennett, informing Flusser on January 8, 1984 and again praising Bennet ("we couldn't have found a better editor"). On January 15, Flusser sent his final corrections, as well as his biography and a short presentation text, to Müller-Pohle. On January 20, Müller-Pohle wrote to Flusser that the corrections were sent to Bennett, and that the text would be set up for printing and that Flusser could read it one last time, which he did upon receipt on 22 March<sup>27</sup>. The book was published by European Photography in April 1984.

#### b. Comparison with the 1983 German text

Most of the differences between the 1984 English text and the 1983 German text are details or clarifications. Only a few changes are really significant. For instance the glossary is slightly different with three words less ("Vorstellung"<sup>28</sup>, "Bedeutung" and "Wertvoll") and three new words ("Character", "Scanning" and "Value"). The title of Chapter 3, instead of "Der Fotoapparat", is "The Apparatus," a change that can be interpreted as an indication that photography is used here to illustrate how apparatuses work. However, the word "pretext", indicating that photography is

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<sup>25</sup> File C70, pages 137 & 145.

<sup>26</sup> Derek Bennett was also the editor of the English version of the bilingual articles Flusser wrote on photographers for *European Photography* from 1984 until his death (File C71, p. 18).

<sup>27</sup> File C71, pages 4, 9, 20, 37, 45-43-41, 46-58.

<sup>28</sup> Of which the English equivalent, « Ideia », had been included in the typescript, but was not retained.

merely an excuse to speak about the apparatus, who already did not appear in the German version ("Vorwand"), is also absent from the English version ("pretext"); it will only appear in the Portuguese version in 1985<sup>29</sup>. In Chapter 4, there is also the addition of the possibility for photographers to build their own camera<sup>30</sup>: by doing so, they are able to position themselves upstream of the photographic apparatus, where the metaprogramming of the apparatuses takes place.

Other modifications are clarifications or corrections: the invention of linear writing is now dated to the second half of the second millennium, not its medium; instead of one, Einstein is now credited with several equations of relativity; a comparison is made with the digestive system of animals, not their auditory one; the apparatuses are defined as cultural objects; the quote "Johnny can't spell" is corrected with the correct title of Don Henley's 1982 song "Johnny can't read"; the word Judaism is replaced by the word Zionism, considered as more appropriate between imperialism and terrorism.

Finally, the style is improved in various places: better explanation of shoe making and apple picking; inclusion of a final paragraph summarizing Chapter 3 and transitioning to the next chapter, as was already the case in all other chapters; introduction of the notion of involution, clearer than that of symmetry or symbiosis.

c. Future of this original English version, and third-party translation

Müller-Pohle tried several times to have this English version republished by an English-language publisher. After his aforementioned trip to New York in January 1983, and not getting any reply from Coleman, he informed Flusser on July 22, 1983 that he had contacted Princeton University Press, but they were not interested either<sup>31</sup>. At the meeting of 16-18 August 1987 mentioned above, the report<sup>32</sup> indicated that sales of the book in English were certainly not exhilarating, but nevertheless important, and that there were many contacts in English-speaking countries.

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<sup>29</sup> But this idea was of course already present in Flusser's mind. On July 30, 1983, a few months after the book's release in German, he wrote to Felix Phillip Ingold: "The aim of this photographic essay was for the most part to define the apparatus and the program. Photography has only served as a pretext, even if I tried to stay true to the phenomenon of photography" (see note 10 ; file C97, page 40).

<sup>30</sup> With this mention of cameras *do-it-yourself*, Flusser probably thought of the *camera obscura* ; he probably didn't know of his fellow Czech, the photographer Miroslav Tichý (1926-2011) who was building his own cameras.

<sup>31</sup> File C71, pages 10 & 12.

<sup>32</sup> File C73, p. 69.

On August 3, 1984, soon after the book's release, Müller-Pohle told Flusser that there were some embarrassing typographical errors and that it would be good to make an *errata* sheet to correct those affecting the understanding of the text (adding that this kind of practice would be forgiven to a German publisher publishing a book in English). Flusser politely replied on August 8th that it was a great idea, but that he himself unfortunately had "neither the time nor the nerves" to reread the book and identify these errors<sup>33</sup>. In fact, there are very few typographical errors affecting understanding<sup>34</sup>; a reader would possibly be shocked only by German quotation marks (reversed for an English-speaking reader) and by non-conventional word truncations ("im-ages"). In her doctoral thesis at the City University of New York in 2016, *The Photographic Universe: Vilém Flusser's Theories of Photography, Media and Digital Culture*, Martha Schwendener proposed the following reasons for the lack of success of this version: limited availability, poorly edited, full of idiosyncrasies and typographical errors (quotation marks printed in reverse, for example)<sup>35</sup>.

It seems to me that the first hypothesis of Martha Schwendener, the weak distribution of the German publisher in English-speaking countries, was the main reason for the relative commercial failure of this English edition, and that the other factors mattered little. In 2000, the English publisher Reaktion Books agreed to publish the book in English, not Flusser's original text, but a translation (by Anthony Mathews) of the German 1989 version. This edition, which includes an afterword by the philosopher and art historian Hubertus von Amelnunxen, has been a great success, it has been reprinted ten times in 20 years<sup>36</sup>. The quotation marks are correct, the quality of the language can be considered better, and the 300 words added at the end of Chapter 3 of the 1989 German edition are included; but, as in the German text, the title "Johnny can't spell" has not been corrected, Einstein has formulated only one equation, and *do-it-yourself* cameras are not mentioned. There is also a slight error in Chapter 7 with the phrase "those who take snapshots feel blind": the qualification "when they don't have their camera", which is in the original German and English texts, is missing here. Three chapter titles have been modified (curiously, the chapters are no longer numbered): Chapter 5 instead of "Photography" is now called "The Photograph", which is not at all the same thing (the German title "Die Fotografie" covered both meanings); the title of Chapter 9 has become explanatory "Why a Philosophy of Photography is Necessary", while the German or English version were just statements ("The Need for a Philosophy of Photography").

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<sup>33</sup> File C70, pages 78 & 89.

<sup>34</sup> Without pretending to be totally comprehensive, I have identified only six typographical errors: "sanning" (p.6), "descision" (p.27), "progressively" (p.41), "callenge" (p.47), "inscibed" (p.59) and "and" instead of "an" (p.56), the latter being the only one that could possibly perturb the understanding of the text.

<sup>35</sup> Note 484, p.137; the thesis is online at <

[https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1707&context=gc\\_etds](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1707&context=gc_etds) >.

<sup>36</sup> In 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018.

Interestingly, the title of Chapter 3 is taken from the English 1984 version "The Apparatus" while the German text said "Der Fotoapparat". Another change from the German version of 1989 demonstrates however a careful reading of the English 1984 version; the same "virtuous" correction was included, that is, in Chapter 7, the reference is now to Zionism and no longer to Judaism, between imperialism and terrorism.

In response to my question, Müller-Pohle wrote to me<sup>37</sup> that the reason for this translation (instead of reusing the original English version by Flusser) was Reaktion Books' request to translate from the revised German version of 1989.

Thus the only book Flusser wrote in English (and his only book in English published in his lifetime) is no longer available, and English-speaking readers no longer have access to his original text. Shouldn't English-speaking readers at least be informed that they are reading a third-party translation while an original Flusser text exists in English but has not been available from the publisher for more than 20 years?

### III. The self-translated Portuguese versions

#### a. The 1985 Brazilian edition

On October 29, 1982, a month and a half before completing his first manuscript in German, Flusser was already thinking about an edition in Brazil, writing to his friend Maria Lilia Leão: "If you think it's publishable, I'll translate it", telling her that his typescript would be about 50 pages typed. Maria Lilia Leão, a lawyer and one of the heads of the vocational training center of the Ministry of Education and Culture, had been part of the group of young people who met regularly to listen to Flusser on the terrace of his home in São Paulo. She replied on January 30, 1983, after receiving the first typescript and having discussed it: "For a newspaper, it's too long; for a magazine specializing in photography, it's too philosophical," but that the rector of the University of Rio Preto, the geographer Aziz Ab'Saber, might be interested<sup>38</sup>. After the publication of the book in German, Leão sent copies of the German book to journalists and critics, such as Stefanie Brill, of the magazine *Iris*, and she contacted several publishers, such as Perspectiva (Jacob Guinsburg; letter of

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<sup>37</sup> Personal message from Andreas Müller-Pohle to the author on April 26, 2020.

<sup>38</sup> File C13, pages 14 & 1.

December 5, 1983), the Cortes editions (letter of 31 January 1984) and others (letter of 13 February 1985). While showing a little impatience (letter of January 2, 1984), Flusser thanked her (letters of March 14, 1984 and April 4, 1985)<sup>39</sup>. Andreas Müller-Pohle wasn't much involved in these contacts, since he did not speak Portuguese (letter of 20 January 1984), but Flusser kept him informed (letter of 2 January 1984)<sup>40</sup>.

Leão informed Flusser on June 10, 1985 that she finally had decided to publish the book herself with José Carlos Ismael, another friend of Flusser, also a participant of the terrace meetings and Director of the Film and Photography Department of the Ministry of Culture, who was in contact with a publisher (not named in this initial letter); the graphic designer Fred Jordan, another friend of Flusser, would design the cover for free. Flusser replied on June 21 that he was honored and enthusiastic, and he sent documents authorizing the deal and appointing Leão as his agent for all his Brazilian editions<sup>41</sup>. Presumably Flusser informed immediately Müller-Pohle, although there is no trace of it in the Archive; the latter sent a contract to Leão on November 29, 1985, a month after the Brazilian book's publication<sup>42</sup>.

In view of his subsequent reaction, it is not certain that Flusser understood that the book, while published under the label of Hucitec editions (Humanismo, Ciência e Tecnologia), was in fact self-published (an expression that Maria Lilia Leão did not explicitly use). A later accounting document, dated August 20, 1986<sup>43</sup>, indicates the names of the contributors: Fred Jordan (the graphic designer), José Bueno and Rodolfo Geiser (two friends and correspondents of Flusser), José Longman, and the great friend of Flusser Milton Vargas. These names are listed at the end of the book's afterword, with thanks for their help in publishing the book, together with the name of Leão, but without the name of Ismael, with whom collaboration seems to have been sometimes difficult ("more Brazilian machismo," wrote Leão to Flusser on July 26, 1985)<sup>44</sup>.

Flusser stayed in Brazil from September 21 to October 27, 1985: upon his arrival, Leão informed him of her suggestion of a new title, which he enthusiastically approved. While in São Paulo, he made the final corrections to the text, and he wrote his new preface, dated October, shortly before it was sent to the printer. The book was released at the end of October 1985, just before Flusser's return to Europe and during the São Paulo Biennale. The differences with the German and English versions will be analyzed in the next section. But one notices immediately the different title: *Filosofia*

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<sup>39</sup> File C13, pages 51, 53, 21, 52, 50 & 22.

<sup>40</sup> File C71, pages 33, 46 & 34.

<sup>41</sup> File C13, pages 64-65 & 66-68.

<sup>42</sup> File C13, p. 69.

<sup>43</sup> File C14, pages 10 & 11.

<sup>44</sup> File C24, p. 73.

*da Caixa Preta. Ensaios para uma futura filosofia da fotografia* (Philosophy of the Black Box. Essays for a future philosophy of photography)<sup>45</sup>. Both Flusser and Leão thought that the alliteration "filosofia fotografia" did not sound very well in Portuguese and looked too much like a "thesis title"<sup>46</sup>; Leão first considered "Fotofilosofia. Estudos sobre as tecno-imagens"<sup>47</sup>, then she suggested the more poetic expression "Filosofia da Caixa Preta". Even if it has never been mentioned, I would like to think, without any proof, that this black box could have been an answer, a counterpoint to the "chambre claire", the camera lucida<sup>48</sup>. When Leão proposed this title to Flusser upon his arrival in São Paulo, his reaction was enthusiastic, saying: "It's an excellent title, much better than the original title! Why didn't we think of it earlier ourselves?"<sup>49</sup> He then informed Müller-Pohle, who agreed.

The cover by the graphic designer Fred Jordan is less austere than the cover of the European Photography first editions. In addition to an original preface by Flusser in which he explains the need for this new edition and thanks Maria Leão, the book includes an afterword by Maria Leão, titled "Flusser and freedom of thought, or Flusser and a certain generation of the 60s", which is about the figure of Flusser and its importance to her and her friends, more than on the theme of the book itself.

Flusser seems to have been a little concerned about the reaction of Müller-Pohle, who replied on December 8, 1985: "I wrote to Maria Lilia and told her my enthusiasm for her postface and all her editorial initiative."<sup>50</sup> Flusser told Leão that he was surprised that Müller-Pohle liked the text of her postface (letter of February 15, 1986). Invited in the autumn of 1986 to Brazil by the Goethe Institute<sup>51</sup>, Müller-Pohle then met Leão, who informed Flusser (letter of 28 October 1986) that

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<sup>45</sup> See references and links URL in Appendix 1. The book edited by Siegfried Zielinski, Peter Weibel and Daniel Irregang (Dirs.), *Flusseriana*, Minneapolis, Univocal, 2015 contains an ambiguity regarding this title on page 504 : while the subtitle *Ensaios Para Uma Futura Filosofia Da Fotografia* is correctly indicated in note 143 as already existing in the 1985 edition by Hucitec, the text itself implies that the subtitle appeared only in the 2002 edition, which is inaccurate.

<sup>46</sup> Phone conversation of the author with Maria Lília Leão February 19, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> File C24, p. 73.

<sup>48</sup> The Portuguese translation of Roland Barthes's book was published in Portugal the same year it was published in France (Edições 70, Lisbon, 1980, trans. Manuela Tores) and in Brazil In 1984 (Nova Fronteira, Rio de Janeiro, 1984, trans. Júlio Caston Guimarães). The book however doesn't appear in Flusser's Travel Library on the site of the Flusser Archive (< <https://arena-attachments.s3.amazonaws.com/185811/81ba2234aae3864e896fc055a5d8dcfa.pdf?1389358868> >).

<sup>49</sup> Phone conversation of the author with Maria Lília Leão February 19, 2019. This version is slightly different from the one exposed In *Flusseriana, op. cit.*, page 504, which does not take into account the fact that Flusser was present in São Paulo at the time of the final editing and printing of the book and therefore accepted and approved this title before publication.

<sup>50</sup> File C72, pages 73 - 85, and file C73, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> File C72, pages 76, 78 & 80.

Müller-Pohle was a pleasant man but that they had to solve "a mountain of misunderstandings". She then proposed on March 10, 1987 a contract for future publications<sup>52</sup>.

An interesting and, after all, revealing incident obscured a little the release of the book. Flusser left Brazil on October 27, 1985, just after the launch. On November 4 he wrote to Leão, thanking her warmly for her superhuman effort, adding: "It is difficult to express oneself adequately when it comes to such intimate things, such as this publication of private reflections." She did not reply until January 6, 1986, two months later, talking about her own work problems, informing him of the first reviews of the book, and then coming to what she called her wounds. "Even now, I cannot accept your ir-ra-tion-nal behavior throughout the course of our beautiful (because serious and difficult) adventure, because I don't understand it. Could you at least tell me now what was 'biting' you so much? I have the impression that 'involving your friends' was like putting your hand in a super-protected and hidden wasp nest inside of you."<sup>53</sup> Similarly, in March 1986, the agronomist and ecologist Rodolfo Ricardo Geiser, one of those who had contributed financially to the book's publishing, also wrote to Flusser, reminding him first of the economics of the publication, and then, using the third person to challenge him: "It was done in this way. And then VF came and did not like. He regarded this as an 'unworthy' thing, as if it were 'asking for alms'. He was offended."<sup>54</sup>

Flusser replied to Leão on February 15, 1986: "As for my ir-ra-tion-nal behavior and the wounds I have caused, this is what I say: any commitment is an abandonment of the private domain in favor of the public one, and he who drags the private into the public commits, in my opinion, an impudent act. That's why I protested about my photo on the cover. It was striptease. Now you have mobilized your and my private domains in favor of the publication of the book. It's like I've been undressed. You may object that these are Judeo-Christian prejudices against nudity, but listen: if I turn publishing into exhibitionism, I betray the private (intimate relationships) and the public (relationships to change the world). Your action (as noble as the motive was) projected me on the slimy terrain of self-promotion, where the concrete hides the abstract and where the abstract serves as a pretext for the concrete. I hate this field, and this explains my behavior that, in retrospect, I regret. Let's forget it, okay?"<sup>55</sup>. Leão forgot and didn't talk about it anymore. Flusser's response to Geiser was more succinct: "From my point of view, publishing (no matter where) is out of the

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<sup>52</sup> File C14, pages 2, 16 & 18.

<sup>53</sup> File C13, pages 70 & 71-72. The emphatic truncations in the word "irrational" and the quotation marks are in the original.

<sup>54</sup> File C16, pages 31 & 26.

<sup>55</sup> File C14, p. 2.

private domain. If the private seeps into the publication (whether through friends or any other form), the publication is distorted (I have a whole theory about it).<sup>56</sup>

So there were two problems, it seems: the involvement of his friends in the financing (which would suggest that he had not understood - or did not want to understand - the financial set-up when Leão wrote to him on June 10, 1985) and the presence of his portrait (doubled, positive and negative) by the photographer Sakae Tajima on the back cover page (Figure 2). But I would be tempted to believe that the photograph was just a pretext. Indeed, Flusser had not previously been so sensitive about the publication of his portrait: on March 1, 1973, he had written to Anne Doria at Mame Editions<sup>57</sup>, who were going to publish *La Force du Quotidien*<sup>58</sup>, to announce the sending of his biography, his bibliography and a photograph of him, which is indeed on the back cover of this book. And, among other examples, no less than three portraits of him were in illustration of his article "Ora, Aprenda a ler Televisão, Fotografia, ..." in the Brazilian magazine *Especial* in December 1979. I did not find in the Archive any correspondence between Flusser and the other contributors (especially Milton Vargas) referring to these problems.

It is possible that, in the eyes of Flusser (and of Müller-Pohle), a self-published edition was considered a second-rate edition; this was perhaps one of the various factors explaining the Europeans' lack of consideration for the Brazilian version.

Although Leão considered the distribution of the book only "fair" (letter of March 4, 1986), the 800 copies of the print run were sold out at the end of April 1986. Flusser asked Leão on June 15 if a reprint would take place<sup>60</sup>. The text was not reprinted in Brazil before 2002, sixteen years later, as will be detailed below.

For a historian of photography, it is interesting to note Leão's letter to Flusser of October 5, 1991<sup>61</sup> about a young photographer from the state of Minas Gerais who, having discovered Flusser in the classroom, was inspired in his practice and built his own "embryonic" camera, a *camera obscura*; he manipulated his first prints with drawing and other techniques, and then rephotographed them. During our conversation in 2019, Mrs. Leão had unfortunately forgotten the name of this pioneer of experimental photography and of the game against apparatus, inspired by Flusser's writings.

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<sup>56</sup> File C16, p. 34.

<sup>57</sup> File C155, p. 60.

<sup>58</sup> Vilém Flusser, *La Force du Quotidien*, Paris, Mame, 1973.

<sup>59</sup> See online : < <http://www.flusserbrasil.com/art454.pdf> >.

<sup>60</sup> File C14, pages 4, 8-9 & 15.

<sup>61</sup> File C14, page 63.

### b. Other editions in Portuguese

The minutes of the meeting of August 16-18, 1987 (see note 21) mentioned a project by the University of Belo Horizonte to publish the trilogy (*Philosophy of the Black Box*, *In the Universe of Technical Images*, and *Does Writing Have a Future?*), a project that did not materialize. On April 15, 1989, Flusser conveyed to Müller-Pohle the interest of the Lisbon academic publisher *Comunicações e Linguagens*, which did not materialize either.

In Brazil, this text has been republished three times:

- in 2002 by the Relume Dumarà publishing house in Rio de Janeiro;
- in 2011 by the Annablume publishing house in São Paulo;
- and in 2018 by the É Realizações publishing house in São Paulo (which is therefore, in all languages, the most recent original edition).

Unlike the previous two editions, this last one, which is part of the project by Miguel Flusser and Rodrigo Maltez Novaes to publish Flusser's complete works in Portuguese, is accompanied by an important peritext: a republication of Flusser's 1985 preface, an introduction by Rodrigo Petronio<sup>62</sup> (co-editor of the book with Rodrigo Maltez Novaes) and postfaces by Maria Lelia Leão<sup>63</sup>, Norval Baitello Junior<sup>64</sup> and Rachel Cecília de Oliveira Costa<sup>65</sup>.

There are very few differences between the four Brazilian editions<sup>66</sup>: the 2002 edition is distinguished by the absence of Flusser's preface, the non-numbering of chapters and the relegation of the glossary at the end of the book. The 2018 edition makes some corrections to the previous versions: the subtitle strangely loses the word "future" "Ensaios para uma Filosofia da Fotografia"; in the glossary, the rather abstruse and erroneous definition of "Valor," "dever-se"<sup>67</sup> (to owe oneself) is replaced by a more correct definition of "como algo deve ser" (as it must be); and the table of

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<sup>62</sup> "Aparelho, Caixa Preta e Emergência» (Apparatus, Black Box and Emergency), p.7-8

<sup>63</sup> This postface (p.103-114) reproduces, with some minor corrections of typography and vocabulary, the afterword of the 1985 edition, with two additional pages written in 1998 after the death of Flusser, and then included in the preface to an anthology of 35 texts by Flusser edited by Maria Lília Leão under the title *Ficções Filosóficas*, editions Edusp, 1998.

<sup>64</sup> "O Aparelho e o Bote» (The Apparatus and the Lunge, p.115-119) & «O Continuo e Prazeroso Desafio de Reler a Caixa Preta e Seu Ambiente» (The Continual and Pleasant Challenge to reread the Black Box and its Environment, p.121-123)

<sup>65</sup> 'Os 'Modos de Usar' a Filosofia Flusseriana» (The 'Instructions for Use' of Flusserian Philosophy),p.125-141)

<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, I didn't manage to read the 2011 edition.

<sup>67</sup> Probably a typographical error instead of "deve ser", « must be ».

matters is corrected and brought into conformity with the title of Chapter 9 ("Urgência" instead of "Necessidade")<sup>68</sup>.

This same text was also published in Portugal by the publishing house Relógio D'Água in 1998 (and then reissued with a different cover around 2010), but under a different title *Ensaio sobre a fotografia. Para uma filosofia da técnica*<sup>69</sup> (Essay about Photography. For a philosophy of technique), with the same Brazilian preface by Flusser and a presentation by the image theorist Arlindo Machado. The glossary is at the beginning, the chapters are numbered; except for some linguistic details (reflecting the difference between the two Portuguese languages, such as, for example, "Caixa Negra" instead of "Caixa Preta") and the correction of an error in the last chapter ("filosofia da fotografia" instead of "filosofia da liberdade"), the text of the Portuguese edition is identical to the Brazilian original. I was unable to find an explanation for the change of title, emphasizing the philosophy of technique.

### c. Differences between the Portuguese and the German and English texts

There are important differences between the Portuguese text and the previous editions of the book in German and English. First of all, the title of the book is different: it changed from photography to the black box, an obvious sign that for Flusser, who had by then just written *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder* (In the Universe of Technical Images)<sup>70</sup>, photography was not the main object of his book, but the most effective tool to analyze the functioning of the apparatus, a concept that had appeared in his writing twenty years earlier, in 1965 in his essay "Do Funcionário" for the number 427 of the *Suplemento Literário* of the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*. Since Flusser was saying that photography was only a pretext excuse to study the apparatus, he obviously found more accurate to emphasize the more generic concept of 'black box'. In his presentation of the book for the Portugal edition, Arlindo Machado, one of the few authors having done a textual critique of this book, considered that "the change of title is fundamental" and added that its aim was to "better explain the conceptual universe and the extent of the book". Flusser wrote in his preface (using for the first time the word "pretext"): "The intention of this essay is to contribute to a

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<sup>68</sup> This discrepancy between the title of the chapter itself, altered, and the table of materials, unmodified, seems to indicate that this was a last-minute correction by Flusser in October 1985. Another small error, "os capitéis românticos (romantic capitals), was corrected ("romanticos" Romanesque).

<sup>69</sup> *Flusseriana op. cit.*, page 504, described erroneously this edition as "more extensive".

<sup>70</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*, Göttingen, European Photography, 1985 [English translation: *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2011, translated by Nancy Ann Roth]. There is also a Portuguese version of this text, self-translated by Flusser and organized differently from the German text: *O Universo das Imagens Técnicas. Elogio Da superficialidade*, São Paulo, Annablume, 2008 [posthumous edition reviewed by Gustavo Bernardo].

philosophical dialogue on the apparatus, in relation to our contemporaries, using the theme of *photography* as a pretext”, while the German and English introductions merely stated: "This is the purpose of this essay: not to defend an existing thesis, but to contribute to a discussion on the subject 'photography' in a philosophical spirit." The preface was also rewritten and became 80% longer than the German and English prefaces. Moreover, the title of Chapter 3 is no longer "The Photographic Apparatus" as in German, but simply "O Aparelho", "The Apparatus" (as indeed in the English version of 1984), demonstrating again the move away from simple photography in direction of the more generic concept of apparatus.

In another very emblematic modification<sup>71</sup>, the last chapter is now titled "The Urgency of a Philosophy of Photography", and no longer its necessity ("Notwendigkeit") or its need ("Need"), and this urgency is repeated twice in the last paragraph of the book<sup>72</sup>. Here, too, it was probably the writing of *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder* that made Flusser aware of this urgency confronting humanity, its communication crisis and its quest for freedom.

A change in the structure of the book also seems to be very meaningful: whereas in previous versions the glossary was at the end of the book, much like an index, a reference, Flusser now put it at the beginning of the Portuguese book, as a foreplay, a passage imposed before beginning reading. This glossary is the most complete with 52 words; it includes all the terms of the German edition, all those of the English edition except "Character," and three new concepts: "Camera," "Historical Consciousness," and "Pre-History," which were absent from previous editions.

Among the new concepts introduced in the text itself, one notes, in addition to the emphasis placed on the black box (especially in Chapter 3), that of the epicycle with negative entropy<sup>73</sup> (Chapters 6 and 9) and that of photography as a hierophany (Chapter 7); the analogy with computers and binary calculation is more developed (Chapter 8). On the other hand, developments in the German and English versions on word processing software (Chapter 3) and instant photography (Chapter 7) are shorter in the Portuguese edition. Some examples are also omitted, such as the reference to Kafka and the case of Japan (both in Chapter 3). On the other hand, there is now a mention of "the apparatus as a ferocious beast" (Chapter 4) and an allusion to Goethe's *Sorcerer's Apprentice* (Chapter 8).

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<sup>71</sup> Change probably made at the last minute, because the table of contents was not changed in this first Portuguese edition, still saying "Necessidade".

<sup>72</sup> See Rachel Costa's interpretation in her postface mentioned in note 66.

<sup>73</sup> A concept already presented in *Kommunikologie*, a book written around 1977/78 but published only in 1996 (p. 12-13).

Several chapters have been extensively rewritten, mainly Chapter 3 (The Apparatus) and Chapter 8 (The Photographic Universe), these two chapters alone accounting for nearly two-thirds of the changes. This rewriting results in a text that is better organized, more condensed, with less repetition and more fluidity, and, ultimately, easier and more enjoyable to read.

Finally, some metaphors are adapted to the local context and language: instead of apples and scissors, there is now talk of bananas and machetes (Chapter 3), and "the last straw that breaks the camel's back" has been replaced by the drop of water that makes the glass overflow (Chapter 4).

How important are these modifications? Quantitatively, based on the number of words (counted in the French translation as a common basis), there are about 2300 words that have disappeared from the German version (or 10.5% of it), while about 1450 new words have appeared in the Portuguese version (or 7% of it), while the common core of both versions counts about 19,500 words.

Qualitatively, while some of these changes may be considered anecdotal, most are loaded with meaning. Why all these changes? Many are due to the extension of Flusser's thinking into the whole field of technical images. Machado pointed out that "the changes [compared to the German and English versions] were made by the author, who himself wrote this version in Portuguese, after reviewing some aspects of his argument," indicating in passing that the quality of Flusser's Portuguese "can render jealous the majority of Portuguese and Brazilian people jealous." Machado continued: "In 1984, the probable date of the writing of this version<sup>74</sup>, Flusser was in the process of conceiving his book *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*, which is, in fact, a duplication of *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, and a response to the many critical comments received by the philosopher on his book. It was therefore impossible that this recent discussion would not affect the 'translation' of *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* in Portuguese. This is why the Portuguese version of Flusser's fundamental work is unique and differs significantly from all other known translations. A simple comparison between the German and Portuguese versions can already glimpse the differences. The preface was completely redone in the Brazilian version, the glossary enriched with new terms not included in the German version, and entire parts of the main text of the book were rewritten to arrive at a more precise and consistent argument." Similarly, in one of the afterwords of the Brazilian edition of 2018, Norval Battello Junior, Director of the Arquivo Flusser São Paulo, describes the German version as a precursor rather than an equivalent of the text recreated and amplified by the author in Portuguese, and also notes that the title in Portuguese is more faithful to the substance of the book than the German title.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Actually in 1985

<sup>75</sup> Norval Battello Junior "O Aparelho e o Bote", see note 65.

About another text by Flusser (*History of the Devil*) also written first in German (written in 1958, published in 1993), then in Portuguese (written and published in 1965), the editor and translator of Flusser Rodrigo Maltez Novaes writes this comment, which also applies very well to the situation described here: "This [the difference between the two versions, German and Portuguese] is mainly due to Flusser's experiences [during this gap of two years] and also to the impressive amount of work he produced during that period. By the time he rewrote the book in Portuguese, not only had his intellect been affected by the many impressions that changed him as a thinker, but he had also become more mature and self-confident, which necessarily resulted in producing a different work. This is just one of his many books for which the first and second final versions were written years apart. His usual approach was to simultaneously rework his texts in self-translation and to have the two final versions ready at the same time [but this was not the case here].<sup>76</sup> »

The consequences that this difference between texts may have today for a more complete reading of Flusser's text will be analyzed later in this essay. But one should already ask whether non-Portuguese-speaking readers should not be systematically informed that there is another version of the text they read in German or in translation, with developments different from those of their version.

## IV. Third-party translations

### a. History of third-party translations

In addition to its three original languages (and the English translation by Reaktion Books), the book has been translated into 22 languages in 24 countries with at least 30 editions. The list of translations is in Appendix 1<sup>77</sup>. This is proof of the worldwide success of this book and the energy put by its initial publisher, Andreas Müller-Pohle, to make it available to the entire world. It is the only one of Flusser's books with third-party translations published during his lifetime<sup>78</sup>. At the

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<sup>76</sup> Rodrigo Malta Novaes, "Translator's notes to The History of the Devil", *Flusser Studies*, N°17, June 2014, online: < <http://www.flusserstudies.net/sites/www.flusserstudies.net/files/media/attachments/rodrigo-maltez-novaes-translator-note.pdf> >. This text can also be found in the English translation of the book: "Translator's Introduction", *The History of the Devil*, Minneapolis, Univocal, 2014, pages XI-XXI (the passage quoted is page XIX).

<sup>77</sup> An Excel table with more information on translations and reproductions of almost all covers could not be included here due to its size, it is available at < <https://1drv.ms/x/s!AqRpWm2Pwl1iiLUdGNR1ICCFE0e8nA?e=YiUCyh> >. To lighten the main text, bibliographical references of the translations are only given in Appendix 1. In some cases, the text of the translation is available online, either fully or partially, at the URLs listed in Appendix 1.

<sup>78</sup> Norway 1987, Italy 1987, Sweden 1988, Mexico 1990, Hungary 1990 and Turkey 1991.

time of Flusser's death, it was already available in nine languages, the three original and six third-party translations.

The first third-party translation was done in 1987 from German by the Norwegian photographer Leif Preus for his Museum of Photography in Horten and was printed in 500 copies. Müller-Pohle regularly informed Flusser of his contacts for translations<sup>79</sup>, but Flusser was personally involved only in the translations into French (see below) and into Italian, where he mobilized his friends Angelo Schwarz<sup>80</sup> and Jean Digne (then Director of the French Institute of Naples, where Flusser was invited for a conference). But at the editorial meeting of August 16-18, 1987<sup>81</sup>, Flusser said that he thought that the just-published translation in Italian was "catastrophic".

All translations<sup>82</sup> have been made from the books published by European Photography. Five translations were made from the 1984 English edition, rather, it seems, for reasons of expediency or availability of translators than according to a defined strategic scheme: the first translation into Italian in 1987, the 1988 Swedish one (but, apparently, taking also into account the German text<sup>83</sup>), the Mexican one in 1990, the first three Turkish ones in 1991, 1994 and 2009, and the Chinese one in 1994. Six translations were made from the 1983 German edition, and, again, except for the first one in 1987, there does not seem to be any particular reason for choosing the 1983 text rather than the 1989 text: the Norwegian translation in 1987, the Hungarian one in 1990, the Japanese one in 1999, the Korean one in 1999, the Croatian one in 2007 and the Hebraic one in 2014. The other sixteen translations were made from the 1989 German edition: the Czech translations in 1994 and 2013, the French one in 1996, the Greek ones in 1998 and 2015, the Serbian one in 1999, the English one in 2000, the Spanish one in 2001, the Bulgarian one in 2002, the Romanian one in 2003, the Polish<sup>84</sup> ones in 2004 and 2015, the second Italian one in 2006, the Dutch one in 2007, the Russian

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, his letter of December 24, 1984, File C3, pages 13 & 10.

<sup>80</sup> Schwarz wrote a preface for the first Italian translation; online: < <http://www.flusserstudies.net/sites/www.flusserstudies.net/files/media/attachments/torino-per-una-filosofia-della-fotografia.pdf> >.

<sup>81</sup> File C73, p. 69.

<sup>82</sup> I would like to thank people who provided me with specific information about the various editions and translations of the book: Elson Sempé Pedroso (Brazil - Portugal), Jeong Jeong Wook (Communication Books, Korea), Davor Žerjav (Croatia), Athena Douzi (Greece), Yanai Toister & Johnathan Soen (Israel), Riccardo Perini (Italy), Masafumi Fukagawa (Keiso Shobo, Japan), the publishing house Ismintis (Lithuania), Willem Desmense (Ijzler, Netherlands), Bogdan Baran (Aletheia, Poland), Cristina Cosorean (Idea, Romania) and Polona Tratnik (Slovenia).

<sup>83</sup> According to *Flusser-Quellen*, bibliographical reference n° 0016, p. 42. This is, I believe, the only time when two different original versions of the book were used for the same translation (perhaps also in Polish, see next note). It would be interesting for a Swedish-speaking researcher to do a textual analysis of this mixed translation.

<sup>84</sup> The genesis of the Polish translation is narrated in Piotr Zawojski, « Flusser, media theory and I. From the genealogy of thought », *Flusser Studies*, N°27, December 2019, online: < <http://www.flusserstudies.net/sites/www.flusserstudies.net/files/media/attachments/zawojski-flusser-media-theory-and-i-from-the-genealogy-thought.pdf> >. Zawojski, not reading German, translated the text of the 1984 English edition, but he later chose to publish the 2004 Polish translation made from German by one of his students, Jacek Maniecki, while "taking into account" his own translation from English. The 2015 edition was a major revision of the 2004 edition.

one in 2008, the Slovenian one in 2010, the Argentine one in 2014, the Lithuanian one in 2015 and the fourth Turkish one in 2020.

It can be noted that in three languages there are translations made from the two original different versions, German and English: in Italian (1987 from English and 2006 from German), in Spanish (in Mexico in 1990 from English, in Spain in 2001 and in Argentina in 2014 from German) and in Turkish (1991, 1994 and 2009 from English and 2020 from German). We can also note that there are three different translations into Spanish: Mexico (1990), Spain (2001) and Argentina (2014), each with a different title.

No translation has been made from the Portuguese edition. None at all.

The title of the original book is in German, *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie* and in English *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, hence a very slight nuance: 'Für' would express more an intention, a manifesto, while 'Towards' would rather imply a movement, an outline towards this philosophy. Most of the translations take up one or the other of these prepositions<sup>85</sup>. However, in six languages<sup>86</sup>, the titles are devoid of preposition and, therefore, more assertive ('A Philosophy of Photography'), seeming to announce, rather incorrectly, an already established philosophical program rather than a research. In the 1999 Japanese translation, the title was slightly modified with the addition of a subtitle: "For a philosophy of photography: technology and visual culture".

At least half of the third-party translations<sup>87</sup> (perhaps more, because I couldn't verify all) have an additional peritext, preface, postface, translator comments, etc. Two of the editions, the Spanish one in 2001 and the Romanian one in 2003, also include a translation of ten of the 48 texts on photography grouped in the book of essays *Standpunkte*<sup>88</sup>.

### **b. The 1996 French third-party translation**

Living in France, Flusser was very eager to publish there, as he said many times. He wrote for instance to Alain Girault, of the magazine *Théâtre / Public* on April 19, 1989: "It happens that for

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<sup>85</sup> As well: 'Per' (Italian 1987 and 2006), 'For' (Norwegian 1987), 'Hacia' (Spanish from Mexico 1990), 'Za' (Czech 1994), 'For' (French 1996), 'Προς' (Greek 1998 and 2015), '위하여' (Korean, 1999), 'Za' (Bulgarian 2002), 'Pentru' (Romanian 2003), 'Ku' (Polish 2004 and 2015), 'Za' (Serbian 2005), '3a' (Russian 2008), 'K' (Slovenian 2010), 'Para' (Spanish from Argentina 2014), תְּחִלָּה (Hebrew 2014), and also in Lithuanian (2014) and Turkish (the 4 editions).

<sup>86</sup> Swedish (1988), Hungarian (1990), Chinese (1994), European Spanish (2001), Dutch (2007) and Croatian (2007).

<sup>87</sup> Norway 1987, Italy 1987 (Angelo Schwarz), Sweden 1988, Mexico 1990, Taiwan 1994, Japan 1999, United Kingdom 2000 (Hubertus von Amelunxen), Poland 2004 & 2015, Croatia 2007, Netherlands 2007, Russia 2008 (Dietmar Kamper and two others), Czech Republic 2013, Israel 2014 and Lithuania 2014.

<sup>88</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Standpunkte. Text zu Fotografie*, Göttingen, European Photography, 1998.

very complex reasons (including my ignorance of the French language, and the centralization of French intellectual life in Paris), I hardly publish in the country where I live. This troubles me.<sup>89</sup>" He repeated this in his video interview of March 1988 (see note 16): "France is a very centralized country; it's all happening in Paris. And, for various reasons, I didn't want to participate in this Parisian theatre." When *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie* was published in Germany in 1983, Flusser had already published three books in French: two lecture transcripts<sup>90</sup> and the French translation of a text first written (but not published) in English by Flusser<sup>91</sup>. He had already published 18 articles in French, some translated, others transcribed from his lectures in French, the majority written directly in French and corrected by the publisher. Before the book was even published in Germany in 1983, he contacted Alain Desvergnès, Director of the National School of Photography, recently established in Arles (and who later invited Flusser for a lecture series in 1984). Desvergnès was ready to have the text translated and published, but the School didn't have a distribution network and Müller-Pohle was concerned by this (letter of January 27, 1983 to Flusser<sup>92</sup>). As Müller-Pohle himself put it (letter of March 19, 1983 to Flusser<sup>93</sup>): "With France, it's really a dilemma; on the one hand the important houses are in Paris, on the other hand I have had bad experiences with some of these houses and I have heard negative things about them". Flusser contacted the magazine *Cahiers de la Photographie*, but it responded negatively on June 22, 1983; the author of the rejection letter, Jacques Cleysson, has since explained to me that, after the publication of Henri van Lier's book, *Philosophie de la Photographie*, in early 1983, the Cahiers no longer had the financial means to publish another book<sup>94</sup>. After the publication of the English and Brazilian editions, Flusser tried again at least once: on January 30, 1986, he wrote to Müller-Pohle<sup>95</sup> that the Éditions de la Ligue de l'Enseignement (Edilig) might be interested and that he should contact them. Since one of their editors, Guy Gautier (himself author of a book in 1979 on the semiology of the image), wanted first to read a chapter of the text in French, Flusser asked the professor of the University of Provence Jean Arrouye<sup>96</sup>, specialized in the semiology of images, to translate a chapter, the 5<sup>th</sup> one. Arrouye's answer on January 30, 1986<sup>97</sup> was very relevant, as it highlighted the difficulties of translating Flusser's text: "In the translation your text unfortunately loses a little of its strength, because it is impossible in French to confuse syncretically as in English, in a single

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<sup>89</sup> File C108, p. 154.

<sup>90</sup> *Le Monde codifié*, Paris, Institut de l'Environnement, 1973 ; and *Orthonature / Paranature*, Sorgues Institut Scientifique de Recherche Paranaturaliste, 1978 [the latter text will be republished in the next issue of *Flusser Studies*].

<sup>91</sup> *La Force du Quotidien*, Paris, Mame, 1973.

<sup>92</sup> File C70, p. 137.

<sup>93</sup> File C70, p. 145.

<sup>94</sup> File C71, p. 2 and exchange of e-mails with Jacques Clayssen May 6, 2020.

<sup>95</sup> File C73, p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> Arrouye, not reading German, had contacted Flusser late 1984 in order to get a copy of the English edition.

<sup>97</sup> File C104, pages 18-19, then p. 22.

word, for example, 'program' and 'programming', or to apply 'intention' to an apparatus, etc., not to mention that the relationship *sense, meaning, significance* does not correspond to the corresponding French words 'sens', 'signification', 'signifiante' (a term used in philosophy or in general linguistic theory)". This translation of a chapter by Arrouye is apparently not in the Archive<sup>98</sup>. The Ligue de l'Enseignement declined to publish the book.

It was only in 1996, when the book had already been published in 11 other languages, that European Photography entered into an agreement with a French publisher, Circé, then based in Saulxures in Alsace (and today in Belval in the Vosges), founded in 1989 and directed by Claude Lutz<sup>99</sup>. The French edition (which was later republished in 2004), *Pour une Philosophie de la Photographie*, was translated from the 1989 German edition by Jean Mouchard. The cover of the first edition (Figure 3) was adorned with a photograph by Patrick Bailly-Maître-Grand of the series *Les Gémelles*<sup>100</sup>. This French translation is faithful to the 1989 German text; unlike at least half of the other translations, it does not include any peritext. It does not address the type of questions raised by Jean Arrouye.

This translation however has a quirk: the translator sometimes introduces the original German word into the text in italics, without further explanation. Thus, nine of the 47 terms of the glossary are accompanied by the German original word (Concept, Value, State of Things, Manufacture, Image, Object, Reality, Representation, Meaning); it is difficult to understand why this was done and why for these words and not for others (why not "Zeichen", Sign, for example?). Moreover, one of these terms, and only one, ("Gegenstand", Object) is also accompanied by part of its definition in the German glossary ("uns entgegenstehend", something obstructing us), probably to emphasize the common root, but without explicitly saying it. We find the same quirk in the text proper several times. This practice may seem rather useless, even irritating; does it mean a form of hesitation, of uncertainty of the translator, which however does not go so far as to explain it in a footnote commenting on the problems of translation? For example (p. 24 and 25) the inclusion of "hergestellt," "hierher gestellt," "stellen," "herstellen," will reveal only to the bilingual scholar the link between "place" and "manufacture" in German, something which a translator's note would have more clearly explained. The necessity to specify "zufällig" after "sans dessein" (p. 30) is not obvious. And (p. 35) only a German-speaking linguist will understand the link between "Be-

<sup>98</sup> Despite my research, I could not find it.

<sup>99</sup> Circé published three more translations of Flusser's books, *Petite Philosophie du Design* in 2002 (from German, © Heirs Flusser), *Essais sur la nature et la culture* in 2005 (from Portuguese, © Edith Flusser) and *La Civilisation des Médias* in 2006 (from German, © Edith Flusser). None of these books therefore came from European Photography. See Claude Lutz's interview in the next issue of *Flusser Studies*.

<sup>100</sup> This is the first time that a photograph adorns the cover of one of his translations; later, there will be photographs by Muybridge (Poland 2004 and Italy 2006) and by a photographer that I couldn't identify (Turkey 2009).

dingtheit" (conditioning) and "Kulturbe-dingung" (cultural condition), especially since the translator has introduced in these two words an artificial truncation, which is of course absent from the German words: this quirk seems to be only a nod to the rare readers who will understand the emphasis on the root "-ding". What is the utility of including "Knipser" in parentheses after "amateur photographer" (p. 59)? Would the introduction of a phrase with the word "snapshot" ("the maker of snapshots" in the English edition) have been more appropriate? Only the bilingual reader will understand and solve these discreet puzzles. All this makes it a bit difficult to read the text.

## V. Can we come up with a final text?

What is proposed here has been thought through in the event of a new French translation, but would apply equally well to any other language.

### a. What lessons can be learned from these translations?

The first lesson that we draw from all these translations is of course the success of this book all over the world (or almost: still missing a translation in Arabic ...). As Müller-Pohle predicted in November 1984, this book "will sooner or later be translated into all languages"<sup>101</sup>. And, in addition to the intrinsic quality of the book, this is due to the tireless work of Müller-Pohle for nearly 40 years to promote it and facilitate its translation and dissemination. Almost all of this worldwide success is based on the editions of *European Photography*, whether in German or English. No translation was made from the Portuguese text; none of the five Portuguese-language publishing houses were able to contract translations of this book into other languages. This is certainly due in part to the number of these houses and the instability associated with these changes, as opposed to the continuity of the publisher in Germany and its dynamism.

But, as Flusser recommends to us about photographic criticism, we must not only explain this situation by the apparatus of the publishing houses and their relative dynamism, but also look at the meta-program, the intellectual, social and cultural apparatus that programs this editorial apparatus. The weight of the German intellectual universe, of German publishing, of German universities, of German newspapers, is obviously of a different magnitude than the intellectual weight of the Portuguese-speaking world. The obvious dynamism of a specific publisher cannot be appreciated

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<sup>101</sup> File C72, p. 4.

alone, out of context, it is also part of this intellectual apparatus. And, if we want to go one level up, to the level of the political and economic apparatus which is itself meta-programming this intellectual apparatus, we obviously come to the political and economic relations between North and South, and therefore to a post-colonial reflection on the relations of languages and power. This omnipresence of the German and English text at the expense of the Portuguese text must also be understood taking into account the relations of power with respect to language and culture<sup>102</sup>.

### **b. What principles should be followed?**

Let's recall a few principles that should preside over any edition and/or translation of a text by a multilingual author such as Flusser.

First, we should distinguish between published texts, books or articles, which were published by Flusser during his lifetime or which were explicitly approved by him for publication (including his public lectures and classes) and the unpublished texts, typescripts that can be found in the Flusser Archive or elsewhere, and which may be only drafts, sketches, texts that he himself considered needing to be reviewed and revised. He himself said it explicitly about one of these typescripts: "This is not a definitive manuscript, but rather a draft manuscript ... If you think it's interesting for a publication, it should be radically reviewed<sup>103</sup>". These unpublished texts are often very interesting in order to understand the path of his thinking, and one can actually say that Flusser himself considered all his texts as drafts, even his published texts, constantly rewriting them. Of course, we must continue to publish the unpublished stand-alone texts, even when we have little context for them. However, it seems to me that, when an unpublished text is clearly a draft or a self-translated version of a text already published, it should not be published as a stand-alone original without any critical apparatus, but that it should be compared with other published versions of the same text (whatever their language), in order to understand better the creative writing process of Flusser. For example, such a rule should apply to the first versions of the typescripts, such as the V2b versions in German and English mentioned above, which it would be absurd to publish as final stand-alone texts, but interesting to publish in a critical edition comparing them with the other self-translated and published versions<sup>104</sup>.

In other words, if we were to miraculously discover tomorrow in a forgotten archive a typescript in French of *Pour une Philosophie de la Photographie* (but there is no clue in his correspondence that

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<sup>102</sup> See Marc Lenot and Gabriel Philipson, "Decolonial Flusser" in a forthcoming issue of *Flusser Studies*.

<sup>103</sup> File C109, p. 32, about a typescript of *Post-Histoire*.

<sup>104</sup> I am grateful to Rainer Gulding for our exchange on this issue.

such a typescript exists), it would certainly have to be published, but by contextualizing it, comparing it with other versions, and accompanying it with a critical apparatus, and not a stand-alone newly discovered unpublished book.

Finally, it may be obvious, but it is not useless to remind that any translation must be made from a Flusser original text or texts, and never from a translation made by a third party (except, perhaps for the translations made by Edith Flusser during her husband's lifetime).

### c. Which version to choose?

We basically have two core versions of the text, since the 1983 German text is included in the 1989 German edition, only very slightly modified, and since the minor differences between the 1983 German text and the 1984 English text can be dealt with in footnotes. On the other side, the different Portuguese versions are almost identical, and the minimal differences between them can be dealt with in footnotes.

But these two core editions, the 1989 German one and the 1985 Portuguese one, are very different. The German one is more recent and a little longer (about 4% more signs), the Portuguese one brings new concepts and reasoning, and, as calculated above, about 10% of the text differs between the two versions.

In his introduction to the 1998 Portuguese edition, Arlindo Machado took a strong radical position: "Therefore, if one wants to be truly faithful to Flusser's thinking, it is the version in Portuguese, not the German version, which should be considered the final text of *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, and therefore it should be used as the basis for translations into other languages." It can indeed be considered that the Portuguese text reflects better the evolution of Flusser's thinking, and, among other things, his emphasis on the apparatus rather than on photography itself, and the urgency of the need for a philosophy of photography. This text is also the most condensed, Flusser's thought is more synthetic, and the reasoning is often more precise. The 1985 Portuguese text is not the most recent. But, as we have seen, the 1989 German text is, except for 300 words, identical to the 1983 one and, except for these two paragraphs, it therefore reflects less well the evolution of Flusser's thinking in 1984/85.

But there are too many differences between the German and Portuguese texts to adopt Machado's radical position and completely put aside the German text, several interesting developments of which have disappeared in the Portuguese version, and would thus be lost.

The dilemma is this: on the one hand, none of the existing translations (done from German or English) does justice to the development of Flusser's thinking as articulated in the 1985 Portuguese text. And, on the other hand, translating the Portuguese text alone would also partially amputate Flusser's thinking.

#### **d. A proposal**

It is therefore necessary to produce a translation that combines these two texts. There are two ways to do it.

The most faithful and erudite, but also the most difficult to read, would be to make a synoptic edition (like the Gospels ...), with the translation of each text in its column (at least the two core texts, perhaps three with the inclusion of the English text in its entirety), and footnotes explaining possible variations (as for example with the English version if one does not grant it its own column). This would have the advantage of not prioritizing one version over another, at the cost of a rather complex layout.

One could also produce a common text whose backbone would be the Portuguese text, with, in inserts with a different typography, the German text when it differs significantly; footnotes would document the secondary differences between the two core texts and differences with the English version. This would need a clearly readable layout, less complex than the synoptic one. This would be more pleasant to read, but would give the Portuguese text a dominant position.

The question of the title needs also to be addressed. As analyzed above, the title of the Brazilian edition, with the replacement of photography by the black box, better reflects the evolution of Flusser's thinking for whom photography was only a pretext to study the apparatus and not the central subject of the book. Although the original title, *Pour une Philosophie de la Photographie*, is already known to French-speaking readers, it would make more sense to revert to the Brazilian title, *Philosophie de la Boîte Noire. Essais pour une future Philosophie de la Photographie*.

It also seems to me that the glossary should serve as an introduction to the text, as Flusser had done in 1985, in order to define from the outset the concepts used in the text, rather than being a final pseudo-index..

Remain to be solved the copyright issues and the search for a publisher.

And a similar work could be done for other Flusser texts, for other languages ....



**APPENDIX 1**

**List of editions**

**1. Original texts**

**D1:** *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie*, Göttingen, European Photography, 1983. Online: < <https://1drv.ms/b/s!AqRpWm2Pwl1ih78hJN4VAIaWiHoH6A?e=ZGIasw> >.

**D2:** *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie*, Göttingen, European Photography, 1989; text revised, with a small addition.

The following German editions with European Photography reproduce *verbatim* the D2 text, but with a different cover after 1997.

**E1:** *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, Göttingen, European Photography, 1984. Online: < <https://app.koofr.net/content/links/1bbc4e85-05ad-472c-948b-3907174d6051/files/get/Flusser,%20Vilem%20-%20Towards%20a%20Philosophy%20of%20Photography%201984.pdf?path=&force> >.

**P1:** *Filosofia da Caixa Preta. Ensaios para uma futura filosofia da fotografia*, São Paulo, Hucitec, 1985. Online: < [https://monoskop.org/images/6/6f/Flusser\\_Vilem\\_A\\_Filosofia\\_da\\_caixa\\_preta\\_Ensaios\\_para\\_uma\\_futura\\_filosofia\\_da\\_fotografia.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/6/6f/Flusser_Vilem_A_Filosofia_da_caixa_preta_Ensaios_para_uma_futura_filosofia_da_fotografia.pdf) >.

or

< [http://www.iphi.org.br/sites/filosofia\\_brasil/Vil%C3%A9m\\_Flusser\\_-\\_Filosofia\\_da\\_Caixa\\_Preta.pdf](http://www.iphi.org.br/sites/filosofia_brasil/Vil%C3%A9m_Flusser_-_Filosofia_da_Caixa_Preta.pdf) >.

**P1b:** *Filosofia da Caixa Preta. Ensaios para uma futura filosofia da fotografia*, Rio de Janeiro, Relume Dumará, 2002; text identical to P1. Online: < <https://fotografiaeteoria.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/filosofia-da-caixa-preta.pdf> >.

**P1c:** *Filosofia da Caixa Preta. Ensaios para uma futura filosofia da fotografia*, São Paulo, Annablume, 2011; text identical to P1.

**P1d:** *Filosofia da Caixa Preta. Ensaios para uma filosofia da fotografia*, São Paulo, É Realizações, 2018; texto almost identical to P1.

**P2:** *Ensaio sobre a Fotografia: Para uma Filosofia da Técnica*, Lisbonne, Religió D'Água, 1998. Text quite similar to P1. Republished around 2010, text identical, but different cover. Online: < <https://1drv.ms/b/s!AqRpWm2Pwl1iiLZiO5nJ-QwjRfunjA?e=3y892O> >.

## 2. Translations

**BU:** *Za edna filosofija na fotografijata* [Za edna Filosofia na Fotografiata], Plovdiv, Horizonti, 2002.

**CR:** *Filozofia fotografije*, Zagreb, Scarabeus, 2007.

**CS1:** *Za filosofii fotografie*, Prague, Nakladatelstri Hynek, 1994. Online: <  
[https://monoskop.org/images/d/de/Flusser\\_Vilem\\_Za\\_filosofii\\_fotografie\\_1994.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/d/de/Flusser_Vilem_Za_filosofii_fotografie_1994.pdf) >.

**CS2:** *Za filosofii fotografie*, Prague, fra, 2013. Text almost identical to CS1. Partly online: <  
[https://issuu.com/fracz/docs/flusser\\_ukazka?e=2598753/5696546](https://issuu.com/fracz/docs/flusser_ukazka?e=2598753/5696546) >.

**E2:** *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, Londres, Reaktion Books, 2000.

**ES1:** *Hacia una filosofia de la fotografia*, Mexico, Trillas, 1990. Online: <  
[https://monoskop.org/images/8/8d/Flusser\\_Vilem\\_Hacia\\_una\\_filosofia\\_de\\_la\\_fotografia.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/8/8d/Flusser_Vilem_Hacia_una_filosofia_de_la_fotografia.pdf) >.

**ES2:** *Una filosofia de la fotografia*, Madrid, Sintesis, 2001.

**ES3:** *Para una filosofía de la fotografía*, Buenos-Aires, La Marca, 2014.

Three different Spanish translations.

**FR:** *Pour une philosophie de la photographie*, Saulxures / Belval, Circé, 1996.

**GR1:** *Προς μια φιλοσοφία της φωτογραφίας* [Pros mia philosophia tis photographias], Thessalonique, University Studio Press, 1998.

**GR2:** *Προς μια φιλοσοφία της φωτογραφίας* [Pros mia philosophia tis photographias], Thessalonique, University Studio Press, 2015.

**HE:** *הצילום של פילוסופיה לקראת* [Ligrat filosofia hatsilum], Tel-Aviv, Resling, 2014. Online: <  
<https://1drv.ms/b/s!AqRpWm2Pwl1iiLZW0HcLMdBfmXhNvA?e=TH58W1> >.

**HU:** *A fotográfia filozófiája*, Budapest, Tartóshullám - Belvedere - ELTE BTK, 1990. Online: <  
<https://artpool.hu/Flusser/flusser.html#foto> >.

**IT1:** *Per una filosofia della fotografia*, Turin, Agorá, 1987.

**IT2:** *Per una filosofia della fotografia*, Milan, Bruno Mondadori, 2006. Translation different.

**JA:** *写真の哲学のために: テクノロジーとヴィジュアルカルチャー* [Shashin no tetsugaku no tame ni: tekunoroji to vijuaru karucha], Tokyo, Keiso Shobo, 1999.

**KO:** *사진의 철학을 위하여* [Sajin-ui cheolhag-eul wihayeo], Séoul, Communication Books, 1999.

**LI:** *Fotografijos Filosofijos link*, Vilnius, Mintis, 2015.

- NL:** *Een filosofie van de fotografie*, Utrecht, Ijzler, 2007.
- NO:** *For Fotografietets Filosofi*, Horten, Preus Fotomuseum, 1987.
- PL1:** *Ku filozofii fotografii*, Katowice, Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Katowicach, 2004.
- PL2:** *Ku filozofii fotografii*, Varsovie, Wyd Aletheia, 2015.
- RO:** *Pentru o Filosofie a fotografie*, Bucarest, Ideia, 2003.
- RU:** *За философию фотографии* [Za filosofiyu fotografii], Saint-Petersbourg, St. Petersburg State University, 2008. Online: < [https://monoskop.org/images/8/8c/Flusser\\_Vilem\\_Za\\_filosofiyu\\_fotografii.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/8/8c/Flusser_Vilem_Za_filosofiyu_fotografii.pdf) >.
- SL:** *K filozofiji fotografije*, Ljubljana, Contemporary Culture and Science Institute (ZSKZ) / Društvo za oživljanje zgodbe 2 koluta, 2010.
- SR:** *Za filozofiju fotografije*, Belgrade, Kulturni Centar Beograda / Edicija Foto Artget, 1999.
- SV:** *En filosofi för fotografien*, Göteborg, Korpen, 1988.
- TR1:** *Bir Fotograf felsefesine dogru*, Istanbul, Ağaç, 1991. Online: < <http://docplayer.biz.tr/15106625-Bir-fotograf-felsefesine-dogru-vilem-flusser.html> >.
- TR2:** *Bir Fotograf felsefesine dogru*, Ankara, MED-Campus Proje #A126, 1994. Text identical to TR1.
- TR3:** *Bir Fotograf felsefesine dogru*, Istanbul, Hayalbaz Kitap/Hayalperest, 2009. Text identical to TR1.
- TR4:** *Bir Fotograf felsefesine dogru*, Istanbul, Espas Kuram Sanat Yayınları, 2020. Different translation.
- ZH:** *摄影的哲学思考* [Shèyǐng de zhéxué sīkǎo], Taipei, Yuan-Liou, 1994.

**APPENDIX 2****Previous texts**

Flusser started the preface of the Brazilian edition of the book by writing: “This essay is a summary of some lectures and courses that I have given mainly in France and Germany. At the request of European Photography, Göttingen, they were reunited in this little book published in German in 1983.” In this appendix, I have identified the essays and lectures by Flusser on photography, first before the 1983 German edition, and then between 1983 and the Brazilian edition in 1985. Almost all these texts are in the Vilém Flusser Archiv, but, for an easier reading, I indicate the VFA reference only for unpublished texts and texts that are not on the flusserbrasil.com website.

A critical edition of these texts (and of the posterior ones) would be highly desirable.

**1. Texts before 1983**

« Reflexões fotograficas = Aparelhos fotograficos» in the draft book (submitted to the Cultural Foundation of the State of São Paulo but unpublished) *Coisas que me cercam*, 1970. Unpublished. VFA reference: BOOKS 32\_1-COISAS [2332]\_COISAS QUE ME CERCAM, fichier 1-COISAS-05\_2338\_REFLEXÕES FOTOGRÁFICAS = APARELHOS FOTOGRÁFICOS A (and two other quasi-identical files). For the first time, Flusser mentions the camera as an apparatus and as an extension of the human body.

One usually reads that Flusser became interested in photography only at the beginning of the 80s, but this text and the one below from Arles in 1975, while little known, demonstrate his early interest of photography already in the 70s.

Letter to Alan Meyer, September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1973. Unpublished. VFA reference: Cor\_41\_6-PORTUGUESE CELSON LAFER ALAN MEYER GABRIEL BORBA STUDENTS 1 OF 4, page 39. “There is no doubt that we miss a philosophy pf photography.”

Lecture to the symposium “Art, Photography and Philosophy” at the 6th Encounters of Photography in Arles on July 16, 1975. The magazine *Le Nouveau Photocinéma*, in its issue n°39 dated October 1975, reproduced, pages 21 to 26, two of the lectures at this symposium, the introductory one by Jean Clair and this one by Flusser. I believe that it is the first published text by Flusser on photography, in whatever language. The article is partly a transcription of the conference and partly a text written by Flusser (the recording of the lecture failed midway). For

the first time, Flusser sketches a philosophical reflection about photography and analyzes the gesture of photographing.

Letter to Milton Vargas, July 20, 1975. Unpublished. VFA reference: Cor\_2\_6-MV-3117\_MILTON VARGAS I 1966-1977 2 OF 2, pages 31-32. “I participated last week to an International Symposium on Photography in Arles, where I spoke about the gesture of photographing, and the result was unexpected: a bomb”, and “Photography and philosophy are both methods of methodical doubt (searching for the point of view to obtain an image = idea) and both are reflexive (the mirror in the camera). These are gestures of quest and hypothetical decision.”

« Le Geste en Photographie » in *Les Gestes*, Marseille / Bruxelles, Al Dante / Aka, 2014, pages 117-142 [edited by Marc Partouche]. A preliminary version of this text was presented at the Arles Encounters on July 16, 1975, see above. Flusser then gave several conferences on this subject (1975 : Institut de l'Environnement, Paris ; 1977 : École d'Art d'Aix-en-Provence).

« Ora, Aprende a ler televisão, fotografia ... », *Especial*, São Paulo, n°1, December 1979, pages 50-55. First published text by Flusser on photography in Portuguese. About the transition from images to text, and from text to technical images, and, apparently, first application of the concept of black box to photography.

« Fotografia publicitaria », no date (estimated from the 70s). Unpublished. Two slightly different versions, online <http://flusserbrasil.com/art396.pdf> and <http://flusserbrasil.com/art397.pdf>. First text where the photographer is presented as a functionary of the apparatus, who can play with and against it.

« Philosophy of Photography: a Phenomenological Analysis », lecture given at Tel-Aviv University in May 1980; I was unable to find this text.

« Für eine Theorie der Techno-Imagination », lecture given at the Vienna Modern Art Museum on June 22, 1980. Published in 1998 in the *Standpunkte*<sup>105</sup> compilation p.8-16 and then in a third-party English translation in 2011 in the review *Philosophy of Photography*, Vol.2 N°2, pages 195-201. Developments of the concepts of technical images and of apparatus.

In February 1981, Flusser took part in a symposium about photography in Schloß Mickeln near Düsseldorf (and met Müller-Pohle there).

« Fotosymposion 1981. Schloss Mickeln, Düsseldorf. Ein Momentaufnahme », *Camera Austria*,

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<sup>105</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Standpunkte. Texte zur Fotografie*, Göttingen, European Photography, 1998 [edited by Andreas Müller-Pohle]. Some of the bibliographical data here are taken from the bibliographical appendix of this book, pages 244-251.

Graz, n°5, 1981, p. 52 is a short introductory text by Flusser.

The book *Internationales Fotosymposium 1981 Schloss Mickeln bei Düsseldorf. Ist Fotografie Kunst? – Gehört Fotografie ins Museum?*, Munich, Mahner-Lueg, 1982, includes:

- the presentation by Flusser « Wie sind Fotografien zu entziffern? », pages 13-16,
- a transcription of his discussion with the public, pages 16-22, and
- an interview of him, pages 69-70.

About the importance of deciphering and thus of the critic of photography.

« Taking Photographs alias Making Pictures », *European Photography*, n°9 vol.3/1, January-March 1982, pages 29-31, in English and in German. This is the first text of Flusser published in Müller-Pohle's review. This text was written in August 1981, and then revised before being published. Same themes than the Vienna lecture on June 22, 1980 mentioned above.

« Fotokamera », written for *Camera Austria* in 1981/1982 but not published there. Published in 1998 in *Standpunkte*, pages 27-30. Development of the same themes.

« Counter-vision. A sketch for an essay in collaboration with Müller-Pohle and Fontcuberta », January 1982. Unpublished. Online: < <http://www.flusserstudies.net/sites/www.flusserstudies.net/files/media/attachments/flusser-countervision-best1608.pdf> . A German version of this text was included in 1998 in *Standpunkte*, pages 37-39. Theoretical basis for an unrealized project with these two artists on counter-vision as an inverted intent and on the relations between photographing subject and photographed objects.

« Visualismus / Dokumentarismus laut Müller-Pohle », written for *Camera Austria* in January 1982, but not published there. Reproduced in 1998 in *Standpunkte*, pages 31-36. About the photography work of Andreas Müller-Pohle.

« Quando falham as Palavras », *Iris*, June 1982, n°349, p. 6. Contribution to a roundtable discussion « Conceiving the future » at the International Center of Photography (ICP) in New York City on February 19, 1982 (unless I am mistaken, *in absentia*).

Flusser then developed this theme of photographic images replacing words in an unpublished essay with the same title (online: <http://www.flusserbrasil.com/art461.pdf>). In this text, he analyzes the book by the German photographer and writer Joe J. Heydecker (who lived in Brazil between 1960 and 1985) *Onde esta Abel, teu irmão ?* (São Paulo, Atlantis Livros, 1981, trilingual edition) about his photographs of the Warsaw ghetto where he had been a soldier during the war. Flusser argues that in such border situations, there is no more complementarity between

imagination and reasoning, and that one should therefore not consider photography as a medium anymore, but as a critical instrument.

« Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie », written in July 1982. Published in 1998 in *Standpunkte*, pages 40-44. This text is an outline of the proposed book, a working document written after Müller-Pohle's decision to publish Flusser's book.

« O Instrumento do Fotógrafo ou o Fotógrafo-Instrumento? », *Iris*, August 1982, n°351, pages 18-19. This text was also titled « Profissão Fotógrafo »; it points out the singularity of the photographer serving his instrument rather than his subject.

« Neovisualismo e a Fotografia das novas Sociedades », *Iris*, September 1982, n°352, pages 36&38. This text distinguishes neo-visualism (for example Müller-Pohle) from documentary photography; it adds that the visualists are the first to rebel against the apparatus.

« Auf dem Weg zum Umding », written in September 1982 for *European Photography*, but not published there. Included in 1995 in *Die Revolution der Bilder. Der Flusser-Reader zu Kommunikation, Medien und Design*, Mannheim, Bollmann. About the importance of programs, of information and of the *homo ludens*.

« Photography and Exchange Value », *Camera Austria*, n°10, October 1982, pages 58-63, in English and in German. This analysis of the difference between the intrinsic value (its quality), the production value (its cost) and the exchange value (its market price) of a photograph has not been further developed by Flusser, I believe.

« Preto e branco », *Iris*, n°354, November 1982, pages 28-29 (dedicated to Milton Vargas). About the respective roles of black and white and of color in photography.

« Roland Günter: Fotografie als Waffe », *European Photography*, n°13, January 1983, p. 29. Critique of a book on the history and the aesthetics of social photography.

« La Société post-industrielle et l'Image technique. Pour les rencontres d'Albi 3/12/1982 ». Unpublished preparatory note. VFA reference: Con\_1\_FRENCH\_1 of 4, p. 6. This is the first time that Flusser includes a glossary, here with 15 words, that will be later included in the book's glossary.

« O Futuro e a Cultura da Imagem », *Iris*, n°387, March 1983, p. 8. This text is based upon his contribution to the Albi Encounters. It deals with the post-industrial, digital society, where reality is grounded in the universe of the images.

« Handlungen. Transformance », in Andreas Müller-Pohle, *Transformance*, Göttingen, European Photography, 1983. This preface to the book presenting this photographic work of Müller-Pohle was written in February 1983. Flusser underlines that the artist's work subverts the ontology of photography and thus reinvents the concept of freedom.

One should also consider various lectures and conferences given by Flusser, whose texts have not always been preserved. Among others:

- GERMS (Groupe d'Étude et de Recherche des Médias Spontanés) during the 5th Photography Festival in Sammeron, June 30, 1976 ;
- « La Lecture de l'Image », Paris, November 30, 1978 ;
- École d'Art et d'Architecture de Marseille – Luminy, 1976-1979 ;
- École d'Art, Maison de la Culture and Théâtre du Centre, in Aix-en-Provence, 1975-77 ;
- École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts, Paris, November 29-30, 1978 ;
- Office Régional de la Culture, Marseille, February-March 1978 ;

## 2. Texts between 1983 and 1985

Some of these texts are based upon the chapters of the book, some are quasi identical. Others include ideas that will reappear in the Brazilian edition in October 1995; similarly some of the concepts developed around technical images during the writing of *Ins Universum der Technischen Bilder*, published in the spring of 1985, are mentioned in some of these articles; this would be worthy of a deeper “textual archeology” research..

« A Democratização da Fotografia », *Iris*, n°359, May 1983, p. 8.

« Comment ne pas être dévoré par la boîte », lecture at the 14th Arles Encounters on July 9, 1983. Unpublished in French. VFA reference: M\_27\_875\_FRANZOESISCHE BEITRAGE CHRON, p.30-34). Published in German in *Standpunkte*, pages 55-58.

« Louvor da Superficialidade », *Iris*, n°362, August 1983, p. 21. The subtitle of the Brazilian edition *O Universo das Imagens Técnicas* (published only in 2008) is « Elogio da superficialidade ». This article is apparently the first to spell out some of the central concepts in *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*.

« Die lauernde schwarze Kamera-kiste », *Vipecker Raiphan. Revue für Medien-Transformation*, n°3, 1983.

« Für die Podiumsdiskussion meines Essays Für die Philosophie der Fotografie », preparatory note for a discussion at the Hochschule für bildende Kunst, Hamburg, on November 4, 1983, organized by the photographer Hans-Peter Dimke. Published in *Vom aufschreiben und einbilden. Ein Entwurf zu keinem Buch. Briefe von Vilém Flusser an einen ungelehrigen Lerner*, Barterode, Künstliche Intelligenz e.V., 1985, pages 6-12, edited by Dimke.

« Interview Martin Tschechne – Vilém Flusser », *Fotografie, Zeitschrift für Kultur jetzt*, n°32/33, 1984, pages 6-7. Interview made at the Hochschule für bildende Kunst, Hamburg on November 7, 1983. This interview was published with an article by Hans-Peter Dimke titled « Betriebsunfall in Medienapparat? »

Correspondence between Flusser and Hans-Peter Dimke. Their correspondence deals essentially with photographic issues. The VFA references are Cor\_89\_6\_DIMKE\_3123 for the period 1981 - 1985, and Cor\_90\_6\_DIMKE\_3123 after 1986. The first letter, dated September 19, 1981 is online: < <http://www.kunstforschung.de/Flusser.html> >. Some of these letters from 1984/85 were published by Dimke in 1985 in the above-mentioned book *Vom aufschreiben und einbilden*.

« Para uma Filosofia da Fotografia », *Iris*, n°366, December 1983, p. 3.

« Filosofia da Fotografia », *Arte em São Paulo*, n°21, March 1984.

Four lectures at the École Nationale de la Photographie in Arles:

- On February 23, 1984: « La production photographique ». Published in *Inframince*, n°14, 2020, pages 19-23.

- On March 15, 1984 : « La diffusion photographique ». Published in *Inframince*, n°14, 2020, pages 45-49.

- On April 2, 1984 : « La réception photographique ». Online: < <http://www.flusserstudies.net/sites/www.flusserstudies.net/files/media/attachments/flusser-troisieme-conference.pdf> >.

On May 9 or 23, 1984 : « La critique photographique ». Online: < <http://www.flusserstudies.net/sites/www.flusserstudies.net/files/media/attachments/flusser-quatrieme-cours.pdf> >. A preliminary version of this text was published in English with the title « Photocriticism » in *European Photography*, n° 17, January 1984 (also in German).

« Kurzer Abriss zweier Fototheorien », April 1984. Published in 1998 in *Standpunkte*, pages 68-70.

« Pour une philosophie du déclencheur », *Clichés*, n°10, October 1984, pages 48-49.

« Herbert Franke, Computer-Grafik Galerie », *European Photography*, n°20, October 1984, pages 97-99. Critique of a book published by Dumont.

Introduction to Joan Fontcuberta's book, *Herbarium*, Göttingen, European Photography, 1985 (Flusser's text was written in December 1984).

« Bóias-frias. João Urban & Teresa Urban Furtado », *European Photography*, n°22, April 1985. Critique of a book published in German by Diá. About the relationship between text and photographs.

Answer to the questionnaire « Fotografie Heute/Morgen. Eine Umfrage über Gegenwart und Zukunft der Fotografie », *European Photography*, n°22, April 1985, p. 37.

« Sintetizar Imagens », in three parts in *Iris* n°381, May 1985, n°382, June 1985 et n°383, July 1985, all three p. 66. This is apparently the last text written by Flusser in Portuguese about photography.

« Philosophy and Photography », preparatory note for his presentation to the symposium « Fotografia & co. » at the Torino Fotografia Biennale on June 17, 1985. Unpublished. Online: < <http://www.flusserbrasil.com/arte132.pdf> >. .

« La Photographie en tant qu'objet post-industriel ». Flusser started to work on this text in April 1985 and presented it on November 7, 1985 to the symposium « Définition de la Photographie » in Aix-en-Provence. The French text is unpublished; there are two versions of it (the V2 version is more recent) in the VFA file ESSAYS 4\_FRENCH-L [LA PHTO-LIV]. Flusser translated this text in English and published it in 1986 in the peer-reviewed journal *Leonardo* (vol.12, n°4, pages 329-332, and with a bibliography...).

**APPENDIX 3**

**References to the Vilém Flusser Archiv**

Files in the Vilém Flusser Archiv

Abbreviation and complete reference

- B3:** BOOKS 3\_1-FFD [918]\_FUR EINE PHILOSOPHIE DER FOTOGRAFIE [V.2]  
**B4:** BOOKS 4\_1-FFE [931]\_TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF PHOTOGRAPHY [V.2]  
**C5:** Cor\_5\_6-MV-3119\_MILTON VARGAS 3 01.06.1982 - 1986 1 OF 2  
**C13:** Cor\_13\_MARILIA LILIA LEAO 1 OF 2  
**C14:** Cor\_14\_MARILIA LILIA LEAO 2 OF 2  
**C16:** Cor\_16\_6-GEISER\_3142\_RODOLFO RICARDO GEISER  
**C24:** Cor\_24\_6-ISMAEL\_3131 \_JOSÉ CARLOS ISMAEL 1964-1990  
**C70:** Cor\_70\_6\_MUEPOH\_3127\_MUELLER\_POHLE\_1\_OF\_4  
**C71:** Cor\_71\_6\_MUEPOH\_3127\_MUELLER\_POHLE\_2\_OF\_4  
**C72:** Cor\_72\_6\_MUEPOH\_3127\_MUELLER\_POHLE\_3\_OF\_4  
**C73:** Cor\_73\_6\_MUEPOH\_3127\_MUELLER\_POHLE\_4\_OF\_4  
**C97:** Cor\_97\_6\_INGOLD\_3122\_FELIX\_PHILLIP\_INGOLD\_2\_OF\_2  
**C104:** Cor\_104\_FRENCH(GENERAL)  
**C109:** Cor\_109\_MAGAZINES AND PUBLISHERS  
**C155:** Cor\_155\_FRENCH PUBLISHERS\_1 of 3

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(< [http://www.arquivovilemflusser.com.br/vilemflusser/?page\\_id=672](http://www.arquivovilemflusser.com.br/vilemflusser/?page_id=672) >)